

JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

46

WINTER 2005



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The State of Modern Japanese Literature

Okuizumi Hikaru

This is a speech given by the author Okuizumi Hikaru at the University of Indonesia's Faculty of Literature on March 31, 2005. Okuizumi won the 110th Akutagawa Prize in 1994 for *Ishi no raireki* [The Stones Cry Out] and is now one of Japan's leading novelists. In this speech he presented an easy-to-understand analysis of the situation of contemporary Japanese literature and the mission of the author, focusing on the changing social role played by literature in Japan's modernization since the Meiji era (1868–1912).

This event was held as part of the Japan Foundation's Cultural Presentation Abroad Program in cooperation with the Indonesian Writers' Association and the Faculty of Literature of the University of Indonesia.

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Today I would like to talk about the current situation of Japanese literature, especially the novel, mixing in a little historical commentary.

In Japan today you often hear people saying, "literature is finished." In fact a great many novels are published every year, and many of these go on to be bestsellers. People still talk about the end of literature, though, and I think these words do reflect reality to some degree. Let us consider this issue from a historical perspective.

In the Edo period [1603–1868], one form of literature was the literary endeavors of warriors and other members of the intellectual class, which centered on classical Chinese literature. Novels, meanwhile, had become established as a form of reading entertainment for the general populace. These premodern novels were regarded as having very little value. With the advent of the modern age in the mid-nineteenth century, however, the novel came to play a major role in the modernization process. Literature and novels fulfilled the role of renewing the Japanese language. Another role of the modern novel was to create among the people a shared sense of nationhood. It is very hard to form a nation-state unless the people share a common perception of what is good, what is beautiful. The modern novel fulfilled this role, and novels came to be regarded as something of great value.

To elucidate this idea of "shared perceptions," I would like to introduce this haiku by the Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Furuike ya | At the ancient pond |
| Kawazu tobikomu | a frog plunges into |
| Mizu no oto | the sound of water* |

(trans. Sam Hamill)

The Japanese language basically does not distinguish between singular and plural, and in the original verse

there is no way of knowing whether there is only one frog or many. However, most Japanese assume that there is one. This is a "shared perception," something we sense even though no one has ever explained it to us. When I was at university an American student studied this haiku with us. He said, "There are 10,000 frogs in this poem." When asked why, he replied, "Because frogs live in large groups." The Japanese word *furuike* ("ancient pond" in the above translation) made him think of a big body of water like Lake Ontario and of a prehistoric age like the Jurassic era. He was not mistaken; the code he used to understand this haiku was just different from that used by Japanese readers.

When a modern nation is formed, its people need to share codes for many things and, through these codes, to have a shared perception of the world. In Japan, I believe that novels and literature played a major role in the formation of this shared perception. Japan's modernization was essentially completed in the 1910s.

Japan may have entered the modern age, but in the field of literature a second modern movement began to emerge strongly in about the 1930s. This was literature as a means of critiquing the institutions and perceptions of the nation-state that had been created. For example, some writers began to shine a light on things that had been set aside in the perception-sharing process. Literature also served as a movement for critiquing society by illuminating aspects that had been neglected when history was written, such as the problems of minorities.

Then came the late 1940s, when, following the suppression of the wartime period, literature returned to the spotlight in the postwar age as it became linked to the movement for political change centering on Marxism. Why was literature seen as so important? The radical movement that peaked in the 1960s attached the utmost importance to changing human perceptions. In short, there was a strong belief that the state system would not change unless people changed. I believe that novels and literature have the power to change how people think and feel. That is why there are continual attempts to use literature in the fields of politics and religion. In Japan, too, there was a long period in and around the 1960s when literature was widely accepted as having great value because it was at

* Composed by the Edo haiku poet Matsuo Bashō (1644–94), this is one of the most famous haiku in Japan, and it is no exaggeration to say that there is no Japanese who does not know it. It has been translated into numerous foreign languages, and whenever this happens there is always debate over such issues of interpretation as whether there is one frog or many. In a book published this year titled *Furuike ni kawazu wa tobikonda ka* [Did the Frog Jump into the Pond?] (Kashinsha, 2005), the contemporary haiku poet Hasegawa Kai puts forward the new hypothesis that the frog did not, in fact, leap into the water.



*Okuizumi addresses
the University of
Indonesia audience.*

the forefront of the human reforms that would supposedly lead to political reform.

Modern Japanese literature has thus fluctuated within two contradictory movements, a conservative movement concerned with creating and replicating the shared perceptions needed in the modern age and a movement concerned with critiquing and shaking up the shared perceptions that were created.

We now come to the issue of the end of literature. In the 1980s, the role of literature in these two movements shrank. First, the role of creating the shared perceptions needed to sustain the nation-state is now fulfilled by such forms as TV series. Sometimes when I watch TV programs in Japan, I feel as though I am watching modern literature. In this sense, it is fair to say that the role of literature has ended.

As for the second movement, what has happened to literature as a tool for critiquing and shaking the common perceptions of the nation-state? This is a big question. There is actually a strong sense of crisis in Japan that this role may be coming to an end. The fact that the movement for radical political change has run out of steam is a major contributory factor to this. As a result, the role of the novel as the driving force of criticism of the state and society appears to have ended, and all that remains is the novel in its premodern role as something to be consumed for entertainment.

If you think about it, though, it is quite natural for novels to be seen as entertainment. The modern era in which the novel took on another role was highly exceptional. As proof of this, there are many modern Japanese novels that are not in the least bit interesting but are said to have great value. There is a group of writers in Japan known as “naturalists,” and one of them made the following frank comment: “I don’t read the novels I write. I couldn’t read anything so dull.”

Yet these novels were accepted as having value, because they were written in an age when novels were seen as valuable in the context of their functions of creating modern society and then criticizing the society that came into being. In that sense, we are seeing nothing more than a return to basics. Literature and novels have been liberated from these functions and have returned to their natural status as a form of entertainment.

So, are novels just entertainment? This is a difficult issue. I think it has become clear that novels must be entertaining. Novels that do not entertain the reader are no longer acceptable. I question, however, whether entertainment is all that matters. In other words, I believe that the

original power of novels and literature to critique, to shine a light on things that have been forgotten by the world or by history and on things left untouched by daylight, is still there. Modern Japanese authors seek value in challenging existing codes while at the same time entertaining their readers. What is required of novels today is to shed light on various social problems while entertaining the people who read them.

I would also like to consider the fate of the Japanese language in my capacity as a novelist. The rise of English as the international language seems to be our common destiny. In this context, those of us who speak other languages face a major challenge in protecting and developing our languages. This is true of all languages.

In each language there are things that can only be expressed or conceived of in that language. Japanese, of course, has unique ideas that are inconceivable in any other language. I think it is the responsibility of novelists not just to protect these ideas but to develop and expand them.

The Japanese language appears healthy. University education in Japan is conducted in Japanese. Even lectures on German philosophy take place in Japanese; students read Kant and Hegel in Japanese and discuss them in Japanese. Japanese is an excellent language for translating, and there is a long tradition of translating large numbers of foreign works into Japanese—not only well-known books but works that one would never imagine would be translated. This has broadened the range of expressions found in Japanese, and has been a chance for the language to develop. A language is enriched through encounters with different thinking and different linguistic systems, and through the task—by rights a nearly impossible one—of transferring these into the language itself.

