

# JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

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# Prime of Manhood

## On Commemorating the 1000th Anniversary of *The Tale of Genji*

Tanabe Seiko

This year is the 1000th anniversary of *Genji monogatari* [trans. *The Tale of Genji*] and many related events will be held all over Japan. *The Tale of Genji* has been translated into English three times, and into many other languages, as it is loved not only by Japanese but by people all over the world.

We asked the thoughts of Ms. Tanabe Seiko on the tale, as a writer who has rewritten and revived *The Tale of Genji* in a new novel called the *Shin Genji monogatari* [The New Tale of Genji].

*The Tale of Genji* is a piece of literary art written by a woman 1,000 years ago. The story on vulnerable paper has been loved and valued by many people even during the warring era, when people risked their own lives to protect it.

Carried on people's backs or held in their arms, the "tale" must have been saved from the wars. The love to this tale gives life to 1,000 years of history. Its survival makes it one of the rarest cases of luck. As descendants in a modern age, it is our duty to deliver and pass on the adoration of this tale to the next generation.

I joined a Japanese literature faculty at a women's university during the war. After the end of the war, I was at the university only for one and a half years. I worked for another 18 months before that. Because it was wartime, I was mobilized by the military to work at a munitions factory together with other factory workers. Thus, my graduation with a degree in Japanese was nominal. After the war, many poor college graduates like me were sent out into society.

I worked at a hardware wholesaler as a desk worker. My dream during my younger days to learn classical lit-

erature completely vanished. I was therefore depressed. On the other hand, the entire world around me seemed to be over-excited, finally being able to celebrate the end of the war.

Commuter trains were always ridiculously crowded and loud. This was because most private railways and national railways were destroyed during the air raids and only a few remained.

I struggled not to lose all the pride I had as a female university graduate in Japanese literature by carrying around some Iwanami Bunko paperbacks that survived the fires. However, it was just impossible to take a book out to read because the rush hour trains always carried more passengers than they were supposed to, inching along the railway tracks.

My father was killed during the last year of the war, so my mother and I were the breadwinners, paying the tuition for my younger brother and sister who were still students.

Though I had a teaching license from a Japanese women's school, a teacher's salary right after the war was not enough for four people to survive on.

## Tanabe Seiko's novels, modern Japanese Translations, adaptations, essays etc. related to *The Tale of Genji*



***Shin Genji monogatari***  
[The New Tale of Genji]

Shinchō Bunko, 1984



***Ezōshi Genji monogatari***  
[The Picture Book of Genji]

Kadokawa Bunko, 1984



***Koi no karatachigaki no maki***  
[The Volume of Love Karatachi Hedge]

Shueisha Bunko, 1990



***Genji monogatari otoko no sekai***  
[“The Tale of Genji” Man's World]

Iwanami Shoten, 1991

That being said, I didn't entirely abhor my job as an office worker at a hardware wholesaler. Demobilized soldiers wearing uniforms joked with each other in the Osaka dialect, did business in a loud voice, and often laughed.

Men at that time were a bit manic. What awaited them was a city completely destroyed in the air strikes, a teeming black market and stuffed trains. How could a graduate in Japanese literature keep living in a world like this? This is what I worried about. Unable to afford books (there were no book stores anyway), I read my textbook in the way I had been taught at school.

One day, a guy in the next seat looked at my book and asked, "Who the hell reads classical Japanese literature these days?!"

But it didn't sound offensive at all, so I kept silent and did not even try to argue with him. I was reading the historical classic, *Ōkagami* [trans. *The Great Mirror*], which I liked because of its accurate character descriptions.

For some reason, classics and books on Japanese history were generally disregarded at that time, but I did not take up that attitude because I simply liked Japanese literature.

I had enjoyed *The Tale of Genji* as a student, but after I became a professional writer, I was always hoping to turn it into a novel. Fortunately, I had an offer to run the classic story in the newspaper, so I tried to restructure *The Tale of Genji* rather than to directly translate it into modern Japanese.

I felt translating it into modern Japanese is not always the best choice. I personally thought it would be good to have an introduction to the classical work that supplements the shortage of conversation and provides explanations.

My long years of experience as a writer told me that adding sentences, omitting redundancies and supplementing the protagonist's feelings were needed when introducing people to the classics.

I felt that adding a small explanation on ancient prac-

tices or supplementing the dialog on behalf of the characters in the story was allowed when introducing classics.

I thus wrote the *Shin Genji monogatari* based on such approach. Of course, I am confident that I am not veering away from what Murasaki Shikibu intended, and the part I paid most attention to was the grace and elegance of the original work.

In the *Shin Genji monogatari* I created, I was attracted by the "Genji no Kimi."

I am sure Murasaki Shikibu would complain saying, "Hey, I am the author."

But I would say to her, "Of course, you are the author. But I feel I understand the guy, Genji more. To understand this type of man, you have to be an older experienced person. At the age of 50 or 60, you're still too young to tell the charm of Genji."

Then, Murasaki Shikibu would throw a suspicious glance at me, and ask me bluntly, "So how old are you anyway?"

I say "I'm 80, ma'am. When men become 80, they boast of their age and exclaim that the prime of manhood is at 80!"

Murasaki Shikibu becomes increasingly cold. Well, anyway, the literature *The Tale of Genji* becomes more and more interesting in my old age.



**Tanabe Seiko**

Born in 1928. Novelist. Won the Akutagawa Prize for *Kanshō ryokō* [*Sentimental Journey*] in 1964. Awarded the Shiju Hōshō prize in 1995. Wrote *Hinekure Issa* [*Twisted Issa*] and *Dōtonbori no ame ni wakarete irai nari* [*Since We Departed in the Rain at Dōtonbori*]. Has also translated and introduced many classics.



**Kiri fukaki uji no koi**  
[Love in Fog-shrouded Uji]

Shinchō Bunko, 1993



**Genji tamayura**  
[Genji Fraction of a Second]

Kōdansha Bunko, 1995



**Genji jikkashunjū**  
[Picking Flowers in Spring and Autumn According to The Tale of Genji]

Bun-ei-dō, 1998



**Tanabe Seiko no Genji gatari**  
[Tanabe Seiko's Talk of Genji]

Shinchōsha, 2000



**Genji kamifūsen**  
[Genji Paper Balloon]

Shinchō On Demand Books, 2002

## FICTION



Matsuura Rieko

Born in 1958. Debuted with *Sōgi no hi* [The Day of the Funeral], which won the Bungakukai New Writers Award in 1978. Received the 2008 Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 2008 with *Kenshin* [Dog's Body], her full-length novel released after a seven-year hiatus.

## ***Kenshin*** **[Dog's Body]** By Matsuura Rieko

Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007. 190x132 mm. 512 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-02-250335-0.

