In this issue we are in a self-reflective mood with our main theme actually being our regular reviewers and the Japan Society Review itself. We have now reached the milestone of 50 issues since first appearing in January 2006. To mark the occasion, we have an article by each of our current key contributors with pieces mainly focusing on contemporary issues.

For those who wonder how we reached this landmark, here’s a very brief history of our first 50 issues. It all started back in 2005 when we decided to start posting out collected book reviews with the Japan Society mail-shots. This idea was strongly supported by Mike Barrett and Sir Hugh Cortazzi. These newsletter type reviews were extremely popular, so at the beginning of 2006, we launched Japan Society Book Review as a regular bimonthly publication. This would not have happened without the fantastic energy of Clare Barclay, our first managing editor from issues 1 to 12, and the superb support of Sharon Kelly and Robert Guy of the Japan Society team. Our most loyal and dedicated reviewer from the very beginning has been Sir Hugh Cortazzi whose amazing enthusiasm for the project has been limitless. In the early years we also greatly benefited from regular contributions from Professor Ian Nish, Fumiko Halloran, Susan Meehan, Ben-Ami Shillony and Takahiro Miyao. Their ranks were later added to by regular reviewers Mike Sullivan, Lucy Searles, Chris Corker and Ali Muskett. When Heidi Potter and John Toppon joined the Japan Society team, they injected new energy and direction into the publication. Heidi and John gave us a great makeover and we shortened our name to Japan Society Review. John was our dynamic managing editor from issue 13 to 33 during which time JSR really developed. After John left the team, Jennifer Anderson briefly held the reins before handing over to our current dedicated managing editor Jack Cooke, who joined us with issue 35. Jack has worked tirelessly to improve the publication, making us a more visually appealing and slick production.

Fifty issues and nine years makes it impossible to personally thank everyone involved, but I must mention a number of other individuals. We benefited greatly from the support of Sir John Whitehead, Christopher Purvis, Paul Diamond and Sir David Warren and the contributions of Mikihiro Maeda, Tomohiko Taniguchi, William Farr, Simon Cotterill and Anna Davis. I would also like to thank our excellent layout & production support staff, especially Arthur Comets and Abbie Martin. Finally, thanks to all reviewers who contributed one or two articles, especially Sir Graham Fry, Jason James and Mike Barrett and every other reviewer who has kindly contributed a review and who I have not been able to name in person. Here’s to the next 50 issues!

Sean Curtin, Editor, Issues 1 - 50
April 2014
Schoolgirls, Money and Rebellion in Japan
By Sharon Kinsella
Routledge, 2013
238 pages, £26.99
Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi

This sociological study is based on painstaking research and contains much interesting material about aspects of the life of young women in modern Japan. The reader needs to bear in mind that, despite constitutional provisions about equality between the sexes, Japan remains a male-chauvinist society and Japanese women continue to suffer significant discrimination. Kinsella notes (p.104) that ‘the female ratio of the total wages earned in Japan in 2006, women received approximately one third (0.366) of total male wages.’ The Japanese birth rate reached its lowest point on record in 2005 after a five-year slump (at 1.25 live births per 1,000) and marriage rates reached the lowest levels on record of 5.5 per 1,000 in 2010. (p.3).

It is also necessary to bear in mind the history of the ‘sex industry’ in Japan – from the floating word ofTokugawa Japan and the ‘Night city’ of the Yoshiwara, through the war-time ‘comfort women’ and the ‘pan pan’ girls of Japan and the ‘Nightless city’ of the Yoshiwara, through

Schoolgirls in the 1990s had much more pocket money than the pre-war moyoguraz (modern girl) and the magazines that catered for them needed to keep up their circulation to attract advertisers.

