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Publishing Nonfiction Translations

Saishō Hazuki

I interviewed a neuroscientist once at an academic conference in Germany. He asked me about the sort of books I wrote, so I told him about *Zettai onkan* [Absolute Pitch]. This nonfiction work aims to give insight into absolute pitch from a variety of perspectives, including aural psychology, neuroscience, and education, mixing this information with the testimony of musicians. He was interested and said he would very much like to read the book. Unfortunately, however, it had not been published in English. When I got back to Japan I sent him a copy together with a brief outline written in English. He kindly wrote back a thank-you note noting that it was a shame he couldn't read Japanese, and there the matter ended.

This rather frustrating sort of thing always happens when I introduce myself to people overseas. The frustration goes beyond these meetings, too—whenever I hear of a paper that takes for granted that absolute pitch is a naturally endowed talent, I wonder why the author hasn't referred to the previous literature in the field from overseas. My own work has already shown that most children in Japan acquire absolute pitch through the country's innovative education system and that this ability has nothing at all to do with genetics.

I wanted to look into the situation regarding publishing translations of nonfiction partly as a result of these personal experiences, but also because while presenting Japanese books as a member of the *Japanese Book News* Advisory Board I felt very strongly that a number of these books really are world-class. According to a 1999 Japan Foundation report, Japan's exports of literary copyrights are just one-twentieth of its imports. It is not clear what the figures are for nonfiction titles. While works from overseas in such areas as politics, medicine, science, and self-help are imported in vast quantities, the numbers being exported are so small there don't even seem to be any statistics on them. Why should this be? What possible barriers could there be to the export of translations? I decided to look into this situation a little more deeply, concentrating mainly on the status of publications translated into English.

The New York-based publisher Vertical, Inc., which specializes in translations of Japanese works, released its first nonfiction work at the end of 2006. This was *Honda shinwa: Kyōso no naki ato de* [trans. *The Honda Myth: The Genius and His Wake*] by Satō Masaaki, about the lives of Honda Sōichirō, who took Honda Motor Co., Ltd. from small back-street factory to worldwide enterprise, and his old ally, Fujisawa Takeo.

It was a long and tortuous road to get as far as publishing the translation. The original Japanese version was published in 1995, and when a Japanese journalist with the *Financial Times* featured it in the paper, an offer to

translate the book came from Oxford University Press. Satō readily gave his consent, but it was to take a very long time before the manuscript was complete. Eventually, the full English translation was finished in 1999. Vertical was preparing its launch at the time. When Satō asked Sakai Hiroki, Vertical's president and an old friend, to read through the translation, the latter discovered a number of serious errors.

"There were all sorts of mistakes—for example, although the subject was supposed to be General Motors it said Ford, or before you knew it a passage on capital alliances began talking about technology alliances," says Sakai. "It was totally unfit for publication as it was. We had repeated discussions with the editors at Oxford University Press, as a result of which it was decided that Vertical would redo the translation and publish it."

Vertical asked a two-person team—a Japanese woman and her American husband—to handle the translation, and a Japanese person who had grown up in the United States helped get the text reading as naturally as possible. The whole translation was then checked over by Editorial Director Ioannis Mentzas, and finally it was complete. The first edition was published, with a print run of just under 10,000 copies, but it has yet to create much of a stir.

"There are a lot of costs involved in publishing a translation," says Sakai. "First you have the translation fees, to which you have to add the cost of printing, paper, and binding. On top of that, we asked Random House, Inc. to take care of the business side, and we have to pay them 20% of the sales. It is far tougher to get to the break-even point for a title here than it is in Japan—you have to sell over 15,000 copies before you get out of the red. It is hard for a full-length work to make that much of a profit."

One company that has been publishing works translated into English for over 40 years is Kodansha International Ltd. Company president Tomita Mitsuru agrees that costs are a huge problem. Bestselling works like *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* [trans. *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*] are few and far between, and for the last eight years the company has been releasing books in Japanese to make a profit.

A shortage of translators also contributes to the difficulty of publishing translations. The people who introduced Japanese literature to overseas readers were primarily academics, almost all working in the pure literary fields of classical, modern, and even contemporary literature. The shortage is a particularly serious barrier to global distribution of these works, considering that the production of a definitive English translation gives a book a good chance to ripple across the English-speaking world, Europe, and eventually the whole world.

"There are people who want to do translations," says

Tomita. “The problem, though, is that they tend to be English teachers or expatriates between jobs—they aren’t professional translators. Things start getting a bit tricky when it comes down to whether they can grasp the distinctive atmosphere of the original works and read between the lines when necessary, or whether they have real writing ability.”

There is also a structural problem: there has been no fostering of translators with the requisite expressive power at a high literary level, because up until now the majority of English translation has been in the business world. Most translations are purchased at a flat rate, without ongoing royalty payments, and there are figures showing that translations in the arts get about half as much as translations in the field of business.

Sakai has looked into the current situation of publishing in the United States, and he notes a further problem. “American readers are not in the habit of reading books translated into English from other languages,” he says. “As we are trying to get people to buy translations, this means we have a huge hurdle to get over. We decided at Vertical that first and foremost we would maintain the quality of the English writing. For this reason we respect the wishes of the translators, and we offer them a choice of contract between royalties, a one-off payment, or a compromise between the two.”

Despite these difficulties, Kakehashi Kumiko’s *Chiruzo kanashiki* [trans. *So Sad to Fall in Battle*] was published in the United States in January 2007 in an unprecedented first edition of 30,000. The book tells the story of General Kuribayashi Tadamichi, who fought against the US forces on the island of Iōjima (Iwo Jima) during World War II. Its publication more or less coincided with the release of Clint Eastwood’s film *Letters from Iwo Jima*. According to Miyabe Hisashi, who handles copyright matters at Shinchōsha, the book’s Japanese publisher, Random House bought the publishing rights for the United Kingdom and the United States when an editor who knew about the film version marketed the US publication rights through an agent. On the strength of the English version, translations were also slated for Italy, Spain, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

“While you might think that Random House bought the rights after making a careful study of the book, this was probably not the case,” says Miyabe. “I imagine the Clint Eastwood film prompted them to make the purchase.” The title of the book’s UK edition bears this out. “This really is awful,” says Miyabe—the cover reads *Letters from Iwo Jima*, the same title as the film. It should be noted that the film was not based on this book.

High costs, a shortage of translators, insufficient respect paid to the original work—there are certainly numerous obstacles to overcome. Even so, the people interviewed for this article all share the view that the day will eventually come when nonfiction translations make it to the English-speaking world on a regular basis. Certain conditions need to be met, however.

The first of these is the subject matter. An important premise is whether the book is written with a diversity of religions and races in mind. For example, it would be difficult to release Tachibana Takashi’s *Nōshi* [Brain Death] in the United States, where, unlike in Japan, organ trans-

plants are routinely carried out. A work like Komatsu Narumi’s *Ichiro on Ichiro*, a collection of interviews with baseball superstar Suzuki Ichirō published in the United States in 2004, has a chance of getting published if the interviewee or the author is an international celebrity. There are risks here, too, though: for example, Vertical was working on an English translation of *Utsukushii kuni e* [Toward a Beautiful Country] by Abe Shinzō when he was prime minister, but had to abandon the project when he stepped down.

