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The Third Phase of Japanese Literature

Human Relationships in a Networked Society

Ichikawa Makoto

Looking back on contemporary Japanese literature produced during the two decades on either side of the new millennium (in other words, between 1990 and 2010), I am struck again by the highly constructed, artificial nature of "Japanese literature" since the late nineteenth century. From its earliest beginnings in the works of writers recently returned from Europe, such as Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai, the history of modern Japanese literature has been intimately linked to the way in which the national language was taught in schools, based largely on inculcating a "correct" appreciation of literary works. Literature functioned as one of the means by which a small, backward country in East Asia sought to develop itself at accelerated speed into a modern, Western-style state (hence the emphasis placed on its status as *modern* Japanese literature). The reading of literary works written under the rubric of a given political, economic, or linguistic aim imparted a sense of homogeneity to (groups of) readers. The act of reading itself was incorporated into the infrastructure of state, part of a cycle that reinforced the political, economical, and linguistic pillars (Japanese as the national language) of the state apparatus.

In itself, of course, this is not unique to modern Japan. But one of the distinctive things about Japanese modern literature is the close overlap between developments and trends in literature as it has been practiced in this country and the development of Japanese society itself. From its probing exploration of the meaning of the self in the bright, hopeful days of a new age, modern Japanese literature has twice been caught up in the turbulence of the times as state and society underwent major changes—expanding first as a mass phenomenon with the development of mass media technology, and then through its links with the political movement. The first of these trends lasted from the formation of the modern subject in the Meiji era (1868–1912), through the "culturalist" and "proletarian" literary movements of the Taishō era (1912–26), to the period of the Pacific War. The second encompassed the "postwar" writers of the reconstruction period, the collusions between literature and journalism typified by the work of writers like Ishihara Shintarō, and the student movement, continuing to take in the wide-sweeping changes to the structure of society that took place from the end of the twentieth to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

That these changes had a profound effect on the Japanese literature of the 20-year period outlined at the start of this essay becomes clear as soon as we compare works written during the last decade of the twentieth century with those written during the first decade of the new millennium. To state my conclusion upfront: I believe that Japanese literature has entered a new, third phase during the past 10 years.

Broadly speaking, it is possible to divide most of the important writers in Japanese literature today into three main groups. The first is made up of those writers who continue to write an extreme form of prototypical "modern literature" today. The most prominent of these is Ōe Kenzaburō. This group would include the most orthodox writers and works since the Meiji era—works that deal with the conflict that exists, consciously or otherwise, between the interiority of the modern subject and the concept of the "national state" installed by Fukuzawa Yukichi and his calls for Japan to "leave Asia and enter the West" and later overwritten at the end of the Pacific War. In the 1950s, this tendency was represented by the "war's end" writers of the immediate postwar years, the so-called "introvert generation" and the leftist All-Campus Joint Struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the postmodernist literature (an extension of the "modern") of the 1980s and 1990s. Although these tendencies all differed substantially in subject matter and style, each of them kept alive throughout all the changes of the passing decades the literary traditions that had been dominant since the time of Natsume Sōseki. This tendency remains a presence in the first decade of the twenty-first century, kept alive by the present-day heirs of the tradition. Examples include Shimada Masahiko's *Mugen Kanon* [Infinite Canon] trilogy (2000–2003), which takes the postwar imperial household as its subject matter and depicts the antagonism between the system and the inner lives of individual characters. Abe Kazushige's *Shinsemia* [Sinsemilla] (2003) and *Pisutoruzu* [Pistils] (2010) (see *JBN* No. 66) depict events in a rural town in Tōhoku, linking them with broader developments in postwar Japan. Isozaki Ken'ichirō's 2009 novel *Tsui no sumika* [The Final Home] (see *JBN* No. 63) examines the daily life of a career salaryman and the attitude of impermanence at the root of his life. Such works have continued to mine the struggle between an all-encompassing and normative society and the individual self. Nishimura Kenta's *Kueki ressha* [Train of Suffering], which attracted major attention in Japan when it was one of two winners of the Akutagawa Prize in early 2011, also fits comfortably into this category.

In contrast, authors belonging to another group have developed a more strongly narrative framework in their work. This group includes writers like Kakuta Mitsuyo and Yoshida Shūichi, both of whom started their careers as contemporary novelists in the 1980s and 1990s. Both authors' most representative works since the turn of the

new millennium—Kakuta's *Yōkame no semi* [trans. *The Eighth Day*] (see *JBN* No. 55) and Yoshida's *Akunin* [The Bad] (see *JBN* No. 54), both published in 2007—combine an eventful, action-packed narrative framework reminiscent of a detective novel with a probing examination of the inner lives of the novels' characters: a woman who abducts a lover's child and raises it as her own, a man who suffers for the murder he has committed, and the relationships they have with the people around them. One reason why these authors' depictions of the inner lives of stock characters and clichéd situations like these have resonated so profoundly with readers is that the shape of the society around us is itself undergoing dramatic changes.

The worldview that dominated the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, encapsulated in slogans such as "the end of history" and "the collapse of grand narratives," owed more to the development of the information technology infrastructure typical of late capitalism than it did to political change per se. As recent events in Egypt made clear, a revolution can succeed in overthrowing a regime over a short period of just a few weeks (at least superficially) by effective use of a computer network. The social system of the modern age was built predominantly around the central axes of physical infrastructure: railways, roads, machinery, and heavy industry. "History" and "narrative" served as readily recognizable visible reference points within a centralized or tree structure system; based on his or her distance from these points of reference, the individual was required—sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly—to measure his or her own position within the system. In contrast, the central axis of today's social system is the information network. In this system, subjectivities are sent surfing across a virtual net of innumerable interstices and connections, moving between countless choices and inexhaustible alternative futures.

In discussing the changes that have taken place in society since the 1990s, commentators have often pointed to a growing need for social connections and a reorientation of the individual outward, toward society and others. In the contemporary age, the personal relationships that people have with those around them stand like blinds between individuals and capital-letter concepts like History, Narrative, Principle, and (the idea of) God. The present rather than history, neighbors rather than a distant Other, and isolated events (minor narratives) rather than a grand overarching narrative—in this view of society, the immediate and the intimate are recognized as the concerns with the greatest relevance and importance to people's lives; history, the ideological Other, and narratives have become personal, individual factors that must be imagined deductively from objects in one's immediate surroundings.

It is this social environment that allows readers to perceive the dramatic events in works such as *Yōkame no semi* and *Akunin* as something that affects them directly. Although the method is different from that used in a previous age by writers like Dostoevsky on the basis of a shared relationship with God, the reader recognizes a point of commonality with certain aspects of the psychology of the abductor or murderer or something in their relationships with the people around them (the partial nature of this recognition is the point to be noticed here; there is no need for the identification to be total). This recognition of a relationship between the self and another person brings the reader closer to the drama of the abduction or murder. This differs both from the totally detached entertainment of earlier suspense novels and from the imaginative power that leads a reader to feel almost literally caught up in a scene.

The trend that led writers like Kakuta Mitsuyo and Yoshida Shūichi to turn toward "fiction consumed as relationships" forms a neat symmetry with the path followed by Kirino Natsuo. Kirino began her career as a mystery writer before turning to "historical fact consumed as fiction" with her novel *Nanika aru* [There Is Something] (2010), a novel about Hayashi Fumiko, a well-known female writer of the 1930s and 1940s. Writers like Kakuta, Yoshida, and Kirino made pioneering efforts to depict the diversification of the subject within a networked space (through the use of multiple personalities or selves) and to write narratives dealing with events that take place within parallel worlds. Inspired by these examples, several talented young writers belonging to the new generation that has debuted since the turn of the century have worked to build on and purify these early steps in a new direction (by severing it further from the context of "modern literature"). Examples include *Kekkai* [Dam Break] (2008) (see *JBN* No. 58) by Hirano Keiichirō, *Disuko tantei suiyōbi* [Disco Wednesday, Detective] (2008) by Maijō Ōtarō, *Hāmonī* [Harmony] (2008) by Itō Keikaku, and *Kuontamu famirīzu* [Quantum Families] (2010) by Azuma Hiroki.

