

JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

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SPRING 2013



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Two Years On from 3/11

A Look at Some of the Most Interesting Nonfictional Treatments of the Triple Disaster of March 2011

Yonahara Kei

Two years have passed since the disaster of March 11, 2011. The disaster not only marked the end of an era in which we took the benefits of prosperity for granted. It also served as a reminder of the extent to which this very prosperity was built on the sacrifice of the regions. Two years on, recovery plans have made little progress, and cracks are beginning to appear in the community spirit that brought the nation together in support of the affected areas after the disaster. Memories of the disaster are starting to fade.

Even so, a number of writers and thinkers with roots in the region continue to reflect on their experiences working with the people of Tōhoku since the disaster. Shocked by what happened and tormented by a deep sense of loss, a grim sense of obligation to pass on their bitter experiences to future generations has pressed these people to leave a record of what took place.

One work that conveys just how dramatically the world changed on that day is Hatakeyama Naoya's *Kesengawa* [The Kesen River], which combines photographs and text. Hatakeyama is a photographer who grew up in Rikuzen Takata, a town that was almost entirely destroyed in the tsunami. Hatakeyama's photographs are well known for their precise sense of composition, often juxtaposing human beings and untamed nature. These pictures of his hometown were taken with no expectation that they would ever be published. The quiet pictures of everyday scenes took on a special significance after the place depicted in the photographs was torn from existence.

"Something terrible was happening. But from where I was standing, I couldn't get a clear picture of what was going on." The author gets on his motorbike and rides from Tokyo to Tōhoku in search of his missing mother and two sisters who still live in the town where he grew up. Radiation leaks in Fukushima force him to take a detour through the mountains. His itinerary is described in detail, along with the emotions and thoughts that well up inside him as he travels. Turning the pages, the reader comes across photographs showing the mouth of the Kesen River and the local town before the disaster struck. The prose and photographs juxtapose present and past; the stresses and strains of the author's present circumstances alternating with the old town as it still exists inside his memory.

As the author's route brings him within reach of his hometown, three blank pages are inserted into the text, followed by a double-page spread of photographs showing the devastation. The text records the sequence of events till just before the author's reunion with his sisters,

but says nothing about his encounter with his mother's body. The quietly reflective tone forces the reader to confront the scale of what has been lost.

Ōguchi Ryōko's poetry collection *Tori-san naita* [The Little Birdies Are Singing] brings together poems published between 2005 and 2012. In the title piece, a mother and her small child are looking up at the cherry blossoms in full bloom. Spring has arrived in Tōhoku, and the birds sing as the petals flutter in the gentle sunlight. "Listen Mommy, the little birdies are singing," the child chirrups, forcing her mother to raise a smile.

But the major changes brought by the March 11 disaster and its aftermath shake the writer and force her to make a series of difficult major decisions. Making deft use of the limitations of the tanka form, she describes her experiences in the days after the disaster. She is overcome by a feeling of powerlessness as she sees the horror unfolding before her eyes and is unable to do anything as a mother to help. She feels a sense of disconnection from the words, like "disaster areas" and "disaster victims," that she keeps hearing on the radio. In the end, she takes the difficult decision to move far away from the place she has always considered home.

Kotoba no kizashi [Intimations of Language] by Saeki Kazumi and Furui Yoshikichi is a compilation of 24 letters originally serialized in a newspaper. Saeki is driven to wonder whether people are facing the prospect of a "language vacuum." We tend to assume that our words are readily understood by the people we speak to. But is this really the case? Perhaps we are simply failing to notice the doubts and accusations that fall from language like droplets of water. Furui says an experience as distressing as the March 11 disaster cannot be talked about in ordinary language. This means that people tend to bundle up their feelings in silence. But, he says, this silence is itself a "premonition of language." Saeki talks of "waiting patiently for time to be reborn again in a place where time itself seemed to have been crushed," bringing the correspondence to an end with a glimmer of hope.

Folklorist Akasaka Norio is the author of *3/11 kara kangaeru kono kuni no katachi* [What 3/11 Can Tell Us About the State of the Nation]. Akasaka is the founder of Tōhoku Studies. In this book, he travels on foot around post-disaster Tōhoku recording his observations. Pains-takingly, thoroughly, he devotes himself to preserving a record of the situation on the ground.

Akasaka records several stories he has heard around the region of people who were drowned in the tsunami

and subsequently appeared as ghosts. He speculates that the stories might be symbolic of a quest for “reconciliation” between the dead and those who were left behind. While praying for the repose of the spirits of the dead, the survivors must embark on their first steps toward the future. Akasaka also notices the power of the folk performing arts, which were among the first cultural forms to bounce back to life after the disaster. Akasaka considers the ideal forms that communities should take, looking ahead to a view of Japan fifty years into the future.

Saitō Tamaki, a psychiatrist who does the bulk of his work with adolescents and young adults, is well known for the support he provides to young people suffering from acute social withdrawal—a condition known in Japanese as *hikikomori*. He too was born in Tōhoku, and in the weeks and months after the disaster provided mental and spiritual care to people in the disaster zones as well as working as a medical volunteer. His impressions of the time he spent there and his observations on the nuclear plant are recorded in *Hisai shita jikan* [Damaged Time]. He writes that he drew inspiration from the words of the German-language Jewish poet Paul Celan, who wrote after the Holocaust that only language remained “close and secure” after everything else had been lost. Saitō used Twitter and other modern communication tools to provide readers with regular updates on the changing situation. At the same time he used the latest social networking tools to provide people with information about how to obtain medicines and information on medical treatments to those in need.

He describes traveling around the disaster areas asking victims if there was anything that worried them. “Lots of people are much worse off than me,” was the most common response. The author realizes that this sentiment has become something of a set phrase for disaster victims. Making contact through the human touch as he takes people’s blood pressure, he asks in detail about their lives. Gradually, people relax and begin to open up about their painful experiences.

What concerns Saitō most is the state of spiritual care available to people now that everyday life has returned to the disaster areas. He describes children who have refused to return to school since the disaster, adults who have spiraled into alcoholism, and a young man who suffers a relapse into *hikikomori* after a period of remission. These stories are a part of what makes him determined to remain working with the disaster victims in the long term.

The Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art is well known for its collection of works by the Lithuanian-born artist Ben Shahn. Particularly famous in Japan is the “Lucky Dragon” series of prints he made on the subject of the crew of the *Daigo Fukuryū* fishing boat who were exposed to lethal levels of radioactive fallout following US nuclear tests. Plans for a retrospective had been underway for several years. Although the show eventually went ahead in summer 2012, the museum was unable to arrange loans of artworks from many American museums, because of worries that Fukushima was exposed to high levels of radiation.

But it is precisely when times are tough that art can play a major role. Edited by Kurokawa Sō, *Fukushima no bijutsukan de nani ga okotte ita no ka* [What Was Hap-

pening in Fukushima’s Art Museums?] brings together the experiences of curators and their thoughts about the disaster. The curators faced a wide variety of problems: helping to evacuate museum visitors on the day of the disaster, damage to collection holdings, and the sudden drop in visitor numbers caused by radiation fears. As well as modifying the content of exhibitions to suit the somber reflective mood of the times, curators met to discuss their vision for the future of museums and consider what kind of exhibitions could provide consolation, comfort, and perhaps encouragement to visitors.

Fukkō no shoten [Recovery Bookstores] by Inaizumi Ren is a piece of reportage on contributions to recovery made by Tōhoku’s bookstores after the disaster. Not long after the disaster struck, lines began to form in front of bookstores, with local people desperate for reading materials. With many people still living in evacuation centers, books had become a daily necessity. Children enjoyed comic magazines, while books about hobbies and volumes of aerial photography showing the towns and villages as they were before the disaster were also popular.

Among the examples introduced in the book are a two-generation family business that reopened in a tent after its original premises were swept away, and a married couple who took out a loan to open a store in a town where not a single bookshop survived the disaster. The book also depicts the activities of public libraries and the struggles of people working to get books to people in the affected areas.

