

# JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

# 79

SPRING 2014

*Japanese Book News* is published quarterly by the Japan Foundation mainly to provide publishers, editors, translators, scholars, and librarians with up-to-date information about publishing trends in Japan and brief descriptions of the content of selected new books. The opinions and views expressed in the essays and new title summaries are not necessarily those of the Japan Foundation or the Advisory Board.

Romanization follows the Hepburn style with minor modifications; macrons indicate long vowels. Japanese names follow the practice of surname first. Reproduction in whole or in part of *Japanese Book News* articles is prohibited without permission of the author. After permission has been received, articles may be reproduced providing the credit line reads: "Reprinted from *Japanese Book News*, No. xx, published by the Japan Foundation." Three copies should be sent to the editor-in-chief.

<http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/publish/jbn/index.html>

© The Japan Foundation 2014



# Trying Times for Japanese Youth

Ōsawa Machiko

Young people in Japan seem to be reasonably happy these days, according to a number of recent public opinion polls. The writer and sociologist Furuichi Noritoshi claims that young people are more satisfied with their lot now than their predecessors were in previous decades during what he refers to as the optimistic 1970s, the confident bubble era of the 1980s, and the post-bubble nihilism of the 1990s.

This observation appears in Furuichi's *Zetsubō no kuni no kōfuku na wakamono-tachi* (The Happy Young People of a Nation in Despair). Furuichi argues that the relatively optimistic attitude of many Japanese young people today is despite their belief that the future will be no better than the present. People can sometimes be “happy,” he claims, when they have lost their hope for the future.

Japan's stratospheric budget deficit mortgages the future while the burdens imposed by an aging population are falling on the shoulders of today's young. At first glance, it may be hard to understand why young people can remain so unfazed by such daunting prospects. Furuichi argues that the family remains strong in Japan and that young people today are the true beneficiaries of the economic boom of previous decades. He believes that intergenerational inequality is hardly apparent at the individual level since assets are generally reallocated within the family to help the young get by. It may well be true that young people today are seriously at risk of falling into poverty, but Furuichi asserts that this remains an unrecognized problem.

“Desperation,” he writes, “may be waiting around the corner, but at the moment people don't really believe that things will get that bad. People are conflicted—both content and concerned at the same time. That's the age we're living in—a happy generation of young people living in a nation of despair.”

Furuichi, who was born in 1985, has served on government committees as an advocate for young people, and this book is regarded as a key barometer of the state of Japanese youth.

A very different picture of the plight of the “lost generation” emerges from Nakada Shuko's 2013 report based on a public opinion poll on women's career prospects. The survey, conducted under the auspices of the Research Institute for Women and Careers at Japan Women's University, where Nakada is a research fellow, focused primarily on women between 30 and 34 who entered the workforce during Japan's employment “ice age”: the period from 1993 to 2005, when the hiring of new graduates practically came to a standstill. The survey included a section in which the respondents were invited to describe their hopes and fears concerning work and family life. Nakada analyzed this section of the survey and compiled

a list of the words that occurred most frequently in the responses. The most common word was “worried,” which occurred 484 times in comments from 1,070 respondents. By contrast, terms like “hope” and “hopeful” appeared only 30 times.

One respondent—single, without children, and still working for her first employer—said she did not expect her income to rise given the present state of Japan's economy and was worried she might not be able to afford to buy a home or pay for her children's education. In a climate where there is frequent discussion of raising the pension age, the respondent expressed concern that she might not be able to find employment to tide her over between compulsory retirement from her present job and the start of pension benefits.

Another respondent—single, without children, and having recently changed jobs—said she felt she couldn't risk getting married because of economic uncertainty. Another, who described herself as married without children and reentering the job market, said her uncertain employment prospects made her worried about the future stability of her income.

One participant who described herself as married, with children, and no longer employed said, “If raising children were less work, I'd like to get a job, but I worry that I wouldn't be able to find a job that would give me the kind of work and conditions I would want. I also worry about whether we'll have enough money when the kids get older.” Another married woman with children, who had never entered the workforce, said: “I worry because it's costing more and more all the time to raise our kids but our income isn't increasing at all. We've always been frugal, but it's getting to the point where I don't know what else I can cut back on.”

Comments like these suggest that there may be a happiness gap between men and women of the lost generation. This is not hard to understand in light of the striking decline in opportunities for regular employment since the second half of the 1990s and the nature of Japan's social safety net. Since women are still widely expected to devote themselves to the family after marriage, the safety net provides far less protection for them than for men.

The growing income gap since the second half of the 1990s has prompted some to ask whether Japan's middle-class society is collapsing. Empirical research based on survey data does not indicate any real increase in economic disparity among members of today's regular workforce, but the disparity between regular workers and non-regular workers is significant, especially since this precariat constitutes 38% of the entire workforce, involving close to 20 million workers.

In *Kakusa no sengoshi* (Inequality in the Postwar Era),

Hashimoto Kenji focuses on a growing disparity in income among women. In the 1980s women's income was almost universally low, and there was little disparity among individuals. By the second half of the 1990s, however, income levels had polarized, with most women falling into one of two groups—those earning ¥1–¥2 million per year and those earning ¥3 million or more. His main point is that the rapid increase in nonregular employment, doubling since 1990, has amplified disparities across the board as increasing numbers of men, mostly young, are joining the precariat. This is not a lifestyle choice, but rather reflects the shrinking number of full-time positions.

In my book *Nihon-gata wākingu pūa no honshitsu* (The Condition of the Working Poor in Japan), I compare the rise of the nonregular workforce, a byproduct of economic globalization, in Japan and South Korea. In both countries a growing percentage of workers are concerned about their future employment prospects. In South Korea the nonregular workforce mostly comprises temporary workers on fixed-term employment contracts, while in Japan it is primarily made up of married women and young people employed on a part-time basis. As a consequence, women constitute a larger share of the nonregular workforce in Japan.

In Japan it is widely assumed that people working part-time jobs are actually being supported by husbands or parents, so there is no social safety net associated with this type of employment. For companies looking to cut personnel costs, part-time workers are an attractive option, since they place a lower social security burden on the employer. Hourly wages are based on the minimum wage, which is lower in Japan than anywhere else in the developed world—so low that it is virtually impossible to be self-sufficient on a minimum-wage income.

In the past, this situation did not cause major problems for society because the assumption that most women would marry and have children reflected reality. Now, however, that premise is no longer sustainable.

The divorce rate began to climb steadily in Japan in the 1960s, leading to increasing numbers of single-parent households. In single-mother households, the breadwinner usually depends on nonregular employment, and income is generally low. The poverty rate among children raised in a single-mother household is conspicuously high in Japan compared to other developed nations. As Abe Aya points out in *Kodomo no hinkon* (Child Poverty), this means that poverty is inherited from one generation to the next.

The concept of “workfare,” a form of social support incorporating both welfare subsidies and employment, has attracted attention in recent years as a means of combating poverty among single-mother households. In Japan, however, 84% of single mothers are already in employment. The problem is not that single mothers are not working but that they are not paid enough to feed their families.

In *Ikikata no fubyōdō: otogaisama no shakai ni mukete* (Living Without Equality: Toward a More Cooperative Society), Shirahase Sawako asserts that poverty is not the fault of the individual. It is a problem that can happen to anyone, she says, citing the need for mutual assistance across generations and a greater sense of social solidarity.

In his book on growing inequality in Japan, Hashimoto

Kenji argues that a new underclass emerged in the 2000s as the younger generation was marginalized into the nonregular workforce. Members of this group, working in low-paying jobs, can scarcely afford to start a family. The growing prevalence of nonregular employment among men tends to get more attention but, as I have noted, the majority of nonregular workers are women. Consequently, poverty is quietly becoming a particularly female problem.

In July 2013 the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training held a symposium on the transformation of young women into an underclass. Researchers have found a rapid increase in the number of Japanese women who do not live with a husband or parents, are excluded from good jobs, and are ineligible for social security benefits.

