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Writing a New Generation of Japanese Women

Tanaka Yayoi

Women writers have played a leading role in Japanese literature since its earliest days. One who has made an impact in recent years is Wataya Risa (b. 1984), who made a stunning debut in 2001 when she was just 17 and still in high school. In 2004, she became the youngest ever winner of the prestigious Akutagawa Prize.

Most of Wataya's works feature female protagonists—generally women of her own generation. But there is something peculiar about these female characters. In terms of their personalities and psychology, they are closer to the concept of *seinen* (youths) than to any traditional Japanese idea of femininity. *Seinen* is a term that refers to people from their late teens to their thirties. In a narrower sense, it refers to the modern-minded young people who have been the most frequent subjects of Japanese literature since the late nineteenth century. Although there is no reason why the term should not apply equally to both men and women, in practice it has referred mostly to men. In Wataya's case, however, her "*seinen*" are often young women.

In her bestselling debut *Insutōru* (Install, 2001), for example, Asako is a high school student who lives with her mother, an office worker. As the result of a series of coincidences Asako becomes involved in online "prostitution" on an Internet chatroom site. She is a high school student selling sex. Earlier authors might have focused on her conflicted feelings or defiant attitude. But Wataya's story is different. Before she starts the job, Asako speaks of it with excitement—the kind of exhilaration we might expect from a teenage boy in an anime who has been allowed to take control of a giant robot. What is about to happen is not a serious issue for her. The fact that the prostitution is only virtual is presumably a large part of the explanation—but throughout the story, Wataya emphasizes Asako's typical "*seinen*" appetite for adventure and longing for new experiences. Once the story begins, she naturally discovers her own identity as a woman. But that discovery comes after her awakening as a *seinen*. She becomes a *seinen* first, and only later a woman.

With this work, Wataya paints a snapshot of Japan in the early twenty-first century—a time when young women are better placed than young men to act as the *seinen* of their generation. She is more than just a popular woman writer; she has become one of the most important young writers of her time. Obviously, Wataya's work reflects changes in the wider world, such as Japan's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1985 and the revision of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law that followed. With these changes, Japanese society became one in

which men and women were ostensibly equal. Wataya was one of the first generation of girls born into this new society. This generation has produced a number of outstanding women writers. Another who stands alongside Wataya is Kanehara Hitomi (b. 1983).

Unlike Wataya, who writes mostly about ordinary people, Kanehara's heroines are often super-talented and attractive women. Despite their superficial differences, however, both authors' protagonists have something in common: they all encapsulate the idea of women as *seinen*. Kanehara's novel *Amiibikku* (Amebic, 2005) is the story of a woman writer with a dangerous alter ego: a spirit that resembles a destructive young man. This spirit is manifested as chaotic (i.e., amebic) sentences on the protagonist's computer, threatening to disrupt her life as a woman. In Kanehara's later works, such as *Ōtofikushon* (Autofiction, 2006) and *Mazāzu* (Mothers, 2011), her female characters often seem to have a cold and uncaring *seinen* perspective and view their own bodies as objects, looking on scornfully as they give birth and raise children. For these women, the *seinen* spirit that supposedly results from equality in fact becomes a source of pain, causing them to feel reflexive contempt for their own feminine selves.

The new character of young women has had a reinvigorating effect on the language of writers from other generations as well. Shōno Yoriko (b. 1956) has written with an attitude and atmosphere all her own since her debut in the 1980s. Her works have depicted the *seinen* character of women a generation older than Wataya's characters, and the suffering that results. Her best-known work, *Konpira* (Konpira, 2004), is the mysterious story of a woman's double life. She is simultaneously both a writer and the polytheistic god Konpira—the god having possessed the body of a girl who died immediately after birth. Shōno describes how a spiritual entity transcending gender and circumstances grows inside a Japanese woman and how it is oppressed by the assimilatory pressure of Japanese society. At first glance Shōno's work, in which multiple spiritual entities speak through a single human being, appears dauntingly difficult. But the first few pages leave no doubt that this uniquely distorted image of Japan has a reality to it that no other writer can capture. Her work exposes the cruelty and pre-modern aggressiveness toward foreign bodies that have taken root in Japanese society, and reminds young people—women in particular—of the danger that the *seinen* character, although it is tolerated today, might be oppressed again as a result of social changes in the future.

Yang Yi (b. 1964) is a writer from China who writes in

Japanese. She won the Akutagawa Prize for *Toki ga nijimu asa* (A Morning When Time Blurs, 2008), a novel dealing with the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. Like Mo Yan, she is a writer who describes the modern destiny of the Chinese people to an overseas audience. It is precisely this outsider's perspective that allows her to depict so forcefully the changes taking place in Japanese society—particularly those affecting Japanese women, making her work a precious record for Japanese people of the changes taking place in their society. Her debut novel *Wan-chan* (Little Wang, 2007) describes the life of a Chinese woman named Little Wang, who lives in Japan with her Japanese husband. Interestingly, not a single young Japanese woman enters Little Wang's field of vision.

The place occupied by Chinese women in Yang Yi's world is a place from which Japanese women have fled in the process of becoming *seinen*. When the women of one country become *seinen* and gain the freedom to set out on their own, this does not lead to changes in society, but rather ends up binding women in other countries to a pre-modern concept of womanhood and labor. Yang Yi's depiction of a Japan without Japanese women vividly reveals the light and darkness produced by capitalism.

Shibasaki Tomoka (b. 1973), one generation older than Wataya, is a writer who skillfully portrays the reticent, passive, non-*seinen* aspects of traditional Asian femininity. These remain part of the identity of many Japanese women even today. Her best-known work, *Nete mo samete mo* (Dreaming Night and Day, 2010), is a story about a young woman addicted to visual culture. Like the main character in Wataya's novel *Insutōru*, the protagonist is named Asako (literally, "child of morning"), a symbolic name suggestive of a new dawn. She is a universal figure—the kind of woman found in every age and every part of the world, abandoned by a young man who leaves her for his next adventure. In a story reminiscent of a contemporary Japanese *Don Quixote*, Shibasaki recounts the earnestness of Asako's escape into a fantasy world of images, leaving no doubt about Asako's need for an autonomous voice of her own. Shibasaki articulates the feelings of someone left behind by the modern world. This work is a true masterpiece whose effects encapsulate literary fiction at its best.

Kashimada Maki (b. 1976) is a writer who stands out for her ambivalent style, which incorporates elements of post-colonialism, feminism, and other literary theoretical tropes while wrestling hard against these elements at the same time. This distinctive sense of passion and martyrdom may be connected to the fact that she is one of Japan's relatively few Orthodox Christians. In her short story collection *Hitori no kanashimi wa sekai no owari ni hitteki suru* (One Person's Sadness Is Tantamount to the End of the World, 2003), she depicts Japan's cultural environment, with its tendency to measure everything against the standards of Western modernity, as a tragicomedy that unfolds in a missionary school. In her novel *Rokusen-do no ai* (Love at 6,000 Degrees, 2005), she uses the atomic bomb as a metaphor to express the emotions of the Japanese people, with their burning longing for the West. In recent years she has turned from the complex, avant-garde style of her early works to a simpler style of writing. In *Kurete yuku ai* (Love's Decline, 2013), she su-

perimposes a wife's stupefied acceptance of her husband onto Japanese readiness to accept modernization, successfully transforming silent acceptance into a subjective language of love.

