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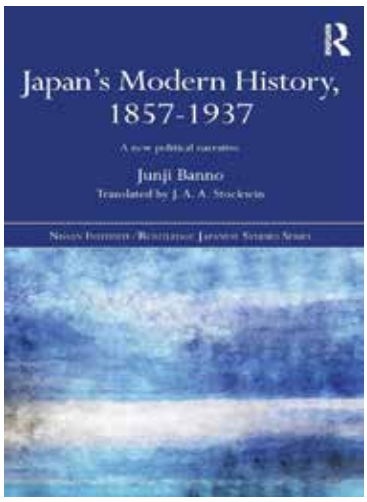
Cover image by Hishida shunso (1874-1911)

Japan's Modern History, 1857-1937: A new political narrative



by Banno Junji, translated by J.A.A. Stockwin

Routledge (2014)

ISBN 978-1-138-77517-6

Review by Hugh Cortazzi

Professor Banno's book was published in Japanese under the title *Nihon Kindai Shi* (日本近代史) in 2012. Professor Stockwin, the translator of this work and former director of the Nissan Institute at Oxford, in his introduction describes Professor Banno as 'a prolific and widely read writer on the political history of modern Japan.' This book is the story of 'early attempts at reform, the dynamics of revolution, nation building, consolidation, reconstruction and finally crisis leading to war.'

The six chapters are: (1) Reform, 1857-1863, (2) Revolution, 1863-1871, (3) Construction, 1871-1880, (4) Management, 1880-1893, (5) Reorganisation, 1894-1924, and (6) Crisis, 1925-1937. Professor Banno gives an interesting and stimulating analysis of political developments in Japan in the eighty years covered in this book. He frequently quotes from diaries, records and articles, which throw new light on many developments, and challenges some of the commonly held views and assumptions of modern Japanese historians.

Professor Banno's book does not purport to be a comprehensive narrative of the political history of Japan from 1857-1937. It assumes that the reader has a fair grasp of the history of modern Japan and some knowledge of the personalities involved. It is thus a book intended primarily for historians and is not an introduction to Japanese political history for the newcomer to the subject. It is, however, a significant contribution to the literature in English on modern Japan by an eminent historian. In the conclusion Professor Banno declares with humility that it is 'composed with (his) personal judgments and prejudices,' but wholly objective historical judgments are difficult if not impossible to achieve. The historian's first need is to get his/her facts right and base their judgments on these and on the writings and diaries of participants and observers. Professor Banno follows these principles.

I was struck by the importance which Banno in the opening section of this book attaches to the role of Saigo Takamori (an influential samurai of the 1860s and 1870s) in developing a 'multi-party alliance' combining the faction which put priority on 'opening the country' and the group which emphasized 'expelling the foreigner.' I had not realized before reading this book how hard Saigo (西郷 隆盛) had worked to ensure that Chōshū (an influential feudal domain occupying the whole of modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture) was exonerated from the charges made against the fief of plotting against the court. I also found particularly interesting his comments on the power struggle between the lower ranking samurai and the leading daimyō. Banno clarifies the way in which the proposals for what he calls 'a feudal parliament' were sidelined and a national army created as a means not only of defense but also of unifying the country. I had not appreciated fully before how the participation of forces from Northern domains in support of Aizu (a western region of Fukushima Prefecture) had led to the low priority given to the Tohoku region (northeastern part of the main island of Honshu) in the post-revolution development of Japan.

Banno is frank about the way in which Japan adopted 'gunboat diplomacy' in its relations with both Korea and China. He notes that 'the first person in the Meiji Government to express the view that China was a threat was perhaps the Chief of the General Staff at the time' (November 1880) Yamagata Aritomo (p.104). He emphasizes (page 123) that from the time of incidents in 1882 and 1884 'a direct confrontation between Japan and China over control of the Korean peninsula was only a matter of time.' The Sino-Japanese war of 1894/5 led to the strengthening of the military who grabbed the indemnity which Japan obtained from China. The appetite of the Japanese armed forces grew again after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904/5.

