

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY

FROM A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE:

TAIGAN NO KANOJO

(WOMAN ON THE OTHER BANK, 2004)

BY KAKUTA MITSUYO

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the novel *Taigan no Kanojo* (Woman on the Other Bank, 2004) by Japanese writer Kakuta Mitsuyo (1967-). A biography of the author is presented first, covering Kakuta's writing to date and the personal circumstances that have influenced her body of work. To my knowledge this is the first in-depth biography prepared, in English or Japanese, of Kakuta Mitsuyo.

The next section of this thesis is a discussion of the text. Kakuta is deeply critical of the status of women in Japanese society, and uses *Taigan no Kanojo* as a platform to make her readers aware of her views. She probes employment conventions that limit women's choices and the difficulties that women face when they try to combine motherhood with work outside the home. She asks her reader to reconsider what should define 'success' or 'failure' in terms of women's lives. This section, therefore, explores these themes, and places the novel firmly within its social background.

Lastly, in order to make the novel that forms the focus of this thesis accessible to a non-Japanese readership, translations of Chapters One and 15, and synopses of Chapters Two through 14 are then provided.

Author's Notes

1. I have given Japanese names in the order that they are used in Japanese, with the surname first.
2. I have used the Revised Hepburn style of romanization for Japanese words and names.
3. I have used macrons to indicate long vowels (e.g. ō, ū) in Japanese words, except where such nouns will be familiar to readers without them (e.g. Tokyo).
4. Quotations from Japanese references are my own translations, as are the translations of titles of works published in Japanese.

I. Introduction

When *Taigan no Kanojo* (Woman on the Other Bank) was published in 2004, it drew both popular and critical acclaim for its author, Kakuta Mitsuyo. Little was known, however, about the author whose work had drawn so many readers and had so impressed the literary community. Developing a biography of the author was therefore a priority. The Japanese practice of only publishing detailed biographical information and literary criticism of an author's body of work posthumously made this a daunting task. The only resources available were the endearing childhood memories and details of early reading experiences that are sometimes published to make novelists more accessible to their readers, and judges' comments about works entered for consideration for awards. Though each of these references provided very little in itself, when these were compiled, translated, analysed and compared, an understanding of Kakuta Mitsuyo, her background, her influences, and her body of work became possible. My research and observations about Kakuta Mitsuyo and her literary career to date form the first section of the thesis.

Already widely recognised for her ability to effectively portray contemporary social issues in her fiction, Kakuta Mitsuyo turned her attention towards the options available to women in Japanese society in *Taigan no Kanojo*. She used the novel's many female characters to illustrate how the choices that women make about employment and marriage shape their lives. She explored the link between a paucity of rewarding employment available to women and the overwhelming proportion of women who marry. She probed the difficulties that women who do not marry often face in a society where marriage is the accepted norm, and explored the isolation endured by women

marrying or having their first children earlier or later than the majority of their peers. She also investigated how the income level of a prospective spouse typically affects the choices that women make regarding whether to marry, how many children to have and when to have them, whether to take maternity leave or to resign from work, and if or when to return to employment outside the home. This thesis, therefore, takes each of Kakuta's observations of contemporary Japanese society and places it within a factual framework. Firstly, I describe the employment options available to contemporary women, and trace how these work patterns came into being. I then look at some of the difficulties most often faced by women who try to combine work outside the home with motherhood. Finally, I discuss Japanese social expectations of women, and how these have changed in the recent past.

The third section of the thesis attempts to address the difficulty of accessibility: *Taigan no Kanojo* was published in Japanese, a language with very few international readers. It became a priority, therefore, to make this significant contribution to the canon of women's writing available to a wider readership, and give it its place in translation alongside other Japanese authors. This thesis therefore presents the translation of the first and last chapters of the novel so that readers can become familiar with the depth and scope of Kakuta's well-crafted, accessible prose as it is revealed in this text. Because of restrictions on length, the interceding thirteen chapters have been summarized to provide continuity of the text and clarity for readers of this thesis.

II. Kakuta Mitsuyo: A Biography of the Author

2.1 Formative Experiences: Childhood

Kakuta Mitsuyo credits much of her writing ability to having been born in March. Because formal education in Japan starts in the April after a child turns four years old, she began going to kindergarten very soon after her fourth birthday. She was the youngest child in her intake, and struggled to keep up physically, academically and emotionally. Because she had not acquired the necessary language skills to express her needs, she often suffered the indignity of wetting her pants. This increasingly isolated her from her peers, and was one reason that she found it difficult to make friends. Unable to compete in the physical games her classmates played, she was also unable to follow the imaginative role-plays they engaged in. “There was no other option than to play alone”¹ and reading provided an excuse for her not to interact with others. She realised as a very small child that, “if [she] opened a book, time would pass.”² This time spent reading developed into time spent writing as she became increasingly proficient with written language. Kakuta feels that because she was so far behind her classmates she was forced to find ways to entertain herself, and that it was the internal world that developed as a result of this that allowed her to become a writer.

It seems that Kakuta found that she could manage at kindergarten and hide her lack of vocal skills by using her reading to limit interaction with others. She did not need to develop a similar strategy at home, however, because the members of her family made so little effort to communicate with one another. Kakuta’s sister³, four years older and

absorbed in mastering the piano, had little interest in interaction. She left on the school bus early in the morning and came home late in the afternoon. Their mother was similarly unavailable, working in a cake shop⁴ in the hours that Kakuta was at kindergarten and therefore busy in the evenings preparing food, cleaning, and doing laundry. This would seem to be a very typical Japanese household, but Kakuta's repeated comments about how busy their mother was with these tasks seem to suggest that Mrs Kakuta did not make a priority of spending time with her daughter (or perhaps daughters). Their father, working the long hours typical for a salesman, was literally unable to spend much time at home with his family. The young Kakuta spent much of her time at home reading, as she did at kindergarten, and this can be seen to explain why she had so much difficulty learning to express herself orally.

The Kakutas had originally planned to send their daughters to the local primary school, as was usual for the children in the area. Mrs Kakuta realised, however, that sending her elder daughter to a private school would create opportunities to visit Yokohama city on a regular basis. She was a city girl originally from Higashikanagawa, in central Yokohama, but her marriage to a man from the then semi-rural, outlying district of Midori-ku⁵ meant that she was forced by local custom to live there, near his parents. Her outings to the city assured with one daughter at the school, she saw no reason for Mitsuyo to also be enrolled.

Mitsuyo, however, was aware that attending school in the city would give her opportunities to make friends that would not exist were she to start school with her kindergarten cohort, and thus insisted that she be allowed to attend Sōshin Girls'

School with her sister. She started making the daily 90-minute one-way commute three weeks after her sixth birthday. The school accepted girls aged six to eighteen and a small number of boys at the primary level. Her sister was happy and successful there, and it would give Kakuta a chance to start afresh. None of the other 59 children in her year knew about her “miserable experiences”⁶ at kindergarten, letting her reinvent herself. Once a quiet child hiding behind a picture book, at school she now could not sit still⁷, talked constantly and “[tore] around the fields and hills”⁸ like a “monkey.”⁹ Kakuta has commented that she became so much more physically active because her new friends were not interested in reading¹⁰, but it seems more likely that she had simply caught up in developmental terms and was now ready for this kind of interaction with her peers. She maintains that had her parents not acquiesced to her demands to attend Sōshin Girls’ School, she would still be unable to express herself orally¹¹.

In complete contrast to the way she spent her time at primary school, Kakuta remained a literary child at home. She and her sister were the only children in the area not attending the local school and therefore had few opportunities to meet other children in the neighbourhood¹². They did not spend their time together, however, her sister dedicating herself to the piano, and Kakuta immersing herself in the written word. Hisako Fujiwara, her Year One and Two teacher, had made a pact with her students that whenever they had completely filled a notebook with writing, she would give them a new one. It was a system designed to encourage the children to memorize the many Japanese and Chinese characters necessary to start learning to read and write. Ms Fujiwara’s intention was that the children fill their notebooks with repetitious lists of

characters. Instead, Kakuta filled some fifty notebooks¹³ with observations of the world she perceived. Some of these writings were diary entries about how she spent her days. Others were fantastic tales, or unlikely stories about the members of her family. These very early writings can be seen as early examples of the risks in terms of style and subject matter that Kakuta would later become known for. The sheer number of notebooks she completed was also an indication of how prolific she would later become.

Another characteristic that would dominate Kakuta's writing career also became apparent at this early age. "The only person [at school] who knew [she] was writing was [her] teacher"¹⁴. Right up until Kakuta won the *Kaien* Newcomer's Award in 1990, her writing would remain a closely guarded secret, only her family and a select few outsiders knowing what she was doing. Her parents found her writing of little interest, however, which led Kakuta to seek praise from other carefully chosen adults. How she chose these people is unclear, but it seems likely that she passed pieces of writing to them quietly and waited for a positive reaction. She remembers Ms Fujiwara with great affection, seemingly largely because the teacher accepted everything that she wrote. Not only did she never guide her pupil's writing or direct her choice of subject, she showered Kakuta with the praise that was so lacking in her home environment. She was, as it were, the ideal editor. On a particularly memorable piece about a trip to Kamakura in which a six or seven year old Kakuta described a wave as being "like lace," Ms Fujiwara wrote, "Great expression," and drew a large flower for her in praise¹⁵. Kakuta remembers, "If I wrote, my teacher praised me."¹⁶

Kakuta is on record as saying that she stopped writing so prolifically two years later when Ms Fujiwara was replaced by a teacher less willing to read her compositions,¹⁷ but it seems more likely that Kakuta's new teacher did not give her the unconditional praise that she had come to expect. The extent to which she needed external appreciation is evident in how quickly she abandoned her writing. Without constant reassurance and praise, Kakuta, even as a young child, was unable to continue. This would become a recurring problem throughout her career. The author has remarked in several interviews that negative criticism has often brought her writing to a standstill. A lack of praise can be seen here to have had a similar result.

Though Kakuta stopped her independent creative writing in the first semester of Year Three, she continued to submit class and homework assignments. Whether she entered the Yokohama Book Report Competition by herself or was guided towards it by a parent or teacher is unclear, but Kakuta won her age section in the year that she was nine. She wrote about *Poil De Carotte* (Carrot Top, 1932) by Jules Renard (1864-1910), a story that focuses on bullying. Many of Kakuta's later works would touch on this theme, and the author herself would experience the issue first-hand and from both sides during her time at Sōshin Girls' School. Renard's novel also explores the titular character's struggles to win his mother's affection, a theme that may have appealed to the isolated Kakuta, a child whose mother had little time for.

Kakuta found herself suddenly frustrated by concepts that she could not fully understand. Her reading in her first years at primary school had been dominated by character-driven series, many of which were translated from other languages into

Japanese. She read *Pippi Longstocking* (Astrid Lindgren, 1945), *Mary Poppins* (P.L.Travers, 1934)¹⁸, *Anne of Green Gables* (Lucy Maud Montgomery, 1908)¹⁹ and the Japanese work *Chiisai Momo-chan* (Little Momo, 1964) by Matsutani Miyoko (1926-)²⁰ during this time. Words like ‘gravy’²¹ and ‘pecan pie’²², however, became stumbling blocks to understanding. Such words are typically simply written in the phonetic katakana script rather than translated or explained. Kakuta could work out from the context that gravy and pecan pie were foods, but little more. Her mother, despite claiming that she “used to read,”²³ was not helpful. Her father, likewise, was not a recreational reader. Neither of them was willing to talk to their daughter about the books that she was reading. Because she was not satisfied with anything less than total understanding, she made the decision to concentrate on home-grown texts. She loved Natsume Soseki’s (1867-1916) *Botchan* (1906), and in Year Six, Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933)²⁴ became her author of choice.

Although Kakuta had read all of the novels in each of the series that she had started in the early grades at primary school, she had not planned to do so, simply reading them one after another. In her final year, however, she made a commitment to herself to finish all of Miyazawa’s published works before she finished primary school. She made daily visits to the school library to achieve this. Even as a child, Kakuta often set herself such personal challenges. The difficulty and scope of these tasks seems to have helped develop the self-determination that Kakuta would later need to make her writing career a success.

2.2 Formative Experiences: Adolescence

The change of environment that came with moving into the Junior High School section of Sōshin Girls' School affected Kakuta greatly. She became increasingly introverted during her three years there, spending her time reading and working on her compositions. Pervasive violent bullying permeated the school. Unable to control what was happening around her, she could do little but withdraw into herself. This was much the same coping mechanism that she had used as a tiny child at kindergarten. Although she managed to avoid attracting the attention of bullies by keeping her head down, the fact that she had changed her behaviour because of them meant that effectively she had become a victim.

This was a complete about-face. In the upper grades of primary school, Kakuta had felt so confident in her ability to manipulate her peers that she instigated various kinds of cruelty, leading them to ignore one another and the like. She now acknowledges this behaviour as “stupid”²⁵. Where there had been only two classes at each level in the primary section, some 110 new students now enrolled in her year in the middle school. Because her cohort more than doubled in number Kakuta lost control of her peers. The new students were also quite different from those who had been at the school since age six; even the teachers were afraid to do anything about behaviours like the lighting of fireworks at the back of the classroom during lessons. The level of bullying also escalated: kicking became common, and some students were forced to eat pretzels that had been dropped into the toilet.²⁶

Kakuta's reading during this period forms a bleak list: Inoue Hisashi's (1934-)

Kirikirijin (The Kirikiri People, 1981), novels by Shiga Naoya (1883-1971), Dazai Osamu (1909-1948)²⁷ and Kajii Motojirō (1901-1932)²⁸ and J D Salinger's (1919-) *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), despite her earlier resolution to read only Japanese fiction. She felt particularly drawn to Dazai's work, telling interviewer Abe Fumie that the difficulty and pain in his work "suited the stifling atmosphere of adolescence."²⁹ Kakuta felt that Dazai had captured in his works the angst that she, as a teenager, frequently experienced. She was "surprised that she was being understood"³⁰, that others, like her, "couldn't be bothered about anything"³¹. It was reassuring for her to discover that she was not alone in these feelings. Kakuta was also deeply affected by Salinger's narrator, Holden Caulfield, describing him as a reliable friend. Holden, with his inability to see anything positive, suited her own turbulent emotional changes during adolescence. She did not read anything else until her final year of high school. Salinger's novel, which she describes as both "a rite of passage"³² and "a bible for a limited period",³³ was left behind when she went away to university when she was 18. It is difficult to know how much Kakuta's later writing was influenced by the reading that she did during this period. Certainly, some of her works take up similar themes, but she has never made specific connections.

In her early teens, Kakuta had started writing a diary separate to the compositions that she submitted at school. She had come to understand the difference between using the writing process to explore her own feelings and using it to capture the attention of a reader. She sourced her material in unexpected places. One aunt called her the "writing machine," often saying laughingly that "Mitsuyo is looking, so I'll change my clothes later" or that she "ha[d] something important to talk to Mother about, but [she would]

do it once [the child was] gone.”³⁴ Kakuta’s insight into the world around her and her ability to capture this in fluid prose was a rare talent, and her teachers began to notice her for her writing. Ever eager for praise, and aware that her writing was one way of getting it, Kakuta began submitting selected pieces of her work quietly to her Japanese teacher. One such piece was a series of interludes that Kakuta had observed on the day of her aunt’s death. It won her not only the praise of her teachers, but also inclusion in the school yearbook.

How Kakuta managed to hide the fact that she was writing from the people around her is unclear. She remains adamant that no one knew of her passion during this time except her family and specific teachers. It seems likely that she worked hard on her writing at home, but made light of her efforts when her work was acclaimed at school. In this way, she had preemptively protected herself from criticism, superficially at least, by downplaying the level of her own effort.

Four years later, in Kakuta’s final year at high school, she made another successful attempt to be included in the annual yearbook. Her father was terminally ill. The cancer that had overtaken his body had failed to respond to either the ceremonies performed by the local priest or the medical treatment at the hospital. His health failing, she sat in the corridor outside his room at the hospital and thought about how to structure the work. She knew that he would not be coming home from the hospital, and explored her many feelings about this through the preparation of the piece. She found herself filled with self-loathing, ashamed for wanting to capitalize from an event that should have been about loss. She failed to recognise that she was effectively writing an obituary for

her father, and that these are often prepared prior to death.

The fact that her father's death brought up so many conflicting emotions for Kakuta reflects a theme that runs through many of her early works, a theme that would persist until she reached her thirties. Perhaps to avoid having to portray a father figure in more than the most superficial detail, she rarely wrote about families. It is unclear whether this was because she was then unaware that fathers can share an emotionally intimate relationship with their children, or whether it was because she recognised that her own filial bond was uncommonly weak. She had not been particularly interested in her father, nor he in her³⁵, and they “d[id not] talk except very rarely”³⁶. She only learnt after his death that he had worked at a company that imported snack foods³⁷.

Kakuta would later be inspired by her memories of her father to write *Kusa no Su* (Grass Nest, 1997), a novel that explores through the central character, Mr Murata, the idea that not all men are suited to having a family³⁸. It questions the widely-held belief that the most common life path, to marry and have children, is the best for all. Like Kakuta's own father, Mr Murata is rarely at home. He prefers to spend the little free time that he does have away from his family. Whether or not this is a biographical comment or not is unclear. Certainly, Kakuta felt isolated from her father. Mr Murata was the first male character that Kakuta examined in this way. Perhaps growing up with the father on whom this character was based is one of the reasons that her writing skills developed. Certainly, it would appear that there was little support or guidance at home, her mother seemingly determined to raise an average daughter, her father unavailable both physically and emotionally, and her elder sister distant both in terms

of age and interest. Kakuta herself, with her limited verbal skills and the love of reading that effectively limited interaction with others, must also be held partially responsible for the shallow relationships that she formed with these people. While it would be interesting here to compare the relationship between Kakuta's parents and her elder sister, this is not possible as Kakuta has steadfastly protected her sister's privacy, never revealing even her name.

As a child, teenager and young woman, Kakuta seems to have lacked a positive sense of self-worth. Much of her childhood was spent in trying to win the praise of her teachers, surrogate parents of a kind. Whether this came as a result of some parental failing or rather was something inherent in Kakuta's character or both, her overwhelming need for praise motivated much of her writing from childhood to adolescence. During this period, she wrote simply because it brought her positive interaction with those in authority. Once she had been formally acknowledged as a writer of merit by the literary world, her continuing desire for approval led to strenuous efforts to produce work that would find favour with award committees or slip past the critical pens and tongues of editorial panels. Her need for praise would remain with her.

2.3 Formative Experiences: University

Kakuta had assumed that she could go to the university of her choice not only because entry had been automatic for each step of her education until then but also because she knew that her teachers regarded her highly for her insightful writing. She was distressed to learn at 17, however, that her grades were inadequate to gain her the

formal recommendation that would let her bypass the grueling university entrance examinations. Aware of her father's imminent death and the financial burdens that it could bring, she knew that the family could not afford to support a further year of pre-university study³⁹. She dedicated herself to an intense programme of study, losing some 10 kilograms⁴⁰ and discovering that many of the subjects that she had regarded as too dull to bother with before were actually very interesting. She had set herself a mammoth task to accomplish in a limited period of time, and yet somehow she managed to turn a very bleak lookout into invitations to the two very universities that she wanted to attend. Again, she had shown stoic determination. Kakuta is on record making light of these efforts, however, perhaps in a further effort towards self-preservation, or perhaps through a sense of reserve. One notable example of this was in a published discussion with award-winning *manga* artist, Onda Riku (1964-), Kakuta saying that she “studied hard, but not that hard”⁴¹ to get into university.

The literature departments of both Waseda University and Nihon University offered her a place in 1986⁴², the only universities in Tokyo offering writing programmes at the time⁴³. After much deliberation, she chose to attend Waseda University based on the information that more published authors had graduated from there⁴⁴. She knew exactly what it was that she wanted to do, and how to make it happen. As with many things in Kakuta's background, however, she is also on record as having made contrary statements about this. She oscillates between saying either that even as a tiny child she knew she would be a novelist, or that when she was faced with having to make a decision about her future at 17, writing was the only thing that she was good at and really had no other choice. While her failure to present one consistent truth may spring

from her fear of criticism and therefore represent a desire to mislead, it may also be linked to her creativity. The difficulty of keeping the real world separate from her fictional writings could explain these inconsistencies.

Her first year, 1986, was spent in general studies, as is standard in Japanese universities, and she found herself in a world very different from that of Sōshin Girls' School. She was alarmed⁴⁵ by the very presence of male students on campus: in high school she had so little contact with boys that she describes those members of her class who were sexually experienced as coming from a different world. She now found herself panicking about how to deal with her male classmates, sure that they were on the point of asking her out. Suffering from nervous exhaustion because of this, she had difficulty returning to class after the Golden Week vacation in early May.⁴⁶ Rather than withdraw into herself, which had been her previous coping mechanism whenever faced with a situation that she felt was out of her control, Kakuta took a “drastic measure”⁴⁷. By joining the drama club, she forced herself to work alongside the male members of the club, and thus soon overcame her shyness to the extent that she was soon part of the dating scene.

Her new friends talked about Ōe Kenzaburō (1935-), Nakagami Kenji (1946-1992) and Takeda Taijun (1912-1976)⁴⁸; Kakuta pretended to be familiar with their works, then “read them sneakily at home”⁴⁹. This is another example of Kakuta concealing something rather than facing potential criticism. Acknowledging that her classmates were more widely read, she tried to expose herself to as much fiction as possible, “devouring works of authors [she] hadn't known about before”⁵⁰. She was impressed

that Murakami Haruki (1949-) wrote in language similar to that which she herself used⁵¹. During this time she also read Uchida Hyakken (1889-1971), Ozaki Midori (1896-1971) and Shibusawa Tatsuhiko (1928-1987)⁵². When one year later she joined the literature department, she was much more able to converse on such topics.

Her course programme taught her how to analyse and examine a wide variety of successful texts and to emulate their style in her own writing. On the first day of class, the lecturer Hata Kōhei read a piece by a student one year older than those in front of him. Written in simple, colloquial prose, it was about menstruation, a subject familiar to many of the students. Written in the first person, the tone and the subject were perfectly matched. Kakuta, who had been convinced that novels were set in “an old, heavy world”⁵³ heard this fresh, modern, relevant prose and knew that she had come to the right place. She had “complete faith that this [course] would be beneficial”⁵⁴. Until this point, Kakuta had hidden or downplayed her writing to all but her teachers. Though her family knew that she was writing, they showed so little interest that they posed no threat. They would not criticise her work. During her three years in the Literature Department at Waseda, Kakuta did not join any of the many student writers’ circles that formed, refusing to share her work⁵⁵ with her fellow students. People not actually in her writing classes did not know that she was trying to become a writer⁵⁶. This may be attributed to the fact that Kakuta has consistently sought the high opinion of her superiors, teachers and professors rather than her peers.

Confident in her formal writing ability, she felt that her creative writing was not of the same calibre. With Hata’s guidance she learned that she could use her own experiences,

opinions and ideas in a style similar to that which she was already using, to produce effective fiction. Her first extended piece, about her own broken heart⁵⁷, was received well by the teachers in the Literature Department. Again, she was not sharing her work with her peers, but rather with her teachers, submitting work directly to them. Their praise gave her the confidence to start applying for literary prizes⁵⁸. This is how most Japanese writers gain their first foothold in the literary world and access to the contracts that will allow them to support themselves with their craft. While a prize is certainly every entrant's ideal outcome, the fact that finalists' work is passed around the editing rooms of large publishing houses means that some are able to secure employment just by submitting an entry.

Thus, though Kakuta did not even reach the finals at this stage of her career, a teen-fiction editor saw her work and offered her a position. She was asked to produce "cheerful school stories"⁵⁹ under the pen name Saikawa Anzu for publishing house Shūeisha, and, over the next two years, wrote seven teen novels aimed at the popular market. At primary school, she had enjoyed reading such books, choosing them strangely because they were all the same size⁶⁰. Though she had initially felt that she had "finally reached [her] childhood goal",⁶¹ she soon recognised the superiority of pure literature over popular literature. She continued to send her work to editors of literary journals⁶². When, at 21, she was included in the semifinal for the *Femina* award that Ekuni Kaori had won the previous year, 1989, her determination to continue writing was further strengthened.⁶³ She was also awarded the 1988 in-house Cobalt Novel Grand Prize for *Okosama Lunch: Rock Sauce* (Kids' Lunch Special: Rock Sauce)⁶⁴. Her own editor, however, repeatedly told her that her work was too "dark"⁶⁵,

and due to dwindling sales⁶⁶, finally asked her to resign. The seven novels are no longer in print.

2.4 From Saikawa Anzu to Kakuta Mitsuyo: Coming into the Open

Kakuta's mother saw this as the ideal time for her to stop writing⁶⁷. Most young women leaving university were applying for full-time salaried company work, and Mrs Kakuta wanted her daughter to do what was expected of her. In much the same way that she had seen little point in paying for her younger daughter to attend a school that was different from the norm, she was now unwilling for Mitsuyo to pursue an uncommon career path. Aware that many people meet their future spouse in their first years in paid employment, her daughter's marriage was her real goal. Kakuta feels that "for [her] mother, marriage [was] happiness for a woman"⁶⁸. Were Kakuta to undertake a solitary occupation like writing, her mother felt that her chances to meet a suitable marital partner would be that much reduced.

Ever in control of her own life path, Kakuta opted instead to work part-time in a restaurant⁶⁹ and continued reworking *Mushū Tenshi* (The Angel Without Sadness, 1991). She felt certain that it would be either this piece or *Sentō* (Public Bath) that would bring her success and continued trying to perfect both pieces over the next few months. She was approached during this time by an editor from the publisher Yamato Shobō and, on the strength of her earlier work for Shūeisha, was asked to write a book of essays entitled *Aishiteiru Nante Iu Wakenai Deshō* (There's No Reason To Say 'I love you', 1990). Though this brought her a small commission, it was not the literary success that she was hoping for. She did not have long to wait, however. *Kōfuku na*

Yūgi (Happy Games, 1990) won her the *Kaien* Newcomer's Award for 1990, an accolade that would open many doors as well as add to her savings. Though the magazine was relatively new, the fact that it came out of publishing giant Benesse meant that the *Kaien* Newcomer's Award would have a significant impact on her future.

Kakuta found herself in a difficult situation. Worried that the earlier publication of her teen-fiction novels would make her ineligible for the newcomer's prize, she chose not to mention them⁷⁰ until the award had been formally announced. *Aishiteiru Nante Iu Wakenai Deshō* (There's No Reason To Say 'I love you', 1990) was also possibly problematic. Publication had been set for a date very soon after the announcement of the *Kaien* award. Wanting to both distance herself from her previous pen name, and take advantage of the prize that she had just won, she pushed for the book to be released three months later under her real name. This desire to be published as Kakuta Mitsuyo, rather than under an assigned penname or a self-appointed pseudonym shows Kakuta's acceptance of the *Kaien* Award for the honor that it truly was. She would no longer hide her writing.

2.5 Major Works and Themes

Kakuta's works thus far can be divided into four broad categories: those which focus on relationships that are entirely free of obligation: those in which characters seek emotional fulfillment within the confines of duty-bound relationships: those which focus on bullying as it affects both children and adults: and the novels that she has written for children. Frequent award nominations, requests for submissions to

magazines and commissions from publishers are proof that though Kakuta's work has sometimes come under intense criticism, her writing is seen to be of value by the literary world. Her struggles to come to terms with this criticism, and efforts to address the points that have attracted negative feedback have meant that her work has consistently improved throughout her career and that she has continued to be included in influential literary magazines. The reading public also regards her work highly, and her readership is wide indeed, spanning from children in the upper grades of primary school to women in their forties. It is likely that the sense of reality that permeates Kakuta's fiction is behind this popularity. Her works are clearly set in time and place, and through them we can observe much about contemporary society.

Kakuta's early works are characterised by their indoor setting and what critic Ishikawa Tadashi termed a "search for a utopia based on the concept of happy community"⁷¹. She seemed unwilling to accept that marriage can be the foundation of a happy home, and wrote a series of novels in which a quiet contentment is spoilt when characters become physically or romantically involved. She wrote about how people interact when they live together, and focussed on groups of people unconnected by blood or marriage or living in non-linear family arrangements. She was certain that it is only when people are truly free that they will be happy, and thus tried to create situations that would allow her characters this. Believing that the relationships people choose to form are worth more than those forced upon them, or those that they no longer want to be a part of, she "wanted to pull down the tendency to hold faith in the family as a good thing"⁷². This desire clearly came from having been raised in a family that remained together only because they felt compelled to, by social mores. The bonds of

affection between Kakuta's parents, with their younger daughter and perhaps also with their elder daughter, and those between their children, all seem to have been weak, yet divorce in rural Midori-ku was unthinkable. Kakuta's term for the relationships she wrote about during this period and soon after her literary debut was 'false families': "If you think deeply about love, you get to 'What is family?', don't you? In that sense, I feel that the theme of false families inevitably followed when I wrote about romantic love."⁷³

Kōfuku na Yūgi (Happy Games, 1990), the work for which Kakuta received her first literary acknowledgement, is the story of narrator Satoko, her one-time classmate Haruo, and his friend Tatsuhito. The three share a house, the premise of which was so rare in Japanese fiction at the time that judge Takubo Hideo commented on it in the Kaien Award announcements, saying, "[m]any young people now live together like this and it is often the subject of creative works, but in this case it is two men and one woman, so the theme is already quite radical."⁷⁴ Kakuta had taken a risk in placing her characters in a setting rare in contemporary fiction, and in doing so distinguished her work from other competition entries. Her writing, about "daily life pruned by her own sensibilities"⁷⁵ was so very fresh and interesting that it was selected above that of her peers.

This first award-winning novella has at its core the proposal that comfort is never truly possible in a home that is based upon marriage. In the world of the novel, all such homes are either turbulent with marital discord or simmering with unspoken resentment. The narrator has suffered through her parents' long drawn-out separation

and the series of unpleasant short-term step-fathers that followed it. She now watches as her sister, a newly married full-time homemaker, polishes her new home to perfection. It looks like it has been copied from the pages of a glossy magazine and has nothing in common with the house they grew up in. There are large potted plants on the polished floors and photographs in frames on the walls. None of it seems real to Satoko, and she is sure that her sister is merely acting the role of the happy homemaker. Even visiting briefly, Satoko feels unable to breathe. She cannot see her sister as anything other than trapped by her marriage, the obligation that it implies, and her financial dependence as a non-earner. Even if she is happy at present in the life that she has chosen, Satoko is certain that there will come a time in the future when her sister will resent her husband, what she is duty-bound to do for him, and her own dependence on him.

Satoko herself is determined to create a home free of this dependence and obligation, and free of the discord that she witnessed as a child. She and her flat mates have banned physical intimacy, afraid that it would pull apart their home. Their freedom from obligation is indeed lost when Satoko and Haruo get drunk together and lose control. Tatsuhito, away visiting his parents, returns to find that Haruo has moved out. Despite Satoko's determination to create her ideal home, she has in fact played a key role in its destruction. Rather than abandon her efforts to date, however, she tries to rectify the situation by devaluing the sexual act between herself and Haruo. She sleeps with Tatsuhito, trying to make it clear to him that both acts were, though physically intimate, not emotionally so. *Kaien* judge Takubo Hideo found Satoko's perception of this second sexual act as being simply to ensure that they can continue to live

peaceably together to be the most interesting part of the novel.

As Tatsuhito gradually comes to question their living arrangements, his understanding of the sex act is presented as being in direct opposition to Satoko's. He is uncomfortable because he cannot name the relationship that he has with Satoko. She is neither his wife nor his girlfriend yet they live together and have been sexually intimate. Takubo praised Kakuta's ability to portray contemporary attitudes towards sexual relationships through the behaviour of these three central characters. Judge Kuroi Chitsugu also commented that Kakuta had captured the sense of the generation caught between adolescence and adulthood, people who have not yet faced the world. She added that Kakuta's expression of the "passing sadness of youth"⁷⁶ is fresh because it is without sentimentality. Judge Tomioka Taeko qualified this, however, saying that while Kakuta had presented her reader with a vague sense of the period, she had failed to reach any clear vision or understanding. Judge Takubo also criticised the expedient nature of the two male characters, there seemingly for the convenience of the narrator. Considering how distant Kakuta had felt from the young men on her university campus and how little she had known of her father, it seems natural that her male characters should still be lightly drawn. It should also be remembered that Kakuta intended Satoko and her quest for the perfect home environment to be the focus of the novel. The other characters therefore function as the plot necessitates.

