

## Rainbow streets

Ali Muskett explores Japanese fashion

## Getting to know the Otaku

Lucy Searles faces up to a stereotype

This issue focuses on the young people of Japanese society through the eyes of both foreigners and the Japanese themselves. Sir Hugh Cortazzi starts off the issue with a review of *Reimagining Japan, The Quest for a Future That Works* which, as he highlights, covers the far-ranging challenges that Japan faces, such as inadequate leadership as well as young people who stay at home (not just their family home, but also don't venture abroad) and lack the necessary skills to help revive the economy. Ali Muskett and Lucy Searles follow this up with reviews of books covering alternative culture in Japan; Japanese street style fashion and the infamous Otaku. Ali finds that we should start raising questions about why teenage culture, in relation to clothes, displays such creativity in a country famous for conformity, while Lucy believes that the people labelled as Otaku are greatly misunderstood. Susan

Meehan attended a special charity viewing of *Mitsuko Delivers* that was shown at the ICA on the anniversary of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. This film focuses on the life of a young, carefree but pregnant girl who, despite having no boyfriend, job or money, never loses her positive outlook on life and actively helps other people. Afterwards, Cortazzi reviews another book that illustrates the viewpoint of a foreigner observing Japanese customs and curiosities from his commute on the Odakyu railway line. Next Ali Muskett considers a Japan guidebook written for foreigners by a foreigner and then Susan Meehan finishes this issue with a film review of a romantic story surrounding a young photographer and three contrasting women.

Michael Sullivan (Guest Editor), October 2012

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## Reimagining Japan The Quest for a Future That Works,

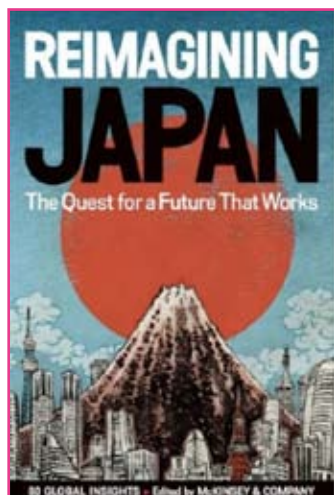
edited by McKinsey & Company

VIZ Media, LLC, San Francisco, 2011

448 pages, \$38.99

ISBN: 13:978-1-4215-4086-3

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi



This book brings together essays about Japan and its future by almost ninety different authors. The non-Japanese authors include journalists such as Bill Emmott, academics such as John Dower, Gerald Curtis and Ezra Vogel, authors such as Ian Buruma and Pico Iyer, investment analysts such as Peter Tasker and Jasper Koll, as well as industrialists such as Carlos Ghosn, CEO of Renault-Nissan. Japanese authors come from all walks of life; industrialists include Masahiro Sakane, the chairman of Komatsu, Yasuchika Hasegawa, the CEO of Takeda, Motoya Okada, the president of AEON, Masayoshi Son, the CEO of Softbank, plus writers, journalists, and sportsmen.

The chapter headings include some all embracing themes such as 'Renewal' 'Rethinking Japan's Past – and Future,' 'Restructuring Japan INC.' and 'Re-engaging with the World.' It is perhaps inevitable that with so many authors and themes the book is a pot-pourri and there is good deal of repetition.

While there is fairly general agreement on the need for change and new leadership there is no consensus on how change is to be achieved.

The introduction by Dominic Barton sets out the main themes. Many of the contributors note the reluctance of young Japanese 'to venture outside the safe cocoon of Japan.' The Tohoku earthquake and the subsequent tsunami and nuclear disaster must surely have shaken the idea that Japan is such a safe place: the disasters could act as a catalyst for change.

Japan still lacks the necessary openness to the outside world and there are signs that the *sakoku* [鎖国] mentality has not disappeared. Japanese continue to see themselves as unique. This belief seems to lie behind what has been called the 'Galapagos Syndrome' which has led some companies to make products for the Japanese market which do not conform to international standards.