The second condition for publication is strict citation of references. Footnotes are avoided in Japanese nonfiction as they are felt to hinder readability, and sources are either cited in the text or else at the end of the work. This is due to the particular way that nonfiction developed in Japan as a branch of literature distinct from academic treatises. Given the current heightened awareness of copyright and personal information issues, however, this is an area that calls for caution. Be that as it may, if these conditions are met there is every chance that translations of Japanese works can be exported. There is also a strong likelihood that the market will see some original works written from the start on the premise that they will eventually be translated into English.

I have only looked so far at the publication of English translations, but there has also been considerable interest recently in the trends in Asia. Over 90% of Shinchōsha’s copyright exports go to the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and China, and top-class translators find their services in tremendous demand. Love stories and mysteries are particularly popular, but there are also requests for translations of nonfiction—the day I was gathering material for this article, the decision had just been made to publish Uesugi Takashi’s book giving the inside story of the collapse of the Abe administration, *Kantei hōkai* [Collapse of the Prime Minister’s Office], in the Republic of Korea. In the past, literary exports were mainly limited to pure literature, but they have now come to include entertainment-oriented fiction and manga; given that interest in Japan is increasing all the time, this is probably a good opportunity for a rediscovery of the allure of nonfiction. I certainly intend to work on bringing out some new books myself.



Courtesy: Shinchōsha

Saishō Hazuki

Born in 1963. Nonfiction writer. Writes on themes including sports, education, and the relationship between humanity and science and technology. Her works include the 1997 *Shōgakukan Nonfiction Award* winner *Zettai onkan* and *Hoshi Shin'ichi: Sen-ichi wa o tsukutta hito* [*Hoshi Shin'ichi: The Man Who Wrote 1,001 Stories*], which won three literary awards in 2007. Member of the Japanese Book News Advisory Board.

FICTION



Kakuta Mitsuyo

Born in 1967. Her debut work *Kōfuku na yūgi* [*A Blissful Pastime*] received the *Kaien Prize for New Writers* in 1990. Other accolades include the *Noma Literary Prize for New Writers* in 1996 for *Madoromu yoru no UFO* [*A Sleepy Night's UFO*], the *Naoki Prize* in 2005 for *Taigan no kanojo* [*trans. Woman on the Other Shore*], and the *Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Literature* in 2006 for *Rokku haha* [*Rock Mother*].

Yōkame no semi [Eighth-day Cicada]

By Kakuta Mitsuyo

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2007. 197x142 mm. 352 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-12-003816-7.

Readers are kept on the edge of their seat from the very first page of this lengthy suspense novel. A recipient of the Chūō Kōron Bungei Prize, the work poignantly questions the nature of motherhood and family by digging deep into the hearts of the two main female characters, a kidnaper and a kidnapped child.

In the novel's first part, a run-of-the-mill office worker snaps emotionally and kidnaps her lover's baby. She then spends close to four years on the run with the girl. During this time they take shelter with a shady religious cult; they also enjoy some momentary happiness while taking refuge on a small island in the Seto Inland Sea. Readers will fully feel the pain of the main character after her impulsive commission of this serious crime. They will also share her joy as their own

during the scene in which she is moved as she and the child together look at the nature around them.

The real beauty of this novel, however, is in its second part. Time has passed and the kidnapped child has grown up. She understands what has happened to her, but becomes more and more confused because of it. Finding herself in a situation similar to that of the woman who snatched her, she embarks on her own journey of self-discovery, and finally experiences a brilliant revelation. The last scene of this harrowing tale is infinitely touching. (MT)

Asatte no hito [A Distracted Man]

By Suwa Tetsushi

Kōdansha, 2007. 194x133 mm. 196 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-214214-4.

Suwa Tetsushi made his debut with *Asatte no hito*. The book was an auspicious first publication, generating a great deal of interest in Suwa as a somewhat offbeat talent who arrived on the literary scene all of a sudden. *Asatte no hito* translates directly as “the day-after-tomorrow person”—in Japanese, to be “heading for the day after tomorrow” means to be going in the completely wrong direction. The title refers to the protagonist, who leads his life at odds with what people anywhere would generally regard as the norm.

Wildly eccentric, the protagonist frequently blurts out bizarre expressions like *ponpa*, *chiripahha*, *hoemyau*, and *tapontyū*, which mean absolutely nothing to anyone else. The protagonist's nephew is the narrator who tries to piece together the puzzle of this man and his life. The

work takes a metafictional approach, weaving together such records as the uncle's private papers and memories of his wife, who died young in a traffic accident. While this may sound pompous or tedious, the text manages to be ironical while retaining a sense of moderation, and there is a restrained sentimentality combined with unexpected flashes of humor. The result is a fascinating world that engrosses the reader.

According to the narrator's interpretation, his uncle's “distracted sensibility” means “turning away from conventional wisdom, arriving at a state with absolutely no relation to the normal laws governing the world.” One wonders what sort of work Suwa will produce next by sticking to this path himself. (NM)



Suwa Tetsushi

Born in 1969. Graduated from the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Letters, Kokugakuin University. His *Asatte no hito* won the *Gunzō Prize for New Writers* and the *Akutagawa Prize* in 2007.



Koike Masayo

Born in 1959. Poet. Began publishing her poetry while working at a legal publishing firm, receiving the Hanatsubaki Award for Contemporary Poetry in 1997 for Eien ni konai basu [The Bus that Never Comes] and the Takami Jun Prize in 2000 for Mottomo kannōteki na heya [The Most Sensuous Room]. Later turned her hand to novels and essays, receiving the Kōdansha Essay Award in 2001 for Okujō e no yūwaku [An Enticement to the Rooftop].

Tatado **[Tatado]**

By Koike Masayo

Shinchōsha, 2007. 197x135 mm. 160 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-10-450902-7.

Koike Masayo is first and foremost a poet. The novels that she writes are also characterized by an acute sense for the insistent rhythms of speech and by narratives representative of a poet. The title story in this collection has received wide acclaim, earning such accolades as the Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Literature, presented annually to the year's most accomplished work of short fiction.

"Tatado" is the tale of four people heading into their twilight years. A television producer and his wife are staying at their weekend house by the sea. One of the husband's colleagues, a modest and reserved actress, and a close male friend of his wife come to the house and spend the night. These people are at that age in life—older than middle age, but not yet elderly—when things are going smoothly

at work and home and there is nothing to complain about. Something, though, is lacking. Their senses are awakened over the course of the evening's dinner and conversation, and they are all enmeshed in a morally questionable situation after dancing together the following day.

In each of this book's three short stories, there is something working slowly in the background, building toward a major, completely unexpected change. Is that world that emerges, removed from everyday life, madness or liberation? At the very least, the reader gets a sense of the characters' joy in escaping from their regimented, day-to-day routines. (MT)

Kawa no hikari **[Light on the River]**

By Matsuura Hisaki

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2007. 197x139 mm. 392 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-12-003850-1.

This is a thrilling full-length novel aimed at younger readers. The plot centers on a family of three mice that live in a riverbank: the father mouse, Tāta the elder son, and his younger brother Chicchi, only just born at the beginning of spring. When work starts on turning their river into a conduit, the mice find themselves forced out of their cozy home. They set out to find a new place where they can once again live in peace. This is no easy journey for such small animals, though. They go through a succession of difficulties and many adventures.

