

Perspectives

The Japan Foundation London Newsletter

Japanese Performing Arts Here, Then and the Future



'The Attic' by the theatre company Rinko-Gun. Photo: Ohara Taku

We are delighted to announce that throughout 2005 the Japan Foundation London office will be running an exciting series of events on the Japanese performing arts. It will form part of the 2005 Euro-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges and will be of interest not only to people with little previous knowledge of the field, but equally to those who wish to deepen their understanding of what makes the performing arts in Japan so unique.

It will cover not only the history of modern Japanese theatre and the major issues surrounding its contemporary form, but will also look at dance and music and explore other genres that have gone beyond traditional boundaries and confines. The talks, workshops, seminars and performance will be conducted with the aim of encouraging full audience participation.

The first event of this special series, *Japanese Theatre – from Modern to Contemporary, and its Prospects* will take place on 23 February from 6:30 pm at our offices in Russell Square. It is designed for UK theatre practitioners, performers and students as well as the generalist and will introduce the history of modern Japanese theatre from the Meiji era to the contemporary period, an area so little understood in the UK. It will explore how and from where

contemporary forms emerged, look at current trends, consider issues affecting Japanese contemporary theatre, and debate the future of the Japanese theatre.

Dr Brian Powell, academic, specialist in Japanese theatre studies, and latterly of Oxford University, will give a presentation that will focus primarily on the historical aspect of Japanese theatre since the Meiji period.

He will discuss the roots of Japanese modern theatre and the relationship between certain modern genres and the classical theatre heritage, notably kabuki, and how they have come to be regarded as forerunners of contemporary theatre. The work of Japanese directors already known in the UK, such as Ninagawa, Terayama and Kokami, will be placed briefly in their Japanese context. Wherever possible, visual images will be used.

He will be joined by Mr Takehiko Tanioka, theatre critic and Associate Professor at Kyoritsu Women's University, Japan, who will focus on the contemporary aspects of Japanese theatre, from 1990 to the present day and will discuss current trends, presenting a number of theatres and their styles and the subjects with which these theatres are principally preoccupied. He will also explore the most significant issues affecting the Japanese theatre world and will also use visual images to illustrate his talk.

On the following day, 24 February, also at 6:30 pm, we will run a session, *Play Right! – Challenges in Adapting Japanese Contemporary Drama* at which the process of presenting and staging Japanese contemporary scripts abroad will be discussed. Although Japan continues with considerable success to adapt a full range of foreign drama, from Shakespeare to the contemporary, there has sadly not been the

same degree of activity the other way, especially in the adaptation of contemporary Japanese scripts. This may be attributed to a variety of reasons, and, in the hope that to some extent this trend can be reversed, we have invited theatre professionals from the UK and Japan who have experience in adapting foreign drama texts from the original language, to conduct a panel discussion. Whilst acknowledging that these scripts present certain linguistic and cultural challenges, the panel will also seek to make participants aware of the enormous potential such adaptations can offer and how exciting and dynamic they can be to stage. It will make reference to reading projects that



'The Moon sinking into sands' by U-enchi Saisei Jigyodan

have been conducted in the past at the Bush and the Traverse theatres and will be chaired by Katherine Mendelsohn, Literary Manager at the Traverse Theatre with Mike Bradwell, Artistic Director at the Bush Theatre, Takehiko Tanioka, theatre critic and Associate Professor, Kyoritsu Women's University, and the playwright, Gregory Burke.

Further events in the series will include a *Nihon Buyo* workshop on 8 March with two sessions, (at 3.30pm and 6.30pm) one for those with little prior knowledge, and one for participants who already have some dance experience. Subsequent events will be notified on our website and in future issues of *Perspectives*, as and when they are arranged.

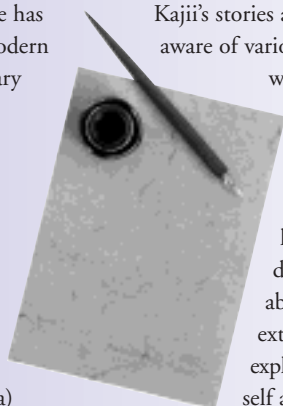
For further information on the series, contact Junko Takekawa Tel: 020 7436 6695. E-mail junko.takekawa@jpf.org.uk or visit our website www.jpf.org.uk

Letter from Japan

Dr Stephen Dodd, Lecturer in Japanese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, has just completed a 4-month Japan Foundation Fellowship and writes from Japan on his new research on Kajii Motojiro (1901–1932), a writer on whose works critical literature outside Japan is still relatively scarce.

