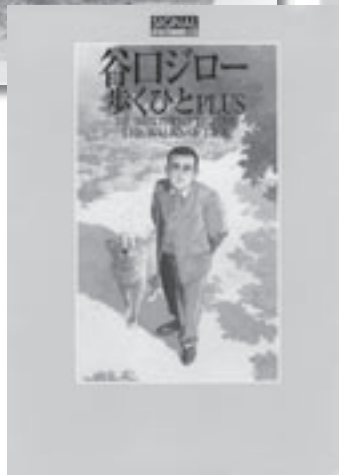


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国際交流基金

Why Mishima? Worldwide Impact and Multicultural Roots

Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner

Currently, Mishima Yukio remains the world's best-known Japanese literary author. With 289 book translations, according to the most recent data from the authoritative UNESCO Index Translationum, he lies far ahead of Kawabata Yasunari and Ōe Kenzaburō, Japan's two literary Nobel Prize winners. For decades, his literature has shaped Japan's image in the world.

After his spectacular suicide in 1970, which made him notorious in the remotest corners of the globe, attention in Japan and abroad subsided for a while. Even so, many translations of his works were published throughout the 1970s and 1980s, among them English, German, and French versions of his 1968–71 tetralogy *Hōjō no umi* [trans. *The Sea of Fertility*].

What makes his impact unique, however, is the extent to which he has since then influenced many artists and intellectuals all over the world. Mishima has inspired films, dramas, ballets, operas, essays, performances, and other works of art by well-known figures and cultural icons, including such film directors as Paul Schrader, Benoît Jacquot, and Lewis John Carlino; Belgian choreographer Maurice Béjart, who dedicated a ballet to Mishima; composers like Hans Werner Henze, Mayuzumi Toshirō, and Hosokawa Toshio, who wrote operas and other musical pieces on the basis of his works; and dancers and artists of the avant-garde. Major theater directors staged Mishima's dramas, among them Robert Wilson, Ingmar Bergman, Andrzej Wajda, and Ferdinando Bruni. No Japanese playwright is performed more frequently on the global stage than Mishima. He has inspired well-known writers such as Marguerite Yourcenar, José Luis Ontiveros, and Henry Miller, as well as famous psychologists and cultural critics like Hélène Piralian and Catherine Millot, to write book-length essays on him.

Perhaps his international impact is also due to the multicultural rooting of his own creativity. Mishima himself stressed his commitment to a multitude of literary and cultural traditions and canons, from classical Greece to *fin de siècle* symbolism, from Buddhism and theatrical genres of premodern Japan through twentieth-century French and German literature, and from Yamamoto Jōchō [1659–1719] and the Japan Romantic School through Friedrich Nietzsche and Eastern European authors of the 1960s.

The Japanese public had considerable difficulty coming to terms with the suicide of this brilliant and controversial writer. Not a few Japanese understand the so-called Mishima incident as a historical watershed, the ending of an era and the beginning of a new one. By no means is this meant as a break in purely literary terms. When the

monthly magazine *Bungei Shunjū* carried out a survey at the turn of the millennium, asking for the twenty most incisive incidents of the twentieth century, Mishima's *seppuku* suicide on November 25, 1970, was second only to the ending of the Second World War on August 15, 1945. The fall of the Berlin wall, by the way, ranked seventh on this list. This view of Mishima's death as an important turning point in modern Japanese history is shared by such intellectuals as Tomioka Kōichirō, who regards it as an expression of those postwar contradictions that other writers had refused to confront, and who, like the critic Karatani Kōjin, places Mishima's suicide as the last historical landmark in his mapping of the discursive space of modern Japan.

In Japan as well as on a global scale, the time seems ripe to reassess Mishima's relevance, his allure as well as his problematic aspects. In Japan, we observe a renewed interest in Mishima as a new generation turns to his work. Is Mishima, who was long considered a political reactionary, turning into a model of "Japanese cool," as was recently suggested? Why have artists of the most diverse orientations turned to him for inspiration? What are the sources of his own creativity? And what is Mishima's relevance for today's world?

These thoughts formed the background for a conference that took place in March 2010 under the title of "MISHIMA! Worldwide Impact and Multi-Cultural Roots" at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, situated in the historical heart of Berlin, and the Henry Ford hall of Freie Universität Berlin. An international array of scholars of literature, art, intellectual history, philosophy, and theater studies was met by an equally international audience, which engaged in lively discussions after each presentation.

It may have been somewhat unusual for a scholarly conference to begin with a public event featuring statements and a panel discussion of representatives from various artistic fields, but the idea was to communicate to a wider audience the repercussions of Mishima's art and existence on the international cultural scene and to different generations. Mishima's personal friend and translator Donald Keene of Columbia University began with some pointed memories, which made Mishima's personality and his aura come alive in a humorous and perceptive way. Photographer Hosoe Eikoh and artist Yokoo Tadanori had also worked with Mishima, and thus were in a position to carve out aspects of the writer's characteristic creativity and his inspirational effects in the interplay of the arts. Russian writer Boris Akunin, who had translated Mishima in the 1980s with no prospects of getting published, added

a truly impressive perspective on Mishima and his effects in a society impregnated by former totalitarianism—a society in which literature, however, retains much of its traditional importance.

Author Hirano Keiichirō, once hailed as “Mishima reborn” by Japanese critics, spoke for the later-born generation who found their own approach to Mishima independent of established opinions. The field of theater was represented by Croatian director Ivica Buljan, who showed a video clip of his staging of *Madame de Sade*, which was premiered in February 2008 in the Slovene National Theater in Ljubljana. In the ensuing panel discussion on the topic of Mishima’s artistic legacies, the different positions and outlooks provided for a lively and sometimes controversial exchange of ideas on Mishima in translation, Mishima on stage, generational as well as cultural differences in Mishima reception, and problems of cultural identity.

Mishima’s impact was then highlighted by a number of scholarly contributions. Japanese critic Miura Masashi addressed his aftereffects in the case of Japan under the deliberately provocative title of “Is Terrorism Beautiful?” Italian Japanologist Virginia Sica of Milano University showed how Mishima was staged in European theaters, and art critic Hayashi Michio of Sophia University in Tokyo gave striking examples of Mishima as an inspiration to today’s Japanese and American artists and performers. I attempted to show how and to what effect Mishima and his works, but even more, his personality, are taken up as a motif or as material in various literatures of the world.

Learning about the reception of Mishima’s literature in various countries also means throwing light on aspects of his art. To date there had been reports on the effect of Mishima in some Western countries, but none were concerned with the non-Western scene. This gap was closed by Hong Yun-Pyo of Yonsei University in Seoul and Terenguto Aitoru, a Mongolian specialist teaching at Hokkai Gakuen University in Sapporo, who informed us about Mishima’s reception and research in Korea and the Chinese areas, respectively. It may come as no surprise that the reception is distinctly different, dependent on a multitude of country-specific factors. Even in neighboring countries such as Germany and France, Mishima has been read and received in particular and distinctive ways. That the author and his literature allow for such diversity speaks for his art and provokes further analyses. Terenguto also delved into “Asian” aspects of Mishima’s literature that had not yet been covered by research.

Mishima’s “multicultural roots” were also addressed by the contributions that followed. French literature appears to have been a major inspirational source for Mishima, as Donald Keene showed, using the example of Racine, and Noriko Thunman-Takei of the University of Gothenburg displayed with French psychological novels by Madame de La Fayette, Raymond Radiguet, and others. Interestingly, the presentations dedicated to Mishima’s references to European literature did not refrain from hinting at interliterary relationships within Eastern traditions, as in the case of Keene, who alerted us to the fact that the motifs Mishima is said to have adopted from the French author can be found in Indian and Japanese lit-

erature as well as in classical Greece. And it is surely no coincidence that Mishima transposed them into Kabuki and *jōruri* (puppet theater) plays. Thunman-Takei, on the other hand, depicted a Mishima who takes on *Genji monogatari* [trans. *The Tale of Genji*], interpreting it in the light of the French psychological novel.