They have to contend with a band of fiendish rats, attacks by a ferocious bird and a weasel, the hustle and bustle in front of a train station, a typhoon, and snow. However, a friendly face always pops up from somewhere to save them in

the nick of time—Tamī the ingenuous dog, the cat granny, the merry mole widow, a pair of sparrows, and a wise, elderly mouse. As the readers are carried through one exciting episode after another, they realize that the world is not just one of danger, but is also made up of the bonds of love and friendship.

Famous works of children's literature in this vein include Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and Richard Adams' *Watership Down*. With modern-day Tokyo as the stage for the travels and adventures of the mice, Matsuura has written a similarly stirring tale that rivals even these established masterpieces. Matsuura's story, which he tells in lithe, graceful Japanese, is sustained by the loving author's gaze that he fixes on his protagonists' tiny lives. (NM)



Matsuura Hisaki

Born in 1954. Graduate of and currently professor at the University of Tokyo, where he teaches representational culture theory and French literature, poet, and novelist. His Hana kutashi [A Spoiling Rain] won the 2000 Akutagawa Prize. Is also a film critic and a translator.



Kohda Main

Born in 1951. After working as a securities dealer, including at an American bank and securities company, launched her writing career in 1995 with *Za hejji* [*The Hedge*] (retitled *Shōsetsu hejji fando* [*Hedge Funds: A Novel*] in 1999). Is also a television commentator and a radio personality.

Baiauto: Kigyō baishū **[Buyout: Corporate Acquisitions]**

By Kohda Main

Bungei Shunjū, 2007. 193x138 mm. 416 pp. ¥1,619. ISBN 978-4-16-325880-5.

Leading business novelist Kohda Main wrote this work on the theme of corporate acquisitions. The author weaves ample human elements into the story, setting it apart from a textbook or introductory guide to takeovers. One intriguing character in the story, Sōma Fund president Sōma Akiyoshi, is able to bring the financial world to its knees with his skillfully engineered hostile takeover bids. In contrast to his power in the financial markets, though, he suffers from a complex about his short stature, reinforcing the adage that there are some things no amount of money can buy. His character brings to mind real-world presidents of fund management companies.

Another character, foreign securities company employee Hirota Mishio, aspires to do business with Sōma. When she gets her chance to do so and is asked to make

block purchases for the Sōma Fund, she finds that the shares she is meant to purchase are in a company for which one of the top executives is her own father—a detestable man who abandoned her at a young age.

As the intertwined stories of the characters reveal themselves, the ultimate question of to whom the company actually belongs remains hazy. All the while, Sōma continues to engineer simple buy-low, sell-high corporate acquisitions. Later in the narrative a criminal investigation in the IT industry causes havoc in the Tokyo stock market, and people around Sōma come under investigation. The plot development mirrors recent headlines concerning the real president of a Japanese fund management company and his hostile takeover bid. (MK)

ESSAY

Sensei to watashi **[Teacher and I]**

By Yomota Inuhiko

Shinchōsha, 2007. 197x136 mm. 240 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-367106-0.

Yomota Inuhiko, the author of this memoir of his early adulthood, is active in a wide range of fields including movie history, literature, manga, and urban studies.

In April 1972 Yomota entered the University of Tokyo's College of Arts and Sciences, where he learned French. In his second year there he first met Yura Kimiyoshi, an assistant professor of English literature. The test students had to pass to enter Yura's seminar was a memorable experience for Yomota, with students asked to analyze the enigmatic subject of what they found interesting in Akatsuka Fujio's manga while the music of Wagner's *The Valkyrie* blared throughout the classroom.

From the author's first encounters with Yura, the novel illustrates the teacher's erudite manner and overwhelming presence. As their relationship developed,

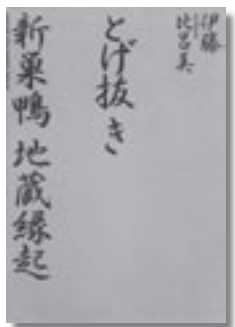
Yura came to recognize Yomota's talent as a graduate student and chose him to jointly translate a work by Colin Wilson. Yura even expressed approval when Yomota studied in the Republic of Korea during the Park Chung Hee administration.

In the end, as often happens in coming-of-age stories, a rift occurred between teacher and pupil. The discord developed when Yomota was offered a job with Etō Jun, who along with Yura had been a protégé of the poet and English literary scholar Nishiwaki Junzaburō. Subsequent to the job offer, Yura struck Yomota for no apparent reason in a German restaurant in Tokyo's Shibuya district. Now, in his novel, more than a decade after teacher and pupil parted, the author Yomota provides an insightful look back at their profound relationship. (MK)



Yomota Inuhiko

Born in 1953. Studied religion at the University of Tokyo and comparative literature as a graduate student. Is currently a professor at Meiji Gakuin University. Awarded the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities in 1998 for his work *Eigashi e no shōtai* [*An Invitation to Film History*]. Other works include *Tsukishima monogatari* [*Tsukishima Story*], *Morokko rutaku* [*Moroccan Exile*], and a collection of poems, *Jinsei no kojiki* [*Beggars of Life*].



Itō Hiromi

Born in 1955. Poet and novelist. *Ra nīya* [La Niña] won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers in 1999. *Kawara arekusa* [Wild Grass upon a Riverbank] won the Takami Jun Prize in 2006. Has lived in California since 1997.

Togenuki: Shin Sugamo Jizō engi [The Thorn Remover: The Fortune of the New Sugamo Jizō]

By Itō Hiromi

Kōdansha, 2007. 195x139 mm. 292 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-06-213944-1.

This epic-length poem is the story of a woman named Itō, seemingly the alter ego of the author, who never settles in one location. It depicts her vigorous lifestyle as she moves between Southern California, Kumamoto, and the Sugamo district of Tokyo, sometimes having to pay the expensive cancellation fees on airline tickets because of the whims of her moody American husband. The author sees her work very much as a poem and not a novel, although the majority of the book is written in prose form. It is safe to say that the strength pervading it is far more narrative in style than that of most recent novels.

Itō Hiromi's heroine comes from the lineage of female characters seen in Japan's classical literature—particularly *sekkyōbushi* (sermons delivered as ballad-

dramas) and legends from the medieval period onward—that take on whatever adversity comes their way. The heroine's parents in Japan, her husband and daughter in America, and finally she herself are all affected by illness. Despite this she lives boldly, facing up to hardship after hardship. Her repeated cry, like a final scream—"I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive"—leaves a deep impression.

Linguistically, this work transcends boundaries. Itō leaps across the vast gulf between elegantly composed Japanese and the contemporary English of conversations between the heroine and her husband, who cannot speak Japanese; through repeated traverses between the two, she creates her own language. (NM)

HISTORY

Jūroku seiki bunka kakumei [Sixteenth Century Cultural Revolution]

By Yamamoto Yoshitaka

Vol. I: Misuzu Shobō, 2007. 193x135 mm. 432 pp. ¥3,200. ISBN 978-4-622-07286-7.

Vol. II: Misuzu Shobō, 2007. 193x135 mm. 464 pp. ¥3,200. ISBN 978-4-622-07287-4.

Taking up the question of why modern-day science and technology were born from Western society, this two-volume work is the sequel to *Jiryoku to jūryoku no hakken* [The Discovery of Magnetic Attraction and Gravity], which received wide acclaim, including such accolades as the Osaragi Jirō Prize.

