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Chasing Haruki Around the World

A discussion, with Yomota Inuhiko, Shibata Motoyuki, Numano Mitsuyoshi

In countries all over the world something is happening that has never happened before as far as Japanese literature is concerned—a boom, a Murakami Haruki boom. During the course of my frequent trips to different parts of the world, I am often asked about Murakami Haruki. Step into a large bookstore in any country, and Murakami's books are stacked next to books by Nabokov. In South Korea, the nostalgia of the generation coming into its own following the struggles for democracy in the 1970s sees itself crystallized in Haruki's work, spawning a cadre of young writers who have come to be called the Haruki Generation. In Ulan Bator, Mongolia, there are readers of the Russian edition of *A Wild Sheep Chase: A Novel* who declare that they "are the only ones who can truly understand" the book. In Belgrade, where I visited recently, students sunk in the political despondency of the post-Milosevic era are reading and sympathizing with the Croatian publication of *Norwegian Wood*. In Hong Kong, the director Stanley Kwan made a film called *Island Tales*, in which the main character is a Japanese writer named Haruki.

In the broad narrative of how Japanese culture is received abroad, the case of Murakami Haruki presents a phenomenon that I find fascinating. The whole topic, including the idea of "transgressing" cultural borders, has great potential for analysis from any number of angles, and right now seems the perfect time to make a thorough study of it. Here, by sharing their views and insights, two scholars who are knowledgeable about the response to Murakami Haruki in the United States and Europe contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon.

Yomota Inuhiko, advisory board, *Japanese Book News*

Transgressing Borders

Shibata: *Kafka on the Shore* was recently published in the United States, and soon after, John Updike wrote a three-page review in the January 24, 2005 issue of *The New Yorker*. Updike, incidentally, is the kind of writer a character in a Murakami book would read. The book was also reviewed on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review* by star critic Laura Miller, and an up-and-coming writer, Paul Lafarge, wrote an enthusiastic review in *The Village Voice*. Nowadays Murakami is not a foreign author from some faraway land; he is treated as a denizen of the American literary universe. All the reviews of his latest book include references and comparisons to his other works. In another sense also he is received differently from Kawabata Yasunari or Mishima Yukio, for example. One reason people read works by authors like the latter is to learn something about Japan. This is partly true even of Ōe Kenzaburō, although to a smaller extent. In the case of Murakami, there cannot be many readers, if any, who seek out his books for that reason.

Murakami is a cohort of and blends in easily among young American writers, yet something about his work sets him off from writers in the English-speaking world. Laura Miller, for example, augments her positive review of *Kafka on the Shore* with the comment that everything in the novel is done "wrong" by Western standards of fiction, but that makes the book all the more interesting. In his review, John Updike goes into a long discourse on Shinto, declaring that without a solid understanding of the religion one cannot fully understand the novel.

Yomota: Does that mean that they are looking, ultimately, for a representation of Japan somewhere?

Shibata: I think they feel a little bit of both. First, these responses reflect a sense of familiarity, that this is an author you can read without having to consider a Japanese backdrop of some kind. Certainly one starts off that way, but as you continue reading Murakami, there develops the gnawing feeling that something is actually quite different. That feeling comes out in the way Updike goes into Shinto instead of writing a straightforward review of the book; this is a common tactic used in reviews of new books written by big-name authors like Updike himself.

Numano: The bookstore scene in Russia is the same as in the United States. In the fiction section of any large bookstore, the biggest space is taken up by Murakami's books. His novels are lined up alongside all the most familiar twentieth-century authors like Kundera, Garcia Marquez, and Nabokov. Murakami is firmly settled in the educated reader's canon. But with a difference. While he may be considered a part of the canon, Murakami's work is not necessarily read as standard literary fare. More accurately—at the risk of sounding cynical—it is perceived as exotic to just the right degree. If his



Numano Mitsuyoshi

novels were like Russian literature, they would not have that distinctive appeal. Russian readers in general are sick and tired of everyday Russian life. They pick up a book to find some fantasy, a world different from the place they inhabit. While Mishima and Kawabata shine as writers, they are too removed from their own world for Russian readers to identify. As Russian translator Dmitry Kovalenin also has pointed out, young Russians can sympathize with the psychology and actions of Murakami's characters. What it comes down to is that Murakami offers a mildly exotic take on what is basically a variation of universal contemporary literature. Before he came along, there were few talented authors in the Russian literary world who could claim that achievement. Murakami's work filled the void.

Way back when, before the days of Murakami translation—and of course before the Murakami craze—a high-brow periodical (in which experts published reviews of new foreign books that they had read in the original languages) called *Sovremennaya khudozhestvennaya literatura za rubezhom* was quick to review *Hear the Wind Sing*. That was 1980. In one issue, a Russian scholar of Japan wrote that the book was about the world of Japanese *mono no aware* (the pathos of things). In Japan at the time, from what I remember, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. and Richard Brautigan were compared with Murakami, who was described as an emerging “American-style” author. At the same time, a Russian Japanologist happened to find a traditionally Japanese aesthetic in Murakami's book, a reaction the exact opposite of ours in Japan. I think this gap still exists. As far as I know, Murakami is not considered an “American”-style author in either Europe or Russia.

Shibata: That's very interesting.

Numano: When something unfamiliar to Russian or European readers crops up in a Murakami book, those readers tend to see the unfamiliar element as essentially Japanese. People in Russia and Eastern Europe are generally positive about Japanese culture as a whole, and so they approve of that element they find in Murakami's work. Murakami is not seen as American but Japanese. That may be why his books are so well-liked.

Shibata: That makes the Russian/European reaction to Murakami quite different from that of the English-speaking world, doesn't it!

Numano: You are probably right. In the United States, I think the matter is trickier. When something recognizably American appears in a Murakami book, the connotations it holds for American readers are completely different from those for the Japanese reader.

Shibata: Right. And the issue is not about how American culture gets distorted, or transformed, when it reaches Japanese shores, but rather how Murakami projects the culture. For example, if Colonel Sanders appears in a Murakami book, he is likely to be depicted in terms of the deconstruction of the original American meaning of Colonel Sanders. This is different from watching an Aki

Kaurismäki film and seeing how lonely and dejected American things look once they reach Finland. Instead of representing a Japanese slant on the same American object, the Murakami approach is probably taken as a kind of arbitrary deconstruction of an American object by a Japanese author.

Yomota: During a couple of years living in New York, my perceptions of what is “American” came tumbling down. The West Coast and New York are different countries, and then there's Miami and Spanish-speaking America. The concept of what is “American” is too amorphous for me.

Shibata: When I, and maybe most other people, speak of “America” in general terms, we are referring to WASP culture.

Yomota: Or the Hollywood film world.

Shibata: Right. And then someone will always counter, “Oh, but the real America is jazz and blues; the real culture is not WASP but the culture of ethnic minorities.” The interesting thing about Murakami is that he is not really concerned with whatever is “real,” either. In the back cover of his first book, *Hear the Wind Sing*, he quotes from the Beach Boys song, “California Girls.” At the time, the Beach Boys were considered soft, not really rock 'n' roll. The real thing was more hardcore.