Along with the judges' comments and excerpts of the winning entries, prizewinners' responses are usually also published when literary awards are announced. Kakuta's comments in this case reveal little more than how overwhelmed she was to have been

chosen for the Kaien Award. As her career progressed and her work became eligible for consideration for ever more prestigious awards, she would be deeply affected by any negativity in the judges' comments. This time, however, the fact that she was awarded a prize seems to have protected her from their criticism. The editor's summary made it clear that the judges had agreed unanimously that Matsumura Eiko's *Boku wa Kaguya Hime* (I am the Moon Princess, 1990) was clearly superior to any other submission, and that Kakuta's work stood somewhere between that and the other 1203 applications. Two years later, in 1992, only one candidate was awarded the *Kaien* prize⁷⁷ when no two suitable entries were found. Had *Kōfuku na Yūgi* not been creditable, only *Boku wa Kaguya Hime* would have been chosen.

The role that awards play in a Japanese author's career cannot be understated. Award announcements function as promotional advertising for both novels and authors. Due to the incredible volume of work published, bookstores are forced to limit the time that they can keep a book in stock. By keeping an author's name in the public consciousness, however, publishers are able to ensure that both their authors' existing works and new novels remain in stock. If an author is recognised with a prize by one publishing company, other firms also become interested and commission work. As the number of offers received grows, some of these can then be turned away, which leads naturally to higher commission fees being offered.

Once an author becomes known to the reading public, sales figures also take on an important role. The reading population is highly stratified, however, and most people do not read outside of their preferred genre. To reach as many prospective readers as

possible, therefore, authors must try to get their work noticed by a range of publishers. A good way to do this is by submitting work to award selection committees. Tracing the prizes that Kakuta has been short-listed for or awarded therefore lets us chart the path that her career has taken and the esteem in which she has been held during different periods.

Kakuta's popular press Cobalt Novel Grand Prize and literary *Kaien* Newcomer's Prize, were followed by three consecutive nominations for the extremely prestigious semi-annual Akutagawa Prize, awarded to the best short novel published in a newspaper or magazine. It is the highest recognition that the literary world can give, and Kakuta was initially flattered to have made the final round. In March 1993, she was nominated for *Yūbe no Kamisama* (The Evening God, 1993), in September 1993 for *Pinku Basu* (Pink Bus, 1993), and in March 1994 for *Mō Hitotsu no Tobira* (The Other Door, 1993). The judges' comments on the finalists, however, published along with the winning submission, did little to satisfy Kakuta's need for approval. Only judge Kuroi Senji even mentioned *Yūbe no Kamisama* (The Evening God, 1993), saying that Kakuta had "tried to probe the depths of adolescence, but didn't reach."⁷⁸ Although at first deeply upset⁷⁹ by his comment, when she reflected on it carefully and tried to apply it to another similarly themed piece, she was able to attain the deft portrayal of adolescence that is *Gakkō no Aozora* (The Blue Skies of School, 1995). This reaction became Kakuta's typical way of responding to criticism or failure. After a period of intense disappointment and self-doubt, she then attempted to rectify the specific problem in a similarly themed piece.

Thus some 18 months later she set *Gakkō no Aozora* (The Blue Skies of School, 1995) primarily in adolescence and covered some of the same themes as *Yūbe no Kamisama* (The Evening God, 1993). Despite the progress that Kakuta had made with it, the individual publication of three of its four short stories in the literary magazine *Bungei* went unnoticed by many at the time, as did its publication as a novel. Chii, the narrator, unreservedly describes the intense bullying that she is alternatively perpetrator and victim of as she grows from a primary school child into a teenager. The novel clearly draws on Kakuta's own experiences of bullying. Interestingly, Kakuta talks candidly in interviews about having been both bully and bullied. She does not seem afraid that she will be censured for her past actions, and explains that because she has experienced it from both sides she is able to more accurately portray her characters and describe what motivates them. So intense are her memories about this time in her life that she found it hard to breathe at times during the creative process of this novel⁸⁰. She obviously believes, however, that readers need to know more about the ways that children behave when they are in groups, and uses her fiction to educate them.

Saitō Minako, discussing *Gakkō no Aozora* (The Blue Skies of School, 1995) in *L-Bungaku Kanzen Dokuhon* (A Complete Reader in L literature, 2002)⁸¹, explains that girls “who are pushed from behind and are never allowed a break are looking for a place for their festering hearts to burst open”(126). She thereby qualifies Chii's behaviour in the novel, explaining that many girls bully others as an outlet for stress because they are under constant pressure from parents to succeed at school. Citing many examples from this novel, critic Machiguchi Tetsuo commented that “in her early works, Kakuta wrote consistently about the unease that lurks in daily life”⁸². He lists

not only Chii's suicide plans, but also the things the reader is shown that have contributed to her wanting to end her life: her grandmother's dim room, the awakening sexual desire of the boys who are her classmates, the minutiae of school life, and underlying it all the basic discomfort of adolescence. Kakuta's novel is an intimate portrayal of a teenager's struggles to find a place for herself. By weaving the fictional Chii with her own real memories of junior high school, she has captured what it is to be young in Japan at the end of the twentieth century.

When *Pink Basu* (Pink Bus, 1993) was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize in September 1993, it won the attention of three of the nine Akutagawa judges. Ōe Kenzaburō praised the intensity of her talent and her ability to “understand the connections between unusual young people”⁸³. He suggested that she rework the second half of the piece, saying that it seemed “hurried and disorganised”, but added that he anticipated reading “fresh, charming, highly original submissions” from her in the future. Hino Keizō found the “feeling [in the novel] that there is something to be uncomfortable about”⁸⁴ interesting. Takubo Hideo complimented Kakuta on the amount of progress she had made since her last work, but was critical of the whimsicality of the ending, saying that this would need to be carefully foreshadowed if it was to be a realistic part of the novel. In March of the next year, describing *Mō Hitotsu no Tobira* (The Other Door, 1993), judge Kōno Taeko wrote that she was surprised that the work failed to gather votes. “Kakuta has grown a lot since her previous two nominated works. Her themes are clear and the techniques that she has adopted are effective.”⁸⁵

In *Gakkō no Aozora* (The Blue Skies of School, 1995) Kakuta had followed Takubo's advice about carefully foreshadowing the elements of Magical Realism and toning them down. She became still more confident with the technique in *Madoromu Yoru no UFO* (A UFO on a Drowsy Night, 1996), the Noma Newcomer's Award winner for 1996. According to Kakuta, winning the award did not increase the amount of work that she was asked to do, and book sales were not affected. It did, however, bring the first praise that Kakuta remembers receiving from the critics. She had found their earlier comments "belittling",⁸⁶ but thought that this was normal: when she was told that she was an author "with her finger on the pulse"⁸⁷ she was very surprised that such praise was possible.

The novel centres on the relationships between Nanako, the young female narrator, her very proper boyfriend Sadaka, her teenage brother Takashi who comes to stay for the summer supposedly to attend summer school and Kyōichi, an older occultist stranger that Takashi brings home following a conversation on the train. It is a little surprising when Takashi sections off a corner of the apartment for himself using a bookshelf and a clothes rack, but his move to his friend's cardboard box shelter is so well integrated into the world of the novel that the reader accepts it without question. Like *Kōfuku na Yūgi* (Happy Games, 1990), this novel is about a group of young people living together. Ishikawa suggests that it is in *Madoromu Yoru no UFO* (A UFO on a Drowsy Night, 1996) that Kakuta comes closest to achieving the "utopia based on the concept of happy community" that she seeks in her work. Because Nanako does not become emotionally involved with the people with whom she is living despite both blood ties and sexual intimacy, the ties between them remain loosely fashioned, and the

characters are able to make decisions that are not based on feelings of obligation. In this novel Kakuta has created her definition of the ideal home. Its members enjoy complete freedom.

Kakuta's next award, the 13th Tsubota Jōji Literature Prize (1997)⁸⁸, came for *Boku wa Kimi no Oniisan* (I'm Your Big Brother, 1996), a novel for children that mixes the real and the imaginary within a fictional world, confusing readers and characters alike. The main character, a child named Ayuko, loves science fiction and is always to be found reading. Almost like a plot from one of the novels she loves so much, Ayuko meets a boy who says that he is her brother. They have been raised by strangers, but must now seek out the real parents from whom they have been separated. Asked to contribute a story to be included in a children's series despite her lack of experience in the field, Kakuta felt somehow apologetic when she won this award ahead of seasoned children's fiction writers.⁸⁹ Her success proved, however, that her talent was not limited to what many had labeled 'room fiction'.

Somewhat naively, Kakuta seems to have been unaware that all fiction, no matter how great, receives criticism. In line with this misconception, she felt that if she effected the changes that critics suggested, her work would become gradually more acceptable to the literary world. Earlier works had explored the relationships between people in a fixed indoor setting. *Coupling No Tuning* (1997)⁹⁰ was Kakuta's first work for adults that irrefutably moved away from this. In a conscious effort to answer her critics⁹¹, she set the series of conversations between university student Honbashi-kun and a succession of girls in his cheap second-hand Honda Civic. Kakuta was disturbed to

find, however, that only the target of the criticism changed. Where she had previously been criticised for writing about people inside rooms, now her works were denigrated for being either ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ fiction. These are not generally recognised literary terms, but rather simply the language used to remark upon Kakuta’s unchanging scenery, and point to what was seen as her overly rigid approach to the settings of her novels.

Machiguchi Tetsuo was the first critic to interpret her work outside of these classifications, suggesting that *Coupling no Tuning* (1997) was the first of her novels to incorporate elements of her love for travel with her interest in communal living.⁹² Enomoto Masaki followed soon after, defining her works as being about the self and other, the self and family and the self and society.⁹³ Kakuta herself describes her fiction as either dark and introspective or bright and letting off steam,⁹⁴ although the literary community has not yet acknowledged the author’s own attempts to define her own fiction.

2.6 Crisis: The End of an Era

Kakuta now faced a key turning point, a crisis of confidence that would lead her towards the full fruition of her talent. Having produced novels almost in the same way that a farmer produces crops, carefully sowing the seeds and watering them with a dedication based on her vocation⁹⁵, Kakuta now felt unable to finish anything. Terada Hiroshi, editor of *Kaien*, had told her soon after her debut and would again in 2001 that: “there is hope in all the novels that remain in the world”⁹⁶. She suddenly saw her own works as utterly bleak and thought that if she did not remedy this, her desire to

become an author “read long after her own death”⁹⁷ could never eventuate. She had been taught as part of her university writing programme that she should write from her own experience, and so had written about things she could see in her immediate surroundings. She suddenly understood that she had taken this as far as she could. Her own “world is quite small so after 12 or 13 years [she] came up against a wall”⁹⁸. Suffering a crisis of confidence⁹⁹, she was unsure how to proceed.

She did not have the luxury of time to explore this, however, and felt forced to keep writing despite her inner turmoil. Her mother had given her a lump sum 1991¹⁰⁰ that was finally exhausted, literary magazines had stopped asking her for submissions and she found it necessary to find a job that would pay her a regular wage. She was employed to man a tiny inner-city office, rerouting the infrequent calls to a less fashionable address. Ever thrifty with material, Kakuta would use this as the narrator’s employment in *Chijō Hachikai no Umi* (The Sea On The Eighth Floor, 1999). The novel did little but make Kakuta further aware that “the desire to do something new was strong”¹⁰¹. With the financial backstop of the money her mother had given her gone, she had written the piece simply hoping that it would sell. With this in mind, she framed it along much the same lines as works that had been successful in the past. Doing so also offered a respite from having to make the difficult choices that would allow her writing to improve.

Another opportunity to postpone the necessary introspection also came during this time answering telephones. Based on the success of *Boku wa Kimi no Oniisan* (I’m Your Big Brother, 1996) she was asked to write another book for children. She wrote a huge

amount during this period because she was allowed to take her laptop computer to the office and distractions were limited to the occasional telephone enquiry. The novel was somewhat controversially titled *Kidnap Tour*¹⁰² (1999), and finally gave her the breathing space she needed. She is on record as saying that she completed it easily because it was about a period that had already passed for her¹⁰³. It seems more likely, however, that because the novel was for children and as such she did not consider it part of her body of literature, it allowed her a rest from the self-doubt that had plagued her.

Critics have termed this novel the turning point in her career, and it won her both the 48th Sankei Children's Publishing Cultural Fuji Television prize (1999) and the 22nd Robō no Ishi Prize for Literature (2000). Certainly, by funneling her energies from self-criticism and negative introspection into this novel instead, she did make significant progress. This is especially clear when it is compared with her previous work for children, *Boku wa Kimi no Oniisan* (I'm Your Big Brother, 1996). She was reluctant to accept the work being labeled as a turning point, however, saying that she "merely did what she could"¹⁰⁴. This was probably a combination of the reticence that she has always shown about revealing how much effort she has put into things, and the fact that she was unwilling to accept this work for children as the pinnacle of her achievement to date. While she recognised that it was clearly different from the limited range of work that she had previously produced, it was not the novel that she hoped for. She could not redefine herself with it. The remarkable sales figures brought much increased royalties, however, which changed her financial situation significantly, allowed her to leave her receptionist position and finally let her take the time she

needed.

The success of *Kidnap Tour* (1999) brought renewed offers of work and requests for submissions. Writing *Tokyo Guest House* (1999) for *Bungei* brought Kakuta a clear realisation that the “stupid confusion that began when [she] was about 23 was ending”¹⁰⁵ and that she was “tired of [both] writing about people living together”, and “living with other people”¹⁰⁶. Enomoto Masaki asserted in 2005 that the novel surpasses *Madoromu Yoru no UFO* (A UFO on a Drowsy Night, 1996) as the pinnacle of Kakuta’s community utopia fiction¹⁰⁷. The narrator arrives back from an extended trip around Asia and calls his girlfriend for a ride home from the airport only to find that he has been replaced. Instead he calls a friend who he met travelling in Nepal, and ends up renting a room at his friend’s grandmother’s cheap guesthouse. Exploring this scenario allowed Kakuta to define the feelings that she had been vaguely aware of when writing *Chijō Hachikai no Umi* (The Sea On The Eighth Floor, 1999). She recognised that she was now ready to finally move on.

Kakuta was unable to enjoy any sense of accomplishment, however. She had difficulty finding a way to finish the story that was satisfactory to her editor, and was forced to rewrite the ending several times. Ever motivated by her need for praise, Kakuta found such criticism very hurtful. This was to such an extent that, even after the piece was finally accepted, she was plagued by dreams in which the novel was again rejected. She often woke in tears¹⁰⁸ during the trip to Myanmar that she treated herself to for its completion.

Kakuta was again approached by the editor of *Gunzō*, one of the pure literature magazines that had often asked her for submissions in the past. Still deeply troubled by what she felt was her own inability and fearful of becoming overly introspective again, she decided to take a defiant stand, and write what she pleased¹⁰⁹ without concern for the press or critics¹¹⁰. She would no longer write to try to please them, but to please herself. Her editor at *Gunzō* supported this decision, helping her to push through the wall that she felt herself to be up against. *Ashita wa Unto Tōku e Ikō* (Let's Go Really Far Away Tomorrow, 2001), a novel about a woman dissatisfied by the men she dates and lives with, had been serialised in *Hato Yo!*, and had been popular with readers. Kakuta felt confident in that she could write something similar again, but was aware of the different readerships of the two periodicals. She decided to combine the elements of this most recent work with the themes that she had debuted with. *Economical Palace* (2002) was the result, a bleak portrayal of a woman in her thirties working two jobs to support her unemployed long-term boyfriend and his friends who come to stay. Kakuta herself feels that this novel forms the end of the first phase of her career. She has described it as the premise of *Kōfuku na Yūgi* (Happy Games, 1990) at its end point.¹¹¹

2.7 Breaking Through: Confronting her Past to Face the Future

Kakuta's next work, *Kūchūteien* (Hanging Garden, 2002), also stemmed from the question: "When love and family are not entirely made up of good things, why do people tether themselves up here?"¹¹² This time, however, Kakuta did not focus on a commune or a group of people, but rather on a family. She knew clearly now that one phase of her writing career had come to an end. With this understanding came the realisation that she had not been writing about family relationships. All her central

characters until this point had had the option of leaving their domestic situation should circumstances deteriorate. With *Kūchūteien*, Kakuta started to explore the ties that bind families together. The story follows the Kyōbashi family, almost stereotypical in their normality, except for their insistence that they have no secrets from one another. As the character narrating the story changes, the same events are related from many different viewpoints, each telling coloured by the character's understanding of what is happening and why. The reader soon understands that each member of the family has a secret that he or she is afraid to share. Kakuta felt that many families work harder at showing the world that they are happy than at actually working to achieve that happiness. The Christmas lights that are appearing increasingly in suburban windows each December serve as an apt illustration of this. Rather than make a beautiful display for the family to share, many choose to instead turn that display outward; the lights cannot be seen from inside the house or apartment. The efforts of the Kyōbashi family to cover their failings and maintain their appearance as a normal, happy family are Kakuta's exploration of this idea.

Kūchūteien brought Kakuta's first Naoki Award nomination. The prize went unawarded however, leaving Kakuta distressed. Many of the judges had felt that none of the works submitted for consideration were of high enough quality. While Inoue Hisashi recognised that Kakuta's novel had power, giving the reader "a sharp taste of the essence of contemporary families"¹¹³, neither he, Tsumoto Akira nor Watanabe Jun'ichi could accept the similarity of the narrative voices. Hiraiwa Yumie felt that it lacked "elaboration,"¹¹⁴ suggesting that because of this, the novel had been read much more lightly than Kakuta had intended it to be.

The book review by Kuse Teruhiko published in *Brio*¹¹⁵, however, proved to be so acerbic that Kakuta was forced to accept that her long-held belief that “criticism of [her] novels equaled criticism of [her]” was not valid and that “no matter what kind of person [she is], it isn’t relevant to [her] writings”.¹¹⁶ Kuse described *Kūchūtein* as being like a beautifully designed building that has been framed by a master-builder then sloppily finished so that everything leaks. He wrote that the story merely stops rather than reaching any form of conclusion, the reader left unsure as to the author’s purpose in the chaos portrayed. Clearly, Kuse wanted more guidance from the author about how to interpret the ending. Kakuta, however, seems to have tried to force her reader to acknowledge that the members of the Kyōbashi family are the same as the readers themselves. As in life, there is no clear plan to the novel. Just as in reality, the things that happen do not do so for any specific purpose. Even when one member of the family in *Kūchūtein* dies, life continues for those around her. Not only is there no happy ending, there is no ending at all.

The speed with which Kakuta had been theretofore expected to complete the creative process must have had an effect on the quality of her writing. Kuse’s comments had also touched on this. He stated that he felt it would be good for Kakuta if the public stopped purchasing her novels. This would force her to “enter deeper into the labyrinth”,¹¹⁷ to reflect on and polish her writing prior to publication. Despite how upset she was by his criticism, the author made it clear that she, too, was aware of the need for this. Asked her opinions on the state of publishing in Japan in an article published December 2004, she criticised the sheer volume of work in print. Pointing to

the heavy publication schedules and remarkably short period of time that books are usually kept in stock in bookstores, she added that she had “been thinking recently that if you don’t want to put out many books you need very strong resolve.”¹¹⁸ Since *Kūchūteien*, Kakuta has made efforts to “sew in”¹¹⁹ all loose ends before sending work to her editors. Though she has implied that this has not been well-received by her publishers, critics and specifically Kuse have not since found reason to question her work.¹²⁰

In her next novel *Niwa no Sakura, Tonari no Inu* (The Cherry Blossom in the Garden, the Dog Next Door, 2004), Kakuta worked to perfect the narrative technique that she had been criticised for in *Kūchūteien* (Hanging Garden, 2002), leading to Enomoto Masaki to compliment her for the “remarkable stretch”¹²¹ that she had made. Perhaps she was able to achieve this by limiting the number of narrative voices to just two: Fusako and her husband Shūji. Kakuta’s focus was also much smaller, contrasting sharply with the intricate web that she tried to weave between the six narrators of *Kūchūteien*. Limiting the number of characters also gave her the space to achieve the depth that Hiraiwa Yumie had seen to be lacking in the previous novel. There are, in fact, many similarities between the husbands in these two works. Both Takashi in *Kūchūteien* and Shūji in *Niwa no Sakura, Tonari no Inu* (The Cherry Blossom in the Garden, the Dog Next Door, 2004), drift through life without clear plans or any apparent purpose, and have mistresses more due to the efforts of the women involved than to any specific desire on their own parts. Kakuta may have taken Kuse’s advice and tried to perfect one part of *Kūchūteien* (Hanging Garden, 2002), the husband.

Taigan no Kanojo takes many of the same basic settings as *Niwa no Sakura*, *Tonari no Inu* (The Cherry Blossom in the Garden, the Dog Next Door, 2004) but here Kakuta does not focus directly on the relationship between a woman and her husband. Instead, she throws this relationship into relief by juxtaposing Sayoko's struggles to come to terms with the loneliness of her roles as a full-time homemaker and mother with the apparent confidence of another woman, single entrepreneur Narahashi Aoi. Her marriage is the backdrop to all the detail that Kakuta has worked in about the employment opportunities available to women, the need for women in Japan to define themselves in terms of either family or career, and the crises of identity that result from these limitations. *Taigan no Kanojo* resounds with the frustrations of contemporary women.

The attention that the novel received led to the reissue of several of Kakuta's earlier novels in paperback form, and would also allow for a collaboration between several small movie production companies to make Kakuta's *Kūchūteien* (Hanging Garden, 2002) into a movie that would be released in October 2005. She was flattered by the attention, and fascinated by the way that director Toyoda Toshiaki had read her novel.¹²²

Serialized in *Bungei Shunjū*, *Taigan no Kanojo* was awarded the extremely prestigious Naoki Award for Literature, one of the top literary awards in Japan, and was televised by WOWOW in January 2006. She had finally achieved both the recognition that she had always desired from the literary community and also that of the popular media. She was surrounded by praise. *Taigan no Kanojo* came at the end of a long drawn-out

process for Kakuta both in terms of the development of her craft and emotionally. Initially motivated by the praise that she came to associate with writing, she had then suffered cruelly when her work was rejected. By working through this criticism, however, she had resolved many of the issues that had previously affected the quality of her work. By acknowledging her own skills and intuition as valid guiding forces, she had learned to write for herself rather than her critics, editors or readers. By recognising the homes that she had created in the novels early in her career as simply escapist, she was able to finally comprehend that the reasons that people live in family groups are valid. This led her to finally use her own troubled family experiences in her work. It is the combination of the sense of alienation that these experiences have given her with her careful portrayal of the employment choices available to modern Japanese women that gives *Taigan no Kanojo* much of its power.

II. A Window into Contemporary Japanese Society from a

Woman's Perspective:

Kakuta Mitsuyo's *Taigan no Kanojo*

3.1 Introduction

In the past, so many Japanese women made similar choices regarding employment, marriage and motherhood, that few non-academics found these choices worthy of interest. When it was suggested that difficulties facing the national pension system¹²³ could be alleviated by women assuming a different role in the workforce, however, many more people became interested. The mass media picked up on the trend early in the new millennium, as did contemporary Japanese literature. One strong example is Kakuta Mitsuyo's *Taigan no Kanojo* (Woman on the Other Bank, 2004). So deft is the novel in its portrayal of these issues that it was recognised with the Naoki Award for 2005, one of the highest, most prestigious prizes that can be given to a work of fiction in Japan. Its esteem was not only limited to the literary world. The novel was also dramatised for television and screened for the first time on January 15, 2006 on WOWOW, one of the satellite television channels.¹²⁴

Kakuta Mitsuyo's *Taigan no Kanojo* explores two main themes: employment and marriage. The author leads her reader through a series of examples showing not only how women's employment is affected by their choices regarding marriage, but also how work influences the private and personal decisions that women make. By examining the situations of several characters, Kakuta criticises limits on women's initial employment

choices and on the types of work available to mothers reentering the workforce. She probes why so few women go out to work while their children are young and concludes that the oft-blamed lack of childcare is only one of many pertinent issues. By casting her eye over the culture surrounding the employment of men, she recognises that many working environments limit the emotional support that men can give their wives, limit the contribution that they can make to the parenting of their children, and limit the role that they can play in the running of their homes. She concludes that these problems also play a large role in limiting either the employment that women undertake or the choices that they make about marriage and motherhood.

From the novel's subject matter it would be easy to assume that *Taigan no Kanojo* is a feminist text. Many of the issues that Kakuta explores have at their root differences in the ways that men and women are treated by Japanese employment conventions and the author makes her dissatisfaction with these inequalities clear. She does not, however, suggest that these be abandoned wholesale. Rather, she shows her reader examples of women making choices for themselves and their families within the existing framework. It is this action on an individual level that allows these women to start to make progress towards achieving personal fulfillment.

There are two main characters in the novel: Tamura Sayoko and Narahashi Aoi. The first is a discontented housewife who spends her days alone with her pessimistic thoughts and her pre-school daughter, the second an apparently confident single businesswoman whose bright ebullience initially conceals her inability to form close relationships. Through the course of the text, both women make progress towards

reconciling work and family life. The many other female characters stand as representations of other choices that are either available to contemporary women or were available to previous generations of women. Kakuta resists any set definition of womanhood, instead offering her reader a kaleidoscope of possibilities.

The unusual structure of the novel, with alternative chapters set in the early 1980s and early in the new millennium allows Kakuta to introduce these many possible permutations seemingly without artifice. Each character represents one of the many types of women in Japanese society. The teenaged Aoi suffers her mother's resentment of the fact that she is only able to find manual labour when she looks for part-time work. Aoi listens to Mano Ryōko, the woman who runs the inn that she helps at during the summer holidays, talk about how she had reacted to changes in society's expectations of the role that women would play in the workforce by choosing early marriage and motherhood, which had simply seemed an easier option. As an adult early in the new millennium, Aoi watches Nakazato Noriko struggle to take care of her two young sons while also managing a cleaning business. The author introduces other characters to the story through their association with Sayoko. One of these is her husband's mother, a widowed housewife, who cannot empathise with her daughter-in-law's desire to return to work. The other is a woman in her 50s suffering from depression who Sayoko meets through the local family support centre. Though her name is not mentioned, the reader learns enough about her to understand her situation. All of these women have stories to tell, stories that revolve around the choices that they have made concerning marriage, childbirth and employment outside the home.

Kakuta also uses the novel as a platform from which to question the validity of regarding married women as society's 'winners', a trend that appeared in the media in the months before she penned *Taigan no Kanojo*. She asks her reader to compare the destructive self-doubt that periodically immobilises 'winner' Sayoko with the emotional torment that plagues unmarried 'loser' Aoi, and concludes that neither is content because her life is incomplete. Sayoko needs the regular contact with people that work provides. Aoi needs the emotional security that permanent relationships give. Kakuta makes it very clear that she sees increased opportunities to combine employment with marriage and motherhood as of benefit, not only to the fictional women who populate her novel, but also to society, to the economy, and to real individuals.

3.2 Employment Conventions that Limit Women's Choices

Taigan no Kanojo is set in present-day Japan, early in the new millennium. The story begins with Tamura Sayoko, one of the two main characters. She is a fulltime homemaker, but did not undertake this role based on a desire to dedicate herself to taking care of her young family. Rather, she used marriage as an excuse to leave a job that was becoming increasingly stressful. The effects that her somewhat mercenary acceptance of Shūji's unexpected marriage proposal would have on their future marital relationship are discussed in Section 3.4. Here, I explore the reasons that Sayoko found it necessary to leave her former employment and observe how Kakuta uses the character's situation to illustrate how limitations on real women in the Japanese workplace affect their lives.

Sayoko functions in the novel as one example of the ways that contemporary Japanese women are affected by the employment options available to them. As such, every aspect of her situation is significant, not only her present status as a suburban housewife but also the steps that have led her here. In the following passage, Kakuta describes the first stage of Sayoko's career. Much of the discussion in this chapter has its roots in this dense excerpt from the novel.

After leaving university, Sayoko started working at a movie distribution company, the kind of place where even new staff members were trusted with important work. Sayoko liked what she was doing and she liked the feeling that people were not too worried about the hierarchy. But after a few years had gone by, she could see a subtle conflict. The bickering between the female staff and those on contracts was more than a little ridiculous. There were endless, quiet struggles over coffee and iced tea preparation, who went home when, what people could wear to work, and time spent in the women's toilet. She was amicable to both factions or she ignored both factions, and before she knew it,

she was being criticised. She needed to keep her distance from both sides. It took a lot of effort (7).

The period that Kakuta is writing about here covers a large part of the 1990s. The fictional Sayoko is 35 years old (11) in the present-day of the novel, published in 2004, and has been out of the workforce for five years (13). She graduated with a four-year university degree and did not take time off either before enrolling at university or before starting work. These careful efforts to ground the novel in time make the author's intention clear that Sayoko's situation be read as a fictional portrayal of the many struggles that Japanese women working during this period endured. To understand all that she wants to convey to her reader, it is important to understand the employment situation that existed for women in Japan then.

Despite the 1946 Japanese Constitution guaranteeing equality for all, many laws limited the work which women could do. Before a woman's working life even began, therefore, her choices were restricted. It seems that because Japan's Constitution was drafted by the American-led occupation forces, elements of it "directly related to the status of women", were thought to be too "radical" or "permissive"¹²⁵ and were therefore largely disregarded when creating public policy even half a century after the end of the war. As late as the 1980s, only women employed in jobs that were considered to be both 'essential' and 'feminine' (nurses, hotel workers and the like) were permitted to work between 10pm and 5am. Some 26 fields of work were deemed 'too dangerous' for women, the cleaning of power transmitters and working with heavy tools among them.¹²⁶ Overtime for women working in factories remained limited to two hours a day, six hours a week, and 150 hours a year.¹²⁷ "Male social reformers [...] sought to deny women access to certain jobs and to night work in order to protect the bodies of

potential mothers”.¹²⁸ Such deeply entrenched beliefs regarding the acceptability of treating men and women differently would mean that efforts to effect change would face heavy opposition.

Changes did come, however, with Japan’s ratification of the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); changes that should have brought women status and rights equal to those of men in each and every way. Countries signing in 1980 had been given five years in which to implement an appropriate legal framework and were then permitted to ratify the Convention in 1985. Critics have suggested that it was only “the desire of the Japanese state apparatus to be recognised as a good global citizen,”¹²⁹ and “a desire to participate in international life, rather than an internal shift in Japanese social values regarding women’s roles”¹³⁰ that led to Japan ratifying CEDAW. It is therefore not surprising that while the laws that Japan drafted and passed superficially seem to support the equal treatment of men and women in all but a few small points, closer inspection shows that they would bring very little actual change. The government had worked to show the international community that it was making changes to its gender policies. In reality, however, many lawmakers were actually striving to maintain highly biased social and employment structures.

Initially named the ‘*Danjo Koyō Kikai Byōdō Hō*’ (Male and Female Employment Opportunity Equality Law), the name of the new law had been changed to the ‘*Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō*’ (Male and Female Employment Opportunity Parity Law) by the time it was actually enacted in 1986. The length of time needed for the bill to pass into law is an indication of just how much resistance it faced. As Cherry Kittredge explained,

“[t]he relatively tough proposed bill was watered down by political compromise, as was the key word in its title”.¹³¹ ‘*Byōdō*’, meaning ‘equality’, had been replaced by ‘*kintō*,’ meaning ‘parity.’¹³² Despite this change, it remains known mistakenly in English as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOC). Politicians opposed to the new bill also managed to limit its effects by ensuring that there was to be no punishment for companies that did not comply, despite UN guidelines stating that state parties should “...adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women”.¹³³

Such lawmakers need not have worried. The EEOC would pose little threat to the seemingly endless supply of workers who could legitimately be paid very low wages that had so benefited the economy during the post-war boom years. Young women, who would typically only work for a few years before leaving their jobs to raise a family, would never be paid much more than the starting wage. Clerical and light manual work could therefore be accomplished with minimal cost as the positions that they vacated would then be filled by more young women who would repeat the cycle an average of eight years later.¹³⁴ By carefully aligning the timeline in the novel and historical national averages, Kakuta had Sayoko leave her position at the movie distribution firm at the most common time. The author thereby subtly emphasises this employment trend for her reader.

Though in the world of the novel Sayoko left her position of her own volition, forcing female workers to retire either when they married or “upon having passed the ‘appropriate age’ (commonly set at 30)”¹³⁵ was standard practice until a judicial

decision in 1966.¹³⁶ Women who failed to attract a mate “would likely experience the pressure of a *kata-tataki* (a tap on the shoulder) through suggestions that they retire.”¹³⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests that unofficial pressure to do so exists even today.¹³⁸ Hashimoto Hiroshi, a Toyota spokesman in Tokyo, is on record as saying in 1991, the year that Sayoko started working, “[n]ormally, women are given very few responsibilities. That’s why companies encourage them to leave after only a few years—if they stayed any longer, they would start to complain”.¹³⁹ Because women had little salary growth, few responsibilities and almost no hope of promotion, morale was often low. Not surprisingly, 44.4% of women planned to leave their jobs when they married.¹⁴⁰ This goes a long way to explaining why Sayoko’s colleagues were not surprised that she intended to leave her job and become a housewife.

