JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

59

SPRING 2009

Japanese Book News is published quarterly by the Japan Foundation mainly to provide publishers, editors, translators, scholars, and librarians with up-to-date information about publishing trends in Japan and brief descriptions of the content of selected new books. The opinions and views expressed in the essays and new title summaries are not necessarily those of the Japan Foundation or the advisory board.

http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/publish/jbn/index.html

JAPANFOUNDATION 国際交流基金

Science Writing for Everyone

Watanabe Masataka

Every three years since 2000, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has carried out a survey known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The purpose of this international undertaking is to administer standardized tests to assess and compare the academic proficiency of 15-year-olds in countries and regions around the world in reading, scientific literacy, and mathematical literacy, as an aid to educational policymaking.

Japanese students have done quite well in each of the tested areas. At the same time, they score considerably lower on questions designed to assess students' reading comprehension than on those designed to assess their knowledge—something critics are quick to point out each time the latest results are published.

Looking at those figures alone, people might be tempted to conclude that Japanese students spend too much time on test preparation and too little time reading. But other, more surprising PISA outcomes point in a different direction. The average science scores of Japanese students are relatively high even on problems dealing with content not covered in Japanese schools' science curriculum. Science education experts believe that the explanation for this seeming paradox lies in the way reading and language arts are taught in Japan.

The reading and language arts textbooks used in Japanese schools offer exemplary writings from a variety of genres, including fiction, poetry, essays, travel writing, and—notably—science writing. Japanese science textbooks contain no content beyond that prescribed in the curriculum, but reading and language arts textbooks fall outside the purview of the science curriculum. By studying the science writings in their reading and language arts textbooks, Japanese students gain content knowledge beyond that taught in their science classes.

Watanabe's latest book, Hitotsubu no kaki no tane: Saiensu komyunikēshon no hirogari *[A Persimmon Seed: A Propagation of Science Communication], explores how best to communicate the joy and wonder of scientific learning.*

Japanese educators and others have been complaining for years that young people are turning away from science, but the results of opinion surveys suggest that the problem is not a fundamental dislike of science per se. Science is rooted in human beings' fundamental curiosity about natural phenomena, and Japanese students still respond to such phenomena with a sense of wonder. Yet the percentage of students who say that they dislike science as a subject, or are bad at it, increases steadily as they advance through middle school and high school. The problem, it would seem, lies in the way science is taught at these levels.

What is the current state of science writing in Japan? The English physicist and writer C. P. Snow (1905–80) lamented that the sciences and the humanities are "two cultures" separated by a deep rift. In Japan a similar dichotomy exists between these academic realms. Students who do poorly in math and physics in school tend to veer toward the humanities when they enter college. About 50% of Japanese high school students go on to college, and of these, 60%–70% major in subjects that are grouped under the heading of the humanities. Contrary to the prevailing image of Japan as a sci-tech nation, "humanities people" occupy a solid majority.

Many adults who majored in the humanities in college have a bit of a complex when it comes to math and science, as well as a certain prejudice toward mathematicians and scientists. The nature of this prejudice is illustrated in Ogawa Yōko's bestselling novel *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* [trans. *The Gift of Numbers*], which sold over a million copies and was made into a movie. The novel, featuring a mathematician suffering from memory loss, embraces the rather stereotyped image of the mathematical genius as an eccentric innocent—an image that seems to have struck a chord with readers. Another example is found in the books in the "Detective Galileo" mystery series by Higashino Keigo, which appear regularly on best-seller lists and are often made into televised dramas and movies. The hero of this series is a brilliant physicist nicknamed Galileo, who solves cases by discovering the logical, scientific explanations for seemingly supernatural phenomena. The salient trait of this character, too, is his stubborn, opinionated eccentricity. The quirky but lovable scientist has become something of a stock character in Japanese fiction and drama.

There is something paradoxical about this as well. As already noted, every Japanese schoolchild learns reading and language arts from textbooks featuring a large number of writings by scientists or writers with a science background. This is largely because such pieces tend to be written logically and clearly and present material that can pique the reader's curiosity. It seems unlikely that the stu-

dents believe the science pieces they study in school were written by eccentrics. One need hardly point out that the vast majority of scientists and mathematicians are perfectly ordinary people.

The physicist and essayist Terada Torahiko pioneered the modern Japanese science essay. (Courtesy: Kōchi Literary Museum)

Japan has a long tradition of essay writing, and the traditional Japanese essay, or *zuihitsu,* has much in common with haiku. Namely, it stresses the writer's appreciation of nature through the description of things and phenomena in the immediate environment and the writer's subtle emotional response to them. The physicist Terada Torahiko (1878–1935) built on this tradition to develop a genre of science essay that incorporates these same literary qualities while focusing on the scientific analysis of natural phenomena. Terada was a student of the great novelist Natsume Sōseki when Sōseki was still teaching English, and he subsequently studied literature and the art of haiku under Sōseki's tutelage. He even made a contribution to Sōseki's novels, not only by suggesting episodes relating to scientific research that the latter could use in his stories but also by providing the model for some of Sōseki's major characters—Mizushima Kangetsu (Avalon Coldmoon) in *Wagahai wa neko de aru* [trans. *I Am a Cat*] and Nonomiya Sōhachi in *Sanshirō* [trans. *Sanshiro*].

Terada established a genre of Japanese-style science essay that has persisted to the present day. At the risk of oversimplifying, these are very short pieces that pair the description and analysis of some specific, easily overlooked phenomenon in the natural world with general scientific observations based on a deep and extensive knowledge of the subject. Essays of this sort are frequently reproduced in school textbooks and used as the basis for test questions.

Yet the manner in which Japanese publishers treat such writings underlines the dominance of the humanities in Japanese society. Even people with a science background who write on science-related topics prefer to be referred to simply as essayists, or *zuihitsuka,* not science essayists. Accordingly, the science writings used for Japanese reading textbooks are classified as literary essays, not science essays. The assumption is that no one will recognize the literary merit of an essay written by a scientist unless it is placed in the Japanese literary category of *zuihitsu*. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this mindset is the frequency with which one hears the backhanded compliment "very readable for something written by a scientist." Given the large number of science writings featured in Japan's reading textbooks, one would think scientists would have a reputation for lucid, accessible writing by now.

This prejudice may be rooted in part in the translations of a slightly earlier era. A large number of popular science books and articles have been translated from English into Japanese over the years, and until a few decades ago, the translations were generally of poor quality. Often the work of scientists who were just dabbling in translation, they were full of mistranslations and awkward wording. These days professional translators are generally tapped for such work, and the quality of science translation is now very high overall.

Recent years have seen the rise of a number of bestselling writers in the field of popular science—Yōrō Takeshi, Mogi Ken'ichirō, and Fukuoka Shin'ichi, for example. Yet they refuse to call themselves "science writers," each insisting that he is a neuroscientist, or molecular biologist, or whatever. Even professional writers who specialize in books and articles about science and technology avoid the term "science writer," preferring the label "nonfiction writer." My own belief is that people who write about science for general consumption should be called science writers, and for the past six or seven years I have consciously embraced that label.

Science is a kind of culture—one of the bodies of knowledge and know-how that the human race has accumulated over centuries—and an understanding of science can be a great help to people in their lives. To spread an awareness of this throughout society, we need to encourage a style of science communication that breaks through the walls between disciplines, as well as those between experts and laypeople. The first step toward this goal is to rid society of its prejudices against science—particularly the misconceptions that scientists are eccentric characters and that science is especially difficult or inaccessible. We also need to increase the number of scientists who are able to explain scientific ideas clearly, without recourse to specialized terminology.