Banno has some interesting comments on the Japanese constitutional provision under which the leaders of the army and navy had the right of direct access to the Emperor and a veto on the appointment of the army and navy ministers. This was undoubtedly an important factor in Japan's drift to war, but other factors were the inability of Japan's political leaders to agree on consistent policies and win popular trust, and ultimately the unwillingness of the Kanto army in China to obey orders from Tokyo. He notes incidentally (page 170) that Takahashi Korekiyo (高橋 是清), who was an outstanding Minister of Finance, was unpopular with the genrō (elder Japanese statesmen) because he advocated the abolition of the General Staff office.

Banno gives an interesting account of the problems which Meiji governments faced in raising revenue, in particular over the land tax. He elucidates the development of relations between the government and the Diet and the important role played by the bureaucracy. He has much of interest to say about the development of political parties in Japan and the personalities of Japanese politicians. In his comments on such issues as universal male suffrage he draws attention to the role of Yoshino Sakuzō (吉野 作造), who advocated what he termed *minponshugi* later called 'democracy' in the years 1916-20. He is scornful of the assertion that Hara Kei (原 敬) was really the progenitor of what came to be termed Taishō democracy pointing out that Hara was opposed to universal suffrage and refused to endorse a two-party system for Japan.

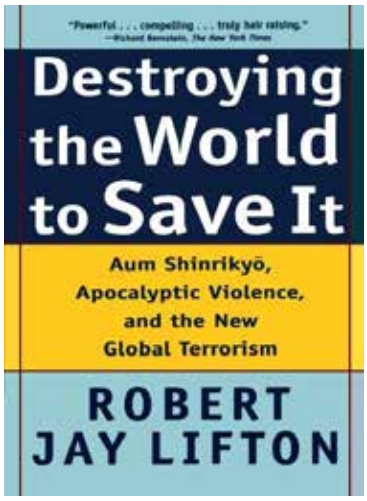
I cannot in this review do more than refer to some of the important themes in Banno's book, but I hope that I have

shown why this is a valuable book for the serious student of modern Japanese history.

Professor Stockwin has obviously worked hard to produce an accurate translation of Professor Banno's text, but it is not an easy read and I did wonder whether a freer translation or paraphrase in English might have resulted in a more easily readable text.

It is a great pity that this book is so expensive not only in hard back (over £90 from Amazon) but also in the electronic version (£85). This inevitably means that many students of Japanese history will be forced to consult the book in libraries rather than have a copy on their bookshelves or even in their electronic books library. The costs of production of scholarly books, for which sales of more than a few hundred copies cannot be expected, are high, but for important works such as this it should be possible to attract subsidies sufficient to ensure that the electronic version at least is available to serious students at a reasonable price.

Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyō, Apocalyptic Violence and the New Global Terrorism



by Robert Jay Lifton

Henry Holt and Company Inc. (2000)

ISBN-10: 0805065113

Review by Chris Corker

'On March 20, 1995, Aum Shinrikyō, a fanatical Japanese religious cult, released sarin, a deadly nerve gas, on five subway trains during Tokyo's early-morning rush hour [...] On the trains, in the stations where they stopped, and at the station exits, people coughed, choked, experienced convulsions and collapsed. Eleven were killed. [...] Had Aum succeeded in producing a purer form of the gas, the deaths could have been in the thousands or hundreds of thousands.'

New religious cults are not unique to Japan, but they are a phenomenon that is deep-rooted in its culture, and have received a large amount of publicity, especially in the case of Aum, which had already committed a host of murders and dealt in many forms of corruption. They had already released toxic gas into a city (on that occasion Matsumoto) by the time their sarin attack on the Tokyo underground gained them global infamy. New religious cults in other countries had tended to be inward-looking – keeping a tight control over their members – rather than extrovert in their campaigns of intimidation, coercion and violence. Similarly, while many groups had believed in an impending Armageddon, none had actively attempted its realisation. Aum was the first to make concerted attempts to catalyse the world's destruction.