Though it was no longer permissible for tasks to be assigned or remuneration given based on gender under the EEOL, companies could comply with the new law by simply employing people as ‘career track workers’ (*sōgōshoku*) or ‘general track workers’ (*ippanshoku*) rather than ‘men’ and ‘women’. All that had changed was the way that staff were labeled. New employees could choose either of these options, but because the general track was (and, in many respects, still is) regarded by most people as “the personnel management system only for women,”¹⁴¹ there were very few men who took this option. *Ippanshoku* jobs were “under the general direction of managers and consist[ed] mainly of supportive and general clerical tasks requiring accuracy and speed”.¹⁴² Because salaries were calculated based on what kind of work staff were involved in and the qualifications that they held, salaries in this track were limited. Career track jobs “involv[ed] planning, judgment, independent performance, and

management”.¹⁴³ New recruits on this track (mainly filled by men) took on incrementally higher-level tasks, and received opportunities to gain work-based qualifications. In response, their wages grew as well. Tellingly, by May 1995, 64.7% of companies with over 5000 employees had adopted this system.¹⁴⁴

As a movie distribution firm, the company that Kakuta created for Sayoko to be employed by was considerably smaller than that. As such, it was much less likely to have adopted the EEOL in such concrete terms. Rather than assigning new employees to an official track, here managers watched their new staff carefully and judged what kind of tasks they would be capable of. This different approach in no way limits Sayoko's relevance as an example of contemporary working women. The fact that small companies employ many more workers overall than large ones makes this case study even more significant. Companies with fewer staff tended to resist labeling their staff with the new terms because they needed the freedom to use them as needs arose. They therefore allocated tasks to individuals rather than to categories of workers. Staff who proved that they were capable of more difficult work were then accordingly promoted. Though Kakuta does not mention Sayoko's employment status, the character's four year university education and the fact she was trusted with important work even as a new employee lead the reader to conclude that Sayoko's employers regarded her as a valuable asset. As such, she would have been welcome to stay on after her marriage had she wished. Women who merely earned themselves the label 'female staff', however, would be farewelled graciously when they chose to move onto another role.

Although both types of jobs were available to both genders, the fact that *sōgōshoku* jobs

were widely perceived as an unrealistic option for women meant that few actually applied, however. This perception was largely connected with the fact that *sōgōshoku* workers could not refuse to be transferred. Single women helping to take care of elderly or infirm family members found it impossible to move away. Married women could not jeopardise their husbands' careers by asking them to move, and even if this were a possibility, national attitudes to the importance of a single elementary, junior high school and high school meant that moving with children was daunting. The pre-1986 standard policy of requiring that single women live either with their parents or in a company dormitory had become so culturally entrenched that living alone was also often problematic.¹⁴⁵ Where smaller companies wished to transfer female employees who had shown themselves capable of coping with a higher level of responsibility, they needed to obtain the consent of the worker involved. Should a woman in this situation refuse, it was understood that her responsibilities would increase no further, and therefore nor would her pay. It seems likely that some women in this situation took the easy way out: marriage.

Other difficulties also existed for women in positions of responsibility. "It is not rare to strike sexual discrimination in the form of exclusion from the male network in the workplace"¹⁴⁶ states a dictionary entry for the term "*sōgōshoku*." The fact that many deals are done after work in bars that rarely accept female customers further limits women's effectiveness as anything other than assistants. There are many different statistics available on the number of women employed in the *sōgōshoku* track, although it is clear that in 2000, only 3.5¹⁴⁷ percent of all career track workers were women, and "in just over half of all companies only men [were] in this stream."¹⁴⁸ No data is

available for the much less official ways in which smaller companies managed their staff.

Some women, however, did apply for and were accepted into the career track. Many such women struggled with managers who had no experience of entrusting female staff with important work and were thus not allowed to do the work that they had been employed for. In such cases, all women, regardless of track, were given the same tasks, and general track women felt that they were paid less for what was essentially the same work. Added to this, the fact that “Japanese language demands the use of honorific language that expresses respect of others and self-effacement, as well as solidarity with an in-group and distance from an out-group,”¹⁴⁹ meant that women working in such offices were very much aware that there should have been differences in the tasks that they were performing. Women who had been working for some years before the new employment systems were brought in sometimes found the limited power that they had managed to build up within their workplace suddenly usurped by new career track recruits. “[T]wo-track hiring produce[d] friction between career track and general track women.”¹⁵⁰

While the women who work at the fictional movie distribution firm have not been labeled ‘career’ or ‘general’ stream workers, they have been divided. The office is filled with “endless, quiet struggles” and “bickering”. Here, the friction is between the ‘female staff’, women on so-called permanent contracts but whose tasks are limited by their capability and whose employment period is limited by social expectation, and the women on contracts that are officially of limited term. Sayoko is not sure which group

she should align herself with, further evidence that her status is closer to that of the career track (male) staff than of the other women in her office.

She was amicable to both factions or she ignored both factions, and before she knew it, she was being criticised. She needed to keep her distance from both sides (7).

Clearly employing people under different conditions creates divisions, and therefore difficulties, between people. I would argue that by making the resulting atmosphere lead to Sayoko's resignation, Kakuta has tried to draw her reader's attention to the significance of this problem.

In offices all over Japan, women either in the general track or seen as 'female staff' by the management were expected to arrive early to tidy the office, turn on the air-conditioner and prepare tea for their male colleagues and guests, the same as generations of women before them. While the system as a whole would fight to maintain access to low-cost labour, men in workplaces all over Japan would continue to use their female colleagues in this way so that they, themselves would not have to perform menial tasks. Clearly, those lowest in the hierarchy are expected to make the coffee and tidy up. In the fictional movie distribution firm in *Taigan no Kanojo* the "female staff" bicker" with "those on contracts" (7), the only people lower than them in the hierarchy.

The narrator of *Taigan no Kanojo* states that Sayoko "liked the feeling that people were not too worried about the hierarchy" (7) at her firm. It may seem from this that Sayoko appreciates a friendly atmosphere between the staff and the management, but further into the paragraph it becomes clear that the hierarchy that she mentions is actually the

one that exists amongst the female staff. Women working in the late 1980s had found themselves divided into two by the implementation of the EEOL: those in the general/assistant track and those in the career track for women in large companies, those performing repetitive clerical tasks and those entrusted with complex work for women in smaller firms. With the recession of the early 1990s, a third group was formed, the women on limited term contracts. The women in this third group will be discussed in Section 3.4.2. Coping with the difficulties that arose from these divisions was problematic for many. The fictional Sayoko's resignation is a fictional representation of a common occurrence in reality.

In the context of the 1980s, the Japanese government did not do enough to truly remove the gender biases in its employment laws. Not surprisingly, working conditions for women did not change much either. When the EEOL was finally revised in 1997 (and these revisions implemented in 1999), all limitations on women's work were officially removed. Other gender-specific policies remained, however. Menstrual Leave, that had been provided so that women could "deal with the physical aspects of their periods"¹⁵¹ in ill-equipped munitions factories and the like during the war years, still remains in the labour laws, despite the now universally available heating systems, toilet facilities and convenient sanitary products. While few women make use of this provision, its very existence can be seen to create an area of difference between male and female staff. This special treatment continues to make it difficult for employers to regard, and therefore treat, women the same way that they treat men, let alone see them as truly equal in every regard. Cherry Kittredge is mistaken when she states, in her influential *Womansword*, that the menstrual law had disappeared. She reports that: "Some

employers used to say it was impossible to promote women because the law prescribed different working conditions for them”.¹⁵² I would argue that this still remains the case today, particularly since the only way to punish non-compliance with the law by companies who do not treat their staff fairly is by publication of their names.

Sayoko is finally able to leave the movie distribution firm when her boyfriend’s marriage proposal gives her a gracious way out. After several years as a fulltime suburban housewife, she then begins to think about reentering the workforce. A New Zealand woman in the same situation would almost certainly look for work similar to that which she had done before her children were born. Sayoko had previously worked for eight years in an office environment, in a position that she had been entrusted with because of her Bachelor of Arts in English. It would seem that the most logical thing for her to do would be to seek work either similar to her previous job, or something requiring the same qualifications. In the Japanese work environment, however,

there is no custom of hiring older women and giving them jobs with reasonable salaries and interesting contents. Unless they have some specialised skill, it is nearly impossible for women returning to the labor (*sic.*) force after their children are grown to earn incomes like those of men who have been working all along.¹⁵³

Thus Sayoko is forced to concede that the only work that is available to her is unskilled labour. She is not greatly upset by this realisation, however, because her motivation in rejoining the workforce is not to advance her career or earn money. Rather, she hopes that a fulltime position will earn her a certificate of employment, which will in turn allow her daughter to go to daycare. With this clearly in mind, she feels herself lucky to have found a position at a cleaning company.

Kakuta also introduces another character who reenters the workforce, but who does so with rather less grace. Mrs Narahashi is seen through the eyes of the teenaged Aoi, her daughter, in the early 1980s. The family has moved from the city to a semi-rural area and her husband is no longer able to earn enough as a taxi driver to support them. She is forced, therefore, to work. The only position she can find is a low-paying job at a bakery. Kakuta has again given one of her characters a very common situation, and in doing so has achieved two goals. Readers can easily identify with Mrs Narahashi's frustration without the need for lengthy explanation and Kakuta can emphasise her dissatisfaction with employment systems as they apply to mothers reassuming a role in the workforce. Many women who need to contribute to the family finances opt to work in small businesses tending the register and doing other light, menial chores. Their wages are often only fractionally more than those paid to high school students doing after school jobs. Earlier work experience and the skills that they have gained from running their households are seen to count for very little.

Though the situation portrayed in this part of the novel takes place in the early 1980s, readers early in the new millennium recognise that very little has changed for women like Aoi's mother, who need to work to boost their husbands' incomes. By leading her reader towards this conclusion, Kakuta emphasises the fact that law changes spanning some 20 years have had little real effect. Employers continue to capitalise on the fact that spouses earning less than 1.03 million yen can still be claimed against the main breadwinner's salary as dependents for tax purposes, and those earning less than the only slightly higher wage of 1.3 million yen still do not need to contribute to the national health and pension schemes. These figures compare to the average annual wage

for 2004 of some 4.5 million yen¹⁵⁴. Afraid to lose these lucrative benefits, many married women are willing to work for the limited wages that will keep them under the threshold. When Kakuta's married protagonist starts looking for work, therefore, she chooses positions advertised in the newspaper as 'suitable for married women', knowing that such jobs will pay little enough for her to still count as a dependent. She hopes that such positions will also be more likely to support her needs as a woman with responsibilities.

3.3 Combining Work Outside the Home with Motherhood

With Tamura Sayoko as her primary example, Kakuta works to make her reader aware of how problematic combining work outside the home with motherhood is in Japan. She shows Sayoko struggling, like the many married women that she represents, to carry the burdens of running her home and raising her child virtually alone as she tries to make a place for herself in the workforce with minimal support from her husband. Kakuta explores how single women become reluctant to, to use Kakuta's own words, "tether themselves"¹⁵⁵ when they see their married friends having such difficulty. She also develops this problem viewed from the opposite perspective; the idea that despite the fact that many women want to have fulfilling careers, full workforce participation is only presently truly viable for women who are not mothers. All these things, when added to the long working hours for both men and women, problematic access to parental leave, limited childcare availability, and negative social pressure, mean that being a mother in paid employment is a difficult prospect for Japanese women.

Yet this is exactly what the central government hopes that women will aspire to. Kakuta also supports movement towards this, though for very different reasons. Her view that women need both family life and employment outside the home to attain personal fulfillment will be discussed in detail in Section 3.4. By writing on these themes, she draws attention to the basic economics that motivate government social planners. Since the early 1970s,¹⁵⁶ they have been alarmed¹⁵⁷ by the decreasing total fertility rate, which fell below the replacement level of 2.1 in 1974 and now stands at 1.34¹⁵⁸. In the early 1990s, it became clear that this downward trend was "likely to be of a permanent nature".¹⁵⁹ It was predicted that not only would the population halve by the end of the

21st century, crippling the Japanese economy, but also that Japan would be “the first developed nation to fall below the ratio of three working-age adults to each elder”,¹⁶⁰ and thus put a huge tax burden on its citizens. Research showed that the decreasing number of children was clearly linked to a decline in the number of first marriages, falling from 83% in 1980 to 72% in 2000.¹⁶¹ The number of children that couples were having had changed very little,¹⁶² as had the fact that unmarried women in Japan tend not to reproduce.¹⁶³ Changing contemporary attitudes about the desirability of marriage and increasing the ideal family size was seen to be of paramount importance in securing the future of the Japanese economy.

Increasing women’s participation in the workforce was also identified as a possible solution to the problems that a shrinking population would bring. If the average eight years in the workforce could be extended significantly, and the proportion of women returning to the workforce after having children raised, the impact of the fall in the birthrate could be limited. The number of years women spent working was actually already increasing naturally as the age at first marriage increased. The fact that so many women still left paid employment when they married, however, meant that this had very little appreciable impact. The central government would therefore need to do all in its power to both increase female labour force participation and to raise the birthrate.

Public initiatives were first taken to these ends in 1972, when the *Kinrō Fujin Fukushi Hō* (Working Women’s Welfare Law)¹⁶⁴ was passed to try to make it easier for women to balance the responsibilities of work and home and to improve both their welfare and status.¹⁶⁵ Social planners hoped that this would increase the number of married women

working, and thereby alleviate labour shortages, and also show younger women that it was possible to have both a career and a family. As part of its implementation, information centres were built throughout Japan to educate employers about women's needs, to help women initially entering the workforce find work appropriate to their skills and to provide support to women already in work.

The 1992 Childcare and Family Care Leave Act's year of unpaid parental leave, the 1994 Angel Plan's focus on improving access to childcare,¹⁶⁶ and the 1999 New Angel Plan's efforts to promote "an environment conducive to the reconciliation of work and family life"¹⁶⁷ similarly had little impact, perhaps due to their nebulous nature. With no concrete regulations, all three of these schemes merely encouraged employers to support the family lives of their staff. Even well-intentioned employers were unaware of how to proceed. Since 2001, however, there has been a comprehensive system in place, entitling new parents to 10 months' leave paid at 30% of their regular earnings. The money comes from compulsory employment insurance that all fulltime workers must contribute to. A further 10% is paid when people return to work.¹⁶⁸ It should also be noted, however, that though this leave is available to all, "corporate culture and social and cultural customs mandate that women, not men, take leave".¹⁶⁹ This is also connected to the fact that men's salaries are so often higher than women's. None of these government efforts have caused an appreciable upswing in marital or fertility rates. Public policy, it seems, can do little to remedy the situation.

A widely perceived lack of support for parents may be at the heart of the issue, causing women to both delay marriage and childbirth and leave the workforce when these

events take place. Employers can be seen to be responsible for at least part of this common belief. Despite full knowledge of the family circumstances of their staff so that correct spousal, child and housing allowances can be paid, many companies fail to recognise that staff have commitments outside of work, and need time to fulfill them. As such, some 21.6% of Japanese men log 38 or more overtime hours a month, and 20% more than 80¹⁷⁰. In *Taigan no Kanojo*, although Sayoko accepts that her husband's work must take priority, she is frustrated when he is suddenly unable to take part in the weekend dance performance that he has been practicing for with their pre-school daughter. Sayoko recognises that her husband cannot refuse his manager's request: a trade-off of the almost guaranteed life-long employment system is that it is virtually impossible to move to a comparable position at another company. The poor treatment, limited choices and miniscule wages that women reentering the workforce receive is one example of this. To ensure that managers regard them as essential team members, therefore, many workers, including Sayoko's husband, stay at work until late in the evening and often work on weekends. Long commutes further restrict the time that workers can spend at home.

Most couples who decide to have children, therefore, opt for one parent to remain dedicated to his or her career and for the other to become the children's primary caregiver. As was noted earlier, it is often women who undertake this role. Some 70%¹⁷¹ choose to simply abandon work outside the home until their children reach school age. Others make use of the 1992 Childcare and Family Care Leave Act, which provides an initial year of parental leave and also forces employers to "provide work and family reconciliation support"¹⁷² to staff with children under three and encourages them to

continue this until the children are six years old.¹⁷³ Employers often interpret this to mean reducing working hours by between one and four hours each day, which Kakuta has incorporated into the fabric of the novel. Narahashi Aoi, as Sayoko's employer, does exactly this for her.

Both children and parents alike are adversely affected by one parent assuming the role of primary caregiver to such an extent. Women who either resign from work or who opt to work reduced hours soon take up another burden in its place. Not only must they take care of their children and run their homes on a day-to-day basis, they must also parent their children virtually alone. For women who have envisaged shared parenting, this is a significant disappointment. The loneliness that husbands' long working hours and compulsory evening socialising invariably cause is also a problem. Young children, who go to bed early in the evening, rarely spend time with their non-primary caregiver during the week. A government survey conducted in 1987 showed that some 37.4% of fathers had no regular daily contact with their children, 20.3% had 30 minutes' contact, and 15% over an hour.¹⁷⁴ Kakuta gives a poignant example of this in *Taigan no Kanojo*. When the teenaged Aoi goes to work at a seaside inn for the summer and lodges with her employer's family, she sees first-hand a father who has time to do things with his young son. Looking at the fluorescent stars that he has stuck to the bedroom ceiling, she admits to being envious. She has no such memories of her own father and knows little about him. The emotional distance between them has no doubt been exacerbated by the fact that he is a taxi driver and as such is forced to work even longer hours than most. Aoi has therefore effectively grown up in a single parent home. When her father realises that it has taken her suicide attempt for him to notice that she has been unhappy, he is

deeply affected. He makes serious efforts to get to know his daughter and to show her that he cares. Kakuta's novel here takes on a warning tone, advising parents and more especially fathers, to spend more time with their children.

In this text, the women who have children are largely responsible for their care and receive little help from their husbands. It seems that this reflects contemporary Japanese reality: men with non-working wives spend an average of just 13 minutes each day on either housework or care tasks.¹⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that New Zealand men in similar circumstances spend 35 minutes each day on these tasks.¹⁷⁶ With the 1985 ratification of CEDAW, the Japanese government had promised to

take all appropriate measures [...] to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;¹⁷⁷

and also “to ensure [...] the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children.”¹⁷⁸ Despite the 23 years that have passed since then, Japanese society still seems unable to accept that childcare, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and laundry are all tasks that can be performed equally well by men and women.

The level of care that some women put into running their homes may work to keep this misconception alive. Kakuta uses Sayoko to illustrate this point. At the start of the novel, she is seen to be running her home efficiently. As a fulltime homemaker, this is nothing out of the ordinary. She keeps glasses in the freezer so that she can always serve a perfect glass of beer, rides her bicycle to the store when her husband learns that she does

not have what he wants on hand and eats leftovers so that he can always have something freshly prepared. She makes everything herself rather than relying on readymade meals, washes and irons all her husband's business shirts rather than dropping them off at the local laundry as is common, and keeps the apartment spotless. Her housekeeping pride precludes her husband, Shūji, from being able to go to the supermarket, do the laundry or any other helpful domestic tasks.

Having been raised by a full-time homemaker, Shūji remains completely unaware of how well his wife runs their home. He takes the things that she does for granted, and does not notice all that she does for him until she takes on a part-time job and cannot maintain her previous high standards. When she snaps at their small daughter at the end of a long and stressful day, he comments that there is no financial need for her to work. His logic tells him that if she were at home concentrating on what he sees as her first priority as a mother, she would not lose patience with Akari.

As Sayoko becomes more confident through interaction with others in her new job, she learns that not only is perfect housekeeping not her only source of pride, but also that a lot can be accomplished by simply asking for help. When she finally asks Shūji to go to the supermarket, therefore, she finds his immediate compliance only mildly surprising. And because she now has other things in which to take pride, she is not overly concerned about the fish he will choose at the store. The example that Kakuta gives here can be read in two ways. One is that individual women can make choices that will let them combine employment outside the home with family life. The other is that Sayoko functions here as a representative Japanese woman, and her extended family as

representative of Japanese society. As such, when she successfully asks for her husband's help, Kakuta is asking her reader to recognise her desire for women to be more proactive in working towards equality. Perhaps the reason that so many women have stayed within traditional gender roles is simply because they have not yet tried to step outside of them.

In much the same way that Japanese society has regarded housekeeping as a task for women rather than men, childcare has been regarded as best done by the children's mother rather than by any other adult. "The option of outside assistance is only ever considered once the child has reached the age of three," writes Muriel Jolivet in *Japan: The Childless Society*.¹⁷⁹ So deeply entrenched is this belief that though "daycare offers many advantages over a situation in which a child is brought up exclusively by his or her parents inside the home, particularly in the often cramped and socially isolated environment of Japan's cities,"¹⁸⁰ kindergarten, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, is only provided from the age of four in some areas, and in others five. This year or two of structured play is regarded as essential for a child's socialisation.

Children placed in care before they reach three, however, are viewed by many as neglected. This may explain why "Japan's 20,000-odd licensed daycare centres accommodate about 1.7 million infants and children, [but] these facilities accept very few children under three years of age,"¹⁸¹ wrote Funabashi Keiko in 1999. While the situation has changed somewhat, two clear problems still exist: a lack of available places, and serious restrictions in terms of care facility opening hours. Reflecting this reality, in *Taigan no Kanojo* Sayoko struggles to find a place for her child. It is only the

relocation of another family that allows Akari to be enrolled. Sayoko must then ask for her working hours to be reduced so that she is able to collect her from the daycare centre, which closes in the afternoon. Many facilities operate a system in which penalty fees are charged to parents who do not collect their children on time. Women whose jobs preclude them finishing each day before this can face hefty fines.

Another perhaps less apparent difficulty in relying on the services of a daycare provider is that many care facilities are unwilling to accept children who are unwell. Thus, a woman waking to find that her child has even a slight temperature is unable to go to work herself because she must stay at home to care for her child. If a child becomes unwell during the day, care facilities call the registered main caregiver to ask that the child be collected as soon as possible. While employers must support their staff through such issues, it is their colleagues who must, in fact, pick up the slack. In this land where it is considered unacceptable to use more than a few paid annual holidays each year so as not to burden others, and people are careful to remain at the office until their superiors leave for home, people hesitate to be seen to put the needs of their family before those of the company or their co-workers. Sayoko is deeply upset when she learns that her new co-workers regard her as less committed to the future of the company than themselves. They have assumed because she goes home earlier in the day, and is sometimes unable to attend work, that this must be the case. Rather, it is simply the reality for many working mothers who must rely on daycare. Though Sayoko is a character in a novel, she must also deal with this common problem.

Where parents can rely on the support of extended family, however, they can give their

full attention to their jobs during the working day. An ill child can be cared for at home or collected by a grandparent. Women who have this support do not need to use the Childcare and Family Care Leave Act, can maintain positive relationships with their colleagues and can resume a full workload soon after returning to work. As it becomes increasingly common for couples to set up a new home upon marriage rather than moving into an existing household, however, and the domestic transfer of staff continues unabated, fewer people are able to rely on their extended families for help in taking care of their offspring.

Not only are there geographical difficulties, however. It seems that many older women who live with or near their adult children are now balking at taking an active role in caring for their grandchildren and “have been heard to complain bitterly that they find [dropping the child off at daycare in the morning] very restricting”¹⁸² writes Muriel Jolivet in *Japan: The Childless Society*. She thinks perhaps this could be linked with the “importance of gateball (a Japanese version of croquet) in the lives of elderly people”¹⁸³, which begins at about 7:30am. In *Taigan no Kanojo*, Sayoko can find no other option but to leave Akari with her husband’s mother, initially while she goes to job interviews and then until she can find a daycare facility that has an opening. The older woman does not seem to enjoy this time with her granddaughter, virtually ignoring the child when the family eats dinner together one evening, and Sayoko fears what kind of effect this negativity will have on Akari. Certainly, she makes her daughter-in-law aware that she feels the only acceptable reason for her to work outside the home would be if Shūji were unable to support the family financially. She makes lengthy speeches on the telephone about how Sayoko should be thinking about having a second child, and cannot imagine

that there could be a better way to raise a family than the way that she raised her own. It is very likely that she subscribes to the belief that children are best cared for by their mothers until they start school or kindergarten. Her motivation can be seen to be ambiguous, however, especially when Jolivet's comment is taken into consideration. Whether the older Mrs Tamura truly expects Sayoko to produce another child and remain a full-time homemaker so that she can take the best possible care of her young family, or actually really only desires her own freedom from traditional grandmotherly responsibilities is unclear.

In an article published first in Japanese then in translation in the internationally available *Japan Echo*, Kawamoto Yūko made an interesting comment about crafting systems to allow people, not only women, to combine active parenting with meaningful employment outside of the home. She points to specific companies that allow people to do this.

Mazda's evaluation system,[...]with its focus on results achieved, had been hailed as a fair method even for those who work shorter hours. Nesty, a software firm in the city of Fukui, is known for its success in attracting talented systems engineers with its flexible working hours. And Kamite, a metal-stamping company in the town of Kosaka, Akita Prefecture, has gained renown for training its workers to handle a variety of skilled tasks, thus making it easy for them to fill in for those who take parental leave and boosting their motivation and productivity to boot.¹⁸⁴

Strategies such as these allow for a woman to progress naturally in her career and not be handicapped in any way by taking parental leave, extended or otherwise. They allow men to take an active role in the raising of their children and the running of their homes. Kakuta could not make her support for the need for such strategies more explicit.

3.4 'Success' and 'Failure'

During the period of sustained economic growth (1955-1990)¹⁸⁵, many believed that a comfortable lifestyle was within the reach of all. High salaries meant that most families could live comfortably on one wage, at least while the children were young. Unlike in previous generations, married women with small children did not need to go out to work and could dedicate themselves to caring for their homes. With all of their daily needs looked after, men could focus entirely on work. Both men and women enjoyed a higher standard of living than their parents had, and because of this, the 'male breadwinner female full-time homemaker' family model became the accepted norm. The view that had previously only been held by "the small minority of women whose husbands were government bureaucrats or corporate executives"¹⁸⁶ in the pre-war years of "a woman's primary function as being wife and mother"¹⁸⁷ became standard. Divorce rates fell, as did the number of children born to unmarried mothers, and the proportion of nuclear families rose. In 1965 some 90% of the population felt that they were 'middle class'¹⁸⁸. In 2005, however, some 34% of the population defined themselves as 'lower middle or lower class,'¹⁸⁹ and many felt that the gap between rich and poor was widening.¹⁹⁰

Reflecting this new awareness, and perhaps also fuelling it, variations of the words *kachigumi* (winning team) and *makegumi* (losing team) reappeared in the media with increasing frequency. These terms had originally been used to describe people who found economic success or failed to do so in Brazil, America or Manchuria following widespread emigration that started in the 1870s. They came into use again in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the general lack of reliable information meant that many were unaware of the true outcome of the war. Japanese expatriate society

became polarised into two groups, those who believed in Japan's victory over the Pacific, the *kachigumi*, and those who believed in a Japanese defeat, the *makegumi*. In "The Expectation Gap: Winners and Losers in the New Economy," Yamada Masahiro explains that these terms were more recently used to "distinguish the corporations that had made it through the prolonged economic downturn in good shape from those that were stumbling along" and that they "are now applied to almost every area of life."¹⁹¹

The publication of *Taigan no Kanojo* in 2004 came in the midst of a gradual movement towards questioning the usage of the words *kachigumi* and *makegumi*. Until then, when women were judged *kachigumi* or *makegumi*, there had been only one criterion: marriage. Women who married were universally acknowledged as successful; and those who failed to do so were labeled as 'losers.' Through careful depiction of her characters, however, Kakuta shows her reader that in contemporary Japan, there is often little connection between a woman's marital status, her financial success and her personal happiness. Some four years have now passed since the question of the validity of the application of these words came into the public consciousness. Despite the fact that both statistical and anecdotal evidence supports such observations, however, many Japanese have yet to reconsider the ways in which they use and understand these words.

3.4.1 Married women: The 'Winning Team'?

Women fortunate enough to obtain regular employment are initially known as *kachigumi*. Usually employed in the third year of a four-year university degree, they are then able to enjoy their final year at university, safe in the knowledge that their future employment is assured no matter how little they then study. Women attending

tankidaigaku (junior colleges) spend only two years studying between high school and starting work, but it is often enough to earn them a good clerical position. As well as receiving subsidised health insurance and pension schemes, housing allowance, annual bonuses and sometimes even extra payments for dependents, they have little need to worry about their employment throughout their working lives. Even in the present economic environment of near-zero growth, their jobs are virtually guaranteed, especially if they are employed by a large corporation. As long as they fulfill their duties and do not step out of line, such employment can last until 65, although many women leave their positions much earlier as was previously discussed.

Pay parity data substantiates the wide-held view that women are unable to sufficiently support themselves financially throughout their lives and is one of the reasons that many believe that women must marry in order to remain 'successful'. Though laws that should ensure equal pay for equal work have existed since 1986, in 2001 women in their early twenties were paid just 90% of the wages that men employed at the same time to do the same jobs received. This fell to some 50% after women reached 45 years of age¹⁹². According to Iwao Sumiko, however, "the first postwar generation of women [...] are fully capable of supporting themselves economically, if necessary[.]"¹⁹³ She adds that "with marriage no longer necessary for social and economic survival, the marriageable age extended considerably and marriage became a less pressing concern for the women themselves."¹⁹⁴ It seems that while an unmarried life became a possibility for women born between 1946 and 1955, the level of affluence of that life could not be relied upon.

The link between marriage and success is also connected with the extent to which the ‘male breadwinner female full-time homemaker’ family model had become successful in the years between 1955 and 1990. In *The Japanese Family in Transition*, Yamada writes,

[T]he myth arose that maintenance of the standard form would bring happiness, fostering a discriminatory attitude towards deviation from that form, and ensuring that people made adoption of the form their personal goal.¹⁹⁵

Believing that success would be possible if they followed the norms, not only did women marry, they did so within the prescribed age range. They followed contemporary wisdom about placing greater importance on the home and family than on a career, and worked hard to provide their families with a comfortable home. Men, too, supported their wives adopting this role: in 1972, 40% of Japanese men felt that women should not work outside the home at all after marriage¹⁹⁶. By 2002, however, this had dropped to some 13%.¹⁹⁷

According to Inagaki Yoshihiro writing in *Gendai Yōgo no Kisō Chishiki 2005*, (Basic Knowledge of Contemporary Terms, 2005), contemporary women have also reassessed their view of what constitutes an ideal marriage. He writes that women now want to be able to entrust the financing of their material needs to their husband not so that they can focus on caring for him, the house and their children, but rather so that they can do creative, interesting work that they feel is of value. This is only possible, however, if the husband’s salary is large enough to cover the cost of daycare while the children are small. After children start school, the wives of such men can use the daytime hours as they please. Though fictional Tamura Sayoko in *Taigan no Kanojo* can rely on her husband for financial support, her days are filled with the minutiae of raising her

pre-school daughter. Kakuta's depiction of Sayoko's life "chafe[s] against the convention that s[ees] all women happiest as full-time homemakers, dutiful wives, and 'education mothers' (*kyōiku mama*)."¹⁹⁸ Sayoko doubts her own ability to give their three year-old daughter a good educational start, takes providing a comfortable home for her husband as a given that provides little interest or challenge, and has difficulty filling her long empty days at home.

For much of the novel there is very little sense of trust between Sayoko and Shūji. This is not a recent development: When Shūji proposed some five years earlier, Sayoko

accepted his proposal and handed in her notice [...] Shūji, who had been under the mistaken illusion that she would continue working after the wedding, seemed dissatisfied but Sayoko pretended not to notice (7).

Sayoko had lost the joy that she initially found in her work, instead becoming unable to see past her worsening relationship with her female colleagues. "Just when this was becoming tiresome, Shūji, whom she had been going out with, brought up the subject of marriage with great timing"(7). There is no mention of love; Sayoko agrees to marry him so that she can walk away from a difficult situation. Patricia Morley writes in *The Mountain is moving: Japanese Women's Lives* that "[m]arriage offers women not only security but escape from tedious and/or unchallenging work", perfectly describing what motivated Sayoko to marry Shūji, as in fact she tells her new boss when she re-enters the workforce later in the novel. "I wasn't brave enough to go it alone. I didn't have the confidence to keep on working" (93).