No writer has been more adept at picking up on the changing temper of the times than Murakami Haruki, the originator of the trend. Murakami made his debut with a novel whose sly structure used a kind of novelistic double exposure, dipping into the mainstream of "modern Japanese literature" while at the same time exposing the fabrication (Americanism) at its depths. By minimizing the distinctive individuality of his characters, he brings out the relationships between them more strongly. (It is this that allows readers to identify so readily with his characters.) Murakami has continued to develop his unique style over the years, marking the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century with *1Q84* (2009–10), a major work set explicitly in a pluralized fictional world. The path of Murakami's career coincides neatly with the course of recent Japanese literature as we have just traced it. That his widespread global popularity can be dated to the mid-1990s—just as the information network began to function as a vital part of the infrastructure of contemporary daily life—only serves to underline the contemporaneity of Murakami Haruki as a writer.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw the beginning of what we might describe as the third phase of modern Japanese literature. As we have seen, it also marked the first attempts to measure how literature could adjust to an era in which information networks (and the computer technology that makes them possible) function as essential parts of the infrastructure of society and the people who live in such a society, and how literature itself could be recursively integrated into this infrastructure. In this sense, contemporary writers are engaged in a project similar to the one Natsume Sōseki and his contemporaries

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION

Kakuta Mitsuyo

Born in 1967. Won the 2005 Naoki Prize for Taigan no kanojo *[trans.* Woman on the Other Shore*] and the 2007 Chūō Kōron Bungei Prize for* Yōkame no semi *[trans.* The Eighth Day*] (see* JBN *No. 55).*

Tsurī hausu [Tree House]

By Kakuta Mitsuyo

Bungei Shunjū, 2010. 194 x 133 mm. 470 pp. ¥1,619. ISBN 978-4-16-328950-2.

Kakuta Mitsuyo, one of the most popular women novelists active in Japan today, has been remarkably prolific of late. In the latter half of 2010 she came out with three books in close succession: *Hisoyaka na hanazono* [Quiet Flower Garden], about the fate of children born through in vitro fertilization; *Nakushita mono tachi no kuni* [The Land of the Lost], a series of short stories depicting the growth of one woman with fantastic imagination and rich lyricism; and *Tsurī hausu*. Astonishingly, all three books, while dealing with vastly different subjects, are masterful works of fiction that transcend genre, combining a literary insight into the human heart with a highly entertaining narrative.

Set in Tokyo in the late 1990s, *Tsurī hausu* traces the history of an ordinary Japanese family running a Chinese restaurant. A family chronicle spanning three generations unfolds against the backdrop of modern Japanese history—from the grandparents, who emigrated from Japan to Manchuria around 1940; to the parents, members of the generation involved in the campus unrest of the late 1960s; and finally to the children, who struggle to make sense of their lives amid such apocalyptic events as a massive terrorist attack by a Japanese cult and a major earthquake.

As a historical novel written from a sweeping perspective, this is a new departure for Kakuta, who has tended to focus more narrowly on interpersonal relations in contemporary society. As such, it is an ambitious and noteworthy work. *(NM)*

Fugainai boku wa sora o mita [Cowering, I Saw the Sky]

By Kubo Misumi

Shinchōsha, 2010. 197 x 135 mm. 236 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-10-325921-3.

This is a collection of five connected stories. Events in the life of a high school boy whose mother runs a maternity clinic act as an organizing axis, linking the stories in a loose spiral across gaps of time and space.

The opening story shows the midwife's son acting the lead in a series of sexual role-play scenarios scripted by a housewife with a fetish for dressing up as her favorite anime characters. In the second story, the perspective shifts to an *otaku* housewife who was bullied as a schoolgirl and is now visiting a fertility clinic. The reader gradually comes to realize that this is the same housewife from the first story. In the stories that follow, we are introduced to the daily lives of the young man's girlfriend, a classmate struggling with poverty, and a coworker in the convenience store where that classmate works part-time who is struggling to come to terms with some unusual sexual proclivities.

As the same events are shown from the perspectives of different characters, discrepancies become apparent between the thoughts of the background characters and the world seen by the protagonist. The clumsy but warm emotions of characters seen only tangentially gradually overlap and reinforce each other.

The main action involves a leak of personal information over the Internet: a suitably shady and contemporary series of events. Despite deep emotional scars, the characters remain passive, almost numb. It is the infectious enthusiasm for life of the midwife mother and her assistant, Mitchan, that saves the day. *(SH)*

Kubo Misumi

Born in 1965. Worked as a freelance editor and writer prior to writing the 2009 short story "Mikumari," which won the grand prize in the eighth R-18 Prizes in Literature by Women for Women.

Murakami Ryū

Born in 1952. Has won numerous literary awards, starting with the Akutagawa Prize and the Gunzō Prize for New Writers for his 1976 work Kagirinaku tōmei ni chikai burū *[trans.* Almost Transparent Blue*]. His 2005 novel* Hantō o deyo *[Get out of the Peninsula] won the Noma Literary Prize and the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award.*

Utau kujira
[A Singing Whale]
By Murakami Ryū

Vol. 1: Kōdansha, 2010. 193 x 135 mm. 376 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-216595-2.
Vol. 2: Kōdansha, 2010. 193 x 135 mm. 358 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-216596-9.

On Christmas Eve, 2022, near the ocean floor off the coast of Maui, Hawaii, a humpback whale is discovered repeatedly singing a Gregorian chant melody. Analyses of its nerve tissue, blood samples, and matter attached to its skin reveal that the whale is at least 1,400 years old. After much research on the whale's cells and its genes, humankind at long last obtains the gene for immortality. Using this gene, it becomes possible not only to extend human lives but also, by reverse application, to accelerate aging.

About a century later in Japan, revolts by immigrants have been quelled and social disparities have progressed to an extreme degree. Japan's "ideal society" is segmented into three strata, each living in geographical isolation from the others. Radical efficiency is demanded in both politics and culture, and genetic engineering is used as a means of profit distribution and criminal punishment.

This controversial work draws on the stagnation and anxiety hanging over contemporary society. But its roller-coaster narrative keeps readers engaged. Although the fantastic plot seems like science fiction, the author probably had no intention of writing an entertainment novel. Murakami admits that he wrote with the issues facing Japanese society today in mind.

The novel also garnered attention as Japan's first book published exclusively in electronic form. The book became available in print soon thereafter, though, leaving questions as to the effectiveness of its digital publication. *(ZJ)*

Koshū
[Lone Boat]
By Watanabe Jun'ichi

Shūeisha, 2010. 194 x 134 mm. 358 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-08-771353-4.

Iichirō is an executive at an advertising agency. When he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 60, he envisions a rosy future in which he reads what he wants, watches movies, and attends the theater. He hopes to hone his skills in his favorite game of go and take up French again, a subject he had studied only briefly during college.

But reality is nothing like Iichirō had imagined. Once retired, he is too lazy to go out and finds himself spending a lot of time at home. His wife Yōko, meanwhile, takes classes in watercolor painting and yoga. Each time she heads out, Iichirō demands to know such things as where she is going and what time she is coming home, and he gets angry whenever something rubs him the wrong way. At length, Yōko gets fed up with her husband's domineering attitude from his executive days, and Iichirō becomes an outcast in the family.