This work focuses on sixteenth-century artists and tradesmen. This was a period of great activity for "hand laborers" outside academia, which emphasized the study of recondite Latin texts. The author presents a new view of science history in which these tradesmen prepared the foundation for the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century.

Specifically, the author means those involved in dissection and measurement, commercial transactions, astronomy, and

weaponry. These people wrote books in the vernacular based on personal experience, drew detailed illustrations, and made their findings widely available. In doing so, they put an end to academia's monopoly on knowledge and the guild tradition of secrecy.

Academia, however, also changed with the appearance of scholars who were not adverse to hand labor. They adopted the techniques of tradesmen, leading to the birth of laboratory science based on measurement and observation. In the end this contributed to the aggressive, questing nature of modern science.

The author himself also hails from outside academia. It will be interesting to see how Western society regards the viewpoint of someone who has distanced himself from academia and the West. (SH)



Yamamoto Yoshitaka

Born in 1941. Did graduate studies in science at the University of Tokyo. Is the author of *Chisei no hanran*: Tōdai kaitai made [Intellectual Mutiny: To the Breakdown of the University of Tokyo], and *Jūryoku to riki-gakuteki sekai*: koten to shite no koten rikigaku [Gravity and the Mechanical World: Classical Mechanics as Part of the Classics]. Has also translated books including Ernst Cassirer's *Zur Einsteinschen Relativitätstheorie* [trans. Einstein's Theory of Relativity] into Japanese.

BIOGRAPHY



Kido Hisae

Born in 1976. Studied at Jilin University in Changchun, Jilin Province, from 1997 to 1999. Areas of study included the history of modern Sino-Japanese relations and the Chinese language. Worked at a publishing company before becoming a freelance writer in 2005.

Ano sensō kara tōku hanarete **[Far Away from That War]**

By Kido Hisae

Jōhō Center Publishing, 2007. 194x136 mm. 460 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-7958-4742-2.

The author's father was one of the many Japanese "war orphans" in China. The book is a nonfictional account of her father's life, about which she was inspired to write after realizing that her life crossed paths with "that war"—World War II.

The first half tells the story of her father, who was left in the care of a Chinese family before the age of four when his parents fled during the Soviet invasion of Japan's holdings in China. Enduring constant discrimination, he diligently studied Chinese and even became a Chinese language instructor, but became the victim of persecution during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution because of his Japanese nationality. Despite requests to return to Japan, his search for his birth parents was difficult, taking place before a government program allowing war orphans to

return to Japan to search for their families. After his return to Japan, he experienced more hardship because of his unfamiliarity with the Japanese language and society. The cries of Kido's father, torn between his adopted mother and his birth parents, pierce the heart.

In the second half, the author talks about her path to discovery of "that war" through her experiences in China and the court proceedings for the war orphans' compensation suit against the Japanese government. She notes the puzzling contrast of the anti-Japanese sentiments at her university and the warm welcome in her father's hometown of Mudanjiang. The confirmation of her identity in the face of two Chinese emotions—deep familial love and hatred toward Japan—is most refreshing. (SH)

CULTURE

Kyōto ikoku isan **[Exotic Designs and Heritages in Kyoto]**

Written and edited by Tsuruoka Mayumi

Heibonsha, 2007. 210x148 mm. 216 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-582-54432-9.

This book unveils foreign cultural treasures underlying the Japanese culture of Kyoto. Kyoto's renowned event, the Gion Festival of Yasaka Shrine, is a striking example of this. The name of the festival actually derives from the Gion Shōja, the Jetavana Monastery in India where the Buddha imparted many of his teachings. The festival features a series of *yamahoko* floats that parade around the city of Kyoto accompanied by the tinkling sounds of bells. Adorned with vast swaths of fabric that even include Persian carpets and Belgian tapestries, the floats are indeed an impressive sight. Of the 32 *yamahoko* floats exhibited in the Gion Festival, 28 are adorned with a combined total of as many as 297 foreign-made textiles.

Similar to the Gion Festival, Kyoto

itself at first glance looks like a purely Japanese city, but is in fact a treasure trove of exotic items from foreign lands. The city is a clear example of the way the culture of Japan is able to absorb outside elements to enhance its own depth.

The writer and editor of this book, Tsuruoka Mayumi, began as a researcher of Celtic art and culture. Over time she has expanded her focus to include the ornamentation and design of the Euro-Asian world. In this enjoyable work she has uncovered the foreign lands—indeed, the entire world—that is present within the city of Kyoto. (MK)



Tsuruoka Mayumi

Born in 1952. Professor at Tama Art University. After finishing her graduate degree at Waseda University, studied at the University of Dublin's Trinity College. Conducted research on Celtic art and culture in Ireland and at various locations across Europe and Eurasia. Author of Keruto: Sōshokuteki shikō [The Celts: Ornamental Thought], an introduction to Celtic art and culture present in Japan.



Okada Toshio

Born in 1958. Produced such works as *Fushigi no umi no Nadia* [trans. *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*] after founding the animation and game production company Gainax Co., Ltd. in 1985. Left the company in 1992 and became head of Otaking Co., Ltd. Is an otaku critic and has written several books on otaku culture, including *Otakugaku nyūmon* [An Introduction to Otaku Studies] and *Tōdai otakugaku kōza* [The University of Tokyo Course on Otaku Studies]. Currently a visiting professor at Osaka University of Arts.

“Sekai seifuku” wa kanō ka? [Is World Conquest Possible?]

By Okada Toshio

Chikuma Shobō, 2007. 173x106 mm. 192 pp. ¥760. ISBN 978-4-480-68762-3.

Along with being a producer of anime and video games, Okada is active as a researcher and promoter of *otaku* culture, which includes manga, anime, and video games. Considered the foremost authority on *otaku*, he is called the *otaking*, or the “king of *otaku*.” In this book he delivers a thorough analysis of a theme common in anime and manga—namely, world conquest. He gives serious consideration to such interesting questions as “Is world conquest really possible?” “Is world conquest such a bad thing?” and “What is evil?”

Conducting realistic simulations within the realms of anime and manga, he reveals the problems of applying them in real life. Starting from the world of *otaku* culture, which is thought to be an escape from reality, Okada goes deeper, consider-

ing the real world and its politics. This is one achievement that shows the maturity of *otaku* culture, which has generally been viewed as insular and inward-looking.

Okada succeeded in losing a significant amount of weight, going from 117 to 67 kilograms, in just one year. His book about his slimming experience, entitled *Itsu made mo debu to omou na yo* [Don’t Think I’ll Always Be Fat], became a best-seller. His method of dieting was both simple and scientific: he recorded his meals every day and controlled his calorie intake. He effectively used *otaku* methodology in this area too. (MT)

Okamoto Tarō no mita Nihon [Japan as Seen by Okamoto Tarō]

By Akasaka Norio

Iwanami Shoten, 2007. 193x137 mm. 378 pp. ¥2,300. ISBN 978-4-00-022391-1.

Okamoto Tarō is remembered today as one of the greatest avant-garde artists to have lived in Japan during the twentieth century. During his final years he appeared on television, and his challenging mantra “Art is an explosion!” became a popular catchphrase. However, hidden behind this celebrated face was a side that remains less well known—his work as an ethnologist. Akasaka Norio, one of Japan’s leading ethnologists, follows the tracks left by Okamoto in this work, a critical biography with a particular focus on Okamoto’s Japan-related ethnological work.