I believe that Japanese is currently in a critical state, though. I sense that the breadth of the world that can be expressed in Japanese is shrinking. Over the past 10 years, the power of translation has declined dramatically in Japan. Meanwhile, many people have expressed the view that we must defend the beauty of the Japanese language, and recently more elderly people have been getting angry about the “distorted” language used by the younger generations. I expect something similar is happening in Indonesia. Yet the sense of what is beautiful is not universal. Particularly with regard to language, perceptions of beauty can change in a very short period. The important issue is not defending beauty in the conservative sense but expanding the potential and power of a language to conceive and express new things. If this can be done, then I do not mind in the least if language becomes “distorted.” As an author, I think every day about expanding the possibilities of language in that sense. I believe that when peoples around the world develop the power of their languages and these different languages encounter one another, this increases the richness of culture.

I consider all of you here today to be members of the Indonesian literary world. In that sense, it follows that you face the same challenges as me. We share the challenge of how to expand the power of our country’s language and to encounter other cultures while developing our own distinctive culture. As people involved in the same field, language, let’s do our best to expand the possibilities of language.

FICTION



Sono Ayako

Born in 1931. Has published a number of well-known books, including *Kyokō no ie* [Fictional Family], which addressed domestic violence. Cooperated with the volunteer activities of overseas missionaries as a representative of the NGO Japan Overseas Missionaries Assistance Society.

Aika **[Lament]** By Sono Ayako

Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2005. 193x135 mm. Two volumes: 341 pp; 313 pp. ¥1,600 each. ISBN 4-620-10692-5; 4-620-10693-3.

What effect can the novel have on human suffering and sadness? This book helps to provide an answer to this question.

Torikai Haruna was a Catholic nun sent to an area in East Africa that was once under Belgian control. While confronting the crushing poverty, starvation, and sickness of that country, she spent her days in selfless devotion under the instruction of the Belgian mother superior of her convent, Soeur Louise.

This nun, however, soon found herself in a real-life tragedy as ethnic strife erupted in Rwanda. The conflict was between the Tutsi, a socially privileged minority, and the Hutu, the poor majority tribe. A Hutu politician who became president used a local radio station to call for an ethnic-cleansing campaign against the

Tutsi, and the convent was soon caught up in the tragic events that unfolded.

After the president drowned in a lake, the massacre of the Tutsi began. As this horror swept the country, Haruna herself was raped. She was eventually rescued by United Nations forces and taken to a neighboring country before returning home to Japan, where she at last came to accept her fate. This acceptance comes in the form of an *aika* (lament), the title of the book, that she directs to her unborn child.

Chiji ni kudakete **[Broken into Thousands of Pieces]**

By Levy Hideo

Kōdansha, 2005. 195x135 mm. 165 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 4-06-212884-5.

Chiji ni kudakete is a compilation of three pieces: the book's title work, a sequel to this work, and an essay that reads like an afterword. The opening piece is a masterpiece worthy of attention. The protagonist is an American named Edward, who appears to be the author's alter ego. Edward has lived in Japan for 20 years and occasionally makes trips back to the United States to visit relatives. On September 11, 2001, when the terrorist attacks take place, Edward happens to be in Canada on his way back to the United States.

Along with the shocking news of the attacks comes notice that the border has been closed, leaving Edward in Vancouver, "unable to return to America, unable to return to Japan." With a sense of alarm, Edward tries to contact his sister in New York and his mother in Washington, and

he walks the streets of Vancouver "with a feeling of dizziness and sense that my feet are not firm on the ground." This protagonist, who has become a bridge between America and Japan, constantly switches between Japanese and English in his head, and he loses the critical distance between himself and the tragedy that has unfolded. While watching American news reports on TV, he unconsciously argues against them in Japanese.

This story is possible because the author is an American who has traveled between Japan and the United States and who writes in Japanese. The book's title is taken from a haiku by Matsuo Bashō extolling Matsushima:

All those islands!
Broken into thousands of pieces,
The summer sea.



Levy Hideo

Born in California in 1950. Moved to Japan in 1967 and split his time between the two countries, receiving a PhD from Princeton University. In 1982 received the National Book Award for *The Ten Thousand Leaves: A Translation of Man'yōshū*, Japan's Premier Anthology of Classical Poetry.



Kawakami Hiromi

Born in 1958. Graduated from the Biology Department at Ochanomizu University. Belonged to a science-fiction group during her student days, when she began to write. Worked as a middle school teacher after graduation but became a writer after marriage and childbirth. Her 2001 work Sensei no kaban [The Teacher's Bag] became a bestseller, won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize, and was made into a TV drama.

Furudōgu Nakano Shōten **[The Nakano Thrift Store]**

By Kawakami Hiromi

Shinchōsha, 2005. 197x140 mm. 277 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 4-10-441204-X.

Kawakami Hiromi is one of Japan's most popular woman writers today. She has captivated many readers with her fluid style of writing, her refined and soft sense of humor, and her talent for telling stories that resemble fairy tales, depicting reality but seeming to float above it at the same time.

Furudōgu Nakano Shōten is her latest full-length novel. The fantastical nature of Kawakami's works is disappearing, replaced by the unique denseness one would find in a thrift shop. The book, composed of 12 chapters, could almost be read as a collection of 12 largely independent short stories. The setting for this novel is the Nakano Thrift Store, located to the west of central Tokyo in an area with many students. The shop does not sell expensive antiques. It mainly deals with cheap,

folksy odds and ends that are not especially old. The story—told from the perspective of Hitomi, a woman in her late twenties—sketches in detail the human relationships among Hitomi and others around her: Mr. Nakano, the good-natured, middle-aged storeowner with a keen eye for the opposite sex, Nakano's older sister Masayo, who makes dolls, Takeo, a young man who works at the shop, and the different customers who visit the store. The writing focuses not on the warmth of these relationships but on their more mysterious aspects.

Though the novel is set in modern Tokyo, it has a nostalgic atmosphere. The book examines human relationships in an elegant and humorous manner, but is at the same time somewhat melancholy.

6000 do no ai **[Love at 6,000 Degrees]**

By Kashimada Maki

Shinchōsha, 2005. 197x140 mm. 173 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 4-10-469502-5.

This novel employs the techniques of Marguerite Duras, detachedly sketching out the flow of a series of symbolic occurrences. Winner of the eighteenth Mishima Yukio Prize, *6000 do no ai* uses the story of a woman's casual love affair to bring into relief the memories of those who suffered from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

The story begins with the woman making curry roux in a pot. When her child asks her why the potatoes and onions have disappeared, she replies: "Because it's hot. These are things that melt and disappear when they get hot." Her answer hints at the fate of the victims of the atomic bombing, whose flesh melted away from the extreme heat. Having explained to her child why the potatoes and onions melted in the pot, the woman suddenly

springs into action, spurred by a bell in her housing complex's elevator that malfunctions and rings inadvertently. At that time in the back of her mind is the image of a slowly wavering, spreading mushroom cloud. She leaves her child with someone and sets off to Nagasaki, along the way meeting a man born of a Japanese father and a Russian mother. While telling the story of the woman and the man, this novel quietly makes the case that the atomic bombings have left deep scars on the psyches of modern people.