As I see it, what is really required is for my own books to become runaway bestsellers. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem likely to happen any time soon.

Watanabe Masataka

Born in 1955. Visiting professor at Wakayama University, Nihon University, and Nara Institute of Science and Technology. A freelance science writer and researcher of science history and evolutionary biology for over 25 years. Author and coauthor of eight books on science communication, history of science, and evolutionary biology, the latest of which is Hitotsubu no kaki no tane: Saiensu komyunikēshon no hirogari *[A Persimmon Seed: A Propagation of Science Communication]. Has translated over 50 English popular science books into Japanese, including almost all of Stephen Jay Gould's works. In April 2008, joined the Japan Science and Technology Agency, where he is organizing Science Agora, Japan's biggest science-communication conference.*

FICTION

Yamamoto Fumio

Born in 1962. After working as an office clerk at a company, won the Cobalt Novel Prize for Puremiamu pūru no hibi *[Premium Pool Days], which marked the start of her career as a writer of novels for young women. Began to write for general audiences after publishing* Painappuru no kanata *[Beyond the Pineapple]. In 1999* Ren'ai chūdoku *[Lovaholic] was awarded the twentieth Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for New Writers, and in 2001* Puranaria *[Planarian] won the Naoki Prize.*

Akapera
[A Capella]
By Yamamoto Fumio

Shinchōsha, 2008. 197 x 137 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-10-308011-4.

Yamamoto Fumio was regarded as a writer of promise for her vivid portrayals of the inner workings of the human psyche in *Ren'ai chūdoku* [Lovaholic] and other works. She won the Naoki Prize for *Puranaria* [Planarian] and built a reputation as a master storyteller. Just when she seemed to have everything, including an apartment in the heart of Tokyo and a happy second marriage, she fell into a state of severe depression. Contrary to what she expected, married life proved too demanding physically and emotionally, and her days were spent in an abyss—unable to connect to the world of family, friends, and work. Yamamoto ultimately recovered and made a new life for herself. This collection of short stories is her first work to appear in six years.

"Nerori" [Neroli] is about the hardships that befall a woman in her fifties and her jobless and frail younger brother, who lives with her. "Sorichūdo" [Solitude] is the tale of a "loser" who returns to his home in the countryside after a 20-year absence and the fate that awaits him. And the collection's title story depicts a resolute junior high school student who lives with her 72-year-old grandfather.

Yamamoto's short stories are heartwarming and arouse deep compassion with their depiction of the quiet lives of people who neither hope for great glamour in their lives nor expect too much from the future. Since her bout of depression, her works have delved still deeper into the people she portrays. The characters can be quirky and their relations with others somewhat odd, but it is this very quality that makes them vessels for irrevocable love. *(MT)*

Bokkusu!
[Box!]
By Hyakuta Naoki

Ōta Shuppan, 2008. 183 x 130 mm. 589 pp. ¥1,780. ISBN 978-4-7783-1134-6.

Hyakuta Naoki

Born in 1956. Was active in the creation of many television programs as a broadcast writer. Made his debut as a novelist in 2006 with Eien no 0 *[0 of Eternity]. Other works include a collection of short stories published in 2007 titled* Seiya no okurimono *[Gift of the Holy Night].*

Set in a high school boxing club, the novel revolves around two boys—Kaburaya, a gifted boxer, and Kitaru, a brilliant student preparing to advance to university—and the friendships, struggles, setbacks, and successes in their lives. The two boys are watched over by Yōko, an English teacher, while they encounter various people who seek to outshine them. The story describes their experiences and what they ultimately gain from them.

Though long, *Bokkusu!* contains nothing extraneous or pretentious, and readers find themselves drawn deeper and deeper into the tale. The novel is comparable to the body of a consummate athlete, lean and muscular. The two protagonists are cool young men, and the manager of the boxing team, teachers, and teammates are attractive characters in their own right. The ardent love and other powerful emotions of the characters in the story come to a head, and the suspense builds to a crescendo during a series of boxing matches toward the end of the novel. The work is a masterpiece of sports fiction for young adults that leaves readers feeling refreshed and deeply moved.

The author succeeds thoroughly in making amateur boxing rules and techniques fascinating and easy to understand. And in doing so, he is able to transport readers to the world of the practices and matches that he describes. *(MT)*

Inoue Areno

Born in 1961. Daughter of Inoue Mitsuharu, one of Japan's postwar literary giants. Received the Japanese Femina Prize in 1989 for her short story "Watashi no Nureefu" [My Nureyev] and began to devote herself to writing. Won the Shimase Romantic Literature Prize in 2004 for Jun'ichi *[Junichi]. Received the Naoki Prize in 2008 for* Kiriha e *(covered in* Japanese Book News *No. 57, p. 14). Other works include* Mō kiru wa *[I'm Going to Hang Up],* Bēkon *[Bacon], and* Yoru o kiru *[Wearing Night].*

Kiriha e
[To the Mine Face]

By Inoue Areno

Shinchōsha, 2008. 196 x 135 mm. 208 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-473102-2.

A "mine face" is the place at the end of a tunnel in a mine where coal is extracted. This novel is set on an island in Kyushu where coal mining once flourished. Here a 31-year-old elementary school teacher named Sei, who is in charge of a special-education class, lives peacefully and happily with her husband, an artist. One day, an enigmatic young man arrives from the mainland to teach at the school. Though Sei loves her husband, she finds herself drawn to the newcomer.

At the same time, another teacher at the school starts seeing the new teacher, even though she is already involved with a married, middle-aged man. Sei knows this, but still cannot stop thinking about the young teacher. She is paralyzed by her feelings, as though she is confronted by a mine face and unable to move forward.

Sei's love leads nowhere. The very point of this novel is its depiction of passion that remains inert. Like the passage of the seasons, love comes and goes once again. The young man disappears, although nobody can say when, leaving the sense that his very existence was illusory.

The only character who comes across as real is Shizuka, an old woman like the island itself. Shizuka lives alone, falls ill, and dies in the hospital. Sei ends up serving as the chief mourner at Shizuka's funeral. Despite his promise to be there, the young man does not show up. Shizuka represents the island, and the young man an illusion that calls upon it. *(MK)*

Nishiki
[Brocade]

By Miyao Tomiko

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2008. 198 x 138 mm. 439 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-12-003935-5.

Miyao Tomiko is known for her historical fiction featuring women protagonists. In 2008, her novel *Tenshōin Atsuhime* was made into a yearlong NHK TV series that enjoyed high ratings in Japan. The subtitled version, titled *Atsuhime,* was well-received in the United States. The story follows the life of Atsuhime (Princess Atsu), who married the shogun Tokugawa Iesada during the shogunate's final days.