Economic disparity was a problem among women first before coming to affect men as well. There is a risk that the transformation of young women into an underclass may make a similar journey across the gender divide. Japan urgently needs to create a society in which young people can become self-sufficient, by better supporting the precariat and promoting their transition to regular employment. It is nice to imagine a happy youth, and no doubt those from “good” families may be insulated from the turmoil in Japan's labor market, but for many young Japanese, especially women, these are not happy times as they cope with poverty and the dispiriting realities of dead-end jobs with low pay and little job security.

---

#### Ōsawa Machiko

Professor, Department of Studies on Contemporary Society, Faculty of Integrated Arts and Social Sciences, Japan Women's University. PhD in economics from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Director of the Research Institute for Women and Careers at Japan Women's University. Specialist in labor economics. Member of various government committees, including the cabinet's expert panel on the declining birthrate and gender equality. Recent published works include *Tsuma ga saishūshoku suru toki* (When the Wife Goes Back to Work), *Nihon-gata wākingu pūa no honshitsu* (The Condition of the Working Poor in Japan), and *Wāku raifu shinaji* (Work-Life Synergy).

## FICTION



Aoyama Nanae

Born in 1983. Graduated from the University of Tsukuba. Awarded the 136th Akutagawa Prize for Hitori biyori [A Perfect Day to Be Alone] in 2007 and the Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Kakera [Fragments] in 2009 (see "In Their Own Words," JBN No. 78).

*Erotic escapades  
in Venice*

## **Kairaku [Pleasure]**

By Aoyama Nanae

Kōdansha, 2013. 193 x 132 mm. 272 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-218339-0.

*Kairaku* tells the story of the erotic adventures of two Japanese couples on vacation in Venice. Sakaki, an ambitious and successful entrepreneur, has been married to his beautiful wife for eight years. Their relationship has grown cold, but Sakaki gets a vicarious thrill from the lust his wife inspires in other men. This is his real reason for inviting the newly married Kotanis to travel to Venice with them. He looks forward to watching the handsome young husband seduce his wife. As it turns out, Mrs. Sakaki had a brief but unforgettable sexual encounter with Mr. Kotani years ago, when she was 19. During the trip, she and Kotani gradually grow close. Meanwhile, Sakaki and Kotani's wife wander separately through the streets of Venice and find themselves entangled in a bizarre series of events.

The author depicts the inner emptiness of these bored and languorous young Japanese tourists with a sardonic irony reminiscent of Mishima Yukio. Ultimately, however, the novel sheds its air of cool detachment as it careens toward a shocking climax.

Aoyama Nanae is a young writer who has already proved her talent as a writer of short stories. With this work she has established herself as a novelist to be reckoned with. (Nozaki)

## **Shima wa bokura to [The Island Stays with Us]**

By Tsujimura Mizuki

Kōdansha, 2013. 193 x 131 mm. 336 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-218365-9.

Akari, Kinuka, Genki, and Arata are high school students living on Saejima, a fictional island in the Seto Inland Sea. Cut off from the mainland, tiny Saejima has no high school of its own, and the four teenagers must board a ferry every day to travel to a school on the mainland.

The novel depicts the inner lives of these young people during the emotional upheaval of adolescence. At the same time, it reveals the daily lives of the people around them through their eyes, creating a kind of tableau of provincial life.

The youngsters are islanders, intimately familiar with the small village where they grew up. At the same time, they spend most days in school on the mainland, which gives them a double perspective. This mobile, "in between" point of view makes them particularly astute in

their observations of emigrés who have escaped the confines of the island and settled on the mainland.

The novel is meticulously constructed, with remarkable attention to detail. The stories of the individual characters stand alone but appear to the reader not as unrelated fragments but as threads woven together into a single tapestry.

Perhaps the novel's greatest strength is its gentle, rhythmic language. Tsujimura's subtle writing conveys both the tranquility of provincial life and the feeling of suffocation young people can experience in rural communities, especially on a remote island. With its unusual setting for a contemporary coming-of-age novel, Tsujimura's book makes skillful use of literary techniques carefully attuned to the tastes of the urban reader. (Chō)



Tsujimura Mizuki

Born in 1980. Graduated from Chiba University. Received the 32nd Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for New Writers for Tsunagu [Link] in 2011 and the 147th Naoki Prize for Kagi no nai yume o miru [Dreams Without Keys] in 2012.

*Young lives  
on the Inland Sea*





**Tsutsui Yasutaka**

*Born in 1934. Graduated from Dōshisha University. Literary awards include the 1989 Kawabata Yasunari Prize for Yoppa-dani e no kōka [Descent into the Yoppa Valley] and the 2002 Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon.*

*A stylistic tour  
de force*

## **Seikon [Stigmata]**

**By Tsutsui Yasutaka**

Shinchōsha, 2013. 196 x 135 mm. 263 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-10-314530-1.

The protagonist of *Seikon* is Hazuki Takao, a boy of striking good looks who is deprived of his manhood in a bizarre amputation at the age of five. As a school-boy he faces a variety of difficulties, and as he grows older, his looks frequently get him into trouble. But while others pity him, Takao sees nothing terrible about life without libido. On the contrary, he is pleased to live as he chooses, free from desire and the entanglements that come from sexuality. Takao has little interest in the arts, which he sees as inextricably tied up with sex. But his lack of libido is balanced by an intense interest in food. His development is depicted against the backdrop of a changing Japan, beginning with his birth during the “economic miracle” of the 1960s. He experiences the bubble economy of the 1980s and its collapse, the

global financial crisis of 2008, and the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011. In midlife he encounters the person responsible for his deformity, and there the story ends.

The narrative voice of *Seikon* alternates between first and third person with no clear division between dialogue and narrative. In the third-person sections, the style is characterized by heavy use of classical vocabulary and diction. This archaic language—sometimes reminiscent of classical Japanese, sometimes of Japanese translations of classical Chinese—is used to particularly good effect in description of psychological states and scenery. The style of the first-person narrative, by contrast, is consistently modern and colloquial. A remarkably ambitious experiment in style. (Chō)

## **Tsume to me [Nails and Eyes]**

**By Fujino Kaori**

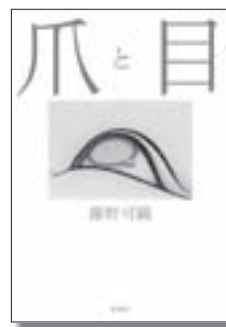
Shinchōsha, 2013. 196 x 133 mm. 127 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-10-334511-4.

“On the very first day he had relations with you, my father was just about to leave when he confessed: ‘I can’t marry you.’” With this curious opening sentence, we are introduced to the novel’s unique narrative premise. The narrator is the stepdaughter of the woman she addresses throughout as “you.” Her mother died in suspicious circumstances when she was three years old, and her father’s lover moved in and established herself as his new wife a short time later. The daughter’s words, addressed to the stepmother, gradually unveil a dysfunctional family’s warped relationships.

The story unfolds in an atmosphere of suspense. In time we see that the stepmother (“you”) is not just indifferent to her stepdaughter but fundamentally devoid of interest in the world around her.

Traumatized by her mother’s death, the daughter constantly bites her nails while using her excellent eyesight to keep a watchful and observant eye on her near-sighted, contacts-wearing stepmother. At length, the “nails” of the narrator and the “eyes” of the stepmother meet in a moment of high drama.

