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Japan's Marriage Crisis and the Future for Young Singles

Yamada Masahiro

One of the buzzwords of recent years in Japan has been the term *konkatsu* (lit., “marriage activities”). Sometimes translated as “marriage hunting,” *konkatsu* refers to the increasingly diverse efforts made by young people to find a suitable marriage partner. Since I coined the term in 2007, the word and the activities it refers to have become part of mainstream discourse. A book I wrote with Shirakawa Momoko titled *Konkatsu jidai* [The Age of Marriage Hunting], published in 2008 by Discover 21, sold more than 200,000 copies. The term crops up frequently in TV dramas and in the titles of popular novels such as Ishida Ira's *Konkatsu?* (Marriage Hunting?; Bungei Shunjū, 2012).

Behind all the marriage-partner-hunting activity lies a grim reality. Japan faces a serious crisis—a marriage crisis. Fewer people are getting married than ever before. In 2010, 47.3 percent of men and 34.5 percent of women aged 30 to 34 were still single. Almost half of all men in their early thirties, and one in three women, were unmarried. (In 1975 the equivalent figures were just 14.3 percent for men and 7.7 percent for women.) And it is not only marriage that is suffering, but love and romance as well. A mere 25 percent of single men and 35 percent of single women aged 18 to 34 are in a relationship, according to a survey carried out in 2010 by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. And unlike in Europe and North America, where it is now common for couples to live together before marriage, very few unmarried couples cohabit in Japan—just 1.6 percent according to the same survey. Nevertheless, almost 90 percent of single people who responded to the survey said they hoped to get married in the future. This is the reality Japan is facing: the number of young people who want to get married but are failing to do so because they cannot find a suitable partner is increasing rapidly. This is what is driving the *konkatsu* phenomenon.

Reasons for the Marriage Crisis

How has Japanese society come to this state of affairs? The reasons, as I explained in my book *Shōshi shakai Nihon* [Japan's Dwindling Birthrate], published by Iwanami Shoten in 2007, can be outlined as follows.

From the end of World War II until around 1980, almost all young people got married. Japan was a society in which marriage was more or less universal. This was because economic factors made it easy for couples to build their household finances on a gender-based division of labor, in which the husband went out to work while the wife stayed at home and took care of the housework. Starting in the postwar period of rapid economic growth

right up until around 1980, companies offered an abundance of opportunities for young men to find jobs as permanent (regular) employees (*seishain*) with lifetime employment and generous benefits. Government policies also helped ensure a steady income for self-employed people. These circumstances made it feasible for a young woman to marry a company employee or a man who was self-employed because such men were more or less assured a steady income sufficient to build a prosperous life for the family on the husband's earnings alone.

Things began to change following the 1973 Gulf oil crisis. Young men's incomes were no longer increasing as quickly as they had previously and the average age at marriage started to creep higher. When the bubble economy burst in 1992 and the Japanese economy entered a slump that continued through the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the proportion of unmarried young people rocketed.

I believe the current situation is due to a combination of three factors. These are: (1) the dwindling earning power of young men; (2) the persistence of the idea that a man should support his family financially; and (3) the maintenance of the custom according to which unmarried people continue to live with their parents. Let me say a few words about each of these in turn.

The first factor is the drawn-out economic stagnation that Japan has been experiencing since the bubble economy collapsed in 1992. Globalization has led to an increased demand for non-permanent workers, creating jobs with little stability and low pay. In Japan, with its entrenched practice of lifetime employment, it is extremely difficult for companies to dismiss regular employees. And as a general rule Japan does not issue visas for unskilled foreign workers. As a result, these unstable jobs with low pay have been filled by young Japanese non-permanent workers. This has created a serious gap in pay between young people who managed to land jobs as *seishain* and those who did not.

The second factor is the deeply rooted view that assumes a couple will rely on the husband's income alone after marriage. Something of how persistent this idea is can be seen from the large numbers of young women who still agree with the statement that “a man should go out to work while the woman looks after the home.” (In a survey carried out by the Cabinet Office in 2012, 43.9 percent of women in their twenties agreed with this statement.) It is also a fact that Japan does not yet have in place an environment that would make it realistic for a woman to continue to work fulltime after having a child. Long working hours continue to be expected of all regular employees, both men and women. A would-be husband therefore has

to have a steady income in order to ensure a comfortable lifestyle after marriage.

What happens when we put these two factors together? According to a survey conducted by the Meiji Yasuda Institute of Life and Wellness, two-thirds of single women say they want their husband to have an income of at least ¥4 million a year—but in fact only a quarter of single men aged 20 to 39 earn this much (see Figure 1). In 1992, 90 percent of unmarried men aged 25 to 34 were regular

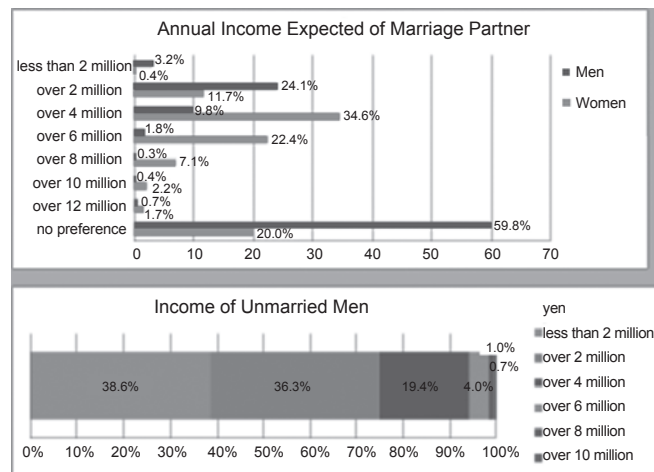


Figure 1. The spread of the New Economy and shortage of young men with stable jobs. (Source: *Seikatsu fukushi kenkyū* 74 (2010). Meiji Yasuda Institute of Life and Wellness.)

employees with full permanent-employee benefits. A survey carried out in 2010 showed that this proportion had dropped to around 60 percent, with a corresponding increase in the number of young single men working in non-permanent jobs, normally for lower pay, or not working at all. Men without a steady income are unattractive as potential mates. And this is one of the major reasons for the marriage crisis: people's way of thinking about marriage has not adapted to the new reality. Despite the ever-increasing numbers of men stuck in poorly paid jobs, society still expects a man to provide for his wife and children single-handedly after marriage. The truth is that for a growing number of men, this is simply no longer realistic.

The third factor is that in Japan most unmarried people live with their parents. In Europe and North America the majority of unmarried young people live apart from their parents. In these circumstances, it makes economic sense for couples to cohabit. But in Japan, young people who live with their parents are able to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle even if their own income is low. This is the demographic I described in 1997 as the "parasite singles." By continuing to live at home, these people are able to bide their time waiting for an attractive mate to come along. This means that they avoid getting married if it is likely to involve economic sacrifices.

One result is that many young men with poor economic prospects give up on the idea of finding a girlfriend altogether, while women continue to wait stubbornly for an attractive partner with a steady income. This is one reason for the decline in dating in Japan (the term used in the surveys is *danjo kōsai*, or a "going steady" type of relationship). A survey carried out by the Japanese Association

for Sex Education suggests a dramatic drop in the percentage of students in junior high, high school, and college who are sexually experienced. One reason is apparently a widely held belief among young people that "dating" involves unacceptable risks (both sexually and emotionally).

