

Perspectives

The Japan Foundation London Newsletter

Japanese Film Season

– Self, Identity and the Outsider in Recent Japanese Film

In collaboration with UK professional organisations, the Japan Foundation is presenting in March at Watershed, Bristol, Sheffield's Showroom and at the Birmingham Screen Festival a season of recent Japanese films. It will feature films that look at the concept of "others" within Japanese society and the search for self and identity. Contemporary Japanese film has begun to reflect a general shift away from the depiction of Japan as a homogeneous society to reveal its increasing diversification in terms of race and the way people think and interact. Films are focusing more and more on people's place within society, their feeling of "otherness", and their need to re-identify themselves as they attempt to adjust to and communicate with those they perceive as "different".

We plan to show the following films:

Cure	Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 1997
Embracing	Naomi Kawase, 1992
All Under the Moon	Yoichi Sai, 1993
Helpless	Shinji Aoyama, 1996
Distance	Hirokazu Koreeda, 2001
Shangri-la	Takashi Miike, 2003
Swallowtail Butterfly	Shunji Iwai, 1996

The outsider is a romantic figure in every national cinema. The actor who best represented the "outsider" in the 1990s was Tadanobu Asano, who starred in the feature debut of nearly every important Japanese director to emerge during the decade, including Shinji Aoyama's *Helpless*, Shunji Iwai's *Picnic*, Hirokazu Koreeda's *Maborosi* and Satoshi Isaka's *Focus*. And with films such as Pen-ek Ratanaruang's *The Last Life in the Universe*, he is increasingly called on to play the outsider in films by directors heavily influenced by Japanese cinema.

Asano has been joined in the ranks of rebels with and without a cause by Koji Chihara in *Pornostar* and *Hysteria*, Ryuhei Matsuda in *Gohatto* and *Blue Spring*, Masato Hagiwara in *Cure* and *Rain of Light*, Masanobu Ando in *Kids*



A scene from *Shangri-la*. This will be the UK premier

Return and *Transparent*, Nao Omori in *Ichi the Killer* and *Vibrator*, and Yosuke Kubozuka in *Go, Laundry* and *Madness in Bloom*. Even housewives are getting a look in with Hideyuki Hirayama's *Out* and Tetsuo Shinohara's *Showa Kayo Daizenshu*. In the former, factory workers find their vocation cutting up dead bodies for the yakuza; in the latter our heroines enter gang warfare with the local hooligans, matching them weapon for weapon before Tokyo explodes in a mushroom cloud.

One catalyst for the trend was the bursting of the economic bubble. Shunji Iwai's blockbuster *Swallowtail Butterfly* (1996), conceived during the boom years, takes place in a fictional Yen Town, a "paradise of yen" for Asian immigrants. Like Yoichi Sai's critically applauded *All Under the Moon* (1993) before it, the protagonists with whom the audience is asked to identify are foreigners. Another groundbreaking film was Isao Yukisada's *Go* (2001) whose Korean-Japanese protagonist Sugihara doesn't give a damn about discrimination until the girl he loves backs off after finding out what's really in his genes. It showed that it's not only okay for a Japanese actor's career to portray a foreigner, but that it can also be the epitome of cool.

The other major trend in Japanese cinema over the past five years is the psycho-horror boom. And what more extreme example of the outsider is there than Sadako in the *Ring* series, a

woman trapped for decades in a well who has projected her vengeance as a broadcast recorded on to a cursed videotape. But before *Ring* there was Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cure* (1997) in which a stranger can so undermine one's sense of self that one could murder the people one most loves. Japanese critics have speculated that such an examination of evil could only come from a nation without the concept of a monolithic god. Kurosawa's most recent film, *Doppelganger*, takes his examination of identity even further, speculating what would happen if one was literally confronted by one's idealised self.

Identity, of course, is the six million dollar question that all of these films about the outsider, the other, the dispossessed, are striving to answer. What is exciting about recent Japanese cinema is how this quest, a mainstay of independent and avant-garde film, has found such fruitful and commercially successful forms. It is no coincidence that the most influential films of the past decade within Asia – Shunji Iwai's *Love Letter* (1995), Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (1998) and Kwak Jae-yong's *My Sassy Girl* (South Korea, 2001) – have each taken the question of identity, communication, and what it means to love and be loved, at their core. We are all outsiders. Even the Japanese.