Glenn Fukushima in an essay entitled 'Unlocking *Sakoku*' notes that 'Japan has the lowest level of inward foreign-direct investment in the OECD – by far.' Tadashi Yanai, president of Fast Retailing, declares that 'My Advice to young people is simple: get out of Japan.' But will they? Masahiro Yamada points out in an essay entitled

'The Young and the Hopeless' that 'eighty percent of unmarried Japanese between 18 and 35 live with their parents.' Bill Emmott in his essay headed 'A Tale of Two Futures' thinks that 'a quiet life amid genteel decline could look tempting to many Japanese.'

Many contributors are concerned that Japan's education system does not encourage creativity and innovation. Kazuhiro Fujihara, who came from business to serve as a principal in a Japanese junior high school, declares that 'Japan is still educating children as it did fifty years ago.' Japanese universities are no longer among the best in the world.

Apart from more openness Japan needs to become more diverse. Japanese codes of conduct designed to preserve harmony helped Japanese people to endure the recent disasters. But 'homogeneity can also be a disadvantage.'

The standard of English in Japanese companies based in Japan is comparatively poor. 'Japanese companies do not reward staffs for their overseas experience or qualifications and do not compete effectively to recruit the ablest from abroad.'

Japanese companies do not make good use of Japanese female talent. William H. Saito points out in an essay on 'Expanding Japan's social capital' that 'women hold a minuscule 1.4 per cent of the board seats in Japan's leading companies, less than in Oman, Jordan and Kuwait.'

Japanese are proud of their manufacturing expertise, but Japan can no longer compete in labour-intensive industries. The productivity of Japanese service industries is low and as one economist points out 'such inefficiency saps competitiveness.'

Richard Katz considers that a fundamental issue holding back change is that 'In Japan a workers primary social safety net is his job. That creates tremendous political pressure to keep moribund and mediocre firms going.'

In a chapter entitled 'Japan's Globalization imperative' three authors point out that 'Japan accounted for 35 percent of the Fortune Global 500's revenues in 1995 – and only 13 per cent in 2009,' but they assert that 'the sleeping giant that is Japan Inc has begun to awaken.'

Many authors bemoan the failures of Japanese politicians to provide adequate leadership. Changes must be made and can be made as was demonstrated so clearly in the Meiji period. The message is not new but weak governments and inflexible superannuated leaders have lacked the necessary sense of urgency.

Ordinary Japanese are increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo and a few realists, ready to confront the old guard, may now be coming to the fore. Gerald Curtis declares that 'The daunting reality is that Japan's political system is in the midst of a period of "creative destruction."' He notes that the 'close government-business relationship no longer exists. Fortunately

Japanese companies are no longer willing to accept old-style administrative guidance.'

Japan's demographic problems are highlighted by many contributors. Various measures to deal with the ageing society and a declining population are discussed, but none seem likely to reverse current trends. Jasper Koll asks: 'Can it be that the combination of demographic destiny, entrenched vested interests, and cultural stubbornness leaves no other outcome but the relative and absolute decline of a once great national economy?' But he and others are reluctant to be too pessimistic.

Klaus Schwab reminds us that 'twenty-one percent of patents granted in the US in 2009 were from Japan – equivalent to the shares of Germany, South Korea, Taiwan, Canada, United Kingdom, France and China combined.' Stephen S. Roach thinks that 'corporate Japan has finally come to grips with tough competitive challenges,' although he notes that 'gains in total factor productivity averaged just 0.2 percent per year from 1991-2000, down from the 2.4 per cent average from 1983-1991.'

*'... while the challenges facing Japan are daunting the future need not be as bleak as Japanese demographics suggest.'*

The nuclear issue features in many essays. The Fukushima disaster has exacerbated Japan's nuclear allergy. Solar power and other alternative methods of generating power can be harnessed but without nuclear Japan will be unable to meet its climate change targets.

Some contributors focus on foreign policy issues including relations with the US and with China. Hitoshi Tanaka in an essay 'Forging partnership with China' points out that 'Japan is becoming less important to China, while China is becoming more important to Japan.' In an essay entitled 'The Diplomacy Deficit' Paul Blustein takes the view that 'Repeated bouts of economic recession and stagnation over the past two decades have sapped Japan's already modest capacity for exerting influence overseas... Nowhere is Japan's relative weakness more evident than in the WTO (World Trade Organization).'