One might also question Shūji's reasons for proposing to Sayoko. There is so little emotional interaction between them that not only was he unaware of how unhappy she

had been at work, she was able to ignore the fact that he “seemed dissatisfied”(7). It seems that Kakuta may be using him as an example of the contemporary man. As Kazanami Fumiko tells Sandra Buckley in an interview published in 1997,

[t]he decision to marry is often made because of one’s age and job profile. Needless to say, this does not foster strong [emotional] investment in the marriage on the part of the husband.¹⁹⁹

While Shūji’s motivation for wanting his new bride to continue working after the wedding is also not mentioned in the novel, contemporary men, it seems, have recognised that “a wife’s employment status has a major bearing on the husband’s level of affluence,”²⁰⁰ and that “[t]he gap in the affluence between dual-income and single-income couples is growing more evident”.²⁰¹ The number of men supporting their wives working even after having children almost doubled in the decade between 1992 and 2002, to 37.2%.²⁰² “Today the status of housewife is marked by flagrant contradictions”.²⁰³ Whereas once the full-time homemaker was regarded as both the pinnacle of success and within the reach of all families, now it seems that neither of these beliefs is true.

Lacking any real sense of partnership with her husband, and with no regular contact with the world, Sayoko has become entirely isolated. Her own family is a distance away in Chiba and she cannot find common ground with her mother-in-law who lives nearby in Iogi. She has no contact with friends from school or university, or with her former colleagues at the movie distribution firm. This could perhaps be explained by her marriage at age 30, some three years above the national average (in the year 2000)²⁰⁴. The fact that her daughter was born two years after the wedding, also bucking national trends,²⁰⁵ can be seen to have further distanced Sayoko from her peers. Muriel Jolivet,

in her 1997 exploration of modern Japanese motherhood *Japan: The Childless Society*, cites several examples of the isolation that can result from marriage and childbirth before what used to be the “most propitious”²⁰⁶ age of 25. Women accepting the burdens of motherhood and housekeeping become distant from their still carefree friends, who are unable to understand what the new wife and mother is experiencing. Similarly, women who undertake these roles later than their peers face isolation.

Even if women find themselves the only one of their friends pregnant, many are soon able to make new friends at the doctor’s office as they wait for regularly scheduled pregnancy and infancy check-ups and then later in the local park. “Not only can [new mothers] help each other and exchange information, but the network prevents them from feeling alone or secluded from society”.²⁰⁷ No such network has been available to Sayoko, however. In Japanese society, age plays a far more important part than it does in New Zealand, and dictates how people interact with and speak to one another. In *Keys to the Japanese Heart and Soul*, we learn that “the essential building blocks of Japanese society are didactic relationships based on a presumption of hierarchical difference”.²⁰⁸ Because Sayoko is older, other mothers have felt that she should be treated as such, which has created a sense of distance between them. Though many of them have more experience of motherhood, Sayoko has felt unable to ask their advice.

Sayoko watches her daughter playing alone in the sandpit at the local park, seeing Akari’s hesitance to join the other children as a reflection of her own inability to form effective relationships. In doing so, she becomes increasingly worried that she is unable to give her daughter the skills needed to make friends. By describing Sayoko’s intense

unease and isolation, Kakuta makes her reader consider how her situation compares to that of real fulltime homemakers with young children. She leads her reader to question why society views women in this situation as more successful than single women who suffer no such stress. While it could be said that Sayoko's physical needs are provided for without her having to go out to work, her emotional needs are not met. The lack of regular contact with people that work ensures has caused much of the stress that she feels. Sayoko eventually reconnects herself with society by finding herself a part-time job that not only gives her contact with others, but also provides her with the document that allows her to enroll her child at a daycare facility, giving Akari opportunities to make friends.

By clearly linking Sayoko's happiness with her return to paid employment, Kakuta introduces the concept that women need both work and family life to achieve personal fulfillment. Although society has labeled Sayoko a 'success', she does not consider herself as such until she reenters the workforce. Although Sayoko willingly left her job some five years before the start of the novel, she now recognises that she needs both work and family life to be happy. She observes changes in herself as she goes about her work and interacts with her co-workers, then begins to see changes in how she parents her pre-school daughter, and finally realises that she is now able to function more effectively in her role as a mother. The reader concludes that in Kakuta's view, not only do women need to be employed outside the home to be happy, but also that children benefit from regular contact with the outside world.

Nakazato Noriko is another character that Kakuta uses to try to make her reader

reconsider whether *kachigumi* status automatically brings personal happiness. In her 40s, Noriko is married with two young children and runs At Home Service, the company that she and a friend started some seven years before. If one were to judge just on this information, it would seem that Noriko is a perfect ‘winner’. Not only is she married; she can devote her time and energy to a business that she has started herself and therefore presumably believes is of value. Superficially, it seems that she has achieved the contemporary woman’s ideal marriage. As the reader learns more about Noriko’s situation, however, it becomes clear that she is not coping with all of her roles, and struggles to keep up the appearance that she is in total control.

The first time the reader encounters Noriko she seems less than content, and is portrayed as an unfriendly, inhuman perfectionist. When she comes to collect Sayoko for her first day of training, she does not introduce herself but rather barks, “[g]et in. In the back,” (40) from the driver’s window of her van. She then brushes off Sayoko’s greetings and self-introduction with, “[g]et in quickly” (41). Sayoko is soon able to observe that Noriko expects perfection of her workers, not only in the work that they do, but also in the way that they conduct themselves in front of customers, and in how they respond to her instructions. The fact that the At Home Service staff do not talk to one another as Noriko drives them across the city is indicative to Sayoko of their awe of their boss.

It seems that Noriko has limited the number of people to whom she is willing to devote the time and energy needed to build close relationships, and that she purposely keeps all others at a distance. This allows her to maintain the impression that she has everything

under control. Narahashi Aoi, as her fellow female business owner-operator, is one of her inner circle, so much so that Noriko has even undertaken Sayoko's training. Aoi accompanies them sporadically throughout this period, and when she whistles in surprise about a particularly filthy apartment, Noriko laughs, saying, "You must be used to seeing this sort of thing, Aoi! Your place is much like this isn't it?"(43) The two women know one another well enough to tease each other, and are friends as well as business acquaintances. The following conversation, which takes place between Sayoko and Aoi, helps the reader understand Noriko's situation and her friendship with Aoi.

"Was Nori scary today?" Aoi asked her, and Sayoko answered with a smile,

"Why would she be scary?"

"Well, she used to be a normal married woman. I met her overseas. I was by myself, but she was with a tour, and she'd lost the rest of her group and came up to me in a real panic," said Aoi, lighting a cigarette. "She couldn't have kids and she was really upset about it, but then she and a friend set up the housekeeping company together. Just when they'd started it, she got pregnant. The first time I met her, I thought she was a conservative married woman, but then after starting the company, or perhaps rather after becoming a mother, she completely transformed herself into that really bold character."

Sayoko raised her eyes from her notebook and looked at Aoi. "Does Ms Nakazato have kids?"

"One is in Year One at school, and the other is a pre-schooler. She told me that soon after one was born she got pregnant again with the next."

"She's got kids that little?" Sayoko said, surprised.

"Because she had them late. She tells me that it's OK if you don't want any, but if you do, you should have them as soon as you can. She says that your physical strength in your twenties, thirties and forties is completely different. Because Noriko's kids were born when she was almost 40, and it was just after she had started working, it looked really very hard."

Sayoko, who had been absorbed in what Aoi was saying, looked at the time and hurriedly dropped her eyes to her work. She quickly started writing (55-56).

The reason for Noriko's lack of connection with her staff could have its roots in the fact

that Japanese tend to be what DeVos terms “role perfectionists,”²⁰⁹ and as such dedicate much of their time and energy to what they see as their primary role. When the only role that Noriko held was as a fulltime housewife, she was a “normal married woman” (55) who behaved much as expected. One example of this is her panic when she became separated from her tour group while traveling overseas (55). With Aoi’s encouragement and mentoring, she was then able to establish a small business with a friend, and seemingly coped with the addition of this new role. When two consecutive unexpected pregnancies brought new stresses, however, “completely transform[ing] herself into [a] really bold character” may have only been the only way that she was able to cope. I would argue that because Noriko has not assigned primary and secondary importance to the many roles she plays as wife, mother, housekeeper and entrepreneur, she feels compelled to achieve perfection in all of these. Because she has taken on so many roles, however, she has no spare energy to dedicate to pleasantries.

Many would argue that it is completely natural that motherhood would have usurped all of Noriko’s other roles, and that her refusal to abandon her business shows that she does not understand the supreme importance of a mother’s part in the raising of her children. Such people believe that “the type and quality of the care [mothers] provide will conclusively determine whether or not their children will grow into healthy, productive adults”.²¹⁰ Women who follow this doctrine devote themselves to raising their children at the expense of all else. Considering the fact that Noriko “was really upset about” (56) her inability to have a child, it seems likely that she also subscribes to this belief. Unable to leave her friend alone with the business that they had just started together, however, and also unable to back out of the pregnancy that she now faced, Noriko made

the difficult decision to continue working. The daytime care of her children she would have had to entrust to either a daycare center or her mother, and her choice on this point is not mentioned in the text. Either way, her children were away from their mother for many hours each day in their formative years.

Noriko is not only fighting her own expectations, she is living in a society that is not accustomed to people failing to perform their roles perfectly. Noriko's mother, therefore, does not know how to support her daughter through her difficulties, but instead criticises her choice to continue working. She tells Noriko that her children's minor behavioural problems stem from the fact that she continues to go out to work. Noriko's husband, on the other hand, is never mentioned in the novel. His complete absence from the narrative, however, would seem to suggest that he, too, does little to support her.

Both the reader and Sayoko gradually come to understand that Noriko's coldness is one symptom of the fact that she has not yet reached a balance between motherhood and employment outside the home. For earlier generations of women, it was normal to look after their children as they carried out heavy agricultural labour. This, combined with the fact that the average family had many more children, meant that people simply trusted that their children would grow up to be good, healthy citizens. In the intervening years, however, because the economy soared and mothers did not need to work outside of the home, society's expectations of the role that mothers play in the raising of their children increased. Whereas in the past, the term in common usage for childrearing had been '*kosodachi*'²¹¹, a compound of '*ko*' meaning child and the noun form of the intransitive verb '*sodatsu*' or grow, now the term '*kosodate*' is far more common. The

transitive verb '*sodateru*,' or 'raise', with its implied subject the mother, puts far greater emphasis on the importance of her role. Women with small children who choose to go out to work where there is no pressing financial need are now treated with suspicion. Though Noriko meets the superficial criteria of the *kachigumi*, because she continues to work outside the home and struggles to perform her roles to the level that society expects of her, she cannot be considered content.

Mano Ryōko is another member of the *kachigumi* in Kakuta's novel that has suffered because of society's changing attitudes regarding how women should incorporate work into their lives. The reader encounters Ryōko in the early 1980s, when the teenaged Aoi goes to Izu to work for the summer. Married, Ryōko lives with her husband, five year old son and mother-in-law in a small seaside inn. Her dark tanned skin, coarse dry hair, and thickset body are the first signs to the reader that all is not perfect, however. She smokes constantly, speaks roughly, and, like Noriko some twenty years later, does not treat her staff well. It seems that unlike Noriko, however, Ryōko does so because she is afraid of letting down her guard due to an unpleasant experience the year before. As she slowly gets to know Aoi, however, she relaxes and starts to talk with her about her life. She explains that expectations of women suddenly changed when she was at school, and she had difficulty coping.

In our generation, people suddenly started telling us that educational background was important and all at once it got really difficult to pass the entrance exams, and balancing that, the job that most of us high school students most wanted was something like fulltime homemaker. What I'm trying to say is that the general atmosphere wasn't simple (111).

Though it is unclear how old Ryōko is, it seems likely that she is referring to the changes in social expectations that occurred in the late 1970s, influenced by the

international Decade for Women. Like many of her generation, Ryōko had been raised to look forward to getting married and becoming a mother. When Japanese girls were suddenly expected to pursue a career rather than just find a job to fill the years between high school and marriage, however, many had difficulty adjusting. Patricia Morley writes in *The Mountain is Moving: Japanese Women's Lives* that even after the introduction of the Equal Opportunity Employment Law in 1986, “women’s career aspirations did not rise” and that “[w]omen displayed instead a greater degree of uncertainty about their career futures.” The fictional Ryōko ran away from home rather than face the pressure that her final year at high school now entailed.

Kakuta Mitsuyo is not the only contemporary novelist presenting female characters that defy their *kachigumi* labels. Sawaki Eriko, a central character in Hayashi Mariko’s *Anego* (Big Sister Type, 2003), is another example of a supposedly successful woman who is far from content. She is initially presented as having achieved the ideal: her education at an above average women’s college²¹² led to regular employment at a large company, which gave her the opportunity to meet an ideal marriage partner. Her husband is an attractive businessman who works for a successful consulting firm, meaning that Eriko has no financial need to work. All is not as it seems, however. Emotionally unstable due to the international relocation that her husband’s company has demanded and deeply shaken by her husband’s continuing extra-marital affairs, she retreats to her parents’ home with their young daughter and eventually commits suicide. Though she is a model *kachigumi*, she is cruelly made to suffer.

Interestingly, when *Anego* was made into a television program for Nippon Television

Network Corporation in 2005, some major revisions had been made to the plot, perhaps indicating that while authors like Kakuta and Hayashi were able to openly criticise the status quo, the national broadcaster needed to be more reticent. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the changes were deemed necessary to prevent jeopardising future work prospects for Tomosaka Rie, the actress who played Eriko. Appearing to disembowel herself on national television may have caused trouble. It seems that any suicide at all was unacceptable, whatever the means, however, because in the television series when Eriko tries to leap from a rooftop, she is prevented. While she and her husband go ahead with the divorce that Hayashi had proposed in the novel, relations between them seem likely to improve in the television dramatisation. Hayashi's bleak forecast had been softened dramatically, perhaps to make *Anego* acceptable to a wider audience.

3.4.2 Single Women: The 'Losing Team'?

If marriage ensures that a woman is regarded as one of the *kachigumi*, the winning team, one may assume that a woman's unmarried status must therefore be the defining characteristic that makes her one of the *makegumi*, the losing team. This is only partly true, however. More accurately, *makegumi* are women who are unlikely ever to marry. While there are, of course, manifold reasons for this, let us first consider the influence that the financial positions of the individual, her parents, and her prospective marriage partner all bring to bear on the viability of marriage.

Makegumi typically have very little job security, occupying jobs that are "subject to a contractually limited term and that [do not] pay[...] enough for a worker (and

dependents) to live on.”²¹³ Many companies hire staff as ‘part-timers’ to get around employment laws which state that limited term contracts can only exist for full-time staff where there is a proven need for them to be so. This loophole gives companies the freedom to hire and fire staff as they need to: people nominally employed as ‘part-timers’ have no recourse should something go wrong. Employers can easily bypass even the 35-hour weekly limit on part-time work, by simply defining anything outside this as overtime.²¹⁴ Unlike in the European Union, where there is an explicit directive prohibiting discriminatory labour conditions for part-timers, in Japan such people are commonly regarded as having a different status from that of permanent employees. Not only can they be taken on and dismissed easily, employers need not make pension and health insurance contributions for them.²¹⁵ From pay packets that are already significantly smaller than those of their full-time colleagues, such nominally ‘part-time’ staff must then find the full amount of insurance contributions themselves.

Women supporting themselves on such low wages, and with so little job security, are often unwilling to risk the deterioration in their circumstances that marriage to a man in similar circumstances might bring. Considering that marriage may also result in childbirth, bringing with it the possibility of high medical costs²¹⁶ and the necessity of an extended period without income for one of the new parents, this seems highly probable. Thus unless women in low-paying work are able to attract a suitor who is registered as a full-time employee, marriage is often not seen as a financially viable prospect. Unable to marry, they remain members of the *makegumi*.

Similarly, women relying on their parents to supply their basic needs are unwilling to

see their standard of living fall with marriage. Yamada Masahiro made waves when he labeled such people ‘parasite singles’ in an article in the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (Japan Economic Newspaper) in February 1997. In a series of articles and books on the subject, he criticised the estimated 10 million unmarried workers aged 20-34²¹⁷ “who, even after leaving school, continue to depend on [their parents] for food, clothing, and shelter.”²¹⁸ With no need to pay housing costs, such people have much more of their income at their disposal, the impact of which is further felt in urban centres where rents are higher but salaries remain relatively unchanged. Estimating that singles living with their parents typically contribute between 10,000 and 30,000 yen each month to the household budget, Yamada concluded that even a job paying the minimum wage of 115,653²¹⁹ yen would allow for a discretionary budget large enough to buy designer accessories or to pay for international travel.

Marriage for women in this situation is problematic. The earning power of a prospective spouse would have to be great indeed for the former ‘parasite single’ not to have to give up her discretionary income to pay for the groceries. One possible solution is sharing a home with one spouse’s parents and relying on them for increasing levels of financial support should they have children. Another is moving into a third dwelling and facing financial hardship. Neither seems an easy choice to make. With nuclear families now the norm, few young people have grown up expecting that they would ever have to live with their spouse’s parents. Paying for privacy with the resulting reduction in lifestyle, however, is also less than attractive. Members of the *makegumi* see these obstacles as insurmountable, and reconcile themselves to the fact that they will never marry.

Picked up by the international press, Yamada's theories enjoyed international attention, starting with an article in *The U.S. News and World Report* in October 1998. Peggy Orenstein delved much deeper in her July 1, 2001 article for *The New York Times*, "Parasites in Pret-a-porter." As the title of her article suggests, Orenstein focused on the women able to finance luxury lifestyles by accepting free board and lodging from their parents rather than those forced to live at home so as to be able to have any discretionary income at all. Her article was shot down by Japan scholar and Harvard University professor Andrew Gordon, not for the one-sidedness of her research, but rather for her portrayal of this as a new phenomenon rather than merely a new label for, and attitude toward, something that was not new at all.

The sharp increase in the age for marriage of Japanese women, the corresponding decline in the birth-rate, the young female office worker's pitiful gaze upon senior male colleagues caught in the corporate rat-race, the flamboyant spending and playful behavior of young adult women living at home at their parents' expense: at least since the 1980s, all these trends have been prominently noted in the media of Japan and abroad.²²⁰

It was the fact that Orenstein distorted Yamada's definition of a 'parasite single' by focusing solely on single women that drew criticism from the writers at Zipangu, Inc.²²¹ Writers, like popular *Japan Times* columnist Janet Ashby, have also ridiculed Yamada's portrayal of people "enjoying their wages as disposable income rather than marrying and buying consumer durables like refrigerators and, most importantly, having babies."²²²

Genda Yūji, a labour economics specialist and associate professor at the University of Tokyo, criticises Yamada's failure to acknowledge the realities of the employment environment for young people, pointing to high unemployment statistics for those in

their twenties. It seems that those under 25 suffer 10% unemployment²²³; a statistic that hides the reality that many people who are working are doing so in temporary positions that pay minimum wage. Corporations faced with the need to cut costs are tending to hire fewer new graduates so that they can continue to pay their senior staff, and therefore retain their skill base. In 1979, fulltime workers over the age of 45 made up some 22% of the workforce in large corporations, which had become 36% by 1999.²²⁴ “[O]pportunities for young people to enter permanent employment are decreasing,”²²⁵ meaning that many are forced to accept low-paying jobs, and are therefore unable to support themselves to a level adequate to live alone. Should someone earning minimum wages try to live independently of their parents, their monthly income would only just cover the very basic essentials.

Though the financial benefits of living in the parental home with a father who either continues to receive a senior-level paycheck or who has recently received a generous lump-sum retirement bonus are substantial, there are two other advantages. Mothers, accustomed to taking care of their families, often continue to provide meals and do laundry even after their children are grown. Not only does this free people who live with their mothers of the tedium of domestic chores, it gives them more time and energy to devote to either their work or personal interests. Because salaried employees often find themselves pressured to remain at work long after the time written in their contract, to work on weekends and to entertain clients and supervisors late into the evening, lack of free time to spend as they wish is a common complaint. None of these things are problems for the non-salaried employee. The wide availability of low-paying work also means that people in such jobs do not need to commute far, eliminating the typical

90-minute one-way journey common in urban areas. Indeed, minimum wage-level work can seem an attractive option. It seems that seeing the slavish devotion that companies often ask of their employees, many young people yet to enter the workforce no longer aspire to be ‘salarymen’ or ‘office ladies,’ the most common salaried positions for men and women. It seems that some would rather become ‘freeters’, a combination of the English word ‘free’ with the German ‘arbeiter’, meaning ‘worker’.²²⁶

Recognising that marriage would necessitate a significant reduction in their quality of life, many are choosing not to marry at all. Long-term relationships known as ‘Living Apart Together’, a modern equivalent of the *kayoikon*, are increasingly common. Many couples that do eventually marry have postponed doing so for as long as possible: in 2003 some 25% of brides were pregnant on their wedding day, compared with 12% in 1983.²²⁷ Japan’s approximately 1% illegitimacy rate²²⁸ remains unchanged.

While *kachigumi* and *makegumi* are relatively new terms, the word ‘*makeinu*’ has long been used to mean ‘loser,’ or more literally, ‘losing dog.’ Due to the 2003 publication of Sakai Junko’s *Makeinu no Toboe* (The Far-off Howl of the Losing Dog) and the furor that surrounded it, however, a *makeinu* is now widely recognised to be an unmarried woman in her 30s. Selling some 260,000 copies, the book was a successful issue for Kōdansha²²⁹, Sakai’s publisher, and gave another perspective to the issues that Yamada had covered. While he had been explicitly critical of single women living off the fat of the land, Sakai defends their position. She writes that *makeinu* become such due to the difficulty in finding a suitable partner rather than a desire to remain permanently single: by the time they are ready to marry, they have grown beyond the traditional male

preference for a *teihōkon*, marriage to a woman who is less educated, earns less and who is shorter than he is. Sakai tells her reader that it is men at the bottom of the scale and women at the top who are unable to marry, and suggests somewhat tongue-in-cheek that if all people were to find a mate at their own level this problem would cease to exist. She asks her reader to consider why it is women who are consistently blamed for the declining birthrate, and points to the disparity between real women and the virtual reality portrayals of them that many men enjoy. In *Kekkon no Jōken* (The Conditions of Marriage, 2003) Ogura Chikako denies this, writing that it is not men's, but rather women's ideals that are out of touch with reality, and gives this as the reason that Japan has the world's oldest average age at first marriage.

The full idiomatic expression of Sakai's title, *Makeinu no Toboe*, means 'the far-off howl of the losing dog', and describes the behaviour of someone who knows he has lost an argument, but feebly continues trying to make his point. She points out to those who hold themselves up as examples of happy, successful, unmarried women that society refuses to accept their words as anything other than a denial of defeat, the archetypal *makeinu no toboue*. In response to heavy criticism, she commented to magazine *Shūkan Bunshun* early in January 2004 that "[r]egardless of how much we say we enjoy our work, or how happy we are to be single, whatever we say has all the resonance of a dog that had just been whipped in a fight."²³⁰ Her work recognises that Japanese society is still unwilling to accept that there are valid choices for women other than marriage.

Reflecting this, there are only four single women portrayed in *Taigan no Kanojo*: the world of the novel is almost exclusively populated by married women. Three of these

characters make only brief appearances necessary to the mechanics of the plot, but Narahashi Aoi is a fully crafted central character. At 35 years old, she owns a small travel agency, Platina Planet. In the 12 years that it has been operating, it has distinguished itself by accepting work that other travel agencies have rejected.

The main business was putting together package tours to resorts mainly in Asia for individuals or corporations, but sometimes travel agencies purchased their packages[...]From acting as a purchasing agent, to coordinating overseas research trips for film crews, to organising travel and accommodation and aggregating data from surveys(17)

it seems that Platina Planet really does do anything relating to international travel. Aoi further clarifies her original work policy: “If someone brought me work, I accepted it, no matter what it was” (18). The international travel business has been badly affected by terrorism, war and SARS, however, and many companies reliant on the cautious Japanese traveler have already been forced to close. In an effort to stay afloat, Aoi plans to develop a cleaning service, which she hopes will help gain Platina Planet access to the longer-term travel market. While the company is not wildly lucrative, Aoi is able to employ a small staff and owns both the rooms that her company operates from and the apartment in which she lives. She would seem to have created a successful business, but this does not make her, personally, a success. Unmarried at 35, she is the quintessential *make inu*.

Aoi has surrounded herself with a fulltime staff comprised entirely of women, perhaps as a preemptive measure against difficulties that could arise in employing men. In “Japan’s Neglected Resource: Female Workers,” an article in a *New York Times* series entitled “Can Japan Change?”, Howard W. French describes experiences common to many women who own their own companies. He cites one Suzuki Yūko, who

found that customers merely pretended to listen to her. Time and again when she finished a presentation, men would ask who her boss was. Eventually she hired a man to go along with her, because merely having a man by her side—even a virtual dummy—increased her sales significantly, if not her morale.²³¹

Mr Kihara, younger than most of the staff, and as such called ‘Kihara-kun’, is often to be seen at Platina Planet. Aoi points out to Sayoko that he is not an employee, but rather someone who she calls on for help when they have a lot of work (54). His frequent presence at the office, at staff parties, and at meetings, combined with the way in which Aoi refers to her staff as ‘Kihara and the others’ (143), makes the reader question what his role at Platina Planet really is. Aoi welcomes his ideas about her business, and he clearly regards her as someone that he can learn from. When he criticises what he regards as the nebulous connection between the travel business and the new house cleaning service that she is trying to establish, she is quick to point out that she owns Platina Planet and will decide how to proceed. Mr Kihara may well be French’s ‘virtual dummy’: his role at Aoi’s company is never clearly explained, but he is never seen to be actually working. The fact that Aoi needs to employ someone like Mr Kihara presumably merely as window dressing, is an indication that though her business Platina Planet has achieved a modicum of success, it has not broken through the stigma of having a woman at the helm.

Another way that Aoi has limited the ill effects on Platina Planet of having a female boss, has been by attracting clients and forming business alliances with people who are comfortable with women in positions of responsibility. While this is never expressly stated in the novel, Sayoko notices that the 20 people at the social that serves as her welcome to Platina Planet are all very much like Aoi. Open and friendly, they talk both

to one another and to Sayoko as if they are old friends. Though initially surprised by this when she interviewed at Platina Planet, Sayoko comes to regard it as normal. The people at the party are from all walks of life, male and female, young and old, successful and hoping to be so.

The relationship that Aoi shares with Noriko shows the reader another example of how women in business can achieve success. By first showing Noriko that she had the option of starting her own business, then guiding and supporting her through the process of establishing At Home Service, Aoi has ensured that she will always have Noriko's support. She has created an ally for herself, another female-run business in central Tokyo. Both women are at the helm of their own companies in a world dominated by men, and as such, try to look out for one another.

Aoi's employees, however, are unsure how to regard her, and can be seen to function in the novel as a representation of Japanese society. It may seem that the staff are critical of flaws in Aoi specifically rather than in the concept of a female manager as such, but one wonders whether they would be as critical if a male manager were to display the same traits. When Sayoko first joins Platina Planet, Ms Iwabuchi uses their first lunchtime together to warn her about what she sees as their boss' flaws. According to Ms Iwabuchi, Aoi is careless, gets involved in new projects without researching them carefully and does not understand how a business should be run. Having observed the internal workings of a large publishing house for five years, Ms Iwabuchi is confident that Aoi, who has never been part of such a firm, cannot be relied upon to ensure the stability of Platina Planet. It is this very refusal to accept standard operating practice, so

often responsible for the exclusion of women from the decision-making process, that has allowed Platina Planet to grow. In June 2003, the Economy Ministry reported that “at companies where women make up 40 to 50 percent of the staff, average profits are double those where women account for 10 percent or less,”²³² which would seem to imply that companies that do employ women are more likely to succeed financially than those that do not. Perhaps companies willing to employ female staff are also willing to embrace other non-traditional business concepts, giving them an edge over other businesses and therefore leading to their comparative success.

While Aoi is clearly not married, the reader is given the impression that she could marry if she chose to: obviously attractive, she has an easy camaraderie with both the men and women around her. Sayoko seems to imagine that her boss' single state is a matter of choice, asking her, “Are you determined never to marry?”(142). It seems that despite the easy relationship that Aoi shares with Mr Kihara, comfortable calling him to join her for an impromptu dinner, and perhaps more, an hour out of town, she regards herself as single. She tells Sayoko that while she has not ruled out marriage, she simply has no boyfriend. She has been alone since the previous year when the man she was traveling with told her that she was stingy and ended the relationship. Her attitude towards marriage and motherhood is made clear however, in the following dialogue, which takes place at her apartment after Sayoko's welcome party.

“I've had a gutsful. What do you think he said just now? That I'd pushed our daughter onto him, those were the words that he used. I was really surprised. I wanted to ask he if he thinks of her the same way as he thinks of the laundry or something.” Slightly drunk, Sayoko's words came freely. [...]

“Argh. Listening to what you just said, my desire to marry has gone down by a definite 70 percent. That's why the number of women not getting married or

having kids is going up. The main cause of the low birthrate isn't working women, it's happy housewives complaining" (93).

From Aoi's comments above, it would seem that the reason she is not married is not that she has not yet met the right person, nor that she is presently single but rather that she has judged the role of wife and mother to be simply too difficult. She has seen her friend Noriko suffer, initially as a bored, childless, homemaker, and later as a harried mother of two. Similarly, Sayoko's evident lack of communication with her husband and the obvious inequality in the level of responsibility that she and her husband share as parents, gives Aoi another example that serves to further convince her.

Sayoko's condemnation of her husband regarding spending an evening alone with their child as just another household task, on a par with doing a load of laundry, brings to light another concern of Aoi's.

Really, I'm the opposite. I don't have the courage to get married and become a mother. Working is easy. You just do it. If you tidy away the things in front of you one by one, tomorrow soon comes." There, Aoi stopped talking, and the room became quiet. The smoke that Aoi had breathed out drifted slowly towards the ceiling (93).

To her, marriage and motherhood are both more complicated and more valuable than her work running Platina Planet: her work is indeed like the laundry that Sayoko disregards as simply a chore. By commenting that all one needs to do is to "tidy away the things in front of you one by one," she makes it clear that she regards the work that she does as different from Sayoko's work as a wife and mother.

Another example of a single woman trying to make the most of her situation is given in Hayashi Mariko's *Anego* (Big Sister Type, 2003). The title is an abbreviation of a

common slang term, ‘*anegohada*’, meaning ‘big-sister type.’ Kittredge Cherry explains in her analysis of language relating to Japanese women that, in this society where “[w]omen are not usually viewed as both strong and good,”²³³ the only exception to this is the “*anegohada*.” “A strong, honest and capable woman of any age [...] admired by men as well as by women [...] the big-sister type leads and looks after her underlings on the job, at school or anywhere else.”²³⁴ This is a perfect description of Noda Naoko, the central character. She is so honest that her sense of justice prevents her from marrying Mr Saito, a man introduced by her sister-in-law as a prospective marriage partner.²³⁵ Learning that he has quashed his feelings for a divorcee to preserve his chances for promotion at work, she encourages him instead to follow his heart. She has always performed her job well, ensuring that her colleagues view her as indispensable. The managerial staff rely on her, not only to do her own job perfectly, but also to guide and reprimand her female co-workers because they, themselves, do not feel comfortable doing so. Both men and women come to her to discuss their personal problems, and through the course of the novel, she helps two couples to marry by diffusing scandals that would otherwise have separated them.

Naoko’s own desire to marry, and to marry well, has until the start of the novel been supported by a careful plan to study hard through school and university to achieve employment at a good firm. Tozai Shōji, while fictional, is clearly a very stable general trading company, meaning that any husband found there would be a reliable long-term provider. Initially sure that the long hours that the staff work will mean that the men have few chances to meet other women, she thinks that if she waits, she will attract someone suitable. Her very dependency, however, means that her male colleagues are

unable to see past her 'big-sister' role. When the company decides to use clerical staff from a temp agency, Naoko is distressed to see them pairing off with the more desirable male staff. In the novel, these relationships all soon end in tears. In the television adaptation, however, one temp achieves the ultimate goal, and marries a salaried worker. Overcoming her *makegumi* job, she becomes a *kachigumi* by getting married.