Miyao's latest novel portrays a male protagonist over the course of his 87 years from the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the Showa era (1926–89). Hishimura Kichizō is modeled after Tatsumura Heizō, the real-life founder of the Tatsumura Textile Co., Ltd., still located in Kyoto. Based on true events, the novel documents Kichizō's life, beginning with his upbringing as the son of an Osaka merchant. He sets up a mill in the Nishijin district of Kyoto, an area known as the home of textiles. Kichizō then goes on to develop a series of innovative textiles and finally achieves fame. He also restores the temple Hōryūji's brocaded fabric, a national treasure of Japan. The most remarkable aspect of the novel lies in the vivid depictions of three strong-willed women who, modest but strong to the core, supported the real-life Heizō, who exhibited eccentric behavior at times in his excessive pursuit of ideals. The story, with its many accurate details related to textiles throughout, leaves the reader with the impression that Miyao's novel itself has been woven together from colorful brocade. *(NM)*

Miyao Tomiko

Born in 1926. Awarded the Fujin Kōron Prize for new women writers in 1962 for Ren *[Stringing Pearls], the Dazai Osamu Prize for* Kai *[Oar] in 1973, the Women's Literature Prize for* Kantsubaki *[Winter Camellias] in 1977, and the Naoki Prize in 1978 for* Ichigen no koto *[One-Stringed Japanese Harp]. Received the Kikuchi Kan Prize in 2008 for her successful writing career, during which she has authored many famous works on the theme of traditional Japanese culture and women's lives throughout history.*

Yang Yi

Born in 1964 in Harbin, China. Debuted as a novelist with the 2007 Wan-chan *[Wang-chan], which won the Bungakukai Prize for new writers. Her 2008* Toki ga nijimu asa *[A Morning When Time Blurs] won the Akutagawa Prize, making her the first Chinese and the first non-native speaker of Japanese to win the prestigious award. (See* JBN *No. 57 for information on* Wan-chan.*)*

Toki ga nijimu asa [A Morning When Time Blurs]

By Yang Yi

Bungei Shunjū, 2008. 193 x 137 mm. 152 pp. ¥1,238. ISBN 978-4-16-327360-0.

Among novelists who have made their debuts recently, Yang Yi stands out for attracting the most attention of them all. One reason the works of this Chinese writer are now in the spotlight is that she writes them in Japanese, an acquired language for her. As Japan has become increasingly internationalized in recent years, it has seen the emergence of a number of writers who are not native Japanese speakers but produce their works in the language. Few of them, however, have garnered the critical literary praise that Yang has. In July 2008, this novel won the Akutagawa Prize, one of Japan's most celebrated literary awards, making her the first Chinese writer and the first non-native Japanese speaker to win the prize in all of its long history. It goes without saying that this novel earned the lofty award with a combination of its considerable literary merit and its ability to fascinate readers who pick it up.

Toki ga nijimu asa takes both China and Japan as settings for the lively presentation of the dramatic, vivid existence of a Chinese university student who has lived through the tumult of his nation's modern history. Through her exploration of the protagonist's history—his admission to a provincial Chinese university, his participation in the Tiananmen protests and the democracy movement in China, his arrest and expulsion from school, and his emigration to Japan—Yang weaves a tale of the idealism and setbacks of his youth, creating a powerful narrative with an allure that has been lacking in much of the output of contemporary Japanese literature. *(NM)*

Yadoya meguri [Inn Visits]

By Machida Kō

Kōdansha, 2008. 195 x 145 mm. 607 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-06-214861-0.

Seven years in the making and spanning more than 600 pages, Machida Kō's latest novel is a masterpiece. The fast-paced story spurs the reader forward with both the narrative's loquacious first-person colloquial style, which underpins the author's distinct rhythm, and the adept incorporation of everything from quibbling and nonsense to very subtle psychological analysis. Although the style of the novel can initially make it seem like a deceptively easy read, the chaotic plot yields a sense of the escalating and recurring nature of nightmares, and attempts to decipher what is real in the story and what is not as it seems gradually sweep the reader into a state of bewilderment. The basic story involves the protagonist, Sukina Hikona, who, at the behest of the "master," sets off on a quest to offer a sword to the Great Avatar. However, the protagonist's quest is interrupted when he jumps into the skin of a "white *kunyu-kunyu* [slimy] substance" that emerges from within a lake. Although Machida exhibits a striking ability to use difficult-to-translate mimetic terms like *kunyu-kunyu,* he leaves the reader with a sense of wonder, never revealing what exactly this mysterious substance might be. After the incident at the lake, Sukina finds himself in a different world, where he is destined to wander about from one inn to another. Throughout the story, Machida takes the reader on a journey from Japanese mythology and *rōkyoku* narrative ballads to modern culture and customs, infusing his work with aspects that reach beyond time and place in his pursuit of the irrationality inherent in human existence. *(NM)*

Machida Kō

Born in 1962. Active as a rock vocalist before debuting as a novelist in 1996 with Kussun Daikoku. *His 2000 novel* Kiregire *[In Shreds] received the Akutagawa Prize. Other works include the novella* Gongen no odoriko *[The Avatar Dancer], winner of the 2002 Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Literature, and* Kokuhaku *[Confession], a major work based on the well-known Japanese folk song "Kawachi jūningiri" (Ten Kawachi Murders), which won the 2005 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize (see* JBN *No. 45).* Yadoya meguri *[Inn Visits] won the 2008 Noma Prize for Literature.*

Hashimoto Osamu

Among his works are Binan e no ressun *[Lessons in Male Beauty],* Ayashi no sekai *[World of the Mysterious; coauthor], and* "Mishima Yukio" to wa nanimono datta no ka *[Who Exactly Was Mishima Yukio?], covered in* JBN *11, 35, and 39, respectively. For his complete history, please refer to his interview in "In Their Own Words" on page 16.*

Yoru
[Night]

By Hashimoto Osamu

Shūeisha, 2008. 195 x 137 mm. 304 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-08-771244-5.

A man leaves home. One senses the involvement of another woman, but she is not clearly a reason for his action. The man himself is emotionally confused, and because of this, he leaves his heart uninvestigated. This is the "night" of his life. The woman left at home is not so much waiting for him as living with his absence.

This book is a collection of five short stories describing this man's absence from different viewpoints: that of his daughter, his wife, his lover. In "Boshoku" [Evening Twilight], the daughter is frustrated with her mother, who refuses to divorce, silently bearing the situation. When her father finally returns home in the form of his cremated remains, her mother becomes a wife once again, and the daughter feels that a great weight has at last been lifted from her.

In "Rōsoku" [Candle], we are with the woman who has stolen the man away. When she says she wants to build a home for the two of them, he tells her to do as she pleases and leave him out of it. Soon afterward he leaves her, returning to "the place he belongs." The woman realizes that her sensation of living had depended upon someone other than herself, and the sadness she feels at its loss frustrates her.

In "Gyōan" [Predawn Darkness], we experience the complex relationship between two men, one of whom is gay. "Each of them" writes Hashimoto, "heeded only the content of his own heart." Inexpressible emotion seeps into the heart of the reader, becoming a "night" for the person who takes in this work. *(SH)*

BIOGRAPHY

Tezuka Osamu āchisuto ni naru na
[Tezuka Osamu, Don't Be an Artist]

By Takeuchi Osamu

Minerva Shobō, 2008. 195 x 135 mm. 330 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-623-05251-6.

Tezuka Osamu is a manga artist beloved in Japan, best known for such works as *Tetsuwan Atomu* [trans. *Astro Boy*] and *Janguru taitei* [trans. *Kimba the White Lion*]. The influence he has had in Japan cannot be overestimated. His character Astro Boy, a robot with human emotions that runs on atomic power, is still popular today and has become a symbol of the nation's prayers for peace. This critical biography focuses principally on the first half of Tezuka's life. It follows the process through which Tezuka, who had great artistic aspirations, pioneered the field of story manga after being influenced by Disney films. As his work appeared in manga magazines, he came to compromise his art with forms of expression aimed at a mass audience.

Takeuchi is meticulous in his bibliographic verification throughout this book. He clearly sees where the evidence deliberately presents Tezuka in a favorable light, and he compares the similarities in *Tetsuwan Atomu* and works by other artists that preceded it. Tezuka always struggled to stay at the forefront of media attention, and it is somehow awful to see the trail of his trial and error in doing so brought into agonizingly sharp relief.