Mishima’s transcending of genres was highlighted by Rebecca Mak of Freie Universität Berlin in her analysis of “Eirei no koe” [Voices of the Heroic Dead], a cumbersome kind of narration voicing Mishima’s criticism of postwar Japan through the lamentations of the fallen heroes, the officers of the so-called February 26 Incident in 1936 and the kamikaze pilots of World War II. Mak disclosed the novella’s Noh structure, asking herself what this artistic endeavor was aimed at and how our perception of the piece is modified through reading it as a modern Noh play.

What keeps us engaged in the case of Mishima, besides the literary and aesthetic aspects, are the moral and political implications and subtexts, thematized in the last section of the conference. David Goodman of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign followed what he termed the “perversion of evil” in Mishima’s dramas, a combination of depravation, sexual transgression, and salvation that Goodman traced back to Kabuki. It may not have been Mishima himself but rather his successors in the Japanese avant-garde, or *angura* [underground] drama scene, who, according to Goodman, brought this concept to full bloom and who sublated the legacy of Kabuki into a contemporary art form.

Among the many influences ascribed to Mishima, the literature of the *fin de siècle* is said to have played a central role. But why did Mishima, who embraced Nietzsche’s aestheticism, choose the disorder of popular culture on the one hand and develop a kind of aesthetic national theology on the other? Mishima Ken’ichi of Tokyo Keizai University, who also compared the writer’s inclinations with those of D’Annunzio and the Italian Futurists, opened the scope of discussion to look into Mishima as representing a significant intellectual trend in twentieth-century Japan.

The independent scholar Gerhard Bierwirth of Frankfurt concluded these explorations by reading the philosophical subtext of Mishima’s work with Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the embodiment of the struggle for “recognition” and as a resistance against the “end of history” as spelled out by Alexandre Kojève, Jean Baudrillard, Francis Fukuyama, and others. The result was a rather sobering and critical assessment that can be read as a counterpoint to the fascination still emanating from this author.

The conference did not aim at a homogenized and finalized Mishima image. On the contrary, its complexity speaks for the writer and calls for further inquiry. To deal with Mishima can be unsettling and painful. But perhaps this is part of his enduring impact, which transcends the boundaries of cultures. At the conference, an effort was made to reach beyond the “Mishima myth” as it had built up over the years. Such popular images as the writer as a modern samurai were definitely deconstructed. On the other hand, Mishima’s affinity with the postmodern “aes-

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION



Abe Kazushige

Born in 1968. His debut novel Amerika no yoru [Day for Night] won the 37th Gunzo New Writers Award in 1994. Also awarded the Noma New Writers Award in 1999 for Mujō no sekai [A Merciless World], the Itō Sei Prize for Literature and the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award for Shinsemia [Sinsemilla], and the Akutagawa Prize for Gurando fināre [Grand Finale].

***Pisutoruzu* [Pistils]**

By Abe Kazushige

Kōdansha, 2010. 194 x 137 mm. 671 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-06-216116-9.

Abe Kazushige has published a number of works as part of his “Jinmachi saga”; this is the latest. Jinmachi is the author’s hometown, located in the northern Japanese countryside. The action in this novel takes place in an orchard behind Mt. Osanagi, which overlooks the town. The aroma of peaches in the orchard gives a hazy feeling to anyone who draws near. The orchard is run by the Ayame family that lives there. This family, whose members are rumored to be magicians, is shrouded in mystery. Just this glimpse of the plot shows how it veers off from the reality of Jinmachi, taking shape as a fabulous tale that could not occur in the real world.

In the Ayame household, four sisters—each born to a different mother—live together. The story unfolds as the second eldest, Aoba, comes to publish a novel

and the man who runs the town’s bookstore closes in on the secrets of the Ayame family. The word *pisutoruzu* that forms the book’s title could mean either “pistils” or “pistols,” reflecting the contrast between the colorful, fluid narration of Aoba, which calls to mind the novel *Little Women*, and the harsh training regime undergone by the youngest daughter Mizuki to acquire a knowledge of witchcraft.

Each of the characters has but one life to live, but at the same time all their lives take place amidst those of many others—both living and dead—and the history of places. In this respect, the author has displayed great talent as a storyteller, creating a novel that calls to mind *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. Abe’s new novel won the Tani-zaki Jun’ichirō Prize in 2010. (MK)

***Isshūkan* [One Week]**

By Inoue Hisashi

Shinchōsha, 2010. 194 x 137 mm. 528 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-10-302330-2.

This is the final full-length novel by Inoue Hisashi, who died in April this year. The setting is Siberia, the year 1946. Komatsu, the protagonist, is captured in Manchuria by the Soviet Far Eastern Red Army and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Khabarovsk. He gets hold of a previously unknown letter written by Lenin as a young man, and uses this as his trump card as he embarks on a titanic struggle against the entire Soviet Union. A riotous tussle ensues between the Soviet authorities, desperate to get the letter back, and Komatsu, who uses all his wits to resist them.

Inoue was Japan’s greatest comic writer of modern times, and his last book shows to great effect his famous lightness of touch and all-pervading sense of humor, even while dealing with a weighty

subject that would normally not be promising material for comedy. In the background to the novel are the far from humorous historical events that took place when the Soviet Union broke the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact and invaded Manchuria, illegally keeping large numbers of Japanese soldiers prisoner for many years after the war ended. But the author’s critical gaze is also focused on the Kwantung Army and the Japanese government itself for the way they all but abandoned the Japanese in Manchuria.

Inoue made it his life work to write about serious subjects in an entertaining way. This gift is on full display throughout Inoue’s entertaining final work, prompting the reader not just to laugh out loud but also to take a fresh look at this dark episode in history. (NM)



Inoue Hisashi

Born 1934. Author and playwright. Published many novels, essays, and plays that used humor to probe human society. Received numerous prizes, including the Naoki Prize for Tegusari shinjū [Handcuffed Double Suicide] in 1972 and the Nihon SF Taishō Award and the Yomiuri Prize for Literature for Kirikiri-jin [The People of Kirikiri] in 1981. He was a famously slow writer, and performances of his plays sometimes had to be postponed or cancelled. Throughout his life he was an active antiwar campaigner and peace activist. He died on April 9, 2010. (See JBN No. 65.)



Ekuni Kaori

Born in 1964. Won the Murasaki Shikibu Prize for Literature in 1992 for Kirakira hikaru [trans. Twinkle Twinkle], depicting the life of an alcoholic wife and her homosexual husband; the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize in 2002 for Oyogu no ni, anzen demo teki-setsu demo arimasen [It's Not Safe or Suitable to Swim]; and the Naoki Prize in 2004 for Gōkyū suru junbi wa dekite ita [On the Verge of Tears]. Has written in a wide range of genres, including novels, essays, picture books, and poems.

***Mahiru na no ni kurai heya* [A Dark Room in the Middle of the Day]**

By Ekuni Kaori

Kōdansha, 2010. 133 x 145 mm. 207 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-06-216105-3.

Ekuni Kaori is one of Japan's preeminent romance novelists. She has written a diverse array of stories about love—including the novels *Kamisama no bōto* [God's Boat], the tale of a mother pursued by past love and her daughter's pursuit of future love, and *Garakuta* [Junk], a story of the strangeness of love, which sweeps people up to the point of thinking of nothing else and then crumbles to pieces when its power wears off. This latest outing brings her romance novels to a new height.