The overall message of this thought provoking collection of essays is that while the challenges facing Japan are daunting the future need not be as bleak as Japanese demographics suggest. The non-Japanese authors sometimes seem more optimistic than some of the Japanese contributors. Japan clearly has many friends overseas.

## Japanese Street Style

by Pat Lyttle

Bloomsbury/A&C Black, 2012

128 pages, £19.99

ISBN: 978-1-4081-5671-1

Review by Ali Muskett

*Japanese Street Style* claims to be 'the first book of its kind to showcase the most innovative and cutting-edge looks in Japan today.' There certainly does seem to have been a gap in the market since *Fruits and Fresh Fruits* (Shoichi Aoki, Phaidon, 2001 & 2005), although many fans of Japanese street fashion would probably rather fill that gap with the latest fashion magazines and websites, rather than fork out £19.99 for a book of glossy photographs. That said, *Japanese Street Style* is a gorgeous, colourful book, which would certainly brighten up any fashion-fan's Muji coffee table.

The photographer, Pat Lyttle, started out as a chef specialising in Japanese cuisine, but soon realised he was more at home in the world of fashion. Although untrained as a photographer, he has photographed some of the biggest celebrity names, including Betty Davis and Joan Collins. Now Lyttle focuses on fashion, in particular Japanese street fashion, and has a website and blog called JStreetstyle.

The majority of the pages of *Japanese Street Style* are taken up with pictures of young Japanese people posing in the latest street fashion trends. Poses range from sultry and pouty, to happy-go-lucky and leaping in the air. Many are making peace-signs with their fingers – I counted at least 32 peace-signs throughout the book – and this does become a little wearying. I suppose it's just a reflection of Japanese street style and youth culture though, and I don't blame the photographer for this lack of creativity.

The fashion tribes and trends which the book covers include: Lolita (Classical, Gothic, Elegant, Punk, Sweet, Guro and Male), Dolly Kei, Kogal or Kogyaru, Ganguro, Date Megane, Kigurumi, Visual Kei, and Decora. Brief explanations of the styles are included at the beginning of the book, although the pictures beside them don't seem to match up, and aren't labelled. It would have been nice to have included a small example picture with each explanation – this is a photo book, after all.

Pat Lyttle is an excellent fashion photographer, and manages to convey the spirit of his subjects' characters in his pictures. These young people are bursting with life and energy, and generally look thrilled to be photographed. Lyttle believes that, 'Style is an expression of one's feelings – how you feel and how you choose to display those feelings visually,' and certainly captures that essence in his photographs. In



the book's introduction he also notes that, 'In Japanese society individuality has traditionally been viewed as less of a positive thing while the group identity is strongly encouraged. [ . . . ] But in Tokyo or Osaka you'll find possibly the largest concentration of individual style on the planet, a unique teenage culture of individual self-expression that seeks neither understanding nor approval, but just to be itself.' Japan is a country which lives by the expression 'The nail that sticks up will be hammered down' (出る釘は打たれる), so some people might be surprised to see the wild fashion trends that are becoming popular among young people in Japan today. Seeing the creativity in some of these outfits – not just wearing a dress off-the-rack, but adapting and customising it to express something – makes me think we should be paying more attention to the youth of Japan, because they obviously have something to say.

While I simply can't fault the photos in *Japanese Street Style*, I found that the captions beside them didn't always adequately explain what fashion trend I was looking at. This led me to wonder what the exact purpose of this book is – should I be learning something about street fashion, or simply lusting after gorgeous clothes, accessories and shoes (oh my, the shoes!). If it's the latter, then bravo Pat Lyttle. However, if it's the former, I did find the text lacking in places. Some captions describe the outfits worn, including fashion brands and even the names of the models, whereas other photos are completely captionless, or include captions with odd little bits of rhyme that I found wholly unnecessary and grating ('Four girls from Ame Mura lined up in a row. Dressed in so many colours from their head to their toes').

