JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

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SUMMER 2015

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.

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The Inner Tokyo and the "Inscrutable City"

Wakabayashi Mikio

"Tokyo: Of all the major cities in the world, it is perhaps the hardest to understand," is how the edition of *Fodor's Tokyo*[1] I bought about 20 years ago portrayed the city. Such words are not included in the latest edition of this guidebook, but recent visitors to Tokyo would no doubt agree with them. The difficulty of grasping the city is not only because of its size or the complexity of its public transport and metropolitan expressway systems. The very "social grammar" that organizes its urban spaces is quite different from that of other cities.

Roland Barthes, who visited Japan several times in the late 1960s, describes Tokyo, with the imperial palace at its heart, as having not a "filled" center where political, economic, cultural, and civic interchange converges, but a "central emptiness,"[2] in his book *Empire of Signs*. There may be room for debate as to whether or not the imperial palace is indeed "empty," but at least it is obvious that the city does not have one great plaza or street that forms the pivot of the city's communal life and where its citizens can gather to express joy, anger, or other sentiments as they can in Paris's Place de la République, New York's Times Square, Mexico City's Zócalo, or Prague's Wenceslas Square. Tokyo does have districts that can be considered "centers"—Kasumigaseki is the center of government ministries, Marunouchi, Nihonbashi, and Kabutocho are centers of finance and business, and Ginza, Shinjuku, and Shibuya are centers for shopping—but there is no place that can be called *the* center of the city.

Tokyo also lacks any clear lines demarcating the boundary between what is *in* the city and what is *outside* the city. Even in older times, Tokyo did not have an encircling castle wall, and though there were administrative boundaries, in fact it spilled out over such lines and now extends to the edges of the neighboring cities of Kawasaki, Yokohama, Chiba, and Saitama. The sprawling metropolis transcends the bounds of "Tokyo" as an administrative unit and the syntax of its space and society is quite different from that of most of the world's cities, which have had a "definite spatial territory with a center" since antiquity.

Barthes also noted that Tokyo's streets usually do not have names. Locating a particular house or building simply by asking the address is difficult, so people are in the habit of using maps to show how to get places, and Barthes was so impressed by this approach that he included a number of examples in *Empire of Signs* (see Figure 1). Some major avenues through the city, like Aoyama-dōri and Omote-Sandō, have names by which they are popularly known, but most streets are indeed nameless; even when a street has a name, addresses do not include the name. The areas encircled by streets are organized into variously shaped and numbered blocks with the buildings numbered more-or-less consecutively around the perimeter. The address of a building facing Aoyama-dōri, for example, might be "4-4-25 Shibuya, Shibuya ward."[3] The absence of street names and people's way of using maps to show people how to get places is an indication of the fact that the city and the people who live there do not follow a grammar of urban space in which buildings and places are located on the axes of named streets. Visitors from overseas often find this bewildering.

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that Tokyo lacks any rules or principles governing its urban space and way of life. As pointed out by architect Maki Fumihiko and architectural historian Jinnai Hidenobu, the main thoroughfares of Tokyo today have changed little since the Tokugawa period (1603–1867) when the city was called Edo.[4] Traced along the ridgelines, valleys, and banks of waterways, they follow the same principles as roads running through a rural landscape. Since the rapid economic development era, Tokyo has often been disparaged as "country on a massive scale" (*kyodai na inaka*), and this is because the basic structure of the city itself is the same as that of rural villages that were built in harmony with the natural topography.

In his book *Miegakure suru toshi*, Maki says that Tokyo's city space can be read in accordance with the idea of "oku" (inside, secluded interior). *Oku* refers to the inside of a space and has the connotation of a dynamic proceeding toward the interior of a place, where meaning and value increase as one goes deeper inside. The sense of *oku* can be experienced in a large, old-style Japanese inn (*ryokan*). From the public and common-use entrance the guest is shown down corridors that wind this way and that, leading past guest rooms and sitting rooms, and further into the ever-deeper seclusion of the baths and the dining hall. A feature of traditional Japanese architecture

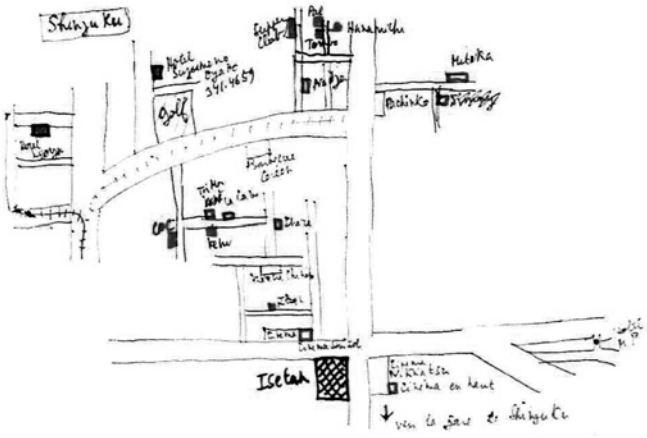

Figure 1. Handwritten map from Roland Barthes, *L'empire des signes* (Genève: Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1970).

is this pattern of design that induces a sense of depth (*okuyuki*), beginning at the entrance (outside), proceeding to the inside (*naka*), from there along corridors to the *oku* (interior), and further on to the *oku no oku* (deep interior), each type of space representing enhanced levels of privacy, intimacy, and seclusion. Shrines, temples, castles, and houses are all built on this spatial pattern. In the city of Tokyo, one can find this progression of urban space continuing from outside to interior and deep interior by stepping off the main streets into the areas they enclose, which are laced with side streets and back alleys. The handwritten maps that so entranced Barthes are a reflection of this kind of city and the activity within it that follows a syntax of progression from a point outside (or entrance), such as a station, into its intimate inner recesses.

In the same way that one of the fascinations and pleasures of staying at a Japanese-style inn is the way one is drawn inward, from public to secluded private space, one of the fascinations of the city of Tokyo is the experience of moving off its main streets and coming to know its insides. Such an experience of the interior can be found not only in old and less-well-known entertainment quarters like Kagurazaka and Nippori but also in famous Ginza and Shinbashi. The areas where tiny drinking places cluster under the Yamanote line tracks and the jumbled insides of mixed-use buildings filled with eating and drinking establishments can be considered the kind of *oku* spaces created by the modern city. In the "interior of Tokyo" one finds quite a few small *izakaya* pubs and cozy *koryōriya* drinking and eating establishments different from the big chain-run *izakaya* that recently dominate entertainment districts. For those who want to understand the city and the way its people live, I highly recommend exploring the side streets and back alleys, the areas under the railway tracks and in the depths of the mixed-use buildings where the pleasures of *izakaya* and *koryōriya* can be savored (see Figure 2). This is true of any country, perhaps, but a good drinking establishment is a small "public square" for its clientele. There one will see the people of the town and hear them talk as they really are. Tokyo may not be able to boast of vast plazas or large thoroughfares, but it is filled with small but fulfilled "public meeting places" of this intimate kind in every corner and fold of its space.

Scholar-writers like Hashimoto Kenji and Michael Molasky[5] recommend the *izakaya* for a good introduction to the inner workings of the city of Tokyo and Japanese society. Hashimoto's *Izakaya Horoyoi kōgengaku*, with its appendices listing information and menus for *izakaya*, can be used as a guidebook, but it also offers a history of Tokyo's *izakaya* since the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912) through which an *izakaya*-loving sociologist considers the structure and changes in Japan's urban society (where social disparities are often glaring). In *Nome ba, miyako* (see JBN 77, p. 7), long-time Japan resident Molasky says, "If it had not been for the *akachōchin* hanging hither and yon, I might not still be living in this country." The book is a study of contemporary urban culture based on fieldwork in *izakaya* all over Tokyo by an American scholar of literature and culture who teaches at a Japanese university and is also a jazz pianist. His powerful descriptions aptly capture the feeling of being in the inner Tokyo.