The setting stripped to its bare necessities, this gripping tale of miscommunication unfolds slowly and relentlessly. *Tsume to me* is a tour de force in which an elegant narrative technique brings to vivid life the terror lurking beneath an appearance of everyday normality. (Nozaki)



**Fujino Kaori**

*Born in 1980. Completed the first part of the doctoral program in aesthetics and art theory at Dōshisha University. Received the 103rd Bungakukai Prize for New Writers in 2006 for Iyashii tori [Greedy Birds]. Tsume to me won the 149th Akutagawa Prize in 2013.*

*The horrors that  
lurk behind the  
everyday*



Furukawa Hideo

Born in 1966. His 2006 Love won the Mishima Yukio Prize. Works include *Beruka, hoenai no ka?* [trans. Belka, *Why Don't You Bark?*] (2005) and *Umatachi yo, sore demo hikari wa muku de* [*Horses, Even Now the Light Is Still Pure*] (2011).

*A dazzling treatment of the central crisis of our time*

## ***Namu rokunrōru nijūichi bu kyō* [Glory to the 21-Part Rock-and-Roll Sutra]**

By Furukawa Hideo

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2013. 196 x 137 mm. 575 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-309-02187-4.

This epic novel opens on an early-autumn morning in the second half of the 1990s, as a man boards a Tokyo subway bearing a deadly poison. The scenario immediately calls to mind the 1995 sarin attack by members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult. But as the man prepares to execute his orders to “wipe out” the enemy, the rousing notes of a rock-and-roll song reach his ears, escaping from the headphones of the passenger next to him. So begins Furukawa Hideo’s triumph of imagination over catastrophe, a far-flung odyssey bound together by the conceit of rock and roll as a Buddhist invocation.

Three narrative arcs unfold across the novel’s seven “books.” There is “Kōma W,” in which the narrator strives to awaken the eternally sleeping “she”; “On the Threshold of the Pure Land,” set in the

hellish ruins of a post-apocalyptic Tokyo, is the story of a soul’s journey of transmigration from a chicken into a tiger and a girl; and “Twenty-first Century,” which recounts the spread of rock and roll across the world. As the novel progresses, these seemingly unrelated arcs begin to come together in an organically unified plot.

At length, we are introduced to a character by the name of Noboru Taiyō [Rising Sun]—a name strongly reminiscent of the author’s given name, Hideo—and the work moves toward its horrific climax. Fukushima native Furukawa Hideo has wedded a powerful style to a grand concept and in the process has created a dazzling work of fiction that boldly tackles the central crisis of our time. (Nozaki)

## **ESSAY**

### ***Tagayasedo tagayasedo* [A Lonely Furrow]**

By Itō Rei

Tōkai Education Research Institute, 2013. 187 x 128 mm. 272 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-486-03749-1.

Itō Rei is a scholar of English literature. Although he is a translator of some renown who has produced well-regarded translations of works by D. H. Lawrence and other writers, in recent years he has perhaps become better known for his essays on the joys of bicycling. His father was the well-known Japanese literary figure Itō Sei, who produced the first Japanese version of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Father and son share a similarly crisp, readable style.

Now in his eighties, Itō Rei owns a farm to the west of Tokyo—a tiny “farm” just 3 meters by 13. Despite its diminutive size, he continues to cultivate this plot of land with a hand-held automatic plow, struggling against the cold of winter and the heat of summer as well as periodic infestations of pests. Sometimes he gets a

harvest of fresh vegetables for his breakfast—at other times, his crops fail. This collection of essays begins as a diary-style chronicle of his attempts at farming, but despite his best efforts his thoughts and reflections keep leading him off on tangential digressions. Much of the pleasure of the book lies in these entertaining and thought-provoking diversions.

He looks for tips by watching professional farmers at work and is constantly trying new approaches to improve his results. A recollection of how his father used to grow vegetables when food was in short supply during the war prompts a lengthy reverie of reminiscence. In farming, as in life, things do not always go according to plan: but in both, small moments of happiness are there if you know where to look. (Yonahara)



Itō Rei

Born in 1933. An essayist and translator, he graduated from Hitotsubashi University and was a professor at Nihon University College of Art until 2002. Won the Kōdansha Essay Award for Tanuki biiru [*Tanuki Beer*] in 1991.

*A scholar’s essayistic reflections on farming*



Mizoguchi Kenji

Born 1898, died 1956. Directed 90 films between 1923 and 1956. Won prizes at the Venice International Film Festival in three consecutive years for *Saikaku ichidai onna* [*The Life of Oharu*] (1952), *Ugetsu monogatari* [*Ugetsu*] (1953), and *Sanshō dayū* [*Sanshō the Bailiff*] (1954).

*Essays by one of  
Japan's leading  
film directors*

## Mizoguchi Kenji chosaku shū [The Complete Writings of Mizoguchi Kenji]

By Mizoguchi Kenji

Kinema Junpōsha, 2013. 190 x 130 mm. 448 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-87376-422-1.

Mizoguchi Kenji is one of the most recognized and respected names in Japanese cinema. Film enthusiasts throughout the world revere him as one of the leading directors in the history of Japanese film, along with Ozu Yasujiro and Kurosawa Akira. Yet few people are aware that Mizoguchi also left behind a huge body of essays and commentaries. Now this ground-breaking publication has brought together the entire corpus—from a 1923 essay on music, written when Mizoguchi was 25, to a brief comment on his last film, *Akassen chitai* [*Street of Shame*—in a single volume.

The writing is highly varied, but the overall impression it conveys is that of a committed intellectual alert to new literary and artistic trends, restlessly broadening his knowledge and learning from the

classics of Eastern and Western literature.

At the heart of this unrelenting drive was Mizoguchi's dedication to perfecting the art of film. Even as a young filmmaker, Mizoguchi was acutely aware of international opinion. He recognized the need for Japanese cinema to carve out its own distinct niche, even while building on the achievements of Western filmmakers. "Until Japanese cinema renounces the spirit of imitation," he wrote, "it can never hope to surpass Western cinema." His aim was to elevate film into a new Japanese art form, anchored by the ethos and aesthetic of the premodern period. The writings collected in this volume are a brilliant testament to the unceasing spiritual quest that defined Mizoguchi as an artist. (Nozaki)

## CULTURE

### Ukiyo-e shuppanron [A Study of Ukiyo-e Publishing]

By Ōkubo Jun'ichi

Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2013. 216 x 150 mm. 231 pp. ¥3,800. ISBN 978-4-642-07915-0.

In this book, Ōkubo Jun'ichi examines the creation and distribution of multicolored woodblock prints from a commercial standpoint. Many scholars have explored the ukiyo-e production and distribution process, but Ōkubo sets himself apart by analyzing how the commercial exigencies of production and distribution influenced subject matter, style, and technique.

As Ōkubo makes clear, innovations in style and technique cannot be ascribed simply to the aesthetic sensibility or artistic imagination of individual ukiyo-e artists. They also reflect steps taken by publishers to whip up sales.

Approaching the subject from this angle, Ōkubo offers an answer to a long-standing riddle. Why did the wildly popular landscape series of Hokusai and Hiroshige, such as *Thirty-six Views of*

*Mount Fuji* and *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, not inspire a raft of imitations? According to Ōkubo, the reason is that publishers, who also sold the ukiyo-e in their own shops, were in the practice of exchanging prints in bulk. As a result, works printed by one publisher routinely appeared in other publishers' shops, and there was no need for any of them to produce an imitation of a popular work in order to compete.

While others have examined ukiyo-e production and distribution from an economic or commercial perspective, Ōkubo has contributed something new and original to the field by elucidating the impact of such economic and commercial considerations on the pictorial and stylistic development of the art form. (Chō)



Ōkubo Jun'ichi

Born in 1959. Received his PhD in literature from the University of Tokyo. Currently a professor at the research department of the National Museum of Japanese History. Works include *Hiroshige to ukiyo-e fūkeiga* [*Hiroshige and Landscape Woodblock Prints*].

*The commercial  
context of  
woodblock  
publishing*



Ōtsuka Eiji

*Born in 1958. Majored in folklore at the College of Humanities, University of Tsukuba. Worked as a freelance editor for manga magazines and published a variety of successful manga and criticism. Currently professor at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies.*

*A ground-breaking study of early manga*

## ***Mikki no shoshiki*** **[Variations on Mickey's Style]**

**By Ōtsuka Eiji**

Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2013. 194 x 133 mm. 324 pp. ¥3,500. ISBN 978-4-04-702153-2.