The novel revolves around a housewife, Miyako, who enjoys an active everyday life and is unencumbered by any inconvenience or dissatisfaction. She becomes acquainted with Jones, an American university professor. They spend their afternoons together taking walks or sipping tea, engrossed in conversations that

cause them to lose all sense of time. Their feelings for each other gradually become closer, until a dark passion grows out of the dazzling light of their midday meetings. In wholeheartedly following their emotions, Miyako and Jones are thrown out of the world like two victims of a shipwreck.

Ekuni recounts this romantic tale of a beautiful married woman's "immoral" love in gentle sentences that softly envelop the reader and are as easy to understand as those in a children's story or picture book. The style allows the author to vividly convey the psychology of people who are carried away by love. (MT)

***Yowai kami* [A Weak God]**

By Ogawa Kunio

Kōdansha, 2010. 155 x 137 mm. 583 pp. ¥3,800. ISBN 978-4-06-214076-8.

Ogawa Kunio's works prior to this novel had been characterized by intense, visually oriented depictions of nature that instill in readers a sense of viewing the world from a divine perspective.

In this posthumously published work, however, which the author wrote over the last ten years of his life, the descriptions of nature have vanished, incorporated completely—along with his characters—within the narrator's words. The narration itself transcends time, moving beyond the present, so that the men and women in the book are illuminated by a transcendental light from heaven, which could be called *God*.

The novel is set around the Ōi River estuary and the city of Fujieda in Shizuoka Prefecture, which was the author's hometown. In this area (called Ikarumi in

the novel) lives Kanpei. The character, modeled after Ogawa's grandfather, is a kind, stouthearted man of the Meiji era. During his lifetime, Kanpei experiences the wild natural world of Ikarumi as well as the encroachment of modernity. He is joined in this novel by a number of men and women.

Ogawa writes from the perspective of these other characters as well as Kanpei, avoiding positioning himself as author on one side and what he is depicting on the other. In this respect, he transcends the schema of the modern realistic novel. Ogawa's work emerged from his mindset of wanting to recount "that which my own ears heard, just as they heard it." But it is not a book that expresses the perspective of the author's "self" in the modern, individualistic sense of the term. (MK)



Ogawa Kunio

Born in 1927. Became a Catholic after World War II as a high school student. In 1953, while still enrolled as a student at the University of Tokyo, left Japan and paid his own way to study for three years in France. Began to write upon returning to Japan and in 1957 self-published his first work, Aporon no shima [Isles of Apollo], which won high praise from the novelist Shimao Toshio. Viewed as a key writer of the so-called "introvert generation." Won a number of literary prizes. Died in 2008.



Takahashi Gen'ichirō

Born in 1951. Made his debut in 1981 with *Sayonara, Gyangu-tachi* [trans. *Sayonara, Gangsters*], which received a special commendation as a novel by a new writer in the fourth Gunzō Prizes. In 1988, won the 1st Mishima Yukio Prize for *Yūga de kanshōteki na Nihon yakyū* [The Elegance and Sentimentality of Japanese Baseball], and in 2002 took the 13th Itō Sei Prize for Literature for *Nihon bungaku seisuishi* [The Rise and Fall of Japanese Literature].

***Aku to tatakau* [Fighting Against Evil]**

By Takahashi Gen'ichirō

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2010. 194 x 134 mm. 291 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-309-01980-2.

Aku to tatakau [Fighting Against Evil] is the latest full-length novel by Takahashi Gen'ichirō, who has been on the cutting edge of Japanese fiction since making his debut with *Sayonara, Gyangu-tachi* [trans. *Sayonara, Gangsters*] nearly thirty years ago. The main characters are a three-year-old named Ran-chan and his baby brother, Kī-chan, 18 months old and slow to start speaking. One day, Kī-chan is abducted by a girl called Mia-chan, apparently an agent of the “evil” of the title. This prompts Ran-chan to undergo a sudden growth spurt, shooting up to the height of a teenage boy and hurrying off to the rescue. But in the course of his pursuit Ran-chan transforms into a killer, and it is revealed that Mia-chan, supposedly an agent of evil, is in fact herself a survivor of hideous abuse. So the story con-

tinues, the battle against evil and the investigation of the meaning of evil unfolding in multiple parallel worlds in the style of a rollicking children's fantasy.

The story features young children as its protagonists and is written in simple prose befitting a children's book. But in its depiction of youngsters fighting to save the world from evil, the work can also be seen as a philosophical exploration of the reasons for the wounded state of the human soul in modern society. In terms of narratology, the novel breaks apart a classic novelistic plot in typical postmodern fashion, building an interwoven fabric made up of literary games and quotations from popular culture. It is interesting as a reflection of what might be described as the high-water mark of literary postmodernism in Japan today. (NM)

***Chīsai ouchi* [The Little House]**

By Nakajima Kyōko

Bungei Shunjū, 2010. 193 x 134 mm. 320 pp. ¥1,581. ISBN 978-4-16-329230-4.

This novel is the winner of the 143rd Naoki Prize—Japan's best known and most influential literary award for popular fiction. The story is set in the early years of the Shōwa era (1926–89), when the social situation in Japan is becoming tenser but the country has not yet fully entered a wartime footing. On the outskirts of Tokyo, near a station on a private train line, stands a European-style house with a red, triangular-shaped roof. There a woman named Taki has worked as a maidservant in the house and lived with its owners, the Hirai family. Now, near the end of her life, Taki is writing down in a notebook her nostalgic memories of the time spent living in the house. Her journal captures the refined middle-class life of the time, from her gentle perspective.

At the end of the novel, however, a startling final chapter is added. The chapter brings to light, after Taki's death, a fact not described in her notebook. This suddenly transforms the world that had been viewed through the lens of a nostalgic memoir, so that a dramatic, flesh-and-blood story takes shape. The revelation generates surprise and stirs up deep emotions. Upon finishing the novel, the reader cannot help feeling dazed for a few moments, thinking back on the time that has elapsed in the story and the feelings of each of the characters who have appeared. Nakajima manages to combine skillful dialogue with a dazzling ending. The result is a polished, masterful work fully deserving of the Naoki Prize. (MT)



Nakajima Kyōko

Born in 1964. After working at a publishing firm, she made her debut as a novelist in 2003 with *Futon*, which was nominated for the 2003 Noma Literary Prize for New Writers. Her 2005 *Itō no koi* [Itō's Romance], 2006 *Kinchan no shissō* [The Disappearance of Kin-chan], and 2007 *Kankonsōsai* [Wakes and Weddings] were all nominated for the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for New Writers. Her 2010 novel *Chīsai ouchi* [The Little House] won the Naoki Prize.



Kogure shashinkan [Kogure Photo Studio]

By Miyabe Miyuki

Kōdansha, 2010. 193 x 142 mm. 719 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-06-216222-7.

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. Also won the 1992 Mystery Writers of Japan Award for Ryū wa nemuru [trans. The Sleeping Dragon], the 1993 Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize for Kasha [trans. All She Was Worth], the Naoki Prize in 1999 for Riyū [Reason], and the 2007 Yoshikawa Eiji Literary Award for Na mo naki doku [The Nameless Poison], as well as numerous awards for Mohō-han [The Copy Cat]. Has published historical fiction, fantasy, and mystery works.

Miyabe Miyuki has become perhaps the most popular female writer in Japan today. Her published works up to now have primarily been in the genres of contemporary mystery, historical fiction, and adventure fantasy, and her literary output in that diverse range of styles has earned her a broad readership.

