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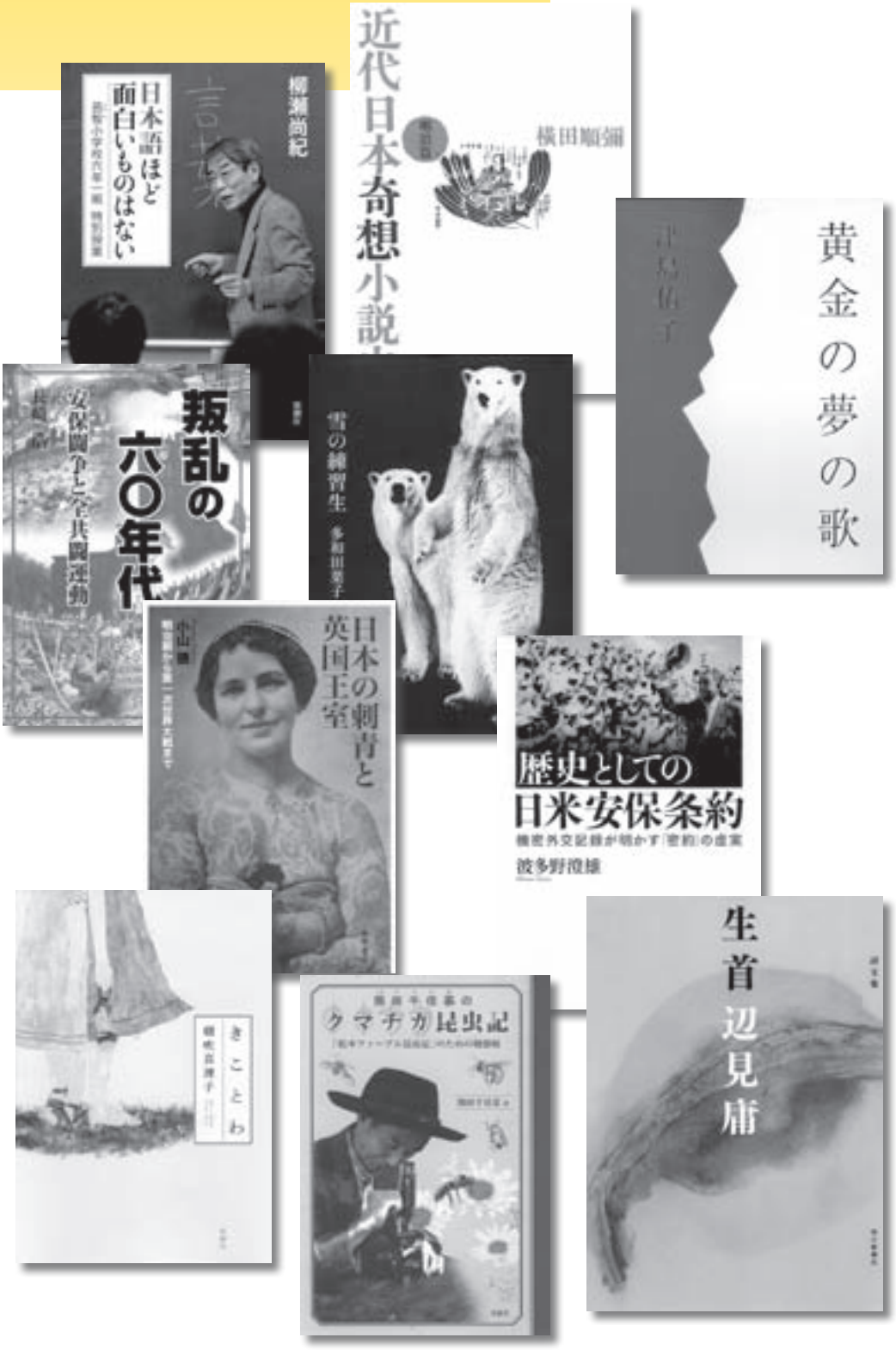

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On Disaster and the Tōhoku Spirit

Seeds of Hope from the Midst of Desperation

Akasaka Norio

The Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, dealt a devastating blow to the nation's northeastern Tōhoku region. The massive magnitude 9.0 quake triggered a tsunami that devastated towns and villages along some 500 kilometers of the Pacific coastline, leaving more than 20,000 dead or missing. Making matters worse was the nuclear crisis in Fukushima Prefecture, which added a new layer of complexity to the disaster conditions. Many residents have been forced to leave the villages and towns where they were born and raised and start new lives elsewhere, at least for the time being. The nuclear accident has transformed the disaster from a straightforward natural calamity into a situation compounding natural and human factors.

The devastation caused by the disaster has focused the world's attention on Tōhoku. Since March 11, the media have broadcast a steady stream of images of Tōhoku communities reduced to rubble. But we have reached saturation point. People with no personal memories of the region may find it difficult to imagine the former towns and villages, each with its own character, that now lie buried in rubble. Tōhoku is far away. People are coming to realize that there is a whole world out there unknown to them. They are beginning to ask: What is Tōhoku?

I have spent more than two decades traveling the length and breadth of this part of Japan. My work has taken me to isolated hamlets deep in the hills and fishing towns on the rough coastline, interviewing residents and writing about their lives. I have visited, or at least driven through, nearly every area affected by the March 11 disaster. I have a full set of memories of Tōhoku as it was before the earthquake and tsunami. I am at a loss for words when I consider the vast gulf between the way the region appeared before March 11 and what it looks like today. I can only stand frozen in horror.

The question "What is Tōhoku?" is a complex, refractive one. The earthquake and tsunami and the ensuing nuclear disaster have lifted a veil that was covering the region, and brought it into plain view. Tōhoku comes across as an archaic place, a relic of the previous century. It is as if the region has been wrenched back suddenly from its march toward the future it would otherwise have reached a decade or two from now. The March 11 disaster has brought about massive distortions in the arc of time that links Tōhoku's past to its present and future.

In what follows, I want to write about the region's spiritual history. The field of folklore studies offers no single coherent image of Tōhoku. There is no center to the region's identity, but rather a diverse range of cultures, histories, and folkways. In the wake of the disaster, though, a clear line of demarcation has appeared once more on the map of Japan. The boundary has become starker again between areas to the south and north of Shirakawa, the spot in southern Fukushima Prefecture where a barrier station stood from ancient times to let travelers know they were about to enter Michinoku, the "back country" accessed by the roads to the deep north. This rediscovery of Tōhoku inescapably brings with it memories of a long history of discrimination and disdain.

Well over a millennium ago, the Emishi—the Tōhoku descendants of the indigenous Jōmon people—were subjected to a series of wars of subjugation at the hands of the Yamato state. Since then the region has been burdened by its history as a wild frontier land. In the Boshin Civil War of 1868–69, which marked Japan's entry into the modern era, the Tōhoku domains of Dewa, Mutsu, and Echigo formed a proshogunate alliance and suffered a harsh defeat to the imperial forces from western Japan. Over the years the region came to be bound by its spiritual

An open-air market started in the town of Rikuzen Takata by store-owners whose premises were destroyed in the disaster. (© Jiji)

history as a defeated land. From the Meiji era (1868–1912) through the end of the Pacific War in 1945, the national government undertook just one development project in Tōhoku: the construction of port facilities in the Nobiru district east of Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Even this came to naught in 1884, when a typhoon brought a storm surge that destroyed the facilities. Thereafter national policy focused on demanding that Tōhoku farmers produce more rice, a crop better suited to warmer climes. The result was repeated frost damage and poor harvests that lasted right up until recent times. In the prewar era, the people of Tōhoku self-mockingly described their role as to supply Tokyo with soldiers from their men, prostitutes from their women, and rice from their farmers.

In recent years a new mood of optimism had started to take hold: this troubled Tōhoku was a thing of the past, and the region was enjoying an age of plenty. Unfortunately this spirit of hopefulness seems to have been based on an illusion. The events of March 11 have exposed the hidden truths that still confront the region. During the postwar era Tōhoku supplied electricity, manufacturing parts, and food to the capital. But the region's wealth was built on rickety foundations indeed. In exchange for housing the nuclear power plants that provided electricity to Tokyo, for example, coastal Fukushima Prefecture gained a small measure of material benefit. The selection of this remote area—once called "the Tibet of the Tōhoku coast"—was no accident. The Shimokita Peninsula in Aomori Prefecture farther north, another nuclear power plant site, is extraordinarily similar in this regard, almost like a remote colony.