Numano: By then he had already strayed from the mainstream.

Shibata: That's right. Murakami has always said that one of his author-role models is F. Scott Fitzgerald, a writer who, in the perspective of the Faulkner-Hemingway school—one author a severe minimalist and the other known for his extravagant writing—is not quite up to par. Even when it comes to jazz, Murakami is just as enthusiastic about West Coast white musicians as he is about East Coast black jazz; he is free from the restrictions dictated by pursuit of the “real.” In Japan, many readers probably respond intuitively to that element of his writing. I do not know if people overseas talk about how much Murakami deviates from mainstream American culture, but readers must be somehow aware that Murakami does not hold out one thing as “the answer.”

The Culture of Murakami Literature

Yomota: A new phenomenon that has developed out of the Murakami craze is “fan culture.” In the 1990s, Koreans spoke of the “Haruki generation.” Before Murakami, Korean literature had been inseparably bound to the theme of family. With the arrival of Murakami literature, however, writers realized that it was possible for characters set loose from family relationships to be literary protagonists. It did not take long for such works to begin appearing. In the novel *Euneo Naksi Tongsin* [Fishing for Sweetfish News], by Yoon Dae-nyeong, an author of this generation, the protagonist is a single photographer in his thirties who lives in an apartment in Seoul



Yomota Inuhiko

where he drinks whiskey alone at night while listening to Billie Holiday. One day he receives a mysterious letter from a former girlfriend, a fashion model. As he reads the letter, the phone rings. A voice tells him, “You must think about the origins of your existence,” and hangs up. The letter is signed, “Fishing for Sweetfish News.” The story begins with a reflection by the protagonist as he conjectures what all this is about.

When I started to read that book, I was stunned. It looked to me like a faithful, unabashed pastiche of Murakami. But when you think about the cultures of our world, you can find numerous examples of people who have become enthralled with something and are trying to recreate it in their own language, thereby developing a new culture.

The Hong Kong film *Island Tales*, in which the main character is a writer named Haruki, is showing now in Japan. Wong Kar-Wai wanted to make *Norwegian Wood* into a movie, but failing to obtain the rights to it, he made a film titled *Chungching senlin* [Chungching Wood; English title *Chungking Express*, Japanese title *Koi suru wakusei* (Planet of Love)] instead. In all these cases we can see the spread in different ways of a subculture that originates in Murakami Haruki.

Shibata: Since writers debut perhaps later in the United States than they do in South Korea, it will be a while before American writers who have grown up on Murakami finally emerge. But even now, when I talk to young, eager writers who have written two or three books, they often tell me that they find Murakami one of the most interesting authors. In my opinion, a lot of American literature today looks a little like Murakami.

As I see it, all over the world popular culture increasingly shapes and influences a writer’s deeper layers of consciousness. In the 1980s and early 1990s—and this may be limited to the United States—American fiction was overwhelmingly based in realism. But now more and more Murakami-esque fiction is coming out, stories that begin in reality and effortlessly enter a world of fantasy. The pivotal agent that lets these books slide so smoothly into a fantasy world might be Johnny Walker or Colonel Sanders. The point is that the transition into fantasy has become completely natural.

There must be a connection between that trend and what Yomota-san says about fan culture. Murakami literature itself utilizes subculture as a way of penetrating the depths of consciousness, and readers find in Murakami literature the most meaningful elements of that subculture.

Yomota: That is an important point. Subculture itself can be a framework within which a certain culture develops. Murakami’s novels themselves appeared, in a way, from the place where the Beach Boys and other subcultures overlapped, taking shape as something other than a representation of personal ideology. They resonate with readers

whose experience grows out of a similar framework, and that becomes the source of a certain fan culture. No matter how much one likes Mishima or Oe, no one would think of trying to create a pastiche of their work.

Numano: Europeans have long resisted American pop culture, and Russians in particular have held onto their heavy literature expressing serious commitment to reality rooted in mainstream values. But those values are changing, and elements of pop culture have been quick to find their way into writing and are spreading throughout Europe. Perhaps few Russians grew up on Murakami, but one young female author has written a book called *A Wild Monkey Chase*. The novel is merely a parody on the title, but it suggests the pervasive influence of Murakami literature.

Russian readers of Murakami span a wide demographic sweep, but the core group are from a young generation who feel affinity with pop culture. Older generations of Japanese-literature specialists probably have no idea what to think. The younger generation, having abandoned the restrictive social commitments of realist literature, now read world literature with more pleasure. Murakami is naturally on their reading list.

Shibata: Murakami of course uses a plethora of objects, or symbols, from American culture in his work, but their significance is subtle. This seems to puzzle American readers. Earlier, I offered the examples of Johnny Walker and Colonel Sanders, which hold certain connotations in Japan and in the English-speaking world. Murakami is giving them new meanings. However, it is often unclear what kind of meaning he is giving to these things.

This is true not only of American things, but also of the sheep in *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Think about what the sheep symbolizes in that book. The Murakami meaning has little to do with the idea of the animal, the conventional image.

Yomota: In the Christian world, a novel like that would never have been written, which is why Mongolians sympathize with the sheep portrayed by Murakami.

Shibata: They want to claim it as their own, as “our sheep.”

Yomota: Mongolians would never accept a Western representation of sheep.

Shibata: True. That’s fascinating.

Yomota: That is why that book resonated with Mongolians. They felt they could understand Murakami’s sheep because they know the animal so intimately.

Shibata: It literally is a wild sheep chase.



Cover of the Russian edition of *A Wild Sheep Chase: A Novel*.

This discussion was most thought-provoking. As I listened, I became more convinced than ever that this topic is a potential gold mine of ideas that has hardly been scratched. It can and should be studied thoroughly. Personally, I am deeply interested in the cultural and social paradigms and literary views in different countries that take shape in the various reactions to Murakami's works. My personal hypothesis is that the spread of Murakami literature is anchored not just in the universal cultural foundation of pop culture, but also in the political disillusionment experienced by young people in countries like South Korea and countries of Eastern Europe. Murakami's works are widely read in those countries. Some day I would like to investigate this theory. In South Korea, for example, jazz never had particularly wide appeal until Murakami's popularity spurred the rise of jazz bars. Where and why do Murakami's novels have the biggest impact? These questions are endlessly fascinating.

If we could get everyone involved in translation from around the world to gather in Japan for a symposium, we would surely be deluged with suggestions about how to conduct further cultural exchange.

Yomota Inuhiko

This article is translated from a discussion held on February 15, 2005 at the Japan Foundation, moderated by Yomota Inuhiko, professor, Meiji Gakuin University. Yomota is a literary and film critic with a particular interest in comparative cultural theory. In 2004, he served as Agency for Cultural Affairs special advisor for cultural exchange in Israel, Serbia and Montenegro.