In his youth Okamoto studied in Paris for 10 years. There he became close to such artists as Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, and was profoundly influenced by the thinker Georges Bataille and the ethnologist Marcel Mauss. After re-

turning to Japan, he put to use the grounding he had acquired in Paris, rediscovering the distinctive beauty of ancient pottery from the Jōmon period (ca. 3000–300 B.C.) and traveling the length and breadth of the country for his fieldwork. He produced a succession of works that included *Nihon saihakken* [Japan Rediscovered], *Wasurerareta Nihon: Okinawa bunkaron* [The Forgotten Japan: Okinawan Culture], and *Shinpi Nihon* [Mysteries of Japan]. Akasaka reconfirms the enormous significance of this body of ethnological work, at the same time successfully giving an authoritative, comprehensive portrait of Okamoto, who was an artist as well as a thinker. As an artist, Okamoto Tarō “accurately scanned the whole world” by “thoroughly getting to grips with what it means to be Japanese.” (NM)



Akasaka Norio

Born in 1953. Dean of a graduate school of the Tohoku University of Art and Design and director of the Tohoku Culture Research Center. Specializes in the history of Japanese thinking and Tōhoku culture. Among his works are *Tōzai/nanboku kō: Ikutsumo no Nihon e* [East to West, North to South: Various Faces of Japan], *Umi no seishinshi* [History of the Maritime Spirit], and *Hōhō to shite no Tōhoku* [Tōhoku as Methodology]. Okamoto Tarō no mita Nihon won the 2007 Bunkamura Deux Magots Literary Prize.

SOCIETY



Wākingu pua: Nihon o mushibamu yamai [Working Poor: The Sickness Undermining Japan]

Edited by the production team for the NHK special “Working Poor”

Poplar, 2007. 193x136 mm. 232 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-591-09827-1.

The number of youth in Japan classified as NEET (not in education, employment, or training) or *furitā* (part-time workers who flit from job to job) is increasing rapidly. This nonfiction work explores the causes of this trend and the “Japanese sickness” it is bringing about.

People in older generations, in particular the baby-boom generation that shouldered the workload behind Japan’s years of high economic growth, tend to wonder why these young people fail to get proper jobs, postulating that perhaps they have been spoiled by their parents or by society. The real problem is not, however, that these youths are not working, but that even if they want to secure proper employment, there are no jobs for them. Moreover, they face a situation in which no amount of hard work will lead to im-

provement in their lives. The conundrum these youths face gave birth to the term “working poor.”

This book is based on an NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) television special that featured the real voices of the working poor, the horrendous working conditions they deal with, and the state of the social welfare system. Readers will realize how jobs are flowing away from Japan’s youth due to the influx of workers from other Asian countries and how young Japanese are often unable to maintain employment due to family illnesses and corporate restructuring. The work is a warning that the current state of the working poor is indeed a modern sickness in Japan. (MK)

THOUGHT

Tanikawa Shuntarō shitsumon-bako [Questions for Shuntaro Tanikawa]

By Tanikawa Shuntarō

Illustrated by Eda Nanae

Tokyo Itoi Shigesato Office, 2007. 197x151 mm. 192 pp. ¥1,428. ISBN 978-4-902516-14-2.

Tanikawa is one of Japan’s foremost contemporary poets. Prolific in publishing poetry collections and picture books, he has also lent his hand to writing songs for children and TV commercials. He is a step above his contemporaries in terms of book sales, as well as public recognition and popularity. Tanikawa contributed regularly to the popular website *Hobo nikkan Itoi shinbun* [The Almost-Daily Itoi Newspaper], answering questions from readers. This book is a collection of the readers’ questions and his skilled responses to them.

For example, one question comes from a mother troubled by the worries of Sae, her six-year-old daughter: “Why do people die? I don’t want to die!” Tanikawa replies: “If I were Sae’s mother, I would

hold her close and say ‘Mommy doesn’t want to die either!’ and cry along with her. Afterwards, I would have a warm cup of tea with her.” The book goes beyond simple questions and answers. Many people want to talk about their problems and find the “correct” answers to life’s important questions. Tanikawa gives no straight responses, though: he speaks subtly to get the important points across. While his replies are pithy and simple to understand, they contain much wisdom. As a result, this book is like a “massage of words,” gently working to relax the feelings of readers who may not have known where their emotions had been aching. (MT)



Tanikawa Shuntarō

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

Eda Nanae

Illustrator. Graduated from *Setsu-Mode Seminar* in 1997. Active in various fields, has produced cover illustrations for such works as school textbooks and *Inu no kimochi* [Feelings of Dogs].



Iio Jun

Born in 1962. Specializes in modern Japanese political theory. Earned a PhD in political science from the University of Tokyo in 1992. Has served as an associate professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, where he became a full professor in 2000. Was a faculty fellow at the Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry until 2004. Other works include Min'eika no seiji katei [The Political Process of Privatization].

***Nihon no tōchi kōzō* [Japan's Government Structure]**

By Iio Jun

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2007. 173x109 mm. 250 pp. ¥800. ISBN 978-4-12-101905-9.

Japan's postwar administrative structure has its roots in the "bureaucratic cabinet system," and the bureaucracy plays a major role in Japan's government to this day. Why is this? Comparing the transformation of Japan's political system with the development of the parliamentary system in Britain and the presidential system in the United States, the author logically deciphers the dynamism of structures of governance. While discussing Japan's political system—from the lawmakers affiliated with special interests to the party factions, along with the system's distinctive jargon—the author explains how balance is maintained within this unique system that offers voters few opportunities to directly guide the political process themselves. This is a guidebook for understanding Japan's political structure.

In recent years, people in Japan have called for a system of executive leadership to give the prime minister more authority. The author ascribes this to a misunderstanding caused by the lengthy rule of the Liberal Democratic Party, though: a mistaken view of the problems in the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats as a natural part of the parliamentary system.

Beginning in the 1990s, Japan's parliamentary cabinet system moved in new directions as a result of political reforms carried out by Koizumi Jun'ichirō, among others. It is worth paying attention to the author's views on future goals to strive for—namely, clarifying the system of decision making and strengthening democratic governance. This book offers useful insight on the future of Japanese politics. (SH)

MEDICINE

***Konna toki watashi wa dōshite kita ka* [What I Have Done in Situations Like These]**

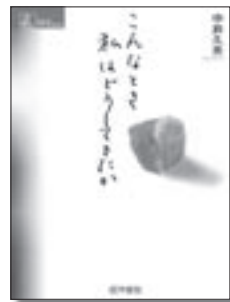
By Nakai Hisao

Igaku Shoin, 2007. 209x148 mm. 240 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-260-00457-2.

The author is a psychiatrist specializing in the treatment of schizophrenia. With a strong belief in the power of the human spirit to heal itself, Dr. Nakai has been treating patients with psychiatric disorders for more than 40 years. He was among the first to provide emotional care for the victims of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, and now, as the head of the Hyōgo Victim Support Center, is involved in offering support to victims of crime and natural disasters.