In this full-length novel, Matsuura Rieko dreamed up an unexpected by turning a human being into a dog that is petted by the person it loves. Positioned on the other side of the story is a gruesome, realistic, abnormal love-hate family relationship, which contrasts sharply against the pure heartfelt relationship between the dog and person. Matsuura probed her original stance towards sex by releasing a voluminous novel called *Oyayubi P no shugyō jidai* [The Edification of Big Toe P] in 1993 that surprised the readers by basing her story on an extremely strange setting. Matsuura expanded her free imagination further in *Kenshin*. Unbound by the conventional framework of a popular story, her stance struck a chord in the readers' hearts. In the tale, the dog-

turned-heroine says, "My soul is damaged, and must taste very bad." In response, the Mephistopheles-like man who demands Fusae's soul says, "Don't worry. A well-beaten soul tastes good, just like certain kinds of meat." With exquisite humor and earnestness of the dialog, this story cultivates new ground for the contemporary novel.

The story features dog-related puns and the title *Kenshin* has a double meaning: "dog's body" and "devotion." (NM)

## ***Keikan no chi*** **[The Policeman's Lineage]** By Sasaki Jō

Vol. I : Shinchōsha, 2007. 192x134 mm. 398 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-10-455505-5.

Vol. II : Shinchōsha, 2007. 192x134 mm. 382 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-10-455506-2.

This book received the This Mystery Is Great Award in 2007, the most prestigious prize for mystery writers in Japan. A veteran mystery writer, Sasaki has written numerous tales featuring policemen as the main characters. This book is a compilation of all his works, as it highlights three generations of policemen and the history of Japan's police force after World War II.

The first-generation Seiji agonizes as he tries to be an honest policeman at a police box just after the war when black market trading was common. The second-generation Tamio is a spy who infiltrates the student movements that turned increasingly violent. The third-generation Kazuya confronts modern crime and corruption in the police force.

Profiles of the distinctive crimes of the times and the battle between policemen are vividly outlined, including war orphan and problems with Philopon addiction during Seiji's times, left-wing extremists and domestic violence that Tamio encounters, and *yakuza* gangs and economic scandals that Kazuya tackles.

Towards the end, a shocking "truth" is revealed. This book is not merely a righteous tale of police tackling malice and crime, or an illumination of the dark side of the police. It is a masterpiece that penetrates both the bright and dark sides of the police force all woven into an enjoyable mystery. (MT)



Sasaki Jō

Born in 1950. A year after leaving work at an automobile maker, became a writer in 1979 with the release of *Tekkihei tonda* [The Iron Cavalryman that Leapt]. After this novel won the All Yomimono New Writers' Prize, he released *Etorofu-hatsu kinkyū-den* [Urgent Telegram from Etorofu] in 1990 that won three awards. Also an author of historic novels such as *Buyōden* [The History of Enomoto Takeaki]. Has written numerous other books featuring policemen such as *Warau keikan* [Laughing Policeman], and *Keisatsu-chō kara kita otoko* [The Guy Who Came from the Police Agency].





### Miyabe Miyuki

Born in 1960. Debuted in 1987 with *Warera ga rinjin no hanzai* [Our Next Door Neighbor's Crime], which won the All Yomimono New Mystery Writers' Prize. She has since written in a wide variety of genres including mystery, historic tales, fantasy and science fiction. Has won many awards including the Mystery Writers of Japan Award with *Ryū wa nemuru* [The Dragon Goes on Sleeping], and the Naoki Prize with *Riyū* [Reason]. Won numerous awards with *Mohō-han* [The Copy Cat], and *Namonaki doku* [The Nameless Poison] won the Yoshikawa Eiji Literary Award in 2007.

## Rakuen [Paradise]

By Miyabe Miyuki

Vol. I : Bungei Shunjū, 2007. 190x138 mm. 416 pp. ¥1,619. ISBN 978-4-16-326240-6.

Vol. II : Bungei Shunjū, 2007. 190x138 mm. 368 pp. ¥1,619. ISBN 978-4-16-326360-1.

The body of a girl who lied under the floor of her home for 16 years and the traffic accident death of a boy who “saw through” the body using his super power. The curtain thus rises on this mysterious tale of parent and child.

Miyabe Miyuki remains one of the most popular writers of entertainment literature. She has written hit modern mysteries, period pieces from the Edo period (1603–1868) and science fiction fantasy. *Mohō-han* [The Copy Cat] is her signature title and greatest best-selling mystery that she wrote in 2001.

*Rakuen* is the sequel. Though the main characters are the same, this novel can be enjoyed as a stand-alone tale in which no savage incidents occur suddenly. Instead, the shadow of an evil crime creeps up be-

hind ordinary people leading humble lives. It closely follows the recovery process of people who are deeply hurt by the crime. *Rakuen* conveys the author's kindness towards people who live their lives in earnest.

This is a masterpiece mystery written against the backdrop of the recent arguments over how to help victims. (MT)

## Anata no kokyū ga tomaru made [Until Your Breathing Stops]

By Shimamoto Rio

Shinchōsha, 2007. 194x136 mm. 190 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-302032-5.

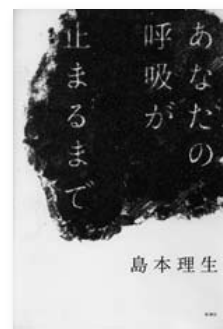
Young female writers have become more prominent in the Japanese literary scene, as is evidenced by the fact that the Akutagawa Prize has been won recently by women born in 1983 and 1984, including Wataya Risa, Kanehara Hitomi, and Aoyama Nanae. Shimamoto Rio has not won the award, but is reputed to have as much talent and popularity as the aforementioned three writers.

The heroine of this tale is a 12-year-old girl who is becoming aware of boys. Due to the busy life of her father, a choreographer, she grows close to a middle-aged man who is her father's friend. She is then deeply hurt after the man sexually violates her. While acknowledging her hatred toward the man who did this filth to her, she also detests her “sexual reac-

tion to him as a woman.” In order to clear her mind of this hatred, the girl decides to revive the incident in a story.

Though often considered a writer of love stories since her debut, this is not a correct evaluation of her. Her stories are attractive because she carefully follows each scene and action in daily life through to the feelings and emotions of every person featured in the tale.

This is probably why we should consider her a writer who continues to scrutinize the distance between people to delicately outline the ripples and winds that occur in each situation. (MT)



### Shimamoto Rio

Born in 1983. Generated much news by becoming a candidate for the Akutagawa Prize in 2003 with *Ritoru bai ritoru* [Little by Little] while she was still in high school. Received the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers the same year, the youngest winner to date. *Umareru mori* [The Birth-giving Forest] written in 2005, as well as *Okina kuma ga kurumae ni oyasumi* [Sleep Before the Big Bear Comes], which she wrote in 2006, have both been candidates for the Akutagawa Prize. *Naratāju* [Narratage], her full-length love story written in 2005, is her best-seller with sales of more than 230,000 copies.

## FICTION



Satō Yasushi

Born in 1949. Started writing stories in high school. Continued writing after graduating from Kokugakuin University and taking a variety of jobs. Never won a prominent award, though nominated for the Akutagawa Prize five times and the Mishima Yukio Prize for *Soko nomi nite hikari kagayaku* [*Shining Brilliantly Only There*]. Committed suicide in 1990.

## Satō Yasushi sakuhin-shū [Writings of Sato Yasushi]

By Satō Yasushi

Crane, 2007. 194x140 mm. 688 pp. ¥3,300. ISBN 978-4-90-668128-0.