Throughout the book, the quality of the writing simply doesn't match the quality of the photographs. Lyttle writes enthusiastically, showing his passion for Japanese street style, but his words seem to be based more on opinion than research. In addition, the editing and proof-reading throughout the book are, quite frankly, sloppy. At the beginning of the book the blurb about Punk Lolita appears on two different pages, containing different information. Later in the book, two captions have been switched, so that the description of two Lolitas in the brand Baby the Stars Shine Bright sits beside an image of two Visual Kei girls splattered in red paint. I had a sense of deja vu when I realised that one picture of some pretty pink rose shoes was repeated on two separate pages. As gorgeous as the shoes were, I didn't need to see them twice. And then there's the reference to Dolly Kei 'Taking its visual queue [sic] from Eastern European folklore and fairytales.'

All in all, *Japanese Street Style* is a bright, fun book containing interesting, beautifully shot photographs full of character and energy. But, if you're looking for a place to learn about Japanese street style and fashion, I wouldn't rely on this book.

## Otaku Spaces

by Patrick Galbraith

Chin Music Press, Seattle, 2012

240 pages, £15.99

ISBN: 9780984457656

Review by Lucy Searles

For many, even for the Japanese themselves, the concept of the *otaku* is still something misunderstood and often, misrepresented. Despite a number of academic works being produced on the idea; works that seek to define who *otaku* are, their consuming habits and the reasons for their interests, the *otaku* still remains a mystery and a source of fascination for many in the west and in Japan. *Otaku Spaces* is a book that attempts to dispel some of these misconceptions by, rather than seeking to define what an *otaku* is, allowing these people who are considered to have *otaku* interests, to discuss their hobbies and the rationale behind them. In many of the interviews, for example the interview with the 'race queen' and model Mariru Harida, the idea of an *otaku* as an anti-social and unfashionable person is totally dispelled – while her interests are reading manga and collecting the related paraphernalia, the woman goes against the very definition of *otaku* that is explained as the stereotype in the book's introduction.

Galbraith begins by detailing the emergence of the concept of an *otaku* – describing them as someone (while there are female *otaku*'s, it is something that is generally associated with males) who devotes their life to anime, manga and games, who shuns work and responsibilities and spends huge amounts of money collecting and obsessing on their hobbies. The book then goes onto



describe the origins of the word and its use in Japanese society, briefly touching on the spread of the *otaku* concept into the west. While this is important background information, it is not an exhaustive study of the *otaku*, and while a lot more could be offered on the topic the purpose of the book is not for Galbraith to explain his theories on what the *otaku* is, but rather to allow for the people themselves to help explain what being an *otaku* is to them. The book then moves onto the most interesting section – the interviews and a look into the private spaces of the *otaku*.

While the interviews do demonstrate the expected otaku images, the girlfriendless men who have hundreds of figurines of scantily clad teenage girls and the infamous ‘hugging pillows’ that display young anime women, they also offer some surprising insights. For example the interview with Ryosuke Watanabe, who collects banned materials – from Aum memorabilia to Japanese bike gang stickers and KKK badges, comes as an interesting contrast with the anime obsessed interviewees later in the book, yet he expresses similar affections for his collection as the others do – statements that confirm the *otaku* stereotypes Galbraith describes in the introduction.

An interesting twist to the interview sections is the inclusion of the interviews with academics on the subject, but also the interview with western *otaku* and Internet celebrity Danny Choo. Choo, who himself writes on the subject of the *otaku* on his website [dannychoo.com](http://dannychoo.com) from a personal perspective, offers an insight into otaku culture as a western outsider who became interested in anime and manga, and whose interview is entertaining and insightful.

Galbraith then discusses the public spaces of the *otaku*, outlining the various Mecca across Japan that cater exclusively to the diverse tastes of the nation’s *otaku* consumers. The vivid descriptions serve more as a travel guide than offering an in depth history, with the exception of the section on Akihabara, but by describing the public spaces of the *otaku*, Galbraith is able to explain not only the growth of otaku culture, but to show how it is steadily becoming a more recognized sub-culture within Japan.

