

Welcome to the final issue of *The Japan Society Review* in 2020. This has been a strange and difficult year, but we hope our publication has accompanied you during these uncertain times offering new opportunities to discover, read and learn about Japan. In 2020 *The Japan Society Review* has featured more than 30 reviews, including the five reviews in this December issue which cover non-fiction books on Japanese history, philosophy, gardening, film and cuisine.

The issue opens with a review of *Revolution Goes East* by Tatiana Linkhoeva, an academic monograph which concentrates on the intellectual history of Russo-Japanese relations in the interwar period. It focuses mainly on the impact and understanding of the Soviet revolution in imperial Japan, weaving together histories of diplomats, intellectuals, and underworld political agents. This review has been written by Francesco Cioffo.

Originally written in Japanese, *Flower Petals Fall, but the Flower Endures* by Seiichi Takeuchi revolves around the concept of impermanence and transience in Japanese culture and society. As reviewer Chris Arning points out, the book examines the notion from the perspective of philosophy, spirituality, and religion emphasising how it permeates everyday life in Japan. Also dealing with issues of change and conservation but from

a naturalistic point of view is the book *Tokachi Millenium Forest* by landscape designer, horticulturalist, writer and gardener Dan Pearson in collaboration with Shintani Midori, head gardener at the forest in Hokkaido. To reviewer Katie Croft, Dan “takes us on a journey from his first contact with Japanese gardens, through his design process, onto the creation of the garden and up to the maintenance challenges of growing in such a harsh climate”.

For those readers interested in revisiting Japanese film classics, *Noriko Smiling* by Adam Mars-Jones, reviewed in this issue by Laurence Green, offers an analysis of the narrative, themes and style of the film *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, Ozu Yasujiro, 1949), a canonical work in the history of Japanese cinema.

To conclude this issue, our last review, written by Ann Morrison, explores the cookbook *No Sushi* by MasterChef Finalist Andrew Kojima (Koj). Expanding the focus beyond the world of sushi, Koj’s book presents a wide range of Japanese recipes which can be cooked successfully at home.

The Japan Society is extremely grateful to all of its reviewers for giving their time and expertise. They transmit their knowledge and passion about Japan and Japanese culture and this publication could not be possible without them.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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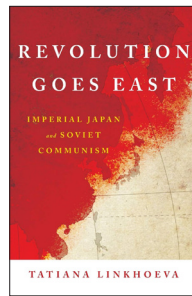
Chris Arning, Francesco Cioffo, Katie Croft, Laurence Green and Ann Morrison.

Image: Tokachi Millenium Forest (official website: <http://www.tmf.jp/>)

Revolution Goes East: Imperial Japan and Soviet Communism

by Tatiana Linkhoveva

Cornell University Press (2020)
ISBN-13: 978-1501748080



Review by Francesco Cioffo

Tatiana Linkhoveva's *Revolution Goes East* is a remarkable study that aims to deepen our understanding of both Japanese modern history and the global history of the Russian Revolution.

The main argument of the book is that, in the period between 1917 and the late 1920s, Japanese responses to the Russian Revolution were influenced by a combination of both ideological and geopolitical factors. More crucially, Linkhoveva refocuses the attention upon the Soviet impact on the Japanese empire, its continental aspirations and anxieties. This is not as straightforward as it may appear. The author in fact goes to great lengths to correct the assumptions and misconceptions that have crowded the field until now.

The long historiography of Russo-Japanese relations has been quite predominantly limited to diplomatic relations and military conflicts (chiefly the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, the Siberian Intervention, and the events of WWII). [1] It has often portrayed the two as natural ideological enemies at the expenses of their rich history of interactions and exchanges.

In recent times, global intellectual and transnational studies of Russo-Japanese relations have tried to shift the focus upon more complex and variegated arguments that take into account multiple socio-cultural perspectives as well as the usual ones. [2] This diversification is a timely one. For while state-to-state relations are of course relevant, they often tend to explain merely the perspectives of political elites. Linkhoveva's analysis not only shows both the intellectual and the geopolitical perspectives, but it also demonstrates how crucial was the interplay of these factors in shaping Japanese responses.