Sandwiched between Aomori and Fukushima, the coastal communities of Sanriku (the Pacific coast of Tōhoku) for the most part made the opposite choice, rejecting the nuclear plant construction proposals that came their way. In addition to undergoing severe depopulation, the Sanriku region had already suffered devastating tsunamis in 1896 and 1933. In the face of this most recent battering, communities are beginning to disintegrate, stripped of vitality and unable to draw up plans to rebuild physically, much less restore themselves economically and socially. Before the disaster, analysts were warning of conditions like this a decade or two from now in the worst-affected of Japan's so-called marginal villages, where depopulation, plummeting birthrates, and the graying of society pose a serious threat to the sustainability of rural communities. The disaster has pressed the fast-forward button and compressed a decade or more of social decline into the space of a few months.

As I mentioned earlier, the Great East Japan Earthquake has severely distorted the arc of time in Tōhoku. Entire towns and villages have been washed away, and the region's past and future are now tangled strangely in its present, casting a shadow over the lives of those who remain. March 11 brought mercilessly to the fore all the pressing problems that weigh heavily on Tōhoku—past, present, and future.

Nevertheless, the seeds of hope are already being sown in the midst of this desperate situation. As a member of the government's Reconstruction Design Council, I have proposed creating a special economic zone in Fukushima for the development of natural, renewable energy. Our council's first report to the prime minister, issued on June 25, develops this scheme considerably. As if in response to our proposals, the Fukushima prefectural council tasked with producing a vision for reconstruction came up with a scenario for releasing Japan from its dependence on nuclear energy by replacing our nuclear power plants with natural energy sources. This soon became mainstream public opinion among Fukushima residents.

The combination of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident dealt Fukushima a severe body blow. On top of this, its farmers and fishermen have seen their livelihoods threatened by consumer anxieties about radiation contamination. The land and sea have been poisoned by radiation leaks. People around the world now rank Fukushima—the crisis is known by that single name—alongside Chernobyl, and place it in a history of Japanese nuclear calamities that stretches back to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The prefecture has been dealt a terrible hand. It is for this very reason, though, that we are now seeing hope for the future arise here. The answer is not to endure these hardships in silence; we need to have the courage to stand up and fight. We may be able to play this terrible hand to our benefit. Already a clear vision is in place for replacing nuclear power with natural energy. As I see it, this is the trump card that may yet help the prefecture to turn things around.

Fukushima has been more deeply scarred by March 11 than anywhere else in Japan, and it is here that we must begin the battle to cleanse the irradiated earth and restore it to health. This is a subject that humanity as a whole will have to grapple with on a global basis in the years to come. As this work proceeds, Fukushima will take on a new character as the testing ground for new forms of natural energy as humanity moves beyond the atomic age. The people of the prefecture are already taking their first steps toward this future.

We must craft strategic scenarios for reconstructing Tōhoku in creative ways. We must express our gratitude to the people around the globe who have given their warm support following the disaster. There is no better way for us to do this than by working to build the world of tomorrow.

Akasaka Norio

Born in Tokyo in 1953. Professor at Gakushuin University and director of the Fukushima Museum. Specializes in the culture of Tōhoku and the history of Japanese thought. Long a champion of the potential of regionally focused research under the banner of "Tōhoku Studies," he has recently begun exploring new approaches to the history of thought in the modern age. His major works include Ijinron josetsu *[Introduction to the Theory of the Other],* Yama no seishinshi *[A Spiritual History of Mountains], and* Tōhokugaku: Wasurerareta Tōhoku *[Tōhoku Studies: The Forgotten Tōhoku].*

FICTION

Asabuki Mariko

Born in 1984. Currently studying for a PhD in the Faculty of Letters, Keio University. Her debut work Ryūseki *[The Stream's Meandering Course], published in 2009, was selected for the Bunkamura Deux Magots Literary Prize by Horie Toshiyuki the following year, making her the youngest winner of the award. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 2011 for her novel* Kikotowa *[Kiko and Towako].*

Kikotowa
[Kiko and Towako]

By Asabuki Mariko

Shinchōsha, 2011. 193 x 132 mm. 142 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-10-328462-8.

"Kikotowa" is not a word you will find in the dictionary. It is a neologism formed by combining the names of two women, Kiko and Towako. Towako's mother, Yoshiko, is the caretaker of a summer villa owned by Kiko's parents in Hayama on the Miura Peninsula. As children, Kiko and Towako once spent a summer sleeping side by side at the villa. Towako was 15 years old and in her first year of high school; Kiko, seven years younger, was a third-grade elementary school student.

Twenty-five years later, the two women meet again. From this point, past and present intertwine; memory and dreams intersect. Within the narrative space, time no longer exists as something that flows from past to present, and from the present into the future. And although Kiko and Towako are separate individuals, their depictions overlap and their characters occasionally blend into one. At first glance, the novel may seem little more than a casual jumble of random elements, composed of depictions of scenery, the minutiae of daily life, and fragmentary memories. But between the lines of the prose is a deeply felt sense of the pathos of life, which seizes hold of the reader and refuses to relax its grip.

For such a young writer, the writing is marked by a remarkably mature feeling for language. The prose sparkles, unleashing a torrent of emotions and a meteor shower of vivid images. One marvels at the author's command of language and the lyricism of her writing. The author is still just 26 years of age; this, her third published work, won her the Akutagawa Prize. With talent like this, few would begrudge her the honor. (Chō)

Yuki no renshūsei
[The Apprentices of Snow]

By Tawada Yōko

Shinchōsha, 2011. 197 x 132 mm. 254 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-10-436104-5.

Tawada Yōko's latest novel tells the story of three generations of polar bears. The opening lines, a first-person account of the narrator's coming into the world as "a baby covered in soft downy fur," will alert most readers to the fact that this is no ordinary human narrative voice—but the fact that the story is told from the perspective of a polar bear is not immediately clear. The first-person narrator describes the protagonist's upbringing and youth, just like a human autobiography.

Gradually, the reader comes to understand that the narrator is a polar bear who was trained for the circus by a man named Ivan in Soviet-era Moscow. In later years, the bear writes an autobiography, becomes a famous writer, and defects to West Germany. The "I" of the opening lines turns out to be the first generation, or grandmother, of a three-generation saga.

The novel is divided into three parts—one for each generation. The second section, "Yuki no seppun" (Kiss of Snow), features the first narrator's daughter Tosca as its main character; the hero of part three is Knut, her son. Tawada Yōko's writing has always been marked by a heightened sensitivity to language; in this novel, the alienating and disorienting effect of presenting human language from the perspective of a family of polar bears produces a unique kind of humor.

At the same time, the novel also deals with the twentieth-century history of the Soviet Union and East Germany, successfully blending experimental linguistic whimsy and historical fact. (Numano)

Tawada Yōko

Born in 1960. Studied Russian literature at Waseda University and earned her PhD from the University of Zurich in 2000. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1993 for Inu mukoiri *[trans.* The Bridegroom Was a Dog*]. Has published in both Japanese and German, and won the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize literary prize in 1996 for her work in German. Also a recipient of the Goethe Medal in 2005.*

Tsushima Yūko

Born in 1947. Aspired to be a writer from her student days. Won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers in 1979 for Hikari no ryōbun *[The Territory of Light] and the Yomiuri Literary Prize in 1987 for* Yoru no hikari ni owarete *[Driven by the Light of Night]. Was awarded the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize and the Noma Literary Prize for* Hi no yama: yamazaru ki *[Mountain of Fire: Account of a Wild Monkey]. Her father was the novelist Dazai Osamu.*

Ōgon no yume no uta [Golden Dream Songs]

By Tsushima Yūko

Kōdansha, 2010. 193 x 138 mm. 426 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-06-216648-5.