As a result of this process, there has been a rapid increase in the number of young people who are unmarried and do not have a boyfriend or girlfriend either—at least 10 million people are now estimated to fall into this category. This in turn contributes to the dwindling birth rate and the declining population.

Virtual Romance

So how do young people channel their desire for love and romance? In many cases, I believe, the answer is that these urges are being satisfied "virtually." Japanese pop culture—anime, video games, cosplay, music idols, "kawaii" culture, and so on—has become well known around the world, giving rise to the so-called "Cool Japan" phenomenon. Lurking behind much of this popular culture is the fact that many single people are enjoying "romance" in a virtual world. It is no exaggeration to say that virtual romance is standing in for the real thing. Examples include the "JK" (*joshi kōsei*, or high school girl) services, in which men pay expensive fees to enjoy a romantic walk with a female high school student. (The seedy world of the JK industry is exposed in Nitō Yume-no's book *Joshi kōsei no ura-shakai* [The Hidden Society of High School Girls].) Similarly, single women in their thirties and forties are often to be seen among the crowds of adoring fans swarming around the latest boy bands.

The Limits of *Konkatsu* and the Future for Parasite Singles

The success of "marriage hunting" will be limited as long as society as a whole remains fixated on the traditional norm of a gendered division of labor within the household. The supply of men with steady incomes is itself limited, after all. While this problem remains unresolved, young people will continue to grow old without marrying, eager to tie the knot but unable to do so for the reasons I have described. One of the striking developments in

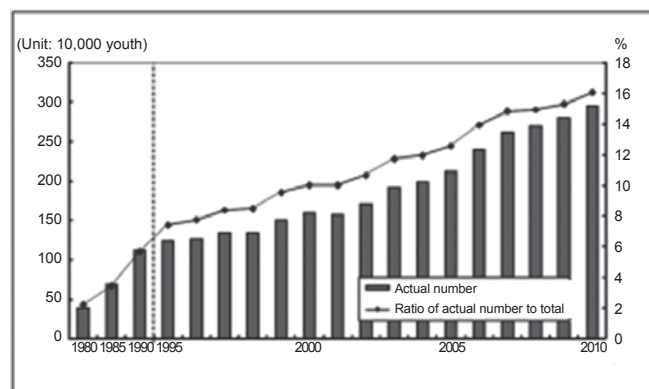
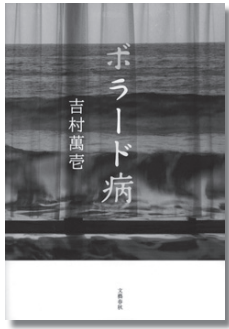


Figure 2. The future of parasite singles (number and ratio of people aged 35-44 living with their parents in Japan for 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995-2010). (Source: Compiled by Nishi Fumihiko from data on the website of the Statistical Research and Training Institute, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.)

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION



Yoshimura Man'ichi

Born in 1961. In 2001 received the 92nd Bungakukai Prize for New Writers for *Kuchukuchū bān* [Tickle Tickle Bang] and the Akutagawa Prize for *Harigane-mushi* [Horsehair Worms] in 2003.

*Dystopian thriller
set in a post-disaster
coastal community*

***Borādo-byō* [Bollard Disease]** By Yoshimura Man'ichi

Bungei Shunjū, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 168 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-16-390079-7.

The novel depicts the lives of residents of a coastal town who had once evacuated but have returned to their community badly polluted in a major disaster. The story unfolds from the point of view of an elementary school girl. People are proud that their town is the first to have reached the designated safety levels, and set about building an unshakeable order as if nothing had happened. But despite their praise for their hometown, there is no guarantee that the fish or crops they are eating are safe.

One after another, the girl's classmates start to fall victim to a mysterious disease and disappear. The girl lives alone with her disciplinarian mother, who is obsessively concerned with what people around them might be thinking. The girl is a poor student and is alienated from her classmates. She keeps a secret diary to vent her

frustration, but her mother finds it and cuts it to ribbons with a pair of scissors.

Mysterious, threatening men in suits begin to appear in the town. Anyone who complains about the establishment is arrested. Just as the girl is released from her feelings of awkwardness and has begun to feel the intoxication of acting as part of a group, her life changes in dramatic ways.

Depicting the bleak everyday lives of people living in a post-disaster alternate reality, twisted by deceit and cowed by fear, the novel blends elements of dystopia and descriptions of the girl's sensitivity with the mystery surrounding the narrator's fate. The combination makes for a thrilling novel, rich in suspense. (Nozaki)

***Haru no niwa* [Spring Garden]** By Shibasaki Tomoka

Bungei Shunjū, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 144 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 978-4-16-390101-5.

Following his divorce, Tarō moves into a decrepit two-story apartment building scheduled for demolition. The eight units are cramped, and most of the residents live alone. One day, Tarō notices Nishi, one of the other tenants, gazing wistfully at the light-blue house next door.

Nishi is an unsuccessful manga artist who becomes fascinated by the light-blue house and the life of the family living there after discovering it, when a high school student, in a collection of photographs. She had tracked it down and moved in next door. She became friends with the woman who lived in the house, and even got to see it inside.

The story is nested in structure. Tarō observes Nishi as Nishi delves into the lives of the couple that originally built and lived in the house. Finally, another layer is

added, when Tarō's sister is seen observing the other two characters. In a sense, it is the blue house and the apartment building that are the story's real protagonists, with space itself playing the central role, transected by the characters who appear in the story. With precise descriptions and a finely calibrated sense of space, the author makes a bold experiment a resounding success.

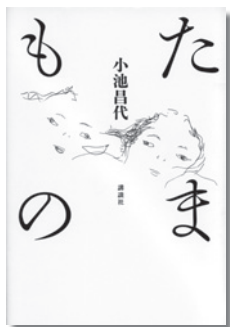
The human characters are not just supporting roles. Tarō, Nishi, and the couple who built the blue house all have experienced the breakup of their households. Love, family, and everyday life are as fragile as glass: that is the message, conveyed with great emotional power, through this story of a house. (Chō)



Shibasaki Tomoka

Born in 1973. Received the 23rd Oda Sakunosuke Prize in 2006 and the 57th Minister of Culture's Art Encouragement Prize in 2007, for *Sono machi no ima wa* [What That Town Is Today]. She won the 151st Akutagawa Prize in 2014 for this work.

*A powerful story
of the fragility of
human
relationships*



Koike Masayo

Born in 1959. Poet and novelist. Won the 33rd Kawabata Yasunari Literature Prize in 2007 for *Tatado* [Tatado] (see JBN No. 55) and the 18th Hagiwara Sakutarō Prize in 2010 for the collection of poems *Korukata* [Kolkata]. *Tamamono* won the Izumi Kyōka Literature Prize in 2014.

The jewel of a mother's love for a child

Tamamono [Godsend]

By Koike Masayo

Kōdansha, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 192 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-06-218969-9.

One day, when the narrator was in her early forties, an old childhood friend and former lover appeared on her doorstep with a baby in his arms. He begged her to take care of the baby, whose mother had been killed in a traffic accident. He promised to come back to collect the child one day. Ten years later, the woman looks back over the time she has spent bringing up the baby boy alone. When responsibility for a fragile life is suddenly thrust upon you one day, she muses, what can a person do but cherish it?

The love of a mother for her child is presented as unshakeable. The fact that there is no blood relationship between the woman and her son only brings the nobility of the maternal instinct into clearer focus. The subject of a parent's love is one of the oldest themes of Japanese liter-

ature, as seen in the *Man'yōshū* verse "there is no jewel more precious than a child."