Kogure shashinkan is her first novel in a contemporary setting that is not a mystery. After having written so many dramatic tales, Miyabe has undertaken the challenge of writing a major work in which no incident or crime occurs. She tells the story of the Hanabishi family, who live in an old-fashioned photo studio, and their friends. The novel is filled with slightly odd yet endearing characters, and depicts their humorous everyday lives and easygoing banter. One day, the protagonist

of the novel receives a photograph of a ghost. As the mystery hidden behind the photograph is unraveled, the psychological scars borne by the novel's characters are gradually brought to light.

Miyabe, an exceptional storyteller, conveys the tale of her loveable characters on the basis of a deep-rooted kindness. This has the effect of stirring up deep emotions in readers, who are likely to be bowled over by and swept up in the unfolding narrative, which comes together neatly at the end. The story of an attempt to salvage people who have gotten off track in contemporary society has a lot to say to readers today. (MT)

Kishibe no tabi [Riverbank Journey]

By Yumoto Kazumi

Bungei Shunjū, 2010. 194 x 134 mm. 214 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-16-328980-9.

One day, the first-person narrator of the story is in the kitchen making *shiratama* dumplings. Suddenly, there in the semi-darkness behind the serving table is her husband, Yūsuke—he has come back. He has been missing ever since he disappeared three years previously, but has returned to eat her dumplings, which he loved—yet Yūsuke says he has been eaten by crabs at the bottom of the sea. And now he is preparing to go somewhere again.

"Come on, hurry up. It will soon be daybreak."

The two pack their things and set out. The husband is no longer living, but cannot die without closure. There is something he has to tell his wife, and their journey retraces the path he has taken to do so. The couple visits a newspaper de-

livery shop and a maker of *gyōza* meat dumplings; they then help out with the work in a tobacco field in the hills. They are interacting with people who know the husband, but it is hard to tell whether they are living or dead. However, as the couple drift along, the people they meet accept them completely naturally. While going back and forth between this world and the next, the narrator fills in the blanks of her husband's three-year absence.

"I wanted to apologize properly," says Yūsuke, gazing out to sea. As the two sit together on the shore, a Jacob's ladder to heaven finally appears. The narrator tells Yūsuke's soul that it is time to part, and, carrying both of their bags, once more starts to walk. This beautifully peaceful tale tells of a present-day descent into the realm of the dead. (SH)



Yumoto Kazumi

Born in 1959. Specialized in composition at Tokyo College of Music. Her first novel, *Natsu no niwa*: The Friends [trans. The Friends], won newcomer's prizes from the Japanese Association of Writers for Children and the Japan Juvenile Writers Association in 1993. *Natsu no niwa* has been made into a film and stage play, has been published in translation in over 10 countries, and has won the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award and the Mildred L. Batchelder Award. Other works include *Nishibi no machi* [City of the Afternoon Sun] and *Popura no aki* [trans. The Letters].

ESSAY



Nakanishi Susumu

Born in 1929. Finished the doctoral course of study at the University of Tokyo. Prominent researcher on the Man'yōshū and the cultural and intellectual history of Japan. Won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 1963 for Man'yōshū no hikaku bungakuteki kenkyū [*Comparative Literary Studies on the Man'yōshū*]. Won the 1990 Watsuji Tetsurō Culture Prize for his book Manyō to kaihi [Man'yōshū and the World Outside Japan] and the 1997 Osaragi Jirō Prize for Genji monogatari to Hakurakuten [The Tale of Genji and Bai Juyi].

Kame ga naku kuni: Nihon no fūdo to uta [A Country Where the Turtles Cry: Japan's Cultural Setting and Poetry]

By Nakanishi Susumu

Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2010. 188 x 128 mm. 196 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-04-621280-1.

A turtle does not “cry,” yet there is a lyrical expression in traditional Japanese poetry that describes a turtle as having a voice. Apparently, this *kigo* can be traced back to the following tanka from the Kamakura period (1192–1333):

Walking the long road
That runs along the river bank
A sound can be heard
Amid the dusk of nightfall
The cry of the turtle

In the poem, a faint sound seems barely audible to someone straining to hear it in the lingering mist of a springtime evening. The sound heard is expressed with the poetic—or playful—image of the cry of a turtle. Given its playful nature, the expression has not been used as often in tanka,

which aim to convey some sort of emotion, as in haiku, which dissolve tension through the use of humor and the refined language peculiar to the genre. One example is the following haiku by Suzuki Masajo:

To be left alone
With only turtles crying
Freed of clinging thoughts

The tense feeling that entangles the poet Suzuki Masajo dissolves when she is alone, freeing her of the thoughts that fill her mind. It is at this moment that she hears the faint cries of turtles.

The author argues that a country's culture ultimately comes down to the way of life of the people who are rooted in that country's cultural setting. (MK)

SOCIETY

Shigoto hyōryū [Adrift at Work]

By Inaizumi Ren

President Inc., 2010. 188 x 130 mm. 359 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-8334-1932-1.

When Japan's corporate sector fell into decline after the economic bubble burst, the effects were felt in the uptake of new employees. This book covers the movements over several years of eight members of Japan's lost generation as they become company employees during the “employment ice age” from the mid-1990s to the first half of the 2000s.

In comparison to *freeters*—young people who subsist on part-time work, unable to find full-time employment—these eight are seen as the winners in society. However, as the corporate environment changes, they leave their companies and embark on new lives. They all have their own reasons. Despite landing a position, one was forced to do the work of a newcomer indefinitely because the company wasn't hiring new employees. Another

found there was no one taken on at the same time to turn to for advice. And another wanted to work overseas, but couldn't get into the right position to get started.

“You get married, buy an apartment, and that's the end of it. No way, not for me.” So said one of the eight, who quit his job at a major trading company and joined an IT venture business. While he felt insecure about the stability of his new life, it gave him the chance to make a difference through his own efforts.

It is not whether or not you can do what you want, it is whether you can add something to society. The writer homes in on this new meaning of work that the eight have grasped for themselves. This book is a straightforward, careful account of the concept of work held by today's young Japanese. (SH)



Inaizumi Ren

Born in 1979. Graduated from Waseda University. Wrote Boku no kōkō chūtai manyuaru [*My Manual for Dropping Out of High School*] and Bokura ga hataraku riyū, hatarakanai riyū, hatarakenai riyū [*The Reasons We Work, Don't Work, or Can't Work*] while still enrolled at university. In 2005 he received the 36th Ōya Sōichi Prize for Non-fiction for Boku mo ikusa ni yuku no da keredo: Takeuchi Kōzō no shi to shi [*Although I Will Also Go to Fight: The Poems and Death of Takeuchi Kōzō*], becoming the youngest-ever winner. Shigoto hyōryū is his first work since winning the prize.



Iwamura Nobuko

Born in 1953. Researches cuisine and family life. Works include *Kawaru kazoku*, *kawaru shokutaku*: Shinjitsu ni hakai sareru māketingu jōshiki [*Changing Families, Changing Dietary Habits: Reality Is Destroying the Common Sense of Marketing*], *Gendai kazoku no tanjō*, *gensōkei kazoku ron no shi* [*Birth of the "Modern Family" and Death of Fantasies About Family Life*], and *Futsū no kazoku ga ichiban kowai*: Tettei chōsa! Hametsu suru Nihon no shokutaku [*Normal Families Are the Scariest of All: Extensive Survey on the Collapse of Japanese Dietary Habits*].

Kazoku no katte desho: Shashin 274 mai de miru shokutaku no kigeki [Families Can't Be Bothered: Farcical Home-cooked Meals as Seen in 274 Photographs]

By Iwamura Nobuko

Shinchōsha, 2010. 188 x 127 mm. 192 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-305852-6.