In this informative and chilling book, Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton takes a look at the structure and appeal of Aum, as well as the influences that brought it into existence. Through interviews with former members, he gives an insight not only into the organisation, but into the psyche of those who joined, both before and after the Tokyo sarin attack. The interviewees are mainly low-level members, but their testimony contains more than enough substance for the reader to fill in the remaining gaps. Lifton chronicles the history of the cult, right up to the modern day, before discussing the similarities found in other destructive cults in America, including Heaven's Gate and The People's Temple.

Any discussion of Aum will revolve around its leader, Asahara Shoko. What is most chilling about the interviews with Aum's former members – and this is reinforced by their testimonies in court – is that almost all of them retain a sense of fondness and even reverence for Asahara, some claiming that they still believe in his divinity. Many of the interviewees express a marked distrust of the press, amounting to the feeling that Aum was the victim of a conspiracy and unfairly accused. Lifton paints Asahara as a man whose superiority complex stems from growing up in a school for the blind when he was, at worst, partially sighted. Later in life he would have his brush-ins with the law, being convicted of assault and the sale of fake Chinese Medicines. Following a spiritual awakening, he became obsessed with the Hindu goddess of destruction, Shiva. When he felt he was losing control over his followers, he became obsessed with the idea that someone – typically the government or other cults – was trying to have him killed. Paranoia seemed to fuel his vices and his hypocrisy deepened. His driver recalls him binging and drinking while his followers fasted, chastised for their desire to eat. This paranoia also led to violence. One of his high-ranking followers, Murai Hideo, was assassinated by a member of the Yakuza, shortly after he let Aum secrets slip in a media interview.

For a cult whose members had grown up inspired by such seemingly innocent sci-fi animation as Battleship Yamato, things soon became dark, technology always intertwined with their final solution. Murder became an obsession, justified by their distortion of the concept of pao, where a higher being killing a lesser one is considered an act of mercy. Asahara was the highest, and his orders, however severe, were followed. In the book there are reports of members with doubts being strangled or injected with poison. A lawyer, about to bring a case against Aum, was killed in his

home along with his wife and young son. Their bodies were separated and left in barrels, their eyes and teeth removed to hinder identification. If Aum had succeeded in their goals, these deaths would have been the tip of the iceberg; it was only the means to genocide that they lacked. Envoys were sent to countries such as Russia, with the aim of securing nuclear warheads. At home, Asahara began to talk of death rays that would evaporate people by the million. Were it not for the ineptitude of Aum's scientists, they may have come closer than they did to their aims.

After the attacks took place and Aum was formerly investigated, the police discovered Asahara in a safe room, soaked in his own urine, surrounded by piles of money. He was given the death penalty but has yet to be executed.

The book is well-written and easy to read, avoiding many technical terms that may confuse the psychiatry layman. The intimacy of some of the confessions is intriguing for a nation stereotypically regarded as reserved. They provide narratives in themselves, and the book is, in places, hard to put down.

Lifton concludes with a look at Aum at the turn of the Millennium. The cult continues to exist under the name of Aleph, although Asahara's charismatic protégé , Joyuu Fumihiro, has left, beginning his own faction in the hope of dispelling the taint of Aum's reputation. He still, however, refers to Asahara as their 'exalted leader' and a 'spiritual being'. Lifton finishes with a worrying fact that demonstrates how deeply Aum had infiltrated into Japanese society, and the impotency of the authorities when dealing with them:

'In late February and early March of 2000, it was discovered that a number of Aum-owned companies had created elaborate software for many of Japan's government offices [...] Aum had provided computer systems for the Defense Agency and the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, meaning the cult could help design the patrol routes of the very police department that was supposed to be monitoring it.'