A collection of lyrical stories written by an author who took his own life at the age of 41.

Satō Yasushi became an Akutagawa Prize candidate five times with novels including *Kimi no tori wa utaeru* [Your Bird Can Sing], which was published when he was 32. He also was a candidate for the Mishima Yukio Prize when he was 39 with *Soko nominite hikari kagayaku* [Shining Brilliantly Only There]. But he suffered from autonomic dystonia since he was in his 20s and later became alcoholic after a literary scandal. *Kaitanshi jokei* [Sea Coal City Scenery] was published after he committed suicide in 1990.

The three titles above are representatives of his work. His simple phrases and his limpid tales grasp the hearts of many

readers. As proof, a new collection of his writings has emerged 18 years after his death.

Born in Hakodate, Hokkaido, Satō frequently chose this local city of 250,000 as the stage for his tales, including *Soko nominite hikari kagayaku* and *Kaitanshi jokei*. Satō referred to this seaport town built on a sand spit as a “small, stifling town” in *Ōgon no fuku* [Golden Clothes].

Yet he ultimately learned the lives of men, women, family, work, and sex in Hakodate. He was a novelist whose maturity we would like to have observed, had he lived longer. (MK)

## ESSAY

## Yū Miri fukō zen kiroku [Yu Miri's Entire Record of Unhappiness]

By Yū Miri

Shinchōsha, 2007. 188x130 mm. 806 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-10-401709-6.

This book is the diary of Akutagawa Prize Winner Yū Miri, from November 20, 2001 to June 7, 2007. It is written in the form of an exchange diary with the deceased Higashi Yutaka, who was a master and Yū's lover since she was a student at the Tokyo Kid Brothers theatrical troupe.

Over these five and a half years, Yū's business suffered: Her early work, *Ishi ni oyogu sakana* [The Fish Swimming in the Stones], was suspended after a model filed a lawsuit for libel. *Hachigatsu no owari* [The End of August], which had been placed in the Asahi Shimbun and the Dong-a Ilbo simultaneously, was terminated. And her relationship with Shinchōsha Publishing Co., Ltd. that had supported Yū for a long time, soured. These incidents plunged Yū into a state of depression, and

hampered her writing. In her private life, she started a strange cohabitation with her son she had between her ex-lover, together with an exceptionally young man that could almost be her son, whom she got to know through her fan website.

The ordinary life of the novelist is described negatively to stimulate the reader's curiosity. There is malicious intention, despair, callousness, anger and regret.

However, her writing style of always stepping back and cruelly contemplating her own emotions has turned the diary into literature. The front cover is Yū's first nude photo by Shinoyama Kishin who has photographed her since she was 24 years old. This photo created much havoc when the book was first published. (SH)



Yū Miri

Born in 1968. After dropping out of high school, became a member of “Tokyo Kid Brothers,” a musical troupe. Formed her own theatrical group called the “Seishun Gogatsutō” in 1986. Won the Kishida Kunio Drama Award in 1993 with *Sakana no matsuri* [The Fish Festival]. This was followed by the release of her first novel in 1994. Won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers and the Izumi Kyōka Literary Award in 1996 with *Furuhausu* [Fullhouse]. In 1997, she won the Akutagawa Prize with *Kazoku shinema* [Family Cinema]. *Inochi* [Life], her big seller, is her private diary featuring an interaction between a life about to be born and a life about to end.



**Takano Hideyuki**

Born in 1966. Debuted with *Genjū Mubenbe o oe* [Search for the Phantom Beast Mubenbe], which he wrote while at Waseda University and being a member of the Expedition Club. After teaching Japanese at the Chiang Mai University, wrote nonfiction stories depicting exploration in remote areas, as well as experiencing a cultural shock in Japan by contacting various different cultures within the nation. His representative titles include *Kaigyo Umokka kakutō-ki: Indo eno michi* [Fighting the Monstrous Fish Umokka: The Road to India], and *Ahen ōkoku sennyū-ki* [Infiltrating into the Opium Kingdom].

## **Kaijū-ki [Monster Story]**

**By Takano Hideyuki**

Kōdansha, 2007. 186x130 mm. 286 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-214077-5.

Takano Hideyuki is a nonfiction writer of expeditionary stories that take place in remote areas of foreign countries. He is interested in little known Unidentified Mysterious Animals (UMAs). This book is an entertaining journey of his search for an UMA, the Lake Van Monster that has reportedly been spotted many times at Lake Van in eastern Turkey.

After an interview with a leading UMA researching Turkish professor, the monster is found to have become an issue at a time when tensions with the Kurds were creating international controversy. A video recording of the UMA turns out to be a fabrication, and a right-wing extremist was involved in promoting the rumor.

In short, the Lake Van Monster was a political tool to keep citizens from focus-

ing on ethnic tensions between the Turks and Kurds.

Common sense says the search should end here, but this one does not. As soon as the existence of the Lake Van Monster turned out to be a fake, the author's monster-hunting moves into full swing driven by "expectation and anxiety." There is an encounter with a "dragon legend" considered to be the origin of the Lake Van Monster. The stories of witnesses come up one after another. Laughed at by the locals, the author makes a serious effort to seek a water-spouting, humongous aquatic animal 10 meters long. Then, the crew reaches Inkyo Village, the home of the Lake Van Monster. Did they finally see the monster?

(SH)

## **HISTORY**

### **Sengo harapeko jidai no shattā-on [The Sound of the Shutter Snapping in the Hungry Post-war Era]**

**By Akasegawa Genpei**

Iwanami Shoten, 2007. 184x130 mm. 224 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-00-023671-3.

The author Akasegawa Genpei was an active avant-garde artist in the 1960s who later took up the pen, ultimately winning the Akutagawa Prize in the 1970s. He continued to be a newsmaker by proposing a new way of observing a city in *Rojō kansatsu-gaku* [Observations on the Streets], and preaching in *Rōjin-ryoku* [An Elderly Power], which tackled the issue of aging from a fresh perspective.

*Iwanami shashin bunko* [Iwanami Photo Paperback], a collection of thematic photos, was first issued in 1950, five years after Japan was defeated in World War II. A total of 286 issues were published until 1958, introducing various themes of the times, such as "Americans," "horses," "round worms," "steam locomotives,"

"coal," "USSR", and "whaling in the Antarctic Ocean."

When *Iwanami shashin bunko* was issued in the 1950s, most Japanese were poor and hungry. But everything in those days shone brilliantly towards the future. People were hungry not just for food, but also for knowledge, culture, movies and photos. This photo series conveyed tidbits of the world poignantly.

This book is a selection of 24 issues of *Iwanami shashin bunko* made by Akasegawa, who added superb commentary to each issue. The photos show boorishness yet also a strong power. They revive the air of the times captured in a realistic manner, a kind of vivid profile of post-war Japan before our eyes. (MT)



**Akasegawa Genpei**

Born in 1937. Avant-garde artist and writer. After quitting the Musashino Art School, became involved in avant-garde activities such as Neo Dadaism and the High Red Center. Won the Kōdansha Essay Award in 1980 with *Tōkyō rojō tanken-ki* [An Exploration of Tokyo's Streets], in which he discovered and studied "strange, unnecessary things in town." Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1981 for his tale called *Chichi ga kieta* [Father Disappeared], which he released under the name, Otsuji Katsuhiko. Also a member of the Japan Art Support Group and the Leica Camera Lovers' Association.

## CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY



Ueyama Akihiro

Born in 1955. Nonfiction writer cum science journalist. Writes about topics beyond the border of literature and science with his theme of the "Japanese and creativity." Author of *Hatsumei rikkoku Nippon no shōzō [The Bust of the Inventor Country, Japan]*.

## *Nippon tensai-den: Shirarezaru hatsumei/hakken no chichi-tachi*

### [A History of Japanese Geniuses: The Fathers of Unknown Inventions and Discoveries]

By Ueyama Akihiro

Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007. 186x126 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-02-259929-2.

Often, Japanese are said to "lack originality." The author, a scientific journalist, questions this proposition.

He looks at the history of science and technology since the Meiji era (1868–1912) and finds that original research and skills of many Japanese are applied in all areas of life today. These inventions and discoveries tended to exceed the global standards though none received a Nobel Prize.

The 16 personalities featured include Takamine Jōkichi, who developed "Takadiastase" and discovered "adrenaline," Shimazu Genzō, the founder of Shimadzu Corporation who developed an accumulator battery, and Sugiura Mutsuo, the lead

technician at Takachiho Optics (now the Olympus Corporation), and the renowned father of a gastroscope.

Another representative figure was Tahara Sunao, the father of the pacemaker. Visiting the pathology laboratory of the University of Marburg in Germany, he observed a myocardial cell by cutting the heart into several thousand thin slices. Does the heart beat automatically due to the function of the nerves or because of its muscles? He discovered that the regular, automatic beating of the heart is caused by an impulse conduction system in the muscles instead of in the nerves. His discovery paved the way for the development of the pacemaker. (MK)

## *Erekutora: Nakagami Kenji no shōgai*

### [Electra: The Life of Nakagami Kenji]

By Takayama Fumihiko

Bungei Shunjū, 2007. 190x140 mm. 413 pp. ¥2,381. ISBN 978-4-16-369680-5.

This book is a critical biography of the author Nakagami Kenji, though it does not cover his entire life. It also does not take up Nakagami's literary process. It is a non-fiction novel that exploits the secret of why Nakagami Kenji, the writer, was born.

The title was taken from the Greek tragedy. But this book points out that Nakagami himself tried to write about his maternal family and the tale of a mother killer by borrowing the name of this Greek tale.

"Electra," the origin of Nakagami literature, was sealed by an editor and lost in a fire. Is that really true? Wasn't it a myth created by the editor? As to remove such suspicion, Takayama Fumihiko's tale of Nakagami has an overwhelming impact.

Nakagami Kenji had many negative features that he wanted to hide. He was born a

discriminated villager. He was an illegitimate child of his mother. His elder brother committed suicide. He lied that he went to college, when in fact he spent his youth days at a jazz café and nicknamed Fatso Ken.

We learn that Nakagami Kenji eventually became a writer by subsuming these negative factors into the back alleys of Kumano. (MK)



Takayama Fumihiko

Born in 1958. Quit the Literature Department of Hosei University. Attracted attention by winning the Magazine Journalism Prize, Work Award, an award chosen by editors, in both 1995 and 1998. Won both the Ōya Sōichi Nonfiction Literature Prize and the Kodānsha Nonfiction Award in 2000 with his depiction of the life of a young writer who died at 23 from leprosy in Hibana: Hōjō Tamio no shōgai [Fire Sparks: The Life of Hojo Tamio]. Mira-koro [Mirakoro] is his full-length novel.





**Nakajima Takeshi**

Born in 1975. Completed his doctorate in Asia/Africa Regional Research at Kyoto University Graduate School. Currently serves as the associate professor at Hokkaido University Public Policy School. Won the Osaragi Jirō Rondan Prize in 2005 with Nakamura no Bōsu: Indo dokuritsu undō to kindai Nihon no Ajia shugi [Bose of Nakamura: India's Independence Movement and Modern Japan's Pan-Asian Principle].

## **Pāru hanji [Judge Pal]**

**By Nakajima Takeshi**

Hakusuisha, 2007. 192x138 mm. 309 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-560-03166-7.

Radhabinod Pal was the Indian judge who maintained that all of Japan's Class A war criminals were innocent at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (the so-called Tokyo Trial). In this profile, Pal is an "absolute pacifist" based on a critical reading of his biography, the Pal Judgment Document.

Ever since Tanaka Masaaki published a commentary called, *Pāru hakase no Nihon muzai-ron* [Dr. Pal's Judgement of Japan as Innocent] in 1963, the document has been interpreted as showing that Japan was innocent and that the Tokyo Trial was a way to retaliate against Japan.

But according to Nakajima, Pal did not say that Japan was innocent, only that the Class A war criminals should be pardoned. Nakajima says that Tanaka should have

called his book, *A-kyū senpan muzai-ron* [The Judgement of A-Class War Criminals Being Innocent].

Nakajima's opinion is justifiable and questions the conventional view on Pal and the Tokyo Trial.

Even if it is true that Pal thought highly of Gandhi's "Principle of Non-violence," Nakajima's theory that Pal supported Japan's pacifist constitution as a result of his devotion to Gandhi's ideology seems like a stretch. Nakajima's statement that the Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is a "declaration of Gandhi's ideology in a clear sentence" does not reflect Pal's thoughts, but those of Nakajima himself.

(MK)

## **CRITICAL ESSAY**

### **"Karamāzofu no kyōdai" zokuhen o kūsō suru [Imagining the Sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*]**

**By Kameyama Ikuo**

Kōbunsha, 2007. 170x108 mm. 277 pp. ¥780. ISBN 978-4-334-03420-7.

*The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky's full-length novel, has long been known in Japan as a literary classic. But thick, long and stodgy Russian literature has been considered too difficult and avoided by young readers. Kameyama Ikuo, one of the best-known critics of Russian literature in Japan, made a splash in the book world last year with his completely new easy-to-read translation of the book.

Though his work was an exceptional best-seller, he wasn't satisfied with merely translating a book, and thus pursued to stoke his imagination further. As is well known, Dostoevsky planned to write a sequel to *The Brothers Karamazov*, but it never came to be because of his abrupt death.

Through meticulous reading of the tale

and close research coupled with a bold imagination, Kameyama "scientifically imagines" what kind of sequel Dostoevsky would have written if he was alive for several more years.

With a dynamic hypothesis, this is a profound book of literary research backed by a deep knowledge of Russian literature, making it distinctive enough to be acknowledged around the world. (NM)



**Kameyama Ikuo**

Born in 1949. Current Head of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. In addition to his research on Dostoevsky, has written many books related to the politics of the USSR and art under Stalin. Won the Osaragi Jirō Prize in 2002 with Haritsuke no Roshia: Sutārin to geijutsuka tachi [Russia Crucified: Stalin and Artists].

