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How Youth Culture Has Changed the Japanese Publishing Industry

Chō Kyō

School life has emerged as a prominent subject for the Japanese novel in recent years. This is more than just a passing fad; it is a phenomenon that reflects fundamental changes in Japanese society and the structure of Japan's literary marketplace.

One major change began during the postwar period of rapid economic growth. Until then, Japanese fiction had been clearly divided into two distinct categories, each with its own separate readership: literary fiction, or “pure literature” (*jun bungaku*), and popular fiction (*taishū bungaku*). The periodic appearance of a runaway best-seller in the popular fiction category posed no real threat to literary fiction, which had a well-established viable market of its own. This began to change during Japan's economic boom years, as the boundary between the literary and the popular novel began to blur.

Meanwhile, the development of a mature consumer society brought about a number of changes in the makeup of the fiction market. In the 1960s, novels were the leading form of entertainment among adults. But the role of literature in people's lives faded in the years that followed, along with the rise of television and other forms of visual entertainment, the boom in outdoor activities and sports, and the growth of manga into a major social phenomenon. The adult segment of the fiction market began to shrink. As a consequence, younger readers came to make up a larger proportion of the market—particularly those in junior and senior high school.

Young people on the cusp of adulthood are looking for greater independence, but they are also deeply attracted to fantasy and make-believe. Teenagers troubled by feelings of isolation or internal conflict find refuge in stories that help them to cope with their own emotional crises by identifying with protagonists facing similar troubles. Reading can also give them vicarious access to a variety of lifestyles. What readers seek from fiction is a reflection of their aspirations, the inevitable product of their emotional circumstances.

Japan's education system has indirectly encouraged the reading of fiction among young people. Novels are often recommended as supplementary reading for various units in the junior and senior high school curriculum, and they are frequently the subject of summer vacation essays, writing contests, and so on.

For statistical corroboration of these trends, we can consult the results of a nationwide survey of people aged 16 and over conducted by the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper in 2012 and published last spring (*Dokusho yoron chōsa* [Public Opinion Survey on Reading], Mainichi Shimbun Sha, March 2013). Among the survey's respon-

dents, fully 69 percent of those aged 16–19 and in their 20s reported spending an average of up to ¥2,000 per month on books—a higher percentage than any other age group. Some 52 percent of those in the 16–19 age group said their favorite books were Japanese novels—again the highest of any age group, followed by 44 percent of those in their 20s expressing the same preference. The percentage of respondents who said they enjoyed reading translated fiction was also the highest and second highest in these two age groups. Taking into account books borrowed from libraries and received from parents, we should probably assume that the amount of reading done by those in their late teens is even higher than these figures suggest.

Although Japanese publishers and booksellers treat fiction for young children as a separate category, fiction written specifically for “young adults” does not exist as a distinct genre in Japan, and no authors write exclusively for “young adult” readers. This means that Japanese adolescents and young adults choose their reading from the category of adult fiction. Nevertheless, adolescents and young adults clearly have different concerns and interests from older generations, and these differences are reflected in what they read. Stories set in schools and universities are an obvious example. Japanese schools from junior high onward have a distinctive culture characterized by a strict seniority-based hierarchy and an intense focus on extracurricular activities, collectively known as “clubs.” Club activities are integral to the strong social bonds that Japanese adults tend to recall when they think back on their schooldays. These interests have not gone unnoticed by Japanese writers.

Aspiring novelists are legion in Japan, but getting a first novel published is not easy. Sales of that first book can be decisive for a writer's entire career. In recent years, a growing number of writers have opted to cut their teeth on a *seishun shōsetsu* (youth novel or coming-of-age novel), in the hope that strong sales among that demographic will earn them name recognition and lead to further opportunities. Writing *seishun shōsetsu* is not a goal but a steppingstone; once their reputation is established, they mean to shift their focus elsewhere. A considerable number of successful novelists have taken this path—a fact that helps to explain why very few writers in Japan are permanently categorized as a “young adult novelist.”