Revolution Goes East is divided in two main sections. The first four chapters deal with the more familiar topic of Russo-Japanese political relations from the Tsarist era to the end of the 1920s. It looks at the different interest groups that supported or openly refuted political rapprochement with Soviet Russia. These positions were hardly static, and they tended to vary over time.

The author discusses the diverse responses to the pressing questions of the nature of the Soviet geopolitical aspirations from Japanese politicians and political groups. Quite interestingly, she shows how in Japan emerged two main approaches that effectively mirrored the somewhat

idiosyncratic foreign policy of the Bolsheviks whose goal was the survival of the Soviet Regime through international diplomacy, while facilitating world proletarian revolutions through the support of revolutionary groups in the same countries.

The first approach developed in Japan saw Soviet Russia as a traditional state that would pursue with cynical realism the (tsarist) imperialist policies of spheres of influence in East Asia. A party like any other to coexist with through skilled diplomacy. The core supporters of this approach were party politicians, military and business leaders, as well as some non-governmental groups.

The second approach instead recognised Soviet communism as an existential and ideological treat to the Japanese polity. Looking at the revolutionary activities of the Comintern around the world, they concluded that Communism was a foreign "disease" that would only threaten Japan. Among the main figures behind this approach there were officials of the Foreign Ministry, conservative bureaucrats from the Home and Justice Ministries, liberal commentators, the army as well national socialists.

The second section of the book builds upon Linkhoveva's PhD thesis and it describes the history of leftist movements in Japan and their internal discussions over the nature and meaning of the Revolution. Three main perspectives are presented: the anarchists, the national socialists and the early members of Communist Party of Japan.

Linkhoveva presents a series of arguments that aim to further complicate the historical consensus around the failure of the Left vis-a-vis the totalitarian imperial state in the interwar period. The book points out, in fact, that 'the battle, in fact, was lost first within the Left' (p.9). In other words, despite the consensus of the Russian Revolution as a political model, the internal intellectual debates about Soviet Russia and its Revolution were put into frameworks that never questioned the commitment to the nation, the empire and the national polity.

On the one hand, the primary goal for leftists became the advancement of mass politics and the betterment of the economic, social and moral conditions of the nation. On the other, the conceptualisation of Russo-Japanese civilisational, racial, and cultural differences in Japanese circles engendered a scepticism over communist universalism and the authority of Russian communists. This diffidence had two key effects. Firstly, it elevated national and imperial interests over supranational concerns of proletarian revolutions. Secondly, Japanese leftists' anti-Soviet communism often overshadowed their challenges to Japan's imperialism (p.11).

The substantial bibliography encompasses primary and secondary sources from multiple locations and written

in multiple languages. Linkhoeva uses published works, personal documents, as well as extensive research in diplomatic archives in both Russia and Japan.

The final result is an extremely detailed and well researched book that helps us see through the complex variety of Japanese responses to the Russian Revolution. For, as Linkhoeva reminds us, 'there was no agreement, either among factions of the government, bureaucracy, and the military, or among members of socialist and rightist movement, about what to make of communism and Soviet Russia' (p.11).

The almost picturesque histories of diplomats, intellectuals and underworld political agents in interwar Japan are all woven together by Linkhoeva's clear and punctual prose in such a way that makes the reader actually curious to know more and dig deeper. Beyond the

remarkable historiographical contribution, perhaps the key quality that makes *Revolution Goes East* such a critical book is the fact that despite all the questions it answers, it is able to raise many new ones.

Notes

[1] For Anglophone historiography see the many works of Ian Nish on the topic.

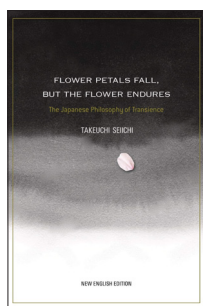
[2] Konishi, Sho (2013), *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center. Steinberg, John W., and David Wolff (2005), *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*. Leiden: Brill. §

Flower Petals Fall, but the Flower Endures

by Seiichi Takeuchi

Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture (JPIC) (2019)
ISBN-13: 978-4866580692

Review by Chris Arning



The first thing that occurred when considering how to review this book is that we judge books by their covers. We cannot help it. My specialism is brand semiotics which studies implicit associations and connotations in bedded in all sorts of media. One of the principles I teach is precisely that we need to judge the book by the cover. All packaging seeks to rhetorically persuade the beholder that its contents are worth sampling, whether food or words. The cover in this case is a beautiful ink washed book cover, subtly related example of most beautiful *sumi-e* painting. I was expecting a treatise on the transience in Japanese aesthetics, art, poetry, music and the performing arts.