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Those interested in religious cults might also like to read Cults: Faith, Healing and Coercion *by Marc Galanter, a more theoretical and statistic-based look at different cults, specifically The Unification Church. Those interested in further Aum reading might find Murakami Haruki's* Underground *useful. The book takes a closer look at the plight of the victims and the impact that the attack had on their lives. It is probably no coincidence that a religious cult and its enigmatic leader play a key role in Murakami's recent novel* 1Q84.

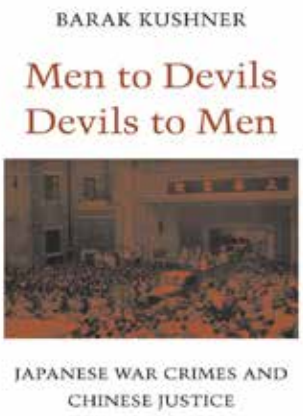
Men to Devils, Devils to Men: Japanese war crimes and Chinese justice

by Barak Kushner

Harvard University Press (2015)

ISBN: 978-0-674-742891-2

Review by Richard Coxford



The latest tour de force by senior Cambridge lecturer Dr Barak Kushner covers the ambiguous post-war period in East Asia where congealing Cold War divisions and power vacuums created by the absence of peace in China criss-crossed and tempered Sino-Japanese relations and the fate of Japanese war criminals. Dr Kushner is possibly the only academic brave enough to have written a book on ramen, his last work being the exciting social and food history Slurp (2012). This book is braver in a different sense, and by his own admission the preliminary context for still further planned publications coming out of the very strong 'War Crimes and Empire' research group he leads and a five year European Research council grant (2013-2018) to investigate the full effect of the Japanese empire's fall in East Asia. Reviewing the treatment of 'B' and 'C' class war criminals, i.e. normal crimes in wartime, and crimes against humanity (or 'humaneness' as he puts it), this fills an historical gap many did not know existed by analysing the trials of Japanese Imperial 'war criminals' by the Guomindang (KMT) and Chinese Communist Party (CPC). China is a crucial and fascinating case study compared to the experiences of Allied or Colonial powers precisely because there the war continued; the USSR barrelling down into Manchuria and the Chinese civil war still in full swing, with one million Imperial Japanese troops lingering on. As a result both Chinese parties sought to try Japanese criminals, and to do so in a way that legitimised their international moral standing. Thus within the fresh post-war peace-making movement towards 'durable peace', seeking public opinion and remembering the past, Dr Kushner seeks to argue that East Asia had its own distinct variety. Taking as his starting point some real gems unearthed in recently declassified archives in China, Japan and Taiwan, he effortlessly blends the highest academic insight with literature, film, and anecdotal evidence that can sometimes bring a chill to the spine. By taking a 'peripheral' rather than 'metropolitan' angle to his post-imperialism, which is to say observing the empire at its fringes rather than its centre, the home isles of Japan, he aims to emphasize that the Japanese empire did not vanish overnight.

In the case of the KMT, Dr Kushner outlines how Chiang Kai-Shek's announcement, on the day Japan surrendered, 'to repay malevolence with benevolence' saw good treatment and fair trials of the Japanese military, and the evacuation

of those prisoners to Taiwan as the Communists began winning the civil war. Ultimately after the war, there was enough recruitment of ex-China Expeditionary force officers to train and assist the KMT that one questions whether it was truly 'secret' or whether it was sanctioned by the Americans. For the Communists, proper Confucian tolerance was ordered, but Japanese PoWs provided as a gift by Stalin – in theory unsolicited – were used as part of an extensive programme of propaganda. The most famous of those PoWs, from whom the book's title derives, were re-educated and repatriated, thereafter perennially admitting their guilt and praising CPC justice. The KMT trials fizzled out in the late 1940s, and the CPC version had ceased by 1964, but in a darkly ironic fashion, those legal experts behind the trials were themselves arraigned, or more accurately, purged. The CPC trials arguably failed because they did not placate the population suffering after Japanese invasion, and we still have no normalized relations on the matter today; similarly, the KMT trials did little for the forgotten Taiwanese. Abandoned by the Japanese empire, which was understandably occupied rebuilding the home islands, Taiwanese presented a complex entanglement of identity and involvement issues, the civil war's competing parties fighting over the veracity of Taiwanese identity and no agency for the Taiwanese within that. As such, today this history is poorly employed by both pro-Independence and KMT supporters.