The latest novel by Tsushima Yūko features a second-person female protagonist who follows the "dream songs" of the title in a series of travels around Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, and Northeast China, eager to hear a performance of the Kyrgyz heroic epic *Manas*. The novel has its roots in the author's interest in the epics of various ethnic groups and her travels around Central Asia researching the *Manas* story.

Tsushima incorporates rich strands of research into her novel. The book's ambitious framework is built upon an intricate interweaving of the animal motifs found in myths from around the world, the complex historical background of Central Asia, and the author's own research into a wide variety of written sources. The result is a colorful world of wolves, golden eagles, sheep, and goats that unfolds across vast expanses of space and time.

Encompassing the whole of Central Asia as its setting, *Ōgon no yume no uta* is a novel of remarkable breadth and scope, ranging widely across history and myth and incorporating numerous tribal groups and individual characters. Not many other women writing in Japan today could pull off such an ambitious work; the novel serves as a reminder of Tsushima Yūko's unique gifts as a writer. (Numano)

Kueki ressha [Train of Suffering]

By Nishimura Kenta

Shinchōsha, 2011. 196 x 132 mm. 150 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-10-303232-8.

Nishimura Kenta writes in what might be called the "wrack and ruin" tradition of confessional "I novels." The "I novel," or *shishōsetsu,* generally consisting of an unembellished account of events drawn directly from the author's life, was one of the dominant genres of twentieth-century Japanese literature. In the "wrack and ruin" version of the genre, the protagonist (which is to say, the writer himself) is normally shown living a depraved existence, drifting inexorably toward self-destruction.

Kueki ressha is a classic example. After graduating from junior high school, nineteen-year-old Kanta drops out of school. He rents a cheap room in Tokyo and works as a day laborer on the docks, scraping together the bare minimum he needs to keep himself in alcohol and prostitutes. He has no girlfriend and practically no friends. When he does begin to get close to someone, he inevitably gets into a drunken argument and severs relations. Kanta's father was arrested as a sex offender, and the son regards himself as tainted by association. He reconciles himself to a life stuck inescapably at the bottom of society. But the novel's depiction of Kanta's dissipated and unhealthy lifestyle, complete with its old-fashioned and exaggerated prose style, may strike contemporary readers less as a classic example of the *shishōsetsu* genre than as an entertaining new type of fiction. Nishimura Kenta has breathed new life into a moribund form and catapulted himself to literary stardom. That this book should have become a bestseller is in itself a remarkable phenomenon. (Numano)

Nishimura Kenta

Born in 1967. After graduating junior high school, worked part-time jobs while pursuing his literary career, inspired largely by the shishōsetsu *genre of confessional literature. Won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers in 2007 for* Ankyo no yado *[Culvert Abode] and the Akutagawa Prize in 2011 for* Kueki ressha *[Train of Suffering].*

ESSAY

Kumada Chikabo

Born in 1911. A painter of detailed illustrations and art for children. Gained fame in 1981 for his work on a picture book version of French entomologist Jean-Henri Casimir Fabre's Book of Insects, *earning him the nickname "Japan's petit Fabre." The book became the first work by a Japanese author to win an award at the Bologna Children's Book Fair the same year. Died in 2009.*

Kumada Chikabo no Kumachika konchūki [Kumada Chikabo's Book of Insects]

By Kumada Chikabo

Kyūryūdō, 2010. 188 x 128 mm. 286 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-7630-1031-5.

Kumada Chikabo was a nature illustrator whose chief work consisted of remarkably detailed illustrations of insects and plants. "I am an insect; the insect is me," Kumada said of himself, and he was certainly remarkably successful at presenting the world from an insect's perspective in his work. Many of his unique drawings are marked by a strikingly bold sense of composition. In one, for example, a thistle droops heavily toward the ground; on top of the thistle a praying mantis waits patiently, while a honeybee buzzes through the air overhead. The picture captures a moment and preserves it, encapsulating the essence of these little lives in delicate colors and shades. Kumada painted with a thin brush, building up an accumulation of fine details using a technique reminiscent of pointillism.

Kumada fell under the spell of insects as a child, when he stumbled upon an original copy of J. H. Fabre's *Book of Insects* in his father's library. As a young man, he worked as a pioneering graphic designer, but later switched careers to become a children's illustrator. Despite having little money, he resolved to make illustrations of insects such as those in Fabre's book his lifework. He devoted himself to this work for the rest of his long life.

This book presents his notebooks. In them, he observes the ecology and characteristics of insects in astonishing detail, making careful note of where they live, what they eat, how they react to a predator's attack. The prose is as vivid and polished as poetry, and brims with fellow feeling for the insects and their short but precious lives. (Yonahara)

Bungō no shokutaku [Great Writers at the Dinner Table]

By Miyamoto Tokuzō

Hakusuisha, 2010. 193 x 134 mm. 232 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-560-08097-9.

Our memories of food are an interesting phenomenon, gaining much of their zest and sweetness from our recollections not only of what we ate, but of when and where we ate it, who we were with at the time, and what we talked about. This book uses a wide-ranging discussion of food to bring many famous literary figures into clear profile. The author studied French literature as a young man—not surprisingly, therefore, his French and American friends make appearances as he discusses the meals and friendships that have left their mark on his life. Alongside bright, happy memories are more bittersweet scenes marked by loneliness and grief.

A vast array of different foods appears: crispy charcoal-grilled eel, a rich cream soup thick with lobster, sushi . . . along with foods that remind Miyamoto of the town where he grew up, including *udon* noodles, octopus sashimi, and sweetfish (*ayu*). But not all of it is high-class, high-priced fare—the book also discusses many of Japan's beloved casual foods.

The enticing descriptions of these foods make a wonderful introduction to Japan's regional diversity and to the fascination that Japanese culture has had with fine food since ancient times.

But perhaps the most enjoyable treats in the collection are the diverting pearls of wisdom that Miyamoto deftly sprinkles into his narrative, ranging over subjects as diverse as the literature of East and West, kabuki, sumo, art, and music. The book is marked by an elegant, conversational tone, and lightened by a refreshing sense of humor. (Yonahara)

Miyamoto Tokuzō

Born in 1930. Debuted as a novelist in 1973 with Rokujū rokubu *[Pilgrimage to 66 Sacred Sites]. Won the Yomiuri Literary Prize in 1987 for the essay collection* Rikishi hyōhaku *[A Wandering Sumo Wrestler] and the Shibata Renzaburō Award in 1991 for* Kohōki *[Chronicle of the Tiger Cannon], a novel depicting the 16th-century Japanese invasion of Korea. Well known for his expertise in a wide range of areas, including sumo wrestling, kabuki, and literature. Died in 2011.*

POETRY

Henmi Yō

Born in 1944. Worked as a journalist in Japan and overseas for Kyōdō News before retiring in 1996 to concentrate on his own writing. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1991 for Jidō kishō sōchi *[Automatic Wake-up Machine] and the Kōdansha Non-Fiction Award in 1994 for* Mono kū hitobito *[People and the Things They Eat]. This latest book won the Nakahara Chūya Prize in 2011.*

Namakubi
[Severed Heads]

By Henmi Yō

Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2010. 215 x 152 mm. 173 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-620-31956-8.

Well known as a novelist and journalist, Henmi Yō is also a gifted poet. This volume collects 46 pieces composed between 2007 and 2010. The gruesome image that provides the title of the collection is taken from "Shūshō" (Autumn Night): "One evening in early autumn/Across the darkening blue of the western skies/I watched a severed head fly across the heavens." Only in the final line is it revealed that the head in question is the poet's own.

A similarly menacing atmosphere envelops "Irie" (The Bay), which in places seems uncannily to anticipate the horrific events of March 11: "The bay stood stagnant, garnet-colored/Like tired blood . . . The bay was exhaustion and fatigue/Something obscene lurking deep beneath the tiredness/Perhaps it was already too late." Indeed, Henmi was born and grew up in Ishinomaki in Miyagi Prefecture, one of the areas worst hit by the tsunami, and has addressed the catastrophe of that day directly in a series of new poems written since the disaster.