Shibata Motoyuki is professor, specializing in American and English literature, at the University of Tokyo. He is a translator of American literature and occasional translation collaborator with Murakami Haruki. Hon'yaku yawa [Workshops on Translation] (Bungei Shunjū, 2000) is a compilation of seminar discussions between Shibata and Murakami.

Numano Mitsuyoshi is professor, specializing in Russian and Polish literature, at the University of Tokyo. As editorial supervisor for an anthology of contemporary Japanese fiction published in Russian, and other activities, he has contributed to Japanese–Russian exchange in publishing.



From left: Yomota, Shibata, and Numano.

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Website: <http://www.jsps.go.jp> (Japanese); <http://www.jsps.go.jp/english/index.html> (English).

FICTION



Tsujii Takashi
Born in 1927. Poet and novelist.
(A detailed profile of Tsujii
accompanies his essay under "In
Their Own Words" on the back
page of this issue of Japanese
Book News.)

Chichi no shōzō [Portrait of My Father]

By Tsujii Takashi

Shinchōsha, 2004. 197×145 mm. 645 pp. ¥2,600. ISBN 4-10-340712-3.

This is a story about Tsutsumi Yasujirō, founder of the Seibu Railway company, who became a long-serving member and later speaker of the House of Representatives. Written by his son, a novelist, the book is both a critical biography and an "I novel." As a biography, it portrays Tsutsumi and the author (whose real name is Tsutsumi Seiji, former chairman of the Saison group of companies) under the fictional names Kusunoki Jirō and Kusunoki Kyōji, respectively. As an I novel, it allows the first-person narrator to describe his relationship with his father. In trying to come to terms with his father's memory, the author took up one of the universal themes of the modern romantic novel, yet the elder Tsutsumi presented special difficulties as a father figure. He was a man of great complexity—

not only politician but entrepreneur. For the author, who displays a similar duality as both businessman and novelist-poet, this is a relatively manageable aspect of his father's character; he says that "the question of which was more basic, the politician or the entrepreneur, is meaningless." What troubled the author more was his ambivalence over his father's obsession with the *ie* ("family"), an obsession that led Yasujirō to sexual intemperance driven by the urge to leave a legacy of blood ties.

Konpira [Konpira]

By Shōno Yoriko

Shūeisha, 2004. 195×140 mm. 296 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 4-08-774720-4.

Shōno Yoriko is one of Japan's leading fiction writers today. In this full-length novel, she draws on the myth and folklore of Konpira, a deity of indigenous belief, while imaginatively elaborating the story. According to legend, Konpira was a gavial (a kind of crocodile) that lived in the river Ganges; it was deified and incorporated into Buddhist teaching as a guardian deity. In Japan, Konpira is known throughout the country as the deity worshipped at Kagawa prefecture's Kotohira Shrine. It became, through fusion with gods of the Shintō religion, an object of widespread folk belief. In this story, the forty-something narrator, who has suddenly come to realize to her own amazement that she is Konpira, looks back over her life as the deity. The story thus has an autobiographical character, the author

recounting her own life by likening herself to the deity Konpira. Shōno uses Konpira to undermine the authority of Japan's national myths, which have been systematized, from the Izumo myth on, through the ancient chronicle *Kojiki* [Record of Ancient Matters] and under the custodianship of Ise Shrine. She deconstructs that system and creates instead a distinct personal world of myth. Although the novel is written in a rather difficult, experimental style, its thoroughgoing pursuit of a vision that breaks through all common sense fills it with humor, vivacity, and a sense of freedom. This work brilliantly reveals the cutting edge of contemporary Japanese fiction.



Shōno Yoriko

Born in 1956. A writer of literary fiction known for her avant-garde style. By spinning bizarre fantasies out of the fissures of everyday life and through radical experimentation with language she conjures up unique worlds of magical realism. She won the Akutagawa Prize for Taimu surippu konbināto [Time Warp Complex].

Nara repōto **[Nara Report]**

By Tsushima Yūko

Bungei Shunjū, 2004. 197×140 mm. 366 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-16-323280-X.

Tsushima Yūko

Born in 1947. Novelist. Daughter of novelist Dazai Osamu. Graduate of the department of English language and literature, Shirayuri Women's College. Tsushima won the Noma Literary Prize for New Talent for Hikari no ryōbun [Territory of Light], the Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Danmari-ichi [Silent Trader], and the Yomiuri Prize for Literature for Yoru no hikari ni owarete [Pursued by Evening Light].

One of the most highly praised works of literature in Japan in 2004, this novel treats the depth of maternal love and the profundity of the mother-child relationship through the story of a mother and son reincarnated in various historical periods in the city of Nara, Japan's capital in ancient times.

The novel begins in the present day. In a park, late at night, twelve-year-old Morio kills a deer and cuts off both of its ears. The spirit of his mother, who has been dead for ten years, appears to him in the form of a pigeon and asks him why he has done such a thing. Morio reveals that he was compelled by his hatred of where he lives—Nara—and of being left with his grandmother and having nowhere else to go. His mother is eager to ease her son's suffering, and soon the two of them set off

to destroy another Nara symbol, the great Buddha at Tōdaiji temple. From there, the story unfolds through a number of variations back through time to the Nara of former ages, building as they go a fully fleshed-out fictive world. The novel also explores the relationship between the "masculine," which moves history and shapes society, and the "feminine," which, though remaining in the shadow of the "masculine," is never lost. Drawing generously from the folk tales and myths of Japan, the story becomes a distinctively Japanese exemplar of the fiction of magical realism.

POETRY

Zenjinrui ga oita yoru **[The Night All Humanity Grew Old]**

By Ishii Tatsuhiko

Shoshi Yamada, 2004. 194×130 mm. 115 pp. ¥2,500. ISBN 4-87995-622-8.

The tanka, the fixed form of verse dominant in Japanese poetry, has a history going back fourteen centuries. Even after spinning off the new genre of haiku in the seventeenth century, tanka has continued to be a source of radical sensibilities in Japanese literature up to the present day. One of the tanka poets who display the greatest refinement and most realistic sense of crisis today, Ishii Tatsuhiko is also a rarity among Japanese poets for his extensive poetic explorations across a broad literary spectrum from Latin literature to W. H. Auden, Ezra Pound, and other twentieth-century poets. The present collection was inspired by the shocking events that took place in New York on September 11, 2001. In these works, the collapse of the World Trade Center towers is superimposed onto the memory of

humanity's original fall and nostalgic sentiments in this age of fear and negligence are described in sweetly cruel language. The volume also includes a series of tanka covering themes ranging from homage to *Genji monogatari* [The Tale of Genji] to mark the millennial anniversary of its writing and an elegy to contemporary Japanese novelist Nakagami Kenji, who died while still in his forties. Among the verses is the following:

*Sono mukashi / haha o ayameshi /
toga yue ni / haha yori oite /
shinu, to tsutae yo*

(My penance for having killed my mother: I am to die older than her. Make this known.)