Today, these *seishun shōsetsu* are marketed at students. The majority are clearly geared to secondary school students and feature junior or senior high school students as their main characters. Stories centering on school clubs—generally either a musical ensemble or an athletic team—

are perennial favorites. A prominent example of the former category is Ashihara Sunao's *Seishun den deke deke* [Jangling Strings of Youth], which tells the story of a provincial high school student who falls in love with rock and roll and decides to form a school band. In this 1990 novel, Ashihara portrays the passionate hopes and growing pains of youth as he follows the band's performances and progress. In a similar vein is Itō Takami's 2005 novel *Gibuson* [Gibson], revolving around the members of a junior high school band.

A standout in the sports category is Asai Ryō's *Kirishima, bukatsu yamerutte yo* [Kirishima's Leaving the Volleyball Club], published in 2010. Set in a prefectural high school in provincial Japan, the novel deals with the repercussions of the volleyball captain's decision to quit the team. Another notable example is Matsuzaki Hiroshi's *Hashire! T-kō basuketto bu* [Run, T Junior High Basketball Team!], focusing on the trials and tribulations of star basketball player Yōichi and his relationships with his teammates as he leads the team from humiliation to triumph. The book was an instant hit among junior and senior high school students when it came out in 2007, becoming one of the year's best-selling novels.

In Japan, the most dependable gateways to success in the world of literary publishing remain the Akutagawa Prize and the Naoki Prize, both designed to recognize relative newcomers. The Akutagawa Prize is reserved for "pure literature," while the Naoki Prize honors popular literature, but winning either one guarantees a novelist instant recognition. If teen fiction can be seen as a bridge to building a literary reputation, there is no doubt that winning either of these major prizes marks a major milestone on the road to success as a well-established author.

Itō Takami is a good example of this tendency. Having launched his career as a writer of children's books, Itō has gradually increased the age of his target audience ever since. Following his success with *Gibuson*, he was awarded the 135th Akutagawa Prize in 2006 for his novel *Hachigatsu no rojō ni suteru* [Discarded on the August Streets], about the collapse of a marriage. Similarly, Asai Ryō won the Naoki Prize this year for *Nanimono* [Somebody] (see page 4), a book dealing with the frustrations of a group of university seniors as they search for jobs.

The job-hunting process was also the subject of Miura Shion's first novel, *Kakutō suru mono ni maru* [A Passing Grade for Those Who Struggle]—essentially a *seishun shōsetsu* for people in their early twenties. Having made a name for herself with this popular debut, Miura honed her style and began writing more sophisticated grownup novels about contemporary urban and family life. In 2006, she won the Naoki Prize for *Mahoro ekimae Tada Benri-ken* [The Tada Handyman's Shop in Front of Mahoro Station].

Higashino Keigo is one of Japan's top mystery writers, with a large international following throughout East Asia. But his first novel was *Hōkago* [After School], a mystery set in an elite girls' high school. It was only after he became established as a best-selling author that he began writing for adults. He still has a huge fan base among teenagers and remains one of the 10 most popular authors among junior and senior high school students, according to the survey of student reading habits published with the Mainichi survey mentioned above.

To be sure, there are cases in which the process has operated in reverse. Miyabe Miyuki only began writing fantasies and mysteries for children and young adults—including her popular novel *Brave Story*—after winning the Naoki Prize in 1998. And a few writers have concentrated on fiction for younger readers throughout their careers. One is Ishida Ira, who made his debut in 1997 by winning a contest for unpublished mystery writers. In his *Ikebukuro West Gate Park* series, about a group of friends who spend their days loitering in a park, Ishida portrayed contemporary youth from a distinctly anti-mainstream stance. He has continued to write for the adolescent and young adult market, and in 2003 he won the Naoki Prize for *4teen*, a collection of coming-of-age stories examining the alienation, hopes, and disappointments of four fourteen-year-old boys living in the Tsukishima area of Tokyo's rapidly changing waterfront district.