This book inevitably leaves a number of questions unanswered. How, for instance, do the Japanese girls studied here compare with British or American girls of a similar age? Do Japanese girls have more or less sex in their teens than their western opposite numbers? Teenage pregnancy would seem to be rarer in Japan than here in the UK. Is this because they take more effective precautions or because they have less sex? Homosexuality is a taboo topic in Japan despite its prevalence. Do young Japanese girls have Lesbian relationships? How does the continuance of what might be termed the ‘kawaii’ syndrome, which attracts hordes of Japanese visitors to Beatrix Potter’s former home in the Lake District, fit in with the deviant behaviour of the girls who are the subject of this book? I do not criticise Kinsella for not offering answers to these topics but they do show that there is room for further studies in this area of sociological research.

When many years ago I was a member of the Economic and Social Research Council, I used to plead with sociologists to try and sociologists to try to write in clear simple English and short sentences. Like so many books by sociologists this book is often very dense.

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The plot is considerably more complex than the description above, however this is one movie which is best to view without knowing too much about the story. Unfortunately, despite the brilliant performance by Tadashi Okuno, this is a movie which you will either like or dislike. The audience is expected to piece together some parts of the different characters’ back stories themselves, as well as read between the lines of the movie’s plot. On my first viewing of this movie, I came away a little dissatisfied from what I had seen, however I feel an increasing need to watch it again in order to think about what Abbas Kiarostami is trying to convey.

Triangle
By Hisaki Matsuura
Dalkey Archive Press (1 April 2014)
350 pages, £10.26
ISBN-10: 162897026X
Review by Chris Corker

Hisaki Matsuura, a professor of French literature at the University of Tokyo, initially made his literary trade as a poet before moving onto novels. There are certain elements of poetic symbolism and surrealism in sections of Triangle that reflect the author’s previous work. A spoiling Rain, a novel published in 2000, won the Akutagawa prize in that same year, while his 2004 novel Peninsula, a follow-up to Triangle, won the Yomiuri Prize. One thing that may be apparent to anyone familiar with the work of John Fowles is the striking similarity of Triangle to Fowles’ 1965 work The Magus. Certain events and concepts of timelessness, entrapment, helplessness and misplaced desire are mirrored throughout. And while the endings diverge and the setting is quite obviously different, the similarities are hard to ignore. The protagonists’ fatal flaws;...
however, are almost polar opposites. While Nicholas in The Magus is betrayed by his own arrogant assumptions and often brazenly wanders into traps laid for him obliviousy, Otsuki, a former drug addict, is driven more out of a self-hatred and paranoid fear at his own circumstances, falling in line with a self-destructive enthusiasm. ‘What was important was feeling comfortable with an idle lifestyle while maintaining a hatred for being a deadbeat.’

While this characteristic may be necessary for the reader to understand Otsuki’s persistence, when those of sadder mind may have stayed well away, it also makes it harder to sympathize with his character, as he wallows in his self-made squalor.

Despite the flaws with Otsuki’s character, the story is an intriguing one. While wondering through the maze-like Tokyo backstreets after an unfurling romantic affair with a married woman, Hiroko (who, as in The Magus, is transformed into tantalising bait), Otsuki is surprised to bump into one of his old colleagues, Sugimoto. Otsuki’s distaste and fear of this character is clear from the offset, and Sugimoto represents a seedy and nefarious past that Otsuki is ashamed of, trying unsuccessfully to forget and move beyond.

Sugimoto implies Otsuki to meet his new boss, Koyama, who he refers to deferentially as ‘Sensei’. After much persuasion, Otsuki agrees. At Koyama’s house he is shown a pornographic film shortly after his arrival, in which images of hardcore sex are inter-spliced with grotesque images of feasting maggots and cannibalistic insects. Shortly after this aversion therapy-like film, which Sugimoto refers to uncompromisingly as ‘art’, Otsuki is asked to contribute his own directed scene, featuring Tornoe, a young woman he will come to desire and destroy in equal measure. Here is highlighted the conflict in man of his baser instincts against his civilisation, his constant struggle to stand above other living things with an assumed transcendental nobility.