During his final years, Tezuka would often say to his assistants, "Don't be an artist. Be an artisan." Torn between artistry and popular appeal, Tezuka himself must have tasted great bitterness in his own struggle. One comes to realize just how profoundly isolated was this genius who led the whole manga world of postwar Japan. *(SH)*

Takeuchi Osamu

Born in 1951. Manga researcher and professor at the Department of Media, Journalism, and Communications in the Doshisha University Faculty of Social Studies. Specializes in manga history and children's culture. Works include Tezuka Osamu ron *[On Tezuka Osamu],* Sengo manga gojū-nen-shi *[Fifty Years of Postwar Manga],* Manga hihyō taikei *[A Compendium of Manga Reviews].*

CULTURE

Suzuki Toshio

Born in 1948. Producer and chairman of Studio Ghibli, Inc. Has produced such hit movies as Mononoke hime *[trans.* Princess Mononoke*],* Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi *[trans.* Spirited Away*], and* Gake no ue no Ponyo *[trans.* Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*]. Author of* Eiga dōraku *[The Pleasure of Films].*

Shigoto dōraku: Sutajio Jiburi no genba [Work for the Fun of It: Inside Studio Ghibli]

By Suzuki Toshio

Iwanami Shoten, 2008. 173 x 105 mm. 224 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-00-431143-0.

Studio Ghibli is a movie design and production company. It is home to animator Miyazaki Hayao, best known for the Academy Award–winning animated movie *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* [trans. *Spirited Away*], and director and producer Takahata Isao. In this nonfiction work Suzuki, a Studio Ghibli producer, reveals his first meetings with these men of peculiar ability, conflicts and reconciliation, and the establishment of the company. He also presents behind-the-scenes views of Studio Ghibli films.

When Suzuki first met them, he found Takahata to be belligerent and Miyazaki provocative. Although he had no real reason other than interest in these characters, Suzuki dropped in on them every day, building rapport with them. He memorized everything from the scripts to the storyboard frames of the creations they were working on and recorded their utterances in a notebook. Having become interested in Miyazaki and Takahata, Suzuki stuck with them, finally earning their trust and launching the Ghibli works onto the world stage.

It is particularly interesting to learn how Ghibli differs from Disney, a vast factory with a staff of over 1,000. Ghibli's approach is like that of a small workshop, assembling 70 people or so for each work and disbanding them when the work is complete. Suzuki says, "If we can make films that we like, manage to get a trickle of income, and keep at it for a long time, then we are happy." His relaxed style may be the key to maximizing the creative power and imagination of Miyazaki and Takahata. *(SH)*

"Shūdan shugi" to iu sakkaku [The Illusion of "Groupism"]

By Takano Yohtaro

Shin'yōsha, 2008. 187 x 128 mm. 374 pp. ¥2,700. ISBN 978-4-7885-1115-6.

There is a general trend to view the Japanese as being group-oriented, while Americans are seen as individualistic. Ever since the cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict published *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* in 1946, this view of the Japanese has been reinforced multiple times by various theories on the people. Today, it is a deeply rooted stereotype of the fundamental Japanese nature. Takano builds on the field of psychology to investigate the truth of this view. He carried out an exhaustive survey of psychological research directly comparing Japanese and Americans to reach a surprising conclusion: the commonly accepted theory of group-oriented Japanese and individualistic Americans is illusory, with no realistic evidence to back it up, and has never been proven scientifically.

Takano argues that it is far from rare to find cases of Japanese people acting more individualistically than Americans, or Americans more collectively than Japanese. His finding sheds light on the various biases at play in human thought giving rise to inaccurate stereotypes, as well as on the fact that the view of Japanese as collectivist is actually a form of orientalism. The conclusions reached by this book—that human beings everywhere resemble each other very closely, that their behavior is decided by circumstances, not culture, and that cultural differences are not decisive factors in human affairs—go beyond the specialized discipline of psychology. They contain significance for a range of fields, from comparative cultural studies to international relations. *(NM)*

Takano Yohtaro

Professor at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology/Faculty of Letters. Specializes in cognitive psychology and social psychology. He is the author of works including Katamuita zukei no nazo *[The Mysteries of Tilted Diagrams] and* Kagami no naka no misuterī *[Mysteries in the Mirror] and editor of such works as* Ninchi shinrigaku 2: Kioku *[Cognitive Psychology, vol. 2, Memory].*

Kosaka Kunitsugu

Born in 1943. Professor in the College of Economics and the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Studies at Nihon University. His main areas of research are religion and philosophy, comparative thought, and environmental ethics. His extensive works include Nishida Kitarō no shisō *[Nishida Kitarō's Thought],* Kankyō rinrigaku nōto *[An Environmental Ethics Notebook], and a fully annotated edition of Nishida's* Zen no kenkyū *[An Inquiry into the Good].*

Tōyōteki na ikikata [The Eastern Way of Life]

By Kosaka Kunitsugu

Minerva Shobō, 2008. 195 x 133 mm. 276 pp. ¥3,500. ISBN 978-4-623-05139-7.

The notion that nature is sacred is universally accepted in the East. The author of this volume seeks to define a way of life built on this view of nature by looking at the teachings of the Chinese Daoist philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi, as well as those of the Japanese Buddhist priests Shinran and Dōgen (founders of Jōdo Shinshū and Sōtō Zen Buddhism, respectively, in the thirteenth century) and the Sōtō Zen monk and poet Ryōkan (1758–1831).

The idea that nature is sacred engenders a belief that artifice and discretion must be denied, nature worshipped, and life lived in accordance with nature. A classic example of this is Laozi's concept of "human nature devoid of artifice." Laozi held up as an ideal a state untouched by people, or nature in its pure form. In contrast to Kong Fuzi (Confucius), who viewed benevolence as the supreme virtue, he preached the value of submissiveness, noting water as the epitome of this quality: "There is nothing in the world so soft and weak as water." For this reason, water in its natural state is a symbol of submission.

The Daoist view of nature dominated Buddhist thought in Japan. Shinran's idea of "nature as uncontrived" is a good example. Shinran explained that Amida Buddha referred to the inevitability of uncontrived nature in his original vows. Nature, as such, is the antithesis of artificial and the will of Buddha. *(MK)*

SOCIETY

Jiheishō no kodomotachi to kangaete kita koto [Things I Have Thought with Autistic Children]

By Satō Mikio

Yōsensha, 2008. 194 x 137 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-86248-285-3.

Satō Mikio taught for 21 years at a school for the disabled and is now a journalist who writes about disability. In this book, he looks sensitively at how to interact with autistic children and understand their conduct and speech. He intersperses the text with anecdotes about autistic children.

Autism in medical terms is a functional disorder of the brain. This fails to explain the wide variety of ways in which autistic children develop, however, and it does not exempt society from the responsibility of educating them. With this belief, Satō examines how to relate to autistic people and how to understand their behavior.

According to Satō, the biggest difficulty for autistic people is that they lose the chance to develop a sense of self. Because they are not good at dealing with other people, their sense of self does not develop properly and they cannot build interpersonal relations. This is why they tend to take things literally, or parrot back things that are said to them. When asked "How are you?" instead of a comment on their present state, they may respond with "How are you?" Through his approach of closeness with autistic people, Satō offers up a profound discussion of the topic.