Ishii Tatsuhiko

Born in 1952. Poet. Ishii attracted attention after winning the Tanka New Talent Prize in 1972 for the poetry collection Nanakamado [Mountain Ash]. He is known for a style alluding freely to a wide range of both Western and Eastern texts, from Chinese poetry to Italian opera. He has recently been engaged in experiments focusing on a bold deconstruction of Japanese syntax.

LITERATURE



Inoki Takenori

Born in 1945. Graduate of the faculty of economics, Kyoto University. Professor, International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Specialist in labor economics, economic thought, and studies of the Japanese economy. Principal publications include *Gakkō to kōjō: Nihon no jinteki shigen* [School and Factory: Japan's Human Resources] and *Jiyū to chitsujo: Kyōsō shakai no futatsu no kao* [Freedom and Order: The Two Faces of Competitive Society].

Bungei ni arawareta Nihon no kindai: Shakai kagaku to bungaku no aida

[Japanese Modernity as Seen in Literature: Between Social Science and Literature]

By Inoki Takenori

Yūhikaku, 2004. 194×138 mm. 221 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 4-641-16219-0.

This work explores a new direction in the social sciences by examining issues of Japan's modernity through works of literature.

The social sciences, in particular the author's field of economics, are premised on application of the principles of analysis of facts derived from the natural sciences. While granting the effectiveness of that approach, the author asserts that scientific methods alone are not sufficient for a proper grasp of reality, and that other approaches are needed to complement understandings gained thereby. The method he chooses is that of ascertaining the nature of people's inner lives and the mood of society as described in works by novelists as the "observers of quality" of their times. For this purpose he selects ten works occupying

important places in Japanese literary history. In the chapter on the oldest of these, Natsume Sōseki's *Bungei no tetsugakuteki kiso* [The Philosophical Foundations of Literature] (1907), he considers the issues of "plurality" and "freedom" in modernity; and discussing that most recent work, Mishima Yukio's *Kinu to meisatsu* [Silk and Insight] (1964), he examines the nature of industrial relations and labor disputes in the early 1950s. The author thus brings into relief the realities of the society and economy of modern Japan and then examines them from various angles. With occasional thought-provoking sidelines on the author's personal experience and opinions, the book can also be read as a collection of literary essays.

Kokutō, 1936 nen no Nihon o aruku

[Cocteau in Japan in 1936]

By Nishikawa Masaya

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2004. 197×140 mm. 225 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-12-003571-9.

In 1936, the French poet Jean Cocteau undertook a challenge proposed by a newspaper to determine whether or not a person really could travel around the world in eighty days, as in the Jules Verne novel *Le Tour du monde en 80 jours*. Cocteau left Paris in high spirits, passed through the Suez Canal, visited a number of port towns in Asia, and traversed the New World. Along the way, he spent eight days traveling from Kobe to Tokyo. The warm reception he enjoyed wherever he went in Japan was due in large part to the fame he had achieved through Japanese translations of his poems by poet Horiguchi Daigaku, which became so well known that even geisha would often recite them. Cocteau eagerly inspected a wide range of things Japanese, from kabuki theater to sumo wrestling, applying his

keen powers of observation and recording witty commentary on what he saw. This book faithfully retraces Cocteau's eight-day experience in Japan and skillfully analyzes the influence this gifted man of poesy had on Japanese literature.

Japanese culture was a source of creative inspiration, in turn, for Cocteau. It is well known, for example, that in directing the film *La Belle et la Bête* Cocteau drew from the deep impression he had received from watching the kabuki dance *Kagamijishi* [The Lion at the New Year's Banquet]. The record he left of his impressions of Japan—long before Roland Barthes's discourses on Japan—will be of increasing significance to Japan studies in the years ahead.



Nishikawa Masaya

Born in 1963. Graduate of the department of French language and literature, Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo. Associate professor, Maebashi Kyōai Gakuen College. Major papers include "Hon'yakusha Horiguchi Daigaku no kōzai: Jan Kokutō shiyaku shiron" [The Merits and Demerits of Horiguchi Daigaku, Translator: Tentative Translations and an Essay on Jean Cocteau] (in *Hikaku bungaku kenkyū*, *Asahi Shuppan Sha*).



Fujii Sadakazu

Born in 1942. Professor of the Faculty of Letters, Rishshō University. Specialist in Japanese classical literature and textual analysis. Poet. Major publications include *Genji monogatari ron* [*Studies of the Tale of Genji*], *Koten no yomikata* [*How to Read Classics*], and the poetry collection “Shizuka no umi” *ishi sono hibiki* [*“The Quiet Sea”: Echoes of Stone*].

Monogatari riron kōgi **[Lectures on the Theory of Narrative]**

By Fujii Sadakazu

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2004. 212×150 mm. 224 pp. ¥2,600. ISBN 4-13-083038-4.

In this ambitious work, the author, a poet and scholar of Japanese classical literature, presents his own theory of narrative, the nature of which he has been studying for forty years.

While the theory of narrative has undergone remarkable development in the West, particularly since the advent of structuralism, in Japan, a body of theoretical works on Japanese narrative literature has yet to emerge. In an effort to address this gap, the author constructs his own theory of narrative in the context of Japanese literature, citing Western works on narrative theory. Particularly striking is his view of the language in which narratives unfold. Focusing on the features of the Japanese language that make it fundamentally different from Western languages, he examines Japanese narrative

literature in a range of forms, including *waka* verse, ballads, myths, history, folk tales, and stories from Japan’s oral literary traditions. The Japanese grammatical categories of *ninshō* (person, as in “first-person narrator”) and *jisei* (tense), for example, are reappraised as fundamental principles in the creation of narrative. The author includes the literature of the Okinawan and Ainu peoples in his purview, and relates some thought-provoking anecdotes from his fieldwork, such as when he met a *biwa hōshi*, a performer who chants tales to the accompaniment of a *biwa* (a lute-like instrument). Presenting in an easy-to-read lecture style a new theory of narrative from the point of view of Japanese language and literature, this work promises to become a landmark in literature studies.

Teikoku no bōrei: Nihon bungaku no seishin chizu **[Ghosts of Empire: An Intellectual Map of Japanese Literature]**

By Marukawa Tetsushi

Seidosha, 2004. 197×140 mm. 235 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 4-7917-6157-X.

What is the place of colonial experience in Japanese literature? Japan formerly colonized Taiwan and Korea, founded the state of Manchukuo under its control, and sent thousands of emigrants to these territories, yet there has been surprisingly little discourse in Japanese literature about the traces this colonial history has left. This book addresses this important topic.

The author notes that novelist Abe Kōbō got his start in literature just after World War II in close connection with his cosmopolitan cultural experience growing up in Manchukuo, his bitter experiences in the process of repatriation in Japan, and the sense of incongruity he felt once he was in what was supposed to be his homeland. Marukawa points out that the Apache tribe that appears in one of Kaikō Ken’s novels

cannot be considered without reference to the lives of Korean nationals in Japan. While thus referring to colonial and post-colonial experiences in the literature, the author also analyzes the politics of language in the works of Yan Sogiru, currently among the most active *zainichi* (Korean resident in Japan) writers, and of Okinawan writer Medoruma Shun. The era in which one could (or should) believe that Japanese literature transparently expresses the essence of a unified, monolithic entity is long past. By taking works previously understood simply as outstanding works of Japanese literature and relocating them in the context of colonialism and imperialism, this book takes a significant step toward reinterpreting that literature in wider historical perspective.