Known for writing romance novels, Watanabe took the public by surprise when he came out with this tale depicting the loneliness of old age. *Koshū* made waves soon after its publication and even gave rise to a new buzzword: *koshū-zoku,* or "lone boaters."

Like the United States, Japan has its own generation of baby boomers, called the *dankai*—or "lump"—generation. The *dankai* generation refers to those born from 1947 to 1949, who number just under 7 million. These people worked very hard during the postwar period of rapid economic growth but have reached retirement age, and how they will spend their sunset years is now a major social issue. It was against this social backdrop that this novel became a hit. *(ZJ)*

Watanabe Jun'ichi

Born in 1933. Graduated from Sapporo Medical University and took up writing while working as an orthopedist. Won the Naoki Prize for his 1970 book Hikari to kage *[Light and Shadows] and the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for Literature for his 1980* Tōki rakujitsu *[The Setting Sun in the Distance] and* Nagasaki Roshia yūjokan *[Nagasaki Brothel for Russians]. Won the Kikuchi Kan Prize in 2003.*

ESSAY

Ueno Akashi

Born in 1956. His father, Ueno Eishin, moved to Kurate, a coal-mining town in Fukuoka Prefecture, where he started the Chikuhō Bunko library. Ueno Akashi has worked in a number of jobs and currently runs a used bookstore. Also author of Warabi no ie: Ueno Eishin to Haruko *[House of Bracken: Ueno Eishin and Haruko].*

Chichi o yaku: Ueno Eishin to Chikuhō [Cremating My Father: Ueno Eishin and Chikuhō]

By Ueno Akashi

Iwanami Shoten, 2010. 193 x 132 mm. 198 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-00-023864-9.

During the 1960s, as the rest of the country basked in the glow of rapid economic growth, the coal mines of Chikuhō in northern Kyushu began to close in quick succession. Ueno Eishin was one of the best known of the "documentary" writers of the postwar period. He made it life's work to record the daily lives of the miners. His son has now published this collection of essays and reminiscences of his parents and the people in Chikuhō.

Eishin was also the founder of the Chikuhō Bunko, a library and open house that became the driving force behind the local proletarian cultural movement. The author remembers his father and his friends laughing and drinking at the big table in the wooden house where he grew up. The book also contains recipes by the author's mother, Haruko, fondly remembered tossing liberal measures of *miso* into a cooking pot, as well as ghost stories handed down by generations of miners. The title piece tells the story of his father's cremation, subject to unexpected delays owing to the large number of books contained in the coffin. Despite its biting vividness, the story is imbued with a gentle warmth.

The days when coal was known as "black diamonds" are long gone now. Ueno Eishin devoted his life to telling the stories of the nameless people. His voice and the voices of his friends live vividly in his son's account. Eishin and his wife dreamed of an equal world without discrimination. Despite their poverty, they spent their days surrounded by the richness of language and the energy of life. *(SH)*

LITERARY ESSAY

Sakka wa idō suru [Authors Migrate]

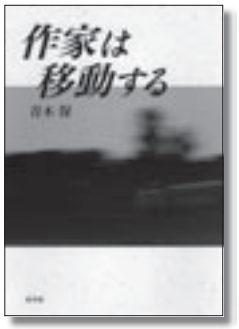
By Aoki Tamotsu

Shinshokan, 2010. 194 x 132 mm. 270 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-403-21103-4.

This work takes up six authors: Tawada Yōko, Ian Hideo Levy, Horie Toshiyuki, Miyauchi Katsusuke, Ikezawa Natsuki, and Murakami Haruki. It carefully interprets the works of writers who have experienced "migration" between cultures—novels set in other cultures and other worlds and works depicting the process of migration—from the perspective of the reader.

Forming part of the book's foundation is the author's sympathy with the stylistic theory of Etō Jun, which states that writing style should not be restrained by the bounds of ornamentation but should play an active role in seeking the meaning of life. The world of vernacular speech is uncertain and only allows us to grasp routine events. It is literary language that can act as a bridge to the genuine world. When vernacular words are thrown together carelessly in a work, it is bound to be consumed like a disposable commodity, even if it is dressed up in the garb of literature.

Based on this theory, Aoki argues that migration can become a new spectrum via which to seek the meaning of life in present-day Japan. Japanese literature should not be confined to the reclusive cultural classification of "Japan." Tawada Yōko writes novels in German, while US-born Ian Hideo Levy has produced novels about China in Japanese. This shows that new expressive frontiers are opening in the Japanese language through the crossing of borders in linguistic representation and the elimination of nationality in literary expression. This book is a unique literary critique that could only have been written by a cultural anthropologist. *(ZJ)*



Aoki Tamotsu

Born in 1938. A cultural anthropologist who headed Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs from 2007 to 2009. His 1985 book Girei no shōchōsei *[Ceremonial Symbols] won the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities. Was also awarded the Yoshino Sakuzō Prize for his 1990 work* Nihon bunka ron no hen'yō *[Transfiguration of the Theory of Japanese Culture]. Other main works include* Ajia jirenma *[Asia's Dilemma] and* Ibunka rikai *[Understanding Other Cultures].*

Yume o miru tame ni maiasa boku wa mezameru no desu: Murakami Haruki intabyū shū 1997–2009
[I Wake Up Every Morning in Order to Dream: Interviews with Murakami Haruki 1997–2009]

By Murakami Haruki

Bungei Shunjū, 2010. 191 x 131 mm. 540 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-16-373100-1.

Murakami Haruki

Born in 1949. Won the 1979 Gunzō Prize for New Writers for his Kaze no uta o kike *[trans.* Hear the Wind Sing*]. The three books comprising* 1Q84*, published in 2009 and 2010, have become a social phenomenon (see* JBN *Nos. 62, 63, and 65). Other major works include* Hitsuji o meguru bōken *[trans.* A Wild Sheep Chase*] (winner of the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers in 1982) and* Sekai no owari to hādo boirudo wandārando *[trans.* Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*] (winner of the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize in 1985).*

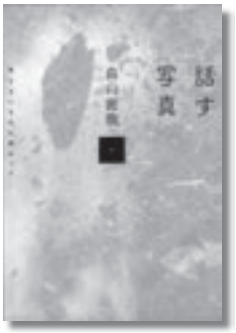
This is the first collection of interviews with Murakami Haruki, which is surprising given his fame as a writer. It comprises a total of 18 interviews conducted between 1997 and 2009, from shortly after the publication of *Andāguraundo* [trans. *Underground*] to just before the release of the first two books of *1Q84*. Interestingly, of these 18, only 6 were originally published in Japanese periodicals; the other 12 appeared overseas. Known for his unsociability, Murakami has kept a low profile ever since he rose to prominence. In Japan especially, he rarely attends parties, never appears on television or gives lectures, and refuses most requests for interviews. For overseas media outlets, however, he has spoken willingly and eloquently regarding his daily life, his creative process, and his ideas about literature. By assembling into a single volume conversations he has had around the globe, the book brings the hitherto obscure image of Murakami Haruki the human being into much sharper focus. The portrait that emerges is that of an ascetic, hard-working, professional writer who is diligent and disciplined about adhering to a writing schedule and looking after his own health, and who sets himself clearly apart from the Japanese literary world. *(NM)*

FINE ARTS

Hanasu shashin: Mienai mono ni mukatte
[Speaking Photographs: Toward the Invisible]

By Hatakeyama Naoya

Shōgakukan, 2010. 210 x 148 mm. 255 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-09-388112-8.



Hatakeyama Naoya

Born in 1958. Studied under the now-deceased Ōtsuji Kiyoji at the University of Tsukuba, where he received a master's degree in art and design. Later worked as a photographer and had his works frequently exhibited in Japan and overseas, most notably in 1994 at the Fox Talbot Museum in the UK and at the Japanese Pavilion of the 2001 Venice Biennale. He also exhibited his works in 2003 and 2009 at the International Photography Festival in Arles.