Stephen Cremin

Details from Junko Takekawa on
Tel: 020 7436 6695
Email: Junko.Takekawa@jpf.org.uk

Doctoral Research

Ever reducing budgets have impacted greatly on the availability of funds for postgraduate and post doctoral research within UK universities. We were therefore pleased that two promising young scholars succeeded last year in visiting Japan under our Fellowship Programme. Richard Ronald and Lee Woolgar describe here their research.

Home Ownership Ideology in Britain and Japan

My postgraduate work raised a number of questions concerning the comparability of British and Japan as modern home owner-societies. Indeed, despite the obvious contrast in household and vernacular tradition, construction and architectural approaches, finance systems and market patterns, both Britain and Japan have transformed themselves rapidly from rental to home ownership orientated societies in the post war era. Thanks to the Japan Foundation Doctoral Fellowship, for 12 months from September 2002 I was based at the faculty of Human Development at Kobe University in order to explore this comparison and carry out fieldwork necessary for the completion of my Ph.D. thesis.

Levels of owner-occupied housing in Japan expanded rapidly during the 1950s, reaching around 65% before the end of the decade. The expansion of home ownership drove the construction sector and was strongly embedded in the process of economic growth and the formation of a mainstream middleclass. For households themselves owner-occupied housing became an important asset or container of family wealth. Furthermore, the privately

owned home was a nodal point of family social relations and intergenerational exchange. However, the Japanese housing market has suffered substantial losses in the post bubble era and family patterns are increasingly fragmenting. Increasingly, the housing ladder system is destabilising, and the long-term sustainability of the housing system is in question.

My investigative approach to Japanese housing drew upon a framework of social and economic analyses developed in Anglo-Saxon societies and the newly industrialised societies of East and South East Asia where owner-occupation is now prevalent. The aim was to develop comparative understanding of the specific and universal aspects of the Japanese system. My empirical work focused upon the process of consumption and involved interview research with around 40 homeowners in the Kansai area, as well as supplementary research with professionals working in planning, construction and architecture.

The findings of the research shed light on the significance of discourses on family and cultural traditions in the consumption of

modern housing. The conceptual and market separation of housing units and land in the Japanese case was also an issue highlighted by the research and stands out as a conspicuous and unusual element of the system. This separation goes some way in explaining the strong preference for detached housing units on family owned land, the deliberately engineered short lifespan of the Japanese housing unit (normally 25-40 years), and the over-construction of housing.

I returned to the UK in September last year and completed the Ph.D. examination in December. My hope is to develop this research further in the future and I am currently looking for a new academic position that might facilitate this. I am extremely grateful to the Japan Foundation for the opportunity to complete my fieldwork and experience a year with Professor Yosuke Hirayama and the postgraduate students of the Urban Planning Research Group at Kobe University.

Richard Ronald Centre for Residential Development, School of Property and Construction, Nottingham Trent University

Japanese Investment in British Science

My research was at the National Graduate Research Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS). It assessed: 1) the scope of Japanese R&D engagement in the UK; 2) how competition from other countries and Japanese universities may influence future Anglo-Japanese engagement.

It is increasingly acknowledged that finite resources and competences lead firms to seek technological and scientific knowledge from organisationally heterogeneous and geographically distributed sources. Research on overseas R&D suggests that nationally distinctive supplies of knowledge, skills, networks and infrastructures are important for firms; inward investment provides new technologies, skills and organisational innovations for a host economy. North American, European and Asian countries compete for investment and adjust and monitor structures both for welcoming innovative firms and incorporating innovative practice into their

innovation system. Furthermore, Japan has recently embarked upon significant reform of its R&D infrastructure and industry-science relations (ISR) linkage mechanisms.

Two main methodologies were used: questionnaires and interviews. One questionnaire was sent to British universities; a second to 150 large Japanese corporations. Twenty-five interviews occurred with R&D managers, policy actors, IPAs, university representatives and academics. The research drew on the national innovation system concept for comparing historical, cultural and institutional configurations.