Murata Kiyoko (b. 1945) is a writer who has provided a corrective counterbalance to the Tokyo-centric perspective of Japanese culture from the southern island of Kyūshū. Her early short story "Nabe no naka" (In the Pot, 1987) was filmed by Kurosawa as *Rhapsody in August* (1991). Her recent novel *Yūjo kō* (A Study of Courtesans, 2013) marks a new departure. Set in the Meiji era [1868–1912], the novel depicts prostitutes as *seinen* figures awakening to the new spirit of modernity. Like a female version of Kurosawa's masterpiece *Seven Samurai* (1954), this moving work depicts a group of prostitutes from different social classes who come together as a group of *seinen* united by the common values of the modern age. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the novel, however, is the depiction of the heroine Ichi, who provides a counterpoint to the other women as they develop into modern *seinen*. Ichi is also a prostitute, but her Huck Finn-like innocence is not shaken by the act of prostitution or swayed by any of the propaganda of modern ideas. Within the single character of one prostitute, Murata gives expression to the fundamental soul that at once transcends and provides the basis for sex, modern education, and the *seinen* spirit they produce. This novel deserves to be counted among the greatest achievements of Japanese literature in recent years.

In the works of young women writers in today's Japan, the morals and behavior of young women are undergoing a change. They are becoming *seinen*, and using a Western-influenced, subject-oriented, and aggressive new style of language. At the same time, other female writers from different generations are addressing the phenomenon in outstanding works, perhaps unconsciously compensating for the radicalness and fragility of the younger generation and pushing ahead with the intricate work of returning a comprehensive sense of femininity to language. It is almost like a soccer team—with some writers attacking from the front while others keep a tight defense at the back. Is this balance between women writers of different generations something that exists in other countries as well? These women's stealthy literary collaborations are something well worth keeping an eye on in the years to come.

Tanaka Yayoi

Literary critic. Born in 1972. Graduated from Tokyo University of the Arts. In 2006, she received the 49th Gunzō Award for New Writers Excellence Award for Kairi suru watashi: Nakamura Fuminori (The Alienated I: Nakamura Fuminori). In Suriringu na onna tachi (Thrilling Women, 2012), she examined the creative inspirations behind the work of six contemporary women writers: Kashimada Maki, Motoya Yukiko, Wataya Risa, Kanehara Hitomi, Shimamoto Rio, and Shibasaki Tomoka.

FICTION



Itō Seikō

Born in 1961. Writer, actor, and entertainer. Worked as an editor in a publishing firm after university and has since enjoyed a successful career in music, theater, and television. Won the 15th Kōdansha Essay Award in 1999 for Botanikaru raifu [Botanical Life].

An original attempt to confront the trauma of 3/11

Sōzō rajio [Imagination Radio]

By Itō Seikō

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2013. 194 x 132 mm. 200 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-309-02172-0.

This novel opens with the voice of DJ Ark, a popular radio personality. DJ Ark's programming follows a familiar format: music interspersed with light banter. What sets this broadcast apart is the fact that it exists purely in the imagination.

DJ Ark, it turns out, is a tsunami victim whose body was left unburied in the radioactive evacuation zone around the stricken Fukushima nuclear power plant. The DJ's body still languishes in the top-most branches of the cedar tree where he breathed his last on March 11, 2011. But his consciousness, caught between this world and the next, continues to broadcast.

People on the same spiritual "wavelength" are able to hear him. They phone in and email one request after another. A novelist named S (who closely resembles

the author) is unable to pick up the broadcasts, although his friend hears them loud and clear.

DJ Ark elicits a wide range of reactions from his audience before he leaves the world of the living for good and the shows come to an end. Do the dead send messages to the living? Are the living permitted to speak for the departed? What is the right way to mourn the dead? These are among the enduring questions asked by this novel, an original literary attempt to come to terms with the experience of 3/11. (Nozaki)

Warinaki koi [Love Beyond Reason]

By Kishi Keiko

Gentōsha Literary Publication, 2013. 194 x 132 mm. 324 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-344-02361-1.

The protagonist of this novel is a world-famous documentary filmmaker named Ina Shōko. At the age of 69, she is a busy, overscheduled woman, constantly flitting around the world.

On a flight to Paris, she strikes up a conversation with a business executive in the next seat. They share their memories of the Prague Spring and end up exchanging telephone numbers. So begins Shōko's love affair with a married man 11 years her junior.

Shōko, who has lived alone since her French husband was killed in an accident, is hesitant to accept the man's advances at first. She even consults a doctor, concerned that she may no longer be physically capable of a sexual relationship. But ultimately she surrenders to passion. Stealing moments from their hectic sched-

ules, they savor the joys of being alive until one day, six years after their first meeting, a crisis threatens their relationship.

Author Kishi Keiko is a movie actress who lived in France for many years. In addition to her acting career, which includes appearances in films by Kurosawa Akira and Ozu Yasujirō, she has made a name for herself as an essayist since her time in France. In this first novel, she has electrified and moved readers with a vivid depiction of love and passion that transcends age. (Nozaki)



Kishi Keiko

Actress and author. Acting career includes appearances in major films such as Yukiguni [Snow Country] and Sasameyuki [The Makioka Sisters]. Lived in Paris for over 40 years and has written widely of her experiences overseas. Named Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters by the French government in 2011.

A moving depiction of an older woman in love



Sakuragi Shino

Born in 1965. Won the 82nd All Yomimono Prize for New Writers in 2002 for Yukimushi [*Snow Bugs*], the 19th Shimase Romantic Literature Prize for Raburesu [*Loveless*] in 2012, and the 149th Naoki Prize for *Hoteru rōyaru* in 2013.

Collection depicting several decades in the life of a love hotel

Hoteru rōyaru **[Hotel Royal]**

By Sakuragi Shino

Shūeisha, 2013. 193 x 134 mm. 200 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-08-771492-0.

In a desolate spot in rural Hokkaidō stands a solitary love hotel, incongruously perched on the edge of a swamp. This is Hotel Royal, a typically garish establishment where rooms can be rented by the hour. When the local economy collapses, business goes from bad to worse until a double suicide in one of the rooms forces the hotel to close. All that is left is the abandoned old hotel, buffeted by the cold Hokkaidō wind.

This, in chronological outline, is the story of *Hoteru rōyaru*. But the novel itself is neither simple nor linear in its narrative. The ruined hotel is not the main subject of the story, but merely its setting. Against this backdrop, characters come and go, mired in their daily routine, either connecting with one another or missing their connections as the isolated commu-

nity around them suffers a serious economic decline.

Hoteru rōyaru is composed of seven stand-alone chapters that describe separate incidents set in the hotel across the years: the crisis that embroils the owner, his wife, and his mistress; the impact of that crisis on his eldest daughter; a day in the life of a middle-aged couple who find themselves at the hotel by chance; the strange fate of the wife of the priest entrusted with the original owner's ashes; and an episode in which a couple take nude photos in the room where the double suicide took place. To weave so many lives into one novel is a challenge. By using the hotel as a unifying backdrop, Sakuragi has avoided the unfocused quality of many short-story collections and has written a novel that goes beyond the ordinary. (Chō)

Yamaneko dōmu **[Wildcat Dome]**

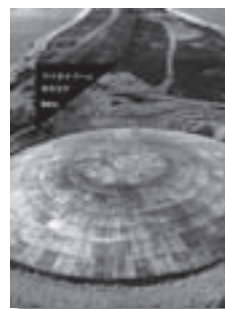
By Tsushima Yūko

Kōdansha, 2013. 193 x 136 mm. 335 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-06-218275-1.