This spirited collection, written before the tragedy, is full of what can only be described as a mood of unease. The poems here are a world away from the refined, inaccessible style of much contemporary verse—but this only serves to lend persuasive force to their critiques of modern civilization and the wishy-washy way that language is used in contemporary society. (Numano)

LITERARY ESSAY

Monogatari Nihon suiri shōsetsu-shi
[A Narrative History of the Japanese Mystery Novel]

By Gōhara Hiroshi

Kōdansha, 2010. 194 x 132 mm. 350 pp. ¥2,300. ISBN 978-4-06-216621-8.

Books on the history of modern Japanese literature generally do not mention detective fiction at all. This volume turns its attention to a much-neglected genre, and focuses on previously little-known aspects of its development.

Revelations include the relationship between the detective fiction boom and the legendary tales of Ōoka Tadasuke, a famous Edo-period magistrate, and a discussion of the monologues of the Australian-born raconteur and *rakugo* performer known as "Kairaku-tei Black," published in the nineteenth century.

The study also looks at the relationship between writers of "pure literature" and mystery fiction. Many of Japan's most respected literary figures—among them Mori Ōgai, Izumi Kyōka, Kōda Rohan, Natsume Sōseki, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and Satō Haruo—wrote works influenced by detective fiction. The author presents a compelling argument that these writers' work helped to enrich the soil in which Japanese fiction subsequently developed.

The book provides an easy-to-follow account of how the novels of Matsumoto Seichō enhanced the prestige and profile of the genre now known as "mystery fiction" (*suiri shōsetsu*) in the postwar era, and speculates about reasons for the genre's renewed popularity over the past 20 years or so.

The book does more than simply catalogue the development of a popular genre. It is a highly readable account, based on painstaking research and full of fascinating anecdotes and important new insights. A major contribution to the field. (Chō)

Gōhara Hiroshi

A poet and literary critic born in 1942. Joined the staff of the Yomiuri Shimbun *newspaper after graduating from the School of Political Science and Economics at Waseda University. Won the Mr. H Prize for the poetry collection* Kanan made *[To Canaan] in 1974. His book of criticism* Shijin no tsuma—Takamura Chieko nōto *[The Poet's Wife—Notes on Takamura Chieko] won a Suntory Prize for literary and art criticism in 1983. Won a Mystery Writers of Japan Award in 2006 for* Matsumoto Seichō jiten: Ketteiban *[The Matsumoto Seichō Encyclopaedia: Definitive Edition].*

Yokota Jun'ya

Science fiction author and preeminent scholar of Japanese science fiction, born in 1945. After graduating from the Faculty of Law at Hosei University, debuted as a science fiction writer with his novel Uchū tsūshin X keikaku *[Space Communications Plan X] in 1971. Won the 9th Nihon SF Taishō Award in 1988 for* Kaidanji Oshikawa Shunrō *[Devil of a Fellow: Oshikawa Shunrō].*

Kindai Nihon kisō shōsetsu-shi: Meiji-hen
[A History of the Japanese Imaginative Novel: Meiji]

By Yokota Jun'ya

Pilar Press, 2011. 194 x 132 mm. 1,218 pp. ¥12,000. ISBN 978-4-86194-016-3.

This book will come as an eye-opener to most people familiar with the development of modern Japanese literature. Famous figures from the Meiji era like Natsume Sōseki and Nagai Kafū do not feature at all. Instead, the book is full of authors and novels that most people will never have read or even heard of before.

The original idea behind the project was to write a history of Meiji-era science fiction—but the finished study goes far beyond the confines of the sci-fi genre. Yokota casts his net wide: as well as science fiction, he introduces adventure novels, gothic monster tales, fantasy, martial arts stories, horror, fairytales, and speculative war novels set in the future. In fact, the book covers just about every type of writing that depicts events unlikely to take place in the real world.

This kind of writing has been ignored so thoroughly by scholars of mainstream literature that many works have disappeared without trace. Not only has the author plowed through an incredible range of material in the course of his research—he has also spent a remarkable amount of energy scouring used book stores, gathering together an unparalleled collection of materials. The book is an invaluable reference work, rescuing from oblivion the fiction of countless authors whose names had been buried and forgotten.

Written in an approachable, colloquial style, the book provides detailed plot summaries of many of the works discussed. Despite its length (weighing in at some 1,200 pages), the book is a pleasure to read. (Chō)

CULTURE

Nihon no irezumi to Eikoku ōshitsu
[Japanese Tattoos and the British Royal Family]

By Koyama Noboru

Fujiwara Shoten, 2010. 193 x 132 mm. 272 pp. ¥3,600. ISBN 978-4-89434-778-6.

It was during the Meiji era (1868–1912) that Japan finally reopened its doors to the outside world after more than two centuries of seclusion. Among the many foreign visitors to Japan in those early years of the country's modernization were five British princes. Remarkably, at least four of them had tattoos done during their stay. Japan was working hard to secure a position in international society at the time, and tattoos were outlawed as a "barbaric custom." What made the English princes choose to have themselves tattooed in Japan? Koyama Noboru, the head librarian of Cambridge University's Japanese collection, uses a remarkable array of historical sources, including contemporary travelogues and newspaper articles, to tell the fascinating and little-known story of intercultural exchanges through tattoos in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For travelers, getting a tattoo was the perfect way to acquire a permanent, portable souvenir of their time in Japan. Highly skilled tattooists opened parlors catering to visiting foreigners, and the popularity of Japanese tattoos boomed. Evidently even visiting royalty was impressed by the quality of Japanese tattoos.

The book examines the history of tattooing, introducing genealogies of tattooists, the process by which tattooing spread to the West, and the technical development of tattooing techniques and tools. And by tracing the tattoo fad across Western Europe, Koyama also sheds light on the complex web of intermarriage that linked numerous countries through their relationships to the British royal family. It all makes for a truly thrilling book. (Yonahara)

Koyama Noboru

Born in 1948. Completed a master's in history at Keio University. Currently in charge of the Japanese collection at the Cambridge University Library. Published works include Kokusai kekkon daiichi-gō *[The First International Marriage],* Hatenko "Meiji ryūgakusei" retsuden *[trans.* Japanese Students at Cambridge University in the Meiji Era, 1868–1912: Pioneers for the Modernization of Japan*], and* Kenburijji Daigaku hizō Meiji koshashin *[Early Photographs of the Meiji Era at the University of Cambridge].*

Suzuki Toshiyuki

Born in 1956. Currently a professor in the Faculty of Letters at Chuo University, specializing in Edo-period Japanese literature and the history of the book. Published works include Tsutaya Jūzaburō *and* Edo no dokusho netsu *[Passion for Reading in Edo]. Awarded the Japan Society of Publishing Studies Award for his research into the history of modern and early-modern publishing.*

Ezōshiya: Edo no ukiyoe shoppu [Ezōshiya: The *Ukiyoe* Shops of Edo]

By Suzuki Toshiyuki

Heibonsha, 2010. 194 x 131 mm. 262 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-582-84230-2.

As the city of Edo (modern Tokyo) developed around the shogun's castle into a major political city inhabited by large numbers of samurai and their servants, it grew into a city that was defined by an insatiable appetite for information. In an age before television and the Internet, book and print publishers were responsible for circulating information—and the leading form of printed matter in Edo was small illustrated booklets (*sōshi*), particularly *ukiyoe* prints. The *sōshi* contained accounts of sensational stories, the latest gossip, and reports on recent events—information weighted strongly in favor of an ever-shifting "now." Examples included simple block-printed gazettes known as *yomi-uri* and *kawaraban*—early versions of what grew into modern newspapers—but the most famous of all Edo *sōshi* consisted of polychromatic *ukiyoe* prints depicting scenes from the popular drama and portraits of actors and courtesans. In tandem with the theater districts and pleasure quarters, these prints played a central role in Edo culture.