This book compiles talks by an internationally recognized photographer. The diverse texts range from advice to a class of matriculating art students to lectures at exhibitions held in Europe and the United States. Hatakeyama's devotion to photography is in evidence on every page.

Hatakeyama was still a student when he met the man who would become his mentor—Ōtsuji Kiyoji, a member of the avant-garde *Jikken kōbō* (Experimental Workshop) group of artists. At the time Hatakeyama was searching for a definition of what photography meant as an art form. Inspired by Ōtsuji's suggestion that he "eliminate explanatory elements as much as possible," Hatakeyama began to take pictures in earnest.

Hatakeyama works hard on self-examination, almost as if challenging himself to come up with answers to his own questions were a second profession alongside photography. But he is no self-absorbed loner. His questions are driven by a keen urge to know the world.

Many people think of photography as a means of self-expression, but Hatekeyama has his doubts. He prefers to see photography as a mechanical technique that anyone can master by following the correct procedures. And yet the results of this have the power to move the spirit. Is "art" not the correct description for a process that can draw in the heart in this way? In Hatakeyama's hands, even a well-worn question like "Is photography art?" prompts passages of deep contemplation and rigorous thought. This stimulating volume suggests exciting new possibilities for talking about photography. *(SH)*

CINEMA

Yomota Inuhiko

Born in 1953. Studied religion at the University of Tokyo and comparative literature as a graduate student. Is currently a professor at Meiji Gakuin University. Awarded the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities in 1998 for his work Eigashi e no shōtai *[An Invitation to Film History]. Other works include* Souru no fūkei—Kioku to henbō *[Cityscape of Seoul: Memory and Transfiguration] and* Ajia no naka no Nihon eiga *[Japanese Film Within Asia].*

Shichinin no samurai to gendai: Kurosawa Akira saikō [*Seven Samurai* and the Present Day: Rethinking Kurosawa Akira]

By Yomota Inuhiko

Iwanami Shoten, 2010. 173 x 104 mm. 216 pp. ¥720. ISBN 978-4-00-431255-0.

Kurosawa Akira is the most internationally renowned film director of postwar Japan. One of his most acclaimed works is *Shichinin no samurai* [*Seven Samurai*], which has had a major impact on filmmakers overseas as well as in Japan. In this book, Yomota Inuhiko analyzes the significance of *Seven Samurai* in film history and illuminates its enduring contemporary appeal. Not simply a film expert in the narrow sense, Yomota makes the most of his broad knowledge and understanding of culture and art, as well as a global perspective developed in the course of energetic travels around the world.

Yomota's position is straightforward. Rather than worship Kurosawa's films as classics of the past whose contribution is already set in stone, he emphasizes *Seven Samurai* as "living art" that continues to exert a strong influence—a view based on the author's encounters with Serbian, Palestinian, and Cuban filmmakers. Examining the 1954 film in the context of the era in which it was made, the book analyzes such aspects as the film's portrayal of medieval peasants and its treatment of the themes of death and defeat, while at the same time exploring the reasons Kurosawa films have won such international critical acclaim. Yomota makes no secret of his dislike of Kurosawa's later works and lets it be known that he does not worship the filmmaker without reserve. This contributes to the book's sense of objectivity and strengthens the case Yomota makes for the continued relevance of *Seven Samurai* today. *(NM)*

CULTURE

Tsukurareta "Nihon no kokoro" shinwa: Enka o meguru sengo taishū-ongaku-shi [Creating the "Soul of Japan" Myth: A History of Postwar Popular Music Through *Enka*]

By Wajima Yūsuke

Kōbunsha Shinsho, 2010. 172 x 106 mm. 358 pp. ¥950. ISBN 978-4-334-03590-7.

Wajima Yūsuke

Born in 1974. Pursued graduate studies in fine art at the University of Tokyo, majoring in pop and folk music in popular culture. Co-author of Kurashikku ongaku no seijigaku *[Political Science of Classical Music] and* Jiten: Sekai ongaku no hon *[Dictionary: Book of World Music].*

The Japanese musical genre known as *enka* is represented by such singers as Mori Shin'ichi, Kitajima Saburō, and Miyako Harumi. Misora Hibari is known as the greatest female *enka* star of all time. But what exactly is this popular song genre? It has been described as an expression of "the soul of Japan," yet it did not even emerge as a genre until the late 1960s. This book traces the rise of *enka*, elucidating the process whereby it became associated with "the soul of Japan."

In the mid-1960s, at the height of Japan's economic growth and urbanization, the dominant trend in recorded popular music began to shift away from polished, urban singing styles toward a much more provincial, rustic orientation. The author's insight is that the rise of *enka* was an extension of this trend. Over time, such consciously "countrified" songs became associated with "traditional Japan" and were thought to express the "soul" of the Japanese people. While the second half of the book suffers from a surfeit of information and a lack of thematic focus, the author must be lauded for taking on the challenge of chronicling the historical development of *enka* as a cultural product of the period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s and early 1970s. *(YS)*

Kimura Ryōko

Born in 1961. Studied gender and education at the Graduate School of Human Sciences at Osaka University, where she is currently a professor in the School of Human Sciences. Author of Gakkō bunka to jendā *[School Culture and Gender] and co-author of* Kyōiku/kazoku o jendā de katareba *[School/Family from a Gender Perspective].*

"Shufu" no tanjō: Fujin zasshi to joseitachi no kindai [The Birth of *Shufu*: Women's Magazines and Women in the Modern Age]

By Kimura Ryōko

Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2010. 216 x 152 mm. 316 pp. ¥4,800. ISBN 978-4-642-03796-9.

First published in 1917, *Shufu no tomo* [Housewife's Companion] quickly took its place as the Japanese women's magazine of the era, boasting over a million subscribers by the late 1920s. The literacy gap between men and women in Japan had narrowed during the Meiji era (1868–1912), so that by the Taishō era (1912–26) women even in the lower classes were expected to read *Shufu no tomo* as part of their education. What was the relationship between this magazine and its readers? The author of this book argues that *Shufu no tomo* gave rise to the concept of the *shufu,* or homemaker, as an independent woman, distinct not only from the traditional *okamisan* (wife) but also from the working woman and "modern girl" types.

Whereas considerable research on Japanese women has focused on the role of the education system in facilitating greater independence, this book considers how independence was fostered outside schools, through the print media of the Taishō era—of which *Shufu no tomo* is a prime example. The author closely examines the content of the articles published in the magazine, focusing on beneficial information, education and culture, and comfort. At the same time, she elucidates the social changes that were occurring during this period. By reading the articles in *Shufu no tomo,* and in some cases by contributing articles themselves, the new class of *shufu* hoped to strike a delicate balance between what they were able to do, what they were expected to do, and what they wanted to do. *(YS)*

Sengo Nihonjin no Chūgoku-zō: Nihon haisen kara Bunka Daikakumei, Nicchū fukkō made [The Postwar Japanese Image of China: From Japan's War Defeat to the Cultural Revolution and Resumption of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations]

By Baba Kimihiko

Shinyōsha, 2010. 215 x 152 mm. 722 pp. ¥6,800. ISBN 978-4-7885-1204-7.

Baba Kimihiko

Born in 1958. Studied Eastern philosophy at Hokkaido University's Graduate School of Letters. Subsequently worked at a publishing company. Earned a PhD in 2010 from Waseda University, Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, specializing in East Asia and Japan-China relations. This book is a revised version of his doctoral thesis. Also the author of Biruma no tategoto o meguru sengo shi *[Postwar History Relating to Harp of Burma].*

China garners great attention from the Japanese, whether they like the country or not. Nevertheless, virtually none of the many studies conducted on China discusses how China has been viewed in modern Japan. This is a pioneering work in that area.