Today, Japanese manga and anime are widely known and loved around the world. When and how did these art forms start? One popular theory regards traditional picture scrolls (*emakimono*) as the original model from which manga developed, but this book by Ōtsuka Eiji discredits this version definitively.

It was not until the 1920s that artists started to draw manga in anything like the form in which we know them today. Many of the people who created these early manga had previously worked as avant garde artists. Their new method of drawing was based on the work of Walt Disney, who was already well known around the world.

In the 1930s Japanese manga followed its own trajectory even as artists also worked on military subjects reflecting the

tenor of the times. The first anime in the 1940s also paralleled the historical developments of the times, as the government worked to reenergize the nation's sciences to support the war effort. This thought-provoking book reveals the historical background against which manga and anime developed in Japan and encourages the reader to think anew about the historical role they have played. (Karube)

## ***Mōrō no jidai*** **[The Age of Mōrōtai Style Painting]**

**By Satō Shino**

Jimibun Shoin, 2013. 193 x 133 mm. 295 pp. ¥3,600. ISBN 978-4-409-10032-5.

The painting style known as *mōrōtai* occupies a position of primary importance in the history of modern Japanese art. The style marked a radical shift away from the clear outlines of charcoal, deliberately smudging and obscuring the depicted object and using variations of color to bring out atmosphere and light. Another aspect that made the style radically different from what preceded it was the decision to focus attention on the surrounding scenery rather than the main subject itself. The *mōrōtai* style revolutionized Japanese painting, which had previously remained faithful to a limited number of fixed forms in everything from subject matter to composition.

The technique was developed by painters such as Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō, who wanted a new approach that would reflect the rapid march of modern-

ization taking place in Japan around 1910. At first, critics savaged the new style, which they said threatened to destroy traditional Japanese painting. People criticized the pictures for looking blurry and unclear—and in some cases joked that one expected ghosts to loom out of the darkness.

Writers, however, responded more positively to the stylistic innovations, and the two groups influenced each other's work. Taikan, whose modernist sensibility was largely inspired by Western art, later became involved in the Indian independence movement and became a fervent nationalist. This book provides an intriguing look at the complexities of modern Japan as seen through one of its most important schools of painting. (Yonahara)



Satō Shino

*Born in 1968. Curator of the Yokoyama Taikan Memorial Hall and lecturer at Rikkyo University. Received her PhD in fine arts and specializes in the history of Japanese modern art.*

*An intriguing look at the style that revolutionized Japanese painting*





Hatooka Keita

Born in 1977. Received his PhD in literature from Keio University. Associate professor of American literature at Meiji University.

*The “light novel”  
and US pop  
culture*

## ***Ranobe no naka no gendai Nihon* [Contemporary Japan Through the Light Novel]**

By Hatooka Keita

Kōdansha, 2013. 173 x 106 mm. 192 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-06-288213-2.

The light novel is a relatively new form of popular Japanese fiction. Published in a small paperback format, these *ranobe*, as they are widely known, typically feature manga-like illustrations. Many of them depict the everyday lives of teenagers, but subject matter covers a wide range of genres, including science fiction and fantasy. The vast majority of *ranobe* readers are junior and senior high school students, and many middle-aged and older Japanese are completely unaware of their existence.

This is not the first book to be published on the subject, but it is the first to analyze the influence on *ranobe* of American culture. According to Hatooka, the origins of the light novel as a continuing cultural phenomenon go back to the 1970s and the popular novels of Murakami Ryū. From here he traces the development of

the *ranobe* within a social and cultural context.

Hatooka argues that in both the “Japanese pop” of the 1970s and 80s and the “otaku” culture of the 1990s, Japanese youth culture rebelled against the “heavy” and the “serious” through the conscious assimilation, in diluted form, of details of American pop culture. But the light novel today no longer concentrates on themes of rebellion. It has absorbed American popular culture and internalized on an unconscious level.

This book contributes significantly to our understanding by interpreting the light novel in terms of the intersection of cultures and, in the process, identifying the essence of Japanese youth culture and its relationship to American pop culture. (Chō)

## **BIOGRAPHY**

### ***Niwashi Ogawa Jihei to sono jidai* [Ogawa Jihei and His Times]**

By Suzuki Hiroyuki

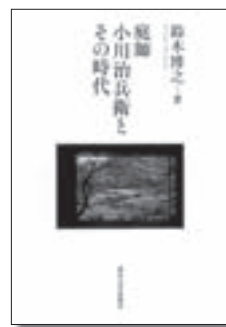
University of Tokyo Press, 2013. 193 x 132 mm. 284 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-13-063811-1.

In the course of Japan’s modernization during the second half of the nineteenth century, the country’s political and economic leaders came from a very different background to those who had been prominent in previous times. Politicians and entrepreneurs of humble birth made their fortunes and came into possession of imposing residences and mansions in Tokyo and Kyoto. Many of them were not satisfied with the traditional Japanese style of architecture and gardening, and many built homes that combined Western-style wings with traditional Japanese architecture, along with gardens that mimicked natural scenery. This led to the beginning of what we might call the modern Japanese style.

From the 1890s, an important role in the development of the new style was

played by Ogawa Jihei, a Kyoto-born landscape gardener. He designed gardens for many of the leading politicians and business magnates of the day—including the garden at the Kyoto residence of Meiji-era statesman Yamagata Aritomo. Many of these have survived, but studying the gardens in situ is not always easy, as they are scattered around the country and not all of them are open to the public.

Architectural historian Suzuki Hiroyuki has visited many of Ogawa’s gardens and carried out painstaking research into his life and work. This book makes clear the work that went into creating a new Japanese aesthetic that responded to the influence of Western culture. This book clearly depicts one man’s pursuit of a Japanese aesthetic in the modern age. (Karube)



Suzuki Hiroyuki

Born in 1945, died in 2014. Emeritus professor at the University of Tokyo and professor at Aoyama Gakuin University. Numerous works include *Tōkyō no geniusu roki* [The Genius Loci of Tokyo] (winner of the 1990 Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities).

*A central figure  
in the develop-  
ment of the mod-  
ern Japanese style*



Takahashi Hideo

*Born in 1930. A literary critic, he graduated from the University of Tokyo, where he majored in German literature. Received the Itō Sei Prize for Literature in 2010 for Haha naru mono—kindai bungaku to ongaku no basho [Modern Literature and Music: The Great Mother].*

*A revealing new study of one of Japan's major literary figures*

## ***Bunjin Kafū shō*** **[Notebooks of Nagai Kafū, Man of Letters]** **By Takahashi Hideo**

Iwanami Shoten, 2013. 193 x 131 mm. 206 pp. ¥2,500. ISBN 978-4-00-024684-2.

More than 50 years after he died, Nagai Kafū (1879–1959) continues to be widely read. Although his early work drew heavily on his experiences in the United States and France, after he resigned his post as a university professor he became obsessed with the literature of the late Edo period (1603–1868). It is perhaps this work that is most widely read today—particularly the series of essays and stories in which he travels around Tokyo in search of surviving traces of old Edo. His diary *Danchōtei nichijō* [Dyspepsia House Days] (1917–59) reveals an attitude of acute criticism based on his observations of an age of breathless change.

This book draws on Kafū's diaries to draw a detailed picture of the author as a cultured man of letters. Takahashi Hideo's new study concentrates on three aspects

of his multifaceted subject. The first is the annual ritual of setting out all the books in the house in the summer sunshine to clear them of insects. This was an opportunity to travel between the present and the past, and a time for thought and reflection. The book also traces his relationship with a woman who entered his life toward the end of the war as Kafū's French student. The book contains some moving scenes of dialogue in which teacher and student talk about literature and philosophy as the bombs echo across the Tokyo skies.