The novel also depicts the fragility and loneliness of parental love. The awareness that her child will one day be taken from her makes the sight of her healthy boy even more precious. The author, also known as a poet, captures in lively and compelling prose the deep emotions that can come from living with a child. As Japanese society struggles with the consequences of a dwindling birthrate, this book serves as a timely reminder of the special joy that children can bring. (Nozaki)

Tōmei na meikyū [The Transparent Labyrinth]

By Hirano Keiichirō

Shinchōsha, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 212 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-426009-6.

This is a thrilling collection of what might be called strange tales for the contemporary age. One story introduces a postman in a rural village who has the uncanny ability to mimic anyone's handwriting perfectly. One day, he decides to start making perfect copies of all the mail he delivers. Where will it all end? In another story, a private detective seeks to hunt down a man who is his exact double. Can he find him? In another story, a Japanese man and woman are locked inside a room in a luxury apartment in Budapest. How will their night of terror affect the rest of their lives? In another story, a daughter struggles to dispose of the gun she finds wrapped in newspaper among her dead father's belongings . . .

Another story introduces a man who is sexually attracted to fire. Will he ever suc-

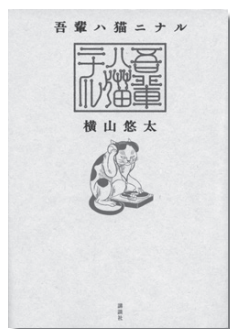
ceed in satisfying his perverted desire? Following a traffic accident, a theater director finds his sense of time radically disturbed, so that a single day seems to last a week. How will he learn to cope with the oppressive weight of time? All six stories present characters who harbor some strange secret or confront a bizarre situation. The stories thrillingly depict a crucial juncture in these characters' lives. Hirano Keiichirō is well known for his ambitious full-length novels; here he handles the short story form with delicacy and skill, communicating the moments of terror that lie within the loneliness of modern life, and extracting from them the pleasure of a story well told. (Nozaki)



Hirano Keiichirō

Born in 1975. Winner of the 120th Akutagawa Prize in 1999 for *Nisshoku* [The Eclipse] and the education ministry's Culture Arts Encouragement Prize in 2009 for *Kekkai* [Dam Break] (see JBN No. 58). Other works include *Kūhaku o mitashi nasai* [Fill in the Blanks] (See JBN No. 77)

A chronicle of the terror that lies within modern life



Yokoyama Yūta

Born in 1981. Won the 57th Gunzō Award for New Writers for this work in 2014, and was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. He is a resident of Beijing.

*The culture shock
of a Japanese
reared in China*

Wagahai wa neko ni naru **[I Become a Cat]**

By Yokoyama Yūta

Kōdansha, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 144 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-06-219064-0.

Born to a Japanese father and a Chinese mother, Isota Kakeru grew up in Shanghai. After graduating from high school he hopes to study in Japan but has to abandon the plan when his father dies.

Although he has Japanese nationality, he speaks only very basic Japanese. When he visits Tokyo as a university student, he experiences unexpected culture shock.

Everything is fresh and new, and the source of many surprises. Looking for a toy figurine for his anime otaku friend back home, he visits Akihabara and is astonished by the world of otaku culture. He wanders into a maid café, is dressed up as a cat and made to indulge in a bizarre role-playing game. He stumbles out of the café and boards the plane home from Narita the next day, his mind still confused, cat's whiskers still drawn on his face.

The narrative unfolds gently, and is mixed with moments of amusing cultural criticism. The title plays on Natsume Sōseki's famous *I Am A Cat*. What makes the novel distinctive is its embrace of the rich orthographical kinship between Japanese and Chinese, presenting the Chinese terms with kana *rubi* glosses. The diglossic writing shakes up the reader's expectations, and imbues the story with a special kind of humor.

The book is remarkably well structured for a debut work, and the various settings are vividly and convincingly evoked. This work won the 57th Gunzō Award for New Writers and was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. (Chō)

ESSAY

Haiku no dōbutsu-tachi **[Haiku Animals]**

Edited by Sendan no Kai

Jinbun Shoin, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 298 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-409-15024-5.

Haiku, with its 17 syllables, divided into lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables, is Japan's best-loved genre of poetry. The form is not without its rules—all haiku must contain a season word, or *kigo*, for example—but is enjoyed by people of all backgrounds. They form numerous haiku societies, one of which is the Sendan no Kai.

These haiku on animal subjects are divided into wryly drawn categories: animals of Japan, insects, creatures that live in the water, birds, zoo animals, and human beings. A short essay about each animal opens a selection of verses.

Dogs, for example: *Himawari wa/Nisoku hokō no/Inu ga suki* [The sunflower/Prefers dogs/That walk on two legs]. Or turtles: *Kame ga naku/Sonna jōken/Nomemasu ka-tte* [The turtle cries/

Can you swallow those conditions?/No way]. From the category "Boys": *Akikaze ya/Are mo mukashi no/Bishōnen* [Autumn wind /And over there what used to be/A handsome young man].

The haiku poet captures in brisk strokes moments of amusement or sorrow found in everyday life. Many of the best verses by unknown poets can stand in comparison with famous masterpieces by well-known writers like Kobayashi Issa and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke.

"Insects" introduces by season a whole range from adorable bugs to un-adorable cockroaches. One humorous example: "Furoba samushi/Tomo ni hadaka no/Aburamushi" [In the cold bathroom /Both naked/The cockroach and me].

This book is a Japanese celebration of life in verse form. (Yonahara)



Sendan no Kai

A group of haiku enthusiasts, founded in 1985, that "meets" online. Active via the quarterly journal Sendan, local chapters, and its website <http://sendan.kai-sya.co.jp>. Leader: Tsubouchi Toshinori.

*A haiku
celebration of life*



Harada Nobuo

Born in 1949. Professor at Kokushikan University, Harada specializes in medieval history and the development of food culture. Received the Suntory Art Prize in 1989 for Edo no ryōri-shi [A Culinary History of Edo]. His numerous works include Washoku to Nihon bunka [Japanese Culture and Cuisine].

A comprehensive guide to food and daily life in Edo

Edo no shoku bunka **[Edo Food Culture]**

Edited by Harada Nobuo

Shōgakusan, 2014. 210 x 148 mm. 208 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-09-626618-2.

From sushi and tempura to soba noodles and grilled eel, many of the favorite foods of modern Japan date back to the Edo period (1603–1868). Other aspects of culinary culture familiar today also became widespread during that time.

With the nation at peace for the more than 260 years of the Edo period, Japan's productivity burgeoned. A network of highways developed, facilitating transport of local specialty products to the cities. The brewing industry flourished, making sake as well as miso, soy sauce, and other fermented seasonings widely available to ordinary people, at least in urban areas. Cookery books flourished and people's diets became richer and more diverse, even in the home.

The book looks at the ingredients and cuisines of different regions, particularly the

three major cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, the importance of annual events and ceremonies, the different kitchens found in samurai, merchant, and commoners' houses, the development of seasonings, the production and transportation of ingredients, methods of food processing, etc.

Of particular interest are the author's discussion of the link between the influx of single men into Edo and the development of the culture of eating out. As the city grew rapidly to become the center of the national economy, farmers and merchants flocked to the city and the food-service industry developed to satisfy this new demand.

The book draws on a wealth of historical resources, and is generously illustrated with colorful woodblock prints, photographs, and other images, which help to make the book even more accessible. (Chō)

Hatsune Miku wa naze sekai o kaeta no ka **[How Hatsune Miku Changed the World]**

By Shiba Tomonori

Ōta Shuppan, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 304pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-7783-1396-8.