Marukawa Tetsushi

Born in 1963. Lecturer in the School of Political Science and Economics, Meiji University. Marukawa’s main fields of special interest are Japanese literary criticism, studies of Taiwanese culture, and the cultural geopolitics of East Asia. He also publishes under the pseudonym Ogura Mushitarō. Among his major publications is *Rijonarizumu* [*Regionalism*] (*Iwanami Shoten*).

PERFORMING ARTS

Toki no hikari no naka de: Gekidan Shiki shusaisha no sengo shi**[In the Light of Time: A Postwar History by the Leader of the Shiki Theatre Company]****By Asari Keita**

Bungei Shunjū, 2004. 194 mm×140 mm. 270 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 4-16-366350-9.

Asari Keita

Born in 1933. Founder and leader of the Shiki Theatre Company, one of Japan's most famous and popular theater companies. Asari also produced the opening and closing ceremonies for the 1998 Olympic Winter Games in Nagano.

Asari Keita has led the Shiki Theatre Company for many years. After being deeply inspired by the American musical *West Side Story*, he helped establish the musical as a genre in Japan and transformed the Japanese theatrical promotion business. His success as producer of the Japanese production of *Cats* is widely known.

Asari counts among his friends people in artistic and intellectual circles such as conductor Ozawa Seiji, novelist and politician Ishihara Shintarō, novelist Mishima Yukio, and playwright Terayama Shūji as well as figures in business and politics like Nakasone Yasuhiro and Satō Eisaku. Cultivating such diverse circles of acquaintances, his work as a producer has not been limited to the stage; in a sense

he has been a producer of postwar history.

This memoir includes a certain amount of self-congratulation, as when the author notes in reference to the multivolume publication *Satō Eisaku nikki*, a diary Satō Eisaku (prime minister 1964–72) kept over a twenty-four-year period, that “my name appears nineteen times, rather more often, I think, than that of any other private citizen.” But unlike literature, where the lone writer gives full rein to his or her imagination behind closed doors, theater is born out of the interaction of all sorts of people, from leaders of the nation down to ordinary people—the audiences. In that sense, this book, including the author’s self-congratulation, is itself part of his version of “postwar history.”

ARTS

Uchū o tataku: Kaen taiko, mandara, Ajia no hibiki
[Percussion of the Cosmos: Flame Drums, Mandalas, and the Sounds of Asia]**By Sugiura Kōhei**

Kōsakusha, 2004. 216×150 mm. 345 pp. ¥3,600. ISBN 4-87502-380-4.

What does Asian music have to do with cosmology? That is the central theme of this book, written by one of Japan’s foremost graphic designers.

Taoism classifies music into three types: music played by people, music played by nature, and the music manifested by the universe itself as a vast musical instrument. This third type is called *tianlai*. In order to comprehend sounds beyond human artifice as music, the ancient Chinese proposed a correspondence between the microcosmos of the human body and the macrocosmos of the universe at large. Musical percussion creates a movement of air upon the human eardrum and gives order to that movement in subtle ways. The Chinese and Korean *keonku* (pole drums) and the Japanese *kaen taiko*

(flame drums) were developed on the basis of this idea. Conceived in Japan during the eleventh century, the *kaen taiko* is one of the largest percussion instruments in the world, extending to some seven meters in height. The *tomoe* (interlocking commas) pattern on the skins of these drums, and their complex decorative designs derive from a mandala-like archetype. The author reveals how these designs ingeniously represent the ancient cosmology according to which the world is seen as consisting of a huge serpent swallowing its own tails, and a giant tortoise.



Sugiura Kōhei

Born in 1932. Graphic designer. Active in promoting exchange among designers of Asian countries through lectures and exhibitions both in Japan and abroad. He was keynote speaker at the Icograda 2003 Nagoya Congress. His major publications include Nihon no katachi Ajia no katachi [Japanese Forms, Asian Forms] (Sanseidō, 1994).



Nakanishi Junko

Born in 1938. Completed a doctoral course in the Graduate School of Engineering, University of Tokyo. Director of the Research Center for Chemical Risk Management, National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, Tsukuba. Her major publications include *Gesuidō: Mizu saisei no tetsugaku [Sewerage: A Philosophy of Water Recycling]* and *Inochi no mizu [Water of Life]*.

***Kankyō risuku gaku: Fuan no umi no rashinban*
[The Study of Environmental Risk: Compass in a Sea of Uncertainty]**

By Nakanishi Junko

Nippon Hyōron Sha, 2004. 194x135 mm. 251 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 4-535-58409-5.

Scientist Nakanishi Junko played a leading role in pioneering the field of environmental risk studies and has had considerable influence on environment-related social policy. This book is a collection of her critical essays centering around her farewell lecture upon retirement from Yokohama National University in 2004, and including discussions of other issues such as endocrine disrupters (dioxins) and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad-cow disease). It is an excellent introduction to environmental risk studies, written for non-specialist readers.

In retracing the many hardships of her long career, the author's university retirement lecture reveals her to be a researcher of great integrity who constantly placed herself between science and society. Her

predictions are objective and balanced, eschewing ideological preconceptions, always taking strict scientific fact as her point of departure, and never allowing herself to be misled by groundless "risk anxiety." She consistently considers the most realistic methods of creating a safe environment. This approach has at times put her at odds with industry and the government and made her the target of criticism in academic circles and from citizen movements. Nonetheless, she has undeniably achieved much in correcting the mistaken perceptions of a general public prone to worry about issues that have little basis in science. The approaches she has developed in the field of environmental risk studies in Japan deserve greater attention in the world at large.

***Kibō kakusa shakai: "Make-gumi" no zetsubōkan ga Nihon o hikisaku*
[The "Hope-Gap" Society: Japan Torn Apart by "Losers" Despair]**

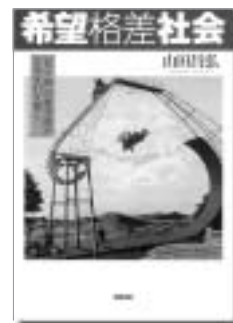
By Yamada Masahiro

Chikuma Shobō, 2004. 197x140 mm. 254 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-480-86360-5.

This book looks at the crisis that Japanese society faces today in terms of people's hopes for the future. The author is a sociologist known for his penetrating analyses of Japanese society from the viewpoints of youth and family.