Figure 2. *Izakaya* and *koryōriya* drinking places, including one called "Oku," line a back street in the Tokyo suburb of Kita-Senju. © Wakabayashi Mikio

Much of the urban reconstruction going on in Tokyo today—called "redevelopment" or "urban revival"—has been doing away with the *oku*—the "secluded interiors"—that were the source of the city's allure and intimacy, replacing them with bright, shopping-mall-like spaces, wonderfully tidy and clean, but ultimately shallow and empty. The spread of chain-operated *izakaya*, known for the efficient, by-the-manual service and high-decibel clamor that Molasky describes, appears to be an indicator of the spread of this sort of superficial, brightly lit, and sterile space. Casting aside all its deep and secluded interiors, will Tokyo really emerge with a different grammar from that of the past and become a city that is "easy to understand"? What will happen to the secluded interiors of Tokyo is a matter of debate and will determine the present and future of this city and the way we live in it.

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[1] Fodor's Travel Publication, 1991.
[2] English translation from French (*L'empire des signes*), by Richard Howard, published by Hill and Wang, 1982.
[3] This is the address of the Aoyama Campus of the Aoyama Gakuin University.
[4] See Maki's *Miegakure suru toshi* [The Seen and Unseen City] (Kashima Shuppankai, 1980) and Jinnai's *Tōkyō no kūkan jinruigaku* (Chikuma Shobō, 1985); trans. by Kimiko Nishimura as *Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology* (University of California Press, 1995).
[5] See Hashimoto's *Izakaya Horoyoi kōgengaku* [A Modern Phenomenologial Study of Izakaya] (Mainichi Shinbunsha, 2008) and Molasky's *Nome ba, miyako: Izakaya no Tokyo* [A Capital Place for a Drink: Tokyo and Its Watering Holes] (Chikuma Shobō, 2012).

Wakabayashi Mikio

Born in 1962. Professor at the Waseda University Faculty of Education and Integrated Arts and Sciences, specializing in sociological theory, urban studies, and media studies. He is author of many books including Mirai no shakaigaku *[The Sociology of the Future] (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2014);* Atsui toshi, tsumetai toshi (zōhoban) *[Hot City, Cold City (expanded edition)] (Seikyūsha, 2013); and* Toshi no hikaku shakaigaku: Toshi wa naze toshi de aru no ka *[A Comparative Sociology of Cities: Why the Cities are Cities] (Iwanami Shoten, 2000). Co-editor (with Yoshimi Shun'ya) of* Tōkyō sutadīzu *[Tokyo Studies] (Kinokuniya Shoten, 2005). He served as visiting professor at El Colegio de Mexico in 2008.*

FICTION

Shiraishi Kazufumi

Born in 1958. Winner of the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize for Kono mune ni fukabuka to tsukisasaru ya o nuke *[Pull Out the Arrow Plunged into My Heart] in 2009 and the Naoki Prize for* Hoka naranu hito e *[My One and Only You] in 2010.*

Ai nante uso
[Love Is All Lies]

By Shiraishi Kazufumi

Shinchōsha, 2014. 191 x 132 mm. 294 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-10-305654-6.

What matters to a woman beyond "happiness" and "love"

In the opening story, one of seven in this volume, Yoda Haruto and Saeki Mioko, one of the women working under him in his office have an affair and are living together. One day Yoda receives a phone call from his ex-wife Natsu, who asks him to let her stay for a while. Mioko is at first shocked at the idea, but then goes to meet the ex-wife without telling Yoda. Listening to Natsu's story, she finds herself coming to understand her.

Later, after Yoda and Mioko are officially married, Mioko is on a business trip to Okayama when she happens to see Natsu doing a street performance (juggling). Mioko invites Natsu out for a drink that night and hears her life story. Natsu lost her parents as a child and has had a lonely life, but she doesn't consider herself unfortunate.

Traveling the country as an itinerant performer is the lifestyle that suits her best, she says. That was why she and Yoda had separated only one year after they were married, and Natsu says Yoda has a similar tendency in himself. Several years later, word arrives that Natsu has died. Not long after Yoda leaves, without a word to Mioko.

The protagonists of the stories are all women in marriages or relationships that ought to be the picture of contentment, yet they do not think of themselves as happy. What society regards as "love" and "happiness" seems fake. Something important is missing. They set out in search of what they feel is missing. In accordance with the lifestyle of each different character, the author skillfully portrays the sadness a woman feels as love seems to slip away. (Chō)

Kyū-nen mae no inori
[The Nine-Year-Old Prayer]

By Ono Masatsugu

Kōdansha, 2014. 188 x 128 mm. 224 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-219292-7.

Ono Masatsugu

Born in 1970. Since 2014 an associate professor at Rikkyō University, where he teaches comparative literature and French literature. His Nigiyaka na wan ni seowareta fune *won the Mishima Yukio Prize in 2002. In 2015, he won the Akutagawa Prize for the present work. See JBN 82,* "*In Their Own Words*."

A jewel of a story

When her relationship with a Canadian man breaks down, 35-year-old Sanae moves back to the house in the country where she grew up. Her young son Kebin is blessed with an angelic beauty but is mentally handicapped and given to unpredictable and uncontrollable fits of loud crying. One day Sanae learns from her mother that the son of a friend of hers called Mitchan is critically ill. On a trip together to Canada together nine years before, and Sanae remembers seeing Mitchan praying desperately for something in a church, even though she is not Christian.

Sanae remembers her friend as kind and good-natured. Perhaps, she thinks, Mitchan was troubled by some deep worry no one else knew about, like the difficulties she herself is going through with her son now. Sanae goes to the beach to gather a kind of shell believed to bring good luck for her friend. Weaving together memories of Montreal with scenery of the Kyushu coast, the story culminates in a firm rebonding of the ties between Sanae and her son that feels something like a moment of grace.

Incorporating the rhythms and sounds of local speech like a kind of creole, the author writes a dense, polished, and evocative prose. The characters who people his landscapes are attractive and individually drawn figures, despite being given to gossip and sometimes showing a lack of concern for others. This jewel of a story marks a new peak in the author's series of novels rooted in the area where he grew up. (Nozaki)

Tawada Yōko

Born in 1960. Resident in Germany since 1982 and writes novels in both Japanese and German. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1993 for Inu mukoiri *[tr.* The Bridegroom Was a Dog*]. In 1996 received the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize from the Bavarian Academy of Arts and the Goethe Medal in 2005.*

An entertaining story of post-apocalyptic dystopia in Japan

Kentōshi
[The Lantern-Bearer]

By Tawada Yōko

Kōdansha, 2014. 188 x 128 mm. 272 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-219192-0.

The story takes place after Japan has suffered irreparably from a massive natural disaster. Japan cuts itself off from the world and severs diplomatic ties with other nations. The government is privatized, and politicians are reduced to spending their time on futile revisions of the laws. The nation's children are enfeebled, constantly running temperatures and barely able to stand or walk. The only ones left with any get-up-and-go are the elderly. In this way, the novel presents an incisive reflection on today's Japan, still reeling from the effects of the March 2011 triple disaster and struggling to come to terms with the declining birthrate and the aging society. Surprisingly, however, the novel is a delight to read, and is filled with an irrepressible humor. All the conditions are in place for a dystopian novel, but the supple and playful way in which the story is told seems to deftly repel "the curse." At the center of the story is a boy known as "Nameless." He is ignorant and powerless, but his life offers a beacon of hope. He is not a prisoner of the past and is not prey to self-pity or pessimism. This boy, whose voice does not change with age, who becomes neither man nor woman, his hair white in spite of his youth, waits for the time when he will throw himself into the sea and set off for the unknown, forbidden world beyond.