Kashimada Maki

Born in 1976. Graduated from the French Department of Shirayuri College. Won the Bungei Award for Nihiki [Two Animals], which she wrote in 1998 while in school. Has been interested in Russian literature since she was a child and converted to the Russian Orthodox Church when she was in high school. Is presently married to a missionary.

POETRY



Tanikawa Shuntarō

Born in 1931. Poet, translator, and screenplay writer. Is famous for his translations of The Songs of Mother Goose, for which he won the Japan Translation Culture Award, and the comic strip Peanuts. Tanikawa also reads his poems aloud to the accompaniment of his son, Kensaku, a jazz pianist, and is active in a number of other areas, including photography and video.

Shagāru to konoha [Chagall and Tree Leaves]

By Tanikawa Shuntarō

Shūeisha, 2005. 217x155 mm. 109 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 4-08-774758-1.

Three genres coexist in the world of Japanese poetry: two traditional short forms, tanka and haiku, and what is known as modern poetry, which formed under the influence of Western verse from the time of the Meiji Restoration. Tanikawa Shuntarō is a renowned figure in modern poetry—a leader in the field ever since he debuted in 1952 with the publication of his first poetry collection, *20 oku kōnen no kodoku* [trans. *Two Billion Light-Years of Solitude*], at the age of 21.

Shagāru to konoha is his most recent collection. While revealing an ever-deepening poetic maturity, the works therein also contain a mysterious lightness and clarity that transcend the ages. In the afterword, Tanikawa himself writes: “I have come to believe that the universe, which belongs to an endless space-time contin-

uum, exists within my body and soul.”

In the title piece, the poet describes how he placed a lithograph by Marc Chagall, which he spent large sums to purchase, next to the leaf of a chestnut oak he picked up off the road, saying that “something born of the heart and hand of man” and “something born of nature” were both irreplaceably important. He concludes another poem, “Aruku” (Walk), thusly:

Walking

This unpretentious joy

Whatever may be hidden in the heart

The legs tread firmly on this world.

This poetry collection shows no sign of Tanikawa’s aging. It is filled with pure joy.

BIOGRAPHY

Nakamura no Bōsu [Nakamura’s Bose]

By Nakajima Takeshi

Hakusuisha, 2005. 195x135 mm. 340 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 4-560-02778-1.

Tokyo’s Shinjuku district is home to a restaurant called Nakamura whose signature dish is Indian curry. The dish, which was made to contrast with the curry introduced to Japan in the early Meiji era (1868–1912) by the British, was created by Indian independence activist Rash Behari Bose, who had sought refuge in Japan.

This book tells the story of Bose’s life, in the process revealing the path taken by “Asianism” in Japan. During World War I, Bose escaped the British crackdown on the Indian independence movement and went into exile in Japan, taking shelter in Nakamura. He was helped by nationalists and pan-Asianists in Japan. The husband and wife who ran the restaurant sympathized with Bose and were pleased when he married their daughter.

This is all a well-known story, but this book goes further and illuminates Bose’s hopes for “Asian liberation” and how he gradually came to defend Japan’s advances into Asia. As a result, Bose came to be seen as a mere mouthpiece for Japan, and he lost his influence in India. Bose did not live to see India’s independence, passing away in his sleep in January 1945.



Nakajima Takeshi

Born in 1975. Graduated from the Osaka University of Foreign Studies with a major in Hindi. Won the Iue Asia Pacific Research Prize for his doctoral thesis. Is presently a researcher at the Kyoto University Institute for Research in Humanities.



Naitō Takashi

Born in 1949. While at the Sorbonne in Paris, focused his studies on artistic criticism of early-twentieth-century poet, playwright, and diplomat Paul Claudel. Is presently researching the themes of relationships between France and recent Japanese literature and arts, as well as cross-genre interactions between such areas as literature and painting. Presently a professor of literary research at Osaka University's graduate school.

Meiji no oto: Seiyōjin ga kiita kindai Nihon [The Sounds of the Meiji Era: Modernizing Japan as Heard by Westerners]

By Naitō Takashi

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005. 173x110 mm. 245 pp. ¥780. ISBN 4-12-101791-9.

A number of Westerners visited Japan from the time when Japan opened its shores at the end of the shogunate until just before World War II. What sounds captivated them? This book examines what they heard and addresses their impressions of Japan through the way they listened to sounds.

The book begins by quoting from the travelogues of Westerners who visited Japan near the end of the shogunate and reproduces the atmosphere of the times. In his work *Le Japon Illustré*, Swiss Ambassador Aimé Humbert, who stayed in the country for 10 months from April 1863, wrote that the kites in the Edo skies produced a sound akin to the Aeolian harps of Greece. The book argues that

sounds are much more culturally conservative than visual impressions, and it illuminates how Westerners in Japan, including Isabella Byrd, Edward Morse, Pierre Loti, Lafcadio Hearn, and Paul Claudel, perceived the sounds. The archaeologist Morse recorded Noh, *gagaku* (court music), the patter of street performers, shamisen music, and the cries of merchants. The traveler Byrd wrote that Japanese music was something only to grate on the nerves. Additionally, the French writer Loti and Hearn both wrote about the sound cicadas make; comparisons of the differences in their impressions, among other observations, make this book a fascinating look at ideas about Japan itself.

PHILOSOPHY

Moderunite, barokku [Modernity and the Baroque]

By Sakabe Megumi

Tetsugaku Shobō, 2005. 195x135 mm. 254 pp. ¥2,600. ISBN 4-88679-087-9.

This book, written by one of Japan's most renowned philosophers, represents an attempt to energize philosophy through the introduction of the concepts of the baroque and modernity. His subjects range from Mozart and Schelling to twentieth-century Japanese philosophers and aestheticians. He focuses on Charles Baudelaire (1821–67) and Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), discussing the similarity between Baudelaire's notion of baroque allegory and Baudelaire's modern allegory concept. Sakabe takes from this the idea that modernity is a baroque entity suffering from a loss of aura.

Next, the author compares the twentieth-century Japanese poet Hagiwara Sakutarō and the philosopher Kuki Shūzō. Both contemporaries of Benjamin, these two were obsessed with reading

Baudelaire. They were captivated by nostalgia and clung to aphoristic modes of thinking. Hagiwara ended up fleeing hopelessly into the phantoms that even he could no longer believe, while Kuki introduced Martin Heidegger to Japan and devoted his life to the study of contingency. By looking closely at the allegorical tendencies of these two Japanese, this book pursues the possibilities of Japanese philosophy in a way unconnected with Orientalism or cultural nationalism.



Sakabe Megumi

Born in 1936. Graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Tokyo. Is professor emeritus at his alma mater. His major works include *Risei no fuan* [The Uncertainty of Reason], *Watsuji Tetsurō*, and *Yōroppa seishinshi nyūmon: Karoringu runesansu no zankō* [Introduction to the History of European Spirituality: The Carolingian Renaissance].

ESSAY



Yonehara Mari

Born in 1950. Completed a doctorate course in Russian and Russian literature at the University of Tokyo. Was the first secretary general of the Russian Interpreters' Association, which was founded in 1980, and served as chair from 1995–97. Won the Ōya Sōichi Prize for her work *Usotsuki Anya no makkana shinjitsu* [*The Absolute Truth of Anya the Liar*].

Pantsu no menboku, fundoshi no koken [The Prestige of Underpants, the Dignity of *Fundoshi*]

By Yonehara Mari

Chikuma Shobō, 2005. 195x137 mm. 242 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 4-480-81639-9.