The protagonists of this novel are Mitch and Kazu, children resulting from short-lived liaisons between Japanese women and American servicemen after World War II. Never knowing their parents, they grow up in an orphanage under the care of a woman known as Mama, who has made it her mission to take in abandoned mixed-race children. When a girl named Miki drowns in a pond, Mitch and Kazu suspect that a boy who lives near the orphanage may have pushed her in. Years later, they are haunted by news reports about a string of murders that take place over the course of several years, all involving young women who were wearing orange when they were killed. Miki too was wearing an orange skirt at the time of the accident. Is there a connection between these cases and Miki's death?

The mysterious setup of the plot is deepened by the unique, dizzying structure of the narrative, in which the characters take turns narrating the story in a rotating monologue. At the heart of this maelstrom lies a damning criticism of modern Japan and its tendency to bury shameful memories, from the tragic lessons of World War II to the nuclear accident in Fukushima.

Tsushima's depiction of the discrimination faced by these mixed-race orphans treated like "wildcats" casts Japanese society in a harsh light. Written in the long shadow of 3/11, *Yamaneko dōmu* is a searing masterpiece of resistance literature. (Nozaki)



Tsushima Yūko

Born in 1947. Prizes include the 10th Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Literature for Danmariichi [*The Silent Traders*] and the 34th Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize for Hi no yama—Yamazaruki [*Mountain of Fire: Account of a Wild Monkey*]. Other works include *Ogon no yume no uta* [*Golden Dream Songs*] (see JBN Nos. 17, 69).

A damning criticism of contemporary society



Yoshida Shūichi

Born in 1968. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 2002 for *Pāku raifu* [Park Life]. His numerous works include *Akunin* [trans. Villain] (see JBN No. 54) and *Heisei saru kani kassen zu* [The Battle of the Monkey and the Crab: A Modern Portrait] (see JBN No. 53).

A drama of domestic betrayal with a twist

Ai ni ranbō **[Doing Violence to Love]**

By Yoshida Shūichi

Shinchōsha, 2013. 195 x 136 mm. 351 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-10-462806-3.

Momoko lives with her husband in a house on his parents' property outside Tokyo. Momoko gets on well with her in-laws, and although she and her husband have no children, their marriage of seven-plus years is a happy one—or so Momoko believes. In fact, her office-worker husband has betrayed her and taken a mistress.

One day he abruptly announces that he wants a divorce. Momoko refuses, determined to defend her position as mistress of the household, and conceals the truth from her husband's parents. But her husband's weak-minded vacillation gradually undermines her own sense of equilibrium.

In its outlines, this is the most familiar of domestic dramas. But in the hands of a master storyteller like Yoshida Shūichi, it becomes a fresh and original tale, filled

with discovery. Through his skillful use of Momoko's diary, Yoshida guides the reader to discover the connection between the dissatisfaction and resentments of the present and the buried secrets of Momoko herself and her husband's family.

It is a thrilling process, driven in part by a destructive urge that longs for catastrophe. But the author also conveys a sense of hope that better days will follow in the wake of the family's trials. This is a novel based on a profound sense of sympathy with the difficult lot that many Japanese women still face today. (Nozaki)

ESSAY

Kono yo wa rakugo **[All the World's a Rakugo Stage]**

By Nakano Midori

Chikuma Shobō, 2013. 188 x 130 mm. 304 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-480-87370-5.

Rakugo first became popular among the urban masses of the Edo period (1603–1868). It has survived into the modern era and still flourishes as Japan's traditional art of spoken comedy. Performed by a single raconteur in traditional dress on a bare stage, *rakugo* is a stripped-down art form. With a fan and handkerchief as his only props, the storyteller uses words and gesture alone to entertain his audience. Many routines involve the lives of ordinary people and the miniature calamities and comedies of human life.

One of the major attractions of *rakugo* is that each performer has his own distinctive style. In *rakugo*, the same person acts as performer, scriptwriter, and producer. He uses his voice and storytelling skills to bring various scenes vividly alive, performing the parts of the diverse characters

and personalities who appear in the story.

The author is a columnist and longtime *rakugo* fanatic who describes the art form as "Japan's greatest cultural heritage." She delights in the fact that the *rakugo* performers have no connection with power, describing them as "fools of every kind imaginable," who serve as a "comprehensive catalogue of human foible and foolishness." At its heart, she says, *rakugo* is a celebration of the human spirit. It is also a crystallization of the Japanese way of life, of the Japanese aesthetic, and of Japanese wisdom and refinement in the broadest sense of the terms. This book, which introduces 53 *rakugo* monologues in an accessible style, is an enjoyable introduction to Japan's art of spoken comedy. (Yonahara)



Nakano Midori

Columnist and essayist. After studying political science and economics at Waseda University, worked in a publishing company before becoming a full-time writer. Her articles and books have covered everything from social issues and current events to film, books, and *rakugo*.

An enjoyable introduction to Japan's art of comedy



Taniguchi Motoi

Born in 1964. Associate professor of modern Japanese literature at Ibaraki University. Works include *Senzen sengo itan bungakuron* [*Literary Theories of Pre- and Postwar Heterodoxy*].

*Excellent study
of an important
popular fiction
writer*

***Sengo henkakuha Yamada Futarō* [Yamada Futarō: Postwar Misfit]**

By Taniguchi Motoi

Seikyūsha, 2013. 188 x 128 mm. 408 pp. ¥3,000. ISBN 978-4-7872-9211-7.

Born in 1922, Yamada Futarō was the doyen of Japanese popular fiction until his death in 2001. From his early beginnings as the enfant terrible of the postwar literary scene he became a dominant figure and standard-bearer of entertainment fiction. From detective fiction, he turned his hand to fantasy, historical fiction, ninja stories, and fiction based on strange events from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was a gifted storyteller who played a key part in the development of a number of new genres. He won himself a passionate readership, and his popularity shows no sign of waning more than a decade after his death.

One of the distinguishing features of Yamada's work was his tendency to set his stories on the borders between different periods or places. In this respect, his

experience of the war had a decisive impact. Yamada was at medical school when Japan surrendered and felt guilty for the rest of his life at the thought that circumstances had saved him from dying at the front like so many of his contemporaries.

This excellent study offers a close analysis of Yamada's writing and makes clear the view of history that lay behind the work. It contains diverse and probing discussions on everything from the author's prewar reading to the dark, brooding stories he wrote following Japan's defeat. The author also looks at the medical knowledge, sexology, and science fiction elements in Yamada's work, as well discussing his Bible parodies and his belief in ghosts. (Yonahara)

***Kane to bungaku* [Money and Literature: An Economic History of Modern Japanese Literature]**

By Yamamoto Yoshiaki

Shinchō Sensho, 2013. 190 x 123 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 978-4-10-603724-5.

In modern Japan, a clear dividing line separates popular writing from *junbungaku* ("pure," or serious, literature). But the literary writers responsible for these works have not dedicated their lives to the single-minded pursuit of pure art. Existing within the mechanism of a market economy, they had no choice but to live by selling their works as commodities and receiving compensation in return. And in most cases, they have preferred to be treated as respected figures with social prestige rather than live in seclusion as hermits dedicated to their art.

How have these writers made a living and sustained their position in society? Despite its centrality to any country's modern literary history, this question has

attracted very little scholarly attention in Japan. In this book, Yamamoto Yoshiaki uses a rich diversity of resources and materials to analyze the situation. He shows how rising standards of living around the time of World War I made it possible for authors to live comfortably by their writing for the first time. This period lasted into the 1960s, interrupted by periods of hardship during times of economic depression and war. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in taking a fresh look at modern Japanese literature from the perspective of social history. (Karube)

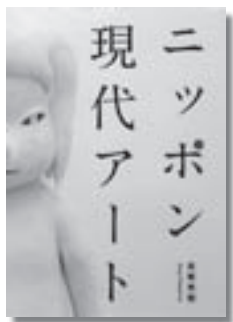


Yamamoto Yoshiaki

Born in 1955. Did his doctoral studies at the University of Tokyo and is now professor in the Faculty of Letters, Gakushūin University, where he specializes in modern Japanese literature. Works include *Bungakusha wa tsukurareru* [*Writers Are Made*].