Studies of overseas R&D have focused predominantly upon laboratory establishment. Growth in these is now more sporadic and organic than earlier and I anticipated them to comprise only one dimension of UK engagement. Japanese UK R&D is not confined solely to prominent examples within the 'golden triangle' of Oxford, London and Cambridge,

but is more geographically and institutionally extensive in range, formality and scope.

As laboratory establishment appears modest, other investments are newly established or continued. British universities are selected for strong research performance, and a more entrepreneurial attitude to ISR than many Japanese counterparts. Reform of Japanese structures and ISR linkage mechanisms were seen to deepen linkages and other countries, particularly China and South Korea, have also gained prominence. Paradoxically, country considerations are relatively unimportant for selection of appropriate technologies and knowledge with firms; but national characteristics and strengths, supported by cultural and historical factors, gain policy prominence for the nurturing, development and promotion of innovation systems to external actors.

Lee Woolgar University of Manchester

Japanese Robots Old and New:

A Cultural History from Karakuri Dolls to Aibo Robots

From 17th to 19th January the Japan Foundation invited Professor Yoshikazu Suematsu of Nagoya University and the 9th Shobei Tamaya, Grand Master of *karakuri* traditional dolls to the UK. Lectures and demonstrations took place at the British Museum and in Edinburgh's Museum of Childhood and the City Arts Centre. Shobei Tamaya, Karakuri Master, showed how the dolls were made and demonstrated two of his favourite working models, a Tea-serving Doll (see inset) and an Arrow-shooting Boy, while Professor Suematsu talked about *karakuri* dolls during the Edo period comparing them with automata in the west and exploring the cultural aspects of the industrial development of Japan that contributed to Japan's position as a leading producer of robots. By demonstrating Aibo robots alongside the *karakuri* dolls he combined the old with the new, showing how the ancient *karakuri* tradition had evolved into contemporary Aibo.

Professor Suematsu's lecture at the British Museum was attended by around 150 and each of the two afternoon demonstrations by Shobei Tamaya attracted a gathering of 50.

Edinburgh was no exception. The Museum of Childhood invited 50 children (aged 7-9) from Blackhall Primary School. As in London, one person was invited to take tea from the Tea-serving Doll and there was never a shortage of volunteers. Mr Tamaya also showed simple *karakuri* dolls made from cardboard, in order to explain how they function. There were two more demonstrations there in the afternoon attended by some 60 people, from students, mothers with children to the retired, and the lecture in the evening at the City Arts Centre attracted 120.

Audiences were amazed at the facial expressions the dolls appeared to assume when there is, of course, no change of expression at all but, like a Noh mask, they look happy or sad depending on the position and the way they interface with the spectator.

The Japan Foundation would like to thank the British Museum, the Japan Society of Scotland and the Japanese Consulate General in Edinburgh for their invaluable help in making the event such a success.



Shobei Tamaya demonstrates his Tea-serving Doll (unclothed) to a rapt Edinburgh audience

'The head and face are the most difficult parts to make', explains Mr. Tamaya Shobei, 'because they are the soul of the *karakuri*'. Sad when downcast, happy when uplifted, certainly the expressions of the 'Tea-serving Doll' (*chahakobi ningyō*) and the 'Arrow-shooting Boy' (*yumihiki dōji*) that he has brought with him from Nagoya are as ethereal and self-contained as Noh masks. 'In 1733 my ancestor moved from Kyoto to Nagoya, and I am the 9th generation since then to make and repair *karakuri* (moving dolls worked by wooden clockwork mechanisms).' In reply to another question, Mr. Tamaya modestly admits that his is in fact the *only* family in Japan to preserve these skills in unbroken line from the Edo Period. How many people work with him in his studio? Three. Will his son continue the tradition? Yes, he is now five and is just starting to help. You really are a Living National Treasure, I suggest. Too young – maybe when I am seventy, he smiles.

The Tea-serving Doll is a modern replica that Mr. Tamaya's father was able to revive, based on the detailed printed diagrams in *Karakuri zui* (*Illustrated Anthology of Mechanical Devices*, 1796) by one Hosokawa Honzo Yorinao.