In 2007, Sapporo-based Crypton Future Media released Hatsune Miku, a new piece of music software that could make a computer sing. The product was an instant hit, and the green-haired young woman shown on the product's packaging became an overnight star. Fans began to post new songs for Hatsune Miku online, while others added images and video to the music.

Before long, the virtual icon was an international sensation. Based on interviews with Crypton's president Itō Hiroyuki and other figures involved in the project, this book shows that the Hatsune Miku phenomenon was a spontaneous movement created by amateurs who gathered online looking for entertainment. In this sense, the Hatsune Miku phenomenon can be seen as the third "Summer of Love," a successor to the flower-power

movement of the 1960s and the club music craze of the 1980s.

At the same time as being on the cutting edge of the information revolution, some aspects of the Hatsune Miku phenomenon are reminiscent of traditional Japanese cultural forms such as the *ningyō jōruri* puppet theater. And it is likely that Hatsune Miku is merely the beginning. This book is an exciting reminder of the previously unthought-of cultural possibilities developing at the point where technology and youthful enthusiasms meet. (Nozaki)



Shiba Tomonori

Born in 1976. Music journalist. Works as an editor on Rockin' on and other music publications. Has written widely on music and the subculture.

The possibilities of computerized music unleashed

POLITICS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS



Nakakita Kōji

Born in 1968. Professor in the Graduate School of Social Sciences, Hitotsubashi University, where he specializes in the history of Japanese diplomacy and modern Japanese politics. Works include *Gendai Nihon no seitō demokurashī* [Party Politics in Contemporary Japanese Democracy].

Insights on recent changes in Japanese politics

Jimintō seiji no hen'yō [Changes in the Politics of the Liberal Democratic Party]

By Nakakita Kōji

NHK Publishing, 2014. 182 x 130 mm. 304 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-14-091217-1.

Prime Minister Abe Shinzō has lately been exhibiting far more dynamic political leadership than most of his immediate predecessors—attracting media attention in Japan and overseas. Concentration of power in the figure of the prime minister did not begin with Abe's return to government in December 2012. Instead, argues political historian Nakakita Kōji in this book, it should be understood as one of the results of long-term change in Japanese politics since in the 1970s.

Originally, the LDP was little more than a collection of politicians who represented local interests. Over the years, what was originally a loose amalgamation has become a unified organization centered on the party president. The move-

ment began in the 1970s with proposals put forward by non-dominant factions within the party. Although the pace of change was often slow, after Koizumi Jun'ichirō came to office in 2001, authority was more or less totally vested in the party president.

Prime Minister Abe has worked to strengthen his authority by building on this base. Nakakita worries that he seems to be trying to achieve solidarity within the LDP based on nationalist ideology, forgetting the importance of rationalizing the party organization. This book is the ideal volume for anyone looking for a clear understanding of the recent changes that have taken place in Japanese politics. (Karube)

BIOGRAPHY

Kanashisugiru zo, Roppa [The Sad Life of Furukawa Roppa]

By Yamamoto Isshō

Kōdansha, 2014. 190 x 132 mm. 456 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-06-218980-4.

Furukawa Roppa (1903–1961) was an actor who specialized in comic farce (*kigeki*), active mostly in the 1930s. Known for his fine voice, Roppa had an air of Western modernism about him and won phenomenal popularity with stage performances inspired by musicals. He also appeared in numerous films and made many recordings of comic songs. He came from an illustrious background—his grandfather had been president of Tokyo Imperial University—and he had a learned, intellectual style. Roppa's popularity declined after World War II when he failed to change with the times. A well-known gourmet and bookworm, he was also famous for the numerous essays he wrote during this period of his life. As an actor, he missed a chance to appear in a Hollywood film,

and ended his life more or less forgotten.

Renewed appreciation of Roppa's career grew in the 1980s following publication of a new edition of his more-than-100-volume diary. In the present biography, Yamamoto describes the diary as "a telescope through which to view one of the most important periods in history." The book draws on numerous materials, the diaries in particular, to bring to life not just Roppa's personal career but his times. He vividly records the lives of ordinary people as they struggled through the war years. Writing the diaries gave Roppa a new lease on life, but his later years were filled of sadness. (Yonahara)



Yamamoto Isshō

Born in 1948. Historian of modern Japan and researcher on the history of horseracing. Won the Japan Essayist Club prize in 2008 for *Koi to hakushaku to Taishō demokurashī* [Love and the Count and Taisho Democracy].

Actor's diaries open window on the Shōwa period



Yoshikawa Nagi

Born in Osaka. After working for a newspaper, studied for a Ph.D. at Inha University, South Korea. His works include Chōsen saisho no modanisuto Tei Shiyō [Cheong Chi-yong, Korea's First Modernist] (2002). Has translated Kang Young-sook's Rina and other works of Korean literature into Japanese.

*A young Korean
Dadaist in 1920s
Japan*

Keijō no Dada, Tōkyō no Dada [Dada in Seoul, Dada in Tokyo]

By Yoshikawa Nagi

Heibonsha, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 224 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-582-74432-3.

The avant-garde art movement known as Dadaism, which began in Zurich during World War I, arrived in Japan in 1920. It was embraced with wild enthusiasm, particularly among young people. Takahashi Shinkichi (1901–1987) published the first collection by a Japanese Dadaist poet in 1923. One figure who was strongly influenced by the Japanese Dadaists was Ko Han-yong, a young Korean who was studying in Japan at the time.

Many students from Asian countries were in Japan around the time when the liberal atmosphere of the “Taisho Democracy” was still in the air. Ko at first moved toward nihilism and socialism, and was at a loss when he discovered Dada, becoming acquainted with Takahashi, translator and ideologue Tsuji Jun (1884–1944), and other

prominent figures in the movement.

Eventually, Ko returned to Korea. He established himself in Seoul (then known as Gyeongseong or Keijō) and wrote poetry under the name Ko Dada, becoming the only Dadaist in Korean literary history. Takahashi and Tsuji visited him in Korea, while Ko too returned to Japan to deepen his friendships with his fellow poets. He also fell in love during one of his visits to Japan. This refreshing story reminds us of a time when young people from Korea and Japan lived and worked together in search of a new poetic language. The author brings to life a time when artists and social activists belonged to a wide network and worked together toward concord and cooperation. (Yonahara)

HISTORY

Edo/Tōkyō no toshi-shi: Kindai ikōki no toshi, kenchiku, shakai

[An Urban History of Edo-Tokyo: City, Architecture, and Society in the Changing Capital of Japan]

By Matsuyama Megumi

University of Tokyo Press, 2014. 210 x 148 mm. 386 pp. ¥7,400. ISBN 978-4-13-026608-6.

The word “*shitamachi*” is often glossed as “traditional working-class neighborhood,” but in the modern era, the term has been used to describe areas still dominated by dense concentrations of small shops and small factories. These working-class areas remain distinct from the higher-ground *yamanote* areas made up of mainly single-family dwellings.

Back in the Tokugawa period the city was divided between areas where the elite warrior class lived and those inhabited by merchants and craftsmen. The latter areas were what later became the *shitamachi*.