Collections of shops specializing in *ukiyoe* and other kinds of *sōshi* grew up in the busy districts of the city. Suzuki's study provides a vivid and sure-handed account of the development of these shops and their position within the urban environment—how the books were arranged for sale in the front of the shop, how people related to these urban media spaces, how print shops in Edo differed from those in the regions and in Kyoto and Osaka, and finally how they declined and faded from prominence following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. (Yoshimi)

SOCIETY

Hanran no Rokujū nendai [The 1960s: Insurrection]

By Nagasaki Hiroshi

Ronsōsha, 2010. 187 x 128 mm. 306 pp. ¥2,500. ISBN 978-4-8460-0880-2.

The author is a veteran both of the violent protests against the revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty in 1960 and of the student movement that broke out toward the end of the decade. Here, the author takes a detached and unsentimental look at these two major uprisings, examining his own involvement relative to the wider historical context and bringing out the implicit connections between the protests and Japan's period of rapid economic growth.

The author argues that the Security Treaty crisis of 1960 represented a major revolution—a mass movement that forced the prime minister to resign. But it was not the kind of revolution that the New Left dreamed of at the time. Instead, it was a revolution that pushed forward the desires of the masses and the consumerist subjectivity of the people with an irresistible energy. Through the Security Treaty protests, the Japanese people succeeding in moving beyond the postwar era, forgetting the war, poverty, and Japan's subservience to the United States. The movement marked the incarnation of a new kind of postwar nationalism. For the author, the "Anpo Revolution" opened the floodgates to the modern mass consumer society.

Nagasaki sees the events as almost inevitable: a bursting of the banks of what had been unconsciously repressed, resulting in serious social losses. Handing down a harsh assessment of the movements in which he himself took part, the author sees the Security Treaty demonstrations of 1960 and the student movement of 1968 as parts of the same interconnected series of events. (Yoshimi)

Nagasaki Hiroshi

Born in 1937. Graduated from the School of Science of the University of Tokyo. Was a member of the Communist League during the 1960 movement against the Japan-US Security Treaty, and participated in the All-Campus Joint Struggle at the University of Tokyo that began in 1968. Works include Hanran-ron *[On Rebellion],* 1960-nendai: hitotsu no seishin shi *[The Sixties: A History of the Spirit of an Age], and* Seikimatsu no shakaishugi *[Socialism at the End of the Century].*

DIPLOMACY

Hatano Sumio

Born in 1947. Earned a PhD from Keio University. Currently professor and library director at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Tsukuba, where he specializes in Japanese political and diplomatic history. Publications include "Daitōa sensō" no jidai—Nitchū sensō kara Nichi-Bei-Ei sensō e *[Age of the Greater East Asian War—From the Sino-Japanese War to the War with the United States and Britain] and* Bakuryō-tachi no Shinjuwan *[Pearl Harbor as the Heads of Staff Saw It]. Was awarded the Yoshida Shigeru Prize in 1991 and again in 1996.*

Rekishi toshite no Nichibei Anpo Jōyaku [The Japan-US Security Treaty as History]

By Hatano Sumio

Iwanami Shoten, 2010. 193 x 132 mm. 291 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-00-025656-8.

The revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty in 1960 was one of the defining events in the history of postwar Japan. Most previous studies have relied on disclosed American materials. Although numerous researchers have beaten a trail to the National Archives in Washington, facilities in Japan were much less developed.

However, this has begun to change. Shortly after the Democratic Party of Japan took office in 2009, the new government ordered an investigation into the Cold War "secret agreements" between Japan and the United States. This led to an increased commitment to the principle that diplomatic papers should be disclosed after a period of 30 years. The present study takes advantage of these developments, using Japanese sources to provide a detailed account of diplomatic negotiations in the lead-up to the revision of the treaty. The book reveals the jockeying between Japan, eager to maintain its three non-nuclear principles even while continuing to shelter under the US nuclear umbrella, and the United States, which insisted on its right to make free use of military bases in Okinawa. The book provides a vivid account of what went on behind the scenes: which side proposed what, the precise language used by both sides, responses in the Diet and Congress, differences between the prime minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the efforts of bureaucrats to resort to subsidiary agreements rather than an entirely new treaty. This pioneering study shows how important the fuller disclosure of Japanese papers will be for future historians of diplomatic relations. (Yoshimi)

RELIGION

Hito wa hitori de shinu [People Die Alone]

By Shimada Hiromi

NHK Shuppan, 2011. 171 x 110 mm. 216 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-14-088338-9.

Increasing numbers of people in Japan are dying alone, with no one to look after them in their final days.

Most people regard the phenomenon as one of the tragic downsides of the modern urban lifestyle. But the author of this study takes a different approach. According to Shimada, the Japanese have deliberately chosen a society without close connections as part of their pursuit of greater individual freedom.

During the economic boom years of the postwar era, many people moved to cities in search of prosperity and freedom. But even in the cities, communities continued to exist; human relationships did not suddenly vanish altogether. Social ties continued to flourish within Japan's corporate culture, for example, where companies provided their employees with surrogate family relationships. Networks of local relationships grew up between parents whose children attended the same schools. The New Religions also helped to fill the gaps in the social fabric.

But the increasing tendency of companies to rely on nonpermanent staff has eroded these relationships, and also made starting a family economically unfeasible for many. Increasingly, people see living alone as their best option. The author argues that what is important is not whether people die alone, but whether they are able to die with dignity.

Drawing on personal experience, the book is persuasively argued. By looking at death, the book has valuable suggestions to make about how people ought to live. This is a book that overturns conventional thinking on the subject. (Chō)

Shimada Hiromi

Born in 1953. A scholar of religion. Completed a doctorate at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology of the University of Tokyo. Numerous published works include Oumu: Naze shūkyō wa terorizumu o unda no ka *[Aum: Why Did a Religion Give Birth to Terrorism?],* Sōshiki wa iranai *[No Need for Funerals], and* Sōkagakkai.

LANGUAGE

Yanase Naoki

Translator and scholar of English literature, born in 1943. Studied literature in the doctoral program at Waseda University. Left his university teaching post in 1991 to concentrate on translation. His Japanese version of James Joyce's Finnegans Wake, *widely regarded as untranslatable, won the Japanese Translation Culture Award in 1994. Numerous books include* Jeimuzu Joisu no nazo o toku *[Solving the Riddle of James Joyce] and* Nihongo wa tensai de aru *[The Genius of the Japanese Language].*

Nihongo hodo omoshiroi mono wa nai [Nothing Is as Fun as Japanese]

By Yanase Naoki

Shinchōsha, 2010. 196 x 133 mm. 191 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 978-4-10-303952-5.

Yanase Naoki is a much-in-demand translator who came to widespread prominence when he produced a wonderfully enjoyable Japanese translation of James Joyce's notoriously difficult *Finnegans Wake*, a book that most people had previously regarded as untranslatable. Yanase is a particular favorite with younger readers, having translated into Japanese the books of writers such as Roald Dahl and Lewis Carroll.

Yanase says he became a translator out of a love of language—and "because I became fascinated by a language that was not Japanese, and that I came to love almost as much as my own." This book consists of a series of special classes Yanase gave to a class of sixth-graders on the subject of the Japanese language. Including his conversations with the children, the book explores the richness of Japanese and the nature of language itself.

Yanase speculates that the first human language consisted of little more than cries and screams, before people eventually developed words with a more or less fixed meaning that everyone could agree on. Yanase regards language as a living thing and tells his pupils they must value it and use it carefully. He also discusses the development of writing, and the unique allure of Chinese characters. The world of language is a world of limitless possibilities, despite the rules that exist to keep things in order. In his enjoyable question-and-answer sessions with his students, Yanase stresses how important it is not to be afraid of making mistakes. It is a pleasure to watch the children's imaginations start to take flight under his guidance. (Yonahara)

SCIENCE

Tsunami saigai [Tsunami Disasters]

By Kawata Yoshiaki

Iwanami Shoten, 2010. 173 x 105 mm. 191 pp. ¥720. ISBN 978-4-00-431286-4.

The tsunami that ravaged the Pacific coast of northern Japan on March 11 was not, as some have claimed, an event "beyond the scope of expectations." This book was published in December 2010—three months before the disaster. Its author is one of Japan's leading authorities on disaster prevention. His book foresees with chilling precision the tragedy of March 11. The book provides easy-to-follow explanations of why tsunamis occur, how they differ from regular waves, and why they cause such terrible devastation.