*How do writers
make a living
from literature?*

FINE ARTS



Takashina Shūji

Born in 1923. A specialist in the history of Western art and formerly curator of the National Museum of Western Art. Now curator of the Ohara Museum of Art and professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo. Awards include an honorary doctorate from the Sorbonne and the Japanese Order of Culture.

An accessible introduction to contemporary Japanese art

Nippon gendai āto **[Contemporary Japanese Art]**

By Takashina Shūji

Kōdansha, 2013. 210 x 144 mm. 133 pp. ¥2,300. ISBN 978-4-06-6218347-5.

For most people, contemporary Japanese art is an esoteric subject. Although most educated adults have at least a nodding acquaintance with the main names of modern fiction, very few could tell you the first thing about Japan's contemporary art scene. The very term "contemporary art" has become synonymous with impenetrability. Part of the reason is that contemporary art is so diverse, diffuse, and disorganized. Most contemporary artists work independently and are not affiliated with any major artistic movement or organization.

But there is more to it than that. The fact is that Japan has no art market aimed at the general public. It is rare for people to buy art to display at home. Galleries cater almost exclusively to experts and collectors.

Determined to do something to im-

prove this sad state of affairs, Takashina Shūji has put together a ground-breaking publication that aims to open people's eyes to some of the exciting work being done in Japanese art today.

The first challenge for anyone undertaking such a project is to choose a manageable selection from the enormous number of artists working today. Takashina, one of Japan's most distinguished art historians and critics, has chosen works by 30 artists to represent the most important trends in contemporary Japanese art. The book does not claim to be a comprehensive survey. Nonetheless, this outstanding selection and its accessible commentary provide a fascinating single-volume introduction to the rich variety of art being created in Japan today. (Chō)

CULTURE

Omiyage to tetsudō **[Souvenirs and the Railways]**

By Suzuki Yūichirō

Kōdansha, 2013. 188 x 127 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-218156-3.

Visit any tourist site in Japan, and you're sure to find piles of local produce and neatly packaged mementoes for sale as souvenirs. Picking out a suitable *omiyage* (souvenir) is part of the fun of traveling for many Japanese. People give small gifts to their relatives, friends, and colleagues as a way of sharing their impressions of the trip. Common gifts include snacks and examples of local handicrafts.

The *omiyage* tradition apparently dates back to pilgrimages to Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, when people would take small gifts home as "proof" that they had offered food to the gods and prayed for the protection of their families.

But it was in the early modern period that the practice developed into the nationwide phenomenon we know today. Its development ties in closely with the de-

velopment of Japan's modern political and economic systems. Three main factors were important: the development of a national rail network, the establishment of the modern army and the resulting movement of people, and the birth of large-scale fairs and exhibitions that made local produce and specialties more widely known around the country.

These newly established modern systems intertwined in complex ways, and new types of modern *omiyage* were developed as the practice of buying and giving *omiyage* developed into a distinctive part of the Japanese way of travel. This unusual scholarly book sheds new light on a fascinating aspect of modern Japan and traces in detail how *omiyage* products have been created and developed in various areas of modern Japan. (Yonahara)



Suzuki Yūichirō

Born 1972. Research fellow at Rikkyo Archives, Rikkyo University. Completed a doctorate in history at Aoyama Gakuin University. Specializes in modern Japanese and modern urban history. Works include Kindai Nippon no daitoshi keisei [The Formation of Modern Japan's Big Cities].

The early modern roots of Japanese omiyage culture



Mitani Kazuma

Born in 1912, died in 2005. Studied Japanese painting at Tokyo Fine Arts School. He devoted his career to illustrations of Edo-period customs. Awarded the Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for Literature in 1988.

A fascinating guide to a unique aspect of Edo culture

Edo kanban zushū **[Pictorial Collection of Edo Shop Signs]**

By Mitani Kazuma

Chūōkōrōn Shinsha, 2013. 216 x 151 mm. 289 pp. ¥5,000. ISBN 978-4-12-004470-0.

Nineteenth-century Edo (modern Tokyo) was one of the world's biggest cities, with a population of over a million. The city had a highly developed commercial culture, and the streets were crowded with shops of every kind. These advertised their business with handmade *kanban*, eye-catching wooden signs whose shapes varied according to the type of business. As Japan entered the modern era in the second half of the nineteenth century, these wooden *kanban* gradually disappeared.

Happily, they did not vanish without a trace. Their images are preserved in woodblock prints and book illustrations, as well as a few late examples of *kanban* that survive from the late nineteenth century. This book is an attempt to reconstruct what the *kanban* originally looked

like, based on a wide range of Edo-period sources. Compiling such a book may seem straightforward, but finding and selecting the right sources requires hard work, patience and a good eye—not to mention genuine expertise. As a leading scholar of Edo culture and a painter who specialized in Japanese art, Mitani Kazuma was perfectly qualified for the task.

To open this book is to be astonished by the sheer number and variety of *kanban* it records. They encompass every type of business from clothing stores and cosmetic shops to eating and drinking establishments, apothecaries, stationery shops, and freak shows. This valuable reference volume highlights the richness of Edo culture from a unique perspective. (Chō)

SOCIETY

Shōjo shōsetsu no seisei **[Stories for Girls: A Century of Gender Politics]**

By Kume Yoriko

Seikyūsha, 2013. 193 x 131 mm. 358 pp. ¥3,000. ISBN 978-4-7872-9215-5.

Today Japanese manga and anime, symbolized by the simplified image of a “*kawaii*” young girl, have achieved such prominence around the world that they can be fairly described as belonging to the “global standards” of pop culture. Just about anywhere in the world, most of the audience for these pictures of cute young women would be young men.

But in Japan, it is not only boys but also girls who have been most attracted to these images, and *shōjo manga* (girls' comics) are one of the longest established sub-genres of manga. Part of the background to this phenomenon is the history of Japanese novels for girls, named *shōjo shōsetsu*, which dates back to the 1890s. How were girls portrayed in these novels aimed at a mass market? In this book, Kume Yoriko analyzes the history of the

genre from a gender studies perspective.

Originally, such novels started out as stories for girls that appeared in magazines marketed at teenagers of both sexes. Essentially, they served as a means of inculcating an understanding of the gender roles expected of women. But, supported by their young female readership, the novels developed in their own way and eventually started to produce stories that broke free of the shackles of the family system. Similarly, the female characters in *shōjo manga* and anime today do not merely represent conventional roles but hint at deviations from social norms. This book instills in the reader a sense of hope in the productive power of culture. (Karube)



Kume Yoriko

Professor of modern Japanese and children's literature at Meiji University. Did doctoral-level studies at Japan Women's University. Works as coauthor include Shōjo shōnen no poritikkusu [The Politics Concerning “Girls” and “Boys”] and Kyōkō no tanoshimi [The Fun of Fiction].

Changing gender roles in stories for girls

EDUCATION



Arimoto Maki

Born in 1958. Professor of music education and historical sociology at the College of Arts, Rikkyo University. Completed a master's degree at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.