The work is a collection of lectures given by the author to the doctors and nurses at Arima Hospital in Hyōgo Prefecture. Starting with the question "What information do you think is most important to patients?" the author speaks compassionately on how to treat people with emotional illness and what words to use,

drawing on examples from his own experiences. His detailed examples, particularly on such topics as how to manage patient violence and the influence of hospital décor and design on the mental state of patients and medical staff, are extremely useful to people in charge of mental health matters at private companies as well as to medical professionals. As a doctor who puts importance on observation and patiently waits for patient recovery instead of following the analytical methodology originating from the United States, the author provides a valuable viewpoint for an age when mental health issues are of primary concern. (SH)



Nakai Hisao

Born in 1934. Psychiatrist specializing in therapeutic research for schizophrenia. Has taught at various universities, including Nagoya City University and Kobe University. Won the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award in 1996 for his work Kazoku no shin'en [A Family Abyss]. Has also translated books including Harry Stack Sullivan's Conception of Modern Psychiatry and The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry into Japanese.

No. 10: Industrial Design

Modern Design Grows Tenuous

During the half-century or so following the end of World War II, we strove constantly to acquire things like domestic appliances and automobiles. These objects, as well as their design, were indices of wealth and happiness. This is taken up in *Mono tanjō “Ima no seikatsu”: Nihonjin no kurashi o kaeta 133 no mono to teian 1960–1990* [The Birth of Objects, Today’s Lifestyle: 133 Objects and Proposals that Changed the Lives of the Japanese, 1960–90] (Shōbunsha, 1990).

These days, though, objects and their design no longer mean wealth and happiness. While there may be many reasons for this, Japan’s experience of its frenzied over-consumption from the latter half of the 1980s to the early 1990s is by no means insignificant. Through this experience we came to the realization that objects and design do not fundamentally change our way of living.

The defining characteristic of modern design was its presence as a force that could shape new lifestyle patterns and environments and change society. This is easy to see in exhibition catalogues, such as *Kindai dezain ni miru seikatsu kakumei: Taishō demokurashī kara Ōsaka Banpaku made* [The Lifestyle Revolution Seen Through Modern Design: From Taishō Democracy to the Osaka Expo ‘70] (Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 2000), an exhibition at the Utsunomiya Museum of Art; *Nihon no seikatsu dezain: 20 seiki no modanizumu o saguru* [Japan Living Design: Examining Twentieth Century Modernism] (Kenchiku Shiryō Kenkyūsha, 1999); *Dezain meido in Nippon: Nihon indasutoriaru dezain no ayumi* [Design Made in Japan: The History of Japanese Industrial Design] (Creo, 1994), which chronicles a 1993 exhibition held at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art; and *Minna no dezain: Guddo dezain to watashitachi no seikatsu* [Design for All: Good Design and Our Lifestyles] (Kawasaki City Museum, 2007).

However, the realization is now spreading that objects will not, in fact, change our lifestyle; this may well be due to the fact that the ideas of modern design that have developed thus far are in the process of being rejected. This situation appears to be inextricably linked to current-day social phenomena—it may also be modernism becoming more tenuous. For example, general awareness of the public sphere in the modern sense of the term is growing increasingly vague, and even modern consensus building is becoming difficult. Whichever way you look at it, this is not unrelated to the collapse of the collectivist society and the advance of democratization and equality. Another factor is that the power of the individual has been enhanced by the appearance of the Internet.

Design that Dips into Trivial Sensations

With modern design’s firmly held mind-set as an agent of social change now growing more tenuous, Japanese in-

dustrial design (product design) has undergone massive changes over the past 10 or so years. One may see this in no small measure as a reflection of changes to Japanese society and the lifestyle sense of the Japanese people.

Specifically, what happened was a gradual incorporation into the mainstream of designs that dipped into trivial, everyday feelings and sensations, rather than the sort of designs that would reform society or lifestyles from the bottom up. These sensations can be experienced in *99 nin no dezainā to tsukuru mirai no hon* [Book for Creating the Future with Ninety-nine Designers] (Rutles, 2005) or *Japanese Design Today 100* (the Japan Foundation, 2007).

Examples are *kawaii* designs, designs that take miniaturization much further than necessary, designs with delicately detailed finishing touches, designs with sensitive functionality, designs that use such natural materials as paper or bamboo, minimal designs, or designs that bring to mind the traditional Japan.

The sense of *kawaii* has come to mean something that goes far beyond mere cuteness. *Kawaii* designs appeal to a diverse range of sensibilities, being, among other things, small, slightly humorous, and non-aggressive. The perfect example of this is the Q-Car Quno, an electric automobile that will actually carry a person, faithfully modeled on the hugely popular palm-sized Choro-Q toy cars that Takara Co., Ltd. (now Tomy Company, Ltd.) began making in the 1970s. With space for only one person on board, this automobile also takes miniaturization to extremes.

Delicate finishing touches have been incorporated into the design of a great many Japanese cars, one perfect example being Toyota Motor Corporation’s Lexus brand. Moreover, these cars are also fitted with onboard computers that give control over sensitive functionality. In exactly the same way, Japanese mobile phones compete over diverse and sensitive functionality.

The use of natural materials may be seen in the Honey Pop designs of Yoshioka Tokujin, who creates chairs by building up layers of very thin paper. Also, Ashitomi Takashi designs his Taketlery (“bambootlery”) cutlery using bamboo. The Sumitsubo desk designed by Koizumi Makoto is a minimal design that calls to mind the works of Donald Judd. The desk also gives a taste of the traditional Japanese lifestyle in which people sit on the floor.

These designs that dip into trivial sensations give expression to the current state of Japan. With the whole world currently undergoing globalization, design is also becoming increasingly homogenized—nonetheless, a careful inspection would certainly lead one to think that the various cultures of the world are being projected onto design. Design that accommodates trivial sensations is certainly contemporary, and at the same time there is also the feeling that it is a special feature of Japan’s own culture.

Recommended Reading

There is a great scarcity of books giving an overall critical view of Japanese industrial design. For an overall view, some of the exhibition catalogues I have already mentioned are useful as reference material. I would like to take a look here at one of these, along with other works.

***Mono tanjō “Ima no seikatsu”: Nihonjin no kurashi o kaeta 133 no mono to teian 1960–1990* [The Birth of Objects, Today’s Lifestyle: 133 Objects and Proposals that Changed the Lives of the Japanese, 1960–90]**

Edited by Suigyū Kurabu

Shōbunsha, 1990. 264x188 mm. 668 pp. ¥5,728. ISBN 978-4-7949-5879-2 (4-7949-5879-X).

As the subtitle suggests, this book documents the extent to which the design of objects that appeared during the postwar phase of high economic growth impacted the lifestyles of people at the time and aroused their desire for the objects.

Note: This title is currently unavailable from the publisher. It may be possible to find it in used book stores.



***20–21 seiki design index* [Design Index from the Twentieth to the Twenty-first Century]**

Editorial supervision by Mizuno Seiichi

Inax Shuppan, 2000. 238x170 mm. 360 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-87275-094-2 (4-87275-094-2).

The focus of this book is not limited to Japan, but there are contributions from numerous writers and the text allows the reader to get an overview of the current situation of Japanese design. The book also gives the reader a grasp of critical perspectives of the current state of design in Japan.

Note: This title is currently unavailable from the publisher. It may be possible to find it in used book stores.

***Nihon no seikatsu dezain: 20 seiki no modanizumu o saguru* [Japan Living Design: Examining Twentieth Century Modernism]**

Editorial supervision by Japan Interior Designer’s Association et al.