Tsunamis occur on a regular periodic cycle, but because the intervals in the cycle are so long, people tend to forget the lessons of previous disasters. The Sanriku Coast that bore the brunt of the March 11 tsunami, for example, is located in what Kawata calls a "fatal" zone where tsunamis are a regular occurrence. To make matters worse, the geographic structure of the seabed offshore exacerbates the devastation caused by tsunamis when they do occur.

The author underlines the fact that in many cases lives can be saved if people will only take the appropriate measures to evacuate. It is shocking that we have not built a better system to minimize the risk of tsunamis. Anyone who reads this book will surely be horrified that more was not done to act on the scientific knowledge available and the warnings given. The problem facing us today is not that science cannot find solutions to the issues we face. The problem is that we lack the ability to synthesize, to bind science and society together pluralistically, reach consensus on the risks we face, and build a society appropriate to dealing with them. (Yoshimi)

Kawata Yoshiaki

Born in 1946. Completed a doctoral degree in engineering at Kyoto University. Head of the Faculty of Safety Science at Kansai University and executive director of the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution. Numerous awards, include the United Nations Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction in 2007 and the Cabinet Office Disaster Prevention Achievement Award in 2009. Specializes in disaster alleviation and prevention and crisis management. Published works include Toshi dai saigai *[Urban Mega-Disaster].*

No. 7 Hayashi Fumiko

Famous for her unflinching portrayals of poverty and the hardships of working-class life in Japan before and after World War II, Hayashi Fumiko was one of the most popular Japanese women writers of the twentieth century. Several films based on her books by director Naruse Mikio are among the masterpieces of Japanese cinema.

Love, Poverty, and Postwar Japan

Hayashi Fumiko (1903–51) rose from poverty to achieve fame and fortune as a writer until her sudden death aged just 46. Her mother and foster-father were itinerant peddlers, and Fumiko had an unsettled childhood, changing schools frequently. As she wrote in *Hōrōki* [trans. *Diary of a Vagabond*], the work that brought her to prominence, "I am fated to be a vagabond and a wanderer without a hometown to call my own."

Hayashi was 18 years old when she moved to Tokyo from the city of Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture in 1922. She worked in a variety of lowly menial jobs—as a shoe attendant at a public bath, writing address labels for a magazine publisher, as a clerk in a securities firm, and as a worker in a celluloid factory, among others—in a manner reminiscent of today's young "freeters," who flit from one job to another without ever settling down to permanent employment. Finally, she took a job as a waitress in a café.

Throughout it all, Hayashi Fumiko dreamed of becoming a writer. She wrote poetry and children's stories in her free moments at work, and became intimate with young poets and playwrights.

The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 changed Tokyo dramatically. Japan's old system of values was destroyed and the economic boom fueled by the massive rebuilding effort meant there were plenty of jobs to be had, albeit mostly menial ones. Even a young woman newly arrived from a provincial city was able to scrape by. Hayashi Fumiko's resilience and appetite for life matched the vitality of Tokyo itself as it began to rebuild after the disaster.

In 1930, her first novel was published. Remarkably for a debut work by an unknown writer, *Hōrōki* became a bestseller, and a literary star was born.

In a sense, *Hōrōki* was a kind of autobiography. It describes the heroine's childhood experiences traveling from town to town with her peddler parents in a mining region in Kyushu, and her unsettled youth working a succession of poorly paid jobs after moving to Tokyo.

It is a record of a poor life, but not a gloomy one. In spite of the poverty, the heroine's belief in her dream of a brighter future as a writer enables her to rise above the misery of her immediate situation. The novel is permeated with a lively sense of humor that enables Hayashi's narrator almost to relish her poverty. More than anything, it is a life marked by the freedom to live on one's own wits in the middle of the big city, unshackled by anything or anyone. Long before the feminist movement came to widespread prominence, Hayashi Fumiko was acting out its precepts in her daily life.

Despite the poverty, Fumiko's life was not without its enjoyments: living in a Shinjuku flophouse, Fumiko took pleasure in eating simple rice-bowl breakfasts alongside manual laborers in cheap restaurants, and in bicycling excursions with her fellow workers in the mornings and moments of free time. Written in a lively, feminine, colloquial style brimming with a sense of optimism and strength amid the poverty, the novel made liberal use of onomatopoeia, giving the prose a refreshingly youthful feel.

Hayashi Fumiko was an active writer who traveled widely. Following the success of *Hōrōki,* she traveled to Taiwan, then a Japanese colony, and to Manchuria and China. In 1931 she fulfilled a dream by traveling on the Trans-Siberian railway to Paris, where she spent around six months. She also visited London during this time. Hayashi Fumiko regarded herself as a born wanderer; travel provided her with the stimulation she needed for her writing.

She traveled several times to the frontlines during Japan's long wars in Asia. Shortly after the outbreak of war with China, she traveled to Nanking as a newspaper reporter. A year later, in 1938, she traveled to the frontlines as a reporter attached to the army, and achieved celebrity when she became the first Japanese writer to enter the city of Hankou. She later traveled to Singapore, Borneo, Java, and the Philippines.

After the war, some people accused Hayashi of collaboration with the militarist regime, but the motivation for these trips was not primarily militaristic. Instead, she was driven by a desire to share the suffering of regular soldiers on the frontlines. Once she realized the true nature of what was happening, she fell silent and wrote little else for the duration of the war.

After its defeat, Japan was reborn as a democracy under occupation by the United States and the other allied powers. For many people in Japan, this was a time of hope and peace, democracy, and freedom of speech. But not for Hayashi Fumiko, who in her work preferred to concentrate on the dark side of the postwar era—defeat, wounds, and exhaustion. She was more interested in Japan as a vanquished nation than as a country reborn as a democracy.

Fumiko broke her silence after the war ended, writing prolifically and publishing numerous pieces (particularly short stories) depicting the poverty-stricken lives of people struggling at the bottom of society in postwar Japan: demobilized soldiers, war widows, and evacuees from Japan's former colonies. Back in Japan after the war, soldiers and colonists struggle to find a place for themselves; women who have lost their husbands in the war are forced into prostitution. In a succession of bleak novels and stories, Hayashi Fumiko depicted the mental suffering and anguish of these people as their lives fall apart amid the

chaos of defeated Japan. Having spent her own youth at the bottom of society, Fumiko was well placed to respond to the poverty and desperation of postwar Japan.

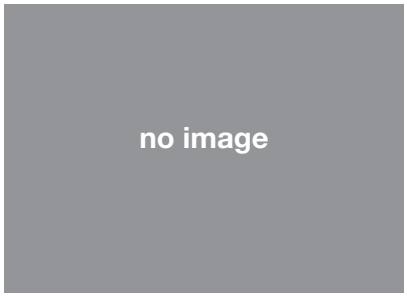
Her sympathy for the suffering of the immediate postwar years reached its apogee in her masterpiece *Ukigumo* [trans. *Floating Cloud*], which depicts the adulterous affair between a couple struggling to find a place in the new age amid the chaos of postwar Japan. Hayashi Fumiko's reputation fell into decline somewhat after her death, but beginning in the early 1990s a number of new studies and several plays and novels about the writer prompted a critical reevaluation. The disparities of wealth and poverty that have become common in Japanese society since the collapse of the bubble economy have given renewed relevance to the works of Hayashi Fumiko and their powerful evocations of a previous age of chaos and confusion.

(Kawamoto Saburō,
literary and film critic)

An Introduction to the Films

Meshi [Repast] (1951)
Directed by Naruse Mikio

Set in peaceful Osaka after the chaos of the immediate postwar years is over, this film depicts the humdrum daily lives of a couple grown tired of each other: childless housewife (Hara Setsuko) and her salaryman husband (Uehara Ken). At first glance, their life together seems comfortable if uneventful, but the wife gradually despairs of her empty, meaningless days and the drudgery of housework. The film was ahead of its time in depicting a housewife's unhappiness in the days when a woman was limited to traditional roles in society. The novel was left unfinished at the author's sudden death. One of six film adaptations of Hayashi Fumiko novels by Naruse Mikio, an ardent admirer of the author's work.