Graduation ceremony tears as a rite of passage

Sotsugyōshiki no rekishigaku **[History of the Graduation Ceremony]**

By Arimoto Maki

Kōdansha, 2013. 188 x 129 mm. 264 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-258549-1.

Customs marking the completion of one's school years vary considerably from country to country. American high school students typically attend a prom at the end of their senior year. Japanese high schools have no such custom. Instead, they focus on the graduation ceremony itself, which is regarded as a major milestone in a person's life. The Japanese also treat graduation from elementary and junior high school as important rites of passage. The same cannot be said of college graduation ceremonies. A Japanese elementary school or secondary school graduation without tears is almost unimaginable. By contrast, a college graduation ceremony is treated more as a formality than a cathartic experience. What accounts for the difference?

In *Sotsugyōshiki no rekishigaku*, Arimoto Maki explores how graduation

ceremonies have developed in Japan and takes a look at their cultural significance—with a special focus on the element of tears.

People in Japan tend to assume that graduation ceremonies are a Western import. In fact, the Japanese graduation ceremony as it exists today is essentially a homegrown rite.

Since Japanese graduation ceremonies are tightly scheduled and carefully rehearsed, crying is actually written into the script. Nevertheless, graduates almost invariably recall their tears as spontaneous. Arimoto's elucidation of this deliberately choreographed response is perhaps the most interesting aspect of this fascinating study. (Chō)

HISTORY

Meiji jingū **[Meiji Shrine]**

By Imaizumi Yoshiko

Shinchō Sensho, 2013. 191 x 128 mm. 352 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-603723-8.

Located in the heart of Harajuku, Tokyo's center of youth culture and street fashion, Meiji Shrine is secluded by dense woodland in grounds that stretch over 72 hectares. It is an oasis of calm and peace. Walking through the grounds, it is hard to believe that you are in the middle of a bustling modern city.

Meiji Shrine was founded in 1920 to revere the spirits of the Meiji emperor, who died eight years earlier, and his empress. Many people were involved in the construction of the new shrine, which was designed to symbolize the spirit of the new modern Japan. Many had spent time in the West.

These early pioneers in the new fields of urban planning, architecture, forestry, and art combined the latest modern Western knowledge with Japanese traditions to

discover their own answers to the problems they faced. This book focuses on 12 of the most important figures, painting a revealing group portrait of the people who made this great project a success.

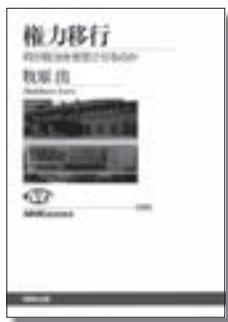
But the building of Meiji Shrine was not just an endeavor carried out by a team of specialists. It also involved the widespread mobilization of the general population. Some 100,000 trees and countless cash donations were received from around the country, and some 110,000 people volunteered to help out with the construction work. As well as being a place of prayer, Meiji Shrine was an act of urban planning that involved an attempt to construct a space that would be at once a vision of the future and a place of memory. (Yonahara)



Imaizumi Yoshiko

Born in 1970. Senior researcher at the Meiji Shrine International Shinto Culture Research Center. Graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Tokyo and obtained her PhD from SOAS, University of London.

How Tokyo's Shinto landmark was built



Makihara Izuru

Born in 1967. Graduated from the University of Tokyo, where he now teaches. Works include *Naikaku seiji to "Ōkurashō shihai"* [Cabinet Politics and "The Power of the Ministry of Finance"], which won the 2003 Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities.

An attempt to get to the heart of Japanese politics

Kenryoku ikō **[Power Shifts and Political Stability]**

By Makihara Izuru

NHK Publishing, 2013. 182 x 128 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,000. ISBN 978-4-14-091205-8.

Japanese politics has undergone major changes over the past 20 years. Why did the Liberal Democratic Party suddenly fall from power in the 1990s after being in office since 1955? And why was the Democratic Party of Japan's period of dominance so short-lived following its overwhelming electoral victory in 2009? Control of the government switched back to the LDP almost immediately, with neither party cabinet able to exert a stabilizing control. In this book, one of Japan's leading scholars of public administration and the bureaucracy attempts to answer these and other questions that get to the heart of modern Japanese politics.

During the 1990s, the LDP and its various coalition partners carried out a number of reforms: relaxing restrictions on economic activities, reorganizing govern-

ment ministries, and decentralization of power. This book's distinctive approach is to explain the defeat of the LDP in 2009 as one of the outcomes of this "age of reform." As calls became louder for politicians to bring the bureaucracy under control as part of this process, the dysfunctional nature of successive LDP governments became obvious, and people transferred their hopes to the DPJ.

But the DPJ was not equipped to fulfill people's expectations either, and power soon reverted to the LDP. How can Japan solve this problem of instability? Makihara argues that Japan needs to establish a system capable of ensuring a smooth transition between governments. As well as being a handy introduction to modern Japanese politics, this excellent book also offers reflections and ideas for the future. (Karube)

THOUGHT

Yokoi Shōnan kenkyū **[Yokoi Shōnan: A Study]**

By Minamoto Ryōen

Fujiwara Shoten, 2013. 215 x 153 mm. 560 pp. ¥9,500. ISBN 978-4-89434-920-9.

Yokoi Shōnan (1809–69), a Confucian scholar active around the time of the Meiji "Restoration" (perhaps better referred to as a "revolution"), is little known outside Japan, despite the importance of his philosophy. In recent years, considerable new scholarly work has been done on Confucian thought in pre-modern Japan and China, challenging the conventional view of Confucianism as merely the philosophical underpinnings of feudal control. This has helped to reveal the positive significance of Confucian thought in a variety of areas. From the perspective of global research trends, this book too can be seen as a similar revisionist appraisal of Confucian thought.

What Minamoto Ryōen has attempted in this book, however, goes beyond simply reevaluating Confucianism as a tradi-

tion separate from Western philosophy. Central to Yokoi Shōnan's thinking was the idea that the *kōron* method of public discussion used in neo-Confucian scholarship should be expanded and put to use by the daimyō in governing their domains. When he later learned about politics in the West, he argued in favor of introducing a parliamentary system in Japan.

As the example of Shōnan illustrates well, Confucianism, as the traditional philosophy of East Asia, provided the basis for understanding Western political principles and later provided the framework for a concept of global order. This book serves as a useful reminder of the importance of Shōnan's thought in this regard. (Karube)



Minamoto Ryōen

Born in 1920. Professor emeritus at Tōhoku University and member of the Japan Academy. Specializes in the history of Japanese thought. Numerous works include *Giri to ninjō* [Duty and Compassion] and *Tokugawa gōri shisō no keifu* [Genealogy of Rational Thought in the Tokugawa Era].

Confucianism and Western political principles

No. 5: Ibuse Masuji and Kōshū

Best known internationally for his atomic bomb novel *Kuroi ame* (trans. *Black Rain*), Hiroshima-born novelist Ibuse Masuji (1898–1993) also wrote many evocative essays on his love of river fishing that are among his most beloved works. Many of these are set along the little-known rivers of Kōshū, in modern Yamanashi Prefecture.

Ibuse Masuji's connection to Kōshū (roughly equivalent to modern Yamanashi Prefecture) came through Satō Kōseki, a man renowned as a “master” of river fishing. In September 1936, the two men set out to fish the Hontanigawa in the Masutomi Valley. Ibuse would later claim that he had “no particular interest in fishing at the time” and gradually became absorbed in the hobby only after Satō suggested he had an aptitude for it. But we can probably write this off as nothing more than Ibuse's characteristic self-deprecation. He had always loved fish—even changing the spelling of his given name to write it with the kanji for “trout” (*masu*). This introduction to river fishing was a decisive event in Ibuse's life—one that shaped him as a writer and enabled him to carve a unique niche for himself with his essays on fishing and the natural and human landscapes of Japan's rivers. A good number of these were set along the rivers of Kōshū.