Onda Riku made her debut in 1991 with the publication of *Rokubanme no Sayoko* [The Sixth Sayoko], a mystery concerning a bizarre series of events at a provincial Japanese high school. We learn that the school has a strange tradition according to which a student is selected once every three years to play the role of "Sayoko." The student must perform three ceremonial duties, including placing a red flower in a vase on the first day of classes and performing the role of Sayoko at the school fair. The novel describes the mysterious occurrences that take place in the year of the "sixth Sayoko." The horror-mystery aspects of Onda's work are typical of a major subgenre of Japanese teen literature. Built around a mystery and its solution, these easy-to-read stories often incorporate elements of the occult.

Of the many novelists writing fiction for young adults, two more merit special mention. One is Makime Manabu, who made his debut in 2006 with *Kamogawa horumō* [Kamogawa Horumō]. Although the main characters in this young adult fantasy are university students, the book's readers are predominantly of junior and senior high school age. The other is Shigematsu Kiyoshi, who won the Naoki Prize in 2000 for *Bitamin F* [Vitamin F]. Shigematsu's core audience is students in the upper grades of elementary school and the first years of junior high, but he has managed to transcend the juvenile literature genre with books that appeal to adults as well.

Although written to appeal to adolescents and young adults, the novels discussed above are by writers who are known for their adult fiction as well. These novelists have appeared in the literary magazines of the major publishing houses and have established some kind of literary reputation. Their latest works are accorded a prominent place in bookstores.

The situation is quite different for the books known as light novels (*raito noberu*, or *ranobe* for short). Light novels are almost exclusively a teen phenomenon (although some people continue to read them into their thirties), and few adult readers are familiar with the names of even the best-selling authors, even though they have captured a major share of the adolescent market.

Light novels are difficult to define precisely. For the most part, they are small-format editions, the same size as a standard Japanese *bunkobon* paperback (A6), with

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION



Asai Ryō

Born in 1989. Won the Subaru Newcomer Award for his 2009 bestseller *Kirishima*, *bukatsu yamerutte yo* [*Kirishima's Leaving the Volleyball Club*], written when he was still in college. *Nanimono* won the Naoki Prize in January 2013.

A skillful depiction of contemporary young lives through SNS messages

Nanimono [Somebody]

By Asai Ryō

Shinchōsha, 2012. 196 x 134 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-333061-5.

With college graduation approaching, Ninomiya Takuto and his friends have begun to fret about the trials that lie ahead.

Japan's low labor mobility makes choosing a first job out of college a decision that can have lifelong repercussions. The recruitment process involves an assessment of a candidate's motivation, personal qualities, and reliability, as well as academic qualifications. Although it is possible to follow a more or less prescribed course from elementary school to university, entering the working world requires a constant rethinking of personal identity. You have to clear your own path.

Perhaps the biggest characteristic of this novel is the use it makes of Twitter, the social networking service, to tell its story. The book opens with a list of the six

characters' Twitter accounts and their identifying avatars, and social media is the main form of communication among the friends throughout the story. The messages they send from their smart phones cover a much wider range of topics and emotions than they are ever able to express in face-to-face conversations.

An important element of the story comes from the contrast between what the characters say in public and the things they tweet using their secondary accounts.

Identifying the job search process as a modern rite of passage, the author portrays the anxieties, isolation, joys, and sorrows of young people through the filter of their SNS messages. This original storytelling device skillfully captures the mood of the times and was a deserving winner of the 148th Naoki Prize. (Chō)

ab sango [ab Coral]

By Kuroda Natsuko

Bungeishunjū, 2013. 194 x 134 mm. 128 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-16-382000-2.

When the story begins, a family of three is living happily in a three-story house. The father is a scholar—or so it seems from the volume of books in his study. But this peaceful life does not last long. The family is forced to move into more confined housing during the war, and the mother dies. The arrival of a housekeeper slowly alters their lives, and when she moves in with the father, the daughter finds herself alienated from her family. She leaves home, but is haunted by memories of happier times.