Bangiku [Late Chrysanthemum] (1954)
Directed by Naruse Mikio

Four women, all popular geishas before the war, begin new lives as they reach middle age in postwar Japan. Based on three short stories: "Bangiku" [Late Chrysanthemum], "Suisen" [Daffodils], and "Shirasagi" [Egret]. The decision to cast middle-aged women rather than young starlets in the lead roles was highly unusual for the 1950s. The four women are played by some of Japan's finest actresses: Sugimura Haruko, Sawamura Sadako, Hosokawa Chikako, and Mochizuki Yūko. Sugimura Haruko gives a particularly fine performance as a resilient, independent-minded woman who becomes a moneylender.

Ukigumo [Floating Cloud] (1955)
Directed by Naruse Mikio

The original novel is fine enough—but the film version is one of the masterpieces of Japanese cinema, famously admired by Ozu Yasujirō. Traces a love affair between a typist (Takamine Hideko) and an engineer in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (Mori Masayuki) thrown together in exotic Indochina during the war. Their relationship drags on unhappily back in postwar Japan, where the engineer has a wife and family. Tiring of her doomed love affair, the heroine dies in despair in Yakushima, then the southernmost point under Japanese control. Features a powerful script by Mizuki Yōko, one of Japan's finest scriptwriters.

Using Books to Help Disaster Victims

The publishing world has been rallying around to help victims of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

One unique undertaking is a new children's picture book written specially for disaster relief by Fukushima-born author Akiba Tamami. *Kin Bāchan no Hanamiyama* [Granny Kin and the Hanamiyama Park], published by Open End, tells the story of a mother and son who designed the Hanamiyama Park in Fukushima City and opened it free of charge to the public. Today, the park is one of the city's leading attractions, particularly famous for its cherry blossoms in the spring. For every book that is sold, another copy will be donated to children affected by the disaster and the ongoing nuclear crisis.

Authors and other publishing figures have been using Twitter and other social networking services to send out messages and publicize projects since the disaster. One particularly impressive undertaking was *2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake,* a compilation published in Japanese and English of 85 firsthand accounts of the disaster and its aftermath provided by people in Japan and overseas. The project started when a British resident of Japan who goes by the online alias of "Our Man in Abiko" tweeted about plans to write and publish a book within a week and donate the proceeds to the Red Cross. Within 15 hours, he had received 74 manuscripts. One was from a New Zealander married to a woman from Fukushima, not long after his homeland suffered an earthquake disaster of its own. All the editing, design, and translation work for the book was done by a team of volunteers brought together over Twitter. The man behind the project says he has never met most of the people involved in the project face to face. The book demonstrates the remarkable reach of the Twitter phenomenon.

Another writer who has used the power of Twitter to publicize his work is Fukushima-born poet Wagō Ryōichi, who used the service to publish short poems written since the disaster to commemorate the dead and address people's fears of radiation. Originally published on Twitter, the poems went on to have a major impact after word of mouth brought them to the attention of a larger audience. Three books that bring together the Twitter poems and interviews with survivors have been published as *Shi no kaikō* [Encounters with Poetry] (Asahi Shimbun Shuppan), *Shi no tsubute* [Pebbles of Poetry] (Tokuma Shoten), and *Shi no mokurei* [Silent Prayers of Poetry] (Shinchōsha).

In other earthquake-related news, 65,000 copies were printed of *Pray for Japan* (Kōdansha), a collection of messages of encouragement sent to Japan from people around the world. This is just one of several books that have been published to raise funds for disaster relief.

Community Bookstore in Fukushima Village Closes Down

The Hon no Mori Iitate (Iitate Forest of Books) bookstore in the small community of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, closed down on June 15. Evacuation of the local population has been underway since Iitate was designated a planned evacuation zone following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The Forest of Books, opened in 1995, was the only bookstore in Japan owned and run by a village on a municipal basis.

Storytime sessions for children, free shipping, and a welcoming, browser-friendly atmosphere made the store a popular hub of the local community. With no end in sight to the nuclear crisis in Fukushima, there is currently no schedule in place for a reopening date.

Book Sales Rise in Tōhoku

Book sales have been on the rise in the Tōhoku region since the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. This comes against the backdrop of a publishing industry slump and despite the fact that many bookstores in the region closed temporarily after the disaster.

According to the Research Institute for Publications, book sales in Tōhoku for April were up by several percentage points from the same month last year. This was in contrast to an overall drop in sales nationwide for the same month. Possible reasons for the strong performance of the sector in Tōhoku include the popularity of books and commemorative photo collections related to the disaster, as well as news magazines with special features on the earthquake and tsunami and the nuclear crisis in Fukushima. Children's books have also been selling well.

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The awards have been announced for the 145th Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes. There was no winner of the Akutagawa Prize. Ikeido Jun won the Naoki Prize for *Shitamachi roketto* [Downtown Rocket], published by Shōgakukan.

This was the third time Ikeido had been nominated for the Naoki Prize. His prize-winning story deals with the dedication and craftsmanship at several small manufacturing companies located in traditional old neighborhoods of Tokyo.

In the novel, the protagonist rekindles an ambition to build a space rocket—a dream he had set aside when he took over the management of his father's small factory. This "business entertainment" novel depicts managers and technicians who continue to believe in their dreams in the face of opposition from large corporations. The judges praised Ikeido for his career dedicated to fictional depictions of life in Japanese companies.

Mishima and Yamamoto Prizes

The Shinchō Society for the Promotion of Literary Arts has announced the winners of the 24th Mishima Yukio and Yamamoto Shūgorō Prizes. Imamura Natsuko won the Mishima Yukio Prize for *Kochira Amiko* [This Is Amiko], published by Chikuma Shobō. The Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize went to Kubo Misumi for *Fugainai boku wa sora o mita* [Cowering, I Saw the Sky] (see *JBN* No. 68), published by Shinchōsha.

Kochira Amiko is a retitled version of Imamura's debut work "Atarashii musume" [New Daughter], which won the Dazai Osamu Prize. The book

depicts the daily life of an eccentric, capricious young girl as her family slowly falls apart.

Fugainai boku wa sora o mita is a collection of five linked stories dealing with contemporary themes such as sex, poverty, and child-raising. Each story is told from the perspective of a different character, including the male high school student of the title.

Tōhan Bestseller List for the First Half of 2011

Book distributor Tōhan Co., Ltd. has published its list of the bestselling books of the first half of 2011 (Dec. 2010–May 2011). The top-selling book over the period was Higashigawa Tokuya's *Nazotoki wa dinā no ato de* [Solving Mysteries Is for After Dinner], winner of the Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize. The book has sold over one million copies.

Placing second was Iwasaki Natsumi's *Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Dorakkā no "Manejimento" o yondara* [What If the Female Manager of a High-School Baseball Team Read Peter Drucker's *Management*?], one of the runaway hits of last year. The book continues to attract attention, thanks in part to anime and film versions that have been released this year.

In third place was the novel *KAGEROU* by Saitō Tomohiro, an actor who uses the stage name "Mizushima Hiro." There was a familiar look to the top of the list, with many of last year's bestsellers continuing to sell well.