The author depicts a world in which people have started to doubt the "faith of more than 100 years." Through the image of this mysterious yet strangely attractive boy, the novel gives readers an encouraging glimpse of "the beauty of the time that is yet to come." (Nozaki)

Shinitaku nattara denwa shite
[Call Me If You Want to Die]

By Lee Yongduk

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2014. 188 x 128 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-309-02336-6.

Working part-time while he studies to resit his university entrance exams, Tokuyama Hisashi meets a girl working at a cabaret club named Yamanaka Hatsumi. She starts laughing hysterically as soon as she sees him, till tears roll down her cheeks. While irritated by her strange behavior, Tokuyama is strangely drawn to her.

The next day, at the girl's invitation, they go to the zoo, but he is shocked to find her apartment in a high-rise building full of books with titles screaming "murder," "cruelty," "hell," "thrill-seeking," "torture," "massacre." Among them are works by Freud, Jung, Nietzsche, and Marx.

Hatsumi reads to him from her books, her gentle voice reminding him of an elementary school teacher reading to her students, and adds explanations. Soon he starts to get used to hearing about acts he initially found horrifying. Even more worryingly, he finds himself getting sexually aroused as he listens to stories of mass murder and child killing.

Tokuyama is soon in Hatsumi's snare, and a pattern is established of readings about cruelty followed by bouts of sex. Carried away, he finds himself slipping into the gruesome world of Hatsumi's stories.

The novel portrays two young people suspended in a fantasy world, with no hint of where they will come down to earth. The story is tightly constructed and rich with unexpected twists. The pathos of human life lurks just below the surface, barely covered by a thin gauze. (Chō)

Lee Yongduk

Born in 1976. Graduate of Waseda University. Won the 51st Bungei Prize for this work in 2014.

Gruesome stories and the passions and pathos of human life

LITERARY ESSAY

Maeda Kyōji

Born in 1964. Currently deputy head of the culture bureau at the Yomiuri Shimbun Tokyo head office. His works include Yasashiku yomitoku Nihon kaiga: Sesshū kara Hiroshige made *[An Easy Access Guide to Japanese Painting: From Sesshū to Hiroshige].*

The influence of art on Meiji Japan's great writers

E no yō ni: Meiji bungaku to bijutsu
[Like a Picture: Literature and Art in Meiji Japan]

By Maeda Kyōji

Hakusuisha, 2014. 189 x 130 mm. 706 pp. ¥6,200. ISBN 978-4-560-08384-0.

In discussing the cultural history of modern Japan, many previous studies have noted that literature and art developed in close relation to each other. Japan's adoption of Western culture during the process of modernization took place across all fields of culture, so it was only natural that Western styles were adopted at the same time in literature and art. Attempts to forge new literary styles, too, were often linked to new tastes in illustration, book design, and other fields.

This book by journalist and art specialist Maeda Kyōji, however, has a different focus. Maeda has collected observations on art from novels and essays by a wide variety of literary figures between 1889 and the early twentieth century and arranged them by topic, thus revealing a new kind of history of the relationship between literature and art.

The frequently used metaphor goes that realistic description in a novel is vivid "like a picture." As this figure of speech suggests, the techniques used in creating literature often went hand in hand with a keen interest in art. Containing many interpretative readings from this new perspective, this book shows readers a previously unknown aspect of many writers, including Kōda Rohan, Natsume Sōseki, and Nagai Kafū. (Karube)

Nihon misuterī shōsetsu-shi
[A History of Japanese Mystery Novels]

By Hori Keiko

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2014. 173 x 109 mm. 288 pp. ¥880. ISBN 978-4-12-102285-1.

There can be no doubt that modern Japan is one of the world's great producers and consumers of mysteries. People are insatiable consumers of anything involving a mysterious crime. When did the mystery phenomenon begin and how did it develop to the situation we see today? While presenting the history of the genre, the book is full of fascinating anecdotes and incidents. People often assume that the fascination with mystery fiction began in the Meiji era following the importation of Western culture. In fact, as early as the Edo period (1603–1867), ordinary people were avid followers of the stories of magistrate and incorruptible judge Ōoka Echizen and the way he made wise and fair judgments in cases of crimes under his jurisdiction.

It was no doubt that this ready-made appetite that laid the groundwork for the popularity of Western mysteries during the Meiji era (1868–1912). The boom for translated mysteries was largely made possible by the remarkable efforts of translators like the legendary Kuroiwa Ruikō, who was said to have read 3000 mysteries in English. The borderline between translation and adaptation was often blurred. Early translations of Sherlock Holmes, for example, rendered "redhead" as "bald," which was easier for Japanese readers to imagine. This flexibility opened the path to original composition and led to the first mysteries written in Japanese. A golden age of made-in-Japan detective fiction followed, from Edogawa Ranpō, who took his penname from Edgar Allen Poe, to longtime champion best-seller Matsumoto Seichō, and on to the present. (Nozaki)

Hori Keiko

Born in 1970. Professor of literature at Tōkai University, she specializes in modern Japanese and comparative literature. She is co-author of Shimbun shōsetsu no miryoku *[The Attractions of Newspaper Novels].*

The roots of the much-loved mystery genre

CULTURE

Yamada Yūji

Born in 1967. Professor at Mie University, where he teaches ancient and medieval Japanese religious belief. His works include Sutoku-in onryō no kenkyū *[Research on Retired Emperor Sutoku as a Vengeful Ghost] and* Onryō, kai'i, Ise Jingū *[Vengeful Ghosts, Strange Happenings, and Ise Shrine].*

The living legends of vengeful spirits

Onryō to wa nani ka [What Were Vengeful Spirits?]

Yamada Yūji

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2014. 173 x 109 mm. 224 pp. ¥760. ISBN 978-4-12-102281-3.

An *onryō* is a ghost or spirit of someone who died a painful or unusual death and seeks vengeance by causing epidemics, misfortune, and death among the living. The *onryō* does not have a prototype in China, but is the distinctive product of Japanese culture.

Belief in vengeful spirits survives even today. Taira no Masakado was executed for leading a rebellion against the court more than a thousand years ago. In Tokyo's Ōtemachi is a place called Masakado Kubizuka—a grave mound said to contain his head. Amid the modern urban landscape surrounded by high-rises, a small square lies undisturbed and untouched. Every time someone has tried to get rid of the memorial, strange things have started to happen, confirming belief in the "curse of Masakado."

The author concentrates on the three best-known examples of such vengeful spirits: Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), Taira no Masakado (916–940), and the Retired Emperor Sutoku (1119–1164). All three were real historical figures widely believed to have become vengeful spirits after death.

Modern history textbooks make no mention of vengeful spirits, but *onryō* come up often in collections of *setsuwa* legends such as the *Jikkinshō* and the *Kokon chomonjū*, the *Taiheiki* and other historical tales, as well as noh plays, *kyōgen*, *jōruri*, kabuki, and other performing arts, and is a subject crucial to understanding the history and culture of ancient Japan. This book, written for the general reader, provides a lively introduction to the most important aspects of the subject. (Chō)

SOCIETY

Kagaku-gijutsu to gendai shakai [Science, Technology, and Modern Society]

By Ikeuchi Satoru

Vol. I: Misuzu Shobō, 2014. 188 x 128 mm. 383 pp. ¥4,200. ISBN 978-4-622-07834-0.
Vol. II: Misuzu Shobō, 2014. 188 x 128 mm. 369 pp. ¥4,200. ISBN 978-4-622-07835-7.