## BUSINESS



Higuchi Takeo

*Born in 1938. Graduated from the Legal Faculty of Kwansei Gakuin University. Joined Daiwa House Industry Co., Ltd. in 1963. Became the president of the company in 2001. Appointed Executive Directing Chairman and CEO of the company in 2004. Came out with numerous renovations and guided Daiwa House Industry Co., Ltd. to the top of the industry after reviving Daiwa Danchi, an ailing subsidiary, and became President of Daiwa House Industry Co., Ltd.*

### **Nettō keiei: "Daisoshiki byō" ni katsu** [Boiling-water Management: Conquer "Large Organization Sickness"]

By Higuchi Takeo

Bungei Shunjū, 2007. 172x108 mm. 200 pp. ¥700. ISBN 978-4-16-660586-6.

This book tells the actual tale of how the current chairman led Daiwa House Industry Co., Ltd. to its top position in the housing industry, by reviving the badly faltering company.

When the author, Higuchi Takeo, was managing director at Daiwa House, he was ordered to run a debt-laden subsidiary, Daiwa Danchi. The subsidiary once led the industry by introducing Japan's first home loans, but its management deteriorated after the collapse of the bubble economy. The author fired troubled executives, while employed and promoted capable employees, and voluntarily took a hands-on role in transforming the company into a community-based industry. "Here the occupation army has come," was how the author was perceived inside the company.

After Daiwa House bought out the subsidiary, Higuchi became president of Daiwa

House. He faced head-on with the parent company's "large organization sickness" that relied on its size and wealth. To revive the company's aggressiveness, the author started "boiling water management." He shortened the term of office from two years to a year for the managers, introduced an in-house FA system, and announced a large-scale deficit accounting for the first time. The book describes Higuchi's personal exchange with the owner, Ishibashi Nobuo, who taught the author "what it is to totally rely on a person." One emotional scene describes the car carrying the coffin of Ishibashi, who refused to have the company run his funeral. The coffin makes a short visit to the factory and research institute that Ishibashi had deep relations with, until finally reaching the HQ. This book teaches us one manager's power to revive a company. (SH)

## DIPLOMACY

### **Tsūyakusha to sengo Nichi-Bei gaikō** [Interpreter and Postwar Japan-US Diplomacy]

By Torikai Kumiko

Misuzu Shobō, 2007. 188x128 mm. 408 pp. ¥3,800. ISBN 978-4-622-07309-3.

An interpreter is an important bridge between different languages. Since the author, Torikai Kumiko, interpreted the live telecast of Apollo 11's first manned lunar landing in 1969, she continued to be a first-hand interpreter mainly working on NHK's programs. Facing dilemmas upon having to interpret things she did not agree with, however, she later switched to a university position.

This book is an academic study on "what interpreting is" by Torikai who had retained a long-time question: "why did I stop being an interpreter?" Upon realizing the need to study the socio-cultural meaning of interpreting, she wrote this book by interviewing five pioneering simultaneous interpreters including Nishiyama Sen, Sōma Yukika, Muramatsu Masumi, Kunihiro

Masao and Komatsu Tatsuya through the oral history method.

The book describes the communication in a prison camp during WWII, negotiation on the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, and the story of Prime Minister Nakasone's controversial statement in 1983, when his expression, "a large aircraft carrier," was back-translated into English as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier."

One interpreter's work, which sheds light on another side of diplomatic history, makes for an interesting and even entertaining book in the process. (SH)



Torikai Kumiko

*Graduate of Department of Spanish Language and Hispanic Studies at Sophia University. Completed her PhD at the Human Literature Research Faculty of University of Southampton. Renowned as one of the first simultaneous interpreters in Japan, working at the forefront while still in college. Currently serves as Professor of Rikkyo Graduate School of Intercultural Communication. Also chairman of the Japan Association for Interpretation Studies, and director of Japan Society of Translators.*



Ōno Susumu

Born in 1919. Prominent Japanese language researcher. Current Honorary Professor of Gakushuin University. Started his research on the ancient Japanese language by pursuing the question, "What is Japan?" While continuing to pursue the origins of the Japanese language, his studies include special usage of kana through the Nara era, Man'yōshū, Kojiki and Nihon Shoki. An author of many books.

## ***Nihongo no genryū o motomete*** **[Seeking the Origin of the Japanese Language]**

By Ōno Susumu

Iwanami Shoten, 2007. 172x106 mm. 284 pp. ¥820. ISBN 978-4-00-431091-4.

Ōno Susumu, a prominent Japanese language researcher, has pursued the origin of the Japanese language for the past 30 years. This is an introductory textbook on his vast research results that meets his goal of including easy-to-understand explanations.

When he was 60, Ōno was flabbergasted to discover that a Dravidian etymological dictionary he came across contained many words that were identical with ancient Japanese. Since then, he has continued his research on the origins of Japanese in Tamil, which belongs to the Dravidian language group of South India. Coupling his profound knowledge on the Japanese language with archaeological and ethnological research, he devised a hypothetical scheme that he clearly explains in this book. He ar-

gues that the Tamil tribe came to northern Kyushu by sea during the ancient Jōmon period (ca. 3000–200 B.C.) and taught rice-growing, steel-making and weaving to Japan. Moreover, the Tamil also passed on their language to the locals so that Tamil words and grammar were mixed with the Polynesian language that was assumed to be used by the Japanese at the time.

Criticized by comparative linguists, his hypothesis is highly divisive and has not been widely acknowledged. However, his bold and persuasive hypothesis is attractive enough for those interested in the mysterious origins of the Japanese. (NM)

# MANGA

## ***Nishūkan no kyūka*** **[Two Weeks of Vacation]**

By Fujimoto Masaru

Kōdansha, 2007. 198x148 mm. 103 pp. ¥1,238. ISBN 978-4-06-214065-2.

Fujimoto Masaru is a cartoonist and illustrator with a unique view of the world. So far, he has published stories with a critical eye towards culture while depicting homey daily life scenes. Featuring animals in lead roles, *Ūru 100%* [Wool 100%] highlights a sheep named Dolly as the main character, while *Sukotto kun* [Mr. Scott] lets a South Pole penguin play the part of a protagonist.

He also has published works created from a surprising imagination using palindromes, riddles and picture books. In his works, animals behave like humans and there is no distinction between the conversation of humans and animals. Fujimoto's work is characterized by an awareness born from the destruction of the gap between animals and humans.

This book, *Nishūkan no kyūka* [Two Weeks of Vacation], is Fujimoto's first long manga. One day, the main character, Hinako, who leads an ordinary life, is suddenly invited into the world of flightless birds and experiences their mystery. There, she finds her childhood friend and Tama, a cat that went missing from her home. After a series of mysterious events, she goes back to reality, but something is surely different.

You will definitely feel like hugging Hinako, who knows the pain and loneliness of life. (SH)



Fujimoto Masaru

Born in 1968. Cartoonist and illustrator. In addition to the production of such titles as *Ūru 100%* [Wool 100%], *Ūru 101%* [Wool 101%] and *Ikimonono subete* [All Living Things], has also written books on palindromes and riddles.