Overall Triangle is a brave and sometimes brutal novel that isn’t afraid to bend conventions and use the surreal to disorientate the reader. While its promise marginally outweighs its delivery, it is still a commendable, and for the most part, intriguing and addictive work.

**Woman in the Dunes, by Kobo Abe**

Adapted as a play and directed by Micha Colombo


An interview with Micha Colombo by Susan Meehan

Kagami Theatre hopes to tour Woman in the Dunes more widely around the UK in 2014 and is currently preparing for a second round of fundraising in order to make the proposed tour possible. The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation supported the London theatre premiere which received extremely good reviews. It was certainly packed on the last night, when I went to see it and I know that it sold out on its first evening as well. I had the pleasure of congratulating and also interviewing Micha Colombo on 24 January, soon after her run at the Theatre503 had come to an end.

Susan: You studied Japanese at Cambridge – what brought you to directing and acting?

Micha: I always loved drama from an early age – from being a regular participant in my local village pantos as a child, through school plays and lots of student drama while at Cambridge. After university, I initially went into a more corporate role in marketing, but eventually realised my heart was still in theatre, so I made the choice to pursue it professionally. I took the plunge, left my job and got a place at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), to train professionally as an actor. While there, and since graduating, I started to realise that my love of theatre might extend beyond performance to include directing and writing too. I’m still pretty early on in my career in theatre, so time will tell where it takes me.

Susan: You founded the Kagami Theatre – can you tell us about this venture?

Micha: The most obvious answer is that my university studies, and time spent in Japan have instilled a long-term love for Japan and broader East Asia (I have also lived and worked in Beijing) and so I want to do my bit to share and showcase a culture that I have found inspiring over the years. There is also another more nuanced reason that I started Kagami Theatre. I am by no means an expert in Japanese theatre or in its representation in the UK (yet!), but from a personal, anecdotal perspective I sometimes get the impression that Japanese culture is exoticised in the UK and I feel this can be a little reductive. While admittedly there are times when it is very useful and interesting to explore our differences and what makes a culture unique, I do however feel that there is also a need to emphasise the universality, the humanity that exists across all cultures. Difference is always appealing for novelty’s sake, but I believe theatre has a powerful role to play in building empathy and helping us make sense of the human condition collectively. So I hope with Kagami Theatre to provide some alternative perspectives on Japanese culture through its ideas and stories rather than its aesthetic.

Susan: Why do you think Woman in the Dunes resonated with the audience at Theatre503?

Micha: As I mentioned in the previous answer, we really tried to keep the adaptation of Dunes to focus on themes that resonate with contemporary audiences in the UK. We live in a global economy that has inequality at its heart. When national economies ‘develop’ and ‘progress’ this doesn’t necessarily translate to every individual in equal measure. For me, one of the key points of the story was an exploration of how people survive when they effectively get left behind by society. Each of the characters in the story is trying to make sense of the harsh conditions in which they find themselves and trying to carve out a normality within that. The story really challenges our notions of purpose and achievement and we found a lot of audience feedback that this exploration of how why we work stuck a real chord with people.

Susan: Is Abe Kobo your favourite author?

Micha: I am terrible at choosing favourites I’m afraid, I think it’s impossible as different writers give you different things! But I think Abe Kobo was a truly visionary person. I absolutely loved reading more of his work and researching his processes and ideas in preparation for the show. He has been a real inspiration to me and I’m sure I will create more work related to him in future.

Susan: What was most difficult about this particular project?

Micha: There were lots of challenges about this project, mainly practical. We had to create this production on a very small budget generously funded by the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation. Without that support, this project may not have been possible. Budget restrictions meant we had to be creative with our production design and seek to keep costs absolutely minimal across all aspects of the production without sacrificing quality. Also, there were some staging challenges that were pretty daunting – making some structural changes if we manage to secure some further funding for another phase of touring the show. We only had a short first run this time but even then the show shifted and evolved over just 5 nights of public performance. I felt it gained pace and the actors really started to ground their characters and make the dialogue come to life. It takes a live audience to make you realise what moments really zing and which need further work. There is always room for improvement, especially since I am relatively new to the game, so I will be editing the script and making some structural changes if we manage to secure funding for another phase of touring the show.