How have society and science-technology influenced each other over the years? A specialist in astrophysics, the author shifted the focus of his research after the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subways in 1995 to the social studies aspects of science and technology and has devoted his energies to writing about the social responsibility of scientists.

Made up chiefly of transcripts of graduate school lectures, this book represents the author's lifework. Looking at science from a broad perspective, Ikeuchi considers the ethics of scientists and what we would expect a scientist to be like in daily life.

The introduction takes up the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami and the nuclear accident in Fukushima. Then, after describing the social foundation he believes is required for science to flourish, he sets forth the various accidents and incidents in which science has been implicated over the past decade or so. He examines the issues in each case and how scientists behaved. He goes on to trace the development of science and technology over the course of human history, with a particular focus on the twentieth century. He also discusses the ethical code scientists should follow. Finally, he deals with subjects like energy, resources, the environment, and biotechnology that will be increasingly important in the years to come, considering the current situation and likely developments in each case. (Yonahara)

Ikeuchi Satoru

Born in 1944. Professor emeritus at Nagoya University. Won the Kodansha Science Publication Award for Kagaku no kangaekata, manabikata *[Thinking and Learning About Science] in 1997. His numerous publications include* Uchūron to kami *[Cosmology and God].*

A masterful treatise on science made accessible to a wide readership

Masuda Hiroya

Born in 1951. After a stint in the Ministry of Construction, he was governor of Iwate prefecure from 1995 to 2007. He served as Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications from 2007 to 2008.

Chihō shōmetsu [Disappearing Towns]

Edited by Masuda Hiroya

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2014. 173 x 109 mm. 256 pp. ¥820. ISBN 978-4-12-102282-0.

Prescriptions for an outlying countryside in decline

Japan's population is declining, year by year. In particular, this book warns that this decline is happening most rapidly not in the cities but in rural areas. If the current trends continue, some 896 of the current subdivisions of local government (*jichitai*) in Japan may be abolished by 2040. The twin specters of a declining birthrate and an aging population cast a grim shadow over Japan's future. This book offers a series of concrete ideas for policies to cope with these trends.

Various steps can be taken to coax young people back to local areas, including changes to education and the employment system. The examples of France and Sweden show that certain policies can be effective in boosting the birthrate. Putting systems in place to support marriage and childrearing is important, as well as forcing a change in the corporate mentality that takes long working hours for granted. The author examines effective strategies for the regions, using Hokkaido, a scale model for the entire country, as an example.

If all the resources available are deployed, it should not be impossible to stop population decline and keep Japan's countryside vital. But the country is already at a critical moment, and must address the problem now before it is too late. Many countries around the world are likely to face similar situations sooner or later. This book's discussions of Japan and its outlying regions therefore have a universal significance. (Nozaki)

Tennō Heika no honshin [What the Emperor Really Thinks]

By Yamamoto Masato

Shinchōsha, 2014. 173 x 107 mm. 239 pp. ¥760. ISBN 978-4-10-610595-1.

Yamamoto Masato

Born 1967. Journalist with the Sankei shimbun*, covering the Imperial Household as court correspondent from 2003 and 2005. He is also the author of* Tennō Heika no zenshigoto *[The Work of the Emperor].*

Insights from the emperor's "okotoba"

In the system of government defined by the Japanese constitution, the emperor holds no political power, and his role is restricted to the performance of formal, ceremonial roles such as the opening of the Diet and the receiving of ambassadors from foreign countries. The government's political policies are decided by the Diet members elected by the people, and the emperor is not allowed to influence their content.

In reality, however, there are frequent occasions on which the emperor reveals his thoughts under the conditions of his formal functions. At press conferences held on his birthday and during visits to foreign countries, the emperor often publishes official statements known as "o-kotoba." These statements are not simply scripts prepared for him by bureaucrats but personal statements that clearly indicate the emperor's own thinking. This book is the first to systematically analyze the content of these "o-kotoba" statements. Among other things, the contents make clear his feelings of regret regarding World War II and his sympathy for people affected by major natural disasters.

The analysis of the "o-kotoba" recorded in this book will allow readers to understand the emperor's aims and aspirations as a human being. At the same time, his words also symbolize the conscience of the Japanese people today. (Karube)

Takemoto Sumitayū

Born 1924. In 1985, he assumed the stage name Sumitayū, the seventh generation of narrators of the Gidayū-bushi tradition dating back to the seventeenth century. In 1989, he was named a Living National Treasure. He received the Order of Cultural Merit in the same year.

Bunraku in the life of a veteran master narrator

Ningen, yappari jō den nā [Life's All About Emotions]

By Takemoto Sumitayū

Bungei Shunjū, 2014. 188 x 130 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-16-390138-1.

The bunraku puppet theater is a performing art with a history that goes back around 300 years. The plays, told by a narrator accompanied by music played on a shamisen, deal with historical events and diverse range of human dramas.

Three puppeteers work to manipulate each puppet, bringing out with remarkable skill the movements of the character's hands and feet and even the facial expressions, while the tones of the shamisen heighten the drama. The narrator, known as the *tayū*, brings everything together. As well as providing background and descriptions of the settings, the *tayū* also takes the dialogue of all the characters, male and female, young and old. At times he plays six or seven parts at once. There is no director or conductor; the various parts of the drama pull naturally together on stage through the skills and mutual understanding of the performers. Takemoto Sumitayū is a veteran master narrator who has been called the Soul of Bunraku. He retired in 2014 at the age of 90.

Master Takemoto explains that he would gain a deep understanding of a story by first copying out the script and then devoting himself to finding convincing ways to bring out the individual voices, rhythms, and timings. The ideal way to pronounce the voice, he says, is to bring it from the back of the throat to behind the nose and aim to enunciate in the middle of the brow. The voice, he says, is not projected simply from the throat; all parts of the body come into play. (Yonahara)

Himitsu no ōkoku: Hyōden Ishii Momoko [Kingdom of Secrets: A Critical Biography of Ishii Momoko]

By Ozaki Mariko

Shinchōsha, 2014. 191 x 131 mm. 575 pp. ¥2,700. ISBN 978-4-10-335851-0.

Ishii Momoko (1907–2008) is Japan's most beloved translator and writer of children's literature. Her translations introduced many famous series to Japanese readers for the first time, including *Winnie the Pooh*, *Peter Rabbit*, and Dick Bruna's Miffy series. Ishii once said, "Even now, my five-year-old self is still inside me somewhere." This book by a literary journalist traces the course of her life. The author conducted 200 hours of interviews with Ishii, and has discovered numerous letters and other unpublished writings by her.

Much influenced as a university student by the works of Willa Cather, Ishii started her career as an editor and went on to develop and build friendships with many other women. The Pacific War era shut down the world of children's literature. Her own work, *Non-chan kumo ni noru* [Non-chan Rides a Cloud] about a little girl living in the suburbs, is still widely read today. This new study reveals for the first time that it was written to cheer up her beau, who had to go to war.

After the war, Ishii absorbed herself in translation and writing of her own works, while working her farm. She said it often took her a lot of time to find the right words in translating and writing so that children would understand the story when it was read to them. The book is also informative on the development of children's literature in Japan. (Yonahara)

Ozaki Mariko

Born 1959. As journalist in the culture department of the Yomiuri Shimbun*, she was in charge of the literary criticism column "Bungei jihyō" for around 10 years starting in 1992. Other works include* Gendai Nihon no shōsetsu *[Novels of Modern Japan].*

Pioneer writer and translator of children's literature

Suzuki Naomichi

Born in 1981. He studied law at Hosei University while working for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government starting in 1999. He is the author of Yaranakya zero! *[If We Don't Do Something, We'll Have Nothing!].*

Yūbari saisei shichō [Yūbari's Reconstruction Mayor]

By Suzuki Naomichi

Kōdansha, 2014. 188 x 128 mm. 236 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-06-219140-1.