Seki Mitsuhiro’s *Higashi Nihon Daishinsai to chiiki sangyō fukkō* [The Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster and the Rebirth of Local Industry] describes the state of efforts to repair local industry, focusing on manufacturing throughout the Tōhoku region. The author has carried out research on SMEs in Tōhoku for over twenty years. He was struck by the dynamism in local companies, which built networks within the region and allowed local businesses to respond to the diverse needs of the community. The connections built up in this way over the years played a crucial role in enabling local industry to recover from the disaster, as companies united to face their difficulties together. The author suggests that the example of Tōhoku offers hints for Japanese industry as a whole, threatened by the challenges of an aging society and depopulation in rural areas.

The colossal earthquake and tsunami took the lives of some 19,000 people and instantly destroyed whole towns and villages. Mounds of rubble still scar the raw, stripped-bare coastline today. And there is no end in sight to the threat of radiation. Despite the challenges, writers and thinkers have begun the job of asking what lessons need to be learned from this disaster. Their work will help to carry far and wide the facts about the paths people have followed as they have worked to rebuild their lives. It is to be hoped that these documents will someday become part of the shared memory of all humanity.

Yonahara Kei

Born in 1958. Began writing reportage for magazines in 1988. Her many works include *Monogatari no umi, yureru shima* [Island in the Seas of Stories], *Bireitō made* [All the Way to Ilha Formosa], and *Marebito-tachi no Okinawa* [Okinawa Through the Eyes of Visitors] (see JBN No. 63). She is a member of the advisory board of JBN.

FICTION



Akasaka Mari

Born in 1964. After serving as chief editor of an art magazine, made her debut as a novelist in 1995 with Kibakusha [*Detonator*]. Awarded the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers for Myūzu [*Muse*] in 2000. Her 2003 novel Vaiburēta [*Vibrator*] was made into a movie. Awarded the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award and Shiba Ryōtarō Prize for the work reviewed here.

Tōkyō purizun [Tokyo Prison]

By Akasaka Mari

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2012. 197 x 134 mm. 448 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-309-02120-1.

In 1980, the sixteen-year-old Mari Akasaka moves to the United States. At her small-town high school in Maine, she realizes how little she knows about her own country, and starts to read as much as she can about Japan. One day she takes part in a debate about Emperor Hirohito's responsibility for the war and comes up against a wall. She struggles to find answers to her questions and is troubled by doubts. To resolve this crisis, she travels through time and space, placing phone calls to her future self and zipping across the ocean to ask advice from her grandmother, who experienced the war at first hand. Moving between past and present, America and Japan, fantasy and reality, the young Mari gradually builds up an understanding about the war and the history of the postwar era.

The author's unique idea of allowing the sixteen-year-old protagonist to interact with herself as a woman in her mid-forties is central to the novel's concerns. It is not only the 16-year-old girl for whom the war is an event from the distant past: even in her forties, Mari maintains the perspective of someone born in the postwar era. What was the war, and what did it mean? Even today, this unanswerable question continues to confront generations of Japanese people.

This novel is quite different from historical fiction based on actual events. This is more like a literary adventure—a bold attempt to take a new approach to the Pacific War. That the experiment is such a success is testimony to the author's first-rate storytelling skills and the inventive structure of the work. (Chō)

Meido meguri [A Tour of the Land of the Dead]

By Kashimada Maki

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2012. 193 x 131 mm. 160 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-309-02122-5.

A couple board a *shinkansen* train in Tokyo and take a short trip out of the city together. The thirty-six-year-old husband lost the use of his arms and legs after a sudden stroke eight years ago. Despite the initial shock, for his wife, Natsuko, the past eight years have been an improvement on what came before. For Natsuko, the days before her marriage, when she lived with her mother and younger brother, are a bitter memory she longs to put behind her. "Something back there was bothering her—not poverty, not loneliness, not illness—but 'something.'" The trip with her husband turns out to be an opportunity to bring this mysterious "something" back into the light and confront it directly.

They stay in a now faded and cheap hotel, once an exclusive resort and a fa-

vorite of Natsuko's mother. For Natsuko, the hotel's fall from its glory days mirrors the decline of her own family and home since the death of her father. Her mother and brother, hopelessly attached to their more prosperous past, continue to spend profligately despite their reduced circumstances. Their thoughtless behavior has been a constant threat and torment to Natsuko. Over the course of the trip, Natsuko comes to realize that her husband is a person of remarkable strengths, quite free of such family troubles, despite the physical handicap he has borne since his illness. Through its tale of the difficult life of one woman, this Akutagawa Prize-winning novel movingly depicts the disappointments of life in contemporary Japanese society, and suggests a glimmer of hope. (Nozaki)



Kashimada Maki

Born in 1976. Awarded the Bungei Prize in 1998 for Nihiki [*Two Animals*] while studying French literature at Shirayuri College. Awarded the Mishima Yukio Prize in 2005 for 6000 do no ai [*Love at 6,000 Degrees*]. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize for the work reviewed here. See "In Their Own Words," JBN No. 62.



Kurokawa Sō

Born in 1961. Awarded the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 2009 for *Kamome no hi* [*The Day of the Seagull*]. Other works include the novels *Jakuchū no me* [*Jakuchū's Eyes*] and *IWO JIMA* [*Iwo Jima*] and the critical essays *Kokkyō* [*Borders*] and *Riaritī kābu* [*Reality Curve*].

***Itsuka, kono sekai de okotte ita koto* [At a Certain Time, Somewhere in the World]**

By Kurokawa Sō

Shinchōsha, 2012. 196 x 133 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-10-444405-2.

Although the six stand-alone short stories in this collection can be enjoyed individually, they are united by the penetrating gaze they bring to bear on crisis in contemporary society. In March 2011, the catastrophic disaster in Fukushima revealed the dangers posed by nuclear power generation to Japan.

The nuclear threat is omnipresent around the world, and overlaps with memories of war. Uranium mined in the Navaho reservations in Arizona was used in the Nagasaki bomb; depleted uranium was used in Sarajevo half a century later.

The contamination released during the Chernobyl disaster continues to be a serious problem across vast swathes of the former Soviet Union and surrounding countries. The author skillfully weaves these historical facts into the body of his

narratives. The stories feature a wide and varied cast: from ordinary residents of contemporary Fukushima to literary figures from the Meiji era and global icons like Anton Chekhov and Elvis Presley.

The stories paint a vivid portrait of lives faced with crisis, deftly leavened by the author's reminiscences of an old Kyoto café redolent with the atmosphere of hippie culture and mouthwatering recipes for Russian mushroom dishes. Drawn in by the narrative pleasures of the author's peripatetic style, the reader is brought inexorably to the heart of "what was happening at a certain time, somewhere in the world." (Nozaki)

***Kagi no nai yume o miru* [Dreams Without Keys]**

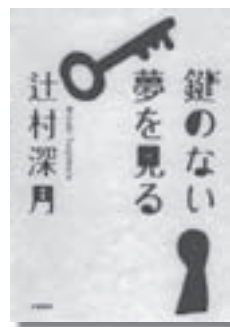
By Tsujimura Mizuki

Bungeishunjū, 2012. 193 x 134 mm. 239 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-16-381350-9.

The summer vacation comes to an end, and third-grader Mizukami Ritsuko transfers to a new school. A cheerful and talented child, she fits in easily and is soon close friends with Yumiko and the nameless first-person narrator. But when the girls are in fifth grade, rumors start to circulate that Ritsuko's mother is a thief, and Ritsuko finds herself ostracized. Yumiko and the narrator hear about the rumors from friends after class one day. Yumiko's reaction is surprising. "Oh, I know about *that*," she says. Yumiko's house has been broken into too, but her mother tells Yumiko she should not allow the incident to affect her friendship with Ritsuko. The mother's behavior is due not to poverty but to a series of irresistible impulses that assail her during her menstrual period. The people of Nishino resolve to put up

with the woman's foibles and agree not to take the case to the police.