Japanese images of China in the postwar era are a massive subject, and there are countless sources to examine. The author limits the target period to between 1945, when World War II ended, and 1972, when Sino-Japanese relations were normalized. He analyzes articles in 24 general-interest and critical periodicals that are highly influential in journalistic circles.

Baba has an unusual background, being enrolled in a doctoral program at Waseda University while working at a publisher. The periodicals covered include those for which he worked on the editorial team. It goes without saying that his experience in selecting feature subjects and requesting article contributions has been put to good use in constructing the book's discourse.

Images of China in modern Japan reflect how the Japanese have viewed their neighbor; they also expose the spirituality of the Japanese themselves. In fact, for many writers, to discuss China is to look back on modern history, as well as to speculate on the perpetual question of how Japan should be. *(ZJ)*

BIOGRAPHY

Pan to pen: Shakaishugi-sha Sakai Toshihiko to Baibunsha no tatakai
[Bread and the Pen: The Socialist Struggle of Sakai Toshihiko and Baibunsha]

By Kuroiwa Hisako

Kōdansha, 2010. 193 x 135 mm. 446 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-06-216447-4.

Kuroiwa Hisako

Born in 1958. Nonfiction writer. Won the Suntory Prize for Sciences and Humanities in 2004 for Shokudōraku no hito Murai Gensai *[Murai Gensai's* Shokudōraku *(Epicureanism)] and the Kadokawa Foundation Gakugei Prize in 2008 for* Henshūsha Kunikida Doppo no jidai *[The Age of the Editor Kunikida Doppo]. Also the author of* Meiji no ojōsama *[Well-Bred Young Ladies of the Meiji Era] and* Shokuiku no susume *[Advice on Food Education]. Died on November 17, 2010.*

There have been several critical biographies of Sakai Toshihiko, the socialist who introduced the works of Karl Marx to Japan. This book differs from previous studies in focusing on the period of Sakai's involvement with the literary agency and publisher Baibunsha, shedding light on Sakai's achievements and providing a more rounded portrait of him as an individual.

The book deals with a period of oppression following the 1910 High Treason Incident. Through Baibunsha, Sakai supported socialist friends and blacklisted writers by providing them with work. He was also an accomplished writer himself, turning out manuscripts full of playful humor and translations of such well-known works as George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* and Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Baibunsha was at the very forefront of introducing Western culture to Japan.

The book sparkles with the multilayered readings typical of Kuroiwa Hisako, who introduces readers to the "pitiful contradiction" inherent in the lives of Sakai and those like him who aspired to purity in a capitalist age and were obliged to earn their crust by the pen. If only the spirit of dedication evoked so vividly in these pages were more widespread among people involved in publishing today, both in Japan and overseas. *(SH)*

HISTORY

Kyōto no kindai to tennō
[The Modernization of Kyoto and the Emperor]

By Itō Yukio

Chikura Shobō, 2010. 193 x 130 mm. 334 pp. ¥2,600. ISBN 978-4-8051-0951-9.

Itō Yukio

Born in 1952. Professor at the Graduate School of Law, Kyoto University, specializing in the political and diplomatic history of modern Japan. Principal works include Meiji tennō *[The Meiji Emperor],* Yamagata Aritomo, *and* Itō Hirobumi: Kindai Nihon o tsukutta otoko *[Itō Hirobumi: The Man Who Created Modern Japan] (see* JBN *No. 65).*

For many, Kyoto Imperial Palace represents the heart and soul of the ancient capital. At the beginning of Japan's modern era, however, the vicinity of the palace presented a very different appearance from that seen today. In the early years of the Meiji era (1868–1912), exhibitions and other entertainments were frequently held in the neglected area around the palace with the aim of reenergizing the ailing Kyoto economy, which entered a decline after the emperor's relocation to Tokyo. This book describes the process by which a raucous public space was transformed into a solemn setting for imperial ritual, linking these developments to the wider history of Kyoto's development as a modern city.

Work began in the 1880s to preserve the palace as a focus of Japanese tradition in accordance with the wishes of the Meiji emperor himself. By the start of the Taishō era (1912–26), the palace and its grounds looked much as they do today. Kyoto's roads were narrow at the beginning of the Meiji era, but were widened during the urban redevelopment undertaken after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 to accommodate imperial processions. We also learn that until the late 1920s, when ceremonies were held there to mark the accession of the Shōwa emperor (Hirohito), the palace and its gardens were open to all, and the area was a popular spot for intimate assignations. By providing a detailed account of the concrete changes in Kyoto's urban environment, this book brings into sharp focus the connections between imperial ceremony and the daily lives of the people. *(YS)*

RELIGION

Shimazono Susumu

Born in 1948. Professor at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, specializing in theology and the history of religion in modern Japan. Works include Gendai shūkyō no kanōsei *[Potential of Modern Religion],* Inochi no hajimari no seimei rinri *[Bioethics of the Beginning of Life], and* Supirichuariti no kōryū *[Rise of Spirituality].*

Kokka Shintō to Nihonjin
[State Shinto and the Japanese]

By Shimazono Susumu

Iwanami Shoten, 2010. 173 x 105 mm. 238 pp. ¥800. ISBN 978-4-00-431259-8.

Non-Japanese often scratch their heads at the way religion is practiced in present-day Japan. Among the Japanese today, it is perfectly normal to practice a combination of religions—as by having a Shinto wedding but a Buddhist-style funeral. In Japanese life, religion seems to play a strictly ceremonial function, divorced from matters of faith and doctrine, leading many to conclude that the majority of Japanese have no religious beliefs. The author of this book, religious scholar Shimazono Susumu, begins by casting doubt on this conventional wisdom.

Shimazono believes that State Shinto is of critical importance in understanding modern Japanese history and the Japanese mentality. State Shinto was the basic shape of Shinto in modern Japan up to the end of World War II. Although many people view it as an organized religion, consisting of shrines, priests, and believers, that was formally affiliated with the state, Shimazono dismisses this understanding as excessively narrow. He proposes a broader definition of State Shinto as a religion in which the worship of ancient Japanese deities was joined to the concept of a nation unified in its veneration of the emperor and the state. The book boldly concludes that State Shinto by this definition was established in the Meiji era (1868–1912) and not truly dismantled even after World War II—that, in fact, it lives on in the present day. Particularly given current standards of religious studies in Japan, this is a thought-provoking work that penetrates to the essential nature of Japanese religion. *(NM)*

MANGA

Sayonara mo iwazu ni
[Without Even Saying Goodbye]

By Ueno Kentarō

Enterbrain, 2010. 188 x 127 mm. 274 pp. ¥780. ISBN 978-4-04-726602-5.

A writer of humorous manga loses his wife suddenly one day. This manga, based on the author's own experiences, depicts the events of the following twelve months.

The story opens one night in December, with the writer hard at work at home struggling to meet a rush of year-end deadlines. He gets up from his desk and goes downstairs to the living room, where he finds his wife Kiho collapsed on the floor. He rushes her to hospital, only for the doctor to tell him that nothing can be done. "In that instant, the world lost its meaning."

The author feels a duty to depict his wife's death in his writing and pitches a work to his editor almost immediately after the funeral. But his initial storyboard is lacking in objectivity and unsuitable for publication. Several years later, the writer tries again, almost as though he cannot move on until he has succeeded in getting the story onto paper.

He cries as his wife's presence fades from his cold, lonely bed. As he moves forward numbly with plans for memorial services, he gets to work on his manuscript: "I'm a pro," he tells himself. But when he stands in a crowd he cannot help looking at others and asking: Why did it have to be Kiho? Why not you instead?