A thorough understanding of autism on the part of the people who give them support will help melt away the barriers that isolate autistics from the non-disabled. This book will encourage the reader who has so far been unable to take the first step down this path. *(SH)*

Satō Mikio

Born in 1953. Became a freelance journalist after working for over 20 years at a school for the disabled. Critiques areas including thought, literature, and psychology as editor-in-chief of a critical magazine. Works include Seishinka-i o seishin bunseki suru *[Psychoanalyzing Psychiatrists],* Handikyappu-ron *[On Handicaps], and* Jiheishō saiban—ressā panda bō otoko no tsumi to batsu *[Autism Court: The Crime and Punishment of the Man in the Lesser Panda Hat].*

Tachibanaki Toshiaki

Born in 1943. Professor in the Faculty of Economics at Doshisha University specializing in labor economics and a member of the Cabinet Office's Council for Gender Equality. His works include Kakusa shakai *[Society of Disparities] and* Amerika-gata fuan shakai de ii no ka *[Do We Really Want an American-style Society of Instability?]. Has edited such volumes as* Gendai josei no rōdō, kekkon, kosodate *[Work, Marriage, and Childrearing of Contemporary Women].*

Jojo kakusa
[Disparities Among Women]

By Tachibanaki Toshiaki

Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 2008. 195 x 137 mm. 356 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-492-22283-6.

Disparities among women are growing. The root of the problem, as is explained in this volume, is the gender gap. In recent years, a new mindset has taken hold. Women with high social status and income have begun calling themselves "losers," while a growing number of full-time homemakers who have all the trappings of material well-being are feeling mounting discontent. What accounts for this?

Generally speaking, Japanese women are divided into three groups. The first is graduates from an elite university who get a job on the managerial track or as a specialist at a large corporation. The second is ordinary college graduates who work in clerical jobs. The third group is high school or vocational school graduates who work in a factory or small shop. Marriage and children have a bearing on women's choices. Those in the second and third groups generally quit working when they get married or have a child. While women in the third group often start working again in their forties, when their children are older, those in the second group tend to remain full-time homemakers—the past definition of a "winner."

Women in the first group no longer quit working when they marry or have a child, and having a career is a condition today for being a "winner." Having a child is also considered a prerequisite for women's happiness, though, and no amount of status or income can make up for not having one. Childless women in the first group are not "winners"; in reality, few Japanese women are. In other words, it is all a matter of the gender gap. *(MK)*

Naze kimi wa zetsubō to tatakaeta no ka
[How Were You Able to Fight Despair?]

By Kadota Ryūshō

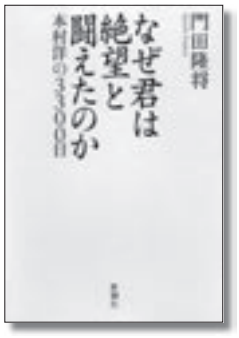
Shinchōsha, 2008. 197 x 139 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 978-4-10-460502-6.

Motomura Hiroshi, a steel company employee who lives in the city of Hikari, Yamaguchi Prefecture, is known for being at the forefront of the movement to retain capital punishment. How did he come to be seen this way? This is a nonfiction account of how Motomura, whose wife and child were killed by an 18-year-old, battled until the youth was given the death sentence in April 2008.

Motomura's wife was raped and strangled; his infant daughter was killed after being thrown to the floor. Under existing precedents, even a double murder does not merit the death sentence when committed by a minor. When Kadota met Motomura soon after the incident, the widower shook with rage, vowing that if the death sentence was not passed he would kill the youth himself. Kadota decided to accompany Motomura to the trial.

Motomura, who even contemplated suicide, received the support of a great many people. When he sought to resign from his company, his boss encouraged him by saying, "People who don't work or pay taxes can complain about society all they want, but they have no voice." Motomura's quest for vengeance against the violent youth changed to a battle against the Japanese justice system, which had abandoned the victims of crime.

When the youth received the death sentence, for the first time he faced up to his crime and spoke some words of atonement. What is capital punishment? This book confronts Japan, which has come to take capital punishment for granted, with this essential question. *(SH)*



Kadota Ryūshō

Born in 1958. Works as a journalist in wide range of fields including politics, economy, justice, crime, history, and sports, mainly for magazines. Author of Saibankan ga Nihon o horobosu *[Judges Are Destroying Japan] and* Kōshien e no yuigon *[A Last Testament to Kōshien].*

Tsujii Takashi

Born as Tsutsumi Seiji in 1927. Poet, writer, and head of the Saison group. His Chichi no shōzō *[Portrait of My Father] won the Noma Prize for Literature in 2004, and* Washi ga ite *[An Eagle Was There] won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 2007.*

Ueno Chizuko

Born in 1948. Professor at the University of Tokyo. In 1994 won the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities for Kindai kazoku no seiritsu to shūen *[Rise and Fall of the Modern Family]. (See* JBN *No. 57, pp. 2–3.)*

Posuto shōhi shakai no yukue [Whither Post-Consumer Society?]

By Tsujii Takashi and Ueno Chizuko

Bungei Shunjū, 2008. 173 x 108 mm. 328 pp. ¥900. ISBN 978-4-16-660633-7.

Tsutsumi Seiji not only heads the Saison group, a conglomerate built on the Seibu Department Stores chain, but is a poet and novelist writing under the pen name Tsujii Takashi. This volume is a transcript of conversations between Tsujii and University of Tokyo Professor Ueno Chizuko, a sociologist and skilled debater, on the theme of Seibu's successes and failures.

Ueno previously contributed to a six-volume set on the history of the Saison group, *Sezon no hassō* [The Ideas of Saison]. In this regard, she is well suited to the task of analyzing Seibu's successes and failures in her role as an outsider.

Tsutsumi started his career as a political secretary to his father, Tsutsumi Yasujirō, who served as speaker of the House of Representatives, and as an employee of Seibu Department Stores, which his father founded. He established a labor union, thereby introducing modern managerial principles into a private business. He also hit upon the idea of making consumer tastes a guiding force in department store management. In 1961 he organized an exhibit of the works of the Swiss artist Paul Klee on the eighth floor of Seibu's flagship department store, a space used for cultural events, seeking to lure more shoppers to the floor. The exhibit succeeded in boosting the company's image, but it did not square with the tastes of Seibu's customers and ultimately failed to tie in with higher sales. Later, during Japan's economic bubble years, Tsujii invested in real estate and suffered a string of failures. It was, one could say, the beginning of the end of Japan's consumer society. *(MK)*

MANGA

Moyashimon [Tales of Agriculture]

By Ishikawa Masayuki

Kōdansha, 2008. 182 x 128 mm. 224 pp. ¥533. ISBN 978-4-06-352106-1 (4-06-352106-0).

Moyashimon is an unconventional manga that won the grand prize in the twelfth Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prizes and the thirty-second Kōdansha Manga Awards' Best General Manga prize.

Since early childhood, Sawaki Sōemon Tadayasu has had an uncanny ability to sense the existence of bacteria, viruses, and other germs and to communicate with them. This manga series describes the strange disturbances involving the microorganisms that Sawaki and his unique classmates, older students, and an out-of-touch professor get mixed up in after he embarks on his studies at an agriculture university.

This manga falls within the genre of dramas set at a school, and students at the agricultural university play a main role in this story. The students are always on the go. They throw themselves into strange school events, try to solve the mystery of a peculiar sake shop, and even head off to Bourgogne, France, the classical home of French wine.