A young mayor puts a bankrupt city back on its feet

Until the 1960s, the city of Yūbari in Hokkaidō was a prosperous city made rich by its coal mining industry. As the main source of fuel switched after that from coal to oil, however, the mines closed one by one and people moved away. Eventually, the population was less than 10 percent what it had been in the boom years. In 2006 the city went bankrupt.

Suzuki Naomichi, the author of this book, was initially sent as a Tokyo Metropolitan government official to work at Yūbari City Hall after its finances collapsed. Two years later he stood as candidate for mayor and was elected at the age of 30. This book is his personal account of his own experiences and the current state of local government in Yūbari.

As Yūbari experienced rapid population decline, the average age of those who stayed shot up. But the crisis in the city's finances led citizens to become more interested in local administration. Many of the services that were cut because of the reduced city budget are now kept going by local volunteers.

Impressed by the attitude of the local people, Suzuki resolved to come up with a plan that would not just pay off the city's debts but support the future of the city and give hope to its hard-working citizens. Population decline and an aging society are problems that many countries around the world face. This book offers readers much food for thought as an early attempt to find a solution. (Karube)

HISTORY

Hiroshima sengo-shi [Postwar History of Hiroshima]

By Ubuki Satoru

Iwanami Shoten, 2014. 188 x 130 mm. 374 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-00-024523-4.

Ubuki Satoru

Born in 1946. Since 1970 has been responsible for compiling and editing materials on the atomic bombing for Hiroshima prefecture. From 2001 to 2011 was a professor at Hiroshima Jogakuin University.

Comprehensive resource on atomic bomb impact and activism

August 2015 marks 70 years since the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. As the experience of Hiroshima passes into history, this work draws on a vast array of resources to provide a definitive record of the trends and transitions of movements surrounding atomic bombing experiences.

First, the documents show how news of the carnage caused by the bomb spread over time, detailing the first encounters with survivors, the censorship imposed on reporting, and then the beginnings, development, and splintering of the movement to ban atomic and hydrogen bombs. The book traces developments up to the present, as survivors' experiences became an issue of concern in Japan and then the world. It also documents the role of government and the activities of various organizations, groups, and the media. Covered as well are the physical effects of the atom bomb on victims and research and surveys on its impact, ceremonies held for the dead, peace demonstrations and memorials, monuments, and artistic chronicles of the experience in film and literature.

The movement to abolish atomic and hydrogen weapons eventually splintered, partly as the result of internal political disagreements. As a result, individual survivors became independent of the movement. The author has paid close attention to memoirs written by survivors and people who were involved in relief activities in the aftermath. From all these documents, the voices of witnesses call on us to think about what we should do about the threat of atomic weapons today. (Yonahara)

LANGUAGE

Kobayashi Takashi and Sawamura Miyuki

Kobayashi Takashi: Born in 1957. Professor at Tōhoku University specializing in the study of Japanese dialects.
Sawamura Miyuki: Born in 1980. Associate professor at Wakayama University specializing in Japanese dialect formation.

How dialect reflects cultural differences around Japan

Mono no iikata Nishi-Higashi [Ways of Saying Things, East and West]

By Kobayashi Takashi, Sawamura Miyuki

Iwanami Shoten, 2014. 173 x 105 mm. 238 pp. ¥780. ISBN 978-4-00-431496-7.

Since the 1970s, numerous books have been published about the beauty and fascination of the Japanese language. A number of myths were recycled over and over in these works—the idea that Japanese somehow have an exceptional ability to communicate non-verbally, that the language is unusually vague, or that people prefer roundabout ways of expressing themselves to straight talking.

This book is not a critique of such theories but rather a comparative analysis of expressions in various Japanese dialects. Perhaps unintentionally it demonstrates that Japanese is diverse and by no means uniform in its usage.

Previous studies of dialect have focused on regional differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, but this study looks at the cultural differences as well. The findings can be revealing. For example, while 93.1 percent of people in Mie prefecture greet family members first thing in the morning, in Aomori prefecture only 61.8 percent do so. At the dinner table when asking a spouse or child to pass the soy sauce, around 90 percent of people in Kantō say "thank you." In Tōhoku, a large proportion of people do not express thanks in such a situation. People in Kansai tend to use expressions that are vague or ambiguous, whereas those in Kantō speak more straightforwardly. In the Tōhoku region people are quite blunt—even rough.

These dialectal differences are carefully elucidated based on large amounts of solid research data, making this an impressive and persuasive study. (Chō)

MANGA

Tajima Rettō

Published Go-aisatsu *[Greeting], which won the Manga Open Sadayasu Kei Award, and other one-shot manga under the name Tayano Ayumu. Under the name Tajima Rettō, published a number of one-shot manga including* Oppai Arigatō *[Thank You Boobs]. This is the artist's first serialized work.*

How the world looks at seventeen

Kodomo wa wakatte agenai [The Kids Just Won't Understand]

By Tajima Rettō

Vol. I: Kōdansha, 2014. 182 x 130 mm. 194 pp. ¥630. ISBN 978-4-06-388379-4.
Vol. II: Kōdansha, 2014. 182 x 130 mm. 194 pp. ¥630. ISBN 978-4-06-388380-0.

The title of this manga is a play on the words of the Japanese title of Francois Truffaut's film *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (*The 400 Blows*), which ran in Japan under the title *Otona wa wakatte kurenai* [The Grown-Ups Just Won't Understand]. The chapter titles also contain numerous parodies of the titles of well-known TV dramas, movies, and magazines. A sense of playfulness runs through much of the work's plotline and dialogue.

The story of two seventeen-year-old high school students who fall in love over the summer vacation sounds quite ordinary. But the plot contains many unusual elements that lift it out of the everyday, such as the girl's journey to meet her estranged father and the mysteries surrounding the religious group of which he is leader. These unusual elements are woven seamlessly into the overall story with great skill. This is the work of a new artist who promises much for the future.

During the girl's search for her father, the two young people stumble upon some of the subtleties of complex adult relationships. At the same time in their own world, they experience worries and confusions in their own way as high-school students. One of the most impressive things about this manga is the author's ability to depict these troubles in a light, humorous manner. The story and its characters will make many adult readers feel the author has been remarkably successful in capturing how they themselves were at 17. (Karube)

No. 11: Ikenami Shōtarō and the Old Tokyo *Shitamachi*

A postwar giant of Japanese historical and period fiction, Ikenami Shōtarō (1923–1990) was born in Asakusa, in the old townsmen's quarter of Tokyo known as *shitamachi*. What he saw of the life and spirit of his native place is richly reflected in his many stories and essays.

In the essay *Tōkyō no shitamachi* [Tokyo's *Shitamachi*] Ikenami Shōtarō relates one day looking up the word "shitamachi" in the dictionary. Along with the usual general definition of "a low-lying commercial and industrial area," he read that the term denotes eastern Tokyo, which includes the central districts of Asakusa, Ueno, Nihonbashi, and Ginza and which is considered the home of the true Edokko, or born-and-bred denizen of Edo (as Tokyo was called until 1868). Tickled by this characterization, he was moved to muse on "the generation upon generation of people who have dwelled in this city that was once Edo and is now Tokyo." They were the people of the world that inspired his stories, and in which he himself had long lived.