This book analyzes the results of a survey on dietary habits in Japanese homes today as well as 274 photos of household meals. The data in the book was compiled from a survey conducted from 2003 to 2008 on 120 housewives, born since 1960, who live in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

The survey revealed that household dietary habits are in a near state of collapse. Today the knowledge of how to cook traditional dishes is disappearing, mothers are not bothering to cook breakfast for their kids, children dislike nutritionally balanced meals and prefer sweets, and household meals consist of ready-made side-dishes from fast-food restaurants or supermarkets. This situation may seem

paradoxical because there are so many food-related shows on Japanese TV featuring professional chefs displaying the secrets of their cuisine or celebrities walking around town enjoying delicious meals at restaurants. The culture of enjoying food may seem to be blossoming today, but this book clearly shows that Japan's culinary culture is gradually becoming hollowed out and impoverished. This fact is eloquently attested to, above all, by the photos included in the book. Readers with an interest in the actual dietary habits of people in Japan today, not only in traditional Japanese cuisine, are likely to find this book fresh and full of fascinating information. (NM)

Ikikata no fubyōdō: Otagaisama no shakai ni mukete [Unequal Ways of Life: Toward a Society of Mutual Support]

By Shirahase Sawako

Iwanami Shoten, 2010. 173 x 105 mm. 250 pp. ¥800. ISBN 978-4-00-431245-1.

Various social problems have come to surface in Japan since the 1990s: unemployment, irregular employment, long working hours, inadequate care for the elderly and physically disabled, and pension system issues. Key problems that are increasingly acute are economic disparities and inequality, as well as poverty. This book directly confronts these problems, offering a precise analysis of the situation and forceful suggestions on how to break through the current impasse.

Shirahase's method is characterized by the idea that connections can be made between problems dealt with by economists on the "macro" level, such as inequality and poverty, and those problems on the "micro" level related to how individuals

live their lives. People's life spans are divided in the book into the four stages of *child*, *youth*, *adult*, and *elderly*. A rich array of statistical data clarify the causes of particular disparities at each of those stages, and the author makes comparisons between the situations in Japan and in other countries. The book ends with an explanation, based on this analysis, of the importance of a "social imagination" that allows members of society to become aware of each other's ways of living. Shirahase offers what could be viewed as a prescription addressing the difficult problems that Japan faces today by suggesting that people pay closer attention to their relations with each other and create a community where they can live in harmony. (NM)



Shirahase Sawako

Born in 1958. Earned her PhD in social science from the University of Oxford in 1997. Currently a professor at the University of Tokyo. Her areas of expertise are sociology, class strata and differences within society, and the falling birthrate and graying of society. Publications include *Nihon no fubyōdō o kangaeu*: Shōshi kōrei shakai no kokusai hikaku [*Thinking About Inequality in Japan: A Global Comparison of Falling Birthrates and Aging Societies*].



Sone Eiji

Born in 1949. Entered San'yō Broadcasting Co. in Okayama Prefecture in 1974. After working as an announcer, became a journalist in the news department. His reports covering the island of Teshima in Kagawa Prefecture, which started with a 1990 scoop on the illegal dumping of industrial waste, have won many awards. He has been a professor at Hannan University since April 2010. He is the author of Gomi ga furu shima—Kagawa Teshima: Sanpai to no "nijū-nen sensō" [The Island Where Waste Falls: Teshima, Kagawa and the Twenty-Year War on Industrial Waste].

Genkai shūroku: Wa no mura nareba **[Marginal Villages: Because This Is My Village]**

By Sone Eiji

Nikkei Publishing Inc., 2010. 194 x 137 mm. 360 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-532-16739-4.

A marginal village is one in which more than half the population is aged 65 or over, so the community is fated to die out sooner or later. More symbolically stated, it is a village in which no children's voices are heard.

The term *kasō*, or "depopulation," first appeared in 1966, at the height of Japan's rapid economic growth. It described the continual flow of people leaving mountain villages and outlying islands to work in the big cities, leaving the population in these remote areas to dwindle.

Four decades later, with the young people gone from these areas and only the elderly left behind, the community system begins to break down. According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism in 2007, there are 7,878 such marginal vil-

lages in Japan. They are most numerous in Okayama Prefecture, followed by Hiroshima Prefecture, both of which have remote mountainous areas.

The author is a journalist who originally worked for San'yō Broadcasting Co. Since that time he has been involved with the mountain village of Shingōkama (administratively part of Niimi City) and the problem of industrial waste dumping on the island of Teshima in the Seto Inland Sea. This book focuses on the everyday life of Ōta Tadahisa, a blind farmer and writer from Shingōkama, and considers the present and future of marginal villages. Government and academic studies of such villages tend to focus on numbers, but this book takes a documentary approach to depict the reality of these communities. (MK)

HISTORY

Toreishī: Nihon hei horyo himitsu jinmonjo **[Interrogation Center, P.O. Box 651, Tracy, California]**

By Nakata Seiichi

Kōdansha, 2010. 194 x 133 mm. 384 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-06-216157-2.

Tracy was the code name for a prisoner of war interrogation center located in Byron, California, in the United States. During World War II, the US Army used this facility to house strategically valuable Japanese soldiers and civilians, and it obtained secret information about the Japanese military through interrogation and bugging. This was immediately put to use in American strategy.

Japanese soldiers were taught that being taken prisoner was a great shame—so why did the POWs talk so readily? This book uses material from the US National Archives and interviews with survivors to search for the truth behind Tracy, going as far back as the origins of the facility.

One POW there was a naval captain. He disclosed Japan's production of ships

and aircraft, as well as the status of the imperial headquarters. He was interrogated, but neither beaten nor threatened. The interrogator was chosen for his expertise in Japanese language and culture—he treated the POWs in a gentlemanly fashion and stayed silent about them all his life. It was due to this relationship of trust that the POWs talked with an easy mind, believing that an end to the war would be for the good of their homeland. There were some who changed their names after returning to Japan; others tried to justify their actions in written memoranda. After the war, they must have been tormented by their experiences as POWs. This book does not look down on them. However, it is overwhelming that prior to surrendering, Japan had suffered total defeat in the war for military intelligence. (SH)



Nakata Seiichi

Born in 1941. After joining NHK (the Japan Broadcasting Corporation), was involved in making documentaries as a producer, mainly about contemporary history. His books include Manshū-koku kōtei no hiroku: Rasuto emperā to "gempi kaiken roku" no nazo [Secret Records of the Emperor of Manchukuo: The Last Emperor and the Mystery of the Top Secret Meeting Records], which won the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award and the Yoshida Shigeru Award. Other works include Tōchō: Ni ni roku jiken [Wiretapping: The February 26 Incident].



Taniguchi Jirō

Born in 1947. He received the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Grand Prize in 1998 for his work on Sekikawa Natsuo's original script Botchan no jidai [The Time of Botchan]. His works painstakingly depict everyday life, and translations published in Europe have been well received. Haruka na machi e [trans. A Distant Neighborhood] was awarded the Alph'Art Award for Best Scenario and the Manga Booksellers' Prize at the 2003 Angoulême International Comics Festival in France. Kamigami no itadaki [trans. Summit of the Gods] took the best art award at the 2005 festival.

Aruku hito plus [The Walks of Life]

By Taniguchi Jirō

Kōbunsha, 2010. 210 x 148 mm. 278 pp. ¥2,381. ISBN 978-4-334-90168-4.