While reading the book, it becomes clear that the real heroes of the story are not the students but the bacteria, yeast, lactobacilli, viruses, and other germs. A variety of organisms make their appearance as adorable characters, and entertaining explanations are provided for the mechanisms of decomposition and fermentation. It also becomes apparent that our world is not driven by people, whose actions tend to be erratic, but is rather supported by the hard work of germs. The book is packed with profound knowledge about Japan's fermented foods and sake and can be enjoyed for this reason alone. *(MT)*

Ishikawa Masayuki

Born in 1974. Made his debut as a manga writer in 1997 with Nihon seifu chokkatsu kidō sentai kōmuin V *[The Japanese Governmental Riot Squad Kōmuin V]. Nominated for the Chiba Tetsuya Prize for* Kami no sumu yama *[The Mountains Where the Gods Dwell] in 1999. Has enjoyed widespread popularity for* Moyashimon *[Tales of Agriculture], which has been carried in the* Ibuningu *[Evening] comic magazine since 2004. In 2008 won the Manga Grand Prize in the twelfth Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prizes and the thirty-second Kōdansha Manga Award for Best General Manga.*

In this issue *Japanese Book News* begins a new series of articles in which leading Japanese researchers in the humanities and social sciences present exceptional books in their fields. By having learned people from the vanguard of various academic areas write these pieces, we hope to give readers a glimpse into the very latest trends in the knowledge of Japan.

No. 1: The Japanese and Religion

In this opening installment, Professor Shimazono Susumu of the University of Tokyo, a religious studies specialist, gives an overview of religion and the people of Japan. His lucid explanation sheds light on the history and current state of the religiosity of the Japanese, whose approach to religious matters is said to be difficult to discern. He also recommends four works that will hopefully one day be translated into foreign languages and shared with an international readership.

Religion in Japan: Hard to See, Deeply Rooted

The advance of globalization and the end of the Cold War have made it increasingly clear that the various powers constituting the modern world are deeply informed by the religion-based civilizational spheres to which they belong. The developed nations of the West, long held to be characterized mainly as liberal and secular, in fact remain home to deep traditions of Western Christian civilization. Recently people have come to see that it is in relation to those traditions that we can best understand the secularism of the modern age. Japan has to a certain extent equipped itself with the modern secularism of the West; at the same time, though, it has seen a resurgent recognition of its position within the East Asian civilizational sphere. The traditional view of Japan's modern religious history is one of a nation that has departed from its religiosity of the past, built on Shinto, Confucian, and Buddhist elements, and shifted toward modern secularism. Today, however, there are growing reasons to doubt this interpretation.

The Meiji-era (1868–1912) Japanese state created a national polity with State Shinto, a form of religious nationalism, at its core. Over time this form of Shinto seeped into the religious life of the Japanese people, eventually gaining such broad, popular force it could no longer be controlled by the bureaucracy intended to wield it. Reverence for the emperor, originally intended by Japan's administrators as little more than a useful fiction to achieve strong national integration and to facilitate the introduction of modern Western systems, was taken up by the populace; as it developed into a unified religious view among the people, it came to be a force affecting the political scene, and once Japan slipped into fascism, it was the main body of philosophical thought in the nation. Although State Shinto was dismantled following Japan's defeat in World War II, to this day a form of nationalism with reverence for the emperor at its core functions behind the scenes in the political arena. In the modern age, we have seen in East Asia a crumbling of rule by the Confucian bureaucrats and massive introduction of aspects of modern Western civilization, including nationalism. How, then, have nationalism and religion interplayed to integrate modern people's spirits of East Asia? In Japan in particular, what roles have been played by the religious rites of the imperial court and the education system?

Traditionally, in the fields of religious history and sociology of religion, there is a strong tendency to focus on religious organizations composed of individuals as the primary historical actors. In the case of Shinto, for instance, this would mean the unit of the shrine. In State Shinto, however, reverence for the emperor, who carried out religious rites, played a major role, as did the schools that instilled in their students the practice of worshipping the emperor as a presence connected directly to the gods. The history of religion, which has to date taken religious organizations as the central axis of its investigations, will need to be explored from a different angle from now on. In the field of modern historical studies, meanwhile, it has become evident that a new perspective on religious history is needed for a reexamination of the sweep of history as a whole. In the twenty-first century there has been increasing awareness among scholars leading them to take a fresh look at the connections between religious and modern history.

The civilizations of East Asia all accord particular significance to rites for the dead. The forms of those rites, however, differ among China, Korea, and Japan. Why have the Japanese come to carry out the particular rites that they do for their dead today? Why did Buddhism exert such a tremendous influence on Japanese funeral practices over the years? From the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, a great number of Buddhist temples went up all over Japan, forming the foundation for the system of temples and their designated patron families that spread widely during the Edo period (1603–1868). To some extent the Japanese boom in Buddhism was influenced by policies of the shogunate aimed at stamping out Christianity, but a full explanation will require a deeper reexamination of the history of the religion before those years.

Today what we need is the creation of a comparative religious and historical scheme that lets us investigate the changes that have led to the present religious situation—the interchange among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism throughout continental East Asia, and among Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism in Japan. Another area that will require the perspective of religious history to illuminate is the question of how people have sought to memorialize and console the spirits of those killed in wars in the modern era. It is historical examination along these lines that offers the possibility of untangling the discord among the peoples of East Asia regarding the problem of Yasukuni Shrine.

In both the State Shinto period lasting up to the end of the war in 1945 and the period of democratic, religious

freedom up through the 1960s, Japan saw the rise of new religious movements like Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō, offshoots of Shinto formed in the late Edo and mid-Meiji periods, respectively, and Sōka Gakkai, a Buddhist offshoot launched in 1930. Why did Japan experience such vigorous growth in these new forms of faith? A great many lines of inquiry sprout from this question, leading to issues of Japanese religious history or the spiritual history of the nation in the modern age. From the 1970s onward, however, new religions have shown little sign of gaining fresh strength. How, then, should we characterize Japan's religious history during the four decades or so since the end of the nation's era of stratospheric economic growth? Some striking developments have been a rise in young people's interest in religious matters and growing interest in the State Shinto of the past. Still another trend has been people's increasing fascination with spirituality. The world's developed nations are seeing fading interest in belonging to a traditional organized religion and a growing population of people who describe themselves as "not religious, but spiritual." This trend is marked in Japan as well. The ease with which this new spirituality culture can be tied to the forces of nationalism is one characteristic of contemporary Japan's religious landscape.

(Shimazono Susumu,
professor, Department of Religious Studies,
Center for Death and Life Studies, University of Tokyo)

Recommended Works

Bunmeika no keiken: Kindai tenkanki no Nihon [The Experience of Civilization: Japan in the Period of Modern Transition]

By Yasumaru Yoshio

Iwanami Shoten, 2007. 216 x 155 mm. 432 pp. ¥5,000. ISBN 978-4-00-024637-8.

The transition from the end of the Edo period (1603–1868) to the Meiji era (1868–1912) brought tremendous change to Japan. How was this change viewed in the popular consciousness? Yasumaru focuses on the top-down policy of enforced civilization in place at this time, connecting this trend to the suppression of folk-oriented aspects of faith and the establishment of State Shinto. He also examines the opposition to the process of civilization offered by religious groups and popular movements.

Shisha no kyūsaishi: Kuyō to hyōi no shūkyōgaku [A History of Salvation of the Dead: Religious Studies on Memorial Services and Possession]

By Ikegami Yoshimasa

Kadokawa Shoten, 2003. 190 x 127 mm. 272 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-04-703354-2 (4-04-703354-5).

Buddhism proved adept at taking on aspects of the folk religions of Japan, coming to encompass them as it became an integral part of Japanese popular life. Rites for the dead had little significance in classical Buddhism, but in Japan, argues this book, the Buddhist faith made use of the concept of memorial rites as it absorbed folk beliefs regarding the spirits of the dead, gradually constructing a system of religious practices and a framework for faith unique to this country.