This volume is a three-part overview of contemporary Japanese manga. Numerous Japanese mangas are translated and enjoyed by readers in various countries. We

summarize the trends of the past 20 years in *shōjo* (girls) manga, *seinen* (youth) manga, and *shōnen* (boys) manga.

## Shōjo (Girls) Manga

The first volume is *shōjo* (girls) manga. What were the trends of *shōjo* manga's story and the backdrop of social changes? Focusing on popular mangas, an expert explains.

### Trends in 1990s

After the 1990s, the largest change that happened to Japanese *shōjo* manga is the fact that “romance” was no longer the main theme. Instead, the main interest shifted to “how I should be” (i.e., soul-searching), and main characters aimed for self-fulfillment in business and other fields of expression. Sometimes, that type of “interest in myself” connected with gene manipulation and clone technology as an effort towards redefining the human's contour.

For instance, from the late 1980s and early 1990s, interest in life was symbolized by ecology and the linkage of living things, like in *Boku no chikyū o mamotte* [trans. *Please Save My Earth*] by Hiwatari Saki and *Tsuki no ko* [Moon Child] by Shimizu Reiko. Gradually, there was a shift in focus towards gene manipulation and clone technology in *Kaguyahime* [trans. *Kaguya-hime*] by Shimizu Reiko and *Yasha* [Devil] by Yoshida Akimi. This shift eventually led to *Shinseiki Evangelion* [trans. *Neon Genesis EVANGELION*], a representative anime of the 1990s.

Furthermore, during the Gulf War, a new motif sharply developed: girls that fight to protect the destiny of a community. The masterpieces in this category include *Sora wa akai kawa no hotori* [trans. *Red River*] by Shinohara Chie, *BASARA* [trans. *Basara*] by Tamura Yumi and *Majikku naito reiāsu* [trans. *Magic Knight Rayearth*] by Clamp, as well as the most influential of all, *Bishōjo senshi Seirā Mūn* [trans. *Sailor Moon*] by Takeuchi Naoko. This symbolized the dawn of the fighting beauty that independently developed apart from a *shōnen* (boys) manga.

Here again, love is something to be fought for. The main character, Tsukushi, in the unprecedented best-seller, *Hana yori dango* [trans. *Boys over Flowers*] by Kamio Yōko, may have been a fighting beauty that forcefully encouraged her boyfriend to grow up no matter how many times she was stamped on.

In battles like this, the manga of this generation featured an emotional bond among women that was noticeably stronger than the relationship between a man and a woman. In addition to *Sailor Moon* and *Rayearth*, in which girls cooperate to fight, the big hit of the next decade, *Nana*, extended the trend.

### Trends in 2000s

After the Millennium, daily topics appear increasingly, but the interest in social affairs is depicted more in the form of “job manga” including *Good Job!* by Kataoka Misao in which an office lady's delicate work is depicted, *Real Clothes* by Makimura Satoru, staged at a corner of the department store that sells women's wear, and *Hataraki man* [Working Man] by Anno Moyoko, which ran in a men's magazine.

*Nodame kantābire* [trans. *Nodame Cantabile*] by Ninomiya Tomoko, which took place in a music academy, as well as *Hachimitsu to kuřōba* [trans. *Honey and Clover*] by Umino Chika, at an art school, focus on the self-realization of musicians and artists. Romance is important, but described as only one of the elements that comprises life. The characteristics of those works are as follows: The main stress is on partnership rather than love, with more monologues to male characters than to females, and the internal aspect of females are depicted as incomprehensible.

This trend may have something to do with the flourishing of BL (stands for boy's love, a.k.a., *yaoi*) after the 1990s. In the past few years, the popularity of Yoshinaga Fumi who is from the BL manga field, is noticeable. She first attracted attention with *Seiyō kottō yōgashiten* [trans. *Antique Bakery*] and its gay protagonist, and was lionized by the critics for *Aisubeki musume tachi* [trans. *All My Darling Daughters*] in which women for the first time were main characters. Yoshinaga is currently running *Ōoku* [The Inner Palace] in the magazine, the male-female reversal *jidaigeki* (historical drama).

At the same time, recently popular manga also include the recurrence of the origins of *shōjo* (girls) manga, the story of pure, first love. Typical examples include *Kōkō debyū* [trans. *High School Debut*] by Kawahara Kazune, *Hatsukare* [First Boyfriend] by Tōmori Miyoshi, and *Kimi ni todoke* [Deliver to You] by Shiina Karuho. Above all, *Kimi ni todoke* is absorbing, describing the friendship between girls. You can certainly feel the evolution of *shōjo* manga after the 1990s in these mangas.

(Fujimoto Yukari, manga critic, editor, associate professor, School of Global Japanes Studies, Meiji University)





**Ōoku**  
**[The Inner Palace]**  
 By Yoshinaga Fumi

Hakusensha, 2005. vol.1 182x128 mm. 191 pp. ¥571. ISBN 978-4-59-214301-7 (4592143019).

In this story, the (Tokugawa) Shogun is portrayed as really being a woman! After the population of men sharply declined because of a mysterious disease, the world has changed. Now women work to produce and men are evaluated for their sex and reproductive capability. What was happening in this time of *Ōoku*? It is a profound story that is much more than a simple male-female reversal. (This Book was introduced in *Japanese Book News* No.52, p.11.)

**Kimi ni todoke**  
**[Deliver to You]**  
 By Shiina Karuho

Shūeisha, 2006. vol.1 176x112 mm. 195 pp. ¥390. ISBN 978-4-08-846061-1 (4088460618).

“Sawako” with long straight hair and a dismal image, is nicknamed “Sadako” (Cf. *Ring*) and alienated by her classmates. One day, Sawako starts to unveil her impressively pure personality after meeting a super-cool boy, Kazahaya. The best part is when she builds friendships, gradually winning over the girls around her.



©Shiina Karuho/Shūeisha



**Herutā sukerutā**  
**[Helter Skelter]**  
 By Okazaki Kyōko

Shōdensha Feel Comics, 2003. 210x148 mm. 315 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-39-676297-1 (4396762976).

The idol “Ririko” whom every girl dreams to be, is actually a beauty created by illegal entire-body cosmetic surgery. The side effect of the medicine is enormous, however, and Ririko gets destroyed little by little from the inside. How much time is left for her? At a glance, she looks good, but her inside keeps distorting. Below her skin, she suffers from her desires, loneliness, starvation, and self-destructive impulses. This is a metaphor of the other side of Japan.

**Puraido**  
**[Pride]**  
 By Ichijō Yukari

Shūeisha, 2003. vol.1 176x112 mm. 192 pp. ¥400. ISBN 978-4-08-865142-2 (4088651421).

Here is a former young lady from a good family in reduced circumstances. Her rival is a girl who desperately wants to break through her poverty. They fight each other on stage at the opera. Two different prides collide violently. The interesting part is that the protagonist is a girl from a good family. Ichijō Yukari, the “Queen of *Shōjo* Manga,” is in full swing in this outstanding work.