Many of his essays open with a reference to the rivers of Kōshū.

“I recently returned from another trip to the Amagōchigawa.”

“When I evacuated to Kōfu during the war I spent most of my time in the rivers fishing for ayu.”

“Recently, poaching and illicit methods of fishing using poison have made it as far as the rivers of Kōshū.”

Many of his pieces refer to rivers that would have been unfamiliar to most of his readers. The Amagōchigawa, Sanogawa, Ojiragawa, Idefukushigawa, Tokuwagawa, Aozasagawa, Tochishirogawa . . . Few outsiders would have heard of most of these rivers—many of them minor tributaries that are not marked even on a large-scale 1:50,000 map. Some are regional names known only to



Ibuse Masuji (right) on a fishing trip with haiku poet Iida Ryūta. Photo by Kobayashi Toshio. (Collection of Yamanashi Prefectural Museum of Art.)

locals. Indeed, there is little reason for anyone to visit these rivers, other than the people who live there and anglers who come to fish the valley streams.

On overnight trips, Ibuse would stay at one of the simple inns for traveling salesmen or one of the local hot springs. And these were typically not just flying visits—he often put up at the same place for several days at a time. As a result, he naturally became friendly with the owners, local residents, and others visiting the area for fishing or business. But it was more than fishing that drew Ibuse to Kōshū. Through his encounters with the local landscape and people he had discovered the perfect material for his writing. More of his works deal with Kōshū than with his hometown of Hiroshima. In Kōshū, Ibuse found a second home.

“I enjoy fishing, but I’m far from accomplished as an angler. Accordingly, although the pieces in this book have a good deal to say about fishing, the reader will find little in them about the techniques and practice of the art.”

These remarks come from the introduction to a collection published under the title *Kawazuri* [River Fishing]. Was it really the case that Ibuse was a poor fisherman? The testimony of the haiku poet Iida Ryūta, who considered Ibuse his mentor and often accompanied him on fishing excursions, makes it clear that the truth was quite different. Ibuse was simply being modest. And if he said “very little” about the techniques of fishing, that was merely because there were so many other things he wanted to say. Naturally, *Kawazuri* is no mere discursion on the art of fishing. It depicts a rich literary world. In it, Ibuse discusses the relationship between human beings and nature, landscape, and history.

Fishing is a test of wits between man and fish. The angler needs to make an instantaneous decision—based on the characteristics of the river, the qualities of the current and depths, the time of year and weather conditions, and the influence of the water and rocks in the place where he is fishing. He must use his knowledge and judgment to battle with the fish. Satō Kōseki, the master fisherman, told him to “dissolve into the scenery.” An old fisherman on the Kawazugawa admonished him: “You need to grab hold of the river.”

Another veteran angler on the Fuefukigawa told him, “You need to devote yourself more seriously to fishing.” The experts on the Shimobegawa scolded him on his poor technique: “You won’t get anywhere fidgiting around like that.”

All of these earthy comments amount to more than just lessons on how to fish. They represent the plainspoken advice of people who had lived at close quarters with river

fish for a long time. The tips concern the hidden depths of fishing, but their words also convey unspoken hints for how a fisherman should behave in the midst of the wide natural world. The author does not need to spell it out: the meaning comes across loud and clear.

What attracted Ibuse to Kōshū? He wrote several times about the scenery that beguiled him the first time he was taken to the Masutomi Valley: the rocky mountains that seemed to appear suddenly, covered in the deep ivy red of autumn. “The mountain stream was visible directly below us, and here and there on the hillside across the valley were charcoal kilns. The charcoal fires taken from the kilns looked mysterious and magical, red in the darkness between the trees. The gap was so close that we could feel the glow of the fires against our faces across the valley.”

This kind of scenery would have been totally new to someone from western Japan. The long history of Kyoto and Osaka meant that even the natural scenery was marked by a quaint human atmosphere. In Kōshū, Ibuse Masuji found a world almost totally different in character from any he had known before. Rocks and valleys, the autumn foliage, the flames of charcoal fires—in this landscape, nature and human activities both exerted themselves against this pristine natural backdrop. In this unforgiving environment, where nature gave no quarter, people tenaciously lived out their lives. On his visits to Kōshū, Ibuse encountered stark nature for the first time. Not polished stone, but the raw appeal of rough hewn rock and human expression far removed from civilized frivolity and fripperies.

The old roads of Kōshū are mentioned in his collection of travel memoirs, *Nanatsu no kaidō* [Seven Roads].

“In Kōshū, old roads remain from long ago.”

He relates an event that has just taken place at Sakaori, the next settlement over from Kōfu to the east. The owner of a locally renowned vineyard has spent seven years rearing a new strain of grape. Just before the harvest, an unknown perpetrator cuts up his vines at their roots. A similar event has taken place the previous year. The police treat the event as a crime occasioned by jealousy of the man’s success.

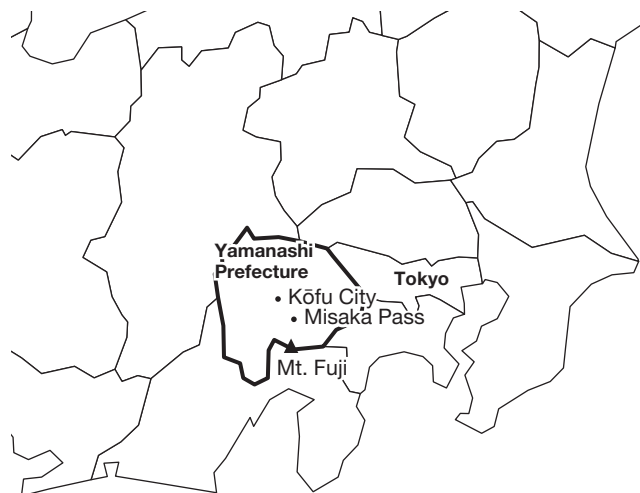
In a separate event in Kōfu City, someone throws water on the keyboard just before a concert by a famous pianist. It happens just before the curtain goes up, so the apologetic organizer has no choice but to cancel the performance. Throwing water on a piano puts it out of action. The sabotage has presumably been committed by someone connected with music, jealous of the concert’s success.

“If you looked, I believe you would find more events connected with these somewhere or other on the Kōshū Plain,” Ibuse wrote.

He did not say this to deprecate the character of Kōshū’s people. In Kōshū, things that people elsewhere keep hidden inside came out into the open. To a novelist, this naked human aspect awoke a strong natural sense of sympathy and empathy.

“This is a tea shop at the Misaka Pass.”

On the new road that was part of the Misaka Kaidō con-



necting Kōshū and Suruga, the Tenka Chaya teahouse and inn was where Ibuse Masuji stayed frequently and wrote. Today it is a fine wooden house, but in Ibuse’s day it was a simple two-story building with a teashop on the first floor and rudimentary accommodation on the second. The only bath was a wooden tub under the eaves outside, without any boarding around it. Guests left their clothes on the piles of firewood. Instead of a roof, a piece of clapboard leaned precariously.

It was typical of Ibuse to make this humble teahouse his regular base for his trips. The slightly deaf owner, his kindly wife, and the crowds of people always coming and going on mysterious business: Ibuse would innocently keep a watchful eye on them as he did his work, listening in to people’s conversations and dealings. From these experiences came a number of short stories with a unique flavor.