Yonehara Mari's writing is characterized by a humorous spirit that knows no taboos and by piercing, straightforward criticism. Her entertaining essays are often marked by erotic, lowbrow topics. This book is a lengthy piece that displays these qualities in full. The main theme of this essay is "the cultural history of our nether regions," namely underwear and the Japanese *fundoshi* (loincloth), topics that would usually be avoided in an essay intended for polite society.

The essay begins with a personal recollection. When the writer was studying at a Prague school in the early 1960s, the first thing the girls were taught in home economics was how to sew underwear. The reason was the extreme shortage of underwear produced by factories in the Soviet Union. With this as the keynote experi-

ence for her theme, the writer sets off on an exploration of how underwear was worn in the Soviet Union, Japan, and Western Europe, and how it was not. Ranging extensively over Eastern and Western materials both old and recent, she covers such topics as excretions, methods of dealing with menstruation, and a historical examination of *fundoshi*, the traditional Japanese men's underwear.

This book is steeped in piercing humor and makes for an interesting read. Beyond that, though, it presents a number of provocative discoveries through the rich use of quotations and the writer's own penetrating insights. Readers will assuredly get the feeling that they are standing at a gateway to the realm of comparative culture.

HISTORY

Senryō to heiwa [Occupation and Peace]

By Michiba Chikanobu

Seidosha, 2005. 195x140 mm. 720 pp. ¥4,200. ISBN 4-7917-6179-0.

Even 60 years after the end of World War II, the term "postwar" is still a valid term describing the present point in time, as well as a key word in the context of modern history. Many issues in Japan's postwar history, however, remain unclear, and this book is an effort to create a new understanding of postwar history by reexamining them.

The first issue taken up is Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which served as the prototype for postwar studies of Japanese culture, and the "Emperor as symbol" ideology that was also the joint creation of America and Japan during the Occupation. *Senryō to heiwa* next examines the role *Chrysanthemum* played in Occupation policy and provides an in-depth analysis of the process by which the Japanese people's be-

havioral patterns and views of their culture were formed.

This book addresses in a multifaceted manner "antiwar peace," a major issue in postwar Japan, presenting the matter within the framework of an "East Asia Cold War setup," and pointing out the problem that the Cold War is continuing in Asia through military alliances, mainly those involving the United States. In this respect, this book presents a postwar history that extends beyond Japan.



Michiba Chikanobu

Born in 1967. Received a master's degree from the Department of Sociology at Waseda University, where he majored in the history of Japanese social sciences and social movements. Is presently an adjunct instructor at Nihon University, Toyo University, and Gakushuin University.



Sawaragi Noi

Born in 1962. Art critic. Was heavily influenced by subculture beginning in the late 1970s, including punk and technopop. Made his debut in 1991 with Simulationism, a critique of house music and simulation art in and around New York. With a focus on artistic criticism, widely debates music and subculture and has worked as a director for exhibitions and TV programs. Is presently an associate professor at Tama Art University.

Sensō to Banpaku **[World Wars and World Fairs]**

By Sawaragi Noi

Bijutsu Shuppansha, 2005. 194x137 mm. 349 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 4-568-20174-8.

This book is an ambitious work of criticism that traces the path of the artists involved with the 1970 Osaka World Exposition while bringing into relief the relationship between “Expo art” and the “war art” that remained hidden in the background.

The Osaka Expo presented an idealized image of the future, and it was a seminal event in postwar Japan that caused people to dream of such prosperity. The country’s artistic avant-garde at the time was mobilized, including visual artists, architects, and musicians, and a space was created that could be called the “denouement” of this avant-garde in postwar Japan. Though these artists held to a variety of principles that sometimes conflicted with each other, they came together as a large group to create “Expo art” in

line with state propaganda for the “largest national undertaking outside of war,” which took as its theme “Mankind’s Progress and Harmony.” The author views this art as of the same nature as the paintings recording scenes of war produced in the past. He expounds that Japanese art during the war, after the war, and at present lies within the same current as the well-known war paintings known as “holy-war art.” Examining the matter from the perspectives of social and cultural history, this book develops a very interesting thesis. Published in the same year as the World Exposition held in Aichi, this is a timely work.

Taiheiyō Sensō to Shanhai no Yudaya nanmin **[The Pacific War and the Jewish Refugees in Shanghai]**

By Maruyama Naoki

Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 2005. 216x155 mm. 312 pp. ¥5,800. ISBN 4-588-37703-5.

Though Japan was once allied with Nazi Germany as a member of the Axis, it did not persecute Jews. Moreover, it actively accepted Jewish refugees from Europe and got them safely to third countries. This book is an interesting study of Jewish history in East Asia, a focus of interest among scholars in recent years; it primarily explores the Jews in Shanghai.

Over 20,000 Jews made their way to Japan or Japanese-occupied territories in the first half of the twentieth century. This was a new experience for Japan, which had only been a modern state since the Meiji era (1868–1912). While the military and the Foreign Ministry had a tendency to use these refugees for diplomatic leverage, fundamentally the government treated these people as refugees from a humanitarian perspective. As their num-

bers grew and the global political situation went downhill, it became extremely difficult to send them to the United States. Even so, Japan did the opposite of many other countries and continued to accept Jewish refugees into the territory it occupied up until the outbreak of the Pacific War.

Drawing on a wealth of materials and offering penetrating insights, this book begins by examining how the Jewish community was formed in Shanghai after the Opium Wars and continues the narrative up to the Jews plotting their escape from Shanghai as China slid into civil war after World War II. The work is a valuable resource for understanding what lay behind the personal decision of Sugihara Chiune to save the lives of many Jews from the Nazis.



Maruyama Naoki

Born in 1942. Professor at the Faculty of Law of Meiji Gakuin University. Researches international relations with a focus on the Middle East. Presented his paper, “Japanese, Japanese-Americans, and Jewish Americans: A Historical Study on Their Perceptions and Relations,” at the 2000 annual conference of the Japan Studies Association in Honolulu.



Fujita Midori

Professor at Tohoku University's Graduate School of International Cultural Studies. Her major papers include "A Nationalistic Meiji Novelist and His Solidarity with Africa" in Journal of Comparative Literature 29 (1986) and "Early History of Afro-Japanese Relations: People Called 'Kurobo' in the Sixteenth Century" in Studies of Comparative Literature 51 (1987).

Afurika "hakken" **[Discovering Africa]**

By Fujita Midori

Iwanami Shoten, 2005. 193x135 mm. 301 pp. ¥3,200. ISBN 4-00-026853-8.

This book examines the formation and changes in Japan's images of Africa and Africans in parallel with the history of Japanese-African relations.

It is said that Japan's first encounter with an African came during the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1603), when a man born in Mozambique was presented to Oda Nobunaga as a servant by an Italian Jesuit missionary. His appearance elicited surprise and wonder among the people. By the time of the Edo period (1603–1868), an image of black people had been formed through indirect information and had found its way into entertainment, while at the same time its "otherness" was emphasized. The author painstakingly examines the Japanese image of Africa by drawing on a variety of materials, including geography books

and political novels from the Meiji era (1868–1912), accounts of explorers and diplomatic emissaries, adventure novels in the Taishō (1912–26) and Shōwa (1926–89) eras, and the famous Tarzan movies.