The change to the plotline of Hayashi Mariko's novel to achieve this happy outcome can be seen to show a desire on the part of Nippon Television Network Corporation to provide the archetypal happy ending for at least one character. Both Hayashi Mariko and Kakuta Mitsuyo have worked, however, to show their readers that there is more than one way for single women to achieve personal fulfillment and thereby happiness. In *Anego*, Naoko finds a sense of self-worth in helping those around her. In *Taigan no Kanojo*, Aoi learns that friendship can provide the necessary emotional support that she has previously lacked.

IV. A Translation of *Taigan no Kanojo*

4.1 Introduction

Presented in the following pages is a translation of Chapters One and Fifteen of Kakuta Mitsuyo's *Taigan no Kanojo* (Woman on the Other Bank), published by Bungei Shunjū in 2004. Because of the considerable length of the novel, only these two chapters have been translated. The intervening chapters have been summarised so that the narrative can be understood.

When this thesis was undertaken, no English translation of the novel existed. Kodansha International has since published a translation, in 2007, under the title *Woman on the Other Shore* by Wayne P. Lammers. His work does not provide any analysis of the text, however, or any significant biographical detail about its author.

Chapter One - Translation

When will I ever change? Sayoko catches herself wondering again and smiles wryly. The very fact that she is still thinking about it shows that she hasn't changed since childhood. Sayoko was the kind of child who often imagined that she was someone else, usually Yoko, who was popular, or Nitta, who excelled at school.

Sayoko, sitting on a bench in the shade of some trees, let her eyes fall on her daughter Akari, playing in the sandpit. In the park there are several other children, all of them playing with someone or other. But Akari is alone again today, digging in the sand in the corner of the sandpit. Will she think it too, when she is a little older? If only I were someone else...? What a thing to think! Sayoko sighs and takes out her cell phone. No one has called. She calls her own house and checks the voice mail, but there is nothing there either. The call she is waiting for hasn't come yet.

It was three years ago in February that Akari had been born. When she was six months old, Sayoko pored over magazines for mothers with infants. Following the instructions on when to go and what to wear, she went to the park nearest her apartment. She talked with mothers with children of a similar age, and arranged to meet them at the clinic for immunisations and check-ups. But little by little she started to notice that there were several cliques. There was a kind of leader, and although she never said she hated anyone, some mothers were casually shunned. Sayoko, at 30 much older than most of them, knew that the group saw her as different from themselves. Not that they saw her as a bad person, rather that since she was so much older, they found it hard to confide in her. Sayoko understood, and accepted their feelings.

With all of this, going to the park became unbearable; for a while she didn't go, but the longer she stayed away, the worse she felt. She knew that for Akari to be properly socialised, she needed to create opportunities for her to play with other children.

And so, for about the past two years, Sayoko has been moving from park to park within walking distance. Going to park 'A' until she saw clearly how the relationships between the mothers worked, she then moved on to 'B'. Thankfully, there were lots of parks and small playgrounds near her apartment.

She knows that families like hers are called 'park gypsies'. "It's not that we like wandering, we are just trying to find a park where we feel comfortable," she mutters under her breath by way of an excuse when she leaves her apartment building with Akari.

This park, two minutes walk from the apartment, is large and there isn't a group of mothers like you find at small parks. Fathers walking babies, grandparents playing with grandchildren, mothers of different ages and appearance: all seem politely indifferent. As long as nothing out of the ordinary happens, they don't come close to socialise. This struck a chord with Sayoko, and she has been coming here for about six months.

While there is no communication between the mothers, the children become friends before you know it. In the area where all the playthings are gathered, mothers and fathers read or tinker with their cameras while the children, contrary to expectation,

move closer and closer together and start to play. There are also some children who cry when someone wants to take a toy from them. The parents do their best not to say anything. It seems that there is an implicit understanding at this park.

Akari has stopped moving the hand holding the plastic shovel and is staring at some girls who are playing 'house' close by. In the middle of the sandpit, a girl in a red T-shirt and a girl about the same age as Akari in a sunflower print dress are holding bright plastic plates and their laughter is ringing out. A boy, still toddling, comes from far off and somehow joins their game. The girls keep looking at him, and the one in the sunflower dress gives him a fork as if she were his mother.

Sayoko, pretending that she isn't interested, watches both the children playing in the centre of the sandpit, and Akari digging by herself, out of the corner of her eye. Akari glances at the group playing 'house', but soon looks back down at the sand.

Sometimes when she looks at Akari, she is surprised by how alike they are. Even though she wants to play, she cannot simply join in. She waits hesitantly in the corner for someone to invite her. Few children notice this, and so, often when she looks up again, everyone has gone. Although Sayoko was following Akari's line of vision, somehow it has become her own. It was she who hadn't been able to adapt to the group of mothers at the park. Whenever she realised this she felt sorry for Akari. She can't help but think that if she were a cheerful mother who could talk to anyone without worrying, and could pretend not to notice cliques, Akari would become that sort of child too.

After two years of marriage, and three more since Akari was born, she has thought many times about going out to work. The park problem has made her think that if she went out to work and put Akari in daycare, her daughter would be able to make more friends than she can as a park gypsy, and would develop socially. But Sayoko had not been able to put her thoughts into practice. She makes excuses, telling herself the words that she has heard housewives in the park saying; that it is unbelievable a mother would go out to work and miss her child's formative years, and on top of that, everyone feels sorry for children who cannot be with their mothers. But these are not the reasons she has not been able to motivate herself. The small factions in the park have reminded her vividly of the company she used to work for.

After leaving university, Sayoko started working at a movie distribution company, the kind of place where even new staff members were trusted with important work. Sayoko liked what she was doing and she liked the feeling that people were not too worried about the hierarchy. But after a few years had gone by, she could see a subtle conflict. The bickering between the female staff and those on contracts was more than a little ridiculous. There were endless, quiet struggles over coffee and iced tea preparation, who went home when, what people could wear to work, and time spent in the women's toilet. She was amicable to both factions or she ignored both factions, and before she knew it, she was being criticised. She needed to keep her distance from both sides. It took a lot of effort. Just when this was becoming tiresome, Shūji, whom she had been going out with, brought up the subject of marriage with great timing. She accepted his proposal and handed in her notice at about the same time. Shūji, who had been under the mistaken illusion that she would continue working after the wedding, seemed

dissatisfied but Sayoko pretended not to notice.

She now wants to go back to work. Sayoko told Shūji just a month ago. Without even asking why she suddenly wanted to work, he said, “Why not?”

“He probably doesn’t believe me,” Sayoko thought. “He must have taken it as just a passing fancy.”

But Sayoko was serious. She hunted out classified ads, and without asking about what kind of work it was, she started applying for jobs, relying on the fact that the ad said ‘Inexperienced people/housewives’. Something was wrong. She continued to be unemployed. Whenever she had an interview, she had to leave Akari with her husband’s mother in Iogi, and her mother-in-law’s endless sarcasm, rather than weaken Sayoko’s intent, strengthened her resolve to keep filling in application forms.

Sayoko looks at her cell phone again, puts it away in her back pocket, and looks up at the sky. Far above the leaves moving above her head, the sky is clear and blue. Today she should find out the result of the interview she had the day before yesterday. Although she hasn’t been successful so far, she secretly thinks that this one might go well. She recalls the female boss that she met at the interview. By chance, she is the same age as Sayoko, and comes from the same university. It was a huge university, so this is not rare, but the female boss seemed as glad as if she had met a good friend from school. “We probably passed each other lots of times along the row of ginkgo nut trees up to the school gate or in the cafeteria.” She smiled at Sayoko and spoke casually.

The children who were playing 'house' in the middle of the sandpit are now playing 'shop'; she can hear their nasal voices, "Half a turnip, please."... "Gut the fish carefully." Sayoko notices that Akari is watching all this out of the corner of her eye. She seems to think that her mother will act as a go-between, and she looks beggingly at Sayoko. Sayoko quickly looks away. It breaks her heart, but she wants her to find her own way into the group.

After a few minutes, Akari, now with sand all over her skirt, slowly stands up. She determinedly makes her way over to the group playing 'shop'. "This is money so that can't be money." Akari, who has come up beside the three-member group caught up in an argument over the tools of their game, holds out her shovel and sand-filled bucket to attract their attention. But all three of them either don't notice her or are ignoring her, and don't even look. The instant that Akari, who has been prowling around them for a while, realises that they are not going to let her play, she throws down her shovel and bucket. Unfortunately, the littlest one wore the sand from the bucket on his head, and started to cry as if he had caught fire. Sayoko rushed to the sandpit.

"Sorry, sorry," she repeated as she dusted the sand off the little boy. Akari, who was watching from a little way off, looked like she was about to cry.

"It's okay. You're all right. Look Shin, you're crying too much. You can see that the girls are surprised." A young mother wearing a hat comes to sandpit and smiles at Sayoko. The child in the red t-shirt and the child in the dress leave the sandpit with a wink.

"Now Akari, say sorry. What did you throw your bucket for?" She hears her own sharp voice. When this sort of thing happens, she regrets saying it as soon as she's said it.

Even while feeling sorry for Akari because she can't make friends, she gets annoyed and raises her voice.

"Right. Let's apologise," Sayoko says kindly and turns around. But the boy and his mother have already turned away. "Akari, let's go to the supermarket, and then go home. I've forgotten to do the washing." While saying this, Sayoko collects up the bucket and shovel, and takes Akari by the hand back to the bench.

She seats Akari in the front of the trolley, and walks around the empty supermarket. Mince is cheap. She decides to make rissoles. She checks the prices of things like spinach, carrots and eggs, while putting them into the trolley. Remembering that she has run out of detergent, she goes to get it.

Akari twists around to say, "Mummy, did you buy *Mirumiru*? You bought *Mirumiru* didn't you?" And Sayoko vaguely saying, "Yes, I bought it," checks the price of detergent. She picks up the cheapest refill pack of detergent, and stares at a pack three times the price.

One month ago. What spurred her decision to work was actually something quite trivial. It was a blouse. In a Kishoji department store, Sayoko had casually looked at the price tag of a blouse that she liked. It was 15800 yen. At the time, Sayoko had not the slightest idea whether it was cheap or expensive. Of course, it was more expensive than Shūji's work shirts, and it would be hard to pay for it from the housekeeping money. But how about for a woman of 35 to wear? According to women the same age as her, precisely how much should a blouse cost?

The fact that she did not know had been shocking beyond all expectation. She suspected that everything was connected. The fact that to avoid making ties with other mothers she had drifted from one park to another, the fact that Akari was exactly like herself in playing alone, the fact that she did not know the average blouse price, were they not all connected? If she started to work, wouldn't she know the average blouse price? Wouldn't she no longer have to worry about which park to go to? And wouldn't the number of times that she was sharp with Akari go down? If I start working... Sayoko thought that it would be the solution to everything.

“Right! That's everything at the supermarket done. Let's go home and I'll do the washing.” With Akari's hand in her right, and the groceries in her left, she sings the words. She tells herself that if the company doesn't call, she will go out again tomorrow and buy the classifieds, and swings Akari's arm as they walk home.

It was just after 8.00 p.m. when the call came from the female boss the same age as herself. Her husband Shūji was home from work, but although the phone was ringing, he continued watching the baseball broadcast without a sign that he was going to answer it. “Mummy, it's the phone,” said Akari at the top of her voice from her high chair, and Sayoko rushed from the kitchen to pick it up in the living room. “Hello, this is the Tamura's.”

“Oh, Ms Tamura, this is Ms Narahashi, from Platina Planet. Thank you for coming the other day.”

The woman's voice coming from the receiver was friendly and Sayoko, who had been on the verge of giving up hope that the call would come, bowed her head, overcome with surprise. "Ah, no, not at all. You're very welcome."

"I would like to ask you to join us. Are you available to work?"

"Ah ... Eh....Have I really got the job?" Shūji glanced her way.

"So I would like to talk with you about what the job entails. I think perhaps you may have misunderstood. Listen to the information, and then if you don't like it, it will be fine for you to turn the job down." Behind the woman's voice, she could hear noisy music. She could also hear someone talking loudly. Sayoko added the voice to her mental image of the small office that she had visited two days before.

"That won't happen."

"Can I ask you to come here again tomorrow or the next day? Any time that suits you will be fine."

"I will come tomorrow. I think I can be there just after midday," Sayoko said eagerly.

"Okay, I'll be waiting for you," said the woman and hung up.

Sayoko put the receiver down carefully and without thinking shouted, "I did it!"

"What? What was the phone call about?" asks Shūji. He's already looking back at the television.

"Mummy, what was the phone call about?" Akari, holding a fork covered with rice, echoed her father.

"It was about the work that I told you about. I got the job. I didn't think I had. At that company, the boss is a woman the same age as me. Besides, she went to the same university as I did. She's a really frank, nice person. The company's small, and it seems

friendly too. I thought that since I haven't worked in five years, a little place like that is probably better. It seems that I can talk easily with the boss, too.”

Sayoko talked about it wildly as she put the salad and plates on the table. The company, named Platina Planet, was on the fifth floor of an old building. The office was an awfully messy 2LDK apartment with a 10 mat living/dining room, an 8 mat Western style room lined with desks and a *tatami* mat room hung with a handmade sign, which read ‘Manager’s Office’. Strangely, despite it being so messy, it felt very comfortable. The female boss didn’t seem two-faced, and sometimes laughter rang out from the group of women at their desks in the other room. At the time she had clearly felt that here there would be no factions, no antagonism, no childish exchanges. After all, there was so few staff. There was the fact that the female boss seemed so openhearted, and that it was more cheerful than any other company that she had interviewed at until then.

Shūji glanced at Sayoko with a surprised look on his face, and with a phrase, “that’s good”, looked back at the TV. “But what about Akari?”

“Are you talking about me?” Akari asked loudly.

“What do you mean, what I am going to do about Akari? I’ll put her into daycare, of course.” Shūji said nothing and served himself some salad. “I’ve been thinking about lots of things. Some people say ‘poor kids who go to daycare’, and your mother said the same thing, but there’s no way that it’s not better for Akari to play with lots of kids her age. Plus, from now we are going to need more money than we have in the past...”

“What kind of work is it?” Shūji interrupted her to ask.

“What kind of work? On the advertisement it said ‘cleaning’ but...”

“A cleaner’s?”

“No, it’s a travel agency.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I’m going to go and hear all about it tomorrow, so I’ll know more then. Oh, I have to call your mother. Can you call for me? I’ll talk to her after you.”

Shūji, who had been watching TV, said “oh.” He is more interested in the whereabouts of the ball that Kiyohara hit than the fact that I am going to start working after five years off, Sayoko mumbled in her heart.

“Whatever you do, you haven’t worked in ages, so don’t overdo it,” said Shūji , still facing the TV, as if he’s just remembered.

“Isn’t that good, Mummy?” Akari, who probably doesn’t understand anything, smiled at her mother.

“Thank you Aa-chan. Let’s have a kiss.” Sayoko put her arms around Akari’s head, and gave her a kiss on the cheek. Akari squealed with delight.

At a Chinese restaurant that it would be hard to say was clean, Sayoko looked between the female boss on the other side of the table and the business card on the corner of the table that said, ‘Narahashi Aoi’. When she arrived at the Okubo office, Aoi had said, “Let’s go and eat some lunch,” and had taken her out. Sayoko, who hadn’t eaten at a restaurant for a long time, was excited and wondered what kind of place a female boss would take her to, but they came to this shop with faded handwritten menus stuck on the wall. Perhaps because it was already after 1p.m., there was nobody else in the upstairs section. The waiter brought a bottle of beer and some glasses. Aoi filled Sayoko’s glass, and then her own. She raised her glass and announced: “Welcome!” and clinked her

glass against Sayoko's.

"Oh, Ms Tamura, what faculty were you in?" asked Aoi, froth from the beer on the corner of her mouth.

"The Literature Faculty. In the English Department."

"There's no need to speak so politely; we're the same age after all. I was in the Philosophy Department. I repeated a year and finally graduated. Actually, there were some people left to interview, but after you left, it was an instant decision."

"What was the reason for that?" asked Sayoko without thinking.

"Polite language again." Aoi threw Sayoko a look. She filled her own glass with beer.

"What do you mean?"

"I wondered why you chose me. Actually I've been out of work for a while. Ads say 'suitable for married women', but people have turned me down, saying that because I have a small child I'll take time off when she gets sick. And some people looked at the fact that I graduated from the English Department, and said not to point out their mistakes. Honestly, I was losing hope."

Aoi laughed with her head thrown back. "Companies that say things like that at the interview stage must be cesspools of dissatisfaction. They were just taking it out on you, that's all. It's only that I don't get gloomy like that, so I can see people as they are," said Aoi.

The waiter put two lunch sets on a tray and brought it very slowly. The daily special was aubergine and mince stir-fry. After the waiter had gone, Aoi took chopsticks from the container and passed them to Sayoko, and her face became serious. "But, Ms Tamura, do you realise what the work entails? What I want you to do is cleaning work. You said that before you got married, you worked at a movie distribution company choosing

Japanese names for Asian movies and arranging for goods. That's to say, what I want you to do isn't so creative, or challenging; it's simple service industry work. Despite that, are you interested?"

"Of course. Anything is OK. I want to work." Sayoko said. It's not that I want to work, I have to work, she was saying in her heart. For Akari. For herself as a mother.

"Is that right? What a relief!" Aoi said and started to eat. Sayoko, too, put her head down and separated her chopsticks. Still looking down at her food, Aoi explained a little about Platina Planet. Aoi said that it was like an odd-job company in the travel industry. The main business was resort contracts and arrangements mainly in Asia, usually for individuals or corporations but sometimes travel agencies bought ideas. But that wasn't all. From purchasing on behalf, to coordinating overseas trips for film crews, to organising travel and accommodation, to arranging trips, to aggregating data from surveys, Aoi explained that they accepted any kind of work. "So, to sum it up, it's an odd-job company. I started it just after I graduated a year late from university. That's to say, I was still very young and green when I went into it. If someone brought me work, I accepted it. It's become the guiding principle of the company. I've made a lot of connections." With that Aoi stopped talking, and drained her beer glass.

Aoi wasn't wearing makeup. She wasn't wearing any accessories, either. For a boss, she's really simply dressed thought Sayoko secretly and wanted to laugh at her image of female bosses. At the word 'female boss' Sayoko imagined a woman with faultless makeup, lots of accessories, and bolstered up with luxury labels. Although she was too nervous at the time to look closely, she recalled that when she went for the interview Aoi had been dressed quite differently from her own hackneyed idea.

“About five or six years ago, a group of hotels named ‘Garden’, mainly in the south of Sri Lanka, started up. We are the representative company in Japan for some as yet undeveloped places along the Indian Ocean like Weligama and Tangelle. Since they entrusted us with the hotels our business has stabilised, and because our customers don’t worry about things like terrorism and war we do have some strengths, but we aren’t a big corporation and now there is SARS. I can’t help thinking that God is picking on us. Lots of little companies like ours that deal with overseas have closed down.”

Sayoko nodded and kept eating her aubergine and mince stir-fry. Still unclear as to the connection between cleaning ladies and a company that is mainly doing travel work, she watched Aoi who was eating at a good speed as she talked.

“So I want to expand a little more too. I’ve thought about it a lot. If we could compete in the domestic market, as part of that we could supply cleaners.” Aoi, who had already finished eating, rested her elbows on the table and leant forward a little. “‘Why so suddenly?’ I know you’re thinking. But I have a long-term outlook. In Japan to go almost anywhere you need to take a flight. Don’t Japanese people travel a lot considering they have so few holidays? We are traveling abroad so much that there are no countries that we don’t go to. When I saw a 72 year-old Japanese tourist in Paraguay, I thought that travel isn’t going to go out of fashion, it’s going to become increasingly popular. This is a really hopeful observation, but I think that the number of days we can take off is going to grow. That’s where cleaning comes into it. The idea is that we offer people going on a long vacation a housekeeping service. Watering potted plants. Weeding. Collecting mail. Airing places out and cleaning. How good do you think it

would be to be able to travel without thinking about all that?” Aoi leant forward and said.

Sayoko, for whom travel had been irrelevant since she had her child, couldn't see how such work could make money, but made sounds of agreement anyway.

“But things like this take a very long time to take root, don't they? Actually, there aren't very many people who take trips that are long enough for them to need a cleaner. We don't need to produce results immediately. We'll expand our client base not only as a travel company, and at any rate working closely with a friend's housekeeping company, I thought I would try. And that's why we've decided to employ you. Ah! My throat's dry from talking.” Having said all that, Aoi drained the beer left in her glass. Finally finishing her lunch, Sayoko put down her chopsticks.

In truth, Sayoko hadn't understood most of what Aoi had said. All that she had understood was that this woman's company, Platina Planet, was having financial difficulties and was thinking of changing from a travel company to a cleaning company. Either because a lack of principle about changing the type of work that you do is embarrassing, or because of some catch with the law, they are trying to twist it into 'Travel' housekeeping, thought Sayoko vaguely.

“About the work hours...” Sayoko opened her mouth when Aoi had finished what she was saying. “It said clearly in the ad that you want someone three or four times a week, but could you use me five days a week?”

“What? You're very eager, aren't you?” said Aoi round-eyed.

“Not really. I want to put my child in daycare but getting a place to take her for three days would be difficult. Eligibility depends on your working hours and conditions.”

“Oh, that’s right, you have a child, don’t you? OK, how about this? At the moment three days a week is enough, but before long we’ll probably need you five days, so how about we employ you as a full-timer rather than as a part-timer. You need some kind of letter of proof, right?”

“Would that be okay?”

“Yes, of course, although we won’t pay you for five days.”

“Of course not,” she said eagerly, and Aoi laughed loudly saying that she was only joking.

“This reminds me of the cafeteria at university,” said Sayoko without thinking. Through the plate glass window of the shop she could see the big trees catching the sunlight just as they did at the cafeteria at the school that they both went to.

“Oh, the new one? I went there a lot too. I even went there after I graduated. It was cheap!” Looking through the glass door, Aoi screwed up her eyes too.

“So we probably did meet.”

“Do you remember the marinated tuna on rice? It was 580 yen, but when I was a student I thought it was really expensive and I longed for it!”

“I remember it! I yearned for it too! If I remember right, curry was 170 yen and the cheapest thing.”

“That’s right, that no-meat curry!” Sayoko and Aoi looked at each other and laughed for a while. By talking about when they were students, it didn’t feel like they had just met. By complaining together about the prices and the lack of meat, it felt like they had eaten together.

“So shall we go back to the office? I’ll introduce you to everybody.” Aoi stood up with the bill. Sayoko hurried to stand up too. “It’s great that someone like you has joined us,” Aoi said, turning around in the narrow staircase.

“Thank you.” Sayoko gave a small bow without thinking.

Sayoko had taken the bus from Ogikubo, but because of the traffic, when she arrived at her husband’s parents’ house in Iogi it was past 3.30. “What? Did you stop and look in a department store? How good to still feel so young,” her husband’s mother, who had been watching TV in the living room, said in a dull voice. “Aa-chan was awake until a few minutes ago. You said not to put her down so I tried to keep her awake, but you didn’t come back and she was fretting so I gave in and let her sleep.” Her mother-in-law always talks like this and Shūji says that she’s being sarcastic or ironic, but Sayoko can’t let it pass with a smile.

“I’m sorry, there was lots of traffic and the bus driver was really slow.”

“Sayoko, are you really going to go to work? Is Shūji’s salary really not enough?”

“It’s not that...” with an ambiguous smile, Sayoko headed upstairs. In the middle of the guest futon Akari was asleep with her arms and legs spread wide. She lifted the child, heavy like wet cloth, onto the tatami, and folded the futon into the cupboard. When she carried Akari downstairs, her mother-in-law was doing something in the kitchen. “OK, Mum. I’m going to head off. Next time we come I’ll spend more time. Thank you so much for today.” When she called out from the hallway, her husband’s mother came out of the kitchen with a paper bag in her hand. “Take some of this home with you. It’s organic vegetables and some dried fish from Odawara. I’ll give you a share.” She balked at the heavy things, but could hardly refuse.

“Thank you, as always. Well. I must be off.”

Bowing repeatedly, she finally left her husband’s parents’ house. Holding the sleeping Akari with one arm, and the paper bag with the other, she walked to the station. The sun is on an angle, the city just a little tinged with orange. “Don’t do that,” Akari muttered in her sleep into her ear. First, we’ll have a look at all the daycare places nearby, then apply to start... thought Sayoko quickly in the bus. She realised that from tomorrow, no, actually from today, completely new things would happen. Waking up to a rainy day with relief that she doesn’t have to go to the park, and the next instant tortured with guilt. It all receded, like the scenery from the window of the train.

Chapter Two - Synopsis

It is the first day of the 1983 spring term, Aoi’s first day at high school in Gunma. Having left their condominium in Yokohama, her family is living in an old house surrounded by rice fields. At junior high school she has been bullied, affecting her grades. In kindergarten and elementary school she was merely friendless, but the problem escalated to the extent that she has been unable to attend school for the past 15 months. Rather than blame the children who stole, ruined and moved her things, Aoi feels that she herself is at fault. She is sure that there is something about her that irritates others. Her parents initially felt that a new school would provide enough of a change, but after the suicide of three young teenagers followed by several other violent crimes involving young perpetrators, they came to agree with Aoi that a completely new area would be better. They have therefore moved to Gunma, where Mrs. Narahashi grew up, but are suffering financially for their choice: Aoi’s taxi-driver father is working very long shifts, and her mother searching fruitlessly for well-paid part-time work. Her

parents are trying to keep Aoi unaware of these difficulties, and her mother is doing her best not to complain about the lack of shops and the nosy neighbours; the things she moved to Yokohama to escape.

Aoi sets off for school, carefully rolling up her uniform so that it is above her knees. When she arrives at school, she is surprised to see that no one else has done this, and hurries to remedy it, but not before Nanako Noguchi has approached her to ask how she has done it. Nanako seems a little odd: she is very short with short hair, and stands very close. Aoi thinks that she looks like a little boy. Aoi is very aware that despite her apparent offer of friendship, Nanako may turn on her. Her mother's insistence that the school only accepts girls from good families does little to reassure her that she is now safe, and she remains certain that if anyone is to be bullied it will be her.

Over the next few weeks Aoi's form class breaks into friendship groups. There are the girls with short hair who like sports, the girls who talk about homework and seem really bright, and the girls who meet to do their make-up in the bathroom after school. Aoi finds herself accepted by a group of perfectly ordinary girls. They are all afraid of being left out, and at lunchtime they talk and laugh more loudly than they need to. Each day Aoi is relieved that she has not been victimised.

Nanako has not joined a group, but rather is comfortable and accepted everywhere. She seems determined to become Aoi's friend, going so far as to invite herself over one afternoon, and Aoi is overcome with happiness. Other than family members, Nanako is the first person to ever show an interest in her. Aoi thinks that her new friend is like a

friendly old lady who chats to strangers, and warns herself that the friendship that Nanako offers so readily could quickly shift to coolness.

Chapter Three - Synopsis

It is June 2, the first day of Sayoko's new job. Determined not to be late, she is twenty minutes early. In the few weeks between finding the job and it starting, she has been unsuccessful in her search for a kindergarten for her daughter. Despite hearing about the lack of childcare from an acquaintance and reading about it in magazines, she had not thought that there would be a problem. Investigating all the kindergartens near their home, she checked the condition of the buildings, the size of the yard, the behaviour of the children and the demeanor of the teachers. Short-listing three, she then put them in order. When she applied, however, she was alarmed to find that all the kindergartens in the area, even the ones that she had initially rejected, had waiting lists. She is dismayed to have to leave Akari with her mother-in-law, not only because she clearly voices her disapproval of working mothers at every opportunity, but also because spending time with her grandmother will not give the child the socialisation that she needs. Because of this, Sayoko is neither nervous nor excited about the start of her new job.

The At Home Service van arrives to pick Sayoko up and she is told brusquely to get in by the middle-aged female driver, Nakazato Noriko. Aoi is in the back of the van with several other women who are dropped off about twenty minutes later. The van then heads to a filthy vacant apartment, which the driver instructs the two of them to clean. Sayoko is directed to the kitchen, Aoi to the bathroom. When Aoi whistles at the filth, Sayoko is afraid that she'll be told off, but instead Nakazato Noriko teases her, implying

that Aoi's place is at least as dirty. They are there to learn how to clean properly: without gloves and using minimal cleansers. It is like boot camp, with the middle-aged supervisor demanding that they respond to each of her orders like military trainees. As Sayoko cleans, her anger over her husband's failure to understand why she would become a 'cleaning lady', her mother-in-law's sarcasm, her worry about the kindergartens' waiting lists, and her doubts about whether she has made the right decision in starting to work all fade away. She discovers a kind of peace. Like in the van, the atmosphere does not encourage them to talk, but it doesn't matter. On the way back, Sayoko asks to telephone her mother-in-law to let her know that she will be a little late. While the other women commiserate, Aoi cannot understand the problem. When Sayoko explains that her husband's mother will likely be critical, Aoi suggests putting her in her place, and swings her fist comically. The women all laugh together, united. Sayoko is surprised to see that Nakazato Noriko can actually smile, so harsh has she seemed throughout the day. When Sayoko and Aoi part for the day, Aoi calls out after her, 'Don't let the old cow get you down', and Sayoko resolves not to give in.

The next day, Ms Iwabuchi is there in Aoi's place. She is angry to learn that she has been sent to do manual labour, and is wearing unsuitable clothing because she was not told. She releases an endless torrent of criticism against their boss, saying that Aoi has no idea how to run a company properly. She compares Aoi's company unfavourably with the publishing firm where she was previously employed and says that Platina Planet would have no doubt failed without Ms Yamaguchi's careful bookkeeping skills. As her assault on Aoi continues, Sayoko reflects on how people like Ms Iwabuchi seem to seek her out, and remembers other times in her life when she has met people like this.

Avoiding confrontation by nodding along vaguely, she has often later found herself the target of their gossip. She acknowledges to herself that she made the choice to leave her job some five years before so that she would not have to deal with such situations. When Ms Iwabuchi says that Aoi has been in the newspapers, implying that she has done something scandalous, Sayoko knows that she ought to distance herself. She is about to ask, however, but notices that their lunch break is over.

Chapter Four - Synopsis

Aoi and Nanako are talking beside the river, and decide to go and have something to eat together. Their friendship has grown and they are easy in one another's company. Realising, however, that Nanako could limit her own chances of friendship with other girls, she has decided to keep their friendship strictly for weekends and after school. Nanako has silently acquiesced to this, and without discussing it, they do not talk at school.

Aoi has noticed that Nanako never says anything negative. Rather than "I can't", she says "I want to". Her mother, however, who used to cheerfully find amusement in all manner of things, now has nothing positive to say. She seems to have retroactively recreated their lifestyle in Yokohama: she talks of weekly dinners at famous restaurants, taxis to go shopping, imported foods and designer clothing bought from department stores; as if she had lived the life of a successful business man's wife. Their new life in Gunma pales in comparison.

Aoi and Nanako are talking on the telephone. Like Anne Shirley and her friend Diana in

Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, they want to be together all the time. Nanako remembers the animated television series from when she was younger, and talks about how Anne and Diana send messages to one another at night using a lamp. Aoi has read the book, and though she cannot recall the scene, laments the fact that they cannot see each other's window to do the same thing, but Nanako laughs, saying that they have the telephone. They are happy not to talk, just to listen to each other breathing. Aoi feels that her mother's sighs fill up the house; she needs to laugh with Nanako to ease the pressure. She has not yet seen where her friend lives, and imagines that Nanako is in a similar room to the one that she is in.

It is Nanako's birthday, and the girls enjoy an autumn picnic by the river. They toast her birthday with beer, a first for both of them, and talk about shortening their winter uniforms, echoing their first conversation. The atmosphere in their class at school has changed, and Aoi is desperate to talk about it. Shindo Haruka, who is friends with the make-up-wearers of the class, initiates the persecution of Hirabayashi Kana, one of Aoi's friends. Kana is criticised for not returning an LP, for having stingy parents and for smelling bad. Her friends are so afraid that they reject her. As the weeks pass, the person being alternatively ignored and abused changes, and each time this happens Aoi finds herself extremely relieved not to be the one singled out. Nanako, however, says that both the bullies and the bullied are good people; that Aoi need not become involved if she does not want to be. Aoi then realises that unless she tells Nanako about her own experiences at her previous schools, her friend will never understand. Nanako is surprised, saying that Aoi was probably bullied because she was envied. Nanako recognises, moreover, that the bullying brought Aoi to her, and is therefore grateful. She

explains that she is not at all afraid of being bullied, and that Aoi must not worry about her should she be targeted. They talk about friendship, and a tradition that Nanako has heard about, of good friends giving one another a silver ring on their 19th birthday. Nanako is bright and hopeful, in sharp contrast to Aoi's fearfulness.