Matsuyama Megumi makes clear, however, based on an exacting study of the architectural and urban history, that the

divisions of urban space under the Tokugawa regime did not simply continue unchanged into the modern era. For around 30 years after modernization began in the 1860s, the city’s plans called for merchants and craftsmen to move into some of the areas that had previously been home to the elite samurai class. The book also reveals some of the plans involved in the introduction of Western-style architecture and the building of various Shinto shrines. These plans show the rich possibilities for change that existed in the early decades of Japan’s modernization. (Karube)



Matsuyama Megumi

Born in 1975. Lecturer at Meiji University, where she specializes in modern Japanese urban and architectural history. Works include Dentō toshi 1 Idea [The Traditional City, 1: Ideas] (2010) and Edo no hiroba [The Open Spaces of Edo] (2005).

*How Edo became
Tokyo*



Baba Kimihiko

Born in 1958. Earned a Ph.D. in 2010 from Waseda University, specializing in East Asia and Japan-China relations. He is also author of "Biruma no tategoto" o meguru sengoshi [The Harp of Burma in Postwar History].

*Media-based
analysis of
Japanese views
on China*

Gendai Nihonjin no Chūgoku-zō: Nit-Chū kokkō seijōka kara Ten'anmon jiken-Tennō hō-Chū made [Contemporary Japanese Images of China: From the Resumption of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations to the Tiananmen Square Incident and the Japanese Emperor's Visit to China]

By Baba Kimihiko

Shin'yōsha, 2014. 210 x 148 mm. 402 pp. ¥4,200. ISBN 978-4-7885-1386-0.

A sequel to *Sengo Nihonjin no Chūgoku-zō: Nihon haisen kara Bunka Daikakumei Nit-Chū fukkō made* [The Postwar Japanese Image of China: From Japan's War Defeat to the Cultural Revolution and Resumption of Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Relations] (see JBN No. 68), this volume examines modern relations between Japan and China as seen in 13 leading opinion journals from the early 1970s through to the beginning of the 1990s.

The author organizes his arguments under four periods: (1) from the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1972 to the conclusion of a formal peace treaty in 1978; (2)

the nine years from the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979 to the democracy movement in 1987; (3) the three years straddling the suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests; and (4) the Japanese emperor's visit to China in 1992 and the previous year.

The 1980s were supposedly a "honeymoon period" for Sino-Japanese relations, but an in-depth look reveals that under the veneer of friendliness, criticisms of China and a pessimistic outlook for the future were already common in Japanese discourse. (Chō)

Inu-tachi no Meiji Ishin: Pochi no tanjō [Dogs and the Meiji Restoration: The Birth of Pochi]

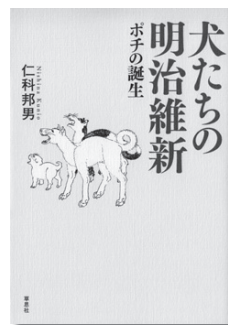
By Nishina Kunio

Sōshisha, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 336 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-7942-2063-9.

The "Pochi" in the subtitle refers to the stereotypical dog's name in modern Japan. The author, journalist Nishina Kunio, has spent many years collecting historical materials about dogs in Japan, and has studied the ways in which the relationship between Japanese and their dogs has changed over time. According to his research, the name "Pochi" was first heard in the years following 1859, when foreign residents began to appear in Yokohama after Japan established diplomatic relations with the Western powers. The new name was born when the English word "patch" and the Japanese word *buchi*, which also describes the spots on a dog's pelt, became mixed up in conversations between English-speaking foreigners and locals in Yokohama.

As this example shows, even some-

thing as simple as a dog's name carries evidence of how society changed after Japanese came into contact with the West in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), the custom of keeping dogs as personal pets did not exist. Instead, the members of a village or town would look after the animals and use them as community guard dogs. The custom of keeping pets took root after new breeds of dog were imported from Western countries in the late nineteenth century. Many of the former community dogs were put down as strays. This entertaining book reveals a little-known side of Japan's modern history from a canine perspective. (Karube)



Nishina Kunio

Born in 1948. In 2001, became chief of the publication bureau of the Mainichi Newspapers and from 2005 to 2011, served as president of Mainichi Productions. His research focuses on the history of Japanese people's relationships with dogs.

*Dogs in the
modernization of
Japan*



Harai Ichirō

Born in 1949. Moved to Amami in 1954 after the islands reverted to Japanese sovereignty. Formerly worked as a newspaper journalist and editor for the local paper. Now a freelance writer. Works for the e-journal Lapiz. His publications include Amami no shiki [The Four Seasons in the Amami Islands].

*Postcolonial
history of sugar
cultivation in
Japan*

Yokubō no satō-shi **[The Lust for Sugar: A History]**

By Harai Ichirō

Shinwasha, 2014. 190 x 130 mm. 320 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-86405-063-0.

Sugar has had a powerful impact on world history—and on the history of modern Japan as well. This book looks at sugar production in the Amami and Ryukyu islands at the south of the Japanese archipelago from the perspective of the farmers.

Sugar cultivation is said to have been brought to the Ryukyus in the seventeenth century, around the same time that the Shimazu clan of the Satsuma domain in modern Kagoshima invaded and annexed the islands together with the Amami Islands. Sugar was positioned as a key industry and plantation-style cultivation began; it soon became an important trade commodity.

A monopolistic sales system was established against the backdrop of the discriminatory, status-driven system of rule that prevailed on the Amami and Ryukyu

islands, and the profits that the Satsuma domain derived from sugar played a major role in the events leading to the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The book also looks at national industrial policy since the beginning of the modern period and examines the close relationship between the government and the sugar merchants. It introduces a variety of people strongly opposed to that state of affairs and reconsiders the significance of the southern islands in Japan's modern history.

The author is a journalist who grew up in the Amami Islands. In this book he looks at the place where he grew up from a new perspective and develops a post-colonial understanding of its history. (Yonahara)

MANGA

Resutō fujin **[De Madame Restor]**

By Mishima Yoshiharu

Shūeisha, 2014. 182 x 130 mm. 174 pp. ¥514. ISBN 978-4-08-879838-7.

An important event on the calendar at many Japanese high schools is the annual school play, produced and acted entirely by students. It is not uncommon for the students to take charge of writing the script and producing the play as well. For the students, rehearsals afford a chance to experience a different quality of time from that which prevails in their daily classes. Not only is the activity itself something set apart from daily routine; the practice results in a performance that produces the fictional world of the play. The students thus pass this special time together in a space that might be described as twice removed from the everyday.

This manga is a groundbreaking work that attempts to evoke the extraordinary atmosphere of this time not simply

through the story or dialogue but through the style of the work itself. One girl is aware of herself only through one of the characters in any book she is reading, while another cannot speak and has to have someone express her feelings on her behalf. These kinds of situations and characters, which could never be plausible in real life, have a strange persuasive power when they are portrayed within the framework of the high school drama play. This unusual work, which represents manga as contemporary art, allows readers to experience these remarkable effects. (Karube)



Mishima Yoshiharu

Manga artist. In May 2014, completed the serialization of the manga Sukurōru [Scroll] in the monthly comic Dengeki Daiō. The story contained in this volume was originally serialized online.

*The imaginative
world of a high
school play*

No. 10: Ariyoshi Sawako and the Far South

Born in 1931, Ariyoshi Sawako had become widely known as a talented writer when she ventured to some of Japan's remotest islands—where people had no idea who she was—to expose and explore the issues they faced.