By tracing the image of the "other," steeped in prejudice, this book takes a fascinating and unique look at the possibilities and limits of the awareness of the Japanese themselves. In this way it can be read as an inverted theory of Japanese-ness. Research on this type of theme has been surprisingly rare to date, and this book, one of the first such works, is a precious resource.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Supēsu shatoru no rakujitsu **[Decline of the Space Shuttle]**

By Sugiura Shin'ya

X-Knowledge, 2005. 193x135 mm. 239 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 4-7678-0418-3.

On August 10, 2005, the Space Shuttle *Discovery* returned to Earth after a two-week journey in space. The flight had faced a number of problems, including the loss of heat-protective tiles during lift-off, which led to an announcement that future shuttle flights would be suspended. The danger of the protective tiles falling off during liftoff had been pointed out beforehand, something that is obvious if you read this book published in May.

There have to date been 113 shuttle missions, 2 of which ended in fatal accidents, with the *Challenger* exploding during liftoff in 1986 and the *Columbia* breaking up upon reentry in 2003. These results are in line with the estimate released in 1989 by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, which placed the odds of a fatal accident befall-

ing any given shuttle mission at 50 to 1.

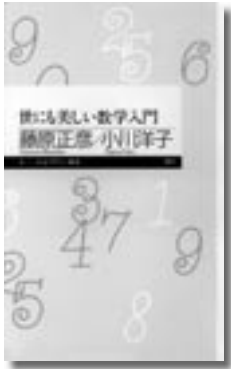
In addition to the risk of accidents, the cost of a shuttle launch had ballooned to ¥80 billion at the time of the *Columbia* disaster, nearly 30 times more than the approximately ¥3 billion spent for the first flight in 1981. Through its examination of the data, this book concludes that the shuttle program was a major failure in terms of developing a next-generation space vehicle.



Sugiura Shin'ya

Born in 1962. Graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering from Keio University, where he also completed a graduate course in media-creation studies. Worked as a reporter for Nikkei Business Publications, Inc., and is now active as a nonfiction writer specializing in aviation and space.

NATURAL SCIENCES



Fujiwara Masahiko
Born in 1943. Is a professor at Ochanomizu University. Presented a TV lecture on NHK in 2001 titled "The Glory and Frustrations of Geniuses," introducing nine mathematicians, including Newton. Is also an essayist.

Ogawa Yōko
Born in 1962. Her work has appeared in translation in the New Yorker. Her 1998 Kusuriyubi no hyōhon [*Ring Finger Specimen*] was made into a movie in France.

Yo ni mo utsukushii sūgaku nyūmon [An Introduction to the World's Most Elegant Mathematics]

By Fujiwara Masahiko and Ogawa Yōko

Chikuma Shobō, 2005. 173x106 mm. 173 pp. ¥760. ISBN 4-480-68711-4.

This book is a dialogue between a novelist and a mathematician on the extraordinary beauty of numbers. The writer, Ogawa Yōko, had three years earlier published *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* [The Equation the Professor Loved] (Shinchōsha; see *Japanese Book News* No. 43, Spring 2005, p. 14), whose protagonist was a mathematician. Ogawa got the idea for the book after watching the mathematician Fujiwara Masahiko on TV speaking of the triumphs and difficulties faced by mathematical geniuses.

According to Fujiwara, mathematics is incredibly beautiful, and mathematicians are those who have been captivated by this power and give their heart and soul over to numbers. The attraction of mathe-

matics is that the complications and the chaos of the real world can be solved immediately through a single formula. Mathematics in its essence brings unity.

Fujiwara says that the beauty of mathematics is close to that of literature, especially the haiku form, as the writer attempts to convey the essence of the world in a few short words. Ogawa points to the beauty of the eternal truth contained in just a single line: "The sum of the angles of a triangle is 180 degrees." Mathematicians refer to the special relationship between the numbers 220 and 284 as "amicable numbers." Ogawa says that this appellation proves that they are poets.

MEDIA

Sensō to masumedia [War and the Mass Media]

By Ishizawa Yasuharu

Minerva Shobō, 2005. 193x135 mm. 327 pp. ¥3,200. ISBN 4-623-04363-0.

This book analyzes the relationship between war and the mass media from the perspective of the ties between the mass media and government in times of war. The author calls into question the nature of journalism by bringing to light the fact that the American media, which had been thought to be generally critical of the US government, was unable to criticize the administration in its reports on the 1991 Gulf War.

The introductory chapter argues that the mass media serves the functions of "framing," or selecting and reporting which of the limitless phenomena in society it deems worth informing its audience of, and "gate-keeping." It also explains that the mass media represents a form of entertainment dependent on fixed images conforming to what can be widely ac-

cepted among certain social groups and members of society.

Based on this kind of analysis of the functions of mass media, this book explains that through its reporting on the Gulf War, the media helped form a body of public opinion that accelerated war with Iraq, demonstrating the effectiveness of the White House's media strategy. This book pointedly identifies the problems in American journalism, noting for instance that the media was not supported by the American people at the time of the Gulf War because of the transformation of journalism into a mere profit-seeking business and a form of entertainment.



Ishizawa Yasuharu
Born in 1957. Earned his MPA from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Was a reporter for the Far East bureau of the Washington Post and deputy editor for the Japanese version of Newsweek. Is presently a professor in the Department of Intercultural Communications at Gakushuin Women's College.

Japanese Book News is beginning a new series of articles introducing books that offer a deeper fundamental understanding of Japanese culture and society. The inaugural article will cover instructive titles on the artistic genre that

currently attracts the greatest international attention: Japanese film. We hope this series will prove enjoyable as well as informative.

No. 1: Cinema

Step into a Japanese bookstore and one will immediately notice the books about movies—both scholarly and popular—and the large number of shelves they take up compared to works on other artistic genres. This article showcases notable titles on Japanese films, primarily those that have been published fairly recently.

Cinema Histories and Reviews

General histories of Japanese film have been written by such critics as Iijima Tadashi, Iwasaki Akira, and Tanaka Jun'ichirō. The latest substantial work is the four-volume *Nihon eiga shi* [History of Japanese Cinema] (Iwanami Shoten, 1995) by Satō Tadao, a masterful overview of the art. A recommended book at the short end of the spectrum is *Nihon eiga shi 100-nen* [100 Years of Japanese Cinema] by Yomota Inuhiko, one of the younger generation of critics. Also by Yomota, *Nihon eiga no radikaru na ishi* [Radical Will in Japanese Cinema] is a collection of essays discussing high-profile contemporary filmmakers. The two books, described on the following page, are best read together, the former for an overview and the latter for an up-close look.

Other notable titles include *Teikoku no ginmaku* [trans. *The Imperial Screen*] (Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1995), a detailed treatise on Japanese films made during World War II, by Peter B. High, an American residing in Japan; Hirano Kyōko's *Tennō to seppun: Amerika senryōka no Nihon eiga ken'etsu* [a translation of *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema Under the American Occupation, 1945–1952*] (Sōshisha, 1998), which looks at movies made during the early postwar years; *Hibakusha Shinema: Nihon eiga ni okeru Hiroshima, Nagasaki to kaku no imēji* [trans. *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*] (Gendai Shokan, 1998), a unique anthology of essays about the depiction of the atomic bombings in Japanese film, edited by Mick Broderick; *Nihon eiga boku no sanbyappan* [My Three Hundred Japanese Movies] (Bunshun Shinsho, 2004) by Japan's oldest active critic, Futaba Jūzaburō, who has followed Japanese cinema for many decades; and *Eiga kantoku besuto 101: Nihon hen* [Japan's Best 101 Film Directors] (see p. 14), an introduction to 142 directors old and new edited by Kawamoto Saburō.