As a practitioner of Japanese calligraphy for 20 years, keen appreciator of Japanese beauty and Buddhist meditator, I was a bit disappointed not to hear more about the idea transience in the mended gilding embedded in *kintsugi* porcelain, the symbolism of nimbus clouds motifs in kimono for instance or seasonal metaphors indicating transience in *waka*, *tanka*, and *haiku*. Given the cover I was expecting something in the line of the classic *In Praise of Shadows* by Tanizaki Junichiro. This was not that. Yes, the subtitle is the Japanese philosophy of impermanence, and this was the core of the book, but I felt the meat of the content only

spoke to one aspect of impermanence, the vicissitudes of life buffeting our self-determinations.

In the preface was written: 'When the voluntary (*mizukara*) actions of human beings are displaced by grand spontaneous (*onozukara*) functions, the values, meanings, "playfulness" and sublimity (*shogon*) of *mizukara* appear at the boundaries (*awai*) between them. These concepts form the underpinnings of Japanese *mujo* philosophy, which I hope will become clearer in the text that follows'.

The through line or red thread that runs through the book if there can be said to be one is that of the dialectic between *onozukara* and *mizukara*. There is a familiarity to these two concepts as every student of Japanese culture will be familiar with ideas like *honne vs tatemae*, *giri* and *ninjo* and other such binaries. The best way I found of assimilating this dialectic was their similarity to the Machiavellian concept of *virtu* and *fortuna*, respectively action and the vagaries of chance. This is long debated by historians for instance, the "Great Men" school of history versus the *Annales* school of "*longue durée*" of gradual or sudden socio-economic shifts in terms of what factors can be ascribed prominence in accounting for events unfolding. Except that the *onozukara* and *mizukara* seem to fit an attitude of resignation rather than political action as in Machiavelli. The text proceeds mainly through literary and other examples, and Seiichi Takeuchi acquaints us with the two concepts through related concepts. We learn for instance that *hakanai* is a thread in contemporary nihilism (the inability to predict the future, what we might call imponderability). Seiichi delves into excerpts of classic writers like novelist Natsume Soseki and poet/activist Miyazawa Kenji to glean examples from their work.

An example of *onozukara's* influence and being inextricably linked to *mizukara* is the examples of "it turns out that we will get married". This suggests that the pairing of bride and groom relied upon an improbable concatenation of events including their facticity, background; way beyond their conscious control. The use of the passive voice reflecting the ambiguous diffuse and often deliberately imprecise nature of the Japanese language - brought out by Oe Kenzaburo in his Nobel Prize winning acceptance speech, *Japan, the Ambiguous and Myself* – underscores the sense of fatalism in the concept. I was once told about the notion of en or thread of karma by a girlfriend, and I guess this was analogous. And a sort of fatalist nihilism, more than aesthetic aspects of *mujokan* is what the book focuses on. This for me, gave it a rather dour and gloomy aspect, that I found salutary but not what I was expecting.

I did learn a lot about the etymology of fundamental Japanese concepts such as *yasashii* or gentleness and link with sort of performative simpering through the kanji actor, *totoi* for the idea of preciousness, and the related idea of *ichigu*. He quotes Shiga Naoya's essay *A Drop in the Nile*: 'Even if you go back scores of thousands of years, you cannot find another me... I will not be born again'.

I learned about the word for thank you as deriving from *arigatai* as being grateful for life – *itamau* the verb to hurt or to be pained as being literally 'something slipping out of the heart' and the fatalism of the word *sayonara* meaning 'as things will be' a way of acquiescing in the fate of the departee, and the divine and incantatory origins of the *iwai* as a form of celebration, *shiwase* as meaning something fitted or aligned with circumstances.