A shocking event takes place one day when the girls are in sixth grade. The three friends are out buying art supplies for their final class projects when the narrator witnesses Ritsuko shoplifting. Although Ritsuko is suitably ashamed, the event leads to an estrangement. "The Thief of Nishino" is the first of five short stories depicting nightmarish situations brought on by spiritual voids. The stories depict the process by which small impulses and motivations can lead a person's life to fragmentation, as well as the discomfort and shock felt by those caught in the crossfire. The collection illustrates the physical and mental pressures of life in contemporary society from a variety of new perspectives. (Chō)



Tsujimura Mizuki

Born in 1980. Received the Mephisto Award in 2004 for her debut novel, *Tsumetai kōsha no toki wa tomaru* [*Time Stands Still in a Cold Campus*]. Awarded the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for New Writers for *Tsunagu* [*Link*] in 2011. Awarded the Naoki Prize for the work reviewed here.



Miki Taku

Born in 1935. Awarded the Mr. H Prize in 1967 for the poetry collection *Tōkyō gozen sanji* [Tokyo, 3 a.m.] and the Akutagawa Prize in 1973 for *Hiwa* [Finch]. Other works include *Roji* [Alley], which won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize, and *Hadashi to kaigara* [Bare Feet and Seashells], which won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature. Publications include poetry, fiction, and children's literature.

K [K]

By Miki Taku

Kōdansha, 2012. 194 x 130 mm. 231 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-217670-5.

“K” stands for “Keiko,” the author’s deceased wife. When they first met, the author and his wife were both young poets with dreams of making a living from their writing. Remarkably, they both achieved success and settled down to live and write together. But despite the years of closeness and collaboration, the author reflects that “when it came down to it, I never really knew her very well at all.” Born into a wealthy Tōhoku merchant family, his wife is spoiled and impractical and has little understanding of the importance of money. Used to having people do things for her, she is proud and introverted. In her poetry, too, she is fiercely defensive of her own personal world, even at the price of loneliness and isolation.

Her husband, meanwhile, decides to build on his success as a poet by turning

his hand to novels. Under constant pressure from deadlines, the couple become estranged, until eventually they are essentially living apart under the same roof. It is the wife’s illness that brings them back together. When the wife’s cancer returns, her husband and daughter support her through her final illness. As he reads through her poems after her death, the husband is reminded of how little he truly knew his wife. But the thought is no longer a painful one. For two people to live together in mutual respect, even though they can never fully understand one another—this, the author concludes, is the true meaning of marriage. Written movingly in a warm and personable style, this impressive work breathes new life into the Japanese *shi-shōsetsu* (I-novel) tradition. (Nozaki)

ESSAY

Tairiku e [Continental Travels]

By Ian Hideo Levy

Iwanami Shoten, 2012. 193 x 131 mm. 180 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-00-023798-7.

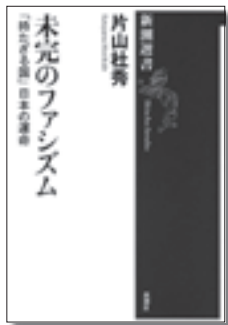
Ian Hideo Levy’s background makes him unique among writers in Japanese. Born in the United States to a Jewish immigrant father from Eastern Europe and a Polish mother, he lived in Taiwan and Hong Kong as a child before returning in his teens to the United States, where he eventually earned a PhD in Japanese literature. He later gave up a position as a university teacher to move to Japan and write fiction in Japanese. A border-crossing cosmopolitan, Levy is unusual in choosing to write in a second language acquired in adulthood. Levy deliberately positions himself in the spaces between cultures—a stance that has produced many notable literary works. In his latest book, he travels through the United States and China. His journey is at once a search for his roots and an attempt to understand what is hap-

pening in these countries in the early twenty-first century by examining the similarities and contrasts between them. Walking through the exhilarated streets of Washington, DC in the days before the Obama inauguration, the author recalls childhood memories of racism and discrimination against black Americans and ponders the depths of the American racial trauma. As he journeys through China’s unprecedented boom, he encounters exhausted people working in harsh conditions. Chinese miners, black with soot but marked by a quiet air of resilience, recall the mistreated African-Americans of the past. Writing in polished prose of identities in flux, the author is opening up new dimensions for literary expression in Japanese. (Nozaki)



Ian Hideo Levy

Born in California in 1950. Grew up in Taiwan and Hong Kong; first moved to Japan in 1967. Taught Japanese literature at Princeton University and Stanford University. His debut, *Seijōki no kikoenahei heya* [trans. A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard], was published in 1992. His numerous other works include *Chiji ni kudakete* [Broken into Thousands of Pieces], which won the Osaragi Jirō Prize, and *Kari no mizu* [False Water], which won the Itō Sei Prize for Literature. See “In Their Own Words,” JBN No. 66.



Katayama Morihide

Born in 1963. Studied modern Japanese philosophy and culture. Associate professor, Keiō University Faculty of Law. Active as a music critic, having been awarded both the Suntory Prize and the Yoshida Hidekazu Prize for two works, *Onban kōgengaku* [Disc Modernology] and *Onban hakubutsushi* [Disc Museography]. Awarded the Shiba Ryōtarō Prize for the work reviewed here.

***Mikan no fashizumu* [Unfinished Fascism]**

By Katayama Morihide

Shinchōsha, 2012. 191 x 128 mm. 352 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-603705-4.

The tumult of World War I brought dramatic changes to the world order. The West European bourgeois order splintered, colonies began clamoring for independence, and the center of geopolitical power shifted from Europe to the United States and the Soviet Union. The nature of warfare itself also underwent a decisive change. Battles were decided by the volume of weaponry that could be deployed: from now on, industrial might and technological prowess would be the decisive factors behind military supremacy. These changes did not go unnoticed by Japan's military leadership. The Imperial Japanese Army that took part in the Siege of Tsingtao (Qingdao) shelled the German position relentlessly — a dramatic change from the tactics Japan adopted during the Russo-Japanese War. The Germans were

isolated, and it was only a matter of time before they ran out of ammunition. Japan's military leaders were thus aware that materially prosperous countries were bound to enjoy military superiority in wartime. Despite this, Japan's military leaders ultimately tried to go against the tide of history, deluding themselves that a more powerful enemy could be defeated in a short, decisive campaign. The author argues that it was the obvious inferiority of Japan's industrial productivity that made the illusion of a devastating first strike so irresistible. This self-justifying argument willfully ignored the reality of Japan's industrial inferiority and drove the country into a war it knew it could never win. Unfortunately, such human and national folly are still with us today. (Yoshimi)

CULTURE

***Niwa o yomitoku* [Understanding Japanese Gardens]**

By Shirahata Yōzaburō

Tankōsha, 2012. 188 x 126 mm. 224 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-473-03798-5.

Why are so many of Japan's finest gardens attached to Buddhist temples in Kyoto? By turning his attention to this previously neglected question, the author has brought to light a number of important facts.

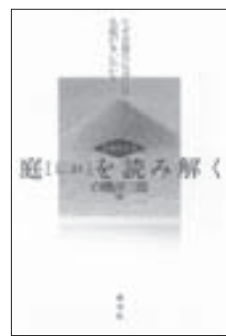
The role of Buddhism has shifted many times over the course of Japanese history. In the Nara period, Buddhist temples were a space of prayer and ceremony for the protection of the state. Temple precincts in the flat parts of cities were occupied by buildings for carrying out religious ceremonies. It apparently did not occur to people to fill the leftover space with plants or lakes.