A large steel spring (originally coiled whale fin) is wound up and this then powers various wooden cogwheels and other intricate devices – made from seven different woods. Place a small bowl of tea on the tray that the boy carries and this lowers the arms and sets off the mechanism to

make him trundle forward. When the guest at the other end of the *tatami* picks up the cup to drink, he stops. When the cup is replaced onto the tray, another clever mechanism kicks in that makes the doll do an exact U-turn and trundle back to the host, head gently bobbing, *tabi*-socked feet turning subtly in and out. Magical.

Arrow-shooting Boy takes each of four small arrows in turn from the lacquered arrow-holder at his side, sizes up the target with an engaging wag of the head, fits the arrow-notch into the bowstring, and pushes the bow forward while still holding the shaft close to his right ear. With a sudden release of his thumb the arrow flies forward about a metre and, as often as not, hits the 6cm target. What operates all this? Again, a large spring, wooden cogwheels and eleven strings (five of these move the head alone). So what are the brass cogwheels at the front, apparently wound up by another, smaller Chinese boy? They're basically there to show off the new metalworking skills of the maker, Tanaka Hisashige (1799-1881, who went on to found Toshiba); all they do is slow down the wooden mechanism. This too is a modern replica made by Mr. Tamaya that copies one of only two originals to have survived. They were made in about 1850 for the Lord of Owari, close relative of the Shogun.

Arrow-shooting Boy is a fine example of the so-called 'parlour *karakuri*' (*zashiki karakuri*), made, like European automata, for a rich individual patron. But what really distinguish Japanese *karakuri*, argues Professor Yoshikazu Suematsu, are the many larger examples made to be enjoyed by crowds. Amazingly, more than three hundred 'carriage *karakuri*' (*dashi*

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Dates for your Diary

Events organised by, or with financial support from, the Japan Foundation

15 January 2004 – 5 June 2005	Counter-Photography: Japan's Artists Today – a Japan Foundation Touring Exhibition now at the <i>Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston</i> until 7 March. 60 works by 11 internationally renowned and emerging young artists. Including works by Sugimoto, Hosoe and Shimabuku. Then to the <i>Piece Hall Art Gallery, Halifax</i> 20 March–2 May: <i>University of Dundee Gallery</i> 25 June–20 August: <i>Millais Gallery, Southampton</i> 10 September–23 October: <i>European Illustration Collection, Hull</i> 6 November–11 December: <i>South Hill Park, Bracknell</i> 23 April–5 June 2005. More information contact Junko Takekawa Tel: 020 7436 6695, E-mail Junko.Takekawa@jpf.org.uk
From 27 January – end November 2004	'through the surface' – an exhibition about collaboration, process and outcome featuring 14 of the most innovative textile artists in the UK and Japan touring venues in the UK and then to the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, April/May 2005. Beginning 27 January–20th March at James Hockey and Foyer Galleries Farnham, Hove Museum and Art Gallery, then 5 April–13 June at Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, UEA, Norwich. Full details and rest of tour schedule on www.throughthesurface.surrart.ac.uk
4 February – 3 May 2004	Work 1991–1995 – an exhibition of photographs by George Hashiguchi: a Japan Foundation Travelling Exhibition. Collection of photographs in which Japanese are pictured and interviewed from the perspective of their differing occupations. Dorset County Hospital & Dorset County Hall, Dorchester. Also part of Dorchester Festival 'The World Comes to Town: East meets West' 29 April–3 May. Details contact Alex Coulter Tel: 01305 25 5144. E-mail: Alex.Coulter@wdgh.nhs.uk
March 2004	Japanese Film Season: See article on front page. Contact Junko Takekawa for further details 020 7436 6695, E-mail Junko.Takekawa@jpf.org.uk
6 March & 13 March 2004	Exploring Japan: 2 Workshops in Scotland: Japanese Language for primary and secondary teachers. Renfrew 6 March, Aberdeen 13 March. Contact our Language Centre on 020 7436 6698 or Japan 21 on 020 7630 8696
23 March 2004	18:30 at the Japan Foundation: Talk by Tatsuo Kobayashi, Professor of Archaeology at Kokugakuin University, Tokyo and Director of the Niigata Prefectural Museum of History. Upon the publication by Oxbow Books of his latest work <i>Jomoneseque Japan</i> , co-authored with Simon Kaner, Assistant Director of the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures at the University of East Anglia. To reserve a place contact Mei-ling Ward on Tel: 020 7436 6695. E-mail info@jpf.org.uk
25 May 2004	18:30 at the Japan Foundation: Talk by Dr Harumi Goto, Associate Professor, Chiba University & currently Visiting Professor at St Antony's College Oxford. "Sir John Tilly – Japan in the late 1920s through the eyes of a British Ambassador". To reserve a place contact Mei-ling Ward on Tel: 020 7436 6695. E-mail info@jpf.org.uk
26 June 2004	JLC Japanese Speech Contest for Secondary Schools 'Nihongo Cup' Presented by ALL's Japanese Language Committee, in partnership with the Japan Foundation and the Embassy of Japan. For more details contact the Project Manager on 020 7379 3934, fax: 020 7836 1157 or by e-mail: cml@japanesematters.co.uk or visit the website www.jlcweb.org.uk