While there is a large number of film critics, some of the most reliable reviews are written by Yamane Sadao and Ueno Kōshi, who have watched Japanese movies on an ongoing basis. Yamane is well versed in period and *yakuza* (Japanese mafia) movies, and in his recent *Gendai eiga e no tabi 1994–2000* [Journey into Contemporary Movies, 1994–2000] (Kōdansha, 2001) he has also come to actively discuss foreign films. *Eiga zenbun 1992–1997* [Complete Cinema, 1992–1997] (Little More, 1998) by Ueno, who has written discourses on subjects including

Suzuki Seijun and manga, is a fine work about Japanese movies of the 1990s.

Books About Filmmakers

The year 2005 has seen the publication of numerous books commemorating the centenary of the birth of director Naruse Mikio. Susanne Schermann's *Naruse Mikio: Nichijō no kirameki* [Naruse Mikio: The Splendor of the Ordinary] (Kinema Junpōsha, 1997) is a work by an Austrian scholar living in Japan. *Naruse Mikio no sekai e* [Into the World of Naruse Mikio] (Chikuma Shobō, 2005), edited by Hasumi Shigehiko, is the latest anthology of essays about the director. A monograph has also been published by up-and-coming critic Abe Casio under the title *Naruse Mikio: Eiga no josei sei* [Femininity in Naruse Mikio's Films] (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2005). Chūko Satoru's *Naruse Mikio no sekkei: Bijutsu kantoku wa kaisō suru* [The Design of Naruse Mikio: Reminiscences of an Art Director] (Chikuma Shobō, 1993) is a beautiful memoir by a man who worked on numerous Naruse films as art director.

Many fascinating titles are to be found on and by film directors. Kurosawa Akira's *Gama no abura: Jiden no yō na mono* [trans. *Something Like an Autobiography*] (Iwanami Gendai Bunko, 2001), Ozu Yasujiro's *Zen nikki Ozu Yasujiro* [The Full Diary of Ozu Yasujiro] (Film Art Sha, 1993), Makino Masahiro's *Eiga tosei: Makino Masahiro jiden* [Living in the Film World: The Autobiography of Makino Masahiro] (Chikuma Bunko, 1995), Fukasaku Kinji's *Eiga kantoku Fukasaku Kinji* [Film Director Fukasaku Kinji] (Wides Shuppan, 2003), Suō Masayuki's "*Shall we dansu?*" *Amerika o iku* [Shall We Dance? Tours the United States] (Bunshun Bunko, 2001), and Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Kurosawa Kiyoshi no kyōfu no eiga shi* [Kurosawa Kiyoshi's Horrible History of Films] (Seidosha, 2003) are all books written or dictated by the directors themselves. In *Ozu Yasujiro no han-eiga* [trans. *Ozu's Anti-Cinema*] (Iwanami Shoten, 1998) the film director Yoshida Yoshishige discusses a senior colleague whom he reveres. The book is singular in being told through the perspective of an artist in the same profession.

There is a fair share of writers among documentary film directors as well, and many of their works are literary gems. Those by veteran and mid-career directors include *Eiga wa ikimono no shigoto de aru* [Filmmaking Is the Work of Living Beings] (Miraisha, 2004) by Tsuchimoto Noriaki, who directed a series of films involving Mina-

mata disease; *Eiga o toru* [Harvesting Film] (Chikuma Shobō, 1993) by Ogawa Shinsuke, the creator of a series about the Narita protests; *Fumikoeru kyamera* [The Overstepping Camera] (Film Art Sha, 1995) by Hara Kazuo; and the two-volume *Dokumentarī eiga no chihei* [Horizons of Documentary Film] (Gaifūsha, 2001) by Satō Makoto. Works by younger directors, meanwhile, include *Dokumentarī wa uso o tsuku* [Documentaries Lie] (Sōshisha, 2005) by Mori Tatsuya, who produced the documentary *A* based on his coverage of the Aum Shinrikyo cult.

Turning to books by producers and those in other crew occupations, there is *Haran banjō no eiga jinsei* [My Roller-Coaster Life in Cinema] (Kadokawa Shoten, 2004) by Okada Shigeru, an autobiography recounting the turbulent life of a man who began his career at the Manchuria Film Association during World War II and went on to become a top producer for Tōei Corp. In *Nihon eiga wa saikō dekiru* [Japanese Film Can Be Revived] (Wayts, 2003), renowned producer Lee Bong-woo, who is a resident Korean, makes aggressive proposals as a young creator fully versed in the standards of world film. *Shōwa no geki* [Drama in the Showa Era] (Ohta Shuppan, 2002) by Kasahara Kazuo, the screenwriter for *Jingi naki tatakai*

[Battles Without Honor and Humanity], is a powerful book that comments on movies that he has scripted, as well as offering a picture of Japan's postwar history. While many autobiographies have been written by actors and actresses, a worthwhile read is *Ri Kōran to Higashi Ajia* [Li Xianglan and East Asia] (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2001), a treatise edited by Yomota Inuhiko that not only looks at the extraordinary actress but, with her as a reference point, ventures farther into studies of the East Asian region.

Subculture Books

A vast number of books are available on manga and anime, two genres close to that of film. Natsume Fusanosuke, Yomoto Inuhiko, and other authors have published some serious manga reviews of interest. Here, however, we will introduce *Kyōyō toshite no "manga, anime"* [Basic Knowledge of Manga and Anime] (see p. 14) by Ōtsuka Eiji and Sasakibara Gō, a compact volume that offers an overview of manga and anime.

(Ishizaka Kenji, Japan Foundation)

***Nihon eiga shi 100-nen* [100 Years of Japanese Cinema]**

By Yomota Inuhiko

Shūeisha, 2000. 174x110 mm. 240 pp. ¥720. ISBN 4-08-720025-6.

This book provides comprehensive histories of Japanese cinema in compact, paperback form, including up-to-date information from as recently as the new millennium. The author considers historical changes in the social, political, and cultural backgrounds to movies; traces the evolution of related technology, from silent movies to talkies, black-and-white to color, and film to video; and also includes the "local" character of movies as represented

by such actors as Ishihara Yūjirō and Takakura Ken and by such works as the Godzilla series, the Tora-san series, animated movies, and pornographic movies. This book and its below-mentioned companion *Nihon eiga no radikaru na ishi* [Radical Will in Japanese Cinema] together provide a broad as well as richly detailed view of the current state of Japanese cinema.



***Nihon eiga no radikaru na ishi* [Radical Will in Japanese Cinema]**

By Yomota Inuhiko

Iwanami Shoten, 1999. 195x140 mm. 495 pp. ¥3,000. ISBN 4-00-001756-X.