But in the Heian period, the focus shifted to personal salvation. Monks turned inward and sought in the serenity of the mountains and fields a suitable setting for their ascetic practices. This is why so many

of Kyoto's temples are located in the foothills of mountains. The same consideration led people to build artificial hills and ponds next to the prayer halls and pagodas. Gardens were designed as a kind of artificial parallel to the natural environment in which monks practiced their devotions.

This tendency persisted into later ages. In many cases, even gardens designed by laymen showed the influence of Buddhist ideas of paradise. The arrival of Zen Buddhism in Japan brought another important idiom of garden architecture, in the *kare sansui* (dry landscape) style.

This book traces the relationship between Buddhism and gardens, drawing on examples from some of the most important temple gardens in Kyoto. The book brings a revelatory new perspective to bear on the history of gardens in Japan. (Chō)



Shirahata Yōzaburō

Born in 1949. Studied agriculture at Kyoto University Graduate School, specializing in the history of gardens, landscape, and urban culture. Professor at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Works include *Puranto hantā: Yōroppa no shokubutsu netsu to Nihon* [Plant Hunter: The European Plant Boom and Japan], for which he was awarded the Mainichi Publishing Cultural Encouragement Prize.

SOCIETY



Kawashima Shūichi

Born in 1952. Graduated from Hōsei University Faculty of Social Sciences. Earned a doctorate in literature. Has helped to compile a history of the city of Kesennuma and worked for the Rias Ark Museum of Art; now a special professor at Kanagawa University. Folklorist born and raised in Kesennuma; studies folk tales and other oral literature, folk beliefs, and the lives of fishermen. Works include *Katsuo ryō* [Bonito Fishing].

Tsunami no machi ni ikite **[Living with Tsunamis]**

By Kawashima Shūichi

Fuzambō International, 2012. 193 x 129 mm. 248 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-905194-34-7.

The author is a folklorist who grew up in Kesennuma, one of the coastal towns worst hit by the March 2011 tsunami. He was still working in the city when the disaster struck. Although the author himself survived, his mother did not. For years, he had been visiting towns along the Sanriku coast as a specialist in the culture of fishing communities, studying the culture of fishing villages and documenting the lives of the people who lived off the sea. Since March 2011, he has regularly visited the devastated areas in an attempt to understand the relationship between the sea and the people who make their living from it. The Sanriku coast has repeatedly been hit by major tsunamis, most recently in 1896, 1933, 1960, and 2011. Although there are now plans to relocate residents to higher ground, the author believes that this will

not be a viable solution. The history of people's response to tsunamis since the Meiji era, as recorded by folklorists like Yanagita Kunio, shows that memories of a disaster fade quickly. Even if people do move uphill, they soon return to their former homes along the coast. Over and above the need for fishing families to live near the sea for economic reasons, the sea is also the object of their prayers and the source of their culture and tradition. Far from solving the problem, a fixated insistence on moving away from the sea would only mean a loss of cultural identity. This meticulously researched book teaches us that simplistically forcing people to move to higher ground would not achieve anything beyond spelling the death of local culture. (Yoshimi)

Gādo-shita no tanjō **[Japan "Under the Arches": A History]**

By Kobayashi Ichirō

Shōdensha, 2012. 172 x 107 mm. 240 pp. ¥780. ISBN 978-4-396-11273-8.

In Japan's major cities, the areas beneath the elevated railway lines that form a vital part of urban transportation networks are often full of bars, restaurants, and shops. The *gādo-shita* ("beneath the rails") districts are a much-loved part of the modern urban landscape, but until now they have been little studied. This book, based on a thorough study of the existing literature and extensive fieldwork, reveals the origins of these areas and the changes they brought to the development of Japan's cities and business environment.

Japan's first railways were built in the years following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, but at first the rails were laid along city streets like tramlines. It was with the expansion of the rail network during the Taishō era (1912–26) that overhead tracks were used for the first time. In the age of

the smoke-belching steam locomotive, elevated tracks offered two major advantages in densely populated cities: they lifted the smoke above street level, and they allowed trains to run smoothly without the need for level crossings.

Focusing on these often neglected urban spaces provides a new perspective on the development of the modern city and the role of the railways in shaping our urban environment. Especially interesting are the author's observations on some of the best-known *gādo-shita*: Ame-yoko shopping street in Ueno, the Akihabara Electric Town, and the wholesale district in Asakusabashi. Illustrated with numerous photographs, this is an excellent introduction to some of the aspects that make Tokyo such a vibrant and fascinating city. (Chō)



Kobayashi Ichirō

Born in 1952. An editor of architectural publications. Works mostly on publications related to construction, architecture, and city guides. Works include *Edo o tazuneru Tōkyō nonbiri sanpo* [Edo-Themed Strolls Through Tokyo] and *Mekiki no Tōkyō kenchiku sanpo: Osusume supotto 33* [An Expert's Walking Tour of Tokyo Architecture: 33 Recommended Sites].



Satō Kaichirō

*Born in 1921. Third-generation craftsman in a line dating back to the Edo period. Famous for his work on earthen walls in tea ceremony rooms, temples, shrines, and storehouses. An expert on restoration of traditional houses, architectural and art history, and traditional Japanese gardens. Coauthor of *Nihon no kabe: kote wa ikite iru* [Japanese Walls: A Living Tradition].*

Kyō no sakan oyakata ga kataru: tanoshiki tsuchikabe [The Pleasures of Earthen Walls: A Kyoto Master Artisan Tells His Story]

By Satō Kaichirō

Gakugei Shuppansha, 2012. 186 x 127 mm. 224 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-7615-1304-7.

Sakan are the artisan plasterers responsible for maintaining the earthen walls used in many traditional Japanese buildings. This book brings together the words and stories of one man who has been at the top of his profession for decades.

Satō Kaichirō was born in Kyoto in 1921. As a master craftsman, he has devoted his skills to building and maintaining the traditional earthen walls of the city's tea houses, temples, and warehouses. Satō has an encyclopedic knowledge and insight into Japanese architectural history, art history, and gardens.

Satō believes no other material can rival earth for use in the buildings where people spend their days. Earth poses no risk to human health, and is resistant to fire. It

can even be recycled. Traditional artisans achieve remarkable effects using blends of yellow, red, brown, and gray earth. The color and texture of the earth develops over time—the distinctive character and unique “personality” of the material is another of the things that make earth so attractive. The work of the *sakan* is not about personal expression, but about bringing out the beauty inherent in the earth.

Satō says it is the affection of the people who use the building that brings out its true beauty. In earlier times, it was customary for craftsmen to pay several visits a year to the houses they had built, carrying out small repairs. The relationship between artisan and owner would last through several generations. (Yonahara)

Gunzō to shite no Tange Kenkyūshitsu [Architectural Theories and Practices of the Kenzō Tange Laboratory]

By Toyokawa Saikaku

Ohmsha, 2012. 209 x 148 mm. 392 pp. ¥4,000. ISBN 978-4-274-21200-0.

As Japan's most prominent postwar architect, Tange Kenzō exerted a decisive influence on the development of architecture and urban planning in postwar Japan. Much has already been written about his numerous buildings (including the Tokyo Olympic Stadium) and his urban redevelopment concepts, most notably *Tokyo Plan 1960*. This book charts new ground by widening the focus to look at the Tange Laboratory, established in 1946, including the personal relationships within the group and the professional interests of its members. Inheriting the urbanology perspectives of Takayama Eika and others at the Tokyo Imperial University, the Tange Laboratory nurtured renowned architects like Isozaki Arata and Kurokawa Kishō as

well as technocrats like Shimokōbe Atsushi. Based on a thorough study of the undergraduate- and graduate-level theses produced by the original members, this new study makes clear the concerns the group inherited and the approaches they took to find solutions for them.

For Tange, architecture was part and parcel of wider efforts at nation building and urban planning. His approach provided the perfect fit with the national mobilization policy of prewar Japan and continued into the postwar years with Tange's preoccupation with national redevelopment and economic growth. (Yoshimi)



Toyokawa Saikaku

Born in 1973. Architect and historian of architecture. Studied architecture at the University of Tokyo School of Engineering. Formerly employed at an architectural design firm; currently associate professor in the Department of Architecture at Oyama National College of Technology.