"I'm just off for a walk," says the husband to his wife, setting off for a stroll. We see a road along the river, the route students take to school, back streets, rooftops. The man meets people, flowers, animals. Open corridors down the sides of houses, public bathhouses, paper balloons—these are nostalgic scenes of yesteryear that are fading from the everyday life of modern-day Japan. This is a collection of manga works that differ from character-driven comic books, having instead a peaceful feeling like the movies of Ozu Yasujiro.

Taniguchi's manga works are enjoyed by adults—here meaning the respectable people on the street, leading totally normal lives, who can take most things philosophically and are blessed with a rich imagination. Just a short time ago, most Japanese were probably like that.

One day, the man tries getting off his train to work a stop before his normal one. He finds himself on the shore of a river, with little idea of where it flows from. An old man asks him the way, and when he enters an alleyway he realizes he is lost, even though he was the one that gave directions. He ends up coming across the old man again. Some youths are kicking a soccer ball around and the ball hits him on the head, breaking his glasses. Although there is no conversation at all, trivial incidents like this during the man's stroll impart movement to the manga.

"I think people and animals were originally quiet beings," notes Taniguchi in the postscript. If you take a good look and listen hard enough, there is a tale to be told in quiet, ordinary life. Walking is the filter that lets you discover the tale. (SH)

Terumae romae I [Thermae Romae I]

By Yamazaki Mari

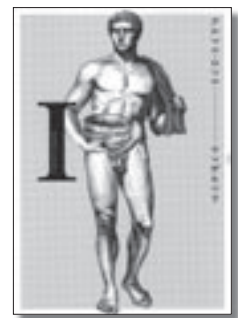
Enterbrain, 2009. 182 x 128 mm. 181 pp. ¥680. ISBN 978-4-04-726127-3.

The author of this comic is a 42-year-old who has spent a total of 18 years living abroad since heading to Italy at the age of 17 to study drawing. She now lives in Chicago with her husband, an Italian researcher of comparative literature. Her personal history seems to have borne fruit in this comic.

In the second century, the Roman Empire covered a vast territory and boasted a high culture. Lucius, a designer of baths, was worrying over the plans for a new public bathhouse. While working on an idea sitting in the bath, he slipped through time into a modern Japanese bathhouse. There he meets the rich bathhouse culture of modern Japan, which he refers to as the "flat-face race." He goes on to experience such things as open-air baths, "unit bath" modular bathing instal-

lations, and household baths, and his attention is drawn to such surprises as shampoo hats to keep soap out of the eyes, fruit-flavored milk drunk at bathhouses, and a public bath with Mt. Fuji painted on the wall. Returning to ancient Rome, he incorporates these things into baths there.

Yamazaki sings the praises of the rich bath cultures of both ancient Rome and contemporary Japan and outlines the numerous significant differences between them—and while comparing the two, she manages to tickle the reader's funny bone. This is a masterpiece of humorous manga, and as well as attracting many readers it garnered the 2010 Cartoon Grand Prize and the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize for short stories. (MT)



Yamazaki Mari

Born in 1967. Since going to Italy to study drawing at the age of 17, she has lived abroad for a total of 18 years. Started drawing manga in her late twenties, debuting with essay manga. Terumae romae I won the 2010 Cartoon Grand Prize, which is awarded by bookstore staff and other manga lovers from different fields, and the 2010 Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize for short stories.

No. 4: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō

In this installment, Kawamoto Saburō examines the celebrated author Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965). A son of Tokyo who found inspiration in the western Kansai region in the second part of his career, Tanizaki wrote stories and novels that in turn inspired numerous worthy films.

Connoisseur and Servant of Beauty

No modern Japanese writer devoted his career more thoroughly to the brightly colored world of beauty and aesthetics than Tanizaki Jun'ichirō. No other writer has dedicated himself so unreservedly to the service of beauty, to the virtual exclusion of the competing virtues of truth and goodness.

Tanizaki's fictional worlds marked a dramatic departure from the sober, high-minded, and often ponderous literature of the Meiji era (1868–1912), creating an aesthetically oriented—and frequently grotesque and fantastical—world that was soaked in reverence for beauty.

The work that first brought him to attention, “Shisei” [trans. “The Tattooer”] (1910), tells the story of a master tattooist who inks a monstrous spider onto the back of a lovely woman. The story shot like a flare of beautiful light across the late-Meiji literary world, characterized as it was by a preponderance of worthy novels that attempted to probe the nature of truth and virtue and sought answers to the question of how people ought to live their lives. In the clutches of the giant spider that engulfs her back, the woman becomes cruel and lascivious, and the artist is soon completely under her spell.

The opening lines of the story are famous: “It was an age when men honored the noble virtue of frivolity, when life was not such a harsh struggle as it is today.”

The Meiji era was a period when Japan underwent rapid modernization in an attempt to catch up with the West. Materialism was the dominant creed of the day, and people prized practical things that served a useful purpose. Beauty and aesthetics were dismissed as outmoded concepts that had nothing to contribute to the modern age. Tanizaki resisted this. For him, an attitude that esteemed beauty and aesthetics, which served no practical use or purpose from the perspective of modern society, could paradoxically be regarded as the “noble virtue of frivolity.”

In “Shunkinshō” [trans. “Portrait of Shunkin”] (1933), one of Tanizaki's masterpieces, Sasuke—the besotted male student and servant of a beautiful blind koto teacher—blinds himself with a needle out of love for his teacher, thus reducing himself to the same state as her. In this story, too, foolishness and frivolity are extolled as virtues.

The pupil's absolute devotion to his teacher has much in common with the dedication that Tanizaki himself showed toward beauty and aesthetics. As seen in both the tattooer's needle in “The Tattooer” and the needle Sasuke uses to blind himself in “Portrait of Shunkin,” beauty is something noble and sublime, and can be arrived at only as the result of a pain that goes beyond the norms of everyday life.

Another dominant theme in Tanizaki's oeuvre was an almost fanatical devotion to women. Throughout his life, Tanizaki dedicated his creativity and writing to the adulation of women and feminine beauty.

At first glance, the tattooer in Tanizaki's story may appear to be the dominant actor. But in fact he offers up his art and talent to bring out the woman's beauty. As for Sasuke in “Portrait of Shunkin,” it goes without saying that he devotes himself entirely to his mistress.

This sense of self-sacrifice occasionally turns to self-abasement and masochism. In *Chijin no ai* [trans. *Naomi*] (1924), the male protagonist offers himself up to a devilishly calculating young woman called Naomi, experiencing a twisted kind of happiness from the haughty and contemptuous treatment he receives at her hands.

In “Haha o kouru ki” [trans. “Longing for Mother”] (1919) and “Yoshino kuzu” [trans. “Arrowroot”] (1931), this selfless devotion is directed toward the figure of a lost mother, while in “Ashikari” [trans. “The Reed Cutter”] (1932), it is transformed into something reminiscent of a medieval knight's chivalrous devotion to his lady. For Tanizaki, masochistic self-abasement and the adulation of feminine beauty were ultimately two sides of the same coin.

During the Taishō era (1912–26), Tanizaki was fascinated by the silent films that were starting to appear as a new art form in Japan at the time, writing several screenplays himself. The films that appealed to him most were the grotesque fantasies of German Expressionist films, such as *The Student of Prague*, *The Golem*, and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. It was only natural that Tanizaki, who dedicated his life to the search for beauty, should be drawn to the new medium of cinema, which took intangible worlds of fantasy and imagination and made them visible on screen.

The influence of the cinema led Tanizaki to write numerous far-fetched fantastical works during the Taishō years. Tanizaki himself later dismissed this period of his writing career, and for a time these works were all but forgotten. But today, decades after the author's death, they are being reevaluated as representing a link to decadent nineteenth-century writers like Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe. In particular, a number of his short novels featuring doppelgangers and split personalities from this period are still well worth reading today.