I also learned that the word *sumimasen* comes from the idea of not allowing a bad situation to persist (the negation of residing or settling or *sumu*), and that *omoshiroi* originates in the Shinto creation myth involving the reclusive sun goddess, Amaterasu who was tempted out of the cave with a lascivious dance – now thought to be residing in a mirror at the Ise Shrine. I always love the way Japanese can be so brutally direct.

This reminded me of my favourite portmanteau – *kokoronokori* – meaning nostalgia for something where one has left one's heart. The book was indeed replete with such fascinating linguistic excursion, but it also felt a little bit disorientating at points too.

The frequent jump from one concept to another made me think that this book would have been more appropriate perhaps as a dictionary or as a compendium of concepts for easy reference to the reader.

Overall, I was a bit perplexed because to my mind the book deals with one aspect of transience the unpredictability of life which requires a certain fatalism.

What was missing for me was the experiential dimension of impermanence and clinging to things that change as the source of suffering and the relish that can be taken in *mono no aware*. I was surprised not to see more poetry in the book and explicit Buddhist concepts. There was mention of Buddhism and the Heart Sutra for instance, 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form' – but overall Buddhism was given a cursory mention even though it is the most thorough philosophy of transience - best expressed in monk Kukai's *Letter to a Nobleman*.

Have you not seen, O have you not seen?

That billions have lived in China, in Japan,
None have been immortal, from time immemorial:
Ancient sage kings or tyrants, good subjects or bad,
Fair ladies and homely – who could enjoy eternal
youth?
Noble men and lowly alike, without exception, die
away;
They all have died, reduced to dust and ashes;
The singing halls and dancing stages have become
the abodes of foxes.
Transient as dreams, bubbles or lightening, all are
perpetual travelers.

I was surprised no to see any reference for example to the *iroha uta* poem, a chain of hiragana with which I am fascinated – which is a pangram, containing all Japanese phonetics - a formative text in the Japanese education system and suffused with impermanence. No reference to the classics of Japanese the *Tale of Heike* and *Tale of Genji*, the former characterised by the short life span, sudden reversal of fortunes, the worldly winds of political machinations courtiers taking the tonsure, or out of favour noblemen being sent into exile; the latter characterised by the drifting and enigmatic shining prince, Genji, moving from one unsatisfactory liaison to the next with various amenable various court women, unaware of his craving to replace the mother love he'd never had. Given the title of the poem, again, I was expecting the author to touch on that most famous of seasonal tropes, the falling cherry blossom.

Anthropologist Ohnuki-Tierney's book *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms and Nationalisms* (2002) was a masterclass in think about the uses of ephemerality and is impossible not to read alongside this book, so obvious are the parallels. Ohnuki-Tierney traces the percolation of the cherry blossom into Japanese painting, Yamato-e in the 9th century as a way of forging a nativist Japanese style vs the previously influential Chinese styles. She then chronicles the cherry blossom as a polysemous sign standing for the individual and social groups in Japan, how it became immortalised

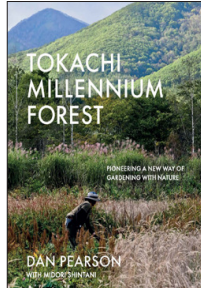
in art but that then later became appropriation by a death cult of militarism: 'The symbolism of cherry blossoms was transformed from full blooms as a life force to falling petals as the sacrifice of soldiers, who then are reborn as blossoms...'. But even after death the souls (*damashii*) of these soldiers endured even after the petals had been scattered.

Tokachi Millennium Forest

by Dan Pearson with Shintani Midori

Filbert Press (2021)
ISBN-13: 978-1999734541

Review by Katie Croft



Dan Pearson is one of the few garden designers to have broken out of the horticulture world to find, if not A-list fame, then at least wider recognition with the general public. He is known for his wild, naturalistic garden style which can be seen at Lowther Castle in the Lake District, the Trout Stream Garden at Chatsworth and the Garden Museum in London amongst others. This book charts the design, creation and evolution of the Tokachi Millennium Forest, which he has been involved with for the last 20 years.