Kenchiku Shiryō Kenkyūsha, 1999. 297x210 mm. 160 pp. ¥3,143. ISBN 978-4-87460-616-2 (4-87460-616-4).

This is the catalogue for an exhibition of the same title held by Living Design Center Ozone in 1999. The catalogue discusses with a wealth of materials the extent to which Japanese modernism from the 1920s to the 1970s aimed at a Western-style revolution in people’s lifestyles.



***99 nin no dezainā to tsukuru mirai no hon* [Book for Creating the Future with Ninety-nine Designers]**

Planning by Hagiwara Shū

Rutles, 2005. 148x210 mm. 208 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-89977-118-0 (4-89977-118-5).

This book gives a graphic introduction to the work of 99 young designers. The designs are shown with some brief words by the designers themselves, a format that makes it possible to get a visual sense of the trends in current Japanese design.

(Kashiwagi Hiroshi, professor, Musashino Art University)

This was the tenth article in the series “A Bibliographic Introduction to Japanese Culture and Society.” We hope our readers have found the various topics that we have highlighted both useful and interesting. We will have a new series starting in the next issue of *Japanese Book News*, which we also hope you will enjoy.

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

On January 16, 2008, the 138th Akutagawa Prize was presented to Kawakami Mieko for her story titled “Chichi to ran” [Breasts and Egg]. On the same day, Sakuraba Kazuki won the Naoki Prize for her novel *Watashi no otoko* [My Man]. Both authors won their respective prizes for the first time, although they had both been nominated for the 137th prizes, awarded in July 2007, as well.

Originally published in the December 2007 issue of the literary journal *Bungakukai*, “Chichi to ran” tells the tale of a woman in her thirties who spends three days with her sister and niece, who have come from Osaka to Tokyo. Kawakami started out her career as a singer but branched out to publishing her poetry and stories in literary magazines. Naoki winner Sakuraba, meanwhile, was originally active in video game novelization and light novels, entertaining books aimed at younger readers, but has in recent years published more serious fiction. Her prizewinning work is an unorthodox tale that travels back in time to describe the forbidden love between a soon-to-be-married woman and her adoptive father.

Yang Yi, the first-ever Chinese writer to be nominated for the Akutagawa Prize, fell short of the award this time around.



Kawakami Mieko (right) and Sakuraba Kazuki pose with their prizewinning works. (Courtesy: Kyōdō News)

Osaragi Jirō Prize Awarded

The thirty-fourth Osaragi Jirō Prize, sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun Company, went to two works in 2007:

Yoshida Shūichi’s *Akunin* [The Bad] (Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007) and Saishō Hazuki’s *Hoshi Shin’ichi: Sen-ichi wa o tsukutta hito* [Hoshi Shin’ichi: The Man Who Wrote 1,001 Stories] (Shinchōsha, 2007). Yoshida’s novel, a murder mystery set in Kyushu, paints thoroughly modern portraits of the people involved in the case. It also won the 2007 Mainichi Publishing Culture Award. Saishō’s work has also received multiple awards, with the Osaragi Jirō Prize coming on the tail of the 2007 Nihon SF Taishō Award, presented by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of Japan, and the 2007 Kōdansha Non-Fiction Award. This book is a biographical look at the writer Hoshi Shin’ichi, who died in December 1997, leaving behind a body of 1,001 short stories that presaged the future. Ten years after his death, Saishō’s work has helped to reignite interest in him. Both of the prizewinning books were introduced in *Japanese Book News* No. 54.

University-Level Manga Studies

Spring 2008 will see the establishment of courses in manga and anime studies at three schools: Gakushuin University, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, and Nagoya Zokei University of Art and Design. This trend in higher education has been on the uptick since 2000, when Kyoto Seika University launched its Department of Cartoon and Comic Art. The Kyoto school in 2006 expanded the department, making it a full Faculty of Manga; students there include Korean and Chinese exchange students as well as young Japanese. The universities are taking various steps to attract students in an age of falling birthrates, such as inviting popular animators and manga artists to serve as visiting professors. Manga and anime have become essential tools for understanding Japan’s culture, and with demand still growing in this artistic industry sector, “manga studies” seem set to attract still greater attention in years to come.

Literary History Online

Since 1968, when the Japan Book Publishers Association (JBPA) came

out with its *Nihon shuppan hyakunen-shi nenpyō* [One Hundred Years of Japanese Publishing History], the publication has been a vital resource for readers. Today, however, this book is difficult to find. The JBPA is now working with the Japan Magazine Publishers Association on a digitized version of the resource as part of their activities to mark their fiftieth anniversary. Viewable in Japanese at <www.shuppan-nenpyo.jp>, this digital edition covers the decade from 1958 through 1967. The associations plan to expand the online content to create a searchable database covering more than 140 years of Japan’s literary history, from before the Meiji era (1868–1912) through the present day.

Akutagawa Manuscript Discovered

Researchers have confirmed the authenticity of handwritten manuscripts by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) of works he wrote for serial publication in the *Ōsaka Mainichi Shimbun* and *Tōkyō Nichinichi Shimbun* (both of which later became part of the *Mainichi Shimbun*). The works are the unfinished “Jashūmon” [Evil Faith], a tale set in the Heian period (794–1185), and “Jigoku hen” [trans. “Hell Screen”]. The former, serialized in both papers from October to December 1918, fills 22 sheets of Japanese writing paper of 200 characters each. The pages from 16 on show a story somewhat different from the published version, indicating that Akutagawa was wrestling with questions of the protagonist’s characterization as he wrote.

The newly found “Jigoku hen” manuscript consists of the first two pages written in the author’s own hand. The first page is topped with the story’s title and Akutagawa’s name. All the manuscripts are in excellent condition, showing clearly where revisions were made to the texts.

Bookstore Influence

Books pass through many hands on their way to readers, beginning with the authors and going through publishers and booksellers. This latter group has until recently received little



POP cards are a common sight in Japanese bookstores. (Courtesy: Kyōdō News)

attention for its role in helping to produce hits in the publishing industry, but it is clear that the efforts of bookstore clerks can go a long way toward boosting a title's popularity.

In Japanese bookstores the term POP, from the English "point of purchase" originally, has come to mean cards displayed in shops to advertise certain books. These POP cards are arranged to stick out and attract attention to the titles they promote. They can range in size from things slightly bigger than a business card to much larger signs. While some of them come directly from publishers or distributors, others are produced by store employees themselves and include handwritten descriptions of the qualities that make a book worth reading. *Shiroi inu to warutsu o* (Shinchōsha, 1998), Kanetake Susumu's translation of Terry Kay's *To Dance with the White Dog*, has enjoyed tremendous sales on the strength of popularity kicked off by a bookstore clerk's POP display.

The year 2004 saw the launch of the Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize, which is awarded to a book selected by the nation's bookstore clerks as the one they most want to sell. Many readers appear to trust the selections of these book professionals.

Rush of New Translations

Many celebrated works of world literature available in Japanese translation were produced decades ago, and most of them were rendered in stilted, old-fashioned language. More recently Japan has seen a number of new translations of these classics appearing on shelves to considerable acclaim.