While economic disparity is nothing new in Japan, that alone cannot explain the malaise of insecurity that is lodged in its society today. The main cause of this condition, says the author, is the fact that many people are no longer able to cherish hopes for a better future. From the post-war economic boom period up to around 1990, the bases of human life were secure in Japanese society and people who worked hard could attain a certain degree of prosperity and security for themselves. With the subsequent advance of globaliza-

tion and the information society, however, economic and social paradigms have shifted, with the result that, particularly (according to the author) since 1998, some people have lost hope for a secure life and economic disparities have widened dramatically. Yamada argues that this has given rise to disparities in lifestyles and social status, which in turn have created a "hope gap." The result is a society in which rewards do not necessarily come to those who strive hard. With the "loser" sector of society struggling with the conviction that life will never get better, society as a whole finds it difficult to regain vitality. On the basis of various data, documents, and survey findings, the author presents a gloomy yet persuasive diagnosis of the current state of Japanese society.



Yamada Masahiro

Born in 1957. Professor of the Faculty of Education, Tokyo Gakugei University. Specialist in the sociology of the family and the sociology of emotions. Through his book *Parasaito shinguru no jidai [The Era of the "Parasite Single"]* (Chikuma Shobō, 1999), he coined and popularized the term "parasite single" to describe young unmarried people who enjoy lives of abundance while living with and depending on their parents well into maturity.



Shimotomai Nobuo

Born in 1948. Graduate of the Faculty of Law, University of Tokyo. Specialist in the politics of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States and in the political history of the Soviet Union. Among his principal publications are Roshia gendai seiji [Russian Politics Today] and Gorubachofu no jidai [The Gorbachev Era].

Aja reisen shi **[The History of the Cold War in Asia]**

By Shimotomai Nobuo

Chūō Kōron Sha, 2004. 174×110 mm. 222 pp. ¥760. ISBN 4-12-101763-3.

The Cold War is usually described in terms of the history of the East–West confrontation that took place primarily in Europe in the context of the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union as the world’s two superpowers. This book, however, traces the Cold War from its origins to its demise as manifested in East Asia. The author, a political scientist specializing in the Soviet Union, draws on historical materials recently made public in Russia. On the basis of such historical records in the Russian language, the book describes the history of East Asia’s Cold War in terms of the Soviet Union’s relations with the countries of that region. According to the author, in East Asia, which unlike Europe passed through the processes of colonial rule and socialism before the establishment of

nation states, there arose a peculiar multi-polar structure of international relations that gave the Cold War in East Asia a different cast from that observed in Europe. He also analyzes the structure of the Cold War in East Asia in terms of ideology, geopolitics, and nuclear arms, touching on the “Cold War orphan” issue that remains unresolved on the Korean peninsula even today. In this way, the book provides a realistic historical understanding of the background to the complex international situation in contemporary East Asia. This is an ambitious work that could only have been written by a Japanese scholar with a thorough knowledge of Soviet political history.

ECONOMY

Matsushita Seikeijuku to wa nani ka **[The Matsushita Institute of Government and Management]**

By Idei Yasuhiro

Shinchōsha, 2004. 174×110 mm. 223 pp. ¥700. ISBN 4-10-610092-4.

Matsushita Kōnosuke was the founder of the major electrical goods manufacturer Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Ltd. (whose products are marketed under the National and Panasonic brand names) and became a charismatic icon in the Japanese business world. Lamenting the directions he saw in Japanese politics of his time, he invested seven billion yen of his personal wealth to establish the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management, an elite school aimed at training political leaders with long-term vision for the nation’s future.

In its first ten years the school produced few politicians, and after Matsushita Kōnosuke’s death in 1989, there was some debate about its continued existence. After 1999, when the Hosokawa Cabinet was launched as a coalition government comprised of new political parties, a large

number of the Institute’s graduates began to enter the political world as new political parties came into being. Since then, the number of junior Diet members who graduated from the Institute has increased, but the school’s character has shifted away from cultivating people capable of guiding the nation and toward teaching skills necessary for winning elections.

Under these circumstances, asks the author, can it be said that the Institute is fulfilling Matsushita Kōnosuke’s wish to cultivate people capable of the kind of bold reform that was achieved by the leaders of the Meiji Restoration? This book considers the history and role, as well as the merits and demerits, of this “incubator of political leadership” in the last quarter-century, bringing into vivid relief the nature of the Japanese political scene of the 1990s.



Idei Yasuhiro

Born in 1965. Graduate of the School of Political Science and Economics, Waseda University. Journalist, formerly for an English-language newspaper and currently on a freelance basis. His publications include Nihon kara meshia ga kita [The Messiah Who Came from Japan], a historical account of a campaign conducted during World War II by a Japanese activist to make Black Americans revolt in various parts of the United States in favor of Japan.

JAPANESE HISTORY

Tairon: Shōwa Tennō [Dialogue on Emperor Shōwa]

By Hara Takeshi and Hosaka Masayasu

Bungei Shunjū, 2004. 174×110 mm. 245 pp. ¥720. ISBN 4-16-660403-1.

Hara Takeshi

Born in 1962. Professor of Meiji Gakuin University. Specialist in the history of Japanese political thought. Among his major publications is *Taishō tennō* [Emperor Taishō] (see JBN No. 35, p. 10).

Hosaka Masayasu

Born in 1939. Nonfiction writer. Head of the *Shōwa Shi o Katari-tsubu Kai* [Association for Discourse on Shōwa History]. Major publications include *Shōwa shi nanatsu no nazo* [Seven Mysteries of Shōwa History].

In his sixty-four-year reign, Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito) became one of the key figures of contemporary Japanese history. Presenting their ideas in a dialogue format, the authors consider little-analyzed aspects of the emperor—his voice, appearance, and poetry—from two perspectives: that of the man himself and that of his historical image as emperor.

Under the Meiji Constitution (Constitution of the Empire of Japan) in effect prior to World War II, the emperor was the head of state and considered divine. Although the emperor would sometimes speak before a limited number of people at ceremonies and functions, because of his divine status it was forbidden to broadcast his voice on radio or other public airwaves, and the general public therefore had no opportunity to hear his voice. With

Japan's defeat in World War II on August 15, 1945, however, the situation changed dramatically. Emperor Shōwa made an unprecedented radio broadcast in his own voice announcing the end of the war, and the public was further stunned when newspapers published a photograph of the emperor standing with General Douglas MacArthur, who had just arrived in Japan as supreme commander of the occupation forces of Allied powers: next to the tall, well-built general, the emperor appeared small and frail.

Emperor Shōwa had an outstanding memory but chose to use it with discretion according to every occasion and situation. In this and similar ways, this unique study also shows him as an individual human being constantly searching for a way to be what he should be as an emperor.

RELIGION

Samayoeru Nihon shūkyō [Japanese Religion Adrift]

By Yamaori Tetsuo

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2004. 196×132 mm. 235 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 4-12-003586-7.

Religion in Japan—Shintō, Buddhism, and Christianity alike—has been in decline for many years. Why is this so, and what would it take for religion to regain its former strength? While posing such fundamental questions and searching for clues by reinterpreting works by such thinkers as Uchimura Kanzō, Nanbara Shigeru, and Yanagita Kunio, the author describes how modern Japan's policies on religion since the Meiji period have run counter to and worked to undermine Japanese indigenous religion. He finds the state of Japan's religious disorientation evident even in contemporary issues. One example is the proposal (prompted by the controversy surrounding visits by Japanese political leaders to Yasukuni Shrine) to establish an alternative, "nonreligious" memorial to the war dead. He argues, further, that

"religious care" at the end of life should be the first choice for care of the elderly.

