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**, Yojiro 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 Porntator and Hypster, Ryuhei Matsuda in The Last Kids and Tetsuo Shinohara’s Out. 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 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

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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 loses 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. That 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 someway 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 U.K 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.

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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 U.K. 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.
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 industrial nation.

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 volunters. 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.
Doing Business with the Japanese

by Geoffrey Bownes, 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 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.

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