A highlight of *Otaku Spaces* is, of course, the beautiful photographs that the book contains. From the brightly coloured images of the rooms of the interviewees, surrounded by their interests and hobbies to the wonderfully rich photographs of stores, cosplaying teenagers and busy city scenes. A particularly wonderful image is the photograph of the cosplaying teenagers at Nippombashi’s Street Festa, where the vibrant anime characters stand out against the drab hustle and bustle of the city behind them. The photographs, which come courtesy of the Tokyo-based photographer Androniki Christodoulou, take the book from being simply an academic analysis of the space of ‘*otaku*-ness’ to being a wonderful celebration of it and widening the general appeal of the book from a niche interest into something

anyone interested in Japanese culture and photography can access.

Galbraith has a brilliant knowledge on the subculture of the *otaku*, and *Otaku Spaces* is a wonderful starting point for anyone interested in this area of Japanese culture, whether it be academically or just from a personal interest. The book is well referenced, providing plenty of food for thought and opportunities to pursue reading on the topic, and the abundant photographs throughout the book put a face to the interviewees – offering an even clearer peek into the personal lives of this misunderstood group.

## Mitsuko Delivers [ハラ がコレなんで]

Directed by Yuya Ishii

2011, 109 mins

Review by Susan Meehan

*Mitsuko Delivers* - the title made me think of the very funny film by the same director with a similar title, *Sawako Decides* [川の底からこんにちは] and it did dispense the same style good humour and feel good factor.



The screening at the ICA (11 March 2012), a year to the day after the Great East Japan Earthquake, and a charity showing organised by Adam Torel, Director of Third Window Films, was a complete sell-out. Adam introduced the film and said that the money raised would be donated to the Fukushima International Festival for Children’s Future. He also had DVDs on sale at a reduced price to raise money for the same cause. His initiative was rightfully acknowledged with thunderous applause. He chose to show *Mitsuko Delivers* due to its upbeat positive message and because the film wraps up in Fukushima.

Mitsuko is pregnant and alone. We see photos of burly American soldiers on one of her walls at home and assume that one of them has knocked her up and dumped her. She remains surprisingly undaunted and spirited.

‘For plucky Mitsuko everything is, quite simply, either cool (*iki*) or uncool.’

She calls her parents and they have a cursory chat. They are much happier to hear Mitsuko than she is to talk to them. After confirming that all is well in California, she hangs up. California?! Popping out of her flat, the familiar Japanese landscape immediately becomes apparent. She lives in a flat in Tokyo and pays a visit to her Japanese doctor who pronounces that her delivery will most probably be tough as the pregnancy hasn’t ever really settled. The ever-optimistic Mitsuko pronounces she’ll be

fine and returns home.

Mitsuko clears out her flat and, with less than ¥300, walks out following in the direction of the wind. Handing over her money to an unemployed man she is completely broke and cannot even afford the taxi which takes her to the modest working class alley where she lived as a kid over 15 years ago. She barges in on the now rather elderly and bedridden landlady, Kayo, who takes her in. Settling back in, Mitsuko then goes to 'Yoichi's restaurant' for a generous helping of food.

For plucky Mitsuko everything is, quite simply, either cool (iki) or uncool. Friendship is cool, a sour face is not cool; being dumped by her American lover is definitely uncool. Though the landlady chastises her for her use of 'iki,' 15 years back, in the years soon after the economic bubble had burst, it was she who exhorted everyone to live a 'cool' life and to help each other. Her mantras were humanity and cool. Fifteen years on, all Kayo's tenants in the alley have left to buy their own flats, leaving her in the lurch.

Mitsuko and her parents had sojourned in the working class alley only temporarily while waiting to be able to reopen their pachinko parlour. As they leave, little Yoichi tells Mitsuko that they'll marry when they're older because he loves her.

Back to the present, Yoichi is on 'granny' duty and visits Kayo. 'That's cool,' observes Mitsuko, noticing that 'humanity' has not totally disappeared. As Yoichi leaves he announces that he will look after Mitsuko's baby; she's 'cool' with that.