In the Rawlsian sense that an action cannot be good if it is not first just, this Asian brand of justice seems shoddy and fraudulent, because 'usefulness after war' became the key factor determining defendants' guilt. However the Chinese trials were a natural reaction to the well-known Tokyo War trials which had a thoroughly disproportionate focus on crimes committed against the Allies, and Allied recalcitrance to help the Chinese proves Dr Kushner's point that this is competitive justice, where victory is scrambling to prosecute the worst suspects yourself first.

Somewhat appropriating the transnational approach to justice that Rana Mitter takes at Oxford, there are some very good reflections on the difficulty of assessing responsibility for colonial subjects performing roles that need differentiating between collaborator and criminal. Also of special interest are the details of Japanese treatment of their own PoWs and trials. Returning PoWs had to be publicly defended by Japanese press to ensure their smooth transition to a defeated Japan, and then handled delicately as only ex-soldiers in disbelief at their 'loss' can be under a fledgling democracy. Dr Kushner's analysis of the Japanese use of prevarication to frustrate trials in Japan even raises the scintillating tale of how the usually unsullied IJN (Imperial Japanese Navy) utilised a plethora of defence mechanisms to escape opprobrium and let indictment crash down squarely on the Army.

Dr Kushner depicts the evolution of the fraught internally-generated divergences between Japan and China as China shifted from limiting their blame to the Japanese militarist clique to blaming the Japanese people as a whole, portraying the fringe of Japanese politics as representative of said people. During the same time-frame, Japan progresses fully into its narrative of victimization, with its roots in legitimate queries as to whether American fire bombing and the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima were war crimes. As a result of this divergence, these trials are almost unknown in China and Japan outside of tiny academic communities, and he argues understanding has deteriorated still more in the highest echelons of Japanese PM Abe Shinzo's government, which cannot even agree who should determine war crimes. Possible criticisms include the sense that terming Japan 'bipolar' for acting differently in global and domestic politics is stating the obvious nature of democracy, and that it is only slightly overstated in Japan's case because electoral mechanisms allow unsavoury extremists like Ishihara Shintaro to somehow flourish. Or that to say Japan never moved on from the war belies some dissatisfaction with the historical praise for leaders like Yoshida Shigeru and latterly Ikeda Hayato, whose achievements are cited but not attributed. Yet these hardly mar the argument.

Overall, this is a timely, considered and thought-provoking book that any fan of Japanese history would enjoy regardless of the connotations behind 'war criminals'. It develops the notion of trials conforming to and shaping public opinion to build peace and is itself also a vital tool in that regard by seeking truth through historical oversight. Given the trajectory of Chinese, Japanese and Taiwanese reactions, both political and public, to the evidence it is further proof that history can change the present, not just by persisting in it, but through active interaction with it. Besides those outlined in the book, and for related topics of war memory, I recommend Hugo Dobson, Nobuko Kosuge, and Philip Seaton as authors of the same calibre. I am unaware of the specification for the planned, no doubt grander in scope sequel, but Dr Kushner's work shows there is still much academic leeway on the matter and we should all look forward to reading more.

Strange Weather in Tokyo

by Kawakami Hiromi, translated by Allison Markin Powell

Portobello Books (2013)

ISBN-10: 1846275083

Review by Susan Meehan

Kawakami Hiromi won the Tanizaki Jun'ichiro Prize for her best-selling novel *Sensei no Kaban* (*Strange Weather in Tokyo* [UK edition] or *The Teacher's Briefcase* [USA edition] in 2001. In 2003 the story was adapted for television by the writer and director Kuze Teruhiko.