Chapter 5 - Synopsis

Sayoko finds herself overwhelmed. Her job has become more difficult as she is expected to remember the properties of various cleaning products. Contrary to all predictions, her daughter has been accepted into a local kindergarten due to the sudden relocation of several families, meaning that Sayoko has to suddenly prepare the extensive equipment required. Each morning when they leave the house, Akari cries, causing Sayoko to reflect on her decision to work outside the home. The kindergarten insists that Akari be collected by 4:00 each day, so Aoi and Noriko decide to reduce the hours Sayoko works each day in recognition of the fact that when she interviewed for the position it was to be four days a week rather than the five she now works.

Meanwhile Sayoko is still trying to get to know the woman Aoi has entrusted her training to. She asks Noriko about her children and gets no reply. To cover her embarrassment she starts talking about her surprise at how hard it is having a child at kindergarten. She had thought that the child's attendance would reduce her workload, but it seems to be a given that mothers have to hand-sew all manner of things, and keep a diary about what their child eats, when she sleeps and other small details about the child's daily life. She tells Noriko about how she sometimes finds herself about to write about Akari's breakfast in the Platina Planet cleaning roster, and Noriko laughs. She

says that her own child still has a pacifier, and that her mother sees the cleaning business as the root of the problem. It seems that Aoi has been of great comfort, telling Noriko that she has never seen an adult sucking his thumb, and that she ought not worry. This is the first time that they have talked about anything other than cleaning, and Sayoko can suddenly see Noriko as a mother.

Sayoko goes to the school gate to pick her daughter up, and is pleased to find that she can talk easily with some of the other mothers gathered there. She notices how much she has changed in just a few months, and hopes to see the same difference in Akari, but her child is still painfully shy. Riding her bicycle to the supermarket, she quizzes the child on who she has played with each day, but it seems that Akari continues to play alone.

Sayoko calls her husband from the Platina Planet welcome party to ask whether he would mind if she came home a little later than planned. He says, “What?” in response, and she is unsure whether he is angry or has not heard her. She reminds him that the party has been held on a Saturday night specifically to accommodate her, and that she would feel bad were she to leave before anyone else. He laughingly suggests that she is going to push him into looking after the child every weekend, but she is not sure whether he is joking. He tells his wife about how he got their daughter to go to sleep, and she finishes the call, saying that she will not be late home. Aoi has invited her back to her apartment for a few more drinks, but Sayoko is worried that a male co-worker, Mr Kihara, will accompany them. It turns out that he is just sharing their taxi. In the cab, Aoi and Mr Kihara talk about the direction that Platina Planet is heading in, and Mr

Kihara questions the wisdom of the cleaning venture. Sayoko feels left out, and realises that though she does not like Mr Kihara, she does not know why.

Sayoko is alarmed at the condition of Aoi's apartment building; the rusty stairs, the rickety lift, the uncovered hallway. It had not occurred to her that Aoi might not live in a better place than herself. Aoi laughs, noticing her visitor's reaction, and says that other people who have seen the apartment have wondered whether the company might be in danger of collapse. Apparently she chose the apartment for the view of the city at night. Around the room, Sayoko can see things bought on trips to Asia, cardboard boxes and piles of documents, and thinks to herself that had she stayed on at the movie distribution company and not married Shūji, she would now be living in a similar apartment.

Her friendship with Aoi has grown, and she now feels comfortable talking to her as an equal, discarding the formalities usual between employee and employer. She has also learnt how good it feels to relax and talk about things, rather than stewing over them alone. Having listened to Sayoko talk, however, Aoi says that she is now 70% less likely to get married. She comments on the ever-decreasing birthrate, and says that it is not working women who are the root of the problem, but rather the complaining of married women. Sayoko is confused; she tells Aoi that she was not confident that she could support herself indefinitely, and married Shūji so that she would not have to. She did not marry him because she wanted to be married, or to marry him specifically, but because she was not sure that she could continue to work. Aoi, in direct contrast, says that work is easier than marriage or raising children. She describes work as merely clearing one task after the other from your desk. She thinks that the emotional interactions of family

life are more difficult, and confides her fear of producing a child like herself, who never had friends and hardly talked to her parents. Two hours pass and Sayoko's cell phone rings. She knows without looking at the screen that it is her husband, either complaining about the hour or asking her to come home. Aoi gives her money to take a taxi, telling her what to say to the driver to get there more quickly.

Chapter 6 - Synopsis

Nanako and Aoi have arranged to work in a seaside resort inn for the summer despite Aoi's mother's disapproval. Aoi can not understand her reluctance: they are going to work, rather than to have fun, they will be together and therefore safe, and all costs will be borne by the owners of the inn. Her mother finally lets slip that it is Nanako that she objects to, or rather the family that she comes from, but will say no more. She is also now much more critical of Aoi, suggesting that the bullying in Yokohama was related to faults in her daughter's character. Aoi cannot forgive her this, or her attitude towards Nanako. As she leaves, however, her mother gives her an envelope of money to use should she need to, and the mood is bright as the girls meet three stations away. Nanako still remains vigilant that the friendship be hidden from their classmates.

After a five-hour train ride they find themselves in a wholly different world. The front of the inn is beautiful, the back a nightmarish hell of dirty dishes and laundry. The owner, a woman of about 30 named Mano Ryōko, is brusque with them, and demands that they work to their limits. She wears baggy old tee shirts, and no make-up and is obviously working as hard as they are. After five days they find that they are on top of the work, and though the hours are long that they do have time to enjoy themselves.

Aoi and Nanako both feel the calming influence of the sea, and wonder how different they would be if they had been born in the small seaside town. Ryōko laughs at them, saying that the only reason they feel so free is that they will only be there for a limited period rather than because the place has any special magic. She tells them that she felt much the same when she went away to work in her own school holidays. She asks them if they have run away from home, and explains that she herself ran away at about the same age, unable to cope with the expectations of her family. She tells them that when she was a teenager girls were suddenly expected to go on to further education after high school, when most of them only wanted to realise their dreams of being full-time home-makers. Not wanting to face the pressure that awaited her at home, she opted to go home with an older co-worker instead. The city apartment that he had promised was actually in a small-town, and within a very short time the landlord reported them. She was forced to go back to her parents, school, and the difficult choices that awaited her. Having learned that he was Ryōko's first sexual partner, Aoi and Nanako assume that the man was Futoshi, her husband, but she laughs, saying that the relationship soon petered out.

Aoi and Nanako enjoy the passing weeks as they become part of the Mano family. Nanako watches four-year-old Shinosuke as Aoi does the grocery shopping, and Aoi reflects on what has been happening at school. The school motto remains, 'A good wife and mother' despite the fact that most of the students go onto low quality higher education which only teaches them how to complain; many of them marry local boys and Aoi believes it is this limited future that urges their classmates to hurt one another.

More than a year has passed, and the bullying has become even more pervasive. There is now no recovery: girls who have been targeted remain tainted. Aoi no longer feels that she is likely to be chosen; more than a year has passed without it happening. Despite Nanako's lack of involvement, however she herself has become a victim. Ignored by the entire grade, and spending her break times in an unused art classroom, she does not seem upset at all. Aoi wishes that she could refute the rumours that Nanako's father is an institutionalised alcoholic, her mother a prostitute, her sister a habitual shoplifter. But having never been to her friend's house, having never met her family, having never heard Nanako mention a sister, she can do nothing. She mentions this to her friend repeatedly, and finally Nanako agrees to let Aoi visit her home.

They have very clear plans for the future: it is halfway through their time at high school and Aoi knows how hard they are going to have to work when they get back to school to succeed at their dream of attending university in Tokyo together. Aoi's grades are fair, but Nanako's poor, and they plan to spend their summer earnings on extra tuition to help them achieve their academic goals. Aoi is sure that they can succeed; they will be together and therefore will not need to rely on men, the reason that Aoi thinks Ryōko's attempt at running away failed.

On their last day in Izu, Ryōko drives them to the station, and despite Shinosuke's tears, says a hurried farewell and drives away. Nanako is strangely quiet, and Aoi blames her downcast state on Ryōko's coolness, but even when she finds and reads out the kind, apologetic letter that Ryōko has included with their pay, Nanako fails to brighten up. The train comes, but when Nanako does not move from the bench, Aoi realises that

something is very wrong. Her friend rocks back and forth chanting, 'I don't want to go home,' her face wet with tears. At the start of the summer, Nanako had finally invited her over, and Aoi had been surprised by what she saw there. She had made the decision to disregard this, instead accepting her friend as she chose to present herself. Aoi now wonders, however, which is real: the Nanako who is always laughing and positive, who is not afraid of being bullied, who has been her friend and talked to her every single day, or the poor wretch who sits in front of her now, surely afraid to go home to Gunma. Aoi must do something, however, and suggests to her friend that they not go home, but rather somewhere else.

Chapter 7 - Synopsis

Sayoko's training is almost at an end, and Noriko starts taking her to clean occupied apartments. Today she is cleaning a mouldy bathroom as Noriko and Sekine Misao clean the greasy kitchen and filthy toilet. As she cleans, she wonders why the customer, a woman about the same age as herself, has allowed her home to become so dirty. The woman sits on the sofa watching a video with her small daughter. She seems perfectly normal; Sayoko wonders if she is unaware that there are dangerous strains of mould in her bathroom or how damaging it can be to watch videos all day. As she cleans, carefully using the organic cleaning products, she thinks about the differences between herself and the woman on the sofa. In the van at the end of the day Noriko tells Sayoko that she is aware of her thoughts, and asks that she not let her feelings show. She explains that the customer must not feel that the cleaning staff is judging her; otherwise she will start cleaning her home herself, thereby removing the need for the business.

Recently the Platina Planet staff have begun to call Sayoko ‘Boss’ on Aoi’s instruction. She feels comfortable talking to them about her experiences, and begins to think that all her difficulties as a wife and mother have not been in vain. Back at the office, they discuss Noriko’s remonstrance, and talk about how they will market the new side of the business. Aoi tells them that as a customer she would appreciate a cleaning company that would not be surprised at her level of filth, and Sayoko says that she would appreciate someone a little older than herself who had raised a family and therefore knew about her needs. As she collects Akari from kindergarten, she again reflects on her choice to go out to work.

It is Saturday morning and Aoi has come to Sayoko’s apartment, mainly to design some fliers for the new cleaning service but also so that Sayoko need not attend her mother-in-law’s birthday celebration. Recalling the ways that she is usually treated at such gatherings, Sayoko has chosen not to go this year. A day spent preparing food and helping with the housework under her mother-in-law’s critical gaze, as her husband lies on the sofa ignoring an increasingly fractious Akari, holds little interest for her. She has not discussed her feelings with her husband, and Shūji is surprised to learn that not only will his wife not accompany him and but also that she has not prepared a present. The summery silk scarf that Sayoko had chosen last year did not make it out of its box, the older woman commenting that she could not believe such things were even sold in the heat of summer. Going home, Shūji had said that it was not in his mother’s character to express thanks. Sayoko had felt grateful for his explanation at the time, but now questions why he has never remembered her parents’ birthdays yet expects this of her.

Chapter 8 - Synopsis

Following their decision not to return home, Aoi and Nanako travel slowly east from Izu, to Atami and finally to Yokohama. As they travel, Aoi reflects on her visit to Nanako's home a few months before. The third-floor three-room apartment in a decaying housing estate was much closer to what the bullies at school had described than the happy place that Aoi had imagined when she talked with her friend on the telephone. It did not seem to Aoi like a home at all: a naked light bulb hung from the ceiling of each room, bedding had not been put away from the night before, empty cans and snack packets littered the floor and there were numerous empty instant noodle packets in the sink. Nanako had asked her if she was happy to have seen first-hand what everyone had been gossiping about, going on to say that bullies attack in others what they are afraid of becoming themselves. The problem therefore, belongs to the bully, not the bullied. Aoi thought that Nanako was again merely pretending to be unaffected, and misunderstood what her friend was trying to say. Aoi had previously imagined an idyllic upbringing for Nanako, and decides not to think about what she has seen, instead treating her as she always has.

The day that they were due home passes, as does the first day of the autumn term but they neither call their parents nor head home. They do not talk about these things, and though Aoi is concerned, Nanako does not appear to be. The 450,000 yen that they left Izu with quickly dwindles; they have been unable to find part-time work despite their efforts to disguise their age and even the cheapest hotels cost 7000 yen. Nanako suggests that they use love hotels¹, and Aoi is surprised that her friend knows so much

¹ Love hotels rent rooms by the hour. In many societies such hotels cater primarily to

about them. She is familiar with the payment system, and knows how to time their arrival so that they need not pay full price. Nanako also shows Aoi how to take advantage of free entry tickets to nightclubs, filling themselves up at the buffet and coercing young men into shouting them both dinner a few days later. Nanako seems to have an instinct as to which men they should avoid, and Aoi feels that she can do anything as long as they are together. When Aoi tells Nanako about the financial situation, explaining that they have only enough money for another month, Nanako says that she can easily get money through prostitution; Aoi is horrified, and suggests instead that they rob her childhood bullies. They successfully commit their first crime, taking 7000 from a girl on her way home from her part-time job at McDonalds, but Aoi feels like she has swallowed something bitter. Nanako says that she wants to see Aoi's old home, and they go to the apartment building and sit on the roof. Aoi asks Nanako about the way her name is written. She has never understood how the character '*sakana no ko*' could be read '*nanako*', and Nanako tells her that she was named by her grandmother after a kind of fabric. Aoi is delighted to have gleaned that Nanako has a grandmother, but Nanako says that she died several years before. The family was glad of the extra space in their cramped apartment: her things were all thrown away very quickly and noone cried at the funeral. Nanako says that she then realised how cold and unfeeling she was, seeing her grandmother getting thinner and yet doing nothing about it.

Both girls are exhausted. Aoi has been ground down by managing the money, finding a

prostitutes and their clients. In Japan, however, with multi-generational families living together in often very small dwellings, a wide variety of people use the discrete services that they provide. There is no need for the customer to ever see the staff: keys are dispensed by automatic vending machine and payment accepted the same way.

new place to sleep each night, keeping Nanako from falling into despair, and making sure that they are not found by the police. Nanako puts into words what Aoi has been thinking, saying that though they are always moving, she feels that they will never get anywhere. She suggests that they jump off the building together, and it seems like the answer to all Aoi's problems. No longer will she have to worry, and as she knows, if she is with Nanako, everything will be all right.

Chapter 9 - Synopsis

Sayoko is making the dinner at the end of a long, exhausting day. While she is delighted that her daughter has started to make friends and that her language has developed so much, she now has to deal with Akari's demands. Her daughter has insisted that she will not eat anything other than meatballs. Sayoko has gone to two different supermarkets in search of the ingredients, but now that she is preparing the meal the child says that she is not hungry, and makes it impossible for Sayoko to cook. She reaches for a knife that is protruding from the bench, and in trying to protect her, Sayoko knocks the remaining meat to the floor. As she cleans up the mess, she decides that the meatballs she has already made will be enough for her child and husband, and that she will make do without. Just as she is hauling Akari out of the kitchen, Shūji comes home and scolds his wife for her harsh treatment of the three-year old. He says that Sayoko has taken on too much, and that their home is suffering as a result. Sayoko wants to tell her husband all about the events of the day: how she had to skip lunch, how Akari was so demanding, how she could not find any mince, and how his mother had called to give her a sermon for almost an hour about having another baby. When he says that he has eaten on the way home, she snaps, saying hysterically, 'What do you have a cell phone for?' Forcing

herself to calm down, she then asks him to bathe their daughter.

Later, when Akari is asleep, Shūji again tries to tell his wife how he feels about her working. He says that he has always supported the idea, and reminds her that it was she herself who decided to be a full-time homemaker. His suggestion she should not feel bad about leaving Platina Planet because another person could easily take her place makes her angry and defensive, particularly when he suggests that she would be better suited to work that has ‘meaning’. The discussion ends with him asking her to think about it. She decides that she will go back to running the home as well as she used to before she started working, and remembers her promise to herself not to let her work affect their home. She notes, however, that since her husband expects perfection, any extra care on her part will just be accepted as normal. It is only when she produces anything less than perfect that he notices at all.

The training with Nakazato Noriko finally finishes, and Sayoko starts the cleaning jobs that Aoi has found. They are small, one-off jobs, and Sayoko completes them easily by herself. Instead of waiting for work to come in, she delivers fliers around the area, and arrives back at the office each afternoon hot and tired. One such day she sits down quietly to write the daily report, and is alarmed to see what seems to be a cleaning uniform on one of the desks. She remembers what her husband said about how she is not irreplaceable, and feels hurt that Aoi has not consulted her about the design. As she picks it up to look at it, Aoi asks her what she thinks, and without thinking how to best phrase her ideas, she tells her boss directly that grime will stand out more on a black apron than a blue or grey one, that a long apron will get in the way when the staff are

kneeling, and that a tee-shirt or very short half-apron would be more suitable. Aoi is impressed by Sayoko's knowledge, and regrets ordering the manufacturer's sample without consulting her. The others decide to continue their meeting at a nearby restaurant, and Mr Kihara offers Sayoko a ride home. In the car, he talks about Platina Planet, asking Sayoko whether she would prefer to be involved in the travel side of the business. Sayoko tells him that she was hired to clean, but that she will do what Aoi asks of her. Despite being a self-professed fan of Aoi's, he criticises Aoi's lack of foresight, and rather than listen to him running her boss down, Sayoko thinks about Akari and listens to the music on the car stereo.

Chapter 10 - Synopsis

Aoi quietly picks up the upstairs telephone and dials Nanako's number. As she learns that the number is no longer in service her mother calls out to ask if she is hungry, and Aoi knows she has seen the in-use light on the downstairs telephone. Since coming home, she has not been left alone. Financial circumstances mean that her mother has to continue four days a week at the bread factory, so Aoi's grandmother comes over during those times. Aoi feels that this constant supervision is unnecessary, but her parents do not understand that because she had no intention of committing suicide there is no danger of her attempting to do so now.

When Aoi first regained consciousness, she was alarmed to see her parents. When she tried to ask about Nanako, her mother talked over her, telling her about the circumstances surrounding her birth. She had planned to follow the traditional practice of returning to her parents' house near the end of her pregnancy and spending Aoi's first

month of life with her own family. Contractions had started two months early, however, and she had been rushed to this same hospital. The tiny Aoi had been almost impossibly small but undeniably beautiful, and her mother had suffered weeks of looking at her through the plastic side of the incubator before being finally allowed to hold her daughter.

Over the two weeks that follow, Aoi is submitted to endless tests and interviews as the doctors try to understand her physical and mental state. While Aoi will soon learn that Nanako has been admitted to a nearby hospital suffering little more than bruising, during her time in the hospital she has no information about her friend. All her questions are denied by the staff, who tell her that they know no more than she does. When her mother briefly leaves the bench outside her room, Aoi wanders down to the shop to get some juice. While there, she sees a magazine cover emblazoned with the words: 'High school girls' unnatural love ends in joint suicide attempt'. Realising that it is about herself, she picks it up and begins to read. She is not interested in the fact that the police had been looking for her since the beginning of September, instead racing to find whether Nanako is alive or not, but her mother appears and pulls the magazine from her hands. Soon after, her father asks if there is anything that he can bring for her on his daily visits. She says that she would like a tabloid magazine, and his face falls.

Aoi is not expected back at school until after the winter vacation and spends her days staring at the bleak sky and watching the reporters who have gathered outside her home. She sneaks into her parents' room and finds some magazines hidden amongst her mother's folded kimonos. Perhaps because the girls stayed at love hotels together, the

press has assumed that they are lesbian. Their original reason for going to Izu is said to have been to fund a month-long party in Yokohama. The press has printed the gossip that circulated at their school the previous year, that Nanako's father is in prison or an alcohol treatment programme and that her mother is either a hostess² or a common prostitute. Aoi waits until her grandmother is absorbed in a television program then puts some clothes on over her pajamas and quietly leaves the house. She takes the bus to the dilapidated housing estate that Nanako showed her just a few months before, and finding the apartment abandoned goes to all the places that she can think of that Nanako might have left a message for her. When she finally goes home, she finds her mother distraught, but is unable to respond.

Chapter 11 - Synopsis

It is Sports Day at the kindergarten and Sayoko is waiting for the parent-child dance event to begin. She, Akari and Shūji have all been practicing the dance routine carefully but her husband is not there, suddenly forced to go into work even though it is Saturday. Sayoko is furious, not because he is not there but rather because of his attitude. Trying to justify going into work, he says that his work, unlike hers, cannot be done by just anyone, and that he is irreplaceable.

Sayoko is surprised to see Aoi waving from the other side of the gate. She is at first confused, wondering why her boss would have come to see the performance, but upon hearing that that the first contracts have been confirmed, feels overwhelmed. She jumps

² Hostessing is a profession that does not exist in New Zealand. Attractive women are paid surprisingly good wages to spend time in bars with wealthy men. They do not have sexual relations with their clients and are paid by the establishment rather than by the client.

up and down, tears streaming down her face, and is overjoyed to hear Aoi say that it is all thanks to her. Aoi mentions several times that she was in the area, and only came to the kindergarten because Sayoko's cellular telephone was not turned on, but stays until the end of the event, diligently filming them dance. Akari, despite all the practice, has frozen in one position, causing great hilarity. As the event wraps up Aoi suggests that they go to a resort for the night. At first, Sayoko cannot imagine leaving her husband and home unattended at such short notice, but she remembers him saying that she is replaceable and decides to teach him a lesson. Surely, she thinks, when he arrives home to find that she has not prepared dinner for him he will appreciate her.

They take the train to the coast, and when Sayoko says that it is like a dream, Aoi laughs, telling her that it is not France or Egypt, merely a two thousand yen train ride away. They sit on the warm sand, go paddling, and eat barbecued corncoobs. Sayoko says that watching the sea lets her forget her worries, and recalls a day that she and a good friend spent at the beach when she was a teenager. Aoi says that she has similar memories, and then suggests that the next day they head towards Hamamatsu, another resort town. With this Sayoko suddenly feels the weight of her responsibilities as a wife and mother. She is suddenly aware that Shūji may see the jaunt as much more, thinking that she as left him and taken their child. She suggests that they go back to the city, which Aoi mistakenly understands as concern about cost and offers to pay. Sayoko says rather that she is worried that Akari will cry and wet the bed if she sleeps in an unfamiliar place, to which Aoi says that they can easily buy fresh clothes in the morning, and that she does not mind the crying.

With these words, Sayoko realises how different they are. She says that on Monday morning the work that they have set up will need to be done; that they are not high school kids who can run away from their responsibilities. With this, the smile slips from Aoi's face. "Run away?" she mumbles, and as Sayoko explains that despite the feeling of empowerment that Aoi gives her, she cannot in fact leave her husband. Aoi asks whether someone has said something, but Sayoko has no idea what she is talking about. Sayoko thinks that Aoi is angry that she wants to cut the trip short, and that Aoi truly has no comprehension of what it is to be part of a family. Aoi apologises for suggesting the trip at such short notice, saying that Sayoko should head back to the city with Akari. She turns away to call another friend and Sayoko feels upset and rejected. She goes to the station with Akari, and reflects on the events of the day as they wait for the train. She reaches the conclusion that Aoi used the news about the contracts as an excuse to come to the event at the kindergarten, and had been planning to go to the beach long before she suggested it.

Chapter 12 - Synopsis

It is the day of the closing ceremony at Aoi's school, and she has been allowed to go by herself. It is her first day back; she has been absent for a full term. She feels distant from the events of the day. Her classmates all ignore her, and the girls from Nanako's class try to answer her questions but do not have anything to tell. At the end of the day her father is waiting in his taxi at the school gate. They are starting to get to know one another again, and he is investing more time and energy into talking with her. He tells her about how hard it was when they first came to the new city to find his way around, and how he now knows how to get his passengers where they need to go. He suggests

buying Aoi a Christmas present and she imagines Nanako's teasing about his choice of stores. Aoi and her father are smiling at one another a little, building a friendship. She says that there is nothing that she wants and he seems sad, in the same way as when she asked him in the hospital to buy her a tabloid magazine. To cheer him up, she tells him about the custom of girls receiving silver rings for their nineteenth birthdays. It is a story that she has heard from Nanako, but she does not tell her father this. He suggests that they go and look at rings, saying that platinum is stronger than silver, and that he would like to buy her something. She refuses, saying instead that he can buy her a bowl of noodles at a place that he has told her about.

It seems that her father has seen how worried she is about her friend, and has arranged a meeting with Nanako. He tells her that he will arrange for her grandmother to look the other way as she sneaks out, but says that if she is caught he will deny helping her. He drives her to a nearby shrine, and Aoi thinks that she has conjured up the figure in front of her, but it is her friend, wearing her school uniform and the coat that they chose together a year before. She has hundreds of questions, and fears that she will be overcome with tears, but it is as if they have never been apart. They laugh and talk, teasing Aoi's father as he drives them slowly around the city. Nanako's hair is dark from the roots to her ears, and she says that her sister calls her, 'pudding girl'.³ Conversation dries up and they sit in silence until Nanako asks to be taken to the river. The sky is brilliantly reflected in the calm water; as Nanako explains that it only happens for a short time each day Aoi imagines her going to her secret hideout to watch this small

³ Pudding is a popular dessert in Japan, sold in clear plastic cups with dark sauce at the top and creamy yellow custard at the bottom.

beauty each day from when she started school as a small child until just a few months ago.

Nanako tells her that she is going to enroll at a different school near where she is now living. Aoi can only assume that they have moved as a result of what happened, but Nanako assures her that her parents did not even file a missing persons report. They have moved due to family reasons, and she is living with relatives in the next prefecture. When she has finished high school she will live alone, but promises that she will write and tell Aoi her present address.⁴ They talk briefly about what happened, agreeing how foolish it was to think that they could escape that away. She tells Nanako that she will buy a ring for her, that platinum is much stronger than silver, and that the present will ensure her friend's happiness. In saying this she comes close to tears, and jokingly adds that she suspects that Nanako will still be single, so as to keep herself from crying. Nanako is serious when she says that she will do the same for Aoi. They get back into the cab and drive in circles around the city, not talking but holding hands. Eventually, her father drops Nanako at the station and she gets out with a smile and a wave, leaving Aoi in tears. Her father tries to reassure her, saying that in a short time they will be able to meet whenever they want to.⁵ She feels that as a child not only must she comply with her parents' and teachers' wishes, but also that she is incapable of achieving her own wishes. Should Nanako be crying somewhere, there is nothing she could do, not even

⁴ It may seem unthinkable that a teenaged girl would not know the address of the house in which she is living, but in Japan where addresses are not linear and children have no need to remember them, this is not unexpected.

⁵ Japanese society regards young people as children until they have finished their education. They are then known as *shakaijin*, literally 'members of society'. Until this point, their lives are controlled by their parents and teachers, and they have little freedom.

send signals with a torch to comfort her. She wonders if adults are similarly constrained, and if so whether there is any purpose in growing up.

Chapter 13 - Synopsis

Sayoko is on the train with her co-worker, Ms Iwabuchi, who has been requisitioned into the cleaning side of the business. The number of contracts has grown sharply, and Sayoko cannot do the work by herself. She fears that Ms Iwabuchi's attitude towards clients and her sloppy work will impact negatively on the business. When they leave the train station she is surprised to see Mr Kihara waiting there, and the three go to a coffee shop. He is critical, saying that Aoi has underestimated the scope of the cleaning business. He fears that should too many staff be taken from the travel company, the level of service will slip and they will lose business. Sayoko looks at Mr Kihara across the table and is intrigued that the same person could go to Atami to be with Aoi, come to the train station to meet Ms Iwabuchi, and drive herself half-way across the city to Akari's kindergarten.

Aoi has not treated Sayoko differently since the failed outing to the seaside, but Sayoko has come to understand her own feelings about Aoi. Before, she had felt drawn to Aoi, wanting to get to know her better and be closer to her. She now recognises that she has been like a teenaged girl who always agrees to accompany a friend to the bathroom because she knows that should she refuse once, she may never be asked again.

Misao joins them at the coffee shop and the conversation turns to Aoi, who has been asked to give a lecture about her career as a successful female entrepreneur. Sayoko is

surprised to hear how little respect Misao has for her boss. The women tell her that she is not in the same precarious position as them because she is married, and should the business fail she can rely on her husband. On top of this, Aoi has apparently made it clear that Sayoko's position is different from the others: she cannot work overtime and must be supported should her daughter fall sick. Sayoko is hurt that she has been labeled unreliable, and in retaliation asks Ms Iwabuchi to describe the incident that led to Aoi being in the newspapers. Mr Kihara happily relates the story.

Sayoko's head is filled with memories of the tabloids in the autumn term of her final year at high school. At the time she found herself obsessed with the double suicide attempt, going to the local public library to read as much as she could. She tried to justify this: friendless and rejected by the girls who had been her friends, she found herself strangely curious about the bond between Aoi and Nanako. In the months that followed, she found a new friend outside of school. She assumed this friendship would continue when they went to university; her friend assumed otherwise, and Sayoko found herself shunned. Her calls and letters went unanswered. She reflected again on the friendship between Nanako and Aoi, wondering how they had related to one another after the incident. In recognising that Aoi is one of those two girls, Sayoko feels further confused. The tabloids stated that one girl lead the other into all the things that they did together, and Sayoko can easily imagine Aoi doing this. She wonders whether the other girl was more like herself: unable to refuse. She imagines the second girl being brushed off in the aftermath.

Sayoko arrives at work and finds Aoi looking disheveled. It seems that many of the staff

have suddenly quit, even Mr Kihara. Aoi says that she appreciated having him to talk to about work, because as a single woman she does not have a husband to discuss such things with. Sayoko has craved to be able to talk to Shūji, but has been unable to, and is angry that Aoi should assume that she has this, when in fact she does not. Aoi tells Sayoko that she will have to entrust the cleaning side of the business to Nakazato Noriko so that they can focus on the travel agency. She asks Sayoko to work alongside her to keep the business afloat. Sayoko, who has put her soul into creating the new cleaning business, feels betrayed, and in retaliation asks Aoi about her experiences with Nanako.

Chapter 14 - Synopsis

Finally, Aoi comes to understand what Nanako said about not being afraid. It was not false pretence, just the simple truth. In accepting this, she became able to go back to school, rejecting her mother's offer of another fresh start so that her parents would not be hurt any further. At school she is left completely alone. The poisonous feeling that permeated her grade has dissipated, but it no longer matters. The most important thing to her now is silence. Each day she hurries home to check the mailbox but nothing comes from Nanako. She finds her mind filled with memories of her time with her friend: at school, on the river bank, in the garden at the inn, in the love hotels and neon-lit discos. She wonders whether they would still have been so close had they not jumped from the apartment building together.

She graduates high school and goes on to university, living alone in a dormitory on campus. She is surprised that people are friendly towards her. She has both male and

female friends and goes to movies, stays over at people's houses, and enjoys shopping trips, but when the friendships start to become deeper she retreats by missing classes and not answering the telephone. Her nineteenth birthday passes without acknowledgement from Nanako, and she assumes that her friend is dead.

In her third year of university she goes backpacking around Asia, finding the world expand with each step that she takes away from Japan. She is sitting at a bus stop in Laos when a young man approaches her, telling her that he met another young Japanese woman a year ago named Nanako, and that he has photographs and letters she could see if she would be willing to accompany him to his home. She willingly gets onto the back of his motorcycle and is quickly taken into the jungle, robbed and abandoned. She recognises that she has always assumed that people will act with integrity, and now feels inclined to mistrust everyone. She recognises that by refusing to trust anyone she will limit her relationships, and consciously decides to put her trust in the driver of an approaching truck, asking for a ride back to civilisation.

Soon after graduation she starts Platina Planet, a travel agency specifically tailored to student needs. She works for other companies as well until her business is financially viable, then hires people to cover her own weaknesses: keeping accurate financial records, remembering appointments and organising information. With the financial downturn, however, she realises that she is earning less than the average white-collar worker. For the first time she questions the validity of herself in business as she looks around and sees her staff, full of complaints and criticism. She wonders whether an inability to keep friends is also one of her faults. She is delighted when Sayoko comes

to the interview. As they clean together Aoi is forcibly reminded of working by Nanako's side in Izu. She recognises her own high school self in Sayoko, and realises that she, herself, has been acting Nanako's part. She feels her unease melting away as she and Sayoko become friends. Though they are in very different situations, she feels that they are working towards the same goal. Suddenly, however, Sayoko asks her about the suicide attempt, and then says that she plans to quit, too. She is clearly trying to hurt her boss and Aoi is frustrated by her own inability to cry.

Chapter 15 - Translation

At the end of the year the kindergarten closed for the holidays. Because Akari was at home everyday, Sayoko managed to convince herself that she had made the right decision.