This book looks at 17 Japanese film directors distinguished for their work since the collapse of the Japanese movie studio system in the 1980s. The author seeks an overall view through an analysis based as much as possible on the entire opus of each director, including not only their feature films but also amateur-period 8-mm studies, works produced for television, and works of "V cinema" (movies originally shot on videotape). Introduced directors

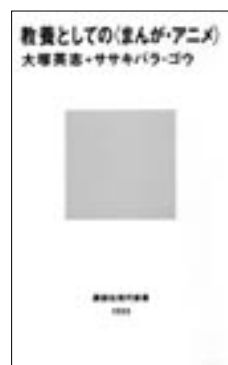
are those who have continued to make stimulating movies in the "post-giant" era of Japanese film, building his discussion around key concepts often associated with each director—Kitano Takeshi and violence, Sai Yoichi and ethnicity, Oshii Mamoru and devastation, Bandō Tamasaburō and the remaking of tradition, and so on. (Yomota Inuhiko is a professor at Meiji Gakuin University.)

***Eiga kantoku besuto 101: Nihon hen* [Japan's Best 101 Film Directors]** By Kawamoto Saburō

Shinshokan, 2003. 211x140 mm. 260 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 4-403-25071-8.

Despite its title, this book actually introduces a total of 142 Japanese film directors—from Uchida Tomu and Mizoguchi Kenji to recent directors like Furumaya Tomoyuki (b. 1968)—in two sections respectively titled “Best 101” and “Plus 41.” Edited by Kawamoto Saburō, the book consists of commentaries by him and 11 other contributors. The selection of directors is finely tuned and drawn from a wide range of filmmaking

genres. In addition to such greats as Ozu Yasujiro and Kurosawa Akira, there are the comparatively minor “program picture” directors, noted directors of pornographic movies, documentary directors, and animated-film directors including Miyazaki Hayao. One can discern Kawamoto’s intent to reexamine Japanese cinema through the lens of foreign cinema. (Kawamoto Saburō is a literary and film critic.)



***Kyōyō toshite no “manga, anime”* [Basic Knowledge of Manga and Anime]**

By Ōtsuka Eiji, Sasakibara Gō

Kōdansha, 2001. 174x106 mm. 266 pp. ¥720. ISBN 4-06-149553-4.

This compact volume provides an overview of two genres, manga and animated films, and includes a survey of the development of each, elucidating the roles of their key authors and artists. Ōtsuka Eiji writes on manga in the first half and Sasakibara Gō on anime in the latter half. Ōtsuka examines manga works in their historical setting and offers insights into post-

war Japanese society. He explores a range of intriguing topics, including the connection between postwar democracy and manga by Tezuka Osamu that feature robots with names related to atomic and nuclear power, as in *Tetsuwan Atomu* [trans. *Astro Boy*]. (Ōtsuka Eiji is a manga critic; Sasakibara Gō is a freelance editor.)

Events and Trends

(October to December 2005)

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

Nakamura Fuminori, 27, won the 133rd Akutagawa Prize for his novel *Tsuchi no naka no kodomo* [Child in the Ground] (Shinchōsha). Nakamura is the first male since 2002 to win one of the top literary awards in Japan given to promising new writers. His book describes a youth abandoned by his parents. The protagonist is a taxi driver, who has lived a harsh life of abuse by his foster parents, who even buried him alive when he was a child. The story depicts how he deals with the trauma from child abuse. Nakamura made his debut in 2002 with *Jū* [A Rifle] (Shinchōsha), which won the Shinchō Prize for new writers, and received the Noma Literary Prize for new talent for *Shakō* [Shielded Light] (Shinchōsha). He was nominated two times for the Akutagawa Prize prior to

receiving the honor this year.

Another noted award, the Naoki Prize, was given to a collection of six short stories by Shukawa Minato, 42. The award-winning *Hana manma* [Flower-Shaped Rice] describes children in Shukawa’s hometown, Osaka, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Shukawa quit working for an art-related publisher when he was 27 and became a househusband, aspiring to be a writer. His first novel, *Fukurō otoko* [An Owl Man] (Bungei Shunjū), was published in 2002, winning the All Yomimono New Mystery Writers’ Prize. In 2003, he received the Japan Horror Story Grand Prize for *Shiroi heya de tsuki no uta o* [A Moon Song in a White Room] (Kadokawa Shoten). He won the Naoki Prize on his second nomination.

Meanwhile, the forty-first Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize went to Machida Kō’s

Kokuhaku [Confession] (Chūō Kōron Shinsha; see *Japanese Book News* No. 45, Fall 2005, p. 4) and *Fūmi Zekka* [Magnificent Taste] (Bungei Shunjū) by Yamada Amy.

Establishment of the Ōe Kenzaburō Prize

Kōdansha has established a new literary award in commemoration of its centennial. Named the Ōe Kenzaburō Prize, it also celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Nobel laureate’s launch of his writing career. Ōe (b. 1935) himself will be the lone member of the selection committee, which will consider a broad spectrum of literary works, centering on the novel. While there will be no prize money, the winning work will be translated into English and published abroad. The inaugural prize will be awarded

to a work published during 2006, and the winner will be announced in May 2007. While no comment on the selection of the work will be issued, a discussion between Ōe and the recipient will be published in the monthly literary magazine *Gunzō*.

New Translations of The Little Prince

The Little Prince by French aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry was first published in 1943 in both French and English. It has since been translated into more than 100 languages and is one of the bestselling books ever. Exclusive Japanese translations rights has been held since 1953 by Iwanami Shoten Publishers, which has sold more than 6 million copies of a translation by Naitō Arou.

The copyright to the original novel in Japan expired in January 2005, however, and a number of new translations have since been published. Five new editions have appeared on the bookstands since June, including translations by Kojima Toshiharu (Chūō Kōron Shinsha), Mino Hiroshi (Ronsōsha), Kurahashi Yumiko (Takarajimasha), Ikezawa Natsuki (Shūeisha), and Yamazaki Yōichirō (Misuzu Shobō).

Except for Yamazaki's translation, all the new editions use the title first given by Naitō: *Hoshi no ōjisama* [Prince from a Star]. Yamazaki chose *Chīsana ōjisama*, which is a more literal rendering of the original. His edition also includes detailed notes, explaining, for instance, that the book was based on the author's near-death experience after crashing into a desert in Libya in 1935.

In a related development, a Website was set up in April 2005 to solicit submissions from the public for use in creating an "Internet edition" of *Hoshi no ōjisama*.

Boom in Literary Prizes a Boon?

There are around 450 prizes for literature awarded each year in Japan. Many of the more recently established among these have selection committees composed of singers, actors, and even bookstore employees. Authors,

though, are becoming an endangered species in many of these groups.

Faced with a slump in business, the industry is turning to these contests as a way to increase sales. Some of them, though, seem to be reducing the role and authority of writers themselves in the award-giving process.

The Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize was at the forefront of this trend. Established in 2004, this prize is awarded to the best novel of the year as chosen by bookstore clerks throughout Japan, who vote via the Internet. After Ogawa Yōko's *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* [The Equation the Professor Loved] (Shinchōsha) took this award last year, sales skyrocketed to total more than 400,000, making the book a runaway bestseller. The novel had sold an impressive 100,000 copies before receiving the prize, but the trust consumers place in the booksellers who made this pick was able to quadruple these numbers.

This spring the magazine *Yasei jidai* [The Age of Wildness], published by Kadokawa Shoten, launched its own Internet-based award contest. The magazine publicly solicits manuscripts and posts the top five selections in full on its Website, where readers can vote on them. The Seishun Bungaku Taishō [Youth Literature Prize] is awarded to the work selected by the magazine's editors, bookstore representatives, and readers.