Mitsuko starts helping out at the restaurant by cleaning tables and going out onto the street to pull in clients. She turns around the ailing restaurant and proceeds to find other people to help.

Yoichi wants to marry Mitsuko but can't. He was abandoned as a kid and taken in by his kindly 'uncle' Jiro who has cared for him ever since and, consequently, never married. Mitsuko dreams up a plan and takes matters into her own hands in order to encourage uncle Jiro to marry his sweetheart, a coffee shop owner. She is in the midst of sorting out the lives of Jiro, his sweetheart, her son, Kayo and Yoichi when she notices her parents are in the tenement. They've returned as their pachinko parlour has failed again. They are stunned at seeing a heavily pregnant Mitsuko.

A bun fight ensues with the parents wanting an explanation, Yoichi standing up for Mitsuko, Kayo not wanting to go to Fukushima, Jiro declining to marry the coffee shop owner, Yoichi proclaiming that he will marry her instead and on and on.

Taking control and making everyone shut up, Mitsuko drives them all to Fukushima, where the coffee shop owner's ill mother lives. A revived Kayo tells her that her condition is all in her mind, Jiro finally asks for the coffee shop owner's hand. Mitsuko formidable as always will

continue to look out for Yoichi and, in the middle of bucolic Fukushima fields, having sorted everyone's lives out, she is about to deliver!

Good and hilarious in parts and despite having a ballsy and gorgeous heroine, *Mitsuko Delivers* has, on the whole, a weak plot and no character development. It is also predictable and too long to hold one's attention throughout.

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## Tokyo Commute, Japanese Customs and way of Life viewed from the Odakyu Line

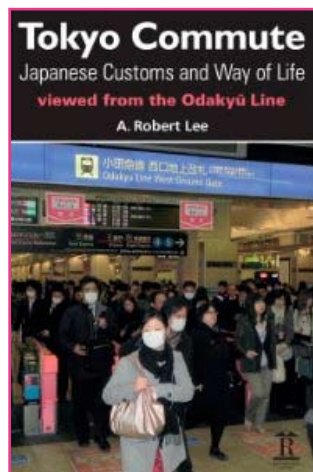
by A. Robert Lee

Renaissance Books, Folkestone,  
2011

214 pages including glossary,  
£16.00

ISBN 978-1-89823-06-3

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi



This is a fun book containing amusing vignettes. Readers who have lived in the Tokyo suburbs and commuted daily on one of the many private railway lines may well feel nostalgic when they look at this little book.

The author used to commute on the Odakyu line to the Shinjuku concourse from Mukōgaoka station. He observed with amusement the daily scenes and the notices in Japanese English. These may no longer be quite as absurd as those recorded by Basil Hall Chamberlain in late Meiji Japan under 'English as she is Japped' in his compendium of *Things Japanese*, but they can still raise a smile and sometimes bewilderment.

Outside a bread shop Lee saw a sign reading 'Scandinavia's Smell.' On a truck belonging to Zest Bakery the following was painted on the sides; 'The secret of delicious is a thing flatly crushed when eating. The delicious source that exists so on the inside is spread in the whole.' Like other foreigners he found the names 'Pocari Sweat' and 'Calpis' for soft drinks unappealing. The advert 'Kirin sparkling hop' raised an eyebrow. He was amused by a notice in the train which instructed him to 'Be careful in case of an emergency stop being made to avoid an accident' and by a temporary notice while repairs were being made which instructed him: 'Please use elevator to go up to the underground concourse.'

Some advertisements by Japanese companies struck him as odd 'Bridgestone -Let's green drive,' but foreign companies could be equally strange e.g. 'Braun-Morning Report.' In Narita duty free he saw the following notices 'Be nice or leave hanging pendant,' 'Diesel

Male Perfume: Evel for life.' A shop selling Shiseido cosmetics had some 'Shimmer black eye palette.'