Novelist Ariyoshi Sawako (1931–84) was celebrated for her writing from early on. Beginning with *Jiuta* [Ballad], about the world of *jiuta* folk singing (published in her early twenties), she produced a rich body of works enlivened by her quick intellect. She loved beauty and order rooted in tradition and often wrote about the practitioners of time-honored performing arts and crafts. In *Ki no kawa* [trans. *The River Ki*], set in Wakayama, her mother's home prefecture, she chronicled the saga of an old family that seems to live in the protective embrace of its ancestors; in *Hanaoka Seishū no tsuma* [trans. *The Doctor's Wife*], she recounted the wife's perspective on the tale of a real-life Japanese doctor and his family who worked from the late eighteenth century to develop the world's first general anesthetic.

While she treasured old Japan, Ariyoshi was keenly attuned to the latest social issues. Her experience studying in the United States (1959–60) inspired *Hishoku* [Not Because of Color] (1963), which probed the deepening of racial discrimination despite the trend toward globalization. *Kōkotsu no hito* [trans. *The Twilight Years*] (1972) portrayed, a near half-century ago, the crisis now facing Japan over the symptoms of senility and the discord and distress that they set in motion in a family. This was followed by *Fukugō osen* [Compound Pollution] (1975), an exposé on the contamination of food by pesticides and chemical fertilizers. The Ministry of Agriculture mobilized experts to refute Ariyoshi's work and pressured her with accusations of citing data without proper permission, but she stood firm. In time, as if in mockery of the bureaucrats and their petty conniving, facts bared the horrifying extent of the pollution for all to see.

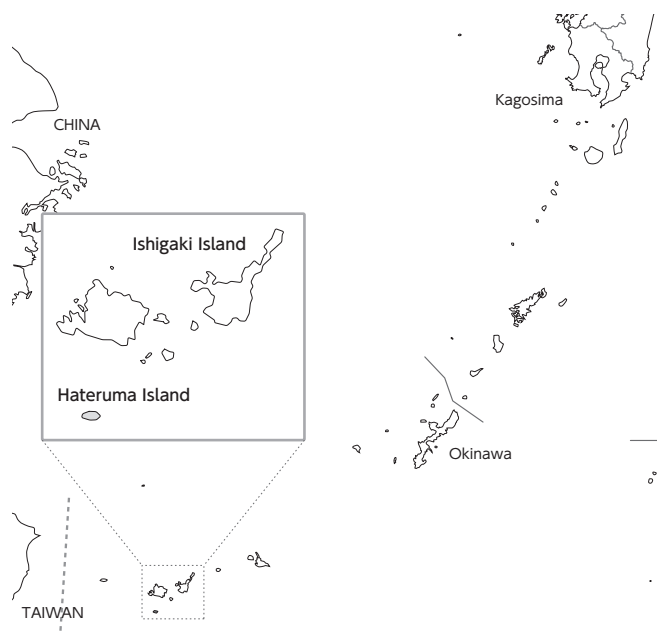
As a best-selling hit-maker Ariyoshi was active in film and theater as well as literature. She took promising young actors and producers under her wing, offering them material and connecting them to opportunities to display their talents. Meanwhile, despite her already heavy commitments, Ariyoshi began from a certain point in her life to take multiple trips to outlying islands—to locales so remote that they were frequently described as being in the middle of nowhere (*zekkai no kotō*).

As to why, Ariyoshi explains in her essay collection *Nihon no shimajima, mukashi to ima* [Islands in Japan, Then and Now] that "I have been interested in remote islands for some twenty years, and my works include those that take place in Kuroshima in Kagoshima prefecture and Mikurajima in the Izu Islands." But collecting ideas for stories could hardly have been her only motive; she seems to have been driven by some fundamental impulse that she herself could not exactly identify. Little else would explain her itinerary. These were no jaunts by a pampered celebrity author who set off after having her publisher arrange every step of the way. The first trip was in 1979, to the islands of Yagishiri and Teuri in Hokkaido;

from there to Tanegashima, Yakushima, Fukue, Tsushima, Takeshima, Hateruma, and more, she chose her own destinations and went alone, in most cases without announcing her coming. As she recalls about her first journey, "I introduced myself as 'Ariyoshi Sawako, a writer of novels and such,' and even then these people who had never read my books only received me in half-bewildered fashion."

She preferred to begin with a "blank slate," going without advance notice, rather than arriving to find only what people had prepared and organized for her to hear. She sat down with the islanders to draw them out, sometimes with a cup of sake in hand. Only then did the issues come vividly into focus: the toll on fishermen of rising oil prices and seller hoarding in the late 1970s to early 1980s, the disputes over national territory, the conflicts with South Korea over the continental shelf and with China over the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone. From these topics would be revealed the poverty of politics, as well as the shamelessness of a central bureaucracy that, for example, forced dairy farmers to increase their stock beyond what was practicable on a remote island, and then left local people to deal with the aftermath.

In January 1980 Ariyoshi arrived in Hateruma, the southernmost inhabited island in the Japanese archipelago. "On the map I could indeed see that it lies at the very southern tip of Japan. Population: 800." So she writes in "Minami no hate" [The Far South], chapter 6 of *Nihon no shimajima*. That was the extent of her knowledge when she flew from Tokyo to Naha on the Okinawan main island, before boarding flights that took her to the island of Ishigaki and then on to Hateruma. Since geographically Hateruma lay much farther south than Taipei, she packed only summer clothes, yet once actually in Okinawa she



found herself shivering. She survived by piling on “multiple summer shirts and two pairs of socks”—an indication of just how blank her slate was about her destination when she began her visit.

There were no inns on Hateruma, only four private homes offering informal accommodations. “No reservation, you say? We’re all full,” she was told by the owner of the largest lodging. The space she somehow did manage to secure was an ill-lighted cubicle by the toilet with only a sliding *fusuma* door between her and the male lodgers in the next room. She negotiated with the owner for use of the children’s study room, and at last she was able to feel settled.

“Minami no hate” is dated April 3, 1980, indicating that between coming back and starting to write Ariyoshi took roughly three months to do research and also sort out her impressions of the trip. This was her *modus operandi* for writing the accounts of all twelve journeys included in the book.

According to Ariyoshi, “The lodge owner’s wife was the one who answered most of my questions.” This being an island, fishing would be expected to be the chief industry, but what kind? The wife replied that bonito fishing had thrived here before World War II, but after the war the eight boats were reduced to two, and even those eventually disappeared so that the island no longer even had a fishing cooperative.

Why had the eight boats all gone? Were there no more full-time fishermen? In this way Ariyoshi started by inquiring and making observations firsthand, then supplemented information from later research. Bonito fishing began in Okinawa in 1901. In 1905 Okinawan fishermen began catching bonito in the Yaeyama Islands, of which Hateruma is one, and fishing on the island enjoyed its peak for about three decades from 1928 to 1961—“A history,” Ariyoshi says, “that is today hard to believe even existed.”

Meanwhile, “In 1963, sugarcane monoculture was instituted in Okinawa.” Planting was encouraged, and refineries built. Touring the island, Ariyoshi noted the presence of sugarcane fields. The houses, however, were what really seized her eye, with their low eaves and half-cylindrical red roof tiles cemented by dark mortar. On other Okinawan islands one often saw animal and other ceramic figurines on the rooftops, but not on Hateruma. Here, every house was encircled by a windbreak of sturdy *fukugi* trees growing more than twenty centimeters wide. No matter how dense the *fukugi* or how solid the mortar, though, a typhoon of savage seventy-meter winds would tear off the tiles from below as though a great hand were lifting them away. “These roofs would go flying? I thought, staring awhile at the houses of the settlement in silent disbelief.”