Kameyama Ikuo, president of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, produced a new translation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* that became a bestseller—unusual for a literary classic. Kōbunsha published this new edition in a series of five paperback volumes completed in July 2007. Many point to the smooth readability of this translation's Japanese as one factor driving its sales past the 300,000 mark; the work continues to sell well to this day.

In 2003 Hakusuisha published Murakami Haruki's translation of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Other notable translations in the years since then include Wakashima Tadashi's rendering of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (Shinchōsha, 2005) and a number of new editions of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, which entered the public domain in 2005 in Japan. Publishers are coming out with one translation after another of foreign works that have built-in recognition as classics.

Kawade Shobō Shinsha is planning a 24-volume series of great works of world literature selected by Ikezawa Natsuki. The first volume, Aoyama Minami's translation of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, was published in November 2007; future series installments will include both new translations and retranslated works. Industry trends point to continued popularity for world literature in translation for some time to come.

Book Donation Program Launched

On December 18, 2007, the Nippon Foundation, which carries out activities to benefit society with funding from Japan's motorboat racing industry, held a press conference to announce its 100 Books for Understanding Contemporary Japan program. The foundation plans to donate this collection of texts, selected with a view to deepening understanding of modern Japan, to opinion and business leaders, journalists, and other individuals and institutions around the world. In the first year the program will donate sets to recipients in the United States, with future years to see expansion to Europe, Asia, and Africa as well.

Bestsellers for 2007

Tohan Co., Ltd. has compiled its annual list of Japan's bestselling books based on sales data from December 2006 through November 2007. At the top of the list is Bandō Mariko's *Josei no hinkaku: Yosooi kara ikikata made* [The Dignity of Women: From Clothing to Ways of Living] (PHP Kenkyūsho). Since its publication in October 2006 this book has marked steady growth in sales, topping 2.3 million copies in print as of the date Tohan released its figures. Bandō, the president of Showa Women's University, draws on episodes from her time as Japan's consul general in Australia as she offers specific advice on ways for modern women to comport themselves. Second on the list is *Hōmuresu chūgakusei* [Homeless Middle School Student] (Wani Books). Written by comedian Tamura Hiroshi, this book tells the story of the author's youth, when his father announced that he was "disbanding the family" as he could no longer provide for everyone; the days when the author slept in a nearby park; and the warm support he received from his siblings and people in the neighborhood. And in third place is Watanabe Jun'ichi's *Donkan-ryoku* [The Power of Insensitivity] (Shūeisha).

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Furukawa Hideo: Constantly on a Wild Chase

Out of deep respect for the celebrated author Murakami Haruki, Furukawa Hideo composed an alternative version of his icon's novella named after the jazz song "On a Slow Boat to China." With Murakami's approval, he released his up-tempo remix of the mellow, ballad-like piece to wide acclaim.

Much of Furukawa's fiction contains direct and oblique *homage* to Murakami. One heroine is called "Sheep Child," echoing the "Sheep Man" in Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and a school bears the name "End of the World," a reminder of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Just like Murakami's characters, the protagonists in Furukawa's novels are always on the go. Despite these constant echoes, however, Furukawa's work maintains its independence, as the 41-year-old author creates his own experimental styles, original characters, and evocative plots.

"Merely copying what another great writer has already done would be nonsense," asserts Furukawa briskly. "I am here to revitalize fiction, to make the world realize that there is a wild, 'flesh-and-blood' literature, distinct from the intellectual comprehension of what novels ought to be."

None of Furukawa's 16 books fit into recognizable genres. "Hybrid literature" might be the closest definition of his oeuvre, as he crosses cultural boundaries, breaks standard rules of writing, and displays a restless mix of voices, tones, and textures.

In the epic novel *Beruka, hoenai no ka?* [Belka, Why Not Bark?], Furukawa explores history from the Russian Revolution to the collapse of the Soviet Union, building his narrative around thousands of dogs. These creatures, whose fate was twisted by the human ego, include Strelka and Belka, animals that were launched into orbit and returned safely to earth; four war dogs cast away by the Japanese army on Alaska's Kiska Island during World War II; and their countless offspring.

This fast-paced yet erudite tale with a canine texture showed that Furukawa can craft metafictional pieces on a global scale. The genre-smashing writer has also shown himself capable of weaving elusive, lyrical prose like *Abishinian* [Abyssinian], in which a girl who abandons her home, name, and literacy lives a cat-like existence in a Tokyo park together with her pet Abyssinian.

Although each novel is different, Furukawa's underlying conviction is consistent: rejection of the beaten track. Where conventional wisdom says that the writer should have a single, potent voice, he alternates voices. While literary circles value seriousness, he pursues playfulness.

"I fight every prefabricated value in society, because they're all rubbish," he avows. The writer notes this as one reason he crafts tales around animals. "If you write only about humans, you'll be bound by convention."

The frequent appearance of animals oppressed by selfish humans signifies his "unconscious impulse to avert misfortune." In one story in his collection *Rūto 350* [Route 350], for example, a person dubbed the Bird Man goes from door to door to save pet parakeets that will be

discarded once the owners tire of the birds' piercing cries. Likewise, he selects undeveloped or impoverished settings like the rainforests in Zaire (*13*, his debut tour de force), and Alexandria, Egypt, in the year 1798 (*Arabia no yoru no shuzoku* [The Arabian Nightbreeds]).

Furukawa's aggressive writing approach is also evident in his word usage and grammatical challenges. In his latest novel, *Goddosutā* [Godstar], he omits all commas to amplify the heroine's compulsion to keep an abandoned boy she has raised illegally. In *Rokkunrōru nanabu saku* [Rock 'n' Roll Septology], Furukawa highlights his protagonists' bizarre names like "Chew-chew" in bold and uses dots to emphasize some words, adding a heart-quickenning musical tempo to his alternative history of rock on seven continents.

Furukawa's efforts are tireless. Learning that his earlier, encyclopedic works had lured mainly hardcore bookworms, he set out to condense his words as much as possible in later books. He has even held recitations backed by a rock guitarist to reach a younger audience that has not developed a reading habit. Creating voices that are at turns audacious, exuberant, earthy, and darkly comic, Furukawa is stirring a response among younger readers with his latest short story collection, *Haru, Haru, Haru*.

What makes Furukawa stand out amid his generation, however, are not his techniques and devices, but his sensibility—one in which poetic imagery propels explorations of the enigma of human experience. This sensibility, he explains, closely resembles that of Jorge Luis Borges, who weaves stories not only as plot vehicles but as a means to explore various conceits.

In the massive 800,000-character story he is now working on, Furukawa portrays a generational tapestry of a family in Tōhoku, the remote northern region of Japan where he was born. Each chapter of this novel, *Seikazoku* [The Holy Family], is being printed separately in six different magazines. The complete work is slated for single-volume publication in late 2008.

"I must finish this while I'm 42. That's the age at which Murakami unveiled *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*," Furukawa confesses. "What novels he wrote at what age are always in my psyche as a road map."

Furukawa looks set to continue his wild chase after Murakami Haruki.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Furukawa Hideo

Born in 1966. Playwright-turned-author. His *Arabia no yoru no shuzoku* won two separate awards for the science-fiction and mystery genres in 2002, while *Love*, a surrealistic novel using cats as a motif, received the Mishima Yukio Prize in 2005, the same year his *Beruka, hoenai no ka?* was nominated for the Naoki Prize. His official website is <www.shueisha.co.jp/furukawa>.