Dear Helen

Thanks for letting me have a look at *Mapping Genres, Mapping Culture – Japanese texts in context*. I’m sorry it’s taken so long to get back to you.

As a foreign policy public servant, a long-time student of the Japanese language and as an active translator, I found the book interesting and educative. I particularly liked the analyses of the Japanese news media, the chapter on nihonjinron (a theme which has become less prominent since Japan entered its current period of low-growth about thirty years ago, but which remains of political and cultural significance), and the discussion on folk tales.

As a translator of many newspaper articles, the chapters on this topic were thought-provoking and a touch reassuring. Noriko’s chapter was a fascinating look at wartime reporting, where the Japanese government was trying to mobilise hearts and minds. As Noriko points out, wartime Japanese editors construed it as being magnificent to die on the battlefield fighting an overwhelmingly strong enemy. And, as Noriko notes (on page 160), some of these concepts remain prized in Japan today.

That should strike the reader as interesting. If a wartime concept remains prized in contemporary peacetime Japan, then how much “censorship” was going on. This isn’t my original observation - histories of wartime Japan frequently point out many average punters had become so charged up by the war effort that they began egging on the authorities.

I also liked Masamichi’s “An analysis of Japanese news stories” for purely practical reasons as it neatly set out some of the rules and guidelines for reading the text layout of so many of the Japanese newspaper articles that I read. I add that when you translate this text into a standard Calibri 11 font, you do feel challenged to choose words that will carry the weight of the meaning inferred by the oversized fonts and prominent placement of the headlines in the original. On this score, I doubt that I ever do that well, but Masamichi has persuaded me that I’m getting most of it right.

This book has something that catches your eye on every page. In “Once upon a time” Elizabeth has written, “In studies of Western folktales, women are typically construed as passive, helpless, emotional and nurturing... Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Japanese women are also construed within a patriarchy in similar ways”.

Well, I’d agree there’s no doubt that some Japanese women are construed this way. On the other hand, as Elizabeth’s own examples show, we have a witch who murders a child, a wife who lies to her husband and eats his male friend, and two women who control where their male partner lives and what he does, and then decide when they’ll take off, abandoning the husband to his own devices.

Passive, helpless, emotional? The women do often seem placed in unenviable situations, but, like Vladimir Putin, they play a weak hand exceptionally well. And, frequently, the men look so unable to keep a simple secret, so under-equipped to manage the simplest of tasks, so lacking in moral fibre. Somehow, I think the community enjoying these tales is having a bit of a laugh (or a dig) at the whole situation.

I look forward to sitting down with a copy of the book when it’s out.

Kind regards