He expands this criticism of contemporary Japan from the realm of religious issues into a sharp critique of the ideas of historian Amino Yoshihiko. By applying such concepts as *muen* (dissociation), *kugai* (the public), and *hi-nōgyōmin* (nonagricultural population), Amino significantly revised understandings of Japanese medieval history. The author wonders, however, whether itinerant minorities such as *kugutsu* (street puppeteers) and *yūjo* (prostitutes) really did sustain society as a whole and effect historical change and innovation. He suggests, rather, that such categories of people were conceptual devices for negating notions of "state" and "ethnicity" in Japan.



Yamaori Tetsuo

Born in 1931. Graduate of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, Tōhoku University. Director of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Specialist in the history of religion and thought. Major publications include *Bukkyō to wa nani ka* [Introduction to Buddhism], *Aiyoku no seishin shi* [An Intellectual History of Lust], and *Namida to Nihonjin* [Tears and the Japanese].

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

In January 2005, the 132nd Akutagawa Prize was awarded to “Gurando fināre” [Grand Finale] by Abe Kazushige (*Gunzō*, December 2004) and the Naoki Prize to *Taigan no kanojo* [Woman on the Other Shore] by Kakuta Mitsuyo (Bungei Shunjū). Unlike Wataya Risa and Kanehara Hitomi, who at nineteen and twenty respectively set a record one year ago as the youngest Akutagawa winners ever, thirty-six-year-old Abe was already established as a writer and had been considered one of the most deserving authors to win the Akutagawa Prize. In 1994, he received the Gunzō Prize for New Writers with his first novel *Amerika no yoru* [A Night in America] published that year, and in 1999 he won the Noma Literary Award for New Writers with “Mujō no sekai” [A Ruthless World]. In 2003, he received the Itō Sei Literary Prize and the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award with *Shinsemia* [Sinsemilla]. In addition, he was shortlisted for the Akutagawa Prize no less than three times. His success this time, some say, shows that the literary world is finally catching up with his genius.

“Gurando Fināre” deals with a middle-aged man obsessed with young girls (the so-called Lolita complex) whose wife divorces him after discovering he has been taking nude photographs of girls, including his own daughter, in stolen moments when he is not on his regular job of making educational films. He quits his job and returns to his childhood home, where an old acquaintance, unaware of his perversion, brings him the task of directing a stage play with two elementary school girls. The story centers on the subtle psychological shifts he undergoes as he becomes increasingly absorbed in a project he had accepted only with reluctance.

Naoki Prize winner Kakuta made her debut in 1990 with “Kōfuku na yūgi” [A Blissful Pastime], which won the Kaien Prize for New Writers, and in 1996 received the Noma Award for “Madoromu yoru no UFO” [A Sleepy Night’s UFO]. Like Abe, Kakuta was nominated three times for the Akutagawa Prize and once for the



Abe Kazushige (left) and Kakuta Mitsuyo
Courtesy: Kyōdō Press

Naoki Prize prior to receiving the honor this year. The narrative of *Taigan no kanojo* follows Aoi, a single businesswoman in her thirties who runs her own company, and Sayoko, a housewife also in her thirties whom Aoi employs, weaving into the story of their hesitant friendship Aoi’s experiences in high school. The novel resonates with the author’s sympathetic affection for these characters who, having experienced emotional pain in their youth, cannot seem to fit into society and continue to live their lives with awkward discomfort even in adulthood.

Yomiuri Literary Prize

The Yomiuri Literary Prize for Best Novel went in February 2005 to Matsuura Hisaki’s *Hantō* [Peninsula] (Bungei Shunjū; see *Japanese Book News* No. 43, Spring 2005, p. 4). Recipients of the award in other categories were Maeda Hayao for *Yota aruki: Kikuchi Sansai no hito to gakumon* [Idle Wanderings: The Life and Work of Kikuchi Sansai] (Shōbunsha) in criticism and biography; and, for poetry, Iijima Kōichi’s collection *Amerika* [America] (Shinchōsha) and Okai Takashi’s volume of tanka, *Tonakai jidai imaka kimukau* [Entering the Age of the Reindeer] (Sunakoya Shobō). There were no winners in the three other categories of theater and screenplay, essay and travel literature, and research and translation.

2005 Hon’ya Prize

The 2005 Hon’ya [Bookseller] Prize was awarded to Onda Riku’s *Yoru no pikunikku* [Nighttime Picnic] (Shinchōsha, 2004). This novel was introduced in the previous issue (No. 43) of *Japanese Book News*.

Train Man: Love Story from the Internet



Nakano Hitori’s *Densha otoko* [Train Man] (Shinchōsha), a love story that unfolds out of postings transcribed from an actual Internet bulletin board, is enjoying

great popularity as an entirely new breed of novel born of the information age. The book has sold 505,000 copies since its first printing in October 2004. The text is printed horizontally, reading from left to right as on a computer screen, and is peppered with the pictograms young Japanese like to use in their Internet communications. The story deals with an “otaku” (a nerdish social loner obsessed with manga, anime, computer games, or other such interests) who, on his way home from Akihabara, happens to rescue a young woman from the pestering of a drunkard on the train. Unable to summon the courage to ask her out, he posts a call for help on an Internet bulletin board for dateless men. His cohorts respond to his pleas with encouragement and advice. But can he successfully pursue his innocent crush?

Otaku subculture is now a major social phenomenon in Japan. In 2004 it was made the theme of the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition. The presentation focused on the power wielded by otaku culture in reshaping Akihabara, a Tokyo district once known simply for its concentration of electronics shops, into an otaku hotspot. *Densha otoko* gives yet more evidence of otaku’s growing



ARINA SHINYOKOHAMA in AKIHABARA.
(From the Japan Pavilion theme “Otaku,” at the 9th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice Biennale 2004.)
Courtesy: OOSHIMA, Yuuki + KAIYODO

influence in mainstream society.

Three different manga versions of *Densha otoko* are currently being serialized in the monthly *Young Champion* (Akita Shoten) and in two other boys' manga magazines, soon to be followed by a girls' manga scheduled to appear in spring 2005 (June 2005 issue of *Dessert* [Kodansha]) as well as by a movie planned for release by Tōhō film company in June. All subsidiary royalties arising from these adaptations will be donated toward helping the victims of the October 2004 Niigata earthquake. Other recent Internet-derived novels, including *Konshū, tsuma ga uwaki shimasu* [My Wife Is Going to Cheat on Me This Week] (Chūō Kōron Shinsha), seem to be signaling the start of what could become a new trend in the Japanese book world.