The content of this story could hardly be more universal: the death of a loved one and the all-too-ordinary funeral that follows are events that most of us will live through sooner or later. Despite the mundane nature of the story, or perhaps because of it, the book carries a strong emotional punch. The story ends with a glimmer of hope for the future. *(SH)*

Ueno Kentarō

Born in 1963. Manga artist in the humor genre. This book was given the third-place listing in Takarajimasha's publication Kono manga ga sugoi! 2011 otoko hen *[Awesome Manga for Men! 2011]. Was also nominated for the 2011 Cartoon Grand Prize. His latest series of manga is* Ashita no yoru wa sen no me o motsu *[Tomorrow Night Has a Thousand Eyes].*

No. 6: Inoue Yasushi

This installment introduces the works of Inoue Yasushi, a journalist-turned-novelist whose subtle depictions of human relationships and historical events made him one of the most popular Japanese writers of the twentieth century and provided the inspiration for a number of highly acclaimed films.

Stoic Detachment and Historical Drama

Inoue Yasushi (1907–91) was something of a late bloomer as a writer. When "Tōgyū" [The Bullfight] won the Akutagawa Prize in 1950 (later published in book form together with "Ryōjū" [trans. *The Hunting Gun*]), its author was 43 years old. At the time, he was a regular company worker, employed as a journalist by the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper. This experience of ordinary working life was one of the things that made Inoue's writing so distinctive.

The maturity, good sense, and keen moral understanding of life that lie at the heart of Inoue's work made him the favorite author of countless readers across Japan.

His writing makes no extravagant self-assertions. There are no expressions of desire, and the author does not aim for a revolutionary new style. Even when writing about childhood and adolescence, his writing remains characterized by a grown-up sense of composure.

When he won the Akutagawa Prize, Japan's most prestigious award for upcoming writers, one of the evaluation panel praised his work as that of an "already perfectly finished writer." Another member of the panel wrote, "This is the product of a literary talent rare among Japanese writers, one that gives the reader the sense of a fully realized mature sensibility."

Inoue was a writer with a job in mainstream society and a family. His literature was written from a place that at first glance might appear ordinary and nondescript. This attitude was unusual in the Japanese literary world, in which a unique genre of confessional "I novels" written by social outsiders was considered the "pure" literature. Inoue's work contains none of the struggles or sweetness of youth, and has nothing to say about the lamentation and sentimentality of those who are shut out from mainstream society.

"Tōgyū" depicts a man organizing a bullfight sponsored by a newspaper company amid the confusion and chaos of postwar Japan. "Ryōjū" gives an account of the amorous life of a man whose hobby is hunting, told through letters to him from the various women he is involved with.

There are substantial differences between the main characters of the two stories. The man in "Tōgyū" is actively engaged with life, while the protagonist of "Ryōjū" remains passive and introspective. But both share a nihilistic, lonely attitude toward the world. Inoue Yasushi depicts his characters in a cool, detached manner. There is no question of the writer's merging himself with his protagonists. This is another major difference from the "I novel" writers and novels of adolescent youthful experience. One might describe Inoue's stance as that of a detached, stoic, and neutral observer. Inoue's journalist background was probably at least part of the reason for this.

One critic described these characteristics of Inoue's work as a "quiet kind of old-fashioned atmosphere." Certainly there is nothing revolutionary or ground-breaking in Inoue's writing. Neither can one discern any attempt at experimentation. In this sense, he certainly cannot be described as avant garde or cutting edge. Inoue himself aspired to be old-fashioned.

As a storyteller, he had few rivals. His works frequently depict love affairs and events from the perspective of a stoic and detached observer. This gained him a wide readership—but in a literary world in which the "I novel" was the mainstream, his critical reputation remained low.

As Japanese society emerged from the chaos of the immediate postwar years and entered a period of rapid economic growth, a new genre known as the "intermediate novel" came into being in the publishing world, filling the gap between highbrow literature and popular fiction. The aim was to maintain the quality of pure literature while producing something that could be enjoyed as more casual entertainment.

Among other things, Inoue Yasushi was an outstanding writer of this kind of intermediate novel. Originally serialized in a newspaper in 1954, *Ashita kuru hito* [The Person Who Comes Tomorrow] depicts the love between a man in early old age and a beautiful young woman. Another popular serialization (1956–57) was *Hyōheki* [Wall of Ice], which depicted an actual climbing accident that took place in the northern part of the Japan Alps in Nagano Prefecture. Both were extremely popular with readers.

Inoue's skill as a storyteller meant that his works were often made into movies. His works often feature figures of idealized feminine beauty, reminiscent of the beloved women idolized by knights in tales of chivalry. Good examples of this can be found in *Hyōheki,* in which the climber is in love with another man's wife, and the historical novel *Fūrin kazan* [trans. *The Samurai Banner of Furin Kazan*], which tells the story of Princess Yūhime, concubine of the medieval warrior Takeda Shingen.

This meant that many of Inoue's works were filmed during the golden age of Japanese cinema, with some of Japan's most beautiful actresses playing the lead roles. Inoue is one of the most filmed writers of twentieth-century Japanese literature.

From his student days, Inoue was fascinated by the Silk Road and the Turkic regions to the west of China. Until late in his life, Inoue never actually visited the region, which was imbued for him with a sense of the purest romanticism. This romanticism produced a number of unique remarkable novels on a sweeping scale. Works such as the short stories "Shikkoson" [Qi Hu Zun] and "Rōran" [trans. "Lou-lan"] and the novels *Tempyō no iraka* [trans. *The Roof Tile of Tempyo*] and *Tonkō* [trans. *Tun-Huang*] helped to spur something of a Silk Road boom in Japan.

Inoue also wrote numerous historical novels marked by the perspective of a detached observer. As well as *Fūrin kazan,* mentioned above, other examples include *Yodo dono nikki* [The Diary of Lady Yodo], depicting a woman who became concubine to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the great Japanese unifier and warlord; *Fūtō* [trans. *Wind and Waves*], depicting the Mongolian invasions of Japan from a Mongolian and Korean perspective; *Go-Shirakawa In* [The Cloistered Emperor Go-Shirakawa], set against the background of the late Heian period (794–1185) and the foundation of the Kamakura shogunate; and *Oroshiyakoku suimutan* [Dreams of Russia], about Daikokuya Kōdayū, a castaway who spent eleven years in Russia during the Edo period (1603–1868) when Japan was more or less isolated from the outside world. This succession of ambitious historical novels made Inoue a pioneer in opening up new literary worlds.

Inoue's experiences as a newspaper journalist covering art and religion proved good training when he came to write these historical fictions. He was also a poet who liked the image of "whiteness." Perhaps it was this love of whiteness that was the source of his stoicism.

(Kawamoto Saburō,
literary and film critic)

An Introduction to the Films

Kuroi ushio [Black Tide] (1954)
Directed by Yamamura Sō


Kuroi ushio © *Nikkatsu Corporation*

A social drama depicting the activities of a newspaper journalist investigating the 1949 Shimoyama Incident (the true facts of which remain a mystery to this day), in which Shimoyama Sadanori, president of the national railway company, was killed by a train. The actor Yamamura Sō directs himself in the role of the frustrated journalist.

At the time, theories about what happened to Shimoyama were divided between murder and suicide. Inoue Yasushi's former paper the *Mainichi Shimbun* took the position that it had been suicide, unlike many other papers. The reporter is driven to the point of despair by his frustration at the way events are covered. A thought-provoking examination of how media reporting is really carried out.


Ashita kuru hito © *Nikkatsu Corporation*

Ashita kuru hito [The Person Who Comes Tomorrow] (1955)
Directed by Kawashima Yūzō

This masterpiece depicts the platonic love between a successful Kansai businessman in early old age (Yamamura Sō) and a young woman living in Tokyo (Aratama Michiyo).