When Ikenami won the prestigious Naoki Prize in 1960, attention focused not so much on his writing as on the biographical detail that he had received formal education only through grade school. He had thereafter gone right into work, at a stockbroker, then at city hall and the tax office. Straightaway people assumed that he had been forced by poverty to give up schooling and enter into a life of toil from a young age. Their image was of someone who had risen after many long years of social disadvantage to finally achieve success as an author of period fiction.

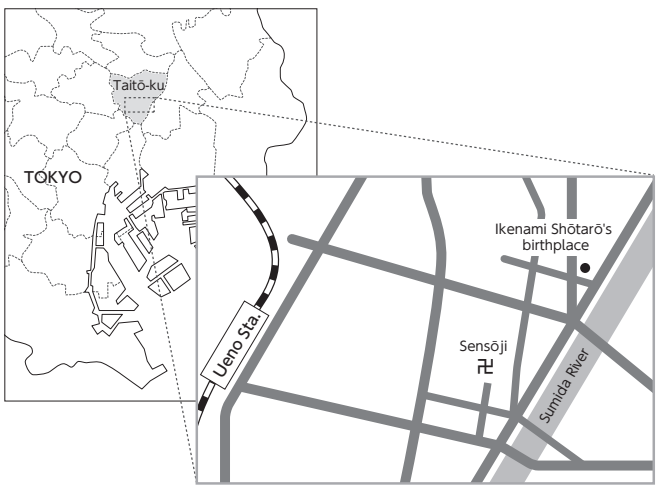
But it wasn't like that, not at all. Ikenami himself never expressed regret over his lack of schooling, and indeed repeatedly recounted fond memories of the time he had spent as a stockbroker's apprentice. The people around him then affectionately called him "Pote-Shō" ("Pote" is short for "potato."). In those days in the late 1930s to early 1940s, train stations and amusement districts had street vendors selling what they advertised as "fries," or breaded morsels of minced onions, potatoes, and flour. Skewered two to three at a time, they were deep-fried and enjoyed dipped in sauce while still piping hot. Young Shōtarō loved this inexpensive treat, and whenever he managed to save up a few coins he would be seen dropping by one of these stalls. He was Shōtarō and he adored fried potatoes, and hence he was Pote-Shō.

"*Shitamachi* children all went out into the world at thirteen or fourteen," Ikenami recalls, "as soon as they finished compulsory grade school." That was simply the way things were; *shitamachi* residents invested little if anything in their children's schooling. And to quote Ikenami's mother, the school expenses "didn't hurt our livelihood" one bit. This was radically different from the situation in the *yamanote*, or the western higher-ground part of the city traditionally occupied by warrior-class residents, where the government offices were centered following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Here lived those who had climbed to success under the new Meiji regime—members of the peerage, military, and civil service who may have been socially esteemed, but who were also often forced to stretch their means in order to maintain appearances and send their children on to higher education at all costs.

Ikenami was born and raised in Asakusa, and returned to live there even after the devastation of large swaths of *shitamachi* in World War II. In *Tōkyō no shitamachi* he describes the attributes of *shitamachi* and its inhabitants as he saw them up close. According to him, "People hardly ventured outside their own neighborhood, unless there was some very great need." Stores and eateries therefore catered mostly to local regulars; neighbors were almost unconsciously accustomed to helping one another in times of need, so that the weak and poor had no fear of starving. "My mother worked while raising her two boys alone, and there were countless women like her, and countless others around them who aided them with no special fuss." This "no fuss" was key to the *shitamachi* spirit, which spurned pretentiousness and show.

Everyone had a sense of each other's feelings, and "did not presume to barge deep inside." "Even in the midst of poverty people were full of vitality, and never showed a hint of envy toward anyone else"—live and let live, in other words. While much is often made in Japan of the "warmth" of *shitamachi* locals, by Ikenami's account this warmth was not a soppy, clinging relationship but a bond of solidarity among individuals who respected one another's bounds. "During festival and other special days," Ikenami further observes, "old *shitamachi* customs and street vendors return, awakened from deep slumber." Those days were special because of what they "awakened" among the residents and their ordinarily unassuming lives.

These qualities that Ikenami enumerates also form the very backbone of his fiction. Despite its 133 episodes, his *Onihei hankachō* [Onihei's Crime Files] series never lags but always moves along with subtle variety, testimony to Ikenami's command of the writer's craft. No less crucial



A busy street lined with movie theaters in Asakusa's Rokku area around 1933. Photograph courtesy of the Shitamachi Museum, Taitō ward, Tokyo.

to the power of his narrative is the stories' rich and colorful look into the lives and mores of the people of *shitamachi*.

The main character of Onihei ("Demon Heizō," so called for his relentless pursuit of crime) is based on Hasegawa Heizō, a real-life samurai who became head of a shogunal law-keeping force in 1787. During his tenure he prevailed upon the government to establish a facility for rounding up vagrants within the city and giving them occupational training so as to offer them another chance at life. Already by the eighteenth century, then, he had been an advocate of what would today be termed social welfare.

Ikenami portrays this character as a man who is not only of quick mind but also well seasoned in the ways of the world, having lived through his share of ups and downs. On one of those rare occasions when Onihei is able to return home early enough to sit down to dinner with his wife, he finds himself grumbling to her about the daily grind. She advises him to cut down on his responsibilities if he is so miserable, but he shakes his head no, he doesn't want any of that. "Why on earth not?" she returns, to which he replies, "Because this work suits me so very much. Well, ahem . . . that's just the quandary, don't you see." Before he knows it his gripes have turned into boasting: "Not to flatter myself, but no one else could do this job as well as me. How could I dream of quitting?" Soon he gets so worked up he starts feeling a bit teary-eyed. His subordinates know all that he has to face, he tells her, and they are ever so tactful of his feelings; it touches him so, it's really almost too much! The homey characters and their relationships seem straight out of *shitamachi*.

The humblest members of Onihei's team, too—commoners like Hikojū of Sagami, Kumehachi of Kobusa, Omasa, or Okinu, who are known only by their given name or some sobriquet—recall many of the characteristics Ikenami ascribes to *shitamachi* folk. The success of Onihei's crime-fighting operations hinges on these trusty informants and their hard work, and yet once their part is done they retreat gracefully back into their usual jobs among the other townspeople. They have a firm sense of their proper place, and never step out of line; they keep strictly to their lives as commoners without trying to grasp for anything more.

Even the outlaws are portrayed vis-à-vis a *shitamachi*-like code of honor. As *Onihei hankachō* tells it, once upon a time thieves leading bands of any repute would take years to prepare after setting their sights on a prey, so that when the heist came, they could swoop in, take the money, and vanish unnoticed. Shedding blood was out of the question; killing or harming anyone was condemned as a "beastly" act that no self-respecting thief would stoop to. Yet as the society around Onihei and his fellows grows ever more money-grubbing, they are forced to contend with the rise of a new breed of criminals who think nothing of murder or violence.

This echoes Japanese society over the two decades that the series was published from the late 1960s on—a period when the country rode from spectacular postwar growth right into the economic bubble. "No matter, it's the same for everyone, not just the likes of our profession," says one Edo criminal in the series. "From the daimyo on top to the farmers below, we all have no choice but to kick others down if we're to keep our own selves afloat. It's what comes of living in a world where the merchants are the only ones smirking over how much money they've made." The words neatly encapsulate the mood of the bubble economy. Once the *shitamachi* ethic of living modestly but decently effectively died out in the real world, so, too, did Ikenami bring his beloved series to an end.