HISTORY



Okuda Hiroko

Associate professor, Nanzan University Department of British and American Studies. Earned PhD from Northwestern University School of Communication in the United States. Major works include *Genbaku no kioku: Hiroshima/Nagasaki no shisō* [Atom Bomb Memories: Thoughts on Hiroshima and Nagasaki].

***Okinawa no kioku* [Okinawa Memories]**

By Okuda Hiroko

Keiō University Press, 2012. 194 x 131 mm. 442 pp. ¥3,400. ISBN 978-4-7664-1935-1.

In September 2012, around 100,000 people attended demonstrations in Okinawa to demand the removal of the “Osprey,” a new transportation aircraft, from US bases on the island. Despite the protests, deployment went ahead as planned. Further controversy flared when two US marines were implicated in a rape scandal just after the protests and one marine was arrested for beating up a 13-year-old boy. At the root of all these problems is the fact that 75% by area of all US bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa, which represents just 0.6% of Japan’s total land area.

Some 150,000 people lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa at the end of World War II—around a third of the local population. After the war, a series of huge US bases were constructed on the island, and

the prefecture itself was under US occupation for 27 years. The “Okinawa problem” encapsulates in miniature scale all the problems that Japan has allowed to fester unsolved since the end of the war. This book examines the roots and history of the problems in Okinawa from the varying perspectives of the United States, Japan, and Okinawa itself.

Until 1879, the Ryūkyū islands were an independent kingdom. The book traces the historical developments that led to the islands’ annexation by Japan and their use as a sacrificial pawn as the Allies advanced toward Japan in the closing months of the war. An examination of diplomatic negotiations carried out by the Japanese government concludes that in many ways Okinawa continues to be run as a colony even today. (Yonahara)

***Ehagaki no Beppu* [Beppu in Postcards]**

By Matsuda Noriko

Sayūsha, 2012. 210 x 148 mm. 315 pp. ¥3,500. ISBN 978-4-903500-75-1.

Kojō Toshihide, the editorial supervisor of this book, owns an immense collection of picture postcards, including 10,000 from Ōita Prefecture alone. The 600 or so cards of Beppu featured in this book are just a small part of this collection, but they are enough to give readers an idea of Beppu’s allure at the peak of its popularity. Beppu was developed as a hot-spring resort by Osaka Shōsen Kaisha, a Kansai-based shipping company that used its fleet of luxury liners to carry travelers on the highly lucrative Osaka–Beppu route along the Seto Inland Sea. The postcards show that Beppu was essentially Japan’s first theme park.

The photos and illustrations of sandy beaches and shopping areas give Beppu a modernist, colonial-era feel. The baths were housed not in the rustic inns nor-

mally associated with hot-spring resorts but in contemporary-style buildings that looked more like pavilions. Indeed, when Beppu played host to an international hot-spring exposition, an amusement park and several resort homes were also built. The expo was a resounding success: postcards in the collection show baths packed like commuter trains at rush hour. Many visitors bought picture postcards to send to friends and family. This vast volume of postcards served as a highly effective publicity campaign that was as successful in its time as travel magazines and TV programs combined today. This collection of postcards shows Beppu in its glory days as a resort and sheds light on the interests and concerns of the time. (Yoshimi)



Matsuda Noriko

Born in 1978. Works in the architecture department at the University of Tokyo. Specialist in urban and architectural history. Has conducted field research on major Japanese hot-spring resorts in Beppu, Atami, and elsewhere.



Itō Satoshi

Born in 1961. Studied Eastern philosophy at Waseda University, earning a doctorate in literature. Currently professor at the Ibaraki University College of Humanities. Specialist in the history of Japanese thought.

Shintō to wa nani ka **[What Is Shinto?]**

By Itō Satoshi

Chūōkōron Shinsha, 2012. 173 x 108 mm. 314 pp. ¥880. ISBN 978-4-12-102158-8.

Shinto is often described as an indigenous folk religion unique to Japan. But is this really the case? Despite the widespread view that primitive nature worship was handed down unchanged through the ages to become the Shinto we know today, this book describes the history of Shinto from a quite different perspective and sees the religion as a construct of much later years.

Shinto came into being as a result of the frictions and exchanges that arose when the indigenous faith of the *kami* encountered the different belief systems imported from the Asian mainland, including the incantatory faith of Buddhism. Syncretism between Shinto and Buddhism was particularly profound during the Middle Ages. Fusion with other traditions gave rise to new *kami* and brought about major changes. For more than a thousand

years, until the dawn of the modern period in the second half of the nineteenth century, Shinto and Buddhism were inextricably intertwined.

Eventually, Shinto broke away from Buddhism and began to emphasize its distinctiveness as an independent religion. In the early years following the Meiji Restoration, violent measures were taken to separate the two faiths, and Buddhist temples and images came under attack from Shinto zealots. The author, however, argues that claims for Shinto as an ancient faith are erroneous post-facto fabrications.

The book draws on a wide range of historical sources to show how views of the land, interpretations of myths, and the understanding of the relationship between humans and gods underwent dramatic shifts over time. (Yonahara)

MANGA

Bōrupen Kojiki **[The Kojiki in Ball-Point Pen]**

By Kōno Fumiyo

Heibonsha, 2012. 210 x 148 mm. 130 pp. ¥1,000. ISBN 978-4-582-28746-2.

Compiled in 712, the *Kojiki* is Japan's oldest book of history. Combining myth, legend, and song, it tells the story of how the Japanese islands were unified around the authority of the *tennō* (emperor).

The book was written down to provide a permanent record of a collection of oral literature that had previously been memorized and recited, but the difficult orthography and archaic language of the text mean that few people read more than brief selections from the book today. This state of affairs inspired the author to retell the story with manga-like illustrations drawn with a humble ball-point pen, bringing the story alive and making it accessible to contemporary audiences.

A huge cast of *kami* appears, and an epic story unfolds. The *kami* are drawn as appealing personalities, the expressions

on their faces conveying their emotions and making them easy for the reader to identify and sympathize with. Although the plot and the language remain faithful to the original, the book remains easy to read, thanks to the attractive illustrations and plentiful explanatory notes. Rhythmic "sound effects" appear frequently throughout. These too come directly from the original text, allowing the reader to enjoy a sense of the Japanese language in its earliest, pristine stages. The humorous, eventful story provides the perfect subject matter for a manga-style treatment. (Yonahara)



Kōno Fumiyo

Born in 1968. Manga artist. Debuted in 1995 with *Machikado hana dayori* [*Cities in Bloom*]. Principal works include *Yūnagi no machi, sakura no kuni* [trans. Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms], awarded the grand prize in the manga division of the Japan Media Arts Festival; *Nagai michi* [*Long Road*]; and *Kono sekai no katasumi ni* [*In a Corner of This World*].

No. 2: Aomori and Dazai Osamu's *Tsugaru*

Written in inauspicious circumstances in the closing stages of World War II, *Tsugaru* provides a vivid account of Dazai's return to the remote rural area of northern Honshū where he grew up. After decades of dissipation and notoriety in Tokyo, the famous writer returns home in search of the meaning of tradition and a sense of belonging . . .

In May 1944, writer Dazai Osamu boarded a 5:30 evening express train at Ueno Station in Tokyo, bound for Aomori in the far north of Honshū. The train would arrive at eight the following morning. In those days, the journey from Tokyo to Aomori took fourteen and a half hours. World War II was entering its final stages, and the deteriorating military situation was having a dire impact on many aspects of Japanese daily life, including clothing and food. What made Dazai undertake a major journey at such a time?