Sengo Nihon to sensō shisha no irei: Shizume to furui no dainamizumu [Postwar Japan and Consoling the Souls of the War Dead: The Dynamism of Pacification and Rousing of the Spirits]

By Nishimura Akira

Yūshisha, 2006. 216 x 157 mm. 237 pp. ¥5,000. ISBN 978-4-903426-06-8 (4-903426-06-8).

Through the prism of the consolation of the spirits of those killed in the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, this book examines pacification of the dead in the post–World War II era, positioning it within the religious and cultural history of Japanese practices in this area and exploring the political functionality of ceremonies for the dead. Nishimura gives consideration to the debate over pacification of the souls enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine and those of the atomic bomb victims at Hiroshima, coming back eventually to the religious nature of ties between the dead and living.

***Supirichuariti no kōryū: Shin reisei bunka to sono shūhen* [The Blossoming of Spirituality: The New Spirituality Culture and Its Periphery]**

By Shimazono Susumu

Iwanami Shoten, 2007. 194 x 137 mm. 348 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-00-001074-0.

Since the 1970s Japan has been home to a growing number of people who say they dislike religion but are drawn to spirituality. The author views this as a sign of the rise of a global "new spirituality culture." This book describes the diverse forms this culture is taking in Japan and the speed with which it is spreading, and the attempts to clarify the Japan-specific characteristics that inform it.

Events and Trends

Centenary of Dazai Osamu's Birth

The year 2009 marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dazai Osamu (1909–48), a writer whose style was at times humorous and at times self-destructive. In June 1948 Dazai committed suicide, flinging himself into the Tamagawa Canal. Each year on June 19, both the author's birthday and the day his body was found, many of his fans visit his grave to lay flowers.

Dazai's writings remain popular to this day, in particular among younger readers. To celebrate his centennial, a number of commemorative events are slated for June this year in various locations connected with his life. This summer the Museum of Modern Aomori Literature, which maintains a collection of materials related to the Aomori Prefecture native, will hold a special exhibition of items including the notebooks Dazai used in his English and ethics classes at Hirosaki Higher School, later made part of Hirosaki University. The Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Literature, in the prefecture where the author lived as a newlywed, will also stage a special exhibition. In the city of Mitaka in western Tokyo, where Dazai lived his final years, the Dazai Osamu Literary Salon opened in March 2008 on the site of a liquor store frequented by the writer.

The publisher Toshi Shuppan released a special December 2008 issue of its magazine *Tōkyōjin* focusing on Dazai's time in Mitaka. In November, Shūeisha released a full-color complete reproduction of Dazai's original handwritten manuscript of *Ningen shikkaku* [trans. *No Longer Human*]. Literary critics and researchers in increasing numbers are taking a fresh look at not just his self-destructive, serious output but his more humorous fare as well. And a number of his works are making their way to the silver screen this year. Film versions are now in production for *Viyon no tsuma* [trans. *Villon's Wife*], *Shayō* [trans. *The Setting Sun*], and *Pandora no hako* [Pandora's Box].

JBN No. 60 will feature an essay on the literature of Dazai Osamu.

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

On January 15, 2009, the winners were announced for the 140th Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes. Tsumura Kikuko won the Akutagawa for her "Potosu raimu no fune" [The Boat of Lime Pothos], while the Naoki went to two writers, Tendō Arata for his *Itamu hito* [The Mourner], to be reviewed in *JBN* No. 60, and Yamamoto Ken'ichi for his *Rikyū ni tazuneyo* [Ask Rikyū].

Tsumura's story, carried in the November 2008 issue of the literary journal *Gunzō,* is a detailed presentation of the daily life of a positive-thinking 29-year-old single woman who lives with her mother and works in a factory. Tsumura was nominated for the two previous Akutagawa Prizes as well. Tendō's novel, seven years in the making, is the tale of a man who drifts from place to place, mourning people's deaths at the sites where they lost their lives. And Yamamoto's book looks at Sen no Rikyū, who perfected the austere form of the tea ceremony while being buffeted by the historical tides of the Warring States (1482–1568) through the Azuchi-Momoyama (1568–1615) periods. The historical novel begins on the morning of the tea master's ritual suicide and traces his life back through time. This was Yamamoto's third nomination for the Naoki.

Other Literary Prizes Awarded

The eighth Osaragi Jirō Rondan Prize has gone to *Han-hinkon: "Suberidai shakai" kara no dasshutsu* [Anti-Poverty: Escaping the "Slide Society"] by Yuasa Makoto of the Anti-Poverty Network. The selection committee's decision was unanimous. The thirty-fifth Osaragi Jirō Prize, meanwhile, went to Iijima Kazuichi's *Shussei zen'ya* [The Night Before the Stars Come Out], which depicts the Shimabara Uprising of 1637–8 from the perspective of the oppressed peasants who launched the rebellion.

The Asahi Prize for 2008 was awarded to the manga artist Mizuki Shigeru in recognition of his contributions to manga culture through his wide range of work, covering topics from supernatural beings to war. He

is the first manga creator to win the award since Tezuka Osamu. Other prizewinners for 2008 included the writer Sawachi Hisae and the dramatist Betsuyaku Minoru.

Ōe Kenzaburō Wins Chinese Prize

Japanese writer Ōe Kenzaburō's *Rōtashi Anaberu Rii sōkedachitsu mimakaritsu* [Chilling and Killing My Beautiful Annabel Lee] (see *JBN* No. 57, p. 4) won the Twenty-first Century Annual Prize for Foreign Novels, presented in January 2009 by the People's Literature Publishing House, one of China's largest publishers, and other organizations. The 2007 book—which focuses on the narrator, an author; his friend from his college days, now a movie producer; and an actress who took the world by storm in the period following the end of the war—is the latest full-length novel by Nobel prizewinner Ōe. He is the first Japanese writer to receive this award, one of the most prestigious in the Chinese publishing industry.

2008 Bestsellers

Tohan Co., Ltd. has announced its annual list of the bestselling books in Japan over the year from December 2007 through November 2008. Topping the list was *Harī Pottā to shi no hihō,* Matsuoka Yūko's translation of J. K. Rowlings's *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* the final installment in her fantasy series. The book, published by Seizansha, hit the shelves on July 23 and sold 1.85 million copies in a half-year. In second place was Mizuno Keiya's self-improvement text *Yume o kanaeru zō* [The Dream-Fulfilling Elephant] (Asuka Shinsha). Four books by the writer with the pen name Jamais Jamais and published by Bungeisha made the list: *B-gata jibun no setsumeisho* [User's Manual for the Blood Type B Person] and similarly titled books for blood types O and A in third through fifth place, and the edition for type AB in ninth. The four volumes sold a combined total of more than 5 million copies. Two books from Bandō Mariko's series on the theme of "dignity," which saw booming popularity in 2007 as well, enjoyed continued strong sales to take the seventh and eighth spots on the list: *Josei no hinkaku: Yosooi kara ikikata made* [The Dignity of Women: From Clothing to Ways of Living] and *Oya no hinkaku* [The Dignity of Parents] (both PHP Shinsho). In sixth place was *Hōmuresu chūgakusei* [Homeless Middle School Student] (Wani Books), an autobiographical work by the comedian Tamura Hiroshi that was made into a movie last year. In literary works, Higashino Keigo took the three top slots with *Ryūsei no kizuna* [Bond of the Shooting Star], recently made into a TV series, and *Seijo no kyūsai* [Salvation of the Woman Saint] and *Garireo no kunō* [Galileo's Anguish], both novels from his "Galileo" series that made it to the big screen.

Obituary

Katō Shūichi, 89, critic, December 5, 2008.