Since quitting Platina Planet she hadn't gone out at all, and spent her days cleaning the house until it shone. She told herself that because it was December she should be cleaning the house in preparation for the New Year rather than going to the park or the local play centre, and so didn't hate herself.

Since she had started work in June, she had done very little in terms of housework for six months except for some light cleaning once a week, but these six months the house had become quite dirty. While playing with Akari, who followed her about, she scrubbed the extractor fan, scrubbed the stove top, scrubbed the floor, scrubbed the cupboards, cleaned the shutters, and gave the bathroom a good clean. No matter how much she cleaned, somewhere was still dirty. Even as she cleaned she had the feeling

that she had missed something and she prowled around the house, cleaning cloth in hand.

At about 4pm, she and Akari would set off for the supermarket. Moving slowly around the supermarket filled with housewives and their small children, she would choose ingredients to use in elaborate dinners every evening. On days that Shūji came home late, she would get Akari off to sleep then do some sewing for the new term. Because she had been in a hurry, she had done a rough job of the school bag that she had made before Akari started daycare, and the bag for her sports shoes. She read the manual that came with her sewing machine thoroughly, and tried embroidering Peter Rabbit and Pooh Bear, and carefully embroidered Akari's name on towels and handkerchiefs. If she didn't find a new job, Akari would have to leave the daycare centre, but she couldn't sit still long enough to do something about it.

Sometimes she thought about Aoi. Or rather about what Aoi had told her about her time at high school the day that she quit. She had said that she had not seen the girl that she jumped off the roof with since then; the other girl had soon changed schools and they had not kept in touch. So that's how it was: just as she had imagined it. She was both convinced that Aoi had soon forgotten about the friend that she had run away with, and disappointed in the high school girls that she had not known but had so envied. "That's how it was," Aoi had murmured, laughing at herself. "We were just kids. We didn't know what we were doing."

That's what Sayoko thought, too, as she cleaned her house and embroidered

handkerchiefs. No matter how close people get, if they no longer see each other, the relationship comes to an end. She would probably forget that strange office and the female boss her own age, and Aoi would probably forget her soon, too. Even though they are not children; no, because they are adults, memory is soon swamped by the days that follow.

When she told Shūji that she had decided to quit her job he wasn't surprised, saying, "Just as I thought. After all, that would be better." That's what he said.

Because she has stopped work, Akari must also stop going to the daycare centre. Either way, soon it will be time for kindergarten⁶. Akari is used to the daycare centre, and there are women there that Sayoko finds it easy to talk to. She wants Akari to keep going, but in that case she has to find a new place to work immediately. She goes through the classifieds in the newspaper, folding down corners and circling some in pen, but Shūji's words keep coming back to her. Still unable to decide what to do, she persists in cleaning her apartment into the New Year.

In the New Year, Sayoko took Akari and went with Shūji to visit her mother-in-law's house. It was an annual event and her mother-in-law was, as ever, full of complaints.

"Sayoko, I know that you don't make traditional New Year's dishes, but without them it just doesn't feel like New Year. I worked until late last night making this. That's why

⁶ Japanese children usually attend between one and three years of pre-school education, depending on what is standard for the area that they live in. Operating between 9am and 3pm, kindergartens have no waiting lists, cost about 5000 yen a month and accept all children who live nearby.

I'm so tired. Please make a salad or something, Sayoko," she insisted, standing close behind her in the tiny kitchen.

Then, when Sayoko opened the vegetable compartment, she gave instructions about everything: "Don't use that cabbage, and leave those carrots. Surely you're not planning to make a salad out of *komatsuna* greens? Goodness knows what it'd turn out like... wouldn't it be better if we had some *sashimi* as well? The supermarkets are open from today, so would you go to the one near the station and choose some things?"

Oh, it has started again, thought Sayoko in the back of her mind, but called out to Shūji, lying on the living room sofa, "Shūji, your Mum says to go and buy some *sashimi*."

Shūji stood up slowly, saying, "Hunh? What did she say to go and buy?"

"*Sashimi*. She said to go and choose something you like. It's good timing actually; would you take Akari with you? I'm about to make *ohitashi*⁷ and I'll be busy with that for a while." She had thought that there would be some retort but her mother-in-law hurriedly got her purse and rushed over to Shūji.

"Tuna or sole or even flounder... Do you know what sole or flounder look like?"

She can hear Shūji laughingly brushing his mother's panicked instructions away as if she is sending him to do some shopping for the first time.

"Akari, let's go to the supermarket!" At Shūji's call, Akari, who was starting to get bored and grizzly sprang to her feet, repeating,

"Let's go!" in imitation. Opening the refrigerator without asking, Sayoko took out all the vegetables that she thought she could use. She lined up the cabbage and the carrots on the sink. Well, that was easy. You don't have to carry the burden alone; if you say

⁷ *Ohitashi* is a vegetable dish made with leafy greens and ground toasted sesame seeds.

something, people will help you. As she boiled the water in the pot, Sayoko noticed that she was humming in her difficult mother-in-law's house.

Dinner was at six o'clock. The traditional New Year's food, the *sashimi* that Shūji had bought, the salad and the *hitashi* that Sayoko had made were all lined up on the table. The TV that had been left on was showing a boisterous talent quest.

"There are always lots of noisy programs on at New Year's." As soon as she spoke, Shūji stood up, agreeing quietly.

"We have a video of Akari's first Sports Day, Mum. I thought we could show you it." Shūji took the video from his bag and crouched in front of the TV, setting it up. To Akari, leaning forward saying, "I was a ninja. It's a ninja dance, Grandma," Sayoko's mother-in-law replied, "Oh really?" without much enthusiasm.

The loud noises from the TV ceased, the screen went blue for a second then the video started to play. Sayoko just glanced at the screen, continuing to eat without a word. Sayoko had only watched the part with Akari dancing on the video that Aoi had taken, and then only a few times. Watching it made her remember the events of that day.

The scratchy music of the Sports Day started and they could hear the daycare centre staff cheering into the microphone. Whenever the scene changed, Akari said something and Shūji explained it to her mother-in-law. Sayoko reached out for a prawn, and peeled it but didn't eat it, instead taking a slice of tuna onto a small plate and dipping it in soy sauce.

"This has been really well filmed."

“Yeah, it could be mistaken for a TV broadcast. Look, there’s Sayoko.”

“Yes, you’re right. So who filmed this?”

“I danced with Mummy. *Lalala... peach tree*,” Akari started to sing.

“A friend was kind enough to come since Shūji couldn’t,” Sayoko said to her mother-in-law.

“I apologised, didn’t I? I really did want to be there.”

“Oh, no! Look, that child is crying. Poor thing,” Sayoko’s mother-in-law said, and gave a rare laugh.

“Sakura is a real crybaby,” laughed Akari.

“Gosh, when you look at them like this there is quite a difference in size! How old are these children?” asked her mother-in-law, and Sayoko looked up from the dining table.

The event had changed from the parent-child dance to the running race. It seemed that Aoi had continued filming. The children at the starting line all started running together.

“I think it’s the five-year olds,” Sayoko answered and kept her eyes on the screen. As the rhythmical backing music played, one of the children in the race fell over flat on his face. He stayed where he was without trying to get up and burst into tears.

“Come on, it’s just a little bit further. Run, Nao.” They could hear the teacher’s voice over the loudspeaker system. The camera zoomed in on the boy who had fallen. A little further on, another boy looked back at him, unsure whether to head for the finish line or to go back: he dithered backwards and forwards till finally, as if he had been flicked, he dashed to where the boy had fallen. The cheering increased. Lying face down in the dirt beside him, he calmed the crying boy, then took his hand to help him up, and walked with him towards the finish line. As he led the crying boy by the hand, he wiped his tears away with the palm of his hand for him. After making sure that the two boys had

reached their goal, the picture blurred to Sayoko waving as she approached the camera. There was a break in the film, and then the next shot appeared. The children of Akari's class were gathered in the centre of the field. The camera zoomed in on Akari.

Still holding the tuna in her chopsticks, Sayoko was staring at the screen. A teacher led Akari and her classmates into position. Cheerful music began to play. Under the blue sky parents in the corners of the playground holding cameras and video cameras leant forward. Akari didn't move at all. Only her eyes moved restlessly. They could hear Sayoko's and Aoi's laughter from the speakers. "Akari, come on, dance!" Their voices overlapped. After a few moments, Akari started moving awkwardly.

As she watched the screen, she pictured Aoi as she held the video camera. Aoi, her face puffed with lack of sleep, strenuously following Akari with the camera. Aoi, who had focussed in on the boy who went back to help his fallen friend.

"Sayoko! You're dripping soy sauce all over yourself!" Her mother-in-law's shrill voice brought her back to reality. Soy sauce was dripping from the tuna held between her chopsticks onto her skirt, making a stain.

"Oh no! And I just bought this for New Year's!" Sayoko said brightly, and hurried to the bathroom sink. She wet a towel and dabbed at the mark. She muttered, "Damn, damn," under her breath, and remembered the days when she had urged her bicycle along. In her memory, wet with sweat and in direct contrast to what she was muttering, the edges of her mouth softened and she was on the verge of smiling, pedaling easily. Making the edges blur, Sayoko continued dabbing the lightening stain with more energy than was

actually necessary. She could hear her mother-in-law, Shūji and Akari's laughter from the dining room.

Sayoko was quite reluctant, but she went to the restaurant as she had been asked. They sat in the non-smoking section by the window and ordered coffee or tea one after the other. These women, who she had recently met, all had children at kindergarten. But Sayoko didn't know all of their names yet. As the deadline for Akari to leave the daycare centre had approached, Sayoko had asked a woman in the elevator who had had a child with her, about kindergarten, and now they often talked. Her name was Mrs Motoyama, and she had introduced her friends from the kindergarten. They usually killed time at a cheap restaurant while they waited to pick up their children, and if they ran into her in the neighbourhood, they invited her along.

As soon as they sat down, they talked busily about events at the kindergarten, or about their child's teacher. Sayoko couldn't join the conversation, but that was more comfortable. It was easy to smile and nod, without saying anything. The waiter brought the drinks. Until he had put a drink in front of each of them, the mothers were silent. As soon as he had gone, they all started talking again.

"I have to think about the exams!"

"Is yours going to sit entrance exams? Oh, that reminds me. Mrs Hayata said that she's going to send her child to cram school from April."

"I think Elementary School Number Three will be fine for us."

"Well, I got scared when I saw the kids who have been in daycare."

“Yeah, there are lots of rough kids, aren’t there. There’s one in our apartment building, too. He glares at me and tells me to shut up. And he says, ‘Stupid’ and ‘Die’ as if it’s OK.”

“How about you, Mrs Tamura? Do you think your daughter has lots of friends with bad manners from daycare?”

Suddenly the conversation came her way and she smiled vaguely.

“You should take her out of there soon; Akari is a good kid but they are so easily influenced.”

“That’s right. As I recall, the kid who says, ‘Die’ and ‘Stupid’ has a brother at the same daycare centre as you. There’s a child in the 3-year-old class named Ren Kurata, right?”

“Yes, I know Ren,” Sayoko nodded. She recalled Ren’s mother with her round face and job at a life insurance company.

“That kid is scary. He may be small, but he shoved my kid and made him cry.”

“There’s nothing you can do about kids who go to daycare.”

“Mrs Tamura, you’ve stopped working so you’re different, but all daycare kids’ mothers work, don’t they? The kids have hardly any time with their mothers so they are coarse, rough. You can tell at a glance which kids have grown up in daycare.”

“And when you warn the mothers about it they respond with a really intellectual argument, because they have this strange confidence, saying that they are contributing to society.”

“That’s exactly it. Recently I...”

As she pretended that she was really impressed by what they were saying, she looked out of the window. The murky sky was grey and low. She’d noticed soon after she met Mrs Motoyama and her friends that as full-time homemakers they really didn’t think

well of mothers who went to work. Despite that, she didn't usually turn down their invitations. Their advice about kindergarten and medical check-ups was simply helpful. She continued to make vague listening noises when the working-mother-bashing suddenly started, feeling a sense of déjà vu. Or rather than déjà vu, she realised that it was an actual memory. Despite being many years older, nothing had changed since she had been at high school eating her lunch, her desk pushed close to the girls' nearby, strongly bound together against an imagined enemy that they themselves had created. But Sayoko also knows that their solidarity is surprisingly weak. She imagines that perhaps in a few months Mrs Hayata, the only one who plans to send her child to cram school, will be their next target.

Why do we get older? Sayoko thinks vaguely as she stares at the row of bare gingko trees outside the large window. It isn't as if she is going to send her child to the same kindergarten as them, so if she says that she is busy and turns down their invitations to drink tea while they wait for their children a few times, they'll probably stop asking her. But things like that don't hurt her anymore. She doesn't have as much free time as she had at high school. Both she and they have their own homes and lives.

"In my apartment block, there's someone who works from home. I don't know if she's a designer or what, but she seems to think it's okay to send her kid to play at our place. He's there till six or seven pm. And during that time, she's working at home. Don't you think that's awful?"

"Yeah, she has us look after the kid for free while she's getting paid for the time. It's unbelievable."

"Bad luck living in the same building."

“And I don’t like the child; he’s rough. He leaves crumbs on the tatami mats, and he made a hole in the paper screen.”

“Really? You should say something.”

“Aren’t the kids in your child’s class like that, too, Mrs Tamura? Aren’t there some mothers who take advantage of the fact that you’re at home and leave their kids with you?” A mother about the same age as Sayoko, sitting diagonally opposite, thrust her face forwards to ask. She looked a lot like Mr Kihara.

“Oh no! My daughter’s class is about to finish. Excuse me, I have to go.” Sayoko looked at her watch and stood up.

“Oh really!”

“Off you go then!”

“Sorry I didn’t notice the time.” She took a few steps away from the booth as the mothers all said goodbye, then turned back quickly. “Sorry, I’ll leave the money for my coffee here. See you again,” she said, smiling, and set off.

It occurred to her that the topic of conversation had probably now shifted from the woman who works at home to herself. Then she thought better of it. She ran to the daycare centre gate and looked for Akari playing amongst the children in the yard. She was playing house in the sandpit. Across from her is Ren, the child that they have just been talking about. She had been walking toward the sandpit but stopped to watch the two children absorbed in their game from a short distance away. Why had she gotten older? Had it been so that when relationships with people became difficult, she could conveniently hide behind life? Was it so that she could say, ‘I have to go to the bank, I have to go pick up my child, I have to prepare dinner’, and close the front door with a

click? Her head was full of such thoughts.

Ren, who apparently pushed a kid older than himself and made him cry, is accepting a bowl heaped with sand from Akari. He is saying cheeky things, like: “Oh, is it sushi today? Mum, isn’t there any beer?”

“Beer? You aren’t allowed to drink beer,” Akari answered and Sayoko laughed in spite of herself.

“Ah! It’s your Mum,” said Ren loudly, and Akari came running. Ren followed her to where Sayoko was standing.

“What time’s your Mum coming, Ren?” asked Sayoko.

“Dunno,”

“Mummy, we were playing house.”

“Well, see you, Ren. Come play at our house next time.”

“Dunno.”

“See you tomorrow.”

“Bye-bye,” waved Akari, but Ren had turned away and was ignoring them. As she walked to the gate holding Akari’s hand, she recalled the video that Aoi had taken. The boy who had tripped, the boy who lay down on the ground to console him, and Aoi, who had recorded the scene unconsciously. Sayoko suddenly understood why the two high school girls who had leapt off the roof together hand-in-hand had not seen each other since then. It wasn’t that they hadn’t kept in touch, or that they had been children and had therefore soon forgotten each other. It was because both Aoi and the other girl had been afraid. Each afraid that the other, who should have been seeing the same things as herself, is now doing things that are different to what she is doing. They both finished high school, went to different places, saw completely different things and were both

afraid to make contact with their probably completely changed friend, afraid of being asked: can you still not make friends?

“Bye-bye,” a voice behind them called and they turned to see Ren, his body pushed against the fence, waving to Akari. “See you tomorrow,” Akari shouts.

“Yeah, tomorrow,” he grumps, going back into the yard.

Sayoko thinks about the time when the word bye-bye meant that tomorrow would be the same as today. When she believed that tomorrow she could see her friend as always, wearing the same uniform; that she could talk to her in the same world, with the same words, with the same look in her eyes.

“Yeah, tomorrow.”

Why do we get older? Looking down at Akari, still waving at her receding classmate, she vaguely goes over her earlier question.

Sayoko goes up to the fifth floor in the jarring, dated elevator, stands in front of the rusting door and takes a deep breath. Bringing her index finger up to eye-level, she reaches out towards the intercom. Her finger is shaking. She might be turned away; there might be an uncomfortable silence. Above all, she thinks that she is doing something stupid. Because it was she, herself, who had thrown what could be seen as a parting shot, and left. But she has decided that even if she is turned away from the door, she had to come. The call from Nakazato Noriko came a few days ago. She called to say that she was starting a new cleaning agency and to ask whether Sayoko would like to register. Her businesslike manner had made Sayoko feel nostalgic. Unsure how to answer, she had changed the subject, asking how she had known that she had gone back

to being a full-time homemaker. “Well, as you know, Aoi’s place is in the state it’s in. I honestly thought that it couldn’t be saved. Then it seemed that thanks to you it was getting back on track. Aoi said how much she regrets what happened with you, and I really appreciate how she feels. People who work as hard as you are very rare, so much so that I considered asking you to join my staff when you first came to me for training.”

“Did Aoi ask you to call me?”

“Not at all. All Aoi can say is how sorry she is that she talked about dropping the cleaning business so lightly. She really wanted you to help her with Platina Planet after everyone left. But that wouldn’t be fair on you. You had to train for ages then it all fell apart just as you started work. I called you to get in before anyone else. You know that Aoi’s place is in no position to do any cleaning work at the moment, so I called as soon as I could to say that the only option for you is to come and work for me.” Sayoko listened to Nakazato Noriko’s voice, the phone pressed against her ear. She remembered Aoi saying that she was planning to give up the cleaning. Aoi’s white face looking down into her mug. What had made her so sure that Aoi wouldn’t know about her fights with Shūji, her internal denials of unease, the days that she cursed to herself as she pedaled her bicycle? Sayoko asked again about Platina Planet. It seemed that after what happened, only Ms Yamaguchi had stayed on. And that Ms Yamaguchi left the office at the end of the year because she was moving away. The Okubo office was not rented, but rather a second-hand condominium, and, unable to find the money for staff severance payments, Aoi had sold it. She was now running the business alone in her apartment in Shimokitazawa, Nakazato Noriko explained.

“It’s natural that people quit; she should get new staff quickly, but Aoi is hesitating, giving up on this or that: it’s like she has retired. Anyway, what will you do about the

temping?”

Picturing Aoi's home that she had visited only once, she absent-mindedly said that she would think about it, and hung up.

She takes a deep breath and presses the intercom. She can hear the distorted sound of the bell ringing on the other side of the door. There is no answer. She presses it again. “Please don't be out!”

It is as if all the strength has gone out of her body. Will she go home? But, she thinks, if I go home now, I probably won't come again. She thinks that she will probably do her best to forget about it, making lots of excuses to put it off: washing blankets and sewing Akari's name onto towels. But she knows full well that even if she prowls around the apartment with a cleaning cloth, there is nothing left that needs to be cleaned.

“I'll wait downstairs,” she mumbles to herself, pushing the lift button in the dim hallway.

It comes up to the fifth floor, and the door opens with a harsh grating sound. Aoi is standing on the other side, and, without meaning to, Sayoko gasps loudly. Aoi gasps at the same time, staring back at Sayoko. Between the two women who have stopped moving, the lift door slowly starts to close. Sayoko hurriedly pushes against it with both hands, and Aoi rushes to hold it with her leg. Each finds the other's behaviour amusing and they laugh in spite of themselves.

“This isn't nice, surprising me.” Aoi gets out of the elevator. In one hand she has a bag from the convenience store. Sayoko thinks that she has lost a lot of weight. Behind her, the door closes, and the lift rasps its way downstairs. You could have heard a pin drop.

“Sorry to come without calling,” said Sayoko. The nervousness that their laughter had

worked loose is back in her throat.

“It is very sudden. What’s happened? Have you come to talk about severance pay?” She slips past Sayoko into the hallway, and unlocks her front door. Sayoko finds the courage to speak, saying, “I came because I want to ask a favour.” Aoi, her hand on the doorknob, looks at Sayoko standing in the hallway. “Is there something that I can help with? I will do anything. Answer the phones, do data entry, clean, fill envelopes, anything. I’ll work for training wages. Or for free until I know the job.”

“Don’t talk so loud, Boss. The neighbours won’t know what to think,” Aoi, interrupting Sayoko, moves quietly into the vestibule and beckons her in. Sayoko hurriedly slips inside. “It’s messy, but come in,” and as asked, she follows Aoi inside.

Aoi’s home-cum-office is so tremendously messy that Sayoko can’t remember how it had been before. The combined living/dining room is so stacked with boxes that she can’t see the walls, and an avalanche of magazines stuck with post-it notes, bundles of copies, pamphlets and things to be proofed cover the floor. In the kitchen sink there is a pile of empty instant noodle cups and fast food boxes, and, even though it is winter, there are small flies hovering.

Someone has removed the sliding doors from the tatami room and the low table that Aoi used at the office, a ridiculously large fax/copier and a bookcase untidily stuffed with papers all crowd around a single bed. Even in here, piles of cardboard boxes cover more than half the windows and it is dark. The view that Aoi had said that she liked from the living room windows is also two-thirds covered with piles of stuff. In the thin strip at the top of the window, the clear winter sky stretches away.

“This is the state of things.” She moves a pile of clothes and laundry aside and says, “Please, have a seat,” pointing Sayoko to the sofa. “I haven’t eaten yet. I hope you don’t mind,” says Aoi, sitting down on the floor and taking a sandwich and rice ball from the convenience store bag. After that she doesn’t say anything, chewing quietly. Sayoko glances at Aoi. She tries to read her feelings from her expression. But she can’t. She has to say something. She has to say something herself. She hunts for words.

“I’ve been regretting that I quit the way I did. I really appreciate what you did for me, and I had just grown used to the pace of things.” No, that isn’t right. None of it is true. They are just words that she has heard somewhere that sound suitable. She looks at the clothes dropped on the floor, at Aoi unwrapping her rice ball, and fixes her eyes on the sliver of blue sky on the other side of the covered window.

“You mentioned Family Support. Actually I didn’t try to check it out because I find getting involved with people I don’t know really hard. But I got up the courage to register and they introduced me to a family near my house. It was so simple I was almost disappointed. It was such a simple, natural thing that I don’t know what I was afraid of. So everything is set. I can do overtime, too,” says Sayoko. Aoi puts a piece of rice ball into her mouth, drops her eyes to the floor, and chews.

It was soon after Nakazato Noriko’s call that she’d been introduced to the Family Support volunteers in her neighbourhood. They were a couple in their fifties whose children were grown up. They had also recently registered at the centre. In the interview, the wife had broken into a smile, saying, “I can look after children again.”

“She had Burnout Syndrome,” the husband laughed, teasing. “After the kids left she sat

staring into space at the dining table all day.”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t say this, having only just met you, but I felt that I hadn’t been able to do anything for my own kids, and that’s why they didn’t visit. Then my husband went to ask about the Family Support system for me. I couldn’t even understand my own kids, so the thought of looking after someone else’s was quite scary and I really dithered about it. But I’m really happy to have met you. I wish I had registered sooner. Because I can meet such lovely little kids again,” she smiled at Akari.

“She looks just like Eiko when she was a child,” said the husband. That seemed to be their daughter’s name.

“I know! Let’s have dinner together at the weekend. We’ll ask Eiko and Masashi as well. There’s no doubt that they’ll come. You’re free, aren’t you? If it doesn’t suit, we can do it next week. Or even next month. It’ll be fun.” Her face brightened with the idea.

She looked at the wife, already planning the menu, and finally thought that she understood why we get older. It’s not to close the door and bury ourselves in our daily lives. It’s to meet new people. It’s to choose to meet people. It’s to tread the path that we have chosen, on our own two feet.

“Didn’t Nakazato Noriko call you? She treats her staff much more squarely than I do.”

“This is the only place for me,” Sayoko says flatly. Aoi stares at the sandwich in her hand. “Rubber gloves were forbidden, right?” Sayoko says very quietly and laughs lightly. “If you keep rubbing an oily stain so bad that the sponge almost sticks to it and your mind goes blank, little by little it becomes easier, and if you rub your fingers over it, there comes a moment when all resistance disappears. With just a sponge, soap and the palm of your hand, caked-on filth disappears without leaving a trace. But I still have

a bad taste in my mouth, as if I had come home leaving that oily stain. I think that even if I were to start cleaning again with Nakazato Noriko, that isn't going to go away."

Aoi doesn't respond and Sayoko begins to feel uneasy. Is she going too far, after all? Or perhaps Aoi doesn't need help at all. Aoi looks up. In spite of herself, Sayoko drops her eyes to her fingertips. Because she's been cleaning continuously at home, her skin is dry and her nails broken.

"That's right. Nakazato Nori is different from me; she's a woman who can clean. So, Boss, you say that you are ready. Ready to clean this awfully messy apartment till it shines by the end of the day," she said, shoveling the sandwich into her mouth and looking up into Sayoko's eyes. She wants to say that she hadn't meant it like that but she swallows the words and stands up from the sofa. Because she realises that Aoi understands what she's said correctly.

"In only one day?" Sayoko surveys the room.

"Let's make it your job interview. If you can do it, Platina Planet will employ you. I may be rotten, but I am the boss!"

"It's a bit rich asking me to get it done in a day when you've made it this dirty. OK. I will do my very best for you." Sayoko stands and bows deeply.

"Please." In imitation of Sayoko, Aoi bows her head. Sayoko laughs and Aoi joins her.

"This window first. I'll do something about this window. I have to let the light in: this room is really spooky. Ms Narahashi if you have work to do, go ahead. I'll ask if I don't know whether to throw something out or how I should separate things." Sayoko walks over to the big living room windows and starts to lift the piled up boxes down into the available spaces on the floor, looking inside each as she does so. Aoi, in the other room, is sitting at the low table, turning on her computer. A fax comes in and they can hear the

sound of it printing. In the box she opens there are files, advertisements, boxes of sweets, and floppy disks. In another box, glue, scissors and stationery is mixed with foreign guidebooks, driving maps and schedules. Sayoko rolls up her sleeves and devotes herself to taking everything out. The floor, full as it had been, now can't be seen at all. When she looks around, she sees the mess of magazines and boxes that fill the room. She feels faint.

It's all right. I can do it if I get rid of them one by one, she tells herself as she folds down the box that she has just emptied. The next box that she opens is full of large books and electrical cords. She sorts them, starting to unravel the tangled cords. The pile of books at her feet slides over and without meaning to, Sayoko clicks her tongue as she picks them up. A paperback book without a cover falls at her feet. Still holding the books, she squats down to pick it up and a yellowed scrap of paper falls lightly from it. Sayoko reaches out her hand and without meaning to, looks at the paper that has fluttered down onto the tangled pile of cords. It is a letter. The blue ink letters are packed closely together. Still holding the books, Sayoko quietly picks it up with one hand. Looking at private things is essentially wrong. It was something that Nakazato Noriko had been very clear about. She had nailed into her from the first day that if, for example, a bankbook fell open in front of her, she was not to look at it. The reason that Sayoko reads it without thinking is that she confuses the writing that dances on the page for her own: Sayoko's high school handwriting was rounded and foreign-looking. "Hello Aoi," the letter starts. She doesn't know who it is from, but soon understands that it is to a high school Aoi. Sayoko can't take her eyes off the letter. Her eyes quickly chase the characters.

“Hello Aoi,

We just got off the phone but I am already writing this letter. What’d you have for dinner today? Everyone is out and I couldn’t be bothered making something so I just ate some snacks. Some Koala’s March biscuits. I’m hooked on them at the moment. Today in World History, Mr Matsubara, totally unlike him, went off-topic and started talking about something else. Did you know? You wouldn’t think it, but Mr Matsubara said that he had traveled around the world. Then Ri asked him what was the most beautiful place and what do you think he said? He said it was Machu Picchu. We don’t even know where that is, do we? He said it’s like an illusory city in the air. Like Laputa in Gulliver’s Travels, maybe? But I don’t know.

It was like a switch had been turned on and Mr Matsubara kept talking about traveling. As I listened to him, I had an idea. Hey, Aoi. One day, I really want to go on a trip together. France or Austria, anywhere would be good. But anyway, I want to go. I wonder what we will think is the most beautiful. I really want to know that.

I wonder, if we went on a trip, whether we’d miss this boring town. Would we think, ‘I want to see the Watarase River’, in wonderful France? That would be awful, but also kind of nice. It sounds strange, but if we wanted to come back it would mean that we are happy here.

Tomorrow I will be waiting at the river in the usual place. I’ll bring the new issues of Olive and Hokuto’s Fist. On the way home shall we go to the bookstore at the station and look at a globe? Let’s look and see where Machu Picchu is! Of course, we don’t have to. I’ve started to feel like a tuna and cheese crepe. I am hungry, after all. I think I’ll make something.

I've gone and written a load of rubbish when we can see each other tomorrow! Gosh, that was stupid. Well. See you tomorrow. I'll be waiting at the river.

From Nanako."

Sayoko looks up from the letter. Although she's never been there, the scene that she pictures is as clear as if it were a memory. The path beside the river. The rampant summer grass. The two high school girls walking on the other side of the river, bent with laughter at something funny, their hair shining in the sun, the skirts of their uniforms fluttering. They suddenly notice her, and wave to the teenaged Sayoko, still standing on the other bank.

They are saying something, waving so hard their arms might come off. Sayoko waves back. She says something. "What? I can't hear you!" The two of them point a little way off, jumping up and down. She looks where they are pointing and sees a bridge crossing the river. The two high school girls beckon to Sayoko, and start to run to the bridge. Following the girls on the other side of the river, she runs toward the bridge, making the skirt of her own uniform dance. The river flows quietly on, reflecting the sky.

Brought back to herself by the ringing of the telephone, she slips the letter back into the paperback. "Thanks for calling. Is it about that? No, I didn't say that I wouldn't do it. Do I look like a fool? I've reopened Platina Planet. Please put lots of work this way. We've got great new staff keen to join us."

Sayoko puts another box on the floor and glances at Aoi in the other room. Their eyes meet. Aoi smiles broadly for a moment, and then drops her eyes to her computer. "Yes, OK. So shall we make the arrangements? Now is fine. Oh, tomorrow? OK. Really?"

Gosh, that was stupid.” Aoi laughs out loud. Sayoko folds down another box, looks up, and sees that the window is just about clear. In sharp outline against the high, clear sky, the rows of low houses and the occasional building that juts up as if piercing the sky stretch into the distance. The thin road winding between the houses is like a river that has just appeared then disappeared. In their school uniforms, the girls jump lightly over the rooftops, and with peals of laughter, run away.

Aoi, who has put down the phone, says, “Let’s have a beer for our three o’clock snack. In celebration of your employment,” without taking her eyes off her keyboard.

“Get me something really dry. It has to be a level five⁸, because this apartment is just unbelievable.” Sayoko, too, speaks without stopping. The band of light from the window stretches across the messy living room and reaches as far as the doorway of the dim Japanese-style room. A droplet of sweat runs from Sayoko’s temple to cheek, and falls.

⁸ The staff at Platina Planet choose what to buy for afternoon tea depending on how they feel. When they are tired, they prefer something sweet. When they feel they have been treated unfairly, they want something hot and spicy, and thus Sayoko asks for a very dry beer.

V. Conclusion

Throughout her career, Kakuta Mitsuyo has consistently tried to achieve recognition from the literary world. Reading only the biography section of this thesis would lead the reader to conclude that Kakuta has been largely motivated by a desire for praise, and that because pure literature would garner her higher acclaim than popular fiction, it became her goal. The discussion section of this thesis, however, makes it clear that Kakuta actually sought the opportunity to express her criticisms of contemporary Japanese society that pure literature would provide. The intervening 13 years between her initial recognition and the solid confirmation of her reputation as a writer of note in 2004 let her experiment widely in terms of both form and subject matter. *Taigan no Kanojo* provided a platform for Kakuta to express her perceptions about the roles that employment, marriage and motherhood play in the lives of women in Japan.

Kakuta does this by presenting a series of female characters, women married and single, all of whom are initially unhappy. She uses the framework of the narrative to explore the decisions that they have made in the past that have led to disappointments. She shows clearly that women who have chosen either career or family at the expense of the other have suffered. The progress that her characters consequently make towards combining these two spheres let them come closer to achieving personal fulfillment. Kakuta thereby makes her reader fully aware that she believes that women need both emotional connections and professional relationships. Marriage need not be the only possible emotional connection; Kakuta also sees the value in friendship.