Situated at the foot of the Hidaka Mountains in southern Hokkaido, the Tokachi Millennium Forest was the brainchild of newspaper magnate Hayashi Mitsushige. Hayashi purchased almost 1000 acres of land between 1990 and 2000 in order to off-set the carbon footprint of his company and protect the land from development. His secondary goal was to counter the urbanisation of the population by providing a place where people can rekindle an intimate relationship with nature.

Opening to the public in 2008, the Tokachi Millennium Forest includes vast land forms, forest gardens and huge swathes of naturalistic planting. The goal of reuniting people with nature is also supported by the productive gardens which supply the café, serving seasonal, organic food. Although ostensibly a coffee table book, Pearson's detailed prose is as informative, insightful, and inspiring as the photography. He takes us on a journey from his first contact with Japanese gardens, through his design process, onto the creation of the garden and up to the maintenance challenges of growing in such a harsh climate.

Pearson takes care to explain his design approach to the garden in the context of the highly industrialised agricultural lowlands of Hokkaido. He explores the history and geography of the area, detailing the Ainu people's traditional relationship with the landscape as well as Honshu's culture of *satoyama* (the area between

Overall I thought this book was an informative read but I felt that I had been mis sold because its content was more about fatalism and resignation to circumstances than transience. §

mountain foothills and arable flat land, from *sato* (里) village, and *yama* (山) mountain). There are some thought-provoking words here, as Pearson scathingly describes how modern Japan's relationship with the land is framed by chemicals, mechanisation and efficiency.

He also reflects on the tradition of Japanese gardening and how it holds nature somewhat apart from humans, even whilst idealising it. We are often expected to view rather than touch; the interpretation of nature is controlled and balanced, never wild or unkempt. This, therefore, is an unusual garden for Japan: Pearson's design is on an extremely large scale and visitors are expected to explore the garden with every sense.

He examines the balance that is struck between visibly cultivated spaces such as the meadow garden and productive gardens, and the native woodland gardens. The latter is carefully tended by the garden team with such a skilled touch that the casual visitor may not realise that they are walking through a gardened space. Pearson takes time to discuss how we think about and interact with wild versus human spaces.

He has included the familiar traditional forms of horticulture (vegetable and flower production) with purpose, as an entry point to naturalistic gardening. Although the New Perennial Movement has made naturalistic planting so popular as to become ubiquitous in the West, it is still new in Japan. It is, therefore, interesting to read that Pearson uses the more familiar cultural counterpoints of forest and *satoyama* to lead the visitor gently out to the meadow garden and then onwards to the earth garden and out to the true wilderness of the mountains.

At no point is the Hokkaido Millennium Forest presented as a "Japanese Garden", but Pearson clearly intends to use his position as an outsider to repackage and reintroduce the Hokkaido landscape and culture to Japanese people. If that is a lofty or arrogant aim, it is one required of him by the goals of Hayashi Mitsushige. If he has succeeded or not, I cannot tell without visiting the garden.

Although Pearson's writing is fascinating, the shining light of this book are the interludes written by Head Gardener Shintani Midori. Her short essays share thoughts on topics such as the significance of *shun* 旬 (seasonal eating) and foraging wild food, historical relationships with the forest,

her experience of gardening around the world and how the garden connects people. A mixture of personal stories and cultural reflection make for a wonderful insight into a Japanese understanding of nature that can sometimes seem lost amongst the bright lights of Tokyo or Osaka.

For the knowledgeable gardener, there is much detail here on the construction and maintenance of the garden. The planting is carefully designed to mimic wild ecosystems using native and non-native plants which are rarely seen in Japan and Pearson goes into detail about the botanical interactions in each area of the garden. The exquisite photographs illustrate the planting as well as the wider landscape and are thoroughly labelled with botanical names and design details.

It is unusual and refreshing for a garden designer's book to include the voice of the gardeners or so much detail about maintenance. This garden is in an extremely challenging climate with long, cold winters and short, hot summers and so it is fascinating to hear about the techniques that the gardeners employ to work with the seasons.

The most surprising is 'breaking the winter' by scattering charcoal on the surface of the snow to speed melting. Although they are maintaining a Western-style garden, the gardeners employ Japanese techniques and aesthetics. Pearson describes the approach of 透かし *sukashi* (transparency) in the thinning of perennial plants so that they can recover from the heavy summer rains. The gardeners also build 冬囲い *fuyugakoi* (protective covers for plants) from rice straw mats to protect woody shrubs from the temperatures that drop down to -25°C.