The third detail concerns the friends who protected Kafū until his last years. What the author describes as “three imaginary portraits in my own style” work together to broaden our understanding of Kafū's inner life. (Yonahara)

## ***Minzoku ishō o kinakatta Ainu*** **[The Ainu Who Never Wore Traditional Dress]**

**By Takiguchi Yumi**

Group SURE, 2013. 188 x 128 mm. 224 pp. ¥2,500.

The Ainu are an aboriginal people who inhabit northern Japan and parts of the Russian Far East. With hunting, fishing, and agriculture as their main industries, they traded over a wide area. They have their own unique language and culture, and a traditional oral epic poetry called *yukar*. From the end of the eighteenth century, however, the Ainu of Hokkaido came increasingly under Japanese control, and since the beginning of Japan's modern period the government in Tokyo has followed a ruthless assimilation policy.

Takiguchi Yumi was born in 1971 in an Ainu village in Hokkaido to an Ainu mother and an ethnically Japanese father. She grew up helping out with the family business, which sold souvenirs to tourists. Although she learned a little about the Ainu language and culture, she struggled

to close the gap between her knowledge of her Ainu roots and the reality of living as an Ainu individual in the present.

There is a tendency for the Ainu to be treated as passive entities, as an exploited and oppressed minority—but Takiguchi believed that the Ainu deserved to be given more attention as actors in their own history. This prompted her to begin her study of the lives of Ainu people since the dawning of the modern age. In her research, she drew on stories she had heard from her mother and grandfather, local history passed on by the old Ainu people around her, and stories heard from ethnic Koreans in Sakhalin. An attentive and sensitive listener, Takiguchi's research brings her closer to the people and their stories, and to a closer relationship with her own Ainu identity. (Yonahara)



Takiguchi Yumi

*Born in 1971 in the Ainu kotan (village) of Lake Akan. An editor, she graduated from Meiji Gakuin University.*

*A sensitive exploration of modern Ainu identity*



Mori Mayumi

Born in 1954. A nonfiction author, essayist, and editor. Graduated from Waseda University. Founded the local magazine *Yanaka, Nezu, Sendagi* in 1984, and was editor until the final issue in 2009. Works include the award-winning *Ōgai no saka* [*Ōgai's Hilly Streets*].

*Study of  
a pioneering  
feminist  
publication*

## ***Seitō no bōken* [The Adventures of *Blue Stocking*]**

**By Mori Mayumi**

Heibonsha, 2013. 194 x 132 mm. 320 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-582-83627-1.

Published from 1911 to 1916, the magazine *Seitō* [Blue Stocking] famously marked the beginnings of the feminist movement in modern Japan. Aiming to liberate women from the discrimination and male chauvinist thinking common in the society of the time, the magazine was written, edited, and published almost entirely by women intellectuals.

The author Mori Mayumi is a woman who formerly worked as editor of a local magazine called *Yanaka, Nezu, Sendagi* that was edited and published by an all-women team. In fact, Mori's connections to her subject go even further than this: the first editor-in-chief of *Seitō*, Hiratsuka Raichō, used to live close to the magazine's offices in Sendagi, one of the areas covered by Mori's magazine. This unique book combines the author's recollections

of her own experiences with a look back at the work of a group of pioneering women active in the same area some 70 years earlier.

Many other women who contributed to *Seitō* appear in the book besides Hiratsuka Raichō—Otake Kōkichi and Itō Noe among them. The author provides vivid descriptions of the women's personalities and careers, going beyond a simple introduction to their writing to draw them clearly as individuals. This important book will surely become a vital reference for future scholars of the feminist movement and the history of publishing in Japan. (Karube)

## **HISTORY**

### ***Aikoku, kakumei, minshu* [Patriotism, Revolution, Democracy]**

**By Mitani Hiroshi**

Chikuma Shobō, 2013. 188 x 130 mm. 352 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-480-01577-8.

The change of political system that took place in 1868, marking the beginning of Japan's modernization, is generally known in English as the Meiji Restoration. In this book, however, Mitani Hiroshi argues that it would be more appropriate to call the changes a "revolution." Describing what happened as a "restoration" emphasizes the return to a national polity centered on the figure of the emperor. But in fact the far-reaching political changes enacted after 1868 altered Japanese society greatly, and this upheaval was more important than any elements of continuity with the past. Mitani argues that the changes were sufficiently sweeping to deserve the description "revolution."

Mitani believes that the aims of the revolution were "democracy," in a broad

sense, and the invention of nationalism. Both the Meiji rulers and their critics in the civil movement shared the aim of bringing about a politics based on *kōron* (public discussion) through the establishment of the Diet and a parliamentary political system. They also aimed to place Japan on a firm footing as a modern nation-state by absorbing the opinions of a wide range of people into the political process. Few books in English reflect the latest Japanese scholarly thinking on the Meiji "Revolution." This reliable and readable volume therefore meets an important need. (Karube)



Mitani Hiroshi

Born 1950. A historian specializing in early modern and modern Japanese history. Received his PhD in literature from the University of Tokyo. Currently a professor at the University of Tokyo. Works include *Meiji ishin to nashonarizumu* [*The Meiji Revolution and Nationalism*].

*Introduction to  
the latest scholarship  
on the Meiji  
"Restoration"*

## No. 6: Yanagita Kunio and Tōkai

Yanagita Kunio is famous as the father of Japanese folklore studies. In the latest installment in our series on the literature of Japan's regions, Ikeuchi Osamu looks at Yanagita's travels through central Honshū—a journey that produced some of his best-known works.

The year 1920 marked an important turning point in the life and career of Yanagita Kunio, famous as the father of Japanese folklore studies. After resigning as chief secretary of the House of Peers in December 1919, he set out at the age of 45 on a long-deferred journey of discovery through central Japan, traveling in the humble capacity of “contributing writer” for the Tokyo *Asahi Shimbun*.

Twenty years earlier, Yanagita had graduated from Tokyo Imperial University with a law degree and embarked on a prestigious career as a civil servant in the Meiji government. After working briefly in the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, he served as a counselor in the Legislation Bureau and subsequently as a secretary in the Imperial Household Ministry. At the age of 39, he was appointed chief secretary of the House of Peers. He had enjoyed a reasonably successful—if not stellar—career as a member of the nation's bureaucratic elite, rising steadily through the ranks of the civil service. Then quite suddenly, he traded it all in for a title more or less synonymous with “newspaper hanger-on.”

Yanagita's colleagues and superiors were no doubt stunned by the decision. When asked why he was abandoning his career, Yanagita presumably said he wanted time to wander about the countryside at leisure. When pressed to explain the purpose of such a journey (as he surely would have been), he may well have answered, “That is something I mean to figure out along the way.” It would have been a completely honest answer, however baffling it might have been to those around him.

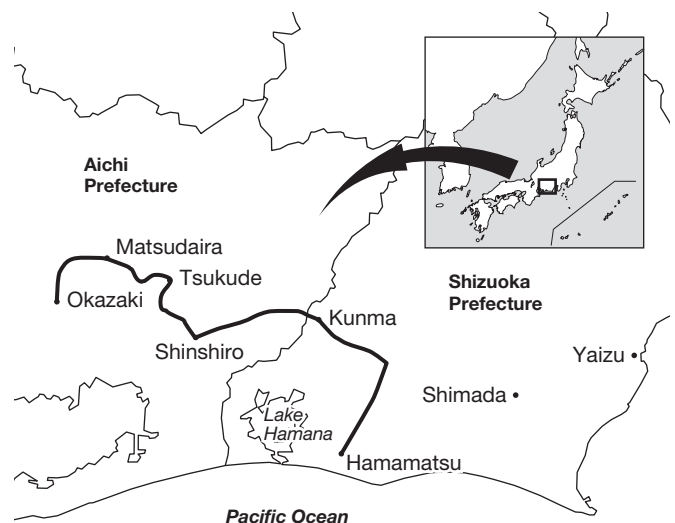
Yanagita traveled through the summer and into the autumn of that year. He described his journey in a series of articles for the Tokyo *Asahi Shimbun* titled *Shūfū chō* [Autumn Wind Notebook]. Ultimately, the fruit of his travels was the development of a new discipline: *minzokugaku*, the study of Japanese folk culture. In his forward to the book edition of *Shūfū chō*, published years later, Yanagita called the 1920 tour “one of the most free-wheeling trips I have ever taken.” In the preface to the finished work, in which he organized the thoughts that had occurred to him on the road, he looked back on the route he had followed and admitted: “I really had no plan at all when I set out.”