The characters in *Taigan no Kanojo* are archetypes, quickly framed and briefly

described. This allows Kakuta to work within the constraints of the length of the novel to present a wide range of female life choices. By introducing these characters through her protagonists, she gives her reader more insight into both Aoi and Sayoko. By setting the novel in two distinct time periods, Kakuta is able to show her reader just how little change there has been for Japanese women between the early 1980s and early in the new millennium.

Taigan no Kanojo does not stand alone in its criticism of the way that contemporary working environments affect the choices that women make, and can be seen as one well-crafted example of this trend in recent Japanese fiction. Hayashi Mariko, respected literary critic and widely acclaimed novelist, one generation older than Kakuta, addresses similar themes in her 2003 *Anego*. She, too, tried to draw the attention of her readership towards these issues.

While Kakuta's work is clearly relevant for women in a Japanese context, it also holds valuable lessons for readers outside Japan. Though much of *Taigan no Kanojo* finds fault with employment practices and societal expectations that apply specifically to the Japanese context, Kakuta's views about the need for women to form both emotional connections and professional relationships have relevance for all. Her warnings about the repercussions of ill-considered decisions regarding employment, marriage and motherhood have widespread application, as do her allegorical teachings about the outcomes of good choices. The barrier of language, however, means that without translation this novel would remain inaccessible to those unable to read Japanese.

A similar problem also exists in terms of access to information about contemporary Japanese writers in general. This is not a problem of language, but rather the fact that very little information is made available to the public. While limited factual information can be found on book jackets and the like, deeper explorations of writers' backgrounds are very rare. The implications of how an author has grown up, therefore, are not usually examined until long after s/he has stopped writing. To gather Kakuta's autobiographical details, therefore, and start to probe how they have shaped her writing goes some way towards mitigating this problem. Criticism of a living author's body of work is also very difficult to discover, so collecting the references that do exist about the work of Kakuta Mitsuyo to date can be seen as a positive step towards ensuring their survival.

Terada Hiroshi, editor of *Kaien*, the magazine that gave Kakuta her first nod of acknowledgement from the literary world, told a young Kakuta soon after her debut and again when she was a little older that: "there is hope in all the novels that remain in the world"²³⁶. To ensure that *Taigan no Kanojo* will be read long after her death, therefore, Kakuta has worked to fill it with hope. She guides her characters towards choices that see them start to balance work and family, career and friendship, employment outside the home and motherhood. She shows time and time again that her characters have the power to control their own lives and leads her reader to conclude that it is action on an individual level that will bring resolution to the difficulties that contemporary women face combining employment outside the home with meaningful personal relationships.

Kakuta Mitsuyo: A Brief Chronology

- 8/3/1967 born in Yokohama city
- 1/4/1973 is enrolled in Sōshin Girls' School in Yokohama
- Late 1984 father dies of cancer
- 31/3/1985 graduates from Sōshin Girls' School
- 1/4/1985 enrolls in the Literature Department at Waseda University in
Tokyo
- 1988 wins the Cobalt Novel Grand Prize for *Okosama Lunch: Rock
Sauce* under the penname Saikawa Anzu
- 31/3/89 graduates from Waseda University
- 1990 is nominated for the *Femina* Award for an untraceable
submission due to the use of an undisclosed pseudonym
- 1990 wins the Kaien Newcomers Literary Award for *Kōfuku na
Yūgi*
- 11/1992 is nominated for the Akutagawa Award for *Yūbe no
Kamisama*
- 3/1993 is nominated for the Akutagawa Award for *Pink Basu*
- 11/1993 is nominated for the Akutagawa Award for *Mō Hitotsu no
Tobira*
- 1996 wins the Noma Newcomers Literary Award for *Madoromu
Yoru no UFO*
- 1998 wins the Tsubota Jōji Literary Award for *Boku wa Kimi no
Oniisan*
- 1999 wins the Sankei Children's Publishing Cultural Award Fuji

Television Prize for *Kidnap Tour*

- 2000 wins the Robō no Ishi Prize for Literature for *Kidnap Tour*
- 2003 is nominated for the Naoki Award for *Kūchūteien*
- 2003 wins the Fujin Kōron Literary Award for *Kūchūteien*
- 10/2004 mother dies
- 2005 wins the Naoki Award for *Taigan no Kanojo*
- 2006 wins the Kawabata Yasunari Award for *Rock Haha*

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- ¹ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.). Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 67.
- ² Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo”. *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 40.
- ³ Kakuta never mentions her sister’s name in interviews or her writing, perhaps to protect her privacy.
- ⁴ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 182.
- ⁵ Perhaps due to her mother’s feelings about the area, in an interview in *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Kakuta describes Midori-ku in the 1970s as “inaka”, a disparaging term meaning “rural, small-town” and often “backward”. Midori-ku was renamed ‘Tsuduki-ku’ in 1994, and is now widely regarded as part of Yokohama.
- ⁶ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.) Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 67.
- ⁷ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.). Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 67.
- ⁸ Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo.” *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 39.
- ⁹ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 65.
- ¹⁰ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 65.
- ¹¹ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.), “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 66.
- ¹² Kakuta, Mitsuyo. “Anata no Dokusho Taiken wo Kikasete Kudasai.” (Please Tell Us About Your Reading Experiences) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. Winter 2004. 23.
- ¹³ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 180.
- ¹⁴ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 37.
- ¹⁵ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 35.
- ¹⁶ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 35.
- ¹⁷ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.). Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 67.
- ¹⁸ Kakuta, Mitsuyo. “Anata no Dokusho Taiken wo Kikasete Kudasai.” (please tell us about your reading experiences) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. Winter 2004. 23.
- ¹⁹ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 66.
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- ²¹ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 66.
- ²² Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo”. *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 41.
- ²³ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 65.

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- ²⁷ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 66.
- ²⁸ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Hiroshi Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.). Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 68.
- ²⁹ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.). Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 68.
- ³⁰ Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo”. *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 41.
- ³¹ Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo”. *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 42.
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- ⁴⁰ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.), “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 11.
- ⁴¹ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 36.
- ⁴² Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 280.
- ⁴³ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 36.
- ⁴⁴ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 280.
- ⁴⁵ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Sakai, Junko. “Gurūpu Nakushite Josei wa Nashi.” (There are No Women Without Groups) *Shōsetsu Hōseki*. 1/6/2005. 24.
- ⁴⁶ In Japan, students start school and new employees start work at the beginning of April. Soon after this, in late April and early May, there are a string of public holidays close together that are known as Golden Week. Some find themselves unable to return to their new positions after this time away, and the problem is known as Freshman’s Apathy Syndrome.
- ⁴⁷ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Sakai, Junko. “Gurūpu Nakushite Josei wa Nashi.” (There are No Women Without Groups) *Shōsetsu Hōseki*. 1/6/2005. 24.
- ⁴⁸ Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo”. *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 43.
- ⁴⁹ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I

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⁵⁰ Abe, Fumie. “Shōgakkō Ninensei no Toki ni wa Sakka ni Naritai to Kangaete Imashita” (When I was in Year Two I Thought I Wanted to be an Author). *Hon Yomo!*, Yamazaki, Hiroshi (ed.). Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 70.

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⁵³ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 281.

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⁵⁵ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 37. (Also Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 283.)

⁵⁶ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 283.

⁵⁷ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 67.

⁵⁸ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 182. (Also Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 286.)

⁵⁹ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 38.

⁶⁰ Ōkawa, Hanae et al. “Kakuta Mitsuyo”. *Sakka no Dokusho Dō* (Author’s Reading Paths), Hamamoto, Shigeru (ed.). Tokyo: Hon no Zasshisha, 2005. 41.

⁶¹ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 37.

⁶² In the Japanese publishing world there is a very clear delineation between literature and entertainment. Nothing published in a non-literary forum is recognised as part of a literary author’s canon of works.

⁶³ Kakuta has referred to this in several interviews, notably in *Bungei* 44.1, but her submission remains untraceable due to the use of an undisclosed pseudonym. Neither the name Kakuta nor Saikawa appears in the list of finalists published in *Saishin Bungakusho Jiten 89/93*. Tokyo: 1994. 102. Using a new name may have been a further attempt to hide the fact that she was striving to achieve acclaim.

⁶⁴ “Kakuta Mitsuyo” <http://ja.wikipedia.org/> accessed 31/8/2007.

⁶⁵ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 38.

⁶⁶ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.) “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 82.

⁶⁷ Hiraki, Yasuko. “Me Yesterday Today Tomorrow.” *Croissant* 29.7 (2005). 112.

⁶⁸ Hiraki, Yasuko. “Me Yesterday Today Tomorrow.” *Croissant* 29.7 (2005). 112.

⁶⁹ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Hoshino, Tomoyuki. “Shōsetsu wa Manaberu ka?” (Can Writing be Learnt?) *Gunzō*. 6/2005. 290.

⁷⁰ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 182.

⁷¹ Ishikawa, Tadashi. “The Novel and Community.” *Bungaku Saisei Keikaku*, Ishikawa, Tadashi and Kōyama, Shūichi (ed.). Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2000. 144.

⁷² Ishitobi, Kano. “Otoko no Hito tte Ketteiteki ni Onna no Hito Yori Yasashii to omou” (I think that Men are Definitely Kinder than Women.) *Oeuf*. 041(2005). 11.

⁷³ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai*

Zensho. 14/2/2003. 180.

⁷⁴ Nemoto, Masao (ed.). “The Ninth Kaien Newcomer’s Award Announcements.” *Kaien* 9.11(1990). 21.

⁷⁵ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 38.

⁷⁶ Nemoto, Masao (ed.). “The Ninth Kaien Newcomer’s Award Announcements”. *Kaien* 9.11(1990). 18.

⁷⁷ *Saishin Bungakushō Jiten 89/93*, Tokyo: 1994. 74.

⁷⁸ Shirakawa, Kōji (ed.). “The 108th Akutagawa Award Announcements.” *Bungei Shunjū* 71.3(1993). 421.

⁷⁹ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 181.

⁸⁰ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 72.

⁸¹ Saitō, Minako (ed.). *Eru Bungaku Kanzen Doku Hon*. Tokyo: Magazine House, 2003: 126.

⁸² Machiguchi, Tetsuo. “Kakuta Mitsuyo no Kiseki.” (The Path of Kakuta Mitsuyo) *Shūkan Dokushojin*. 4/3/2005. 1.

⁸³ Shirakawa, Kōji (ed.). “The 109th Akutagawa Award Announcements.” *Bungei Shunjū* 71.9(1993). 404.

⁸⁴ Shirakawa, Kōji (ed.). “The 109th Akutagawa Award Announcements.” *Bungei Shunjū* 71.9(1993). 405.

⁸⁵ Shirakawa, Kōji (ed.). “The 110th Akutagawa Award Announcements.” *Bungei Shunjū* 72.4(1994). 372.

⁸⁶ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 73.

⁸⁷ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 73.

⁸⁸ The prize is awarded to a work of fiction published between September 1 and August 31 of the previous year. *Boku wa Kimi no Onisan* had been published in October of 1996 and was therefore eligible.

⁸⁹ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 73.

⁹⁰ This text was published with its title written in both katakana and English. The reader can therefore assume that the ‘no’ here is not the Japanese possessive pronoun, but rather the English negative. The usage of the word ‘coupling,’ however, is the Japanese usage of the word. Rather than the purely physical, sexual joining that the English word conveys, used in Japanese it implies dating.

⁹¹ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Nagashima, Ryū. “Tsūjinai kotoba no itoshisa.” (The Sweetness of Words that Can’t be Understood) *Ōru Yomimono*. 3/2005. 111.

⁹² Machiguchi, Tetsuo. “The Path of Kakuta Mitsuyo.” *Shūkan Dokusho Jin* 2577(2005). 1.

⁹³ Enomoto, Masaki. “Kakuta Mitsuyo no Genzai.” (The Present Kakuta Mitsuyo.) *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 107.

⁹⁴ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Kakuta Mitsuyo ni Koisuru Mitsu no Mahō.” (The Three Magical Charms that will Make you Love Kakuta Mitsuyo) *da Vinci*. 6/2005. 58.

⁹⁵ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 181.

⁹⁶ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.) “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 69.

⁹⁷ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Nagashima, Ryū. “Tsūjinai kotoba no itoshisa.” (The Sweetness of Words that Can’t be Understood.) *Ōru Yomimono*. 3/2005. 109.

⁹⁸ Kakuta, Mitsuyo and Onda, Riku. “Minna Kodomo no koro kara Kaite ita” (Everyone was Writing Since Childhood.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. 2.12 Summer 2004. 39.

⁹⁹ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 83.

¹⁰⁰ Kakuta refers to this gift herself in an interview with Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.), “Kakuta Mitsuyo

Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 80. She does not, however, explain where it came from, how much it was or why she was given it.

¹⁰¹ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 83.

¹⁰² Publishers were unsure whether children would be familiar with the recent addition to the Japanese lexicon, ‘kidnap’, but allowed Kakuta to use the word in the title if it were carefully explained on the book jacket.

¹⁰³ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.) “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 83.

¹⁰⁴ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.) “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 83.

¹⁰⁵ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 81.

¹⁰⁶ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 81.

¹⁰⁷ Enomoto Masaki. “Kakuta Mitsuyo no Genzai” (the present Kakuta Mitsuyo.) *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 107.

¹⁰⁸ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 81.

¹⁰⁹ Nishimura, Yōichi. “Tarako: Kakuta Mitsuyo.” (Cod Roe: Kakuta Mitsuyo.) *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 24/5/2005.

¹¹⁰ Nagae, Akira. “Ima, Kakuta Mitsuyo ga Omoshiroi.” (Now Kakuta Mitsuyo is Interesting.) *In Pocket*. 6/2004. 88.

¹¹¹ Nukumizu, Yukari. “Sakka wa ika ni Tsukurareru ka?” (How Can Writers be Made?) *Kaitai Zensho*. 14/2/2003. 182.

¹¹² Ishijima, Ritsuko. “Books Dokusho Nabi” (Book-Reading Guide) *Lettuce Club* 19.19(2005): 81.

¹¹³ Katsuo, Satoshi (ed.). “The 128th Naoki Award Announcements.” *Ōru Yomimono* 58.3 (2003). 53.

¹¹⁴ Katsuo, Satoshi (ed.). “The 128th Naoki Award Announcements.” *Ōru Yomimono* 58.3 (2003). 63.

¹¹⁵ Kuse, Teruhiko. “Onna o Yomu” (Reading Women). *Brio* 5.4 (2003). 109.

¹¹⁶ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.) “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 84.

¹¹⁷ Kuse, Teruhiko. “Onna o Yomu” (Reading Women). *Brio* 5.4 (2003). 109.

¹¹⁸ Kakuta, Mitsuyo. “Anata no Dokusho Taiken wo Kikasete Kudasai.” (Please Tell Us About Your Reading Experiences.) *Kikan Hon to Konpyūtā*. Winter 2004. 23.

¹¹⁹ Miura, Shion and Kakuta, Mitsuyo. “The Enjoyment of Book Reviews.” www.poplarbeech.com/danwa/danwa_061006.html accessed 6/6/2007.

¹²⁰ Miura, Shion and Kakuta, Mitsuyo. “The Enjoyment of Book Reviews.” www.poplarbeech.com/danwa/danwa_061006.html accessed 6/6/2007.

¹²¹ Enomoto Masaki. “Kakuta Mitsuyo no Genzai” (The Present Kakuta Mitsuyo) *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 107.

¹²² Ishitobi, Kano. “Otoko no Hito tte Ketteiteki ni Onna no Hito Yori Yasashii to Omou” (I Think that Men are Definitely Kinder than Women.) *Oeuf*. 041(2005). 11.

¹²³ Japan’s pension system relies on the contributions of working people in order to be able to pay a monthly stipend to the elderly. As the number of people earning salaries and making such contributions is decreasing, and the number of elderly needing such support is increasing, however, it is unclear how much longer the system can continue.

¹²⁴ According to information released to its shareholders, the channel had some 2.3 million subscribers in 2007. http://www.wowow.jp/CGI/autoup/autoup_dsp.cgi/ir/j1/0001468 accessed 14/7/2008.

¹²⁵ Buckley, Sandra. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese feminism*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1997. 69. Buckley goes on to give two specific areas of concern for the Japanese right: women’s access to abortion, and welfare.

¹²⁶ Kittredge, Cherry. *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987. 94.

¹²⁷ Laws implemented in 1986 put in place a framework to rectify many of these inequalities, but some restrictions remained: women under the age of 18 still could not work at night, and work considered dangerous was not allowed for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Weekly and yearly limits for overtime work were also left in place. <<http://labor.tank.jp/rouki-kaiseinenpyou.html>> accessed 2007/08/24

¹²⁸ Morley, Patricia. *The Mountain is Moving: Japanese women's lives*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 75.

¹²⁹ Buckley, Sandra. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese feminism*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1997. 69.

¹³⁰ Chreighton, Millie R. "Marriage, Motherhood, and Career Management in a Japanese 'Counter Culture.'" *Re-Imaging Japanese Women*. ed. Anne E. Imamura, 192-219. Berkley: University of California Press, 1996. 192.

¹³¹ Kittredge, Cherry. *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987. 94.

¹³² While the terms 'equality' and 'parity' are often used synonymously, the fact that one was changed to the other shows that the difference between them was seen to be important. Their meanings are similar to the extent that the Concise Oxford Dictionary lists 'equality' as the first meaning of 'parity'. The usage here of the term 'parity' seems to imply that men and women would be treated as if they were equal under the new law, rather than actually acknowledged as such.

¹³³ <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>> Accessed Jan 4, 2008.

¹³⁴ Iwao, Sumiko. "Working Women and Housewives," *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 51.

¹³⁵ Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993. 1707.

¹³⁶ Kittredge, Cherry. *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987. 106.

¹³⁷ Chreighton, Millie R. "Marriage, Motherhood, and Career Management in a Japanese 'Counter Culture.'" *Re-Imaging Japanese Women*. Imamura, Anne E. (ed.). Berkley: University of California Press, 1996. 194.

¹³⁸ Morley, Patricia. *The Mountain is Moving: Japanese women's lives*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 73.

¹³⁹ Laver, Ross. "Will the Steam Run Out?" *Maclean's* 18/11/1991. 48.

¹⁴⁰ English Discussion Society. *Japanese Women Now II*. Kyoto: Shōkadō Booksellers Company, 1996. 65. (also *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 10/7/1995.)

¹⁴¹ English Discussion Society. *Japanese Women Now II*. Kyoto: Shōkadō Booksellers Company, 1996. 64.

¹⁴² Kawashima, Yoko. "The Labor Market, Corporate Organisation, Corporate Culture, and Gender in Japan." ed. Wakita Haruko, Ann Bouchy and Ueno Chizuko. *Gender and Japanese History: the self and expression/ work and life Volume Two*. Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1999. 515.

¹⁴³ Kawashima, Yoko. "The Labor Market, Corporate Organisation, Corporate Culture, and Gender in Japan." ed. Wakita Haruko, Ann Bouchy and Ueno Chizuko. *Gender and Japanese History: the self and expression/ work and life Volume Two*. Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1999. 515.

¹⁴⁴ English Discussion Society. *Japanese Women Now II*. Kyoto: Shōkadō Booksellers Company, 1996. 64. (also *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 10/7/1995.)

¹⁴⁵ Morley, Patricia. *The Mountain is Moving: Japanese women's lives*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 71. (also Chreighton, Millie R. "Marriage, Motherhood, and Career Management in a Japanese 'Counter Culture.'" *Re-Imaging Japanese Women*. ed. Anne E. Imamura, 192-219. Berkley: University of California Press, 1996. 195.

¹⁴⁶ Maipedia Encyclopedia in Casio XD-W6500.

¹⁴⁷ JIWE, "Survey on Female Sōgō-shoku Workers' Condition." *Japan Institute of Workers Evolution*, 2000.

¹⁴⁸ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Rosenberger, Nancy Ross. *Gambling with Virtue: Japanese women and the search for self in a changing nation*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2001. 6.

¹⁵⁰ English Discussion Society. *Japanese Women Now II*. Kyoto: Shōkadō Booksellers Company,

1996. 65.

¹⁵¹ Babara Moloney in Morley, Patricia. *The Mountain is Moving: Japanese women's lives*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 76.

¹⁵² Kittredge Cherry is under the mistaken impression here that menstrual leave has been removed from the law books, and thus comments here in the past tense. Kittredge, Cherry. *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987. 95.

¹⁵³ Yamada, Masahiro. "The Housewife: A Dying Breed?" *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 58.

¹⁵⁴ *The Asahi Shimbun Japan Almanac 2006*. Tokyo: The Asahi Shimbun, 2005. 124.

¹⁵⁵ Ishijima, Ritsuko. "Books Dokusho Nabi" (Book-Reading Guide). *Lettuce Club* 19.19(2005). 81.

¹⁵⁶ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 103.

¹⁵⁷ While *Babies and Bosses* states that it was in 1973 that the TFR fell below the replacement rate, widely accepted as being 2.1, the Japan Almanac shows clearly that the rate was 2.14 for 1965, 2.13 for 1970 and 2.14 for 1973. In 1975 it dropped to 1.91 and has continued to fall. *The Asahi Shimbun Japan Almanac 2006*. Tokyo: The Asahi Shimbun, 2005. 87.

¹⁵⁸ This is a tentative figure for 2007. The 2006 figure was 1.32. Statistical Handbook of Japan 2008, Statistics Bureau, Japan at http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/pdf/t2_4.pdf accessed 22/10/08.

¹⁵⁹ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 117.

¹⁶⁰ Butler, Steven. "Japan's baby bust: are Japan's unmarried 30-somethings 'parasites' on society?" *U.S. News and World Report* 5/10/1998. 42.

¹⁶¹ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 103.

¹⁶² Funabashi, Keiko. "Reassessing the Value of Children." *Japan Echo* 2/1999. 32.

¹⁶³¹⁶³¹⁶³ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris, OECD Publications, 2003. 108. Also quoted as 1% in Yamada, Masahiro. *The Japanese Family in Transition*. Tokyo: Foreign Press Center/Japan, 1998. 7.

¹⁶⁴ Patricia Morley writes that, "In 1972 the Diet passed the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Law with the proviso that it should come into effect in 1986." I have been unable to corroborate that the *Kinrō Fujin Fukushi Hō* is the law to which she refers, but could find no other law passed in 1972 that addressed the status of working women. There was therefore no mention of such a proviso.

¹⁶⁵ <http://business2.plala.or.jp/kensyoku/gakushuukai/sengoroudouhouhensen.htm> accessed 9/2/08

¹⁶⁶ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 116.

¹⁶⁷ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 116.

¹⁶⁸ Ogawa, Naohiro. "Japan's Changing Fertility Mechanisms and its Policy Responses." *Journal of Population Research* 5/2003.

¹⁶⁹ Kawashima, Yoko. "The Labor Market, Corporate Organisation, Corporate Culture, and Gender in Japan." ed. Wakita Haruko, Ann Bouchy and Ueno Chizuko. *Gender and Japanese History: the self and expression/ work and life Volume Two*. Osaka: Osaka University Press, 1999. 519.

¹⁷⁰ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 72.

¹⁷¹ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 20.

¹⁷² *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 19.

¹⁷³ Male usage of such family support policies in Japan is very limited, quoted as 0.4% in *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 21.

¹⁷⁴ "Nippon no chichioya to kodomo" ('Japanese fathers and their children'). *Sōmuchō Seishōnen taisaku hombu*, Tokyo, 1987. 32, 2.1.

¹⁷⁵ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2003. 14.

¹⁷⁶ *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life: Volume Three New Zealand, Portugal and Switzerland*. Paris: OECD, 2004. 85.

¹⁷⁷ www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm accessed 15/5/2008.

¹⁷⁸ www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm accessed 15/5/2008.

¹⁷⁹ Jolivet, Muriel. *Japan: The Childless Society*. Routledge. London 1997. 55.

¹⁸⁰ Funabashi, Keiko. "Reassessing the Value of Children." *Japan Echo* 2/1999. 35.

¹⁸¹ Funabashi, Keiko. "Reassessing the Value of Children." *Japan Echo* 2/1999. 34.

¹⁸² Jolivet, Muriel. *Japan: The Childless Society*. London: Routledge, 1997. 56.

- ¹⁸³ Jolivet, Muriel. *Japan: The Childless Society*. London: Routledge, 1997. 56.
- ¹⁸⁴ Kawamoto, Yūko. "Doing Something for the Unemployed Young" *Japan Echo* 8/ 2003: 57.
- ¹⁸⁵ While the high growth period ended with the oil crisis in 1973, growth between 1-4% continued between 1975 and 1990.
- ¹⁸⁶ Yamada, Masahiro. "The Housewife: A Dying Breed?" *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 56.
- ¹⁸⁷ *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993. 1705
- ¹⁸⁸ Yamada, Masahiro. *The Japanese Family in Transition*. Tokyo: Foreign Press Center/ Japan, 1998. 20.
- ¹⁸⁹ Kondō, Motohiro. "Japan's New Misfits," *Japan Echo* 2/2005. 8.
- ¹⁹⁰ Kondō, Motohiro. "Japan's New Misfits," *Japan Echo* 2/2005. 8.
- ¹⁹¹ Yamada, Masahiro. "The Expectation Gap: Winners and Losers in the New Economy." *Japan Echo* 2/2005. 9.
- ¹⁹² Iwao, Sumiko. "Working Women and Housewives." *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 51.
- ¹⁹³ Iwao, Sumiko. *The Japanese Woman: traditional image and changing reality*. New York: Macmillan, 1993. 63.
- ¹⁹⁴ Iwao, Sumiko. *The Japanese Woman: traditional image and changing reality*. New York: Macmillan, 1993. 60.
- ¹⁹⁵ Yamada, Masahiro. *The Japanese Family in Transition*. Tokyo: Foreign Press Center/Japan, 1998. 22.
- ¹⁹⁶ Curtain, J. Sean. "Women Advancing in Japanese Society-Part Three: Is Balancing Family and Work Responsibilities Becoming Easier for Women?" *GLOCOM* 28/1/2005.
- ¹⁹⁷ Curtain, J. Sean. "Changing Attitudes towards Gender Roles in Japan: 2002 Snapshot." *GLOCOM* 24/9/2002.
- ¹⁹⁸ Bardsley, Jan. "Women, Marriage and the State in Modern Japan: Introduction," *Women's Studies*, 33, (2004). 355. Though Bardsley is commenting here on the work of Hirota Aki and Hirakawa Hiroko, her comments seem also to apply to Kakuta's work.
- ¹⁹⁹ Buckley, Sandra. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese feminism*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1997. 74.
- ²⁰⁰ Yamada, Masahiro. "The Housewife: A Dying Breed?" *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 54.
- ²⁰¹ Yamada, Masahiro. "The Housewife: A Dying Breed?" *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 54.
- ²⁰² Curtain, J. Sean. "Women Advancing in Japanese Society-Part Three: Is Balancing Family and Work Responsibilities Becoming Easier for Women?" *GLOCOM* 28/1/2005.
- ²⁰³ Yamada, Masahiro. "The Housewife: A Dying Breed?" *Japan Echo* 4/2001. 56.
- ²⁰⁴ *The Asahi Shimbun Japan Almanac 2006*. Tokyo: The Asahi Shimbun, 2005. 89.
- ²⁰⁵ Curtain, J. Sean. "Changing Attitudes towards Gender Roles in Japan: 2002 Snapshot." *GLOCOM* 24/9/2002.
- ²⁰⁶ Jolivet, Muriel. *Japan: The Childless Society*. London: Routledge, 1997. 11.
- ²⁰⁷ English Discussion Society. *Japanese Women Now II*. Kyoto: Shōkadō Booksellers Company, 1996. 49.
- ²⁰⁸ Andrews, Allen A. et al. *Keys to the Japanese Heart and Soul*. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1996. 77.
- ²⁰⁹ DeVos, G.A. "Psychocultural Continuities in Japanese Social Motivation," in D.W.Schwalb and B.J.Schwalb, *Japanese Childrearing: Two Generations of Scholarship*. New York: Guilford Press, 1996.
- ²¹⁰ Holloway, Susan D, et al. "Relation of Maternal Role Concepts to Parenting, Employment Choices, and Life Satisfaction Among Japanese Women" *Sex Roles Ment Health Jron* Vol. 54, nos. 3/4, 2/2006. 237.
- ²¹¹ Funabashi, Keiko. "Reassessing the Value of Children." *Japan Echo*, 2/1999. 35.
- ²¹² Hayashi, Mariko. *Anego* (Big Sister Type). Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2003. 161.
- ²¹³ Nishitani, Satoshi. "Assessing the Growth in Nonregular Employment." *Japan Echo* 4/2003. 63.
- ²¹⁴ Morley, Patricia. *The Mountain is Moving: Japanese women's lives*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. 70.
- ²¹⁵ The payment is made up of 14,410 per month for pension and approximately the same again for

health insurance, but differs slightly depending on the area in which people live. Reduced payments are possible for people who are unable to meet the payments, but result in insurance payouts in proportion to contributions. www.sia.go.jp/infom/pamph/dl/englsih01.pdf accessed 20/7/2008.

²¹⁶ While childbirth is not covered by the national health insurance scheme, most local wards recompense medical expenses for up to 350 thousand yen for a healthy child. This is not always sufficient. Another problem exists in that the hospital must be paid in cash before the new mother can go home, and the reimbursement applied for at the ward office. It is often weeks before the money is available. Should a birth be deemed abnormal, or the mother or her child needs more extensive medical care, all costs are fully covered. If a woman is not enrolled in the national health insurance scheme, however, she must pay for all costs herself, and no reimbursement is possible.

²¹⁷ Kondō, Motohiro. ‘Japan’s Dependent Singles,’ *Japan Echo* 6/2000. 47.

²¹⁸ Kondō, Motohiro. ‘A New Class of Drifters,’ *Japan Echo* 10/2001. 50.

²¹⁹ *Shimbun Akahata* (The Red Flag Newspaper), 28/9/2006.

²²⁰ Gordon, Andrew. “From Modern Girls to Parasites: The Enduring Discourse of Women in Japan,” *Tsushin*, Vol.7, no.2, Fall 2001.

²²¹ Zipangu defines itself as “a grass root, non-profit organization whose purpose it to explore possibilities of dynamic dialogue between people of different cultures, especially focusing on cultural dialogue between Japan and the U.S.A.” www.ezipnagu.org. Accessed 7/1/08.

²²² Ashby, Janet. Foreword to *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*, Cherry Kittredge. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2002.ii.

²²³ Kawamoto, Yūko. “Doing Something for the Unemployed Young.” *Japan Echo* 8/2003. 54.

²²⁴ Genda, Yūji. “Don’t blame the Unmarried Breed,” *Japan Echo* 6/2000. 54.

²²⁵ Genda, Yūji. “Don’t blame the Unmarried Breed,” *Japan Echo* 6/2000. 54.

²²⁶ Yamada, Masahiro. “No Future for ‘Freeters’.” *Japan Echo* 10/2001. 52.

²²⁷ Curtain, J. Sean. “Marriage and Divorce in Today’s Japan: Pregnant Brides a Growing Trend.” *GLOCOM* 9/9/2003.

²²⁸ Butler, Steven. “Japan’s baby bust: are unmarried 30-somethings ‘parasites’ on society?” *U.S. News and World Report* 5/10/1998. 42.

²²⁹ Another book published in 2003 by Kōdansha was *Dempa Otaku* (Electric Wave Nut, 2003) by Honda Tōru, which explored and expounded the idea that romantic love is a modern Western construct and, as such, is of no more value than the animated films, computer games and pornography to which many young men devote their time. The title of his work is adapted from Nakano Hitoshi’s wildly successful *Densha Otoko* (Trainman, Shinchōsha, 2004), the love story of an average Japanese man.

²³⁰ Connell, Ryann. “‘Tail between legs’ position has spinsters hissing.” *Mainichi Daily News* 5/1/2004.

²³¹ French, Howard W. “Japan’s Neglected Resource: Female Workers.” *The New York Times* 25/7/2003.

²³² French, Howard W. “Japan’s Neglected Resource: Female Workers.” *The New York Times* 25/7/2003.

²³³ Kittredge, Cherry. *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987. 17.

²³⁴ Kittredge, Cherry. *Womansword: what Japanese words say about women*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1987. 17.

²³⁵ While arranged marriages are no longer the norm in Japan, families often ask around to see if anyone knows someone suitable. If the two meet and get on well, they often marry.

²³⁶ Yoshida, Hisayasu (ed.) “Kakuta Mitsuyo Long Interview” *Bungei* 44.1 (2005). 69.