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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.*

- *Hidamari gensōkyoku* [Sunlit Fantasia]. By Yang Yi. Kōdansha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-06-216704-8. A housewife describes life in her new home with her husband and their three-year-old son.
- *Karada no iinari* [At the Mercy of the Body]. By Uchizawa Junko. Asahi Shimbun Publications, 2010. ISBN 978-4-02-250819-5. The author battles with her own body during a struggle with illness, describing her changing state of mind in a series of unflinchingly honest essays.
- *Teishoku to bungaku* [Set Meals and Literature]. By Kon Tōji. Hon no zasshisha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-86011-211-0. An analysis of changes in Japanese literature and food culture from the unique perspective of "set lunches" as they appear in literary works.
- *Inaka no nichiyōbi* [Sundays in the Countryside]. By Sasaki Mikirō. Misuzu Shobō, 2010. ISBN 978-4-622-07557-8. In this series of essays the author, who for the past 25 years has spent weekends in a mountain cabin, writes about building a tree house and his experiences of rural life.
- *Jinsei ippan ni sōtairon* [Relativity for Daily Life]. By Sutō Yasushi.Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010. ISBN978-4-13-063354-3. This collection of essays by a physicist goes beyond scientific questions to touch on a diverse range of subjects.
- *Gendai bungaku ronsō* [Contemporary Debates About Literature]. By Koyano Ton. Chikuma Shobō, 2010. ISBN 978-4-480-01501-3. Introduces 17 major "debates about literature" since the 1960s. The book sheds light on the background to the debates, their treatment in the media, and the social significance of the debates themselves.
- *Korona* [Corona]. By Ishikawa Naoki. Seidosha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-7917-6582-9. A photographic account of 10 years spent on the trail of the ocean-dwelling peoples of the South Pacific, across a vast area known as the "Polynesian Triangle."
- *Cha* [Tea]. By Sen Sō-oku. Shinchōsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-10-610392-6. A modern discussion of the art of tea by a leading young tea master, marked by the author's deep familiarity with contemporary art.
- *Kazoku shimbun* [Family Newspaper]. Photos by Asada Masashi, text by Kyōdō Tsūshin. Gentōsha, 2010. ISBN 978-4-344-01930-0. Uses photographs and text to explore the diversity of the Japanese family.
- *Eiga to iu tekunorojī keiken* [Movies: An Experience of Technology]. By Hase Masato. Seikyūsha, 2010. ISBN978-4-7872-7294-2. Treating the experience of watching a movie as an experience of technology, this book considers new ways of reimagining the human potential for freedom.
- *Ōgai no koibito* [Ōgai's Sweetheart]. By Konno Tsutomu. NHK Shuppan, 2010. ISBN 978-4-14-081442-0. A nonfictional account of the author's quest for the German woman who provided the real-life model for the "Dancing Girl" in the famous 1890 story by literary giant Mori Ōgai.
- *Okinawa kūhaku no ichinen* [Okinawa: A Year of Blank Space]. By Kabira Nario. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2011. ISBN 978-4-642-03801-0. This book examines the policy aims of US administrators during the first year of the postwar occupation of Okinawa.
- *Genbaku ga keshita Hiroshima* [Hiroshima Before the Bomb]. By Tanabe Masaaki. Bungei Shunjū, 2010. ISBN 978-4-16-373200-8. An attempt to restore a picture of Hiroshima, the city and its people, as it was before the Bomb, using computer graphics and large numbers of valuable photographs provided by survivors.
- *Okinawa o kiku* [Listening to Okinawa]. By Shinjō Ikuo. Misuzu Shobō, 2010. ISBN 978-4-622-07570-7. An attempt to think seriously about Okinawa by listening to the diversity of voices from the islands.
- *Kindai no chōkoku to Kyoto gakuha* ["Overcoming Modernity" and the Kyoto School]. Edited by Sakai Naoki and Isomae Jun'ichi. Ibunsha, 2010. ISBN978-4-7531-0285-3. A reexamination of the "Overcoming Modernity" debate and the philosophy of the Kyoto School from a contemporary perspective.
- *Nihongo Gokan no jiten* [A "Feel for Language" Dictionary of Japanese]. By Nakamura Akira. Iwanami Shoten, 2010. ISBN 978-4-00-080313-7. This dictionary, based on the author's in-depth studies of the Japanese language, concentrates on achieving "nuance" through an awareness of the subtle differences between words.

Asada Jirō, a Great Literary Entertainer

"Novels are entertainment, nothing more," proclaims bestselling, award-winning author Asada Jirō.

Whether in his tear-jerking short stories, grand historical works, humorous picaresque novels, gripping samurai mysteries, or essays on gambling, Asada is true to this dictum, amusing the reader with both straightforward prose and elegant phrases.

Since his debut at the age of 39, Asada, now 60, has written more than 100 books. His oeuvre appeals to an incredibly broad readership. In "Poppoya" [trans. "The Stationmaster"], for example, he moved readers to tears with his portrayal of an aging railway man facing the closure of his station and coming to grips with the sorrows of his past. This inspirational novella, with a slight supernatural twist, was made into a hit film, a TV drama, and a graphic novel. The collection in which it appeared sold more than 2.0 million copies, and the story won the prestigious Naoki Prize in 1997.

Twelve other popular stories by him, including "Metoro ni notte" [On the Subway], a winner of the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for new writers, have also been turned into movies. Eight of his novels—including *Mibu gishi den* [A Legend of the Righteous Samurai of Mibu], which garnered the Shibata Renzaburō Prize—have been adapted for TV, while countless other stories have been dramatized for the stage.

But these visualized versions of Asada's stories, as successful as they may be, fail to convey the innermost emotion he vividly expresses in text.

"For a writer, who cannot use sound and color, words are the only weapon to convey messages, and novels are the only means through which the creator can portray the thoughts and feelings of his characters," explains Asada, who says he never visualizes his stories while penning them. "Young writers are tainted by visual images, so novels have become more like camera work, merely depicting a sequence of scene images . . . which is a shame."

The novelist still uses pen and paper, but says he never rewrites a word. "The quality of a novel will deteriorate if the writer thinks that sentences can be amended later," he states. "Just as you don't want to hire a carpenter who repairs over and over again when building your house, you don't want novelists who start writing without mapping out a grand design. I feel mortified when I need to correct words."

Though nearly everyone in Japan knows of Asada's high-quality works, few know of the writer's own early background, which had all the drama of his novels.

There was the well-to-do childhood in downtown Tokyo, followed by sudden impoverishment following his parents' divorce. Asada admits that many of his protagonists are infused with the spirit of quintessential Tokyoites, as he was raised by his grandparents in the city.

There were the two intense years he spent with the Japan Self-Defense Forces, which he joined in 1971, a year after the popular author Mishima Yukio killed himself at its headquarters. Asada enlisted to seek the reason for his icon's death. One of his short story collections, entitled *Hohei no honryō* [Soldiers' Sphere], was based on his rigorous SDF experiences.

Then there were the years he spent founding a women's apparel company, only to see it go bankrupt. He then relaunched the business, eventually making it into a success. He also went through a period when he lived on money earned from gambling—which helps explain the many essays he has written related to horse racing.

Despite the rather indirect route that he took to becoming an author, Asada, who started submitting scripts to publishers when he was in junior high school, never doubted that he would end up as a wordsmith.

In the early years he used different pen names for each work, and it took time for him to be recognized as the single author of his body of writing. But the long period during which he went unnoticed never discouraged him. "I'm an extremely optimistic man," laughs Asada.

Today he is swamped with commissions from publishers. He is now serializing three full-length novels in separate magazines and tackling a grand fictional series about the latter Qing dynasty in China. *Sōkyū no subaru* [Stars in the Firmament] (see *JBN* No. 17), which started in 1996, caused a sensation in Japan and China by introducing a new interpretation of the roles of the Empress Dowager Cixi and the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin. The series continues to this day, and is enchanting a new generation of readers.

All of Asada's historical stories are set in Japan or China of the last 150 years, another example being his recent novel *Owarazaru natsu* [The Unending Summer] (see *JBN* No. 67), in which he introduces the relatively unknown battle against the Soviet Union immediately following Japan's surrender at the end of World War II. He says his role is to shed light on the relationship between existing conditions and "those of the recent past," as "some history can only be traced by fictional literature."

While his historical novels are particularly valuable, it is no exaggeration to say that each of Asada's stories is a gem in itself, managing to portray characters in a manner his readers can readily relate to.

Recently elected as president of the Japan P.E.N. Club, Asada Jirō brings both enjoyment and discipline to his work, keeping the reader coming back for more.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)

Asada Jirō

Born in 1951. Won the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for new writers for "Metoro ni notte," the Naoki Prize for "Poppoya," the Shibata Renzaburō Prize for *Mibu gishi den,* the Chuō Kōron Literary Prize and Shiba Ryōtarō Prize for *Ohara meshi mase* [Cut Your Belly Open], the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for Literature for *Chūgen no niji* [Rainbow Over the Chinese Plains], and the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award for *Owarazaru natsu.*