One of the first things to strike the reader is that the characters in *ab sango* have no names. Instead, they are simply referred to as “father,” “child,” or “stranger.” In some cases, the same characters are referred to by their role: “breadwinner,” for example, or “domestic help.”

Many reviewers have commented on the non-Japanese feel of the novel, focusing on the horizontally printed text and the use of Western punctuation marks. But the book also bears a resemblance to the *Pillow Book*—written a millennium ago by Sei Shōnagon—in its plentiful use of hiragana script and close observations of nature. Even the division of the narrative into short sections with descriptive titles closely replicates a Heian-period collection of *zuihitsu* prose. Despite its superficially Western, avant-garde appearance, in its lyrical depth and style of narration, *ab sango* has more in common with the emotional style of a Heian-period (794–1185) female writer. It is a work that stands out among recent recipients of the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. (Chō)



Kuroda Natsuko

Born in 1937. Continued to publish fiction in small amateur magazines while working as a teacher, office clerk, and copy editor. With the publication of *ab sango*, she made her debut as a published author at the age of 75. Won the Akutagawa Prize in January 2013.

A brilliant evocation of loss and longing for the past



Ogawa Yoko

Born in 1962. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1991 for *Ninshin karendā* (trans. *Pregnancy Diary*). Numerous other works include *Hitojichi no rōdokukai* [*The Hostages' Reading Club*] (see JBN No. 34).

A compelling portrait of a lonely man without ambition

Kotori **[Songbird]** By Ogawa Yoko

Asahi Shimbun Publications, 2012. 194 x 133 mm. 254 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-02-251022-8.

An elderly man is found dead in the house where he lived alone, grasping a bamboo cage containing a songbird whose beautiful song fills the air. Known to the neighborhood children as the “bird man,” he spent nearly 20 years looking after the birds kept as pets in the local kindergarten. The novel takes us back to the bird man’s childhood. We are introduced to the protective relationship the man had with his elder brother, who is unable to communicate with anyone else but understands the language of birds. When their parents die, the two live quietly together until the older brother dies suddenly. This turns out to be the first of a series of trials.

A brief romance with a woman who works in the local library and various encounters with people in the community gradually set his life on a new trajectory,

but it is his constant love of birds that gives joy and meaning to his life. In her typically observant, low-key style, Ogawa paints a compelling portrait of a man without ambition, absorbed in the duties, challenges, and rewards of his simple life far from the busy mainstream of modern life. In previous works, Ogawa wove fantastic stories around unusual protagonists, including a mathematician with short-term memory loss and a chess player affected by arrested development. Ogawa’s latest work is invested with an intense sense of pure pathos that brings even greater depth to her fiction. (Nozaki)

Chūju ongaku-shū **[Insect-Tree Music Anthology]**

By Okuizumi Hikaru

Shūeisha, 2012. 193 x 134 mm. 271 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-08-771471-5.

In 1970, fresh from his studies in the United States, a jazz saxophonist known as “Imonabe” electrifies Japan’s underground music scene with a series of concerts named for the various stages in the life cycle of insects (“Hatching,” “Larva,” etc.). He performs all his shows either half-naked or completely nude. Then he disappears from sight. In this novel of nine distinct parts, each written in a different style and from a different viewpoint, Okuizumi Hikaru explores the life and art of the mysterious saxophonist, whose career is cut short by a mental breakdown.

What emerges is a portrait of a figure who is not so much a genius as an eccentric who dreams of becoming a “true artist” through a process of “metamorphosis.” With Kafka’s famous story lurking

constantly just beneath the surface, the novel takes on a progressively unreal quality. Statements made early in the novel are flatly contradicted in later chapters as the narrative blurs the boundary between fact and fiction. A master in the use of metafictional techniques, Okuizumi is also known for his deep knowledge of music. Here he recreates the fevered atmosphere of Japan’s modern jazz movement in the 1970s in an avant-garde work of fiction that embodies an intense, risk-taking spirit of improvisation. The absurdity climaxes with an ending that is sure to take readers by surprise. (Nozaki)



Okuizumi Hikaru

Born in 1956. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1994 for *Ishi no