On September 1, 1923, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck the Tokyo-Yokohama region. Tanizaki was born and raised in Kakigarachō in the Nihonbashi part of Tokyo—one of the oldest districts in the city. When the earthquake destroyed the place where he had grown up, the writer decided to uproot himself and moved to the Kansai region around Osaka and Kyoto and close to the wellspring of Japanese culture.

Normally, this loss of home and the sense of dislocation it brought might have resulted in feelings of loss and frustration. But Tanizaki soon found a second home in the Kansai region. He lived for most of the time in the area around Ashiya, a prosperous neighborhood between Kobe and Osaka.

In Ashiya, the bright and “frivolous” type of beauty that Tanizaki craved still survived. Japan was moving steadily toward militarism, but in Ashiya Tanizaki was delighted to find that a feminine culture still lived on, symbolized by the well-bred daughters of rich local families. It was a different world altogether from the macho culture represented by the military soldiers.

One of the finest and best-known works of the second

half of Tanizaki’s career is *Sasameyuki* [trans. *The Makioka Sisters*]. Completed in 1948, this long novel represented the culmination of his time in Kansai. Although the military authorities halted serialization of the novel during the war on the grounds that its decadent, feminine subject matter was detrimental to the war effort, Tanizaki continued to write in secret. His completed masterpiece finally saw the light of day when the war ended.

The finished work stands as a monument to Tanizaki’s life-long reverence for beauty and women.

(Kawamoto Saburō,
literary and film critic)

An Introduction to the Films

***Shunkinshō: Okoto to Sasuke* [A Portrait of Shunkin] (1935)** Directed by Shimazu Yasujirō

The first of four separate film versions of “Portrait of Shunkin.” A tale of absolute love, in which the servant Sasuke blinds himself with a needle out of devotion to his teacher, the blind *koto* master Shunkin. Features a beautiful performance by Tanaka Kinuyo, one of the finest actresses of the Golden Age of Japanese film.



Shunkinshō: Okoto to Sasuke
© 1935 Shochiku Co., Ltd.



***Shisei* [The Tattooer] (1966)** Directed by Masumura Yasuzō

One of the most aesthetically focused of all Tanizaki’s works, featuring subject matter that might easily have become mere pornography in the hands of a lesser talent. This film features an evocative but restrained dramatization of the story by the master director Masumura Yasuzō. Female lead Wakao Ayako never appears totally naked, giving a performance rich in subtle eroticism.

Shisei
© 1966 Kadokawa Pictures, Inc. (¥3,990)

***Sasameyuki* [The Makioka Sisters] (1983)** Directed by Ichikawa Kon

Tanizaki’s popular work has been filmed no fewer than three times; this version by Ichikawa Kon is the best of them all. Set against the backdrop of Japanese militarism in the 1930s, the film tells the story of the four Makioka sisters and their lives in the prosperous town of Ashiya, between Kobe and Osaka. The film beautifully depicts a fading world of feminine grace and beauty as it refuses to fall victim to the militarism of the age.



Sasameyuki
© 1983 TOHO CO., LTD. (¥5,040)

(Continued from page 3)

thetics of staging” in all walks of life was brought to light in many contributions and was seen as one reason for his continuing international appeal.

The conference, made possible through the substantial support of the Japan Foundation, will be documented in *MISHIMA! Mishima Yukio no chiteki rütsu to kokusaiteki inpakuto* [Mishima Yukio’s Intellectual Roots and International Impact], published by Shōwadō in fall 2010. The conference has also inspired another book in German dedicated to the interplay of aesthetics, performativity, and politics in Mishima: *Yukio Mishima: Poesie, Performanz und Politik*, which I edited with Gerhard Bierwirth. If the Berlin event managed to stir new interest and new approaches to this important author—Japan’s first truly international writer, predating Murakami Haruki—it could

perhaps also teach us something about the workings of literature in our globalized twenty-first century.



Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner

Born in 1948. Professor at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. She has been active as a translator and has published numerous scholarly works on Japanese literature and culture. In 1992 she won the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, a prestigious German award for distinction in research. She has also served as director of the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo and president of the European Association for Japanese Studies.

Events and Trends

Japan Foundation Awards

The Japan Foundation Award recipients have been announced for fiscal 2010. At the October 25 awards ceremony, the renowned film critic Satō Tadao received the Japan Foundation Award for Arts and Culture; the Japan Foundation Award for Japanese Language went to Savitri Vishwanathan, a former professor of Japanese studies at the University of Delhi; and Ben-Ami Shillony, professor emeritus of Japanese studies at the Hebrew University, won the Japan Foundation

Award for Japanese Studies and Intellectual Exchange.

Satō Tadao has served as a judge for many international film festivals, including the Moscow International Film Festival and the Montreal World Film Festival. He has played an active role in international exchanges related to cinema. In particular, he has spotlighted films from Asian countries and played a major role in raising interest in these films among viewers both in Japan and throughout the world.

At the University of Delhi Savitri Vishwanathan taught courses for

many years on the history, language, and politics of Japan. She was pivotal in helping research on Japan and the Japanese language take root in India and fostering subsequent generations of scholars. Her accomplishments include the translation of Shimazaki Tōson’s novel *Hakai* [trans. *The Broken Commandment*] into both Hindi and Tamil, as well as the publication of numerous academic papers and articles on Japanese culture and politics.

Ben-Ami Shillony, the preeminent Israeli scholar on Japan, has lectured and researched at a number of prestigious universities, including Oxford, Harvard, and the University of Tokyo, and has been instrumental in bolstering Japanese studies in various countries by promoting an understanding of Japanese culture and taking part in scholarly exchanges. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including *The Jews and the Japanese: The Successful Outsiders* and *The Emperor as a Mother Figure*.



From left: Japan Foundation President Ogoura Kazuo, prize recipients Satō Tadao, Savitri Vishwanathan, and Ben-Ami Shillony, and Miyauchi Yoshihiko, chair of the award selection committee. (Photo by Atsuko Takagi)

Films Based on Bestselling Novels

In the past year there was a trend among popular new films for works based on bestselling novels. June 5 saw the release of a film adaptation of

Minato Kanae's novel *Kokuhaku* [Confession], which won the Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize in 2009. Directed by Nakashima Tetsuya, the film went on to be a box-office hit earning around ¥3.6 billion. Shot in dark hues, it tells the story of a female school teacher who seeks to wreak revenge on the student who killed her daughter.

Yoshida Shūichi's novel *Akunin* [trans. *Villain*] was also adapted to the big screen, making its movie theater debut on September 11. The two-volume paperback edition of the novel sold over a million copies according to Oricon Inc. *Akunin* is the tale of a man and women who meet on an on-line dating website and later flee from the police, who suspect the man in a murder case. The film has been a great success, grossing over ¥1.2 billion at the box office. Fukatsu Eri, who plays the leading female role, won the Best Actress award at the Montreal World Film Festival for her performance. The great theater attendance in turn boosted sales of the novel.

Japan-China-Korea Digital Library Initiative

Japan's National Diet Library, which can be described as the country's flagship library, is undergoing changes. As more and more books are digitized, the NDL is leading libraries' efforts in the field, and developments are also underway to create digital libraries that transcend national boundaries. In September 2010, the NDL reached an agreement with the National Libraries of China and Korea for the Japan-China-Korea Digital Library Initiative. The three-nation initiative will promote the digitization of the collections of the national libraries. This will make it possible for a person in Japan to search for books in China or Korea. The three countries will form a project committee as well as working groups to push forward the initiative.