Both Pearson and Shintani's writing suggest that the Japanese maintenance approach brings a subtlety and perspective that is often missing from naturalistic gardens in Europe. The attention to both the micro and macro is essential for a garden whose core aim is to be sustainable for 1,000 years. In this search for sustainability, Pearson is honest about the experiments with plants that have failed to thrive and about compromises that have to be made due to time, climate and money. He helpfully lists the planting mixes for the meadow garden, including the failures and what has been substituted for them. It would certainly be interesting to see how these lists evolve over the coming decades as the climate warms.

Pearson also questions whether or not it is truly appropriate to be sinking energy and resources into growing species that cannot survive without intervention, such as the collection of roses he included in the productive gardens. The reluctant conclusion he comes to is that the intensive inputs are worth the resulting engagement with visitors; a compromise that many environmental gardeners struggle with.

Pearson's writing style sometimes becomes too dense or florid, and non-gardeners are likely to find the use of botanical names and technical terms difficult to grapple with. However, the photographs serve very well to illustrate what may be opaque in the text and this book will appeal to anyone with an interest in the natural world. If nothing else, it will certainly inspire you to plan a trip to Hokkaido to see the garden for yourself. §

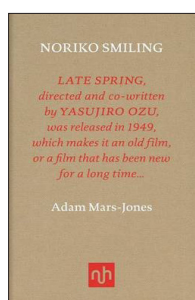
Noriko Smiling

by Adam Mars-Jones

Notting Hill Editions (2011)

ISBN-13: 978-1907903458

Review by Laurence Green



This pocket-sized volume focusing exclusively on Ozu Yasujiro's 1949 masterpiece *Late Spring* (*Banshun*) is rather quaintly subtitled 'It's the quiet ones you have to watch', but the truth is, this is a loud – almost overconfident – book, and is unashamed about it.

Those familiar with *Late Spring* will know that the film's essential plot is simplistic in the extreme – almost minimalist, one could say. We follow Noriko (played so memorably by the iconic Hara Setsuko), at the age of twenty-seven, still living with her widowed father. She faces constant pressure from those around her to marry, but all she wants from life is

to continue her duties as a devotional daughter – and thus the film's central dramatic tension is set. Will she, or won't she, end up getting hitched?

Over the course of around 240 pages, writer Adam Mars-Jones sets to examining *Late Spring* with a fine-toothed comb, offering a surprisingly frank, and often humorous take on the film's narrative and themes. Those used to the quiet, composed subtlety of Ozu's cinema might find this tone jarring at first; Mars-Jones places himself and his personal viewing experience very much at the centre of proceedings here – so much so that he almost seems to supplant Noriko herself at times.

The feel is much like author Peter Carey's classic *Wrong About Japan*, and it has to be said, Mars-Jones background as the *Independent's* film critic from 1986-1997 puts him in good stead to offer what quickly becomes an energised dismantling of previously unassailed Japanese Studies scholarship in favour of journalistic storytelling. Donald Richie

is quickly dismissed with the withering sobriquet: 'rather inconsistent critic'. In this sense, Adam-Mars approach to a classic of Japanese cinema is refreshing – unburdened by decades of scholarly baggage and cultural “knowledge” of how writing about Japan “should be done”. As he puts it rather neatly himself; 'being Japanese is not a state with a single dimension'. And so too, there are many ways to approach an esteemed director and their work, both of which have been covered countless times before. Another pointed line from Mars-Jones suggests: 'Masterpieces are not fragile but robust. They can stand up go more than a reverent dusting'.

And yet, while the opening scene-setting and critique of the film's historical context makes for a punchy start, the following scene-by-scene close-reading quickly becomes overbearingly dull – like a pulpy novelisation of the film itself, complete with transcribed dialogue and timestamps. Without Ozu's accompanying visuals, much of the magic is undoubtedly lost – as such, it is highly advisable to have watched (or re-watched) *Late Spring* immediately prior to reading *Noriko Smiling* so that it remains as fresh in the mind as possible. When the book hits its mark, it is entertaining and undoubtedly witty, but one can't help but wish there had been more here about the star behind the “Noriko Smile” – those looking for insights into Hara Setsuko's enigmatic life on and off the camera will unfortunately find little new or insightful here.