"An editor friend of mine had been suggesting for some time that I might like to write about Tsugaru. Even before this, it had occurred to me that I ought to take the time to revisit the region where I was born and see it properly before I died. And so it was that I set out from Tokyo one spring day in the guise of a beggar."

Why "in the guise of a beggar"? By this stage in the war, Dazai had no serviceable suit of clothes to wear. Instead, he had a tailor stitch together some scraps of cloth into an article of clothing that looked "something like a jumper" and something "resembling a pair of trousers," which he dyed navy blue. But the color faded almost immediately and turned "an odd shade of purple." He wore a tennis cap on his head and green gaiters and rubber shoes on his feet. It was certainly an awkward appearance for a traveler setting out on a long journey.

The invitation to write about Tsugaru came from Koyama Shoten, a small publishing firm that was issuing a series of books in which well-known writers wrote about the towns or regions where they grew up. After traveling for three weeks to gather material, Dazai completed his manuscript in late July; the book was published in November. As publications of this kind were considered non-essential, low-priority work, the book was subject to a special tax equivalent to 8 *sen* on the cover price. These were the circumstances in which Dazai's *Tsugaru*, a masterpiece of travel writing, was born.



Mt. Iwaki soars alone above the Tsugaru Plain. (PANA)

The circumstances of the book's publication were somewhat unusual. The series started in 1936 but came to a halt after the first three volumes: Uno Kōji on Osaka, Satō Haruo on Kumano, and Aono Suekichi on Sado. In 1943, the fourth volume—Tabata Shūichirō on Izumo and Iwami—finally appeared. On the back cover of that book was an advertisement for "upcoming volumes in the series," including Mafune Yutaka on Aizu, Kaburaki Kiyokata on Tokyo, Nakamura Chihei on Hyūga, Tokuda Shūsei on Kanazawa, and Satomi Ton on Satsuma. But there was no mention of any book by Dazai Osamu.

It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the publisher had no plans for a book by Dazai at this stage. The aim of the series was to provide a new series of guides to the regional qualities of Japan—that "beautiful land shaped by the gods," as it was called in the promotional materials. The series was a product of its times—an era of religiously inspired jingoistic rhetoric based around the idea of "Japan, Land of the Gods." Superficially, the series would therefore seem to have little appeal for a writer like Dazai, who had previously shown nothing but scorn for the tragedies of the age in such works as *Otogi zōshi* [trans. *Otogizōshi: The Fairy Tale Book of Dazai Osamu*] and *Shin'shaku shokoku banashi* [New Translation of Saikaku's Tales of the Provinces]. What was it that made Dazai so eager to take up this offer at such short notice and undertake such a major journey as part of his preparations for the book?

After arriving in Aomori, Dazai traveled north up Mutsu Bay with an old childhood friend. He had prepared a hand-written map of his route, inscribed with the names of the places he hoped to visit: Sotogahama, Minmaya, Tappimisaki, Kodomari, Jūsanko, Shichiri Nagahama, and Ajigasawa, all along the coast. Inland, on the Tsugaru Plain lay the town of Hirosaki, where he had attended school, Goshogawara, and Kanagi, where he was born.

In format, Dazai's guide follows the convention for books of this kind and is organized into a preface and a main body. The opening section provides a broad overview of the topography and life of Tsugaru, interweaving the author's own memories with considerations of previous books on the subject. The main body of the text is organized into five chapters, beginning with the author's "pilgrimage" to his arrival in Tsugaru, and then moving along the east coast to Kanita, Sotogahama, the Tsugaru Plain, and the west coast. The conclusion of the preface suggests that although the publisher's intentions were for Dazai to write a guide to the local topography and mores of the region where he grew up, the author's true interests lay elsewhere. Dazai says outright that readers wanting to learn in detail about the lay of the land should consult an expert in the local area. His own specialist subject lies elsewhere, he says: "It is a subject that concerns itself

with the study of contact between human hearts. For want of a better term, people often call it love.”

For Dazai, the project must have brought deep emotion and a wry smile of embarrassment as he remembered his former life.

Born in Tsugaru as the sixth son of a prosperous land-owning family, Dazai’s dissipated and profligate lifestyle had made him unwelcome in his hometown. His family had even disinherited him at one stage after several attempts at suicide both alone and with a succession of mistresses. Now a well-known writer, he was out to practice the subject of “love” by writing about the region where he had grown up.

One of the best-known of the book’s many amusing passages comes when a character referred to only as “S” brings this esteemed visitor from Tokyo back home and barks a series of brusque commands at his wife. “Oy! I’ve brought a guest home. From Tokyo. I told you I’d bring him and I did. The person everyone’s talking about. That Dazai guy. You’d better come out and pay your respects, woman! And bring us some cider. What do you mean you’ve only got one big bottle? That’s not enough! Wait a minute! Go buy two more! And that dried cod from the balcony. You’ll need to pound the bastard with a hammer first to soften it up. Not like that. Here, let me. Here, dried cod . . . No, no, not like that. You’ve got to do it like this, here’s how you . . . Ow, shit that hurts! . . . But that’s how you want to do it. Hey, bring some soy sauce. And some fried monkfish . . . and some shellfish stew with *miso*-marinated eggs. This is the good stuff. You can’t get this anywhere but Tsugaru. Right—eggs! Marinated! In *miso*! That’s what I’m talking about!”

After nearly two pages of this, the author steps in to preempt any doubts the reader may have as to the veracity of his account.

“I am not exaggerating when I describe these things. This whirlwind force of the hospitality in Tsugaru is the perfect expression of the friendship of the local people.”

Passages like this are suggestive of the kind of book Dazai wanted to write. As he traveled through the places where he had grown up, he wanted to reacquaint himself with the spirit of humanity that had been produced by this climate and land. This was an objective that could not be achieved simply by compiling conventional depictions of scenery, topography, and local color. What Dazai was interested in was something that could not be conveyed by photographs, or contained in collections of documents.

It was something that for much of the time remained hidden, only infrequently revealing itself. He was looking to bring out what was distinctive about the people who seemed to enjoy some kind of special connection to the land and its unique topography.

“I heard later that for a week after that night, ‘S’ could not bear to remember the incident of the *miso*-marinated eggs without reaching for a drink to drown his embarrassment.”

Although to some extent familiar with the plains and eastern parts of Tsugaru, Dazai admitted to knowing “absolutely nothing” about the western parts. “This struck me as the ideal opportunity to travel along the west coast of Tsugaru—something I had wanted to do for some time.”

Undertaking a journey of this nature was no easy mat-



Dazai's Route

ter during wartime. Despite the difficulty and discomfort, Dazai traveled from Kanagi to Goshogawara, changing to the Gonō Line before making his way to Kizukuri and the ancient harbor town of Fukaura and Ajigasawa. From here he returned briefly to Goshogawara before setting off a few days later on the Tsugaru Line again. Why was he so eager to travel west? His objective was the small harbor town of Kodomari in the northernmost tip of Tsugaru. Only in the final chapter does Dazai reveal the true reason why he agreed to undertake the journey and write the book. “There was a reason why I had come on this journey to Tsugaru. There was someone I wanted to see.” When he was very small, he had believed this woman to be his own mother. Even though they hadn’t seen each other for nearly thirty years, Dazai still remembered her vividly after all these years. “It occurred to me that I perhaps owed me entire life to this woman.” With Japan on the verge of defeat, living in fear of air raids, and with strict censorship exerted over publication, these were the worst possible conditions in which to write. Dazai alone was clear in his mind what he wanted to do. With remarkable focus, he produced a sequence of masterpieces. There is no doubt that the final chapter of *Tsugaru* ranks at the top of his entire oeuvre.

Dazai boards the one daily bus to Kodomari to visit Take, the nurse who looked after him as a child. He visits her house, but she is not at home. Asking around the neighborhood, he discovers that she is to be found attending the sports day at the local elementary school. “I followed their instructions and found the rice paddies just as they had told me. The school stood on top of the small dune-like hill at the end of the raised path through the paddies. I walked around to the back of the building. What I saw there took my breath away.”