After that the author turned less to fiction and more to essays on food. In works such as *Shokutaku no jōkei* [Scenes from the Table], he penned many captivating accounts of his visits to a variety of eateries; *shitamachi* inhabitants by nature love to eat. He stayed away from places demanding fussy etiquette, opting instead for down-to-earth offerings like soba, tempura, and *izakaya* pub fare. Tempura, he writes for example, should be consumed as intently as if "one were facing off against a parent's killer." Of course, there is no real need to pretend in that way, he adds; just go after starving yourself "to the utmost," and you'll get it right. His food essays are filled with other similarly striking gems, which however smack of no desire to flaunt his good taste and preach to others about the proper way to eat this or that. He was good at drawing on the little turns of phrase he remembered hearing from the staff and fellow customers of local establishments he had frequented since childhood. In *shitamachi*, the food is delightful, but even more so are the people.

(Ikeuchi Osamu, essayist and scholar of German literature)

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes Announced

The screening for the 152nd Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes (sponsored by the Society for the Promotion of Japanese Literature) was held in Tokyo on January 15, 2015. The Akutagawa Prize went to Ono Masatsugu, 44, for *Kyū-nen mae no inori* [The Nine-Year-Old Prayer], which originally appeared in the September issue of *Gunzō*. (See p. 4 of this issue and In Their Own Words, JBN 82) The Naoki Prize was awarded to Nishi Kanako, 37, for *Saraba!* [Good Bye!], published by Shōgakukan.

Ono was born in Ōita prefecture in 1973. After studying at graduate school of the University of Tokyo, he entered the University of Paris and received a doctor's degree there. He is currently associate professor at Rikkyō University. He won the Mishima Yukio Prize for *Nigiyaka na wan ni seowareta fune* [The Boat Carried by the Bustling Bay]. This was the fourth time he had been nominated for the Akutagawa Prize.

The story of *Kyū-nen mae no inori* is set in a remote inlet town in Ōita, Kyushu. After her divorce, the protagonist returns with her ailing child to home town, a community where blood ties are strong. She finds hope in the way locals live and pray, and regains confidence in herself. "The author skillfully captures the strengths of a close-knit local community," says Ogawa Yōko, one of the judges, "It's a splendid work bringing together vivid memories and vague remembrances."

Nishi was born in Teheran, Iran and brought up in Cairo, Egypt as well as in Osaka. She won the Oda Sakunosuke Prize for her 2006 novel, *Tsūtenkaku* [The Tsūtenkaku Tower]. This was the second time she had been nominated for the Naoki Prize.

The winning work depicts the growth of a Teheran-born Japanese boy, Ayumu, the breakup of his family along the way. Award judge Hayashi Mariko comments, "The world being quite a gloomy place these days, I'm glad to see a work like this coming out with a broad scale and cheerful stance."

"Tokiwa-sō" Project Nurtures Manga Aspirants

A 22-year-old aspiring manga artist nicknamed Choko moved into the so-called Tokiwa-sō house in Itabashi ward of Tokyo in 2012. Living with other young budding artists there, she is devoted to writing manga after returning from work; she aims for her dream of being of use for people through her manga.

Tokiwa-sō was an old-style wooden apartment building in Tokyo's Toshima ward, where renowned cartoonist and animator Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989) lived for a year starting in 1953 after moving from his home in Takarazuka, Hyōgo prefecture. The apartment house became the home of other manga artists who gathered around Tezuka like Ishinomori Shōtarō, Fujiko Fujio, and Akatsuka Fujio; living together they improved their manga skills through friendly rivalry and made names for themselves as leading manga artists. The Tokiwa-sō building where Tezuka and others lived was demolished in 1982.

In 2006, the "Tokiwa-sō Project" was launched by an NPO of Tokyo's Toshima ward called Newvery. The NPO holds leases on houses at 25 locations in Tokyo and Kyoto and rents out rooms cheaply to young people aspiring to become manga artists. Today some 130 young people are living in these houses, training hard to be future Tezukas. The project also supports their efforts by holding workshops teaching how to write stories, draw backgrounds, and so forth, thereby encouraging them to be independent artists.

Some 440 million copies of manga magazines sold in 2014 (Research Institute for Publications estimate), down to about one-third the figure recorded in 1995 during the golden age of manga magazines. Recently, however, publishers have opened manga-posting websites and there are many other such sites available, making it easier for manga aspirants to publish their work.

In March, a 27-year-old graduate of the Tokiwa-sō Project with the pen-name Nakamura Shōko succeeded in publishing her basketball-theme manga. A big Tezuka fan since girlhood who still loves Tezuka's *Black Jack*, Nakamura now hopes to publish a serial manga and is working in the "iryō" (healthcare) manga genre.

Colin Joyce Guide to Japan Big Seller

Nippon shakai nyūmon [Introduction to Japanese Society], the Japanese edition of *How to Japan: A Tokyo Correspondent's Take* (Japanese edition published in 2006; English in 2009) is selling briskly with 27 printings and 127,000 copies printed.

The author came to Japan in 1992 and after studying Japanese became a reporter and magazine correspondent, based in Japan for 14 years. The book begins by observing that the way Japanese behave at a public pool is symbolic of Japanese society. People swim in an orderly fashion, allowing space between themselves and others, they wear swim caps and everybody gets out of the water when told to take a break. Apparently the author's non-judgmental style of recording things, even about the rigid rules people live with, has won readers.

Audobon's *Birds of America* Set Reprinted

When the Treaty of Kanagawa opening Japan to trade with the United States was signed 160 years ago, among the gifts presented to Japan's shogun by Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry was a double-elephant folio (1,000 x 680 mm) size set of *The Birds of America*, by John James Audobon. Among the largest books ever printed, the set was published between 1827 and 1838 and depicts more than 400 birds, including species now extinct, in their actual size, natural poses, and habitats.

Publisher Yūshōdō has now published a deluxe facsimile edition using the highest quality digital photographic technology. To produce an "Audubon for the twenty-first century," Yūshōdō president Nitta Mitsuo mobilized veteran expertise for the project from specialty paper company Takeo (Tokyo), printing company Dai Nippon (Tokyo), and cultural asset repair firm Oiri (Kyoto).

The edition was produced by pho-

tographing an original set of the books using an 80-megapixel camera, which captured the subtle hues and gradations of color in the bird's feathers, and finding ways to recapture the soft texture of the original paper as well as the clarity of the printing, or to assure the pages would turn easily and yet the binding would be strong. These considerations were sometimes in mutual conflict.

A limited edition of 100 sets will be sold for ¥4,536,000 (bound edition).

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō was 1964 Nobel Prize Nominee

Documents released by the Swedish Academy at the request of the Kyodo News Service show that in 1964 there were four Japanese among the 76 nominees for the Nobel Prize in Literature: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Mishima Yukio, Kawabata Yasunari, and poet Nishiwaki Junzaburō. Tanizaki was one of the six chosen in the final screening, which were ultimately narrowed down to French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and Russian novelist Mikhail Sholokhov. Sartre was finally selected but declined the prize and it was awarded to Sholokhov in 1965. Tanizaki had been among the final five candidates in 1960 screening, so the documents show that he continued to be considered by the screening committee. He died, however, in 1965 and Kawabata became the Nobel laureate in 1968.