His first stop was Yaizu, an old town in the ancient province of Suruga, present-day Shizuoka Prefecture. Yanagita's only guiding principle when charting his course was to meander by foot between railway stations. After alighting at Yaizu, he spent several days roaming the area between the Ōi-gawa and Tenryū-gawa rivers, then made his way to the regional city of Hamamatsu. From there, he proceeded on foot north through the mountains along the Akiha Highway, an old pilgrimage route, to Kunma. Crossing into Mikawa province (Aichi Prefecture), he passed through the villages of Shinshiro,

Tsukude, Matsudaira, and Kugyūdaira before reaching the castle town of Okazaki. Next he visited the coastal community of Hazu and made his way up the Yahagi-gawa, stopping at Koromo, Nishikamo, Sanage, and Iino. Crossing into Mino province (Gifu Prefecture), he called at Tajimi, then crossed the Kiso-gawa to Mino-Ōta. He traveled to Ōgaki by train and from there walked downstream along the Ibi-gawa to Kuwana, lodging at the Funatsuya, a historic boatman's inn on the Pacific coast.

Gazing out over Ise Bay from his second-story window at the inn, Yanagita “suddenly had the urge to see Kadaura in Kishū province [Wakayama Prefecture] to the south. If possible, I hoped to take a boat from there to Awaji Island.” He traveled on impulse, like a young runaway or a footloose college student. Yet Yanagita was far from young. He was already in his mid-forties, a time of life regarded in those days as the cusp of old age. Moreover, until recently he had been a member of the bureaucratic elite, the kind of government official that provincials customarily greeted with elaborate displays of respect. Now he drifted along anonymously, as if borne by the capricious “autumn wind.”

Yanagita hiked along the Kino-kawa to Wakanoura on the coast. Upon smelling the sea air, he decided he wanted to see the Seto Inland Sea, although it meant traveling many miles to the west. He traveled to Hiroshima, then used local ferries to make his way across the Inland Sea, hopping from island to island. Arriving at Innoshima, he crossed to Onomichi on the Honshū mainland, where the surrounding hills afforded a stunning view of the islands, crowded together like mountains surrounded by glacial lakes. With this striking view, Yanagita's autumn journey came to a close. In his foreword, Yanagita looks back on



The route taken by Yanagita Kunio on his journey through the Tōkai region. (Based on a map included in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio-shū Dai 2-kan*, published by Chikuma Shobō.)



the year as follows: “For me personally, 1920 was the most noteworthy travel year of all.”

It took time, but the seeds planted during that tour were to flower in three works that form the heart of Yanagita’s *minzokugaku* corpus: *Kainan shōki* [Travels in Kyūshū and Okinawa], *Yukiguni no haru* [Springtime in the Snow Country], and the travelogue *Shūfū chō*.

Although Yanagita began his travels in Yaizu, as we have seen, *Shūfū chō* opens with an account of an autumn festival in Shimada, a town situated on the lower reaches of the Ōi-gawa. Yanagita describes how the men play the leading role in the festivities, singing lustily as they proceed through the town dressed in brilliant colors, while the women look on with sparkling eyes. Preparations begin far in advance of the festival, which occurs only every fourth year, and by the day of the event, many of the residents are showing signs of “festival fatigue.” Unable to fit his account of the Shimada festival into a single article, Yanagita divided it into two parts.

But why did he choose to begin his travelogue in Shimada instead of Yaizu, where his tour actually began? At the time, Yaizu had entered a period of growth, and what had until recently been a small fishing village was now expanding in all directions. Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) made his home there late in his life. Yanagita writes that he was puzzled why Hearn, with his preference for quaint, old-fashioned Japanese towns like Matsue, had been so enamored of this seaside town. He must have decided that a sprawling community strewn with construction projects made a poor setting for his opening chapter. With his readers in mind, he opted to begin his travelogue with a colorful local festival and insert Yaizu as a minor stop along the route between Shimada and Hamamatsu.

Hamamatsu itself was by then an up-and-coming provincial city, but urban development had little appeal for Yanagita. His destination was the mountains to the north, on the far side of Lake Hamana. He longed to wander at random down time-worn footpaths, following the directions he got from local children—something that is clear from the fluency and smoothness of his writing once he reaches the mountain villages of Shizuoka, described in “No no hi, yama no kumo” [Field Lamps, Mountain Clouds]. Yanagita does not tell us how he chose the village of Kunma to spend the night; perhaps he was simply drawn by its unusual name, a variant of the Japanese word for “bear.” But he does write about the community’s legendary hospitality. Of its 150 households, he says, more than 120 belong to people who moved there from other communities. It seems that “the villagers have always been so kind and friendly to visitors” that it attracted newcomers, who multiplied from generation to generation. He notes that the community is an egalitarian one, with no wealthy or powerful figures lording it over the rest. Though curious to learn more about this Shangri-La, Yanagita heads into the hills the next morning en route to his next destination.

At a spot known as Tobinosu [Kite’s Nest], the highest point along the Akiha Highway, Yanagita sees the village of Shizutama stretched out below him. After commenting on its lovely name, he describes the houses and gardens and speculates on the lives the villagers lead. The discussion covers many of the same matters that would have oc-

cupied him during his inspection tours for the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce: access to hospitals, running water, exposure to sunlight, the presence or lack of water-wheels and bridges, and so on. On this occasion, however, he arrives as an ordinary wayfarer, and no one runs out to greet him as he approaches the village.

Writing of the remote community of Tsukude in old Mikawa province, Yanagita marvels that “several major roads traveled by the *pon* lead to and from this cold mountain village, despite its location some 1,500 feet above sea level.” The *pon*, it appears, are a transient people who make their living by fishing along the river and selling their catch at nearby villages. The name (and its variant *ponsuke*) is said to derive from *suppon*, a soft-shell turtle regarded as a delicacy. Here Yanagita’s writing grows somewhat hyperbolic, perhaps owing to his delight at discovering a group of nomads who have evaded the Meiji census takers. He dubs the *pon* “a second local population.”

Next comes a light-hearted piece on the topic of two neighboring villages, Sugidaira and Matsudaira. One is named for a stand of cedar (*sugi*), while the other takes its name from the surrounding pines (*matsu*). Where they differ decisively is in “the opportunity that history gave each to make a name for itself” among the Japanese people. While Sugidaira means nothing to the average person, Matsudaira is a household word, thanks to the numerous daimyō of the same name who ruled feudal domains around the country during the Edo period (1603–1868). Yanagita proceeds to explain the origin of this distinction in whimsical fashion. A long time ago, he says, there lived in the village of Matsudaira an old man adept at linked verse. One day, a Buddhist priest came to the village to compose linked verse with the old man, bringing with him his gifted and good-looking son. The villagers prevailed on the son to marry into one of the local families, and from that union sprang the great warrior and leader Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first Tokugawa shōgun. After Ieyasu defeated his enemies and unified the country, he got a bit carried away bestowing the name of Matsudaira on loyal retainers. From this historical anecdote, Yanagita concludes that “whether the mountainside behind one’s childhood home is covered with cedars or pines is a matter of no small consequence.”