Various members of the young generation appear around the two main characters—a mountaineer (Mihashi Tatsuya) and his wife (Tsukioka Yumeji), and a scholar (Mikuni Rentarō) studying the sculpin, a kind of fish. The elderly man's readiness to give over what is left of his life to the younger generation is typical of the sense of philosophical resignation and impermanence so characteristic of Inoue Yasushi's work.

Sen no Rikyū Hongakubō ibun [Death of a Tea Master] (1989)
Directed by Kumai Kei


Sen no Rikyū Hongakubō ibun

Depicts the famous tea master Sen no Rikyū (Mifune Toshirō), a favorite of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, from the perspective of his disciple, the priest Hongakubō (Okuda Eiji). Although he was a favorite of Hideyoshi, he ultimately earned the ruler's displeasure and was commanded to perform ritual suicide. He accepts his death calmly and unflinchingly like a samurai. This rich human drama examines the question of what made Sen no Rikyū accept death so stoically. Winner of a Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

(Continued from page 3)
pursued in their own version of the "present" (today's writers of course engage with a different "present"). But today's writers find themselves on the threshold of a difficult era—one quite different from the days when printed texts enjoyed special privileges. Works such as *Yōkame no semi* and *Akunin* were quickly "media-mixed" into TV serializations and movies, while the work of many young writers is produced and consumed in the context of an intimate relationship with manga and anime. But even today, when public and private worlds merge via blogs and social networking services, creating a world in which "everyone is a reader and writer"—even in an age where what is written is read and overwritten repeatedly by countless individual readers—there remains a need for work that is universal and essential, with stability and autonomy of its own.

It goes without saying that this challenge represents a different kind of difficulty from that which has prevailed over the last 120 years. But the fact that an individual's numerous everyday relationships retain the potential to give rise to histories and narratives suggests that the idea of a theoretical Other transcending one's immediate relationships, along with the concept of universality that previous ages represented as "God" and that the present age would probably express as image, has by no means disappeared. It is merely concealed from view for the time being by the "blinds of the times." When a major event takes place that people cannot adequately deal with through their immediate relationships, such as the major earthquake and tsunami disaster that struck northeastern Japan in March 2011, literature once again steps into the breach, performing a vital function by discussing and thinking about what has happened. Murakami Haruki is a looming presence once more in this context, having published in 2000 a collection of short stories called *Kami no kodomo-tachi wa mina odoru* [trans. *After the Quake*] that dealt tangentially with the Kobe Earthquake of 1995. At the same time, the project involves asking questions about what it means to write and think in Japanese.

This leaves the third group, made up of writers who transcend the historicity of modern Japanese literature. *Yasuraibana* [Festival Flowers] (2010) by Furui Yoshikichi, a member of the so-called "introvert generation," foregrounds what it means to write in Japanese. Novels such as Shōno Yoriko's *Konpira* (2004) (see *JBN* No. 44) and Furukawa Hideo's *Seikazoku* [The Holy Family] (2008) are written in an unorthodox, ground-breaking style and imbued with a premodern religious view. Tawada Yōko's *Borudō no gikei* [The Bordeaux Brother-in-Law] (2008) crisscrosses the border between Japanese and German, while Kawakami Mieko's *Hevun* [Heaven] (2009) (see *JBN* No. 63) is an attempt to record in a distinctive prose style the far shore beyond good and evil. It is not just in the Bible or in the world of wine that vines planted on dry ground produce the best fruit. The same is true of literature.

Ichikawa Makoto

Born in 1971. After graduating from Waseda University, earned a degree in writing and criticism from Kinki University's Graduate School of Literature and Cultural Studies. Now a planner/director for the journal Waseda bungaku *[Waseda Literature] and a lecturer at his alma mater. In addition to* Akutagawa Shō wa naze Murakami Haruki ni ataerarenakatta ka *[Why Wasn't Murakami Haruki Awarded the Akutagawa Prize?], has also published works of criticism including* Kami no hon ga horobiru toki? *[A Time for Paper Books to Die Out?] and* Shōsetsu no mekanikusu *[The Mechanics of the Novel] under the name Maeda Louis.*

Events and Trends

Marketing Contemporary Japanese Literature Overseas

Efforts to market contemporary Japanese literature around the world are gathering momentum. In particular, an increasing number of projects are aiming to promote the work of young Japanese authors in overseas markets.

The Japanese literary magazine *Shinchō* has teamed up with literary journals in China and South Korea, allowing readers in those countries to enjoy some of the latest works by Japanese writers at the same time they are published in Japan. The Japanese literary journal *Gunzō* is pursuing a similar relationship with the British magazine *Granta*. As a result of this collaboration, an English translation of Kirino Natsuo's short story "Yagi no me wa sora o aoku utsusu ka" [trans. "In Goats' Eyes Is the Sky Blue?"] was published on the *Granta* website to coincide with the story's debut in Japan.

The Ōe Kenzaburō Prize is also helping to promote Japanese literature overseas. The winning work, chosen by Ōe Kenzaburō himself, is published in translation in Britain, France, or Germany. The prize seeks to boost the popularity of contemporary Japanese literature in Europe and North America, where the readership has been smaller than in Asian countries.

As well as general works of fiction, "light novels" for young adults and works of poetry are also being translated for overseas markets.

62nd Yomiuri Prize for Literature

The award ceremony for the 62nd Yomiuri Prize for Literature was held

on February 21. The prize was established by the Yomiuri Shimbun Company in 1949 with the aim of reviving the Japanese literary arts in the postwar period. Awards are presented in six different categories: Fiction, Drama/Screenwriting, Essay/Travel writing, Criticism/Biography, Poetry/Haiku, and Scholarship/Translation. This year's winners are as follows:

- Fiction: *Nanika aru* [There Is Something] by Kirino Natsuo
- Essay/Travel writing: *Shasen no tabi* [Diagonal Trip] by Suga Keijirō; *Watari no ashiato* [Migratory Footsteps] by Nashiki Kaho
- Criticism/Biography: *Pan to pen: Shakaishugi-sha Sakai Toshihiko to Baibunsha no tatakai* [Bread and the Pen: The Socialist Struggle of Sakai Toshihiko and Baibunsha] by Kuroiwa Hisako (see p. 10)
- Poetry/Haiku: *Seiryō* [Cool Star] by Ōki Amari
- Scholarship/Translation: *Ihō no kaori—Nerubaru "Tōhō kikō" ron* [Exotic Perfume: Gérard de Nerval's *Voyage en Orient*] by Nozaki Kan

New Bestselling Mystery Series

Higashigawa Tokuya's collection of stories, *Nazotoki wa dinā no ato de* [Solving Mysteries Is for After Dinner], published by Shōgakukan, has become a huge hit, selling over 800,000 copies since its publication in September 2010. The collection features a detective named Hōshō Reiko, the pampered daughter of a wealthy industrialist who solves one crime after another with the help of her butler, Mr. Kageyama. When Reiko is stumped by a particularly knotty problem, her butler will often come up with a solution without even visiting the scene of the crime, based on Reiko's account. The comical aspects of their relationship are a major reason for the success of the stories, with Kageyama frequently making unsparing criticisms of Reiko when she struggles to solve a mystery. A manga version of Higashigawa's mystery series appeared in the May issue of *Petit Comic,* a magazine aimed at teenage girls. The stories also won the 2011 Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize. The series of mystery stories is attracting a lot of attention at the moment.