And nor was it just Ibuse who made good use of this place. Anyone who has read Dazai Osamu’s “Fugaku hyakkei” [One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji] will remember that it was written during a stay at the same inn. He came at Ibuse’s invitation. Ibuse was acting as matchmaker, introducing Dazai to the woman who became his wife. The writing of this famous piece, with its line about how “the evening primroses suit Mt. Fuji well,” as well as the shift in Dazai’s life from the dissipation and self-indulgence of his wild youth to the more ordered life that produced his mature masterpieces of the war years, was due in no small part to the support and encouragement of Ibuse Masuji.

Kōshū native Iida Ryūta wrote affectionately of days gone by. In this remote region, styles of clothing remained largely unaffected by the war. Iida describes how on his summer fishing trips, Ibuse would wear “a light climbing hat and straw-colored cotton coat, along with loose work pants of similar color and a pair of canvas shoes.” This style of dress was calculated to blend in and allowed Ibuse to travel to and from the river by train without attracting unwelcome attention. Iida believed it was also Ibuse’s way of showing respect for the fish.

It also helped to focus the mind: looking carefully, concentrating on the slightest sounds, and absorbing as much as possible of the elements around him to fuel his own growth as a writer and human being.

(Ikeuchi Osamu, essayist and scholar of German literature)

The 2013 Japan Foundation Awards

The recipients of the Japan Foundation Awards for 2013 were announced on October 1. A ceremony took place on October 15. The winners were Iriye Akira, professor emeritus at Harvard University, the Sankai Juku Dance Company, and the Technology Promotion Association (Thailand-Japan).

Professor Iriye is a Japanese historian whose career has been spent in the United States. Professor Iriye's work has concentrated on the influence of ideology and culture on history. His scholarship has emphasized the international nature of history, studying the reciprocal effects that nations have on each other in the course of foreign policy and diplomatic affairs. He has played a leading role in transforming scholarly understanding of US diplomatic history. He is the first Japanese citizen to serve as the president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations and as president of the American Historical Association. This year's award was presented to Professor Iriye in recognition of his role as a Japanese scholar who has played a pioneering role in the field of Japan-US relations overseas.

Sankai Juku is a dance company formed in 1975 by Amagatsu Ushio. Since 1980 the troupe has performed to international acclaim in more than 700 cities and 44 countries throughout Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

The Technology Promotion Association is a public-interest corporation established in 1973. Its aims are to transfer technology from Japan to Thailand and to provide technical training for Thai nationals. The association's programs include technical training, calibration of industrial measurement and experimentation devices, and online business management. It is also involved in creating and publishing Japanese textbooks and course materials, dictionaries, and books on Japanese culture. In 2007, the association opened the Thai-Nichi Institute of Technology (TNI), a private technical university where Japanese classes are an obligatory part of the curriculum. The association is also

the largest institution in Thailand offering Thai language education to Japanese residents and Japanese tuition to Thais, making a significant contribution to the interaction between the two countries and helping to develop human resources.

Kawakami Mieko Wins the Tanizaki Prize

The 2013 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize, sponsored by Chūōkōron Shinsha, was awarded to Kawakami Mieko for her collection *Ai no yume toka* [Dreams of Love and Stuff] (published by Kōdansha.) The collection compiles seven stories published between 2007 and 2012, five of them written after the earthquake and tsunami disaster of March 2011. The stories depict the simple but often profound connections between the self and others, depicting the relationships between married couples, neighbors, and others. The selection committee praised the stories' ability to lead the reader to strange places without offering easy answers, and made special mention of the high quality of the writing throughout the collection.

In "San-gatsu no keito" [trans. "March Yarn"], which deals with the events of March 11, 2011, a young couple expecting their first child are on an anxious trip. Ikezawa Natsuki, one of the judges, said he was particularly moved by the words of one of the characters: *When something unpleasant or dangerous happens, things suddenly come apart. They go back to being just yarn, they wait it out.* "It struck me as the perfect expression of the unease and anxiety that was in the air at that time—that feeling that the texture of the world had changed," he said.

Dictionary of Modern Literature in Tōhoku

A dictionary of writers and literary works connected to the Tōhoku region was recently published. The book, titled *Tōhoku kindai bungaku jiten* [Dictionary of Modern Literature in Tōhoku], is the first of its kind to focus on the six prefectures in the region and cover the period from the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the present day.

The dictionary is divided into two parts. The first introduces more than 800 writers, lyricists, and poets from Tōhoku, including such major figures as Miyazawa Kenji (Iwate) and Dazai Osamu (Aomori), as well as more recent writers like Isaka Kōtarō (Miyagi). Part two covers 25 topics related to the literature of the region, including "Modern Writers and Tōhoku," "Evacuees and Literature," and "Dialect Poetry."

The dictionary's eight-person editorial board, headed by Professor Sudō Hiroaki of Morioka University, began work in 2009. The team sought to incorporate as much regional information as possible by drawing on the work of around 240 contributors, including scholars from each of the six prefectures and local historians. The project was suspended for six months following the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011. When work resumed, the editors decided to include a new theme addressing "The Great East Japan Earthquake and Literature." This section incorporates short poems written in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

New Manga Museums Open

Since the Kyoto International Manga Museum opened in 2006, increasing numbers of museums have opened dedicated to collecting materials on manga and anime. These museums are a new type of comprehensive archive, gathering together an array of books and journals as well as original drawings and video games. They also carry out original research and exhibitions. Nationwide there are over 60 such museums, run by local governments, universities, and other organizations.

These museums have gained attention outside Japan and are helping to increase understanding and appreciation of Japan's manga culture. The world's largest manga-related facility so far is set to open in 2014, when Meiji University unveils its Tokyo International Manga Library (tentative name). The new library follows two others on campus created through donations from renowned researchers and collectors: the Yoshihiro Yonezawa Memorial Library of Manga and Subcultures and the Mod-

ern Manga Library. The new facility's collections will contain not only manga but also anime, video games, and fanzines.

Opening of the Donald Keene Center, Kashiwazaki

The Donald Keene Center, Kashiwazaki opened in Niigata Prefecture in September. The new center showcases the work of the 91-year-old literary scholar and professor emeritus at Columbia University, who has played a key role in introducing Japanese literature to readers overseas. The center's displays and videos chronicle the range of Keene's work over the years.

The centerpiece of the collection is a painstaking replica of Keene's personal study in New York. This includes approximately 1,800 books as well as his desk, sofa, and glass-paned door. The center also displays letters to Keene from numerous Japanese writers, including Abe Kōbō, Shiba Ryōtarō, and Kawabata Yasunari. There is also a diorama with scenes from the performance of a *kyōgen* drama staged when Keene was studying in Kyoto as a young man.

Keene's connection to Kashiwazaki dates back to the major earthquake that struck the area in 2007. Keene proposed the first performance of *jōruri* narrative music in three centuries to help raise the morale of the local people. Assistance for establishing the Donald Keene Center was provided by the Bourbon Yoshida Foundation, run by a local candy maker.

Books with Animal Heroes

The emotional bond between people and animals has inspired a number of essays and works of fiction recently. In her new short-story collection *Itsumo karera wa dokoka ni* [They Are Always Somewhere], Ogawa Yōko offers a number of unusual stories about misfits and people ill-at-ease in society who pick up on signals given out by animals. She says that writing the short stories made her realize how creatures without language have their own stories. "In fact, their world without language is much larger than ours," she said.