The reason for this uncharacteristic levity was doubtless the fact that Yanagita was preparing a weightier piece on a subject dear to his heart. In “Kaerazarishi hito” [The Man Who Never Went Home], he introduces readers to Sugae Masumi (1754–1829), a peripatetic scholar and writer of the late Tokugawa era.

“Sugae Masumi was a scholar who left his birthplace



Portrait of Sugae Masumi.  
(From the collection of the Akita Prefectural Museum.)

here in Okazaki at the age of twenty-eight and wandered, rootless, across northern Japan for almost fifty years until he died,” the essay begins.

Masumi left his home in Mikawa for unknown reasons as a young man and spent most of his life traveling in Japan’s sparsely settled north country. In his later years he limited his activities to the Akita domain, where he labored to complete a topographical description of the domain’s six counties while objectively recording the day-to-day lives of the local inhabitants in that region’s harsh climate. Yanagita’s choice of the Tōkai region as the destination for his first serious travel after resigning from the civil service may have stemmed from a desire to pay homage at the birthplace of his role model before embarking on his own long journey of travel and study.

At the time when Yanagita was writing, the name of Sugae Masumi meant almost nothing to the general public. Yanagita, however, had perused the voluminous travel journals known as the *Sugae Masumi yūranki* [Travel Journals of Sugae Masumi] and drew inspiration from Masumi’s unique approach to travel and ethnography. As Yanagita explains it, Masumi surpassed the haiku poet Matsuo Bashō [1644–94]—famed for his travel diary *Oku no hosomichi* [trans. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*—in his free and extemporaneous approach to travel. In the ambitious scope and variety of his travel notes, he surpassed the various eighteenth- and nineteenth-century herbalists who wrote volumes of “saiyakuki” describing their travels in search of medical plants. Sugae Masumi’s wanderings “covered vast distances even while hugging the quiet backroads”—something impossible to achieve if one uses maps to chart one’s route in advance. “I feel reluctant to let this venerable old sage vanish from my sight,” he writes in the closing sentence of his dispatch from Okazaki.

With the publication of this piece, Yanagita must have felt that he had largely achieved the aims of his travel-

ogue. Although his journey was by no means at an end, he contributed only two more articles before bringing the series to a close.

In his long foreword to the book edition, Yanagita appears to be addressing criticism directed at the series when it originally appeared in newspaper format. Some readers apparently complained that the articles were useless as travel guides and found fault with Yanagita’s habit of lingering over ordinary Japanese villages while neglecting famous scenic spots and historical sites. Who, exactly, was he writing for?

“Here, perhaps belatedly,” he writes, “I ought to address the question of my intended readership.” As a guide for readers who know nothing of the areas covered, he admits, his account must seem self-indulgent and lacking in useful information. But even as a way of “inspiring a sense of shared interests” in people already familiar with the region, the route he had chosen was eccentric and “tended to concentrate too much on out-of-the-way locales.”

Yanagita viewed the Japanese countryside not as a series of fixed, unchanging backdrops but as something that changed continuously over time. He regarded the traditional travelogue—a series of glowing descriptions of established tourist spots—as an antiquated form of travel literature. *Shūfū chō* clearly embodies his own original take on the travel diary. In the foreword, he expresses the hope that, regardless of its immediate reception, the book will “endure as one person’s description of native regional culture that has never been described before.” No doubt he was thinking of Sugae Masumi’s voluminous travel notebooks. Perhaps Masumi’s example also inspired the poetic title *Autumn Wind Notebook*, a name evoking the elegant jottings of a learned scholar rambling through the countryside at leisure, impelled only by the autumn breeze.

(Ikeuchi Osamu, essayist and scholar of German literature)

## Events and Trends

### Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The winners of the 150th Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes have been selected. The Akutagawa Prize went to Oyamada Hiroko’s *Ana* [The Hole], which was published in the September 2013 issue of *Shinchō*. Oyamada dabbled in a number of short-lived careers after college before making her debut as a writer in 2010 with *Kōjō*, which received the Shinchō Prize for New Writers. In 2013 she received the Oda Sakunosuke Prize and was nomi-

nated for the Mishima Yukio Prize for a volume of stories including this debut work.

*Ana* is the story of a young wife who quits her job and moves to the country to live next to her husband’s family home. When she falls into a deep hole on an embankment by the river one day, she soon finds herself caught up in a series of inexplicable events. The story deftly blends together elements of the extraordinary and the everyday.

The Naoki Prize went to Asai

Makate for *Renka* [Love Poem], published by Kōdansha, and Himeno Kaoruko for *Shōwa no inu* [A Dog of the Shōwa Era], published by Gentōsha.

Asai worked in an advertising firm before making her literary debut in 2008 with *Mi sae hana sae* [The Fruit and the Flowers], which received the Shōsetsu Gendai Prize for New Writers Encouragement Prize. *Renka* focuses on the life of Nakajima Utako, poetry teacher to Higuchi Ichiyō, a nineteenth-century woman writer whose image appears on the current

¥5,000 banknote. The novel depicts the passionate love affairs of Nakajima's youth and the struggle of the women embroiled in the disturbances that marked the lead-up to the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Himeno made her debut in 1990 after submitting the unsolicited manuscript that became *Hito yonde Mitsuko* [They Call Her Mitsuko] to her publisher in person. She finally won the prize after four previous works were nominated, including for *Junan* [The Passion] in 1997. Her unconventional depictions of women have won her a devoted readership. *Shōwa no inu* is a quieter, more reflective work than previous stories, depicting a young girl's childhood in a stifling family home through memories of her beloved dog. In this latest work, the author continues to probe the question of what it means to be "happy."

## Noma Literary Prize

Hosaka Kazushi has received the Noma Literary Prize for his novel *Mimei no tōsō* [A Struggle Before Dawn], published by Kodansha. He has previously won the Akutagawa Prize in 1995 for *Kono hito no iki* [This Person's Threshold] and the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize and the Hirabayashi Taiko Prize in 1997 for *Kisetsu no kioku* [Memories of the Seasons].

Originally serialized over a period of nearly four years, the prize-winning work appeared in book form in September 2013. The free-flowing, anecdotal narrative begins with a story about a dead friend who appears in a dream, and goes on to reminisce about a beloved cat and two pet dogs. There are also recollections of short trips taken with a girlfriend. The evocative text is built from fragments of memory, with one recollection triggering a succession of vividly remembered images.

The 35th Noma Literary Prize for New Writers went to Itō Seikō's *Sōzō rajio* [Imagination Radio] (see *JBN* No. 78), published by Kawade Shobō Shinsha. Dealing with the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011, this is the story of a tsunami victim who becomes a kind of supernatural radio DJ after death, transmitting the voices of the dead to his listeners back in the world of the living.

## Mainichi Publishing Culture Prize

The winners of the 67th Mainichi Publishing Culture Awards have been selected. One winner was selected in each of five categories: literature/art, humanities/society, natural sciences, "projects" (collected works, dictionaries, encyclopedias), and criticism. A special prize is also awarded to a book that has attracted readers regardless of category. The literary and cultural awards, established in 1947 by the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper, recognize outstanding works that have contributed to enhancing the publishing culture of Japan.

The winners for 2013 are: for literature/arts, Tendō Arata's *Kanki no ko* [Child of Joy] (Gentōsha); for humanities/society, Nakashima Takuma's *Okinawa henkan to Nichibei anpo taisei* [The Return of Okinawa and the US-Japan Security Structure] (Yūhikaku); for natural sciences, *Iwanami kagaku raiburarii* [Iwanami Science Library], ed. Iwanami Shoten Natural Sciences Book Editorial Department (Iwanami Shoten); for projects, *Tomasu Aquinasu Shingaku taizen* [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*], trans. Inagaki Ryōsuke et al., 45 vols. (Sōbunsha); and for criticism, Tsujihara Noboru's *Shinpan Atsui dokusho tsumetai dokusho* [Hot Reading, Cold Reading, New Edition] (Chikuma Shobō). The special prize went to Hayashi Nozumu's *Kin'yaku Genji monogatari* [A Faithful Modern-Language Translation of *The Tale of Genji*], 10 vols. (Shōdensha).