I am not surprised by these accolades, for *Strange Weather in Tokyo* is an understated, poetic, gentle, profound, thoughtful, poignant, beautiful book centring on the friendship between Omachi Tsukiko and Matsumoto Harutsuna. They both frequent the same small bar near a Tokyo station. Having noticed her and their shared taste in food and drink, one day Mr Matsumoto addresses her, wondering if she is indeed Omachi Tsukiko. It dawns on Tsukiko that this gentleman had been her Japanese teacher at secondary school. As she did at school, she refers to him as 'Sensei'.

37 year-old Tsukiko and 67 year-old Sensei forge a friendship around encounters at the bar. They never arrange to meet there, but are always happy when they meet by chance. They both enjoy their drink.

Sensei is old-fashioned, didactic and often upbraids Tsukiko on her unladylike behaviour while Tsukiko enjoys listening to Sensei recounting haiku or telling her about his collection of teapots. She is unaffected, refreshing, modern, capricious and quirky.

Tsukiko had not excelled in Japanese at school, but as an underhanded compliment Sensei commends her on being 'an excellent student when it comes to drinking.' Their research into drinking is key to their friendship.

Both Tsukiko and Sensei live alone. He is a widower and she is single. They are both rather obstinate. When it comes to drinking he doesn't like being poured for, though Tsukiko insists at times, much to his irritation. She is a lousy pourer anyway, with no interest in learning from Sensei how to pour well.

Tsukiko struggles with her stubbornness and awkward behaviour. On one occasion she cannot bear talking to Sensei any more as he gloats over the victory of his baseball team, The Tokyo Giants, over their perennial rival, the Hanshin Tigers. Tsukiko had never realised quite how profound her dislike of the Giants was, gritting her teeth at Sensei's delight, cursing and wondering why Giants' fans are so ubiquitous. She is such a child and Sensei is taken aback by her stroppiness.

Perhaps the secret to their friendship is the difference in age. As Tsukiko herself recognises, she is somehow becoming more childlike as she ages, having been rather grown up when she was at primary school. She doesn't 'seem able to ally herself with time.'

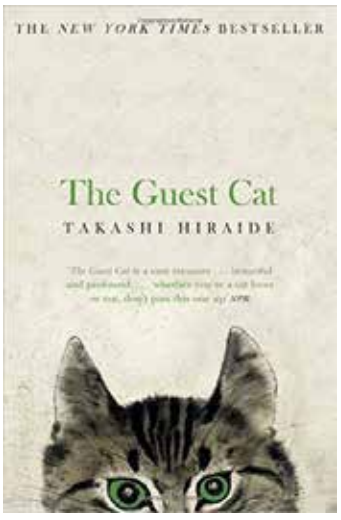
Each chapter of the book is like a haiku, incorporating seasonal references to the moon, mushroom picking and cherry blossoms. The chapters are whimsical and often melancholy, but humour is never far away.

As the novel progresses Tsukiko once again defiantly avoids Sensei. He annoys her so much – albeit unwittingly – and Tsukiko hopes that distancing herself from him will ensure she gets over the co-dependent drinking partnership that has become routine and which is cramping her style.

There is no real surprise as to how the book unwinds, but this does not make it any less enjoyable. It continues to spellbind, and the book's gentle yet powerful sentiment lingers on with the reader. It is a celebration of friendship, the ordinary and individuality, and a rumination on intimacy, love and loneliness.

I cannot recommend *Strange Weather in Tokyo* enough, which is also a testament to the translator who has skilfully retained the poetry and beauty of the original.

The Guest Cat



by Hiraide Takashi

Picador (2014)

ISBN-10: 1447279409

Review by Chris Corker

Hiraide Takashi, now in his mid-sixties, is one of the foremost post-war poets in Japan. He has won a litany of awards and released works covering an array of different genres and forms. *The Guest Cat*, considered to be both autobiographical and surrealist, won the Kiyama Shōhei Literary Award in 2001.