Some of the conversations which he overheard and which he describes as 'Plain old-fashioned, non-stop natter' often sounded peculiar. Of course practically everyone was constantly on their mobiles (*keitai* in Japanese)

Lee includes many literary allusions which may appeal to some intellectual readers. He describes various excursions and local sites, but this is not a guide book. The drawings are evocative. Overall the book would have been improved by more rigorous editing.

This book is likely to appeal more to old Japan hands than to someone who has never been to Japan and who might find it puzzling.

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## A Gaijin's Guide to Japan

by Ben Stevens

The Friday Project, 2009

272 pages

ISBN-10 1906321213

Review by Ali Muskett

A Gaijin's Guide to Japan is a fine place to start if you have a mild interest in Japan which needs nurturing. However, if you're already a bit of a Japanophile, it might not be the best book for you to read. It is written in an A-Z format, and doesn't really go into any one topic in much depth ('Buddhism' is a mere three pages, for example, while 'sushi' barely makes a page).

As a comment on style, I would like to note that the author tends to use a strange mixture of spellings of Japanese words, which results in some entries being found in slightly bizarre places. For example, the entry about 'Capsule Hotels' isn't found under 'C' where I would expect to find it, or even under 'H' for hotel. It's under 'K.' Why? Because the Japanese spelling for capsule hotel is "kapuseru hoteru" (written as カプセルホテル in katakana). But, to be honest, the average 'gaijin' reading this book probably isn't going to know that. This is a book written for foreigners – foreigners who are interested in Japan but feel they need an A-Z guide – so I don't think it's very sensible to order things by their Japanese spelling (unless they are recognised words, such as sushi or kimono). I wouldn't mind so much if he was consistent (although I would still disagree with the choice). However, 'Kapuseru Hoteru' (Capsule Hotel), 'Chikatetsu Sarin Jiken' [地下鉄サリン事件] (Subway Sarin Incident, which does at least have the English

translation, although it's still under 'C'), 'Sarariman' [サラリーマン] (Salaryman) and 'Hosutesu Bar' [ホステスバー] (Hostess Bar) are all under their Japanese spellings. So why then use the correct English spelling for other entries, such as 'Taxis' or 'Golf,' which can be written in katakana, too. And why can I find shrine under 'J' for 'Jinja' [神社] (the Japanese word for shrine) but temples under 'Temples', not '(o)tera' [お寺] (the Japanese word). It just isn't consistent.

Another comment on style, is regarding listing by surname. Of course, I can't dispute that 'David Beckham' (who, believe it or not, makes an appearance in this book along with Cameron Diaz) be listed under 'B'. However, Japanese pop-punk band 'Shonen Knife' [少年ナイフ] can be found under 'K' – 'Knife, Shonen'. Isn't that like listing the Sex Pistols under 'Pistols, Sex'?!

As a final comment on style, I must add that I would love to have a chat with the copy-editors on this book, as I noticed a number of simple errors whilst reading (to list just one example, on page 28, 'packed Toyo commuter trains', I assume, should read 'Tokyo commuter trains'). However, this was a review copy, so I guess there's a chance this was an early print.

Ben Stevens only lived in Japan for about a year I think, although according to his website he returns to Nagasaki every year, presumably to see his wife's family. I don't doubt that he knows a lot about Japan, and I'm sure his Japanese is probably better than mine (having a Japanese wife usually helps with that!), but I still think that one year's experience does not maketh a comprehensive A-Z guide on Japan! I feel there are many glaring oversights in this book and, whilst I am aware that, of course, not everything can be included, I wonder how Stevens could have missed such entries as 'Omamori' [御守] (or, 'Good luck charms' – the kind you buy at shrines) or 'Eikaiwa' [英会話] (or, 'English Conversation Schools'), which would surely interest the typical reader of this book. There is an entry for 'Sensu' [扇子] (the Japanese folding fan), but I don't recall seeing any mention at all of 'Uchiwa' [うちわ], the popular Japanese flat fan, which everyone uses at summer festivals. Even if it's not worthy of its own entry, I would be inclined to give it a mention under 'Sensu'. (And, this is a personal gripe, which I understand isn't important to most people . . . On page 92, Stevens mentions Kit Kats, but fails to mention that there are, in fact, many interesting and bizarre regional flavours of Kit Kat in Japan. He simply mentions the green tea flavoured ones. He's missing out if he hasn't experienced Hokkaido's 'Jagga Butter' [じゃがバター味 キットカット] (jacket potato with butter) flavoured Kit Kats!