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Other Titles of Interest

Due to space limitations only 16 books can be introduced in the "New Titles" section. The following are additional works selected by the Advisory Board as worth sharing with Japanese Book News *readers.*

- *Maboroshi no tori* [The Illusory Bird]. By Ōta Hikari. Shinchōsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-10-328511-3. A debut collection of nine stories, including the title piece, by a popular comedian.
- *Umesao Tadao kataru* [Umesao Tadao Speaks]. By Umesao Tadao, interviewed by Koyama Shūzō. Nikkei Publishing Inc., 2010. ISBN 978-4-532-26097-2. A message from the cultural anthropologist Umesao Tadao, who died in 2010.
- *Jinsei to iu sakuhin* [Life as a Work of Art]. By Miura Masashi. NTT Shuppan, 2010. ISBN 978-4-7571-4242-8. A collection of critical essays dealing sensitively with a range of genres from literature to the pictorial arts and dance.
- *Ryūkōka no tanjō* [The Birth of the Popular Song]. By Nagamine Shigetoshi. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2010. ISBN 978-4-642-05704-2. An account of the popularity of the 1914 "Kachūsha no uta" [Katyusha's Song], often described as Japan's first modern popular song.
- *"Daigakumachi" shutsugen* [The Birth of College Neighborhoods]. By Kikata Junne. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-309-62419-8. Explores the development of "college town" districts in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya.
- *Utau kokumin* [A Singing People]. By Watanabe Hiroshi. Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-12-102075. A new kind of modern history of Japan, examining the relationship between the Japanese people and song.
- *Ikiru tame no media* [Media for Living]. Written and edited by Watanabe Junji. Shunjūsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-393-33276-4. Explores the changes in our lives brought about by the information technology that now permeates our daily existence.
- *Hyōden Kajii Motojirō* [Kajii Motojirō: A Critical Biography]. By Kashiwakura Yasuo, Sayūsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-903500-30-0. A critical biography of the novelist Kajii Motojirō, who died in 1932 at the age of just 31.
- *Jōhō o yomu chikara, gakumon suru kokoro* [The Strength to Interpret Information, a Longing for Learning]. By Nagao Makoto. Minerva Shobō, 2010. ISBN 978-4-623-05840-2. One of Japan's leading figures in information studies looks back on his life and the events that started him down the path of scholarship.
- *Gendai Okinawa no rekishi keiken* [The Historical Experience of Modern Okinawa]. Written and edited by Tomiyama Ichirō and Mori Yoshio. Seikyūsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-7872-3317-2. This collection of 11 essays proposes a new look at modern Okinawa from the perspective of "openness."
- *Heijōkyō tanjō* [The Birth of Heijōkyō]. By Yoshimura Takehiko, Tateno Kazumi, and Hayashibe Hitoshi. Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2010. ISBN 978-4-04-703483-9. Depicts the development of Japan's capitals from the Yamato (300–710) through Nara (646–794) periods.
- *Zetsurinshoku* [The Virility Diet]. By Koizumi Takeo. Shinchōsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-10-454803-3. Introduces an astonishing array of "virility-enhancing" foods from China, Japan, and around the world.
- *Konchū miraigaku* [Insect Futurology]. By Fujisaki Kenji. Shinchōsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-10-603670-5. This introduction to entomology analyzes the structure of insects and looks at the vital function they play in supporting ecosystems.

A Godfather of *Gekiga*

Tatsumi Yoshihiro revolutionized the manga scene in the 1950s with his invention of *gekiga*—a new genre of comics depicting realistic slice-of-life stories.

Translated literally as "dramatic pictures," *gekiga* was Tatsumi's challenge to conventional postwar Japanese manga—cartoonish, fantastic products aimed only at children. To cater to older readers, Tatsumi, heavily influenced by movies, attempted to infuse cinematic techniques with bleak realism and to explore more complex, thought-provoking themes in his works.

Now in his mid-seventies, the legendary *gekiga* artist has reemerged in the spotlight. Tatsumi's 829-page graphic memoir, *Gekiga hyōryū* [trans. *A Drifting Life*], garnered the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Award in 2009 and won two top prizes in 2010 at the Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards. In 2011, some of his earlier short stories were made into a five-part animated film called *Tatsumi,* by the Singaporean director Eric Khoo, with narration provided by Tatsumi himself.

"The current of the times is just amazing," laughs the artist. "My works, which were inspired by so many movies, are now provoking filmmakers to create new works in their medium."

One of the image sequences in *Gekiga hyōryū* that calls to mind a film storyboard involves a romantic tryst that begins with a hug, progresses to a kiss, and ends with a close-up of a pair of shoes and a fallen book bag. Tatsumi also incorporated bold new drawing techniques in his hard-boiled thriller *Kuroi fubuki* [trans. *Black Blizzard*], which he wrote at the age of 21. By using diagonal lines to amplify the tension of a pair of runaway convicts in a snowstorm, Tatsumi constructed a suspenseful narrative with emotional depth. He suggests that this full-length, screenplay-like *gekiga* inspired many of his peers.

"Fast-paced storytelling and perspective shifts are very common in today's manga, but back then, in the early 1950s, most figures appeared from head to toe in each frame, the frame sizes were all about the same, and they were all drawn using similar techniques," he recalls.

Manga legend Tezuka Osamu had already taken the manga world by storm by the time the young Tatsumi began drawing four-panel comic strips. But the creator of *Tetsuwan Atomu* [trans. *Astro Boy*] targeted children and focused on fantasy, while Tatsumi tackled darker themes.

"It was Tezuka who encouraged me to write long stories when I showed him my short strips," Tatsumi recalls. "He was like a god of manga and was my mentor, but I had the urge to experiment with new techniques and tell the stories of people on the fringes of society."

In fact, most characters in Tatsumi's stories are weary, emasculated working-class men struggling through the bleak landscape of postwar Japan. In this they mirrored his own poor family and the people around him who failed to benefit from Japan's postwar economic boom.

"My work is dark, as I want to write about immediate problems," Tatsumi confesses. "I've never played down to my readers, and I know I never will."

A dramatic scene from the English edition of the 1956 Kuroi fubuki. *© Tatsumi Yoshihiro, used with permission of Drawn & Quarterly*

This iron will has helped keep Tatsumi afloat in the industry for over half a century. The going, however, has not always been smooth. The Gekiga Workshop he formed with his artist friends in 1959 fell apart in just one year. The term *gekiga* itself took on a different meaning, becoming a byword for vivid depictions of sex, crime, and violence.

Tatsumi established his own publishing company in 1962 but was forced to close the firm in 1971. Tatsumi then opened an antique manga shop in 1983, but this too closed down after 18 years, when many visitors ended up being shoplifters or rivals. Rave reviews from overseas kept his spirits up during these times, says Tatsumi. His works are now available in 17 languages.

"As I began to gain fans abroad and learned that my *gekiga* were being received as a completely new comic genre with literary qualities, I started to reconsider the potential of *gekiga,*" Tatsumi says.

Today the artist is working on a 300-page tale about a woman who travels around the world for 18 years in a search for the reincarnation of her loved one. "It is really thrilling to think about the meaning of life and death and the possibility of reincarnation," says the tireless Tatsumi.

He is also engaging in a sequel to *Gekiga hyōryū* covering just the first 15 years of his long career. Although he published a textual autobiography, *Gekiga-gurashi* [A *Gekiga* Life], encompassing the years through 2011, the graphic version he is now working on will feature more episodes from earlier in his life, he explains.

Tatsumi sees his art and life as joined at the hip, and says that *Gekiga hyōryū* is not his final word on either *gekiga* or life.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)

Tatsumi Yoshihiro

Born in Osaka in 1935. Started writing comics in 1949 and debuted as a professional manga artist in 1952. In 1959, launched the Gekiga Workshop and announced a *gekiga* manifesto. Following his first manga contribution to a French magazine in 1978, a flood of orders came in from the United States, Spain, Italy, and many other countries. His works have won multiple awards at the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France.