Susan: What other Japanese authors / playwrights have influenced you?

Micha: Lots! I have always enjoyed reading Mishima and Tanizaki Junichiro, I went to a great rehearsed reading of Getting Lost by Maeda Shiro at the Japan Foundation a few years back which sparked a few thoughts. I loved Sei Shonagon when I read her at university. I also think there is a rich tradition of folk tales in Japan that are a real treasure trove of exciting stories.
were few in number and foreigners with a knowledge of East Asian languages fewer still, these observation posts were heavily relied on. Foreign Ministry archives around the world now show the views of these journalists were much read and had the effect of keeping diplomats on their toes. Moreover journalists from these papers like Morgan Young, Hugh Byas, Thomas Millard and Edgar Snow independently published many authoritative books on contemporary issues which carried great weight in ‘shaping international perceptions of the area’.

Professor O’Connor who has systematically analysed a vast amount of archival sources and has previously published a 40-volume series on related topics, has now distilled his findings in this compact volume. Students of the East Asian region will find this encyclopaedic work of reference an essential tool for their understanding. It is, however, a sad commentary on how a once free press can decline over time into the purveying government hand-outs!

The Return of Japan’s Long Lost Telescope

Article by Sean Curtin

Four centuries ago King James I gave Japan its very first telescope when it was among the time-edge piece of technology. The gift was the perfect symbol to mark the beginning of what was to become an extremely fruitful and long-lasting bilateral relationship. Sadly, the original telescope has been lost to the mists of time, but as part of the Japan400 celebrations in 2013, to mark four centuries since the first official encounter, a new telescope was constructed using traditional methods. The idea of restoring a lost symbolic artefact has deep cultural roots in English mythology and literature stretching back to the Arthurian legends.

The original telescope’s tale begins back in April 1611, when the East India Company ship the Clove, under the command of the intrepid Captain John Saris, left England and set sail for distant Japan. The mission was made up of three ships of which only the Clove went all the way to Japan. Saris’ commission was to first go to Yemen and the Spice Islands, primally to seek trade, and then to Japan, if possible. Because his first two ports of call were not especially successful, Saris was motivated to go on to Japan. After a further two months, the Clove arrived in Japanese waters in June 1613. It is believed the Earl of Salisbury, a close advisor and Chief Minister to King James, helped supervise the complex task of sending the first British vessel to Japan and organizing the dispatch of the telescope, which was the most advanced scientific instrument on the planet at the time.

This was a daring mission to what was then the very edge of the known world. After sailing along the Japanese coast, Saris eventually landed at Hirado in modern day Nagasaki Prefecture. Here he was warmly greeted by the local ruler, Mutasu Hoin, the Lord of Hirado. Lord Mutasu helped ensure the telescope’s safe passage to Japan’s paramount ruler, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Along with the aid of William Adams, an Englishman who had arrived in Japan in April 1600 on a Dutch ship, Saris was able to gain an audience with the ruling elite and initiate the first official contact. On 8 September 1613, Saris had an audience with the immensely influential retired Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. He gave the legendary leader a letter from King James and several gifts, including the new telescope, which had just been invented in Europe. Saris also opened a trading post and factory in Hirado, which he subsequently handed over to his colleague Richard Cocks upon departing Japan in December 1613.

The spyglass brought by Saris was the first to leave Europe for any destination, as well as the first ever sent to Asia. To the people of the time, the telescope was a fabulous piece of technology and certainly a truly impressive gift. Sadly, all physical traces of this magnificent device have completely vanished and we do not even have a picture of it. The surviving written Japanese texts describing the telescope are contradictory, so we have no real idea what it was actually like.