Yahoo Japan will also create a prize for fiction based on voting conducted over the Internet. The first prize will be presented in January 2006, and the winning novel will be published in digital form.

The publisher Takarajimasha launched the Japan Love Story Award this spring, signing up popular young celebrities—the singer Ōtsuka Ai and the actor Narimiya Hiroki—to serve as special members of the prize committee. While this is an award given specifically to love stories, and as such may require a bit more of a pop-art sensibility, this program does seem to indicate a tendency to view literature as one form of fashion.

These literary prizes may give an ailing book industry a temporary shot in the arm by raising sales, but it remains to be seen whether they will raise the quality of literature in Japan.

Announcement

JBN Database

The Japan Foundation has added two publishing-related databases to its Website. The first contains back issues of *Japanese Book News* in either text or PDF format, and the other is a bibliography of Japanese literary works that have been translated into other languages. Both can be accessed from the Japan Foundation's Website (www.jpf.go.jp/e/publish/). We hope the new databases will prove to be both useful and enjoyable.

Visitors to the *Japanese Book News* Website can now search the newsletter's "New Titles" sections starting with issue number 43 by genre, title, and author's name. Earlier issues can be downloaded as PDF files. The site also provides details on the titles on the *List of Recommended Works* in the Japan Foundation's Translation and Publication Support Program.

Japanese Literature in Translation Search, meanwhile, is a database of Japanese literary works that have been translated since the end of World War II through the 1990s. Data is searchable by title, author, translator, publisher, and target language and is based on *Japanese Literature in Foreign Languages 1945–1995*, published by the Japan P.E.N. Club.

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Editing, Translation, Design, and Production

Japan Echo Inc.

Printed in Japan on recycled paper
© The Japan Foundation 2005
ISSN 0918-9580

Reaching Readers with Color

A schoolboy ran up to children's book illustrator Arai Ryōji at a book signing, whispering to the celebrated artist: "Sir, you'd better erase your penciled draft lines in your work."

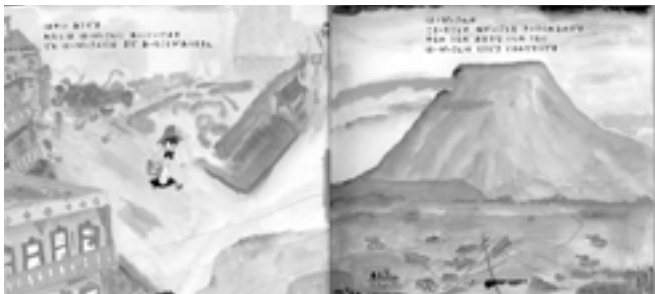
Far from feeling insulted, Arai was thrilled. "That's the kind of reaction I'd always like to get from children," says the 49-year-old artist, pointing out the lines intentionally left in his watercolor work *Happi-san* [Happy] (Kaiseisha, 2003). His goal is to make children believe they could do a much better job.

The value of Arai's work was clear to the jury of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, often called the "Nobel Prize of children's literature." After careful screening of 118 candidates from around the world, Arai was chosen this year as a co-winner, along with British novelist Philip Pullman, of the prize named after the Swedish creator of Pippi Longstocking. Both authors received 2.5 million krona, or \$370,000, in prize money.

In their statement, the judges praised Arai's "bold, mischievous, and unpredictable" style and stated that "his art is at once genuine and truly poetic, encouraging children to paint and to tell their own stories."

Unlike many literary awards, the Lindgren award is based on the author's entire body of work. Arai won high praise for a varied career, which has included workshops for children as well as his picture books for toddlers, whimsical humor works, and collections of folk tales.

Arai's stories and illustrations feature no evil spirits. He paints charming boys and girls and adorable animals, never anything monstrous. His works are vibrant with

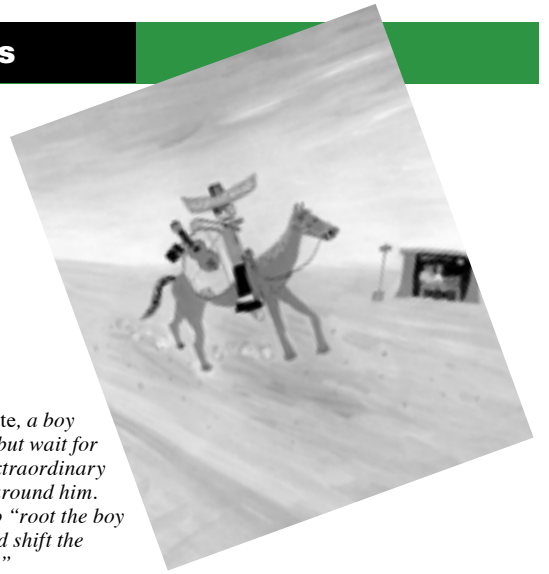


Arai wrote *Happi-san* over six days spent at a quiet hot-spring inn in the Japan Alps of Nagano, where he often goes to work.

music and dance, movement and silence, all in his signature bright colors. They are infused with a deep sweetness, although he does not entirely overlook harsh reality.

In *Happi-san*, for example, a boy and a girl climb a mountain to meet Happy, a being believed to often appear at the summit, where he grants wishes for visitors. The children do not get to meet Happy in the end, but they feel as if they have been close to him. The story is simple and heartwarming, but a closer examination of the pictures shows another face to the world, one they have climbed far above in their journey: tiny tanks and the fires of battle can be found at the foot of the mountain.

"Parents tend to focus on the written lines," says Arai, "so they don't usually recognize the tanks until their chil-



In *Basu ni notte*, a boy does nothing but wait for a bus while extraordinary things go on around him. Arai set out to "root the boy to the spot and shift the surroundings."

dren point them out and ask about the relationship between the narrative and the illustration." He wants family members to use his books as an entryway to talking and thinking about the meanings behind the stories.

"Awful things do happen in this world, and it would be a mistake to fill picture books with nothing but carefree scenes full of happy, smiling people," continues the author. "I find my attention drawn to the wars and other struggles going on around the world, and I want to encapsulate that feeling in my works."

Inspired by Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon*, he became interested in creating children's books in his university days. But pictures have been a part of his life for much longer. Instead of going to elementary school he often stayed at home, spending his days drawing. Today when he paints he frequently imagines kids like him, who refuse to attend school. His creative process is fueled by their images and his hope that his books will encourage them in some way.

The hard-working creator has more than 10 books in the pipeline today. *Kyō to iu hi* [The Day Called Today], a quiet, simple tale in which a girl knits a scarf and builds tiny snow huts to house candles, will reach his fans right before Christmas 2005. An animated TV program, his debut in that medium, is scheduled to air on Japan's public educational channel from April 2006.

With the award to his name, his fame is likely to spread overseas. Work is underway to translate Arai's *Basu ni notte* [Taking the Bus] (Kaiseisha, 1992) and two other books into Swedish, putting them into the hands—and hearts—of children in the land of Astrid Lindgren.

(Kawakatsu Miki, Japan Echo Inc.)



Arai Ryōji

Born in 1956. Studied art at Nihon University. Has worked in advertising, magazine illustration, theater set design, and singing and songwriting. His illustrated books have won him a number of awards in his native Japan and around the world. His website is: <www33.ocn.ne.jp/~oguma/arai/>.