## Suntory Prize

The winners of the 35th Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities have been announced. The prize, established in 1979, is awarded every year to books in four categories—politics/economics, art/literature, society/customs, and thought/history—that have made creative social and cultural contributions. The winners in each category for 2013 are as follows.

- Politics/Economics  
Sunahara Yōsuke, *Ōsaka: Daitoshi wa kokka o koeru ka* [Osaka: Can a Metropolis Surpass the Nation?] (Chūō

### Advisory Board

Chō Kyō (Zhang Jing), professor of comparative literature, Meiji University  
Nozaki Kan, professor of French literature, University of Tokyo  
Yonahara Kei, nonfiction writer  
Karube Tadashi, professor of political thought in Japan, University of Tokyo

### Publisher and Editor-in-Chief

Honda Osamu, Managing Director  
Arts and Culture Department  
The Japan Foundation  
4-4-1 Yotsuya, Shinjuku-ku  
Tokyo 160-0004 Japan  
Tel: +81-3-5369-6064; Fax: +81-3-5369-6038  
Email: booknews@jpf.go.jp

### Editing, Translation, Design, and Production

Japan Echo Inc.

Printed in Japan on recycled paper  
© The Japan Foundation 2014  
ISSN 0918-9580

Kōron Shinsha); and Nakashima Takuma, *Okinawa henkan to Nichibei anpo taisei* [The Return of Okinawa and the U.S.-Japan Security Structure] (Yūhikaku)

- Art/Literature  
Abe Masahiko, *Bungaku o "gyōshi suru"* [Looking Closely at Literature] (Iwanami Shoten); and Okada Mariko, *Kyōmai Inoue-ryū no tanjō* [The Birth of the Inoue Style of Traditional Kyoto Dance] (Shibunkaku)

- Society/Customs  
Aoki Shin, *Meguriau mono tachi no gunzō: Sengo Nihon no Beigun kichi to ongaku, 1945–1958* [A Group Portrait of Chance Encounters: US Bases and Music in Postwar Japan, 1945–58] (Ōtsuki Shoten); and Nakanishi Tatsuya, *Chūka to taiwa suru Isurāmu: 17–19 seiki Chūgoku Musurimu no shisōteki eii* [Islam in Dialogue with China: Islamic Thought in 17th–19th Century China] (Kyoto University Press)

- Thought/History  
Kudō Akihito, *Chichūkai teikoku no hen'ei: Furansu-ryō Arujeria no 19 seiki* [Glimpses of a Mediterranean Empire: French Algeria in the Nineteenth Century] (University of Tokyo Press); and Shōgimen Takashi, *Yōroppa seiji shisō no tanjō* [The Birth of European Political Thought] (University of Nagoya Press)



# Home Truths from a Singer-Turned-Philosopher

When Kawakami Mieko was approached to write a piece in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami that devastated northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, she came up with a story set on the evening of the disaster.

Rather than trying to depict the aftermath of the events, the Akutagawa Prize–winner imagined a young couple from one of the worst-hit areas spending the night in a small hotel in Kyoto, still knowing nothing about what has happened to their hometown. Heavily pregnant, the wife has a strange dream in which her unborn baby, their house, and the month of March itself are all made of yarn, a symbol of fragility and purity. In the story “Sangatsu no keito” [trans. “March Yarn”], the two characters are unaware of the tragedy at home, but the reader knows of the harsh reality that awaits when they return.

“After the terrible events of that day, I was obsessed by the idea that we could be on the brink of another disaster at any moment,” says Kawakami, who admits that she suffered considerable trauma after the quake and tsunami. “When they asked me to contribute something, I found I simply couldn’t write in terms of big ideas. I didn’t want to claim that human beings are strong enough to rebuild the world, or that we are tiny and insignificant in the face of nature. All I could do was to use yarn as a kind of metaphor for the way we live in the world, always potentially on the brink of bereavement or loss or pain.”

A world made of yarn, Kawakami says, represents a world without language. Through the dream of a baby made of yarn, she says she hoped to suggest the way in which “even though we are no longer able to return to our infant selves, we have a lingering memory of that time when we looked at the world without preconceptions—a time before we had the ability to put our thoughts into words.”

An English translation of this powerful story is included in *March Was Made of Yarn*, an anthology published to mark the first anniversary of the earthquake. The original Japanese text is contained in the author’s first short-story collection, *Ai no yume toka* [trans. *Dreams of Love, etc.*], which won the Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize, making her one of only three novelists to garner this prestigious award in their thirties, along with Ōe Kenzaburo and Murakami Haruki.

Of the seven stories in the collection, the final piece, “Jūsangatsu kaidan” [“A Ghost Story of the Thirteenth Month”], is likely to leave the most powerful impression with readers, as it attempts to unravel the substance of death itself.

The novella is divided into three parts. It begins with a third-person narrative detailing the anxiety-ridden final days of a woman who has been diagnosed with a terminal kidney disease. As she lies dying, she worries about what will happen to her beloved husband after she is gone. The next section is told from the perspective of the dead wife’s ghost, as the husband finds a new love and her drifting spirit fades away in despair. The final section, however, tells the widower’s story from a totally different point of view.

“Which version of the story is true? I deliberately left it ambiguous,” says Kawakami. “In the end, however hard we try, we can only see what we want to see. But I wanted to hint at the possibility that we can build something of value by looking within.”

When Kawakami won the coveted Akutagawa Prize in 2008 with her second novella, *Chichi to ran* [Breasts and Egg] (see *JBN* No. 57), readers were captivated by her glamorous, model-like appearance and her unique background. (Before becoming a writer, Kawakami worked as a singer and bar hostess.) In the six years since she made her debut in 2007, she has become one of Japan’s most successful women writers and has revolutionized the structure of the contemporary Japanese novel.

Kawakami says she has been argumentative since early childhood and was enchanted from an early age by the evocative power of words. It is perhaps not surprising that this talented artist has developed into a writer with a uniquely philosophical bent.

Another formative influence on her thinking was the time she spent studying Nietzsche with Hitoshi Nagai, a professor at Nihon University. Her first full-length novel, *Hevun* [Heaven] (see *JBN* No. 63), deals with violent bullying in a junior high school. Kawakami explores the question of what it means to be strong and explores the notion of Nietzschean *ressentiment*.

“I have no interest in writing simple romances,” Kawakami says. “A novel is like a fountain—readers should be free to toss in whatever they like. Every time I write, I try to create a new fountain with clearer water.”

Kawakami admits that this determination to explore the full potential of the novel form can sometimes have an impact on other aspects of her life. She shares her life with her husband, fellow Akutagawa Prize–winner Abe Kazushige. Kawakami says her husband sometimes accuses her of being too uncompromising—both in her writing and in her relationships with other people. “Living with me and arguing all the time must be quite stressful,” she laughs. The two writers work in the same room at home, sitting at opposite ends of the same table.

“Writing novels is my way of thinking about how people should live,” Kawakami says. “Whether another big earthquake hits or not, we will all die someday. My stories are my way of exploring what it means to be alive.”

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



**Kawakami Mieko**

Born in 1976 in Osaka. Novelist, poet, essayist, and actress. Received the Akutagawa Prize for *Chichi to ran*; the Murasaki Shikibu Prize for Literature for *Hevun*; the Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize for her collection *Ai no yume toka*; and the Takami Jun Prize for her poetry collection *Mizugame* [Water Jar]. She also won Kinema Junpō’s Best New Actress Award for her role in the film *Pandora no hako* [Pandora’s Box].