Mars-Jones is clearly a strong writer, and an experienced voice when it comes to film analysis, but it's hard to tell if the book fits its self-proclaimed status as long

form essay, or if it's more at home as a high-calibre piece of fan-ish adoration. Lines like 'Is it just me, or is it odd to keep a visitor waiting while you brush your teeth and discuss your journey?' feel like they would have been better suited to a supplementary audio-commentary track to a DVD edition of *Late Spring*. In print, they just feel unnecessarily trite.

The book reaches its introspective nadir when Mars-Jones ponders: 'Am I being sucked into the vortex of over-interpretation? Occupational disease of the critic'. It feels as if he has lost touch with the subject matter, treading water in an attempt to keep the words coming – so ironically unlike the long pregnant pauses Ozu himself favoured. The analysis becomes skin-deep, constantly and infuriatingly pre-faced with disclaimers like 'I can't help feeling that...' or 'I'm not claiming any actual knowledge of...'. The ever-present 'I' looms larger than ever over the narrative here – an author and book in love with themselves. It is only in the last 50 pages that we return again to a more general analysis of *Late Spring*'s core themes. But by this point it's too little, too late, and the book never again delivers the sharpness and clarity of its early passages.

Noriko Smiling is a valiant attempt to capture what makes Ozu's cinema so enchanting. Yet, despite initial promise and some keen analysis in the book's opening sections, it soon descends into a dull, repetitive replay of the film's events – a mere imitation wilting in the shadow cast by the original. While this tastefully presented and lovingly cloth-bound volume will no doubt make a fine gift for fans of Ozu, the writing is as likely to infuriate as it does entertain. **S**

No Sushi

by Andrew Kojima

A Way With Media (2020)
ISBN-13: 978-1910469231

Review by Ann Morrison



I was very attracted by the title of Andrew Kojima's (Koj) new cookery book – *No Sushi*. I liked the word play of the title and while I do like sushi, the memory of fast lunches bought from the usual outlets found around office hives was not cheering. Eating ice cold sushi straight from the fridge, trying to open the un-openable pickled ginger sachet while juggling the tiny fish-shaped plastic soy sauce bottle (which promptly fell, soaking the first two or three sushi pieces in pure salt, leaving nothing for the others) and eking out the wasabi - was not a great experience. The sushi itself, once out of all its plastic packaging and at room temperature was pretty good - but you get my drift.

Koj promises no sushi recipes - and this book delivers. In the introductory section he explains why, quoting from a MITI report 'There are half a million places to eat in Japan and less than 10% of them are sushi restaurants'. Koj contrasts this with his estimate that there are some 120,000 Japanese restaurants around the world and 90% of them serve sushi. He recognizes the appeal of sushi and its place 'as the poster boy of Japanese culture', that it is photogenic and regarded as a healthy food. But he laments that in focusing on sushi, we are missing out on the breadth and variety in Japanese cuisine. His mission in his restaurant in Cheltenham (also named “Koj”) is 'to promote the eclectic range of Japanese food that exists outside the world of sushi'. The mission is extended in this book with a range of recipes which can be cooked successfully at home (watch also the video of Andrew's recipe for spicy miso peanut aubergine with The Clearspring Kitchen at Japan Matsuri Presents <https://www.japanmatsuripresents.com/>).