©Ichijō Yukari/Shūeisha

## Kenzaburo Ōe Prize

*Watashitachi ni yurusareta tokubetsu-na jikan no owari* [The End of the Special Time Unrestricted to Us] (Shinchōsha, 2007) won the second Kenzaburo Ōe Prize (sponsored by Kōdansha). This was the first novel collection written by Okada Toshiki, a spirited playwright-director and president of the theater troupe, chel-fitsch. This prize-winning work consists of two medium-length stories. “Sangatsu no itsukakan” [The Five Days in March], is the novel version of a play that won the 49th Kishida Kunio Play Award. It is a story of five days in the life of a couple who stayed at a love hotel when the air strikes against Iraq started, choosing not to watch the news. The other story is “Watashi no basho no fukusū” [The Plural of My Places], a new novel about the daily life of a married couple who are part-time workers. This award was established in 2006 to commemorate Ōe’s 50 years as a writer and Kōdansha’s 100th anniversary. For this award, Ōe selects “a powerful work of ‘literary words’” out of the literary productions that have been published over the past year. The winning work will be translated and introduced overseas.

## A perfect reprint of Tezuka Osamu’s masterpiece

*Tezuka Osamu zenshū* [Collected works of Tezuka Osamu] (10 volumes) has been published and includes the four classic masterpieces of Tezuka Osamu (1928–89), a Japanese pioneering cartoonist who is known as the God of Anime. This collection is a reprint of the entire collected edition under the same title that did not appear in public for long after it was originally published in 1964 and 1965. Its reprinting was planned to coincide with the 90th anniversary of Kinnohoshisha next year. The publisher hopes to convey beyond generations “the respect for life,” a message that Tezuka Osamu incorporated into his works. The collection includes *Tetsuwan Atomu* [trans. *Astro Boy*] in Volume 1, *Zero man* (1–7) [trans. *Zero Man*] in Volumes 2 to 8, *Biggu ekkusu* [trans. *Big*

*X*] in Volume 9 and *Ari to kyojin* [trans. *The Ant and the Giant*] in Volume 10. B5 size, each volume 128 pages.

## The Fifth Bookstore Award

Five years have passed since the foundation of the Bookstore Award in which each bookstore clerk from around Japan votes for the book he/she wants to sell most. Every bookstore clerk selling new books can vote, which makes this award unique from existing literary awards decided by selection committees comprised of professional writers. The selection is made from a list of the top ten nominees, after which a second vote is taken.

The 2008 Bookstore Award announced on April 8 was given to Isaka Kōtarō’s entertainment novel, *Gōruden suranbā* [Golden Slumbers] (Shinchōsha, 2007), depicting people’s ties through the escape of a young man who was falsely accused of being a prime minister’s assassin. The second prize was given to Kondō Fumie’s mystery about a bicycle road race, *Sakurifaisu* [Sacrifice] (Shinchōsha), and the third prize went to Morimi Tomihiko’s story about a raccoon family in Kyoto, *Uchōten kazoku* [Rapturous Family] (Gentōsha).



2008 Bookstore Award was announced on April 8, and Isaka Kōtarō’s *Gōruden suranbā* [Golden Slumbers] was awarded a grand prize.

## Rival manga magazines publish a new collaboration magazine

Kōdansha’s *Weekly Shōnen Magazine* and Shōgakukan’s *Weekly Shōnen Sunday* published a new magazine together this April. The two magazines, both started in March 1959, have been rival pioneers of boy’s weekly manga magazines, and have produced numerous masterpieces. Now, the two magazines are working together in a new collaborative magazine to commemorate their 50th anniversaries.

The title of the new magazine, *Meitantei Konan & Kindaichi shōnen no jikenbo* [Detective Conan and Kindaichi’s Case Files], includes past masterpieces from both magazines. They include *Kindaichi shōnen no jikenbo* [trans. *Kindaichi Case Files*] from *Weekly Shōnen Magazine* and *Meitantei Konan* [trans. *Detective Conan*] from *Weekly Shōnen Sunday*. The magazine will be published twice a month for six months.

## The full 25 works of “Kabuki for Reading” series ends

The collection of 25 volumes of the *Kabuki on sutēji* [Kabuki on Stage] series (Hakusuisha) was completed. The series introduced and explained the Kabuki masterpieces written by playwrights including Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Tsuruya Namboku, and Kawatake Mokuami. Readers can enjoy Kabuki by referring to the footnotes explaining difficult vocabulary used in the scenes, a synopsis section, and the entertainment talk section introducing theories of acting and staging of ancient and modern actors. It comes in a compact B6 size, convenient to use as a handy booklet when going to the theater.

## Modern poetry dictionary to overview the trend of words

Sanseidō issued *Gendaishi daijiten* [The Unabridged Dictionary of Modern Poetry] covering the multifaceted trends of Japanese modern poetry. Approximately 1,000 poets from Kitamura Tōkoku to currently active poets, approximately 500 items, 200 poems and reviews are included.

The trend of poetry from the Meiji era (1868–1912) to today can be read in one dictionary.

The breadth of the 500 items makes this dictionary especially useful. It includes sections on the synthesis of “poetry and art,” “poetry and music,” “poetry and eroticism,” and “poetry and media,” as well as other recent research trends that disambiguate the contact point between modern poetry and haiku, such as “Buson and modern poetry.” This publication is the final installment of the triptych of poetry dictionaries after the *Gen-dai tanka daijiten* [The Unabridged Dictionary of Modern Tanka] published in 2000 and *Gendai haiku daijiten* [The Unabridged Dictionary of Modern Haiku] that came out in 2005. Consequently, the completion of the triptych has covered the entire span of Japanese short poem-style literature.

### Continued translation of the history books into modern Japanese

The modern language version of history books including *Azuma Kagami* and *Nihon Shoki* are being published. *Azuma Kagami* is considered the most basic critical document of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). It starts from the scene of Minamoto no Yoritomo hunting down the Heishi clan and establishing the Kamakura Shogunate by sending an anti-Heishi clan army. *Gendaigoyaku azuma kagami* [Modern Japanese Translation: *Azuma Kagami*] (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan) has 16 volumes with detailed notes and explanations based on latest research results. The book is easy-to-understand for beginners, but reaching the level that even satisfies the researchers. The third volume will be published in May, and the series is scheduled to be completed in 2011.

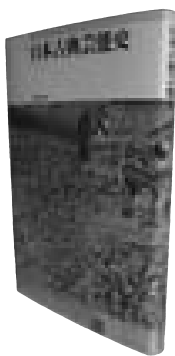
On the other hand, the series of *Nihon no koten wo yomu* [Read Japanese Classics] (20 volumes in total) is currently being published by Shōgakukan. The digest version of the original text of *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki jō* [Nihon Shoki vol. 1] and *Nihon shoki ge fudoki* [Nihon Shoki vol. 2 and *Fudoki*] were published one after an-

other. Also Shin-Jinbutsuōraisha is publishing the modern translation of Nobunaga's history, *Nobunaga kōki* [The History of Nobunaga]. This is another example of the gradual popularization of the original text of the history books that have been difficult to understand.