During my earlier research into various writers' interests in non-urban 'native place' sites, I became increasingly aware of the important role urban experience has played in the creation of the modern Japanese sensibility. Kajii's literary career began just after the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake and finished as the government was cracking down on political dissent in the early 1930s. This was a brief but significant moment of modern Japanese fiction when two literary forces in particular – Neo-Sensationalists (Shinkankaku-ha) and writers of Proletarian Literature – emerged to argue over definitions of self and other, how best to articulate links between individual and wider society and, just as importantly, the literary medium most suited to express such relationships.

Kajii's work touches on similar questions depicting scenes of natural beauty, but also showing strong interest in urban themes.



My new research has deepened my knowledge of the relationship between city and literature. I have been looking at various aspects of modernity in connection with Kajii's literature: the contrast between urban/rural representations; the importance of lighting and visuality; the comparability to Western Modernism; the exploration of relations between self and other; the significance of increasing mass-market literary readership; and the early Showa link between literary aesthetics and politics.

I have also been doing translations of Kajii's stories and have become even more aware of various themes that pervade his whole work: in particular the aspect of light and dark. I believe this interest is a metaphor for the author's awareness of his own limited life-span. This concern with death led him to think deeply about the self in relation to the external world, and it is this exploration of boundaries between self and other that links Kajii to other modernist writers of the time, such as Kawabata Yasunari and Yokomitsu Riichi. After preparing a paper for publication I expect later to write a book that will be partly a critical discussion of Kajii and partly a selected translation of his stories.

Dr Stephen Dodd, Lecturer in Japanese, School of Oriental and African Studies

A Head Start for School Managers

From 24 – 26 January the Japan Foundation London Language Centre (JFLLC) held its ever-popular Head Start Course, where 7 senior managers from secondary and primary schools, were taught the basics of the Japanese language. They were also given advice on some of the core issues that require careful consideration when introducing Japanese for the first time, such as support, staffing, resources and accreditation. Participants came mostly from language colleges, but also from the independent and primary sectors.

Gareth Seddon, Language College Director at Noel Baker Community School in Alverston, Derby, a newly designated Language College from September 2004, is planning to introduce Japanese as soon as possible. "The commitment to introduce Japanese and to develop it at all levels was an integral part of our successful bid (to become a Language College), and we know that there is great interest from our pupils. Toyota is a major employer in the Derby area."

Angie Sellers, Foreign Language Co-ordinator for French and German at St Peter's RC Primary School in Scarborough, Yorkshire, participated to acquire a basic knowledge of Japanese in order to teach primary school children. "Currently we teach French in Reception to Yr 6, German to KS2 and language awareness and introduction to other languages throughout the school."



Teaching the Japanese script

Last year's participant, Paul Nock, Language College Director at Greenford High School in Ealing, spoke about his success in employing a teacher of Japanese who is currently giving after-school lessons, and of

his plans to introduce Japanese more formally into the curriculum later this year.

Everyone enjoyed getting back into the learning seat for a few days and, the course ended with the chance to build up further useful contacts over a buffet lunch with teachers and invited guests from Japan-and language-related organisations.

Kornelia Achrafie

Director's Note



Belatedly, a Happy New Year! – and to your families and organisations a peaceful and prosperous one. As always, may I begin with a personal observation.

I cannot help being surprised at how regularly and directly the seasonal change approaches everybody according to some unseen rule. After Christmas and New Year, the days have started to draw out and wild life has begun to assert itself vigorously. The morning sunshine dazzles and shines in our eyes casting long shadows on the ground. Spring is quickly but quietly approaching and we feel like shedding our winter wear.

I should like to thank those who have applied to the first (2005/2006) programme of grants following our recent structural reforms. Applications were of high quality and, in the

face of ongoing financial constraints, the programmes remain competitive. Our headquarters is now struggling with the careful screening process and this "marathon and torturous" period will continue a further two months. We shall announce the results officially in April.

This year is diplomatically designated as the 2005 EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges. Its aim is to deepen mutual understanding between EU member states and Japan. So throughout 2005 there will be more Japan-related events than in a typical year and they will be registered as part of this People-to-People Exchanges and carry its logo. Accordingly, the Japan Foundation will also organise several events in which your active participation is warmly welcomed.

We value the continuing support and frank advice from our many UK friends and colleagues.

Kohki Kanno, Director General

Nihon Buyo To visit UK in March

The Japan Foundation is pleased to support the first visit to the UK of the Nihon Buyo Foundation when it performs in March at the Peacock Theatre, London and at the Festival Theatre, Edinburgh as part of the 2005 Euro-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges.