This is a beautifully presented book - the cover echoes Japanese design simplicity, being in black and

white with a splash of red, this, with the unusual title, makes you curious to look inside. The layout of the introductory chapters and the recipe sections is clean and clear with lovely, atmospheric, photographs of each completed recipe. In some ways it is an unusual book. It opens with several short sections describing Koj's background and his journey, via the Masterchef finals in 2012, from leaving his job in corporate finance, working in various kitchens to gain experience, becoming a private chef and then, opening "Koj" in Cheltenham (now unfortunately closed). It then moves to describing the development of the restaurant over the last 3 or 4 years, the team Koj works with and the suppliers he uses. I enjoyed the story but, as a Japanese cooking tyro, I would have liked the section on how Japanese cooking can be made accessible to home cooks expanded. That said, the book is not setting itself up as a guide to Japanese cooking for beginners - there are other authors who do that very successfully. Rather, it describes a particular range of dishes which are truly Japanese in inspiration, are served in his restaurant, but which can also be prepared by home cooks. While some recipes for basic flavourings are given, these are not put together in one place for reference. In one section Koj describes simple, time-effective meals which can be prepared at home such as donburi or noodles stir-fried as in yakisoba, but I cannot find separate recipes for these in the book. (I looked for them, but, tragically, there is no index; very unusual in a cook book. After a search I found a recipe for a lovely, unctuous-sounding Mabodon, a spicy gravy originating in Sichuan, which Koj suggests can be served as a topping to a donburi rice bowl.)

The recipes look absolutely yummy which, with the almost edible photographs next to them, make you long to eat the completed dish. The sections covered are - Cocktails, Appetisers, Buns, Grazing plates, Side-dishes and Desserts.

The cocktails sound delicious. They start with the Okinawa Old Fashioned - a short, strong drink made of American Bourbon (in a reference to the US naval presence in Japan), Pedro Ximenez sherry, shiso vinegar, sugar syrup and orange bitters. The description of the cocktail and its photograph made me just want to reach in and slurp! Koj also suggests making it with Japanese whisky which can have a similar feel to Bourbon. And the section ends with a wonderful-sounding mocktail - the Red Lantern, (referencing *akachochin* red lanterns which hang outside Japanese izakaya (informal bars serving drinks and snacks) composed of cold brew hojicha tea, grenadine syrup, hibiscus tonic and fino sherry.

The appetisers are real taste-bud teasers - small plates of food light-years away from the usual crisp and

peanut offerings in many UK bars. Some are familiar, such as the Padron peppers (the European equivalent of Japanese shishito peppers) with sea salt and a twist of yuzu; but others less so - crispy shitake mushrooms with tonkatsu mayo or aubergine agebitashi both sounded perfect for starting a meal or to serve with drinks.

Filled buns are the current vogue in Europe. Food outlets of all descriptions (fast or otherwise) now offer them as authentic street food options. So Koj's section on filled buns rides the bun zeitgeist perfectly. The fillings are built for oozing out of a folded, puffy bun, filled with a mix of savoury tastes, flooded with sauces or mayo. Who could resist panko cauliflower, yuzu pickled red onion and curry mayo? Or crispy shitake, aubergine and truffle mayo? I made the panko cauliflower buns and they were simply gorgeous. The only surprise was that Koj does not give a recipe for making buns; he simply lists bao buns in the ingredients list. This seems a pity as they are straightforward to make at home.

Koj describes "grazing" as a Japanese cultural custom. Rather than quickly eating one main dish, served hot, as we often do in the UK, he suggests that the Japanese "graze" through several dishes, taking time to enjoy the carefully prepared variety of tastes on offer. The recipes in this section are a mix, including Koj fried chicken (his own version of karaage), beef shoga yaki salad, miso marinated cod with bok choy and radish, chicken curry udon (with the curry sauce clinging to the udon and topped with chicken, pak choy and soft boiled egg - mmmmm!). All are packed with flavour. These gorgeous grazing dishes would be accompanied by a variety of vegetable side dishes and rice.

There is a short section on desserts - small portions of singing sweetness, designed to finish off a good meal. The photographs reflect elegant and beautifully presented puddings, providing a sweet hit without making you feel like Paddington Bear after a particularly large pot of marmalade. Gets my vote!

This is an interesting and enjoyable book, following one man's journey to becoming a successful chef and restaurateur, now sharing his Japanese food heritage with his customers. The recipes in the book are clear and simple to follow and are carefully chosen and presented in a way that makes you long to cook them (and eat them!). Koj has been careful to make the most of Japanese flavours and the great thing about his book is that we can now replicate these in carefully chosen home-cooked dishes. Most of the recipes include Japanese ingredients; and while many can now be bought on line, it might have been helpful if Koj could have suggested some alternatives. [S](#)