Having read novellas by poets before and becoming accustomed to their rich imagery, I was surprised to find the prose in *The Guest Cat* bare and clinical. The pace of the book is lethargic, leaving the narrative to meander a little too often. Whether or not this lethargy is the appeal that saw *The Guest Cat* reach both *The New York Times* and *The*

Sunday Times best seller lists, I couldn't say. Perhaps some readers were enticed by the understated but beautiful cover and the papyrus-like paper. After reading, I was left with the feeling that nothing had really happened and, had the characters or the story developed at all, they had done so only infinitesimally. With certain authors, such as Flaubert or Wilde, a certain lack of content can be forgiven in light of their artistry with words, but it is hard to defend a story that says very little without that beauty.

Living with his wife in a quiet suburb of Tokyo, a writer is working hard to realise his ambition of becoming a full-time poet. The book opens with a description of a view through a window, highlighting the monotony of the protagonist's protracted days. The couple live a slow, almost separate life; they say little to each other beyond the necessary. One day their chemistry is altered by the appearance of a beautiful young kitten they name 'Chibi' (roughly meaning small child in Japanese). Chibi gives the couple a common topic to discuss and a child-surrogate to fawn over. At all times, however, it is clear that Chibi is the neighbours' cat, and her visits are accompanied with a sense of loss. Highlighting the Japanese notion of self and other, insiders and outsiders, the story discusses ideas of ownership and the selfishness this brings.

'If the issue involved permission, then would things have been different if permission had been given? After all, a cat left outside on its own will cross any border it wants... Why do they hate us so much for taking care of Chibi?'

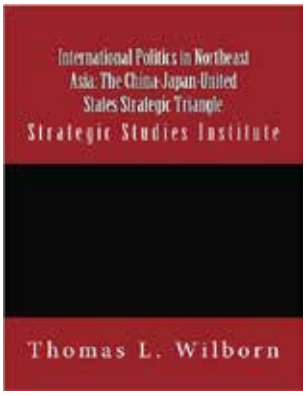
The idea of transient company – of transient love, even – is so entrenched in Japanese society that several businesses have been set up around the idea. Starting with Maid Cafes and Hostess Bars, where the focus is not sex but rather companionship, there are now cafes where patrons can instead be with cats and dogs, as well as other domestic animals. The proliferation of dating simulators is yet another indicator of this trend. As technology simultaneously connects and isolates the modern world, human loneliness provides a demand that businesses have recognised, offering fleeting remedies for a premium. In *The Guest Cat*, whether due to a lack of financial stability or simply out of preference, the couple are childless and never mention the possibility of having a baby. Their unlooked-for solution to loneliness and isolation is Chibi. This remedy, like Chibi herself, is ethereal and bound to end in heartache.

There are meditative moments in *The Guest Cat* that promise profundity, but often they are centred on dry subjects like geometry or the housing market and the tone is one more suitable for a lecture than a piece of prose. There are references to figures in antiquity which poets are traditionally fond of, but again this only adds to a feeling of academic sterility. Throughout, there is also an attempt at a Zen, nature-driven wisdom, but the book never really reaches those heights nor offers much aside from that failed aspiration. The themes of the fragility of life and loneliness are intriguing, but the way they are discussed is neither fresh nor particularly interesting; neither does the narrator or supporting cast have very much to say. I remember reading a review of Murakami's recent novel *Colourless Tsukuru*, in which the reviewer questioned the wisdom of having a dull central character. I feel the same question could be asked here.

On a positive note, there is an obvious appeal here for the cat-lover, despite Chibi's appearances being brief. Having grown up with cats myself, there were certain descriptions that were nostalgically familiar and Chibi's assumed role as muse and child makes her by far the most intriguing character of the book.

There's no denying that at times *The Guest Cat* has the pleasant, laconic pace of a Sunday afternoon. A Sunday afternoon, however, is valued only in its position at the end of an active week, as a needed respite. Here the eventful contents of the week are absent. I found in *The Guest Cat* the reality of an endless chain of Sundays, and for the first time I eagerly awaited Monday.