Year after year the typhoons would come, nearly ten of them from July to September. Every time the sea would roar and the gusts and rain would carry off not only the crops, but the very topsoil. An occasional year with fewer typhoons only meant horrible drought instead.

The staple crop capable of withstanding this harsh environment was millet, which together with sweet potato and other tubers could provide enough to get by even in bad years. But under the infamous head tax system



Hateruma Island from the air.

(Photo by Hirata Kanko Co., Ltd., url: <http://http://www.hirata-group.co.jp/>)

imposed from the seventeenth century during the Edo period, each adult inhabitant was required to pay a levy of rice. So the islanders struggled to grow this less hardy grain—though the paddies were all too often washed away by typhoons or parched rusty red by drought. One record tells of forty-five men and women who fled the head tax to “the paradise of South Hateruma.” When Ariyoshi asked where that was, her informant, a young farmer, replied there was no such place: “It’s said they may actually have drowned themselves in the ocean.” Indeed, south of Hateruma, itself in the far reaches of the southern seas, there is nothing but sea.

This unforgiving tax remained in effect for thirty-five years after the Meiji government replaced the old Edo shogunate. That was how long it took for the august authority of the new central regime to reach this faraway isle. During World War II, the military forcibly relocated the inhabitants north to Iriomote, a jungle island feared for its malaria mosquitoes. Sure enough, half of those who went perished from the disease.

“Since the war the fields have been turned over to sugarcane, and no one grows rice anymore,” the farmer is quoted as saying. Ariyoshi’s down-to-earth exchanges with him and other locals brim with life, no doubt because she, unlike a reporter, was focused on human interaction. The farmer recently switched from sugarcane to *kabocha* squash, and Ariyoshi records her pleasure on learning from him that Hateruma *kabocha* was the first to arrive on the Tokyo market every year—the leader in the “unbroken relay of *kabocha* shipments throughout the season” from south to north between Okinawa and Hokkaido. Reading her words anew today, we cannot but lament the cruel fate that robbed us of this bright and intrepid woman at a mere fifty-three years of age.

(Ikeuchi Osamu, essayist and scholar of German literature)

(Continued from page 3)

Japanese society in recent years has been the increasing numbers of families featuring what we might call “middle-aged parasite singles” (Figure 2). In 2012, an estimated 3.04 million unmarried people aged between 35 and 44 were living with their parents. And the number of single people living with their parents past the age of 45 is also increasing rapidly. Many of these people will be destitute and alone when their parents die. (Yamada Masahiro, *Kazoku nanmin* [Displaced from the Family], Asahi Shimbun Shuppan, 2014.)

We need to act now to break society’s attachment to the idea of clearly defined gender roles. We must get rid of the gulf in pay and benefits that exists between regular and non-regular employees, and cultivate a more tolerant attitude toward different types of families. Unless we act

to implement these policies now, in a few decades’ time Japan risks becoming a nation of isolated and impoverished old people.

Yamada Masahiro

Born in 1957. Professor at Chuo University, where his interests include society, the family, and gender issues. He is well known as the originator of the vogue terms “parasite singles” and “gap society” (kakusa shakai). His books include *The Japanese Family in Transition* (Foreign Press Center, 1997), *Parasaito shinguru no jidai* [The Age of the Parasite Singles], Chikuma Shobō, 1999, and *Koko ga okashii Nihon no shakai hoshō* [What’s Wrong With Japan’s Social Security System], Bungei Shunjū, 2012. Yamada has served in a number of public posts, including chair of a research committee attached to the Cabinet Office’s Council for Gender Equality.

Events and Trends

Japan’s Dwindling Regional Population

A private sector think tank study on the future of Japan’s declining population concludes that some 896 of the current subdivisions of local government (*jichitai*) around Japan may be abolished by 2040 if current trends continue. The think tank published its predictions in May 2014, provoking much discussion in the media. The report focused on the flow of women of child-bearing age away from the countryside to Tokyo.

The issue was also the subject of a book startlingly titled *Chihō shōmetsu* [Disappearing Towns] by Masuda Hiroya (Chūō Kōron Sha). The book contained an edited version of an essay by Masuda that appeared in the June 2014 issue of the opinion journal *Chūō kōron*, along with other material. Masuda, who is well known for his media opinion pieces, is a former minister for internal affairs and a reform-minded former governor of Iwate prefecture. After an initial run of 14,000 copies in late August, the book went through four printings in just two weeks, selling a total of 40,000 copies. The book calls for an end to what the author regards as the excessive concentration of government and business in Tokyo. The birth

rate is particularly low in Tokyo, and Masuda argues that the city acts as a black hole, sucking in young people from outlying areas who then do not even reproduce their own numbers. If regional communities go into decline and disappear, the vitality of Tokyo too will ultimately be sapped. Given the lack of reserves to maintain social infrastructure in all pockets of the country, Masuda’s solution is to make sixty-one cities around the country concentration points for resources and public policy.

Tanizaki Prize for Okuizumi Hikaru

The 50th Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize has been awarded to Okuizumi Hikaru for *Tōkyō jijoden* [Tokyo: The Autobiography] (see JBN No. 82). The award ceremony was held on October 16, 2014 at the Palace Hotel in central Tokyo.

Novelists Abe Kazushige and Isaka Kōtarō Collaborate

Bungei Shunjū has published *Kyaputen Sandāboruto* [Captain Thunderbolt], a novel written jointly by the novelists Abe Kazushige and Isaka Kōtarō. The publisher describes the collaboration as an entertainment

epic set in Yamagata prefecture and the city of Sendai (Miyagi prefecture), both places to which the two authors have close ties. A man who used to be the hero of his junior baseball team suddenly finds himself in financial difficulties as he approaches his thirtieth birthday. When he meets up with the old friend who used to be the captain of the team, he encounters what he believes is a foolproof opportunity to make easy money. The two authors wrote alternate chapters and edited each other’s work.

Abe was born in Yamagata in 1968. His many awards include the Akutagawa Prize. Isaka was born in Chiba prefecture in 1971. He is a popular novelist who has won the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize and other awards.

Nihongo Daijiten Published

A major new two-volume dictionary concentrates on the study of the Japanese language and Japanese linguistics. Published to celebrate the 85th anniversary of the publishing house Asakura Shoten, the project was more than a decade in the making. *Nihongo daijiten* [Dictionary of the Japanese Language], a B5-format work totaling 2,452 pages, is the first undertaking in the field on this scale since the *Kokugo-gaku daijiten* [Dictionary of

the Study of the Japanese Language] compiled by the Kokugo Gakkai (Society for Japanese Linguistics) and published by Tōkyōdō Shuppan in 1980.

The dictionary contains articles written by some 600 authors, all experts in their fields, with Satō Takeyoshi, professor emeritus at Tōhoku University, and Maeda Tomiyoshi, professor emeritus at Osaka University, as supervising editors. The dictionary contains some 3,500 authored entries on terminology and scholars in the field of Japanese language and linguistics. The numerous subheadings help understanding, and the bibliographies and incorporation of the results of previous research make this a treasure trove of knowledge that is a pleasure to read. The articles include one (covering four pages) on “Tōkyōgo” (the language of Tokyo). One feature is that the headwords for each entry are given in both Japanese and English, making the book well suited to an age of increasing internationalization in the study of the Japanese language.