Katō was one of the leading intellectuals of the postwar era. A doctor who had studied serology at the Tokyo Imperial University medical school, Katō joined writers like Nakamura Shin'ichirō and Fukunaga Takehiko in 1942 to create Matinée Poétique, an activist group focusing on new forms of poetry. After World War II ended he coauthored *1946: Bungakuteki kōsatsu* [1946: A Literary Examination] with Nakamura and Fukunaga, and in 1955 he gained attention in intellectual circles for his *Nihon bunka no zasshusei* [The Hybrid Nature of Japanese Culture]. In 1958 he quit his medical practice to write full-time. His writings included the autobiography *Hitsuji no uta* [trans. *A Sheep's Song*] and *Nihonjin no shiseikan* [Japanese Views on Life and Death], which he coauthored; in 1980 he won the Osaragi Jirō Prize for *Nihon-bungaku-shi josetsu* [trans. *A History of Japanese Literature*]. He also lectured at numerous universities in the United States, Germany, and Canada, teaching such subjects as Japanese culture and developing deep ties with intellectuals around the world. In 1994 he won the Asahi Prize, and in 2000 the French government inducted him into the Légion d'honneur.

Announcement

Books on Japanese Modernization Published in Arabic

Egyptian publisher Dar El Shorouk has published Arabic editions of two Japanese books—*Meiji* [Meiji Revolutionaries], written and edited by NHK's Meiji Project, and Ohno Kenichi's *Tojōkoku Nippon no ayumi* [trans. *The Economic Development of Japan: The Path Traveled by Japan as a Developing Country*] (introduced in *JBN* No. 45, p. 13)—under the Japan Foundation's Special Program for Arabic Translation and Publication of Japanese Books. Both texts explore Japanese modernization, a topic of interest in the Arabic-speaking world due to Japan's successful adoption of Western cultural aspects and protection of its traditional culture. Copies of both works are being donated through Japanese embassies to universities and libraries in 18 countries, such as the Bibliotheca Alexandria in Egypt. The GRIPS Development Forum, Tokyo, has produced an English translation of Ohno's book, which is also available in Vietnamese and Chinese. Both books are available in bookshops in Egypt and at the Japan Foundation Library branches in Tokyo and Cairo. For information on the Arabic edition, contact Dar El Shorouk (http://www.shorouk.com/en/default.asp).

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief
Sakato Masaru, Managing Director
Arts Department
The Japan Foundation
4-4-1 Yotsuya, Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 160-0004 Japan
Tel: +81-3-5369-6064; Fax: +81-3-5369-6038

Editing, Translation, Design, and Production
Japan Echo Inc.

Printed in Japan on recycled paper

ISSN 0918-9580

A Writer of Range and Inquisitiveness

Every so often a society produces a maverick who is cleverer, less compromising, and more productive than most. Hashimoto Osamu is just such a figure.

His presence in a vast range of fields—from fiction, poetry, commentary, theater, films, literary reviews, and artful interpretation of classical literature to illustration, music, mathematics, and even hand-knitting—all weaves itself deeply into the thought and values of modern Japanese culture. This 60-year-old novelist comes across as at least twice as alive as most people, with an inexhaustible desire to engage the world and to know everything about it and do everything in it.

"I hate to settle for what I've achieved," says Hashimoto, who began his career as an illustrator. "Once a project ends, I dump everything I did and try something completely new from scratch."

Over the 30 years of his dedicated life as a writer, Hashimoto has published nearly 200 books in numerous genres and styles. His omnivorous literary tastes have led him to compile a hefty series of his own translations of classical Japanese novels that reproduce the subtle nuances of their times and to reach foreign readers with his sole work translated so far into English, a romance story involving a lesbian truck driver ("Ai no botan yuki" [trans. "Peony Snowflakes of Love" in the collection *Monkey Brain Sushi*]). He has also released a textbook for men on how to hand-knit sweaters; published books to teach basic arithmetic in plain language; and written thought-provoking columns on everything from manga and show business to war, capitalism, and religion.

The list goes on, but the literary landmark among all his works may be his 14 volumes of *Yōhen Genji monogatari* [The Transformed Tale of Genji]. He spent three years retelling the story as a confessional from Prince Genji's soul, adding scenic grandeur that is not explicitly existent in the original text but that can be detected from the ancient writing. The archaic Japanese language has a seemingly magical capability to convey more meaning than the words themselves express. Few Japanese today value this tradition, but Hashimoto has made elucidating the delicacy, precision, and beauty that Japan's language once embraced a part of his lifework.

In addition to his translation into modern Japanese of ancient literature, which includes *Kojiki* [Records of Ancient Matters], Japan's oldest surviving text, and the eleventh-century memoir of a woman courtier, *Makura no sōshi* [trans. *The Pillow Book*], Hashimoto has also completed a seven-volume history of Japanese art. He is now working on a history of Japanese modern literature in a monthly series.

"I'm reinventing what the Japanese ought to have done," claims Hashimoto. "We've been too busy acquiring Western culture, and we've forgotten what we possess."

To properly pass down tradition to future generations, Hashimoto, who writes every manuscript by hand, pays meticulous attention to detail. To re-create a scene involving fragrance mixing, an elegant pastime of the eleventh-century aristocracy, Hashimoto sampled various types of incense for half a year until he could verbalize the delicate aromas drifting through the air.

"It's futile, unless the prose appeals to the five senses," states Hashimoto, who also declares that he cares most about finding the appropriate scenic imagery to limn ancient Japan as well as the current state of the country.

In his latest collection of five short stories, *Yoru* [Night] (see p. 7), his picturesque scenes illuminate the darkness of today's male sexuality. The first tale opens with a vista of sunset twilight reminiscent of a daughter's happy evenings with her father, who now lives with another woman, while the last story begins with the sight of a predawn sky reflecting a gay man's inner conflict.

"Exquisite description in the scenes is comparable to portrayal of the thoughts and feelings of the characters," notes the author.

While his well-tuned sentences have attracted large readerships, Japan's rigid literary circles neglected this genre-smashing writer for many years, refraining from giving him literary awards. He won his first prize for fiction in 2005, over 25 years after his debut, and garnered prizes for nonfiction only in 1996 and 2002, for a book on cult religion and his literary survey of Mishima Yukio, respectively. This cold shoulder from the establishment stems largely from Hashimoto's 1977 debut novel, *Momojiri musume* [Peach Hip Girl], which was deemed too sensational and far from belletristic. This witty book, later turned into a film, uses a young woman's colloquial language to highlight teenagers' adolescent clumsiness. At the time it jolted the literary world, as few authors then employed girls' everyday speech to depict teenagers' vulnerable state of mind.

An out-of-the-box thinker, Hashimoto has proved his ability to write up a storm in any genre when the time is right to do so. But there is a consistency in this writer's audacious selection of the subjects he chooses to tackle and the way he pursues them.

"I'm always looking at what has been done and then one step further," asserts Hashimoto. "I'm searching for that 'other' category, for the 'etcetera.'" Without doubt, he continues to dare to go it alone: "Since I'm indifferent to genres, I can do whatever I want to do."

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)

Hashimoto Osamu

Born in 1948. Began working as an illustrator while attending the University of Tokyo. Launched his writing career in 1977 with *Momojiri musume* [Peach Hip Girl]. Has since been active in multiple genres. Has won prizes for the 1995 *Shūkyō nanka kowaku nai!* [Religion Isn't Scary!], the 2002 *"Mishima Yukio" to wa nanimono datta no ka* [Who Exactly Was Mishima Yukio?], the 2004 *Chō no yukue* [Where the Butterfly Goes], and *Sōjō Heike monogatari* [Tale of the Heike in a Classical Japanese Key], completed in 2007.