International PEN Congress in Tokyo

The International PEN Congress was held in Japan for the first time in 26 years. The event, which took place in Tokyo from September 23 to 30, was

the organization's largest congress ever, with some 250 participants from around 85 countries.

The theme of the congress was "Environment and Literature—What can words do?" During the official opening, a group reading of the late Inoue Hisashi's *Mizu no tegami* [Letter for the Water] was staged. The play embodied the theme in addressing the global water problem and calling for human solidarity to deal with the issue.

The literary forums and seminars at the congress were open to the public and admission was free. A variety of topics were covered, with titles that included "A Japan-Korea Literary Evening: Society and Novels," "The Environment of Language: Expression in One's Non-native Language," "The Future of Books," and "Portraying the Environment in Manga and Anime."

At the delegates' meeting held during the congress, the executive director of Japan PEN Club, Hori Takeaki, was chosen to be the first Asian to serve as the International PEN Club's international secretary, its number-two position. Expectations are growing with regard to how the voices of literary writers in Asia will be conveyed to the rest of the world.

Kurokawa Sō to Visit Russia

The Japan Foundation will send literary critic and novelist Kurokawa Sō to Russia, where he will attend the 12th International Book Fair for High-quality Fiction and Non-fiction held in Moscow from December 1 to 5. At the fair, he will participate in a public discussion with the Russian novelist Olaga Slavnikova on December 4.

On December 6, a roundtable discussion featuring Kurokawa will take place at the Japanese Culture Department "Japan Foundation" of the All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature. He is also scheduled to give a talk at Saint Petersburg State University on December 9.

Kurokawa, born in 1961, was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize for his 2002 novel *Ikarosu no mori* [Icarus' Forest], and his novel *Kamome no hi* [A Seagull's Day] won the 60th Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 2008. He is

also the author of such works of criticism as *Kokkyō* [Borders] and *Riaritī kābu* [Reality Curve].

Manga Exhibition in Seoul

The Japan Foundation will hold an exhibition showcasing the work of nine contemporary manga writers from December 4, 2010, to February 13, 2011, at the Artsonje Center in Seoul. The exhibition, titled "Manga Realities: Exploring the Art of Japanese Comics Today," centers on the theme of exploring the possibilities today for expression in manga, with a focus on the works geared to young people that have garnered attention in the past decade.

Translation of Isaka Kōtarō's Novel

Kodansha International has published an English edition of Isaka Kōtarō's mystery novel *Gōrudon suranbā* [Golden Slumbers], which was profiled in *JBN* No. 57. Middlebury College professor Stephen Snyder translated the book, which has the English title *Remote Control*. In 2008, the popular original novel won the Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize and the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize, and in 2010 a film adaptation was released.

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Levy's Japanese World: From *Man'yōshū* to China

When Ian Hideo Levy made his literary debut in 1987, Japanese critics and readers were appalled, as the Berkeley-born, blue-eyed novelist did the unthinkable, writing serious novels in Japanese—and winning numerous prizes for them. Japanese had long believed that only natives could create great works of Japanese literature. But Levy's achievement challenged this, and turned bewilderment into reverent awe. Critics today hail him as a literary genius and even a savior of Japanese literature.

As the son of a US diplomat, Levy moved to Japan when he was sixteen, after spending his childhood in Taiwan and Hong Kong. He then lived alternately in Japan and the United States for twenty years, teaching, researching, and translating Japanese literature. His translation of Japan's eighth century anthology of classical poetry, the *Man'yōshū*, won him the US National Book Award.

"Today, I can admit that my *Man'yōshū* experience is a great asset for me, but when I made my debut as a writer in Japanese I wanted to hide it, as I didn't want people to see me as a foreigner whose representative work was in English," Levy confesses. "Only after I became confident in my work could I start talking about the *Man'yōshū*."

For Levy, the *Man'yōshū* is his point of departure as a reader and a writer of Japanese literature. He captures the animistic richness of nature transformed into verbal landscapes of breathtaking power and beauty. But Levy also felt "immensely liberated" when he discovered that one of the leading poets in the *Man'yōshū*, Yamanoe no Okura (ca. 660–733), was an immigrant from Korea who deliberately chose to write poems in Japanese. Overlaying himself on the image of this master, Levy realized that bilingualism also existed in the age when Japanese literature emerged, and that it could still serve as a vital force for linguistic and artistic expression.

"Writing interesting tales in a cosmopolitan and neutral language is not what the liberalization of literature is for," says Levy. "Entering into and exposing oneself to two or three cultures and languages, then finding one's own form of expression, is the way to go."

He is well prepared for this mission. English is his mother tongue, Chinese is his second language, and Japanese is what he calls his "stepmother tongue." His early stage as a writer was dedicated to soul searching, comparing what he saw and felt in Japan with the Western perspective. But this trilingual author gradually shifted his focus toward mainland China, bringing another vantage point of comparison into his writings.

Levy's 1996 *Ten'anmon* [Tiananmen] is a good example of border-crossing literature. He blends Chinese and English into his Japanese sentences to amplify the complex feelings of the US-born male protagonist, who is on his way from Tokyo to visit Beijing. As he goes, he revisits memories of his young days in Taiwan and his father, who divorced his mother to marry a Chinese woman. This ambitiously experimental novel, based loosely on his own life, was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize.

Whether it is between America and Japan or Japan and

China, travel is inseparable from Levy's work. His six novels to date are all semi-autobiographical works of confessional fiction inspired by his journeys. In his 2002 novella, *Henri Takeshi Reuitsuki no natsu no kikō* [The Summer Trip of Henry Takeshi Lewitzky], an American of Jewish descent takes a trip to the provincial Chinese city of Kaifeng. He is searching for historical traces of Jews who, he has heard, emigrated there 1,000 years ago from the West to become Chinese.

Levy's recent pattern of going into the Chinese countryside, finding inspiration, and coming back to write stories in Japanese will continue for some time. "The Chinese and Japanese languages are linked as with an umbilical cord, yet still different in many ways, so the gap between the two creates tension" and opens up new possibilities for Japanese literature, he notes. The author says he has no intention of writing fiction in Chinese, as "Japanese is the language I found most fascinating, and chose to write when I was young."

The year 2010 will probably go down as a milestone for Levy. October saw the release of *Wareteki Nihongo* [Subjective Japanese], in which he talks about his Japanese language life—starting from his first sojourn in Japan in 1968 through his reception of the Itō Sei Prize for Literature for his most recent novel, *Kari no mizu* [False Water], in 2008. He also signed contracts this year for paperback editions of his novellas on China and two works of nonfiction, as well as publishing the first English translation of his Japanese work.

"It's a strange feeling that the writer, once a translator of Japanese literature, is now being translated himself—all this twenty years after becoming an author in the Japanese language," says Levy. His debut novel, *Seijōki no kiko enai heya*, which won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers, has been translated by an American Japanologist, Christopher Scott, as *A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot be Heard*. The book is slated for a 2011 release in the United States.

Levy has no peers as a writer who crossed cultural and linguistic borders from the United States to Japan and China. Future generations are unlikely to bring as enormous passion as he does to the Japanese language.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Ian Hideo Levy

Born in 1950. An American-born Japanese-language author, he was encouraged to write in Japanese by famed fiction writer Nakagami Kenji. Often compared with Tawada Yōko, who lives and writes in Germany, as both writers pursue linguistic possibilities by exposing themselves to different cultures. Awarded the Japan Foundation's Special Prize for Japanese Language in 2007 for his contribution in introducing Japanese literature to non-Japanese readers.