International Politics in Northeast Asia: The China-Japan-United States Strategic Triangle



By Thomas L. Wilborn,

Strategic Studies Institute (February 2013, first published 1996)

ISBN-10: 1482339471

Review by Michael Sullivan

In order to understand the events of today it is vital to analyse the past; however by understanding the present it is possible to see a glimpse of the future. Nearly twenty years ago Thomas L. Wilborn completed one of his final papers regarding the strategic triangle between China, Japan and the USA and its possible future. Reading it today provides an intriguing insight into recent developments in Japan. Thomas L. Wilborn was a research professor of National Security Affairs and an Asian Specialist with the Strategic Studies Institution of the U.S. Army War College. In the 1990s he published several studies on Japan's military, on dangers in North East Asia and also on US policy in this region.

As an overview into the background of North East Asia an important consideration is that during the Cold War there was a bipolar world which saw Japan and South Korea as key allies of the US while China and Soviet Russia supported North Korea. To complicate this, a breakdown of relations between China and Soviet Russia meant that China also collaborated with the US to frustrate Soviet expansion, a result of which was that the border between Russia and China was heavily manned. At the time of the Cold War China maintained hundreds of thousands of troops as well as thousands of pieces of hardware in this area, since the Cold War the Russian military presence has been greatly

reduced while trade and relations have improved. This is a relevant fact as it has meant that China could focus its military resources in other areas, for example on its navy, and establish new approaches with its neighbours. Without the priorities of the Cold War, Japan as well could be more independent with its policies, which is partly why Wilborn could describe the Northeast Asian political system in 1996 as 'characterized by great uncertainty and unpredictability.' This point is as true now as it was nearly twenty years ago as we have seen with the nuclear tests in North Korea, the shelling of South Korea and sinking of a ship in 2010, and the recent escalation in the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands including the alleged radar lock on a Japanese naval ship by a Chinese frigate. Rather chillingly Wilborn theorised that Northeast Asian countries would be more likely to 'revive historic grievances, and [...] pursue them even at the risk of conflict.'

Within the background of the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute Wilborn provides a convincing explanation about how the leadership of China has evolved from those who led to the revolution to those who achieved their rank within the state bureaucracy, meaning that officials are less likely to be secure in their position while 'contenders for power will emphasize nationalistic symbols and causes.' This has been reflected in the rather high profile fall of Bo Xilai in 2012 as well as the more aggressive dialogue over of territory in the China South Seas and also over the islands mentioned above. When Wilborn wrote his paper China often rebuked Japan for claiming sovereignty over the islands, he described this as being 'largely pro forma exercises, however, partly to exploit the Japanese sense of guilt' (in reference to historical events). As we now know this has developed to a more aggressive claim on the islands.

For Japan the end of the Cold War, as well as fear of disengagement in Northeast Asia by the US, has had important implications on its military, its foreign policy and international role. For example, the Self Defence Force was established in 1954 and has since been authorised to be deployed abroad since 1992, more recently Japan increased its defence budget for the first time in 11 years, although Wilborn described Japan's military forces as 'not valued institutions' clearly territory disputes can change this attitude quickly.

This paper regarding the strategic triangle of China, Japan and the US also covers the other players in this important area of the world such as Russia, South Korean, North Korea, and Taiwan. However, what is most clear, then and now, is how complicated the relations are between all of the different countries as strong economic ties are laid over different political ideologies and foreign policies. Insightful comments are made on the on-going situation with North Korea such as how expensive reunification would be (in the region of a trillion dollars) and therefore is not desirable, while China has a commitment to North Korea that it can't easily withdraw, nor could it allow a US friendly government to be in control. This leaves North Korea in limbo as there is no clear resolution, while as shown in recent years Japan and South Korea frequently face tense situations due to provocative actions.

The entire original paper can be downloaded as a PDF file here: http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubid=96

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