Tanizaki's Letters Discovered

A cache of 288 letters written between Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965), one of the most important modern Japanese writers, and his wife Matsuko and her sister Shigeko, has been discovered. The women were the inspiration for the characters in Tanizaki's famous novel *Sasameyuki* [trans., *The Makioka Sisters*]. The letters which were in the possession of a relative of the author in Tokyo, include Tanizaki's two pledges of marriage to Matsuko written in the early 1930s, in which his reverence for Matsuko is expressed in flamboyant formal language promising to “honor you faithfully as your servant.” The dramatic love affair between Tanizaki and Matsuko attracted widespread attention at the time. The quality and quantity of the letters will make them a resource of first resort for researchers wanting to know more about events crucial to Tanizaki's art. The collection contains 180 letters by Tanizaki, along with 95 by Matsuko and 13 by Shigeko. The correspondence covers 36 years, beginning in 1927.

Tanizaki first met Matsuko on March 2, 1927. At the time she was married to a rich businessman in Senba, Osaka. Tanizaki was already married with a family of his own, but divorced in 1930. Despite his attraction for Matsuko, he then married another woman, Tomiko, from whom he was later divorced. Matsuko's first letter dates from 10 days after her first meeting with the writer. On December 30, 1928, she writes, “I dreamed of you all night.” Tanizaki's letters begin with one written on August 14, 1932—when he was writing *Shunkin-shō* [trans. *Portrait of Shunkin*] and other major works. In his letters, which mix real life with fantasy, he refers to himself as “your faithful servant.”

In December 1932 Tanizaki wrote a pledge to Matsuko following an agreement with Tomiko to live apart. In May 1933, after his divorce was formalized, he sent a second pledge of marriage, promising never to forget “the noble favors you have so generously bestowed” and undertaking to “dedicate myself to you, body and soul, as your humble servant.” They were married in 1935, when Tanizaki was 48 and Matsuko was 31, and spent the rest of their lives together.

Naruto Series Ends

Naruto, the massively popular manga that had been running in the weekly *Shōnen Jump* since 1999, came to an end in the November 10, 2014 issue after 15 years. Seventy volumes of the comic have been published, selling 130 million copies (as of September 2014). *Naruto*, written by Kishimoto Masashi, tells the story of the eponymous ninja hero and traces his development through his dealings with his peers, battles with rivals and the power of destiny, and his quest to master the ninja arts. The action of the comic ranges from fight scenes to magic, and battles of intelligence.

The series has been extremely popular overseas, particularly in Europe and North America, and had sold more than 200 million copies internationally by September 2014. “I still can't really believe it's over,” said the author. “I keep feeling that the deadline is going to come around next

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week just as usual. I had no idea when I started that the series would last this long. I just wanted to create an entertaining manga.”

Japanese Noir Master's Message to the World

When the terrorist attacks hit Paris in January 2015, Nakamura Fuminori was appalled, especially given that his latest novel, released a month earlier, centers on terrorism by a religious cult. Although his *Kyōdan X* [Cult X] takes place in Japan and most characters are Japanese, there are some uncanny coincidences between the story and the incidents that occurred in France: a cult organization under state surveillance, the founder guru already dead, the plotting of two loosely connected attacks, and a female cult-member on the run.

"The background to the terrorism in my fiction and that in reality is completely different, but I was stunned to see some similarities," says Nakamura in a mid-January interview. "I dug deeply into what the human being is from every possible aspect in this story, tackling not just the issue of terrorist attacks, so I want the book to be widely read throughout the world."

Nakamura wrote the novel with a global audience in mind, as he has ardent fans around the world. Immediately after his eighth novel, *Suri*, was translated into English and published as *The Thief* in 2012, it was named a Wall Street Journal Best Fiction work, and an Amazon Best Mystery & Thriller of the month. It was then nominated for a Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 2013. The novel is now available in Chinese, French, Spanish, and other languages, and will soon be available in 12 countries.

Targeting an even larger audience, the 37-year-old novelist set himself a challenge in *Kyōdan X*, which is "to write a masterpiece like Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*," Nakamura proclaims. As the Russian author's philosophical novel depicts moral struggles concerning faith, doubt, and reason, set against the backdrop of modernizing Russia, Nakamura's *Kyōdan X* enters deeply into the debate over the existence of God, the nature of free will, and the struggle between good and evil. He also sheds light on current global issues, including the threat posed by religious fundamentalism, militarism, wealth disparity, and social unrest.

One of the biggest challenges he undertook, he says, was "delving into Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism, and interweaving their doctrines with the latest theories of physics, cosmology and biology," which were not established in the nineteenth century when Dostoevsky was writing. "What I can do and Dostoyevsky could not is to introduce theoretical findings of the twenty-first century and to deliberate on the true nature of humankind by cross-examining religion and modern science."

The 567-page-long book is divided into two sections: The first half focuses on a cult led by a free-thinker, Matsuo, who affirms the continuity of the universe and aspires to create a world of peace. The second half is about Cult X, another religious body led by a vicious leader, Sawatari, who tries to indoctrinate elite members in Matsuo's group by offering them sex and persuading them to destroy the world.

The work could be read as a pulse-quickening "mystery" about a missing woman who left Matsuo's group to

go to Cult X, or an engrossing "crime novel" urging the reader to find out who actually plotted the terrorist acts. It could also be categorized as the darkest "noir fiction" depicting how dreadful and merciless the doctor-turned-guru Sawatari could be, or a twisted "love story" that unfolds among four cult members, who are brainwashed by their leaders.

"Novels talking about the bright side of humanity alone are so unreal," Nakamura asserts. "A ray of hope is sparked only after facing the harshest reality. I have been pursuing the notion of evil from the start of my literary career, and will continue to do so, because that notion can be expressed only in the form of the novel."

Nakamura made his debut in 2002 and won the Akutagawa Prize in 2005 for *Tsuchi no naka no kodomo* [Child in the Ground]. Most of the characters in his novels suffer from a troubled family environment. Nakamura confesses, without elaborating, that he had a tough childhood, too.

"For me, reading novels was what saved my sanity. If I had failed to find sanctuary in literature, I might have joined a cult," he says. "When the doomsday cult members attacked Tokyo subway trains by releasing sarin gas in 1995, I had such a sense of fear that I could have been one of them. I wrote *Kyōdan X* recalling what I felt back then."

Asked why he thinks he gained international acclaim so rapidly, Nakamura answers that his stories delve further into the dark side of human nature, which is "universally recognizable," while the way he presents evil is "exceptional."

In *The Thief*, for example, a sadistic criminal schemer named Kizaki declares that it is perhaps because he experiences the greatest ecstasy when torturing others, while feeling their real pain and crying for them. "Readers told me that my depiction of the mental structure of villains like Kizaki is unprecedented," says Nakamura. He met his fans in the United States and Canada in November 2014 when he toured across the continent to promote the new English-language edition of *Kyonen no fuyu, kimito wakare* [trans. *Last Winter We Parted*] (see JBN No. 81).

"Nonetheless, Sawatari in *Kyōdan X* is the most horrifying character I have ever created," says Nakamura. "I deliberately tried to go beyond the limits of what has been depicted as human viciousness. The story, however, will lead to enlightenment. The novel, to me, is something that stirs emotion."

At this stage, *Kyōdan X* is slated for publication in English and Korean.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Nakamura Fuminori

Born in 1977. Won the 2014 David L. Goodis Award for his contribution to noir fiction, *The Thief* and *Evil and the Mask*. His debut novella, *Jū* [The Gun] and *Kyōdan X* [Cult X] will be published in English in 2015 and 2016, respectively. *Last Winter We Parted* was named an Amazon Best Mystery and Thriller of the month in October 2014.