In this remote fishing village at the northernmost tip of Honshū, this vagabond wanderer found a sight that was truly remarkable in wartime Japan: a sports field decorated with bunting, young girls in bright-colored clothes, people merry with drink in broad daylight, small stalls, and families sitting on rush matting eating their lunches. “It was a beautiful, lively festival celebration, just like the old times. In fact, so similar was the scene that it made me melancholy.” Dazai is rendered speechless by the sight. In the next scene, he finally comes face to face with his old nurse after three decades.

“‘It’s me, Shūji,’ I said. I smiled and took off my hat. ‘Well, well.’ And that was it. She didn’t even smile. In fact, she was looking at me with a serious expression on her face.”

“After a while, she spoke to me in a resigned tone of voice, as if there were nothing remarkable about my sudden appearance at all: ‘Well, I suppose you’d better come and watch the sports. Sit down over there,’ she said.

“After that she fell silent. She sat down formally on the floor with her feet folded beneath her and laid her hands on the round knees of her work trousers, her eyes fixed on the children as they ran.”

It was almost as though she were ignoring him. But, Dazai goes on to say, “I had no complaint about that. She looked quite content and satisfied.” He stretches out his legs and looks at the children’s sports. “Perhaps this is

what freedom really means, I thought.” If so, he concludes, then perhaps he has just felt true freedom of the spirit for the first time in his life.

Although the book adopts the style and form of a traveler’s account of the region where he grew up, Dazai’s *Tsugaru* is in fact the chronicle of a journey in search of a mother figure familiar from children’s stories and moralistic tales. It is a nostalgic narrative of universal appeal, told in a unique style that only a natural storyteller like Dazai could have achieved.

(Ikeuchi Osamu, essayist and scholar of German literature)

Events and Trends

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The awards for the 148th Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes have been announced. The winners of the Naoki Prize were Asai Ryō for *Nanimono* [Somebody], published by Shinchōsha, and Abe Ryūtarō for *Tōhaku* [The Painter Tōhaku], published by Nikkei Publishing Inc. Asai is the youngest man ever to receive the Naoki Prize, as well as the first winner born in the current Heisei era (1989–).

Asai Ryō debuted in 2009 while he was still a second-year student at Waseda University, receiving the Shōsetsu Subaru Prize for New Writers for *Kirishima, bukatsu yamerutte yo* [Kirishima’s Leaving the Volleyball Club]. He continues to write while maintaining his day job in a company sales department. His novel depicts the job-hunting ordeals and frustrations of contemporary university students in the age of Twitter and Internet job searches.

Abe Ryūtarō moved to Tokyo to pursue his writing career after graduating from Kurume National College of Technology in Fukuoka Prefecture, Kyūshū. After finding employment as a civil servant in the municipal office of Tokyo’s Ōta City, he made his debut in 1990 with *Chi no Nihon shi* [Japan’s Bloody History]. His award-winning work is a historical novel that explores the turbulent life of Hasegawa Tōhaku, a renowned painter of the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1603).

Kuroda Natsuko won the Akutagawa Prize for *ab sango* [ab Coral], published in *Waseda Bungaku*. At 75 years of age, she is the oldest person to win the Akutagawa Prize. Kuroda majored in Japanese literature at Waseda University. She continued to write throughout her career as a teacher and a proofreader. Her work *Mari* [Ball] won a prize sponsored by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper in 1963.

The prize-winning novel, written horizontally rather than vertically, describes the nostalgic memories of family life in the Shōwa era. Kuroda employs a creative writing style using the hiragana script to build a story on fragments of childhood memory without using any proper nouns or katakana script. It is the first horizontally written novel to receive the Akutagawa Prize.

Continued Publication of Literary Collections

Plans are being drawn up for several comprehensive collections of literary works that go far beyond the usual anthology suspects. Chikuma Shobō has rebound its 99-volume *Meiji bungaku zenshū* [Compendium of Meiji Literature] for release in January 2013. In addition to well-known literary masterpieces from the Meiji era, the collection includes everything from women’s writing to youth literature and ideological essays.

Shinchōsha plans to publish a

26-volume *Yamamoto Shūgorō chōhen shōsetsu zenshū* [The Collected Novels of Yamamoto Shūgorō] in June this year. Bungeishunjū plans to release a collection of works by Maruya Saiichi this fall.

Sensō to bungaku [War and Literature], a 20-volume compilation of war writing, was another collection that attracted considerable attention during its publication run. The final volume appeared in January.

Literary anthologies of this kind were a major feature of the Japanese publishing scene from the 1950s to 1970s, when rival publishing firms competed to release the most impressive collections. After several decades in abeyance, the trend gained new impetus following the popularity of Kawade Shobō’s *Sekai bungaku zenshū* [World Literature Series], a one-man enterprise edited by Ikezawa Natsuki and published in 2007.

First English Translation of *Saka no ue no kumo*

An English translation of *Saka no ue no kumo*, Shiba Ryōtarō’s historical novel about Japan’s path to modernization in the Meiji era, has been published by Routledge in Great Britain. The English title is *Clouds Above the Hill*.

Despite being one of the best-known writers of recent times in his native Japan, relatively few of Shiba Ryōtarō’s books have been translated,

in comparison to more internationally recognized authors like Murakami Haruki or Kawabata Yasunari. His novels often assume considerable knowledge of Japanese history, such as the structure of the feudal system in the Edo period. His digression-heavy narrative style is also difficult to translate.

Three specialists spent four years on the project. The translators were Juliet Carpenter, a professor at Dōshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts; Paul McCarthy, an expert on the works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō; and Andrew Cobbing, an associate professor at the University of Nottingham whose previous work includes translations of the accounts written by members of the Iwakura Tomomi Embassy.

More Books Now in the Public Domain

Starting this year, a number of works

by Yoshikawa Eiji, best known for *Miyamoto Musashi* [trans. *Musashi: An Epic Novel of the Samurai Era*] and *Sangoku shi* [Romance of the Three Kingdoms], are available for free access online. Aozora Bunko (<http://www.aozora.gr.jp>) (Japanese only), which is making out-of-copy-right works available on the Internet free of charge, released *Tōno Monogatari* [trans. *The Legends of Tōno*] by Yanagita Kunio and *Shihon Taiheiki* [Private Record of Great Peace] by Yoshikawa Eiji on New Year's Day this year. Fans are eagerly watching for news of plans to publish other works by these authors in the future.

Japan's copyright law dictates that an artist's work enters the public domain in its entirety 50 years after his or her death. Works by poet Murō Saisei, as well as Iida Dakotsu and Masamune Hakuchō, will also be added this year.

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Editing, Translation, Design, and Production

Japan Echo Inc.

Printed in Japan on recycled paper
© The Japan Foundation 2013
ISSN 0918-9580

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.