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karakuri) still perform at annual festivals, mainly in the central parts of Japan around Aichi Prefecture, and quite a lot of these have been repaired by Mr. Tamaya. For more than one hundred years after its founding in 1662, the Takeda Omi Company of Osaka staged elaborate *karakuri* performances in theatres all over Japan. A print in the British Museum records a visit to Edo in 1757: a sword-wielding doll balances at the top of a tower of wooden pillars, which are then taken away one by one. *Settsu meisho zue (Famous Places in Osaka, 1798)* shows visiting Dutchmen so amazed by 'Benkei in the Boat' and 'Warning Cockerel on the Drum' that they forget to sit on their thoughtfully provided seats.

So the reason that modern Japan is a 'Robot Kingdom' concludes Professor Suematsu, is that, because of the long tradition of public displays

of *karakuri*, people do not feel any sense of suspicion towards 'entertainment robots'. And they're *not* 'pets' he insists, as he switches on the two Sony Aibo and we watch them go through their doggy tricks. Europe and USA may be ahead in research into robotics for medicine and weaponry, but workers in the Toyota plants near Nagoya give their production robots affectionate names like Hanako and Tsutomu and really care for them. When the first 3,000 Aibo were advertised on the internet in Japan in 1997 they sold out in 17 minutes. Come to Expo 2005 in Aichi and you can see more than 100 carriage *karakuri* and the latest bipedal walking robots. Aibo kicks a pink ball and comes trotting over, attracted by a spectator's red trousers. We're convinced.

**Tim Clark, Japanese Section,
British Museum**

Doing Business with the Japanese

by Geoffrey Bownas, David Powers,
Christopher Hood (editors)

This compact book has been produced by a team of respected and well-known writers and observers of Japan providing a wealth of useful information for those who do, or are about to do, business with Japan. It includes comments on the state of Japan's economy and markets with detailed, how-to-do-it tips on Japanese protocols, the transport system and other areas of interest to business visitors to Japan. A novel aspect of the book, and one which I particularly liked, are the short vignettes from a cross section of people who have lived, worked, or otherwise dealt with Japan in one capacity or another. In a no-nonsense style, these give a real flavour of some of the issues in working with the Japanese.

It is designed as a one-stop guide and is written from a British perspective – good for a British audience, but perhaps limiting its appeal to other countries. This is a pity, given the quality of the material it contains, much of which would be useful to any non-Japanese audience.

This is an edited book, comprising nine chapters by seven lead authors. However, this hides the fact that the names of no fewer than 18 contributors appear on the contents page, an indication of the richness and range of views contained in the book – the aforementioned vignettes account for some of this variety.

The first four chapters provide background information on Japan with particular reference to her current economic circumstances. These include a commentary on business opportunities in Japan, an analysis of the state of the Japanese economy, a discussion of Japanese markets (an important and, to non Japanese eyes, difficult area) and a view of what the future holds for Japan. It is all good stuff, and the contributors do a good job of explaining complex issues in a very clear, straightforward manner.

The remaining chapters cover some of the practical details of doing in business in Japan – a guide to Japanese law for British investors (note the British emphasis), doing business face-to-face (a guide to protocols for meetings, dress, entertaining and so on) and getting about in Japan.

All in all this is a valuable little book, containing a great deal of distilled wisdom.
**Nick Oliver Professor of Management,
University of Cambridge**