The original form of Nihon Buyo is first recorded in *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest history book, completed in 712 AD. It describes how Amenouzume-no-mikoto devoted herself to dancing, placing grass in her hair and clasping a bundle of bamboo leaves whilst stamping her feet on a large pail. Similar props and the style of beating the rhythm with the feet remain today. This was the starting point from which began the long process of the development of Nihon Buyo in different



'Samurai Naozane' played by Senzo Nishikawa

smaller schools have grown up in modern times.

Accompanied by an orchestra of 14 musicians and comprising some of Japan's leading dancers, the Nihon Buyo Foundation performance will illustrate the full range of the art form, including picturesque solo works, a samurai drama, *Samurai Naozane* and *Senkei* – a group dance in the *Su-odori* (dancing without specific costumes) style, of which the motif is a Japanese fan (*sensu*). Performances will be led by Senzo Nishikawa, Chairman of the Nihon Buyo Foundation, Grand Master of the Nishikawa School of Classical Japanese Dance, and one of only three Japanese traditional dancers

to have been awarded the status of 'Living National Treasure'.

For performance and booking details please refer to Dates for your Diary on the back page.

bell and with flutes and drums, that established Nihon Buyo as a performing art. Since then different schools have established themselves, such as Nishikawa, Fujima, Bando, Hanayagi and Wakayagi and

out of the ordinary/ extraordinary

A Japan Foundation Touring Exhibition available for loan to UK venues

102 photographic works by 11 Japanese artists giving a new expressive form to the complexities of our ever-changing world and the instability of Japanese society behind the façade of economic prosperity. The very things in their own world and society that they have long accepted as "obvious" are questioned in their attempt to validate and reconstruct them.



From the series "OMIAI♡" 2001 by Tomoko Sawada

Available for loan from September 2005 onwards.

Approx. 400m² (negotiable) required. Cost sharing scheme. No hire fee. Insurance covered by Japan Foundation. Free catalogues provided.

Details from Junko Takekawa.

Tel: 020 7436 6695

E-mail: junko.takekawa@jpf.org.uk



'Tomoyakko' played by Minosuke Nishikawa

sections. But it was the epoch-making performance on stage in the early 17th century by the dancer Izumo-no-okuni of what was called *nenbutsu odori*, a primitive kind of dance in which dancers jumped about to the rhythm of the accompanying

2nd Yokohama Triennale

YOKOHAMA 2005, Yokohama's second International Triennale of Contemporary Art will take place from 28 September to 18 December 2005. It will feature the work of some 80 international and Japanese artists and has appointed Tadashi Kawamata, one of Japan's best-known contemporary artists, as its Artistic Director. He replaces Arata Isozaki.

Under the theme "Art Circus (Jumping from the ordinary)", it will consider the function of art and its power within society. Unlike the conventional art exhibition, it will offer a dialogue-based show in which the barrier



Tadashi Kawamata

between observer and exhibitor is transcended. The public will have the opportunity to view or to be involved in the artist's creative process while much of the work of art undergoes change as a result of this interaction.

A work of art will be seen, therefore, as something that is variable and that transforms as a result of its relationship with time, and with the community. Artists featured will be those whose creative process reflects this concept.

Organised by the Japan Foundation in collaboration with the City of Yokohama, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), the Asahi Shimbun, and the Organising Committee for Yokohama Triennale.

Information visit:

www.jpf.go.jp/yt2005/e/index.html

Book Review

The Tower of London

by Natsume Soseki

Translated by Damian Flanagan
Peter Owen publishers; ISBN 0 7206 1234 9;
Paperback; Colour, B&W Illustrations; 240pp,
£14.95 Published January 27 2005

Peter Owen's beautifully produced *The Tower of London* is a delightful volume. In October 1900 the then unknown Natsume Soseki came to London, on a meagre government stipend, to study his beloved English literature. It was a dismal, depressing time. By his own account, Soseki hardly mixed, not even with other Japanese expatriots, whom he considered wasteful and frivolous. He spent most of his time reading and a great deal of his very limited funds on buying hundreds of books. A Japanese visitor to Victorian London was a strange sight: rarer still was a visitor of Soseki's unique vision sharing his insights into the London life of his day. But we do not read Soseki today simply for his history. He is a penetrating yet simultaneously hallucinatory writer: the Thames is the river Styx; the Tower a gateway to the Underworld. What remains crucial in Soseki's art is his ability to unpick the quotidian. This new translation, with an excellent critical introduction, is an important and timely book. With a number of Japanese contemporary writers getting all the attention, Peter Owen should be thanked for working so hard to focus our attention on an author whom many regard as Japan's greatest.