- *Nanayo monogatari* [Seven-Night Story]. By Kawakami Hiromi, Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., 2012. In two volumes: ISBN 978-4-02-250959-8, 978-4-02-250960-4. A young girl comes upon a strange book called *Seven-Night Story* in her local library. Drawn into a realm of fantasy, she soon finds herself lost in the world of the book. The author's first full-length work of fantasy.
- *Watashi ga inakatta machi de* [While I Was Elsewhere]. By Shibasaki Tomoka, Shinchōsha, 2012. ISBN 978-4-10-301832-2. Describing the life of a woman who enjoys watching documentaries about wars and conflicts around the world, this unusual story juxtaposes everyday life with wartime experience in often unexpected ways.
- *Kage no bubun* [In Shadow]. By Hata Sahoko, Little More, 2012. ISBN 978-4-89815-331-4. An autobiographical novel by a veteran film critic. Set in Tokyo and Paris, it offers a vivid portrait of the joys, sorrows, and moments of decision in one woman's life.
- *Kotoba no kizashi* [Intimations of Language]. By Furui Yoshikichi and Saeki Kazumi, Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., 2012. ISBN 978-4-02-250989-5. An exchange of letters written after the March 2011 earthquake disaster. Saeki, writing from the disaster area, looks for signs of recovery in language, while Furui compares post-quake and postwar landscapes in a probing analysis of the crisis of language and the possibilities of words. A discussion of the potential of literature in a time of loss.
- *Kanjite aruku* [Walking by Feel]. By Sannomiya Mayuko, Iwanami Shoten, 2012. ISBN 978-4-00-025841-8. The author, who lost her sight at the age of four, now works as a writer and news translator. This collection of essays is driven by her commitment to a society in which all people, regardless of disability, can live free of restrictions.
- *Chūgoku Taiwan Honkon eiga no naka no Nihon* [Japan in the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong Cinema]. By Hayashi Hifumi, Meiji Daigaku Shuppankai, 2012. ISBN 978-4-906811-02-1. A new look at the modern history of Japan and China through the lens of film.
- *Nihonjin wa shokubutsu o dō riyō shite kita ka* [The Japanese Use of Plants]. By Nakanishi Hiroki, Iwanami Shoten, 2012. ISBN 978-4-00-500718-9. People in Japan have long put the plant life around them to a broad variety of uses. This book, intended for younger readers, is accessibly written and enlivened by numerous real-world examples.
- *Kenchiku isan: Hozon to saisei no shikō* [Architectural Heritage: Thoughts on Preservation and Restoration]. Edited by Nomura Shun'ichi and Koresawa Noriko, Tōhoku University Press, 2012. ISBN 978-4-86163-189-4. Many historic buildings and other structures were destroyed in the March 2011 earthquake. This volume presents the minutes of a series of symposiums concerned with the preservation and restoration of historic structures.
- *Shōnen hanzai (genshō) no paradokusu* [The Paradox of (Declining) Juvenile Crime]. By Doi Takayoshi, Iwanami Shoten, 2012. ISBN 978-4-00-028456-1. Why is there so much discussion of "the increasing brutality of juvenile crime" at a time when violent crimes committed by young people are actually declining? Despite a social and economic climate that continues to be difficult for the younger generation, even minor violent crimes are less frequent than they used to be. The author confronts the paradox.
- *Zesshoku-kei danshi to nadeshiko hime* [Abstinent Men and Japanese Princesses]. By Yamada Masahiro and Hirakiuchi Fumino, Tōyō Keizai Inc., 2012. ISBN 978-4-492-22320-8. "Abstinent men" are young men with no interest in the opposite sex; "Japanese princesses" are young Japanese women who want both a family and their own career. Based on interviews with Japanese women married to foreign men, the authors shed light on a variety of issues, including workplace bias against women, worsening prospects for employment, and the mismatched needs of single men and women.

Machida Kō: A Fearlessly Creative Writer

Asked to name the most talented and inventive writer working in Japanese today, there is little doubt that many critics would reach for the same name: Machida Kō. Whether he is writing essays or fiction, his works are poignant, startling, and often laugh-out-loud funny in both content and tone.

Machida, a punk-rock singer before he became a novelist, made a sensational literary debut in 1996 with the short novel *Kussun Daikoku* [Daikoku in Tears]. The story manages to be hilarious and profound at the same time, combining elements of farce and realism. The protagonist decides to get rid of a bronze statue of Daikoku, the Japanese god of wealth, because it refuses to stand up straight and seems to bring nothing but bad luck. But every attempt to dump the sculpture ends in failure. Machida's choice of a jolly-looking Daikoku bronze as a prop provides the perfect vehicle for his puckish sense of humor and cynical view of the absurdity of human life. The story won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers and the Bunkamura Deux Magots Literary Prize.

"People probably think I'm nuts, but all I care about is making my stories funny," Machida says with a laugh that carries a hint of pride. "I started out as a musician, so the way words sound is just as important to me as what they mean," he adds.

Inspired by the Sex Pistols, Machida was the lyricist and vocalist of the critically acclaimed punk-rock band Inu while he was still in high school. After the band split up, Machida continued to sing while also building a reputation as a poet. Switching to prose, he brought the same distinctive musicality into his fiction. By now, his new stories are guaranteed a rapturous reception from readers as well as almost universal critical praise. He won the Akutagawa Prize for *Kiregire* [Shreds], a short novel told in the voice of an aimless and idiosyncratic character. *Gongen no odoriko* [The Avatar Dancer], in which a man travels to a small town for shopping but ends up being forced to perform strange dances, won the Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Literature. The speculative fantasy novel *Yadoya meguri* [Inn Visits] (see *JBN* No. 59) won the Noma Prize for Literature.

One of his major works is the 676-page "true crime" novel *Kokuhaku* [Confession] (see *JBN* No. 45), which won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize. The story is based on a well-known folk song about a series of ten murders that took place in 1893 in Kawachi, Osaka. The book traces the psychological transformation that turns a timid, contemplative man into a serial murderer. Machida makes heavy use of local dialect to depict the words and mind of the protagonist. By blending the local dialect with standard Japanese, Machida creates unusual rhythms that add an element of light relief to the probing, philosophical story.

"People tend to think of Osaka dialect as earthy and not particularly dignified," says Machida, himself an Osaka native. "But I knew that using it in serious literature would allow me to expand the range of the literary language. I want to resist the tendency in contemporary writ-

ing toward a kind of highbrow blandness, where voice and diction are submerged into the same, one-size-fits-all style."

Machida launches into an explanation of how the Kawachi dialect differs from that of other parts of Osaka, and how his favorite *rakugo* comedies and *rōkyoku* narrative ballads helped him form his own comic writing style, before suddenly stopping himself short: "But these things can't be of much interest to readers overseas, can they? My writing is full of puns and wordplay, which must be difficult to translate."

So far, two novellas including *Kiregire* are available in French, but no English translation has yet been published. His *Punk Samurai Kirarete Sōrō* [Punk Samurai and The Cult] is currently being translated into English, but apparently the translator has been getting stuck on some of the stranger elements of the plot.

"The translator pointed out one line of dialogue and asked me why a character would respond like this. I tried hard to explain the underlying logic, but he couldn't get it. He just threw his hands up and said only a mad man would ever say such a line," Machida giggles.

Machida himself suggests the short story "*Hon'ne gai*" ["Honestyville"] as a possible candidate for translation into English. "The language is relatively straightforward," he says, "even if the plot is totally off the wall!" In this fictional town, residents are incapable of hiding their true feelings. A beautiful woman steps out of an elevator, and as the male protagonist is about to get in she warns him that he may find it "a bit smelly in there. I just farted." As appealing as a life without pretensions or dissembling may appear on the surface, Machida's story suggests that the idea is nothing more than a fantasy.

Machida is currently at work on a modern translation of the fourteenth-century war chronicle *Gikeiki* [trans. *Yoshitsune*]. A previous project saw him adapting the sixth chapter of *Genji monogatari* [trans. *The Tale of Genji*]. He says he plans to use the same first-person perspective for the *Gikeiki* project: "A lot of the Japanese classics lack the fixed, constant narrative sensibility we are used to. This can sometimes make it difficult for modern readers to know who is telling the story. So I let Yoshitsune relay the story, and stick faithfully to the original plot." With his skillful use of satire, humor, and his unique sense of rhythm, Machida is rapidly building an oeuvre as impressive as any in contemporary letters.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Machida Kō

Born in 1962. Performed as a rock vocalist before making his debut as a writer in 1996. French translations exist of his Akutagawa Prize-winning novella, *Kiregire* [Charivari], and *Kemonogare, orera no saru to* [Tribulations avec mon singe], which has also been made into a film. His other works include *Kokuhaku*, which won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize, *Gongen no odoriko*, winner of the Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Literature, and *Yadoya meguri*, which garnered the Noma Prize for Literature.