Best-selling Author Miyao Tomiko Passes

Author of best-selling popular historical-romances such as *Kiryūin Hanako no shōgai* [The Life of Kiryūin Hanako], Miyao Tomiko died at the age of 88 on December 30, 2014. Miyao was born in the city of Kōchi in Shikoku in 1926. She began writing after the end of World War II, while working on the farm run by her husband's parents. In 1962 she won the Joryū Shinjin (Newcomer Women's Writer) Prize for *Ren*, and then the Naoki Prize in 1978 for *Ichigen no koto* [The One-Stringed Koto] about women seeking to master traditional art, and the Yoshikawa Eiji Literature Prize for *Jo no mai* [Noh Dance Prelude], a story modeled after the life of woman Nihonga-style painter Uemura Shōen. Miyao won a huge readership for her depiction of the inner life of women who struggled with adversity. In 2009 she was recognized with the prestigious Person of Cultural Merit title.

Writer Kōno Taeko Dies

Prominent writer Kōno Taeko died of respiratory failure on December 29, 2014 at the age of 88. Originally from Osaka, she was an admirer of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and moved to Tokyo aspiring to become a writer. Her debut work *Yōjigari* (later translated as *Toddler-Hunting*, 1996) won recognition and in 1963 she won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for her novel *Kani* [Crabs]. She was known for her distinctive portrayals of sadism latent in the subconscious and the world of perversion. She was awarded the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize, the Kawabata Yasunari Literary Prize and other prizes for the pure-literature genre and is author of a critical study of Tanizaki. She became the first woman to serve on the Akutagawa Prize screening committee. She was awarded the Order of Culture in 2014.

Ōtomo Katsuhiro Wins Top French Comics Prize

On January 29, 2015 at France's famous Angoulême comics festival, Ōtomo Katsuhiro, 60, manga artist known for the SF manga *Akira*, was presented the Grand Prix lifetime achievement award. He was chosen through voting by more than 3,500 artists selected by publishers in the French-speaking countries. This is the first time a Japanese has been awarded the Grand Prix in the 42-year history of festival. The festival website says "This award is an indication of [Ōtomo's] stature in the history of comics and as a Japanese manga artist." Ōtomo began serialization of *Akira*, set in a desolate, post-apocalyptic Tokyo, in the 1980s. It has long been acclaimed for the way it overturned all the rules of the manga genre before it and for its tremendous influence on comics in Europe and the world.

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Editing, Translation, Design, and Production
Showa Information Process Co., Ltd.
The Center for Intercultural Communication

Printed in Japan on recycled paper

ISSN 0918-9580

One Piece Manga as Kabuki

One Piece, the vastly popular manga by Oda Eiichirō, 39, is to be performed as a Kabuki play ("Super Kabuki II") starring Ichikawa Ennosuke, 39, at the Shinbashi Embujō in October and November 2015. *One Piece* is a pirate adventure story in which pirates compete for control of a pirate kingdom, through the eyes of protagonist Luffy and his friends. The manga began serialization in Shūeisha's *Weekly Shōnen Jump* manga magazine and has sold in more than 320 million copies. The series has been produced for television and anime film and has been published in more than 35 countries around the world.

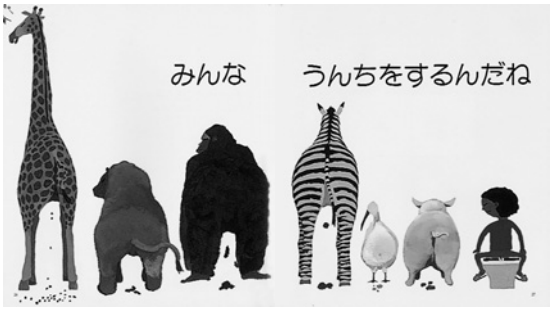
Inimitable Picture Book Legend

Prolific and popular picture book author, Gomi Tarō is fast-paced, quick-witted, funny, and direct. With simplicity, set off by visual and conceptual depth, his work instantly captures the hearts of readers of all ages.

"I work fast, and quit fast," Gomi says in his small and cozy atelier. "I don't get hung up on what I am doing. If I realize the work I'm doing is something that others can do, I scrap it immediately."

With this attitude and the urge to be original, Gomi's oeuvre stands out both in Japan and overseas. Since his first book *Michi* [The Road] hit bookstores in 1973, Gomi has created some 450 books, over 50 of which have been translated into 15 languages.

Among these, his ninth book, *Minna unchi* [trans. *Everyone Poops*], has been a long seller. Depicting beasts and bugs pooping, Gomi tackles a somehow taboo subject with straightforward text and illustrations, showing that all living creatures are the same, despite their differences of size, color, and shape. The book is perfect not only for children of toilet-training age, but also adults who want to explain the body's functions with humor.



Minna unchi [trans. *Everybody Poops*] (Fukuinkan Shoten, 1981), a hilarious book showing many kinds of animals, their poop, and where and how they poop.

"The beauty of a picture book is that it can communicate beyond words," says Gomi. "I am happy that my pictures have universal appeal."

Soon after the original *Minna unchi* was published in Japan in 1981, a publisher from Switzerland came to seek Gomi's permission to publish a French version, and that was followed by similar requests from Israel, South Korea, the Netherlands, Taiwan, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In fact, Gomi confesses that the picture book format is the best means for him to express his thoughts and feelings. Grinning, he adds, "In writing, you need to worry about typographical errors and omissions, but with pictures there are neither set rules, nor wrong answers. That's why I've kept on drawing."

Gomi also emphasizes that when he draws, he aims "to portray the subtleties of a mood or emotion that evokes sound, smell, or taste." For Gomi, the worst type of picture book is one where "something like a bear is going on a picnic under the sunny sky, and the text explains exactly what is drawn on the paper."

Along with picture books, Gomi has also designed stationery and clothing, created children's animated videos, toys, and playing cards; he is also author of numerous essays. "Paradoxically, when I write something, I try to use language that evokes pictures," Gomi smiles.

Hyakunin isshu wandārando [The Wonderland of One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets] (Tokyo Shoseki, 2014) contains a "picture scroll," picture cards, and an essay book, in which Gomi brings his trenchant wit to the interpretation of each poem.

His recent project, *Hyakunin isshu wandārando* [One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets Wonderland], combines his pictorial talents with his distinctive way with language. It presents the world of Kyoto in the early thirteenth century, when the anthology of the thirty-one syllable verses was compiled.

As these poems are traditionally written on cards and used in games, Gomi has packaged the work in a 26.4 x 16 x 5.2 cm box, which includes the set of poem cards featuring his illustrations; a "picture scroll" (long fold-out) showing what society was like in ancient times, where the courtiers who wrote the poems are depicted along with ordinary people and animals; and a book of commentary giving his views on each poem.

"We've already had textbooks analyzing the archaic words and context of these poems. So my approach is different," says Gomi. "I tried to imagine why these aristocrats wrote what now seem like such boring poems, though some are admittedly great, and I express my own thoughts about each poem."

His forthright views bring readers closer to the poets of the time and help them grasp why poets needed to use such high-flown language. His amusing picture-scroll "wonderland" is also likely to rekindle interest in the world of classical poetry, as Gomi depicts intriguing figures such as the poetesses wearing twelve-layered formal kimonos, servants carrying miniature shrines, and ogres fighting in the sky.

"Some people think I'm a primitive artist, but I like to be that way. I want to think simply, and draw plainly," Gomi concludes. By no means as shallow as he pretends to be, the picture-book legend will turn 70 in August 2015. He is an expert in expressing esoteric elements in a direct manner.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)

Gomi Tarō

Born in 1945. Has won many awards, including the Sankei Children's Book Award, and the Bologna Children's Book Fair Award. Has held children's workshops all over Japan and in other countries such as Mexico, Spain, and Sri Lanka. His works available in English include *Bus Stops*, *Everyone Poops*, *I Lost My Dad*, *My Friends*, *Scribbles*, *Spring Is Here*, and more. His website is at www.gomitaro.com.