Mark Thwaite
Managing Editor, ReadySteadyBook.com

The work was given a Japan Foundation grant under our Publication Support Programme and the official launch took place here on 27 January, at which the translator, Dr Damian Flanagan, gave a talk on Soseki and was joined by Soseki specialist, Kichiro Tago.

For further information, contact
Daniel McCabe at Peter Owen
Tel: 020 7373 5628 or
e-mail admin@peterowen.com
Web: www.peterowen.com

Informing the Specialists

Our Japanese studies information librarians are one of our most valuable and indispensable resources. At the end of last year Yasuyo Ohtsuka, Curator, of Japanese in the Japanese Section of the Asia, Pacific & Africa Collections at the British Library attended a 3-week Japan Foundation/National Diet Library Training Programme for Japanese Studies' Information Specialists.

As Japanese studies librarians, one of our main roles is to provide Japan related information abroad. Close links with Japanese authorities like the National Diet Library, the National Institute of Informatics, etc is essential in order to source accurate, up-dated information. This was a great opportunity to learn how these institutions function.

The programme helped us to deepen our understanding of the wider situation in Japanese studies, and gave intensive training in the necessary skills needed in our work, such as using more advanced internet tools, dealing with antiquarian materials, etc.

Lectures covered various subjects from Library Studies to advanced Information Technology, an information literacy workshop hosted by International House, a lecture on Japanese language education hosted by the Japan Foundation Language Institution.

Official visits were to university libraries, independent institutes of Japanese studies and to museums.

What particularly impressed me was the active exchange of opinions, not only between lecturer and participants, but also between participants. We were all categorised as Information Specialists for Japanese Studies, however, individually, we covered a wide range - from librarians in university and national libraries, to researchers and scholars, from information officers to language specialists. This difference led to exciting discussions and our ideas and understanding were much broadened.

Furthermore, establishing a world-wide human network will support our daily work in both visible and invisible ways. We met a number of interesting people working all over the world, including Japan. This was wonderful encouragement for us to cooperate with each other and to continue to exchange information in order to become better bridges between Japan and abroad.

My sincere thanks to all those involved for giving me this precious opportunity. I very much hope this course will continue in further years so that more information specialists and librarians can benefit as I have done.

Yasuyo Ohtsuka

Dates for your Diary

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

Now until 3 July 2005 Counter-Photography: Japan's Artists Today – a Japan Foundation Touring Exhibition comprising 60 works by 11 internationally renowned and emerging young artists including works by Hiroshi Sugimoto and Eiko Hosoe. At the Aberystwyth Arts Centre 15 Jan–5 Mar, Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown, Powys 19 Mar–30 April, South Hill Park Arts Centre 14 May–3 July. Information: junko.takekawa@jpf.org.uk

12–24 Feb Japanese Film after Mr Pink – a Japan Foundation film season
The six films selected highlight the range and depth of those young Japanese filmmakers who emerged in the mid-90s; the so-called "Post-Tarantino Directors." Films include *Adrenaline Drive* and *Wild Life*. At the Watershed, Bristol and the Showroom, Sheffield.

23 Feb Japanese Theatre – from Modern to Contemporary, and its Prospects – at the Japan Foundation at 6:30 pm. See front page for full details

24 Feb Play Right! – Challenges in Adapting Japanese Contemporary Drama – at the Japan Foundation at 6:30 pm. See front page for full details

22 Feb – 10 April Tomoko Takahashi – first major exhibition in a public gallery of the work of this Japanese artist since her nomination for the Turner Prize in 2000. Details: www.serpentinegallery.org

8 March Nihon Buyo Workshop – at the Japan Foundation. 2 sessions at 3:30pm & 6:30 pm. See front page for more information

11–12 & 14 March Nihon Buyo Performance – by the Nihon Buyo Foundation. See page 3 for details. At the Peacock Theatre, London, 11 & 12 March and at the Festival Theatre, Edinburgh on 14 March. Peacock Theatre, Tel: 0870 737 7737 www.sadlerswells.com/peacock Festival Theatre, Tel: 0131 529 6000 www.eft.co.uk

20–21 March BATJ Spring Conference – for details contact Kazuki Morimoto, Tel: 0191 334 5334 or e-mail: Kazuki.Morimoto@durham.ac.uk

23 April Nihongo Cup – Finals Day for the 2005 JLC Japanese Speech Contest for Secondary Schools. Details contact the Project Manager on 020 7379 3934 or e-mail: cml@japanesematters.co.uk



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