### Overview of Japanese classics

*Nippon koten geinōshi* [The History of Classic Japanese Performing Art] by Imaoka Kentarō, an overview from ancient times to the Edo period (1603–1867), was published in April by the Musashino Art University Press.

The book spans ancient *Gigaku* as a national ceremony, comical *Sarugaku*, the mysterious beauty of Bunraku, Rakugo's stylishness, Kabuki's wildness and Kawatake Mokuami, who gave birth to the method to create dramas from the late Edo era to modern times. The book briefly includes each classic artwork's origin, development and characteristics, valuable for those who want to grasp the entire picture of Japan's classic arts.



*Nihon koten geinōshi* [The History of Classic Japanese Performing Art] by Imaoka Kentarō, Musashino Art University Press.

### Children's literature writer, Ishii Momoko, passes away

A writer of children's books, Ishii Momoko, known for creating *Non-chan kumo ni noru* [Non-chan Rides a Cloud], and translating numerous English/American children's books, including *Winnie the Pooh*, died of old age at 101 on April 2.

After graduating from the Department of English at Japan Women's University, she found the original version of Alan Alexander Milne's

*Winnie the Pooh* (translation published in 1940) while working as an editor in a publishing company. The encounter started her children's literature career. Her first creation, *Non-chan kumo ni noru*, released in 1947, became a best seller. She worked as an editor on the “Iwanami shōnen bunko” and “Iwanami kodomo no hon” series from their first issues at Iwanami Shoten. The long-selling books are still read today. Her great contribution to the expansion of children's literature in Japan includes the opening of the library, Katsura Bunko, at her home, which had a great impact on children's libraries, including the Tokyo Children's Library.

Her amassed around 200 written and translated works including *San-gatsu hina no tsuki* [trans. *The Doll's Day for Yoshiko*] and *Osana monogatari* [The Stories of Childhood]. *Maboroshi no akai mi*, [The Illusory Red Berry], her autobiographic long story finished at the age of 87, won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 1995. The seven-volume *Ishii Momoko shū* [The Ishii Momoko Collected Works] published by Iwanami Shoten, was completed in 1999. The collection introduces the history of Ishii Momoko.

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## A taboo world close-up, Kazuki-style

*Watashi no otoko* [My Man], the Naoki Prize-winning novel of 2008, is creating much sensation in Japan today. Jungo is Hana's man, her lover and father. The start of the story already smells of decadence and trouble. As the chapters go on, time winds back, revealing other serious crimes Hana and Jungo had committed in their 15 years of living together.

"A publisher asked me to write about a mother and daughter's relationship. But that was when there already was a definite plan to write *Akakuchiba-ke no densetsu* [The Legend of the Akakuchiba Family], a story on three generations of women with a grandmother, mother and daughter. I wanted to try something different. That is why I turned to highlighting the relationship of a father and daughter," explains Sakuraba Kazuki on the plot of the tale.

In our life, a family, especially a parent-child relationship, tends to be portrayed as something beautiful and fundamental. "People say that it is the basis that all human beings return to when something happens. But because of the same blood running in the family, I thought the relationship could also become very grotesque and gruesome. I wanted to write about that dark side, exceeding the general understanding of good or bad, or the teaching of Confucianism on the ideal image of a family," she explains.

The sea of Monbetsu in Hokkaido plays a vital role in the tale. "It is a dark, gray sea, but with a subtle lightness of the Pacific Ocean. It is very different from the darkness of the sea of Tottori on the Japan Sea side I used to see while growing up. The Japan Sea is generally associated with a very dark image. What's more, unlike the Japan Sea side on the west where the sun sets, Monbetsu is on the Pacific Sea side on the east where the sun rises."

That geographical fact underpins the story, suggesting the never-ending suffering of Hana and Jungo. Eventually fleeing to Tokyo, the days of these fugitives remain tainted, even when sinking into anonymity on a little corner of a huge metropolis. "There really is no place for Jungo and Hana to go and settle down. They are like cut flowers without any roots. They eventually rot and wither without bearing any fruit," says the author.

The names given to the leading characters also suggest the dark destiny of the father and daughter. "I especially wanted the name of the heroine Kusarino Hana (literally meaning a rotten field's flower) to convey the smell of what kind of a person she is. The use of kanji is a smart way of doing that."

Actually, Sakuraba's stance of paying special attention to name selection started long ago when she first chose the name, Kazuki, for herself as a writer. "Some people are prejudiced and set up barriers and taboos against female writers. They create a certain mindset of what a woman can or cannot write about. I wanted to break through this situation by giving myself a man's name." Many readers, critics and publishers have thus been taken aback to learn that the novelist is a woman.

It took quite some time until Sakuraba's books started

selling, however. "I had been a keen reader since childhood. I kept reading a book a day regardless of the genre. So it was a natural thing for me to start writing my own tales. But I wrote in the beginning for myself. I was unaware of the readers. That is why my very first novels went nowhere," she recalls. "But one day, an editor gave me some very practical advice. He said that an unusual story should generate 70 percent sympathy among the readers, 20 percent of something understandable but slightly unique, and 10 percent of something that is completely incomprehensible." Sakuraba found the suggestion so meaningful that she pasted it to the wall in front of her writing desk to look up to and remind herself whenever she takes up her pen.

Eventually, she came to write stories for junior high to high school age boys and girls. She then proceeded to write novels in various genres. Over time, her writing won her various awards, earning her fame and fans of all ages.

Sakuraba's books have also attracted the attention of publishers overseas, who have translated her work into Chinese, Korean, German and so on. "I have seen the Korean translation of *Akakuchiba-ke no densetsu*. Though I don't understand the language, I find it a good idea to leave the original phrases in the English alphabet that wouldn't translate well into Korean, and add a footnote explaining the meaning," she notes. *Goshikku* [trans. GOSICK], a mystery horror tale of a girl who could restructure chaos, is also selling well in Germany.

"Regardless of nationality, I think core human issues are universal. It therefore is quite natural that things appealing to Japanese readers would attract foreign readers," she says. Currently, she operates her own website in Japan, seeking feedback from readers. "Though my site is all in Japanese, I'd love to receive comments from overseas readers, too," she added.

Today, Sakuraba has ideas of writing a fine, long novel. As a warm-up, she plans to produce various short stories. "Asada Jirō, a famous novelist of historic tales and essays, told me that long novels require a lot of physical strength to write, and that writing short novels builds your power you need for completing a good, lengthy tale."

In such way, the ambitious challenge of the high-flying writer, Sakuraba Kazuki, continues.

(Michiru Yoshino, The Japan Times writer)



### Sakuraba Kazuki

Born in 1971. The 138th Naoki Prize-winning writer in 2008 with *Watashi no otoko*. Debuting in 1999, she eventually broadened her work scope, which in turn has earned her a wide and varied group of fans. She won the 60th Mystery Writers of Japan Award with the *Akakuchiba-ke no densetsu*. Her most recent novel includes *Shōjo Nanakamado to shichinin no kawaisōna otōna* [Young Girl Nanakamado and the Poor Seven Adults]. Her official website is < <http://sakuraba.if.tv/> >.