In many respects this first gift of such an innovative piece of world-changing technology was the perfect symbol to inaugurate a highly successful, centuries-long relationship of scientific, economic and cultural exchange. It is a shame that this potent emblem of friendship no longer exists. Thanks to the vision of the Japan400 co-chairs, Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG, along with the very generous funding for the entire project by Robin Maynard MBE, a new telescope was commissioned in 2013. The new instrument was painstakingly created over a year-long period by Ian Poyser, one of Britain’s foremost craftsmen in the field of traditional brass telescope construction.

Having recreated such a historic symbol from the genesis of the Japan-British relationship, a fitting location and occasion had to be found for the telescope to make its global debut, Monday 9 September 2013, almost four hundred years to
the day from the original presentation, was selected as the date to reveal the newly-commissioned brass instrument. Hatfield House, built by the 1st Earl of Salisbury, who helped organize its dispatch to Japan, was selected as the special venue. To add a further layer of historic resonance, two direct descendants of key 1613 dramatis personae were present at the ceremony. These were the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of the 1st Earl of Salisbury, and Mr Akira Matsura, descendant of the Lord of Hirado, where the Clove had landed 400 year ago.

A close encounter after 400 years – Mr Akira Matsura, descendant of the ruler of Hirado and the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of the 1st Earl of Salisbury

A lunch was held to celebrate the historic Saris-Tokugawa encounter and the first public appearance of the newly crafted spyglass. It was announced that the beautiful instrument was to be a gift to the Japanese people from Japan400, being given as a renewal of the original gift. It is hoped it will symbolise the centuries-long exchanges in culture, diplomacy and trade between the two great nations as well as the long-standing and mutual cooperation in science and technology. Later that same day, the telescope made its second public outing, this time at the world-famous Tower of London, where the Shogun's gift to King James, a magnificent suit of Japanese armour, is on display. After its day in the sun, the telescope was returned to the workshop for further internal work to be completed.

A Farewell for the Telescope – From King James’s Telescope to the Present and the Future, Symposium and Celebration of the Departure of the Japan400 Telescope for Japan

After the conference, there was a dinner in honour of the departing telescope. Japan400 will send the telescope to No. 1 House at the British Embassy in Tokyo before it tours a number of Japanese cities with strong British historical connections. It will eventually come to rest in Shizuoka City. The telescope will be a key part of the Ieyasu400 celebrations, which will commemorate the life of the great Japanese leader Tokugawa Ieyasu, who died in June 1616. The telescope will eventually be placed on permanent display in a specially reconstructed tower of Sunpu Castle in Shizuoka City.

The next time the instrument was on display was at the ‘Two Cultures United by Tea’ event organized by Japan400 and held at the magnificent Banqueting House in Whitehall on Sunday 15 September 2013. At this spacious location many people were able to admire it and the general impression of the gleaming brass device was extremely favourable. This was perhaps the best chance the British public had to see it before it returned once again to Mr Poyser’s workshop for a final series of refinements to its optical array. Like the original telescope, it was destined to be dispatched to Japan, but fortunately there would be one final opportunity to view it before it left the UK.

On 17 January 2014, Japan400 and the University of Cambridge organized a unique seminar entitled ‘From King James’s Telescope to the Present and the Future: the Japan-British partnership in science and technology’ at Jesus College, Cambridge, which is one of the university’s most ancient colleges. This conference was kindly sponsored by the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and Toshiba of Europe and functioned as a farewell event for the telescope. A highly distinguish academic gathering, including Lord Rees FRS, Astronomer Royal, was assembled to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Japan-British scientific relations and bid adieu to the glistening optical device. The symposium was chaired by Professor Timon Screech and Nicolas Maclean CMG, the co-chairmen of Japan400, and by Professor Roberto Cipolla, Fellow of Jesus College.