Another animal-related book is *Sōru meito* [Soul Mate], a series of short stories by Hase Seishū. The stories capture the characters of different dog breeds and depict the relationship between dogs and the families they live with. In one, a dog fights to keep a quarreling family together; in another a pet dog is the lone survivor of a disaster. In *Ribon* [Ribbon] by Ogawa Ito, the protagonist is a cockatiel—a gifted mimic that can live for 20 years or more. In the story, a bird hatched under two persons' care flies away and spreads warmth and friendship on a journey that culminates in a miraculous ending.

New Books on Japan's Major Shrines

Numerous books were published this year in Japan to coincide with important ceremonies at the Ise Shrine and Izumo Taisha Shrine. The shrine at Ise has been rebuilt to precisely the same specifications every 20 years for more than 1,300 years. On October 2, priests transported the sacred mirror representing the deity to the newly built shrine, marking the climax of the year's events. The shrine's main buildings are often cited as an example of indigenous Japanese architectural survivals from a period before extensive Chinese influence. However, Inoue Shoichi's *Isejingu to Nihonbi* [Ise Shrine and the Japanese Aesthetic] exposes the ideological underpinnings of this belief, based on his detailed study of records dating from the Edo period (1603–1868) to the present.

At the Izumo Taisha Shrine, work is carried out every 60 years to replace parts of the roof and main structure. The shrine's deity is rehoused in a temporary structure while the work is carried out. During the ceremony, the deity is moved back into the rebuilt structure.

A recently published book on the shrine titled *Izumo taisha: Nihon no kami matsuri no genryū* [Izumo Taisha Shrine: The Origins of Japan's Divine Ceremonies], edited by Senge Yoshihiko and Matsumoto Iwao, claims that a rebuilding ceremony similar to the one at Ise was carried out at Izumo till the eighteenth cen-

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tury but changed to its present form during the nineteenth century.

Death of Yamasaki Toyoko

Yamasaki Toyoko, a Japanese novelist who dealt with social issues and the absurdities of the world, died on September 29 at the age of 88. She was born into an Osaka family who ran an established *konbu* (kelp) business. Her early novels were set in her native city and depicted the life of its merchants.

In 1958, while still working as a journalist for the *Mainichi Shimbun*, she won the Naoki Prize for her story *Hana noren* [Storefront Curtain]. Her interest in depicting social issues dates back to her novel *Shiroi kyotō* [Tower of White] in 1965. From this period, her works began to deal with national- and international-level subjects. *Futatsu no sokoku* [Two Homelands] depicted the experiences of a Japanese-American protagonist during World War II. In *Daichi no ko* [Child of the Continent], she depicts the life of a Japanese man left behind in Manchuria after the war. Her novels were based on painstaking research, resulting in works that offer insights into topics neglected by most other authors. Her novels were dependable bestsellers, and many were adapted into popular TV dramas and films.

Sensitive Young Chronicler of Women's Inner Lives

Aoyama Nanae is one of Japan's accomplished and decorated young writers. Just out of college when she won the Bungei Prize for *Mado no akari* [The Light of Windows] in 2005, she took the prestigious Akutagawa Prize two years later for her second novel, *Hitori biyori* [A Perfect Day to Be Alone] (see *JBN* No. 53). She went on to become the youngest-ever winner of the Kawabata Yasunari Prize for her collection of short stories *Kakera* [Fragments] in 2009.

Aoyama's writing is marked by her ability to depict with extraordinary subtlety the feelings and thought processes of her mostly female characters. She does this in simple, precisely pitched prose and crisp and wry dialogue that often hints at hidden psychological depths. In many cases, her stories depict the struggle between two women from different generations who emerge from their conflict to embark on their own journeys toward self-discovery.

"I try to write about different situations and subjects, but I always seem to come back to the same thing," Aoyama laughs. "I've learned not to worry about it. Focusing on the ways my characters interact, psychologically and visually, seems to be what I'm good at!"

Aoyama credits some of the characteristics of her writing to her younger sister: "We have a love-hate relationship. I guess that might be part of the reason. I'm interested in depicting the psychological states of my female characters as realistically as I can. For me, it's a subject that never loses its interest."

Aoyama's stories often feature two female protagonists. Until now, however, they have not been siblings. The exception comes with her recent novella, "Kaze" [Wind], which is about two sisters who have never married and are now in their fifties.

In *Mado no akari*, for example, the central character is a college dropout who harbors conflicted feelings of curiosity, envy, and adoration for the beautiful older woman who manages the small bar where she works.

The two women live in adjacent rooms above the bar. The dividing wall is so thin that the young heroine can hear every sound as the woman entertains a string of male admirers. The young woman listens guiltily and spies on her neighbors through the windows of the opposite apartment. "In the end," she reflects, "what I really wanted to see was not the humdrum monotony of strangers' lives. I was hoping to catch a glimpse of their ugly, distorted features—the true faces that lay hidden beneath their expressionless masks . . . Faces riven by sorrow, contradiction, and lust."

A young woman's troubled passage into adulthood is portrayed with marvelous effect in *Hitori biyori*. The novel traces the personal growth of the 20-year-old protagonist over the course of a year she spends living with a 71-year-old widow. At first, the girl is mocking and contemptuous of her landlady, dismissing her as an "old bag" unworthy of respect. Over the course of the story, she comes to understand the significance of passing time and the inevitability of separation and parting in human lives.

Although Aoyama's stories tend to center on the tangled psychology of her heroines, she is always sure to tackle something new in each work.

Her latest novel, *Kairaku* [Pleasure], is narrated in the third person from the varying perspectives of two ill-suited married couples, exploring the question of what "pleasure" really means to each individual. Covering the duration of a trip the two couples take together to Venice, the novel is narrated alternately from the perspective of each character as well as by a more detached and objective narrator. This combination of different viewpoints allows Aoyama to capture each character's inner struggle with remarkable vividness and precision.

The story concerns four main characters. They are a woman in her thirties with model-like good looks who clings to the memory of a one-night affair with a stranger; her forty-something husband, rich but physically unprepossessing, who is carrying on an affair with his wife's niece; a handsome man in his early thirties who lusts after nothing but food; and his chubby wife, constantly worried that her too-good-to-be-true husband will one day fall for their beautiful traveling companion.

"I wanted to convey the idea that there's no such thing as ordinary," Aoyama says. "I'm interested in skewed relationships—whether those relationships involve men and women or two people of the same sex."

Aoyama was able to complete the 270-page story in just three months. She says her personal experience of the heat and humidity of Venice in summer was crucial. "That short trip with my editor was an amazing experience for me in so many ways. I had no hesitation about taking on a sexual subject," she says. "And the exotic setting turned out to be much easier than I had anticipated."

Aoyama admits that she often has a clear image in her mind of the final scene when she begins to write a story. *Kairaku* ends with the panoramic wide-angle shot of a boat setting sail from Venice with the four Japanese travelers on board. Each has undergone sensational events during their brief stay and reached self-understanding by the end of the story.

What does the future hold for such a gifted young writer? Aoyama, who counts Françoise Sagan's novel *Bonjour Tristesse* among her biggest inspirations, says: "Sagan was a playwright as well as a novelist. I'd love the chance to try writing for the theater someday. But fiction will always come first. I want to continue to examine the relationships between women through my stories."

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Aoyama Nanae

Born in 1983. Graduated from Tsukuba University's School of Library and Information Science. The Chinese translation of her Akutagawa Prize-winning *Hitori biyori*, which deals with the subject of aimless young "freeters" working short-term jobs, has sold more than 100,000 copies in China. The book has also been translated into Italian. All her novels are available in Chinese.