A Gaijin's Guide to Japan is supposed to be a light, amusing read. But I found the humour pretty hit-or-miss, and at times I found the author's attitude towards Japanese culture and customs, quite frankly, insulting. Insulting to the Japanese, and insulting to

other foreigners living in Japan and actually wanting to learn about the culture and experience new things. For example, at the end of the short entry on 'Keigo' [敬語] (or, honorific speech), the author writes 'However, don't worry about it if you're a gaijin, as it's yet another thing you're not supposed to know the slightest thing about.' OK. If you say so, Mr. Stevens. As the old saying goes, 'you can't judge a book by the cover,' but this book does have an awesome cover.

## Tokyo Park (東京公園)

directed by Shinji Aoyama (青山真治)

2011, 119 minutes

Review by Susan Meehan

Tokyo Park, based on a novel by Shoji Yukiya [小路幸也], opens with university student and aspiring photographer Koji, played by rising heart-throb Haruma Miura (三浦春馬), taking photos in a Tokyo park.

He directs his lens towards a beautiful woman pushing a pram (played by Haruka Igawa [井川遥]) and, unable to ignore her, snaps away. There is just enough time to instinctively flinch at this breach of privacy before Koji is confronted by Takashi Matsushima, played by Hiroshi Takahashi [高橋洋]. Matsushima chastises carefree Koji for taking photos without permission, but proceeds to call him the next day asking him to tail the woman and baby who pick a different park to walk in each day. This assignment is to become Koji's day job; he is to take photographs and email them to Matsushima on a daily basis.

Following Koji in pursuit of his photographic targets who continue to chastely keep to themselves, it is easy to wonder whether Koji is falling in love with the mother and whether that is what Matsushima had intended from the start – playing the victim and further adding to his jealousy and angst. Koji seems to enjoy and pursue the project as something more than just a job.

Love and isolation are central to the film and are often talked about by Koji with his goofy friend Miyu, beautifully acted by Nana Eikura [榮倉奈々], by far the film's most engaging character. As well as hobbling around on crutches, uninjured but practising how to use crutches should she ever need to use them, she generally amuses Koji with her zaniness. Deep down, however, she cannot get over the loss of her boyfriend and Koji's best friend, Hiro (Shota Sometani – 染谷将太) or can she?

At the jazz bar where Koji works in the evenings we also encounter his beautiful sister Misaki, dextrously played by Manami Konishi [小西真奈美]. Misaki, who has always looked out for her adorable brother who is nine years younger, turns out to be his step-sister. She also, it transcends, has unresolved feelings for him.

While Koji continues his spiral tour of Tokyo parks, he gradually becomes aware of the need to sort out some of his own sentimental affairs. The assignment is, in many ways, a kind of maze which Koji successfully navigates, ably finding the end point.

It is at this juncture that Koji phones Matsushima to quit his assignment and resolves his affairs much to the viewers' delight.

All in all, this is a light and enjoyable film with plenty of zany and metaphysical moments and a good jazz sound score to boot.

'While Koji continues his spiral tour of Tokyo parks, he gradually becomes aware of the need to sort out some of his own sentimental affairs.'

This film was shown at the Premiere Japan 2011 event at the Barbican and was preceded by an original short film by students from the University of the Arts London. All films in Premiere Japan 2011 were preceded by original short films by students from the University of the Arts London. Unfortunately I only watched the first one, 'A Day in Regent's Place Museum' by Ami Kanki in its entirety. It is light, funny and superb playfully showing how people interact with the structures near Regent's Place; a fountain and an Antony Gormley statue feature.

*In the next issue . . .*

\* Susan Meehan gets up close with author Kazuo Ishiguro.

\* Hugh Cortazzi examines the many etchings of Bernard Leach.