2004 Publishing Sales Up for the First Time in Eight Years

In 2004, publishing sales improved 0.7 percent over last year to reach an estimated total of 2,242.8 billion yen, generating the first increase in eight years. The rise in book sales was particularly strong, growing 4.1 percent over last year for a total of 94.3 billion yen. The runaway success of several novels in the category known as "pure love fiction" (*jun'ai shōsetsu*) has been a major factor in this spurt: for example, Katayama Kyōichi's *Sekai no chūshin de, ai o sakebu* [Crying "I Love You" in the Middle of the World], which has sold 3.21 million copies, and Ichikawa Takuji's *Ima, ai ni yukimasu* [I'm Coming to See You Now], which has sold 1.05 million. Sales of periodicals continued to slide for the seventh consecutive year, however, and now stand at 1,299.8 billion yen, or minus 1.7 percent compared with last year. Weekly magazines were hardest hit with a decrease of 4.9 percent.

University Press Makes Good

Making steady progress, the University of Nagoya Press is becoming a respected presence in the world of Japanese academic publishing. Although it is still small, with only four

editors and about twenty-five new publications a year, in 2004 it published eight award-winning works. Two of its titles received the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities, adding to last year's five honors, which included the Suntory Prize and the Ōhira Masayoshi Memorial Prize.

This year, the press plans to publish a variety of scholarly works ranging from a Japanese translation of the monumental classic *Römische Geschichte* [History of Rome] by German historian Theodor Mommsen to studies in politics, law, and literature. Readers can look forward to future publications from this press dedicated to high-quality publishing.

Obituary

Ishigaki Rin, 84, poet, December 27, 2004.

One of Japan's leading poets of the post-World War II era, Ishigaki wrote poetry that deals with postwar society, family, and work, using simple, ordinary language. Her work combined a keenly critical eye with warm insight into human nature and captured a wide readership. Many of her poems have been selected for use in Japanese school textbooks.

2005 Tokyo International Book Fair

This year's Tokyo International Book Fair will be held in July instead of May as in previous years. Last year, 587 exhibitors came from 29 countries, and the fair drew a total of 48,000 visitors. Publications introduced in *Japanese Book News* will be displayed at the Japan Foundation booth.



Tokyo International Book Fair (2004)

Dates: July 7 (Thu)–10 (Sun), 2005

Hours: 10:00–18:00

Venue: Tokyo Big Sight
(3-21-1 Ariake, Kōtō-ku)

- Five minute walk from Rinkai Line Kokusai-tenjijo Station
- One minute walk from Yurikamome Line Kokusai-tenjijo Seimon-mae Station

Organizers: Tokyo International Book Fair Executive Committee; Reed Exhibitions Japan, Ltd.

For further information see <http://www.bookfair.jp>

Announcement

New publications introduced in issues 43 and 44 of *Japanese Book News* will also be exhibited at the Japan Foundation booth at international book fairs to be held in the following locations: Seoul, Republic of Korea (June 3–8); La Paz, Bolivia (August 10–21); Cali, Colombia (October 28–November 7); Frankfurt, Germany (October 19–23); Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro (October, dates to be announced); Moscow, Russia (non/fiction, November 30–December 4); and New Delhi, India (January–February 2006, dates to be announced).

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Literature in a Time of Transformation

Japan is where I was born and raised, but I still find it a strange country. There are far too many things I don't understand about it.

Economically, it is definitely a modern nation, but the way people think about things is riddled with habits left over from the premodern age. Apart from a few at the top, Japanese have never been particularly adept at understanding different cultures, yet from time to time they reach out and embrace foreign things and ideas with extraordinary zeal. Why? There is no rational explanation.

Despite our culture's enthusiasm for the foreign, literature has passed down its own legacy, quietly and punctiliously preserving tradition, particularly in short poetic forms like tanka and haiku. Yet what we think of as contemporary literature, in its main genres of poetry and fiction, gives little indication of any dedicated ties to tradition. It has created a disjunct with the tradition-bearing forms.

In another odd twist, contemporary literature somehow seems to have become disassociated with ideas. It is a common assumption that Japanese literature is not a suitable vehicle for ideas or thought, although the classics of ages past, including *Makura no sōshi* [*The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*], *Tsurezuregusa* [*Essays in Idleness*], *Hōjōki* [*An Account of My Hut*], the writings and plays of Zeami, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, the satirical sketches of Ihara Saikaku, and many others are rich and sophisticated repositories of thought.

As a poet and novelist, I would like to do away with some *idées fixes* concerning Japanese literature. To do so, first we need a coherence of feelings and thoughts joined together in unity where they should be, as they once were. Next we should reconstruct, within people living today, traditions in a form that is not distorted by ideology.

My career as a writer started out with poetry. As of 2005, I have had fourteen volumes of poetry published, and I am now working simultaneously on three more to be published soon. Several of those books were awarded literary prizes, and a number of them have been published abroad in English, French, and other languages. Virtually all my poems use multiple layers of trope and figures of speech to probe the uncertainty of human existence.

My novels, on the other hand, are of three broad types. One category includes narratives that look for the source of human existence in the fictive, such as my novel *Shizumeru shiro* [*Sunken Castle*] that was awarded the Shinran Prize, a prize targeted at long novels. "Owari kara no tabi" [*Setting Out from Journey's End*], which is scheduled for publication in April 2005, is another in this group.

The second type portrays realms of fantasy triggered by the ordinary aspects of everyday life. Most of these are short stories, such as *Tōgenki* [*Narrative of a Peach Delusion*], which has just been published in Chinese in Beijing.

Making up the third type of novel are stories that deconstruct fictitious or real persons in history from a contemporary point of view. Both *Niji no misaki* [*Cape of*

Rainbows], which won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize, and *Chichi no shōzō* [*Portrait of My Father*], which was awarded the Noma Literary Prize, are in this group. In some of my writing I have used my mother and my younger sister, also, as models. Since I write about certain times and social milieus in these works, they could be taken as a kind of social commentary.

For three decades I managed a business in tandem with my creative writing and publishing career. My years in business spanned the dynamic period of Japan's rapid economic growth through the period of stagnation that followed, eventually setting the economy on the verge of decline. Those years brought out in some people a shallow frivolity and egotism propelling them merrily through life, and in others, earnest dedication to hard work, revealing the folly and pathos—and in another sense, the endearing appeal—of being human. Just a slight change in perspective could bring into focus either the negative aspects or the positive aspects of the special character of the thought and feeling that permeate Japanese society, and if I could capture them faithfully, surely I would end up with a universal tragicomedy enacted by people living in any modern industrial society.

Such thoughts ultimately come out of my sense that in some ways society as we know it is coming to an end. What kind of society will emerge in its place, no one yet knows.

Perhaps we are living in times like the end of the middle ages; society was about to change radically, but no one then could possibly have predicted the industrial society that was to emerge. Today, what is certain is that people caught in the transformation that is beginning now will be lost, angry, and in pain, and that much blood and many tears will be shed. What is expected of literature at such times? What can literature do about it? These questions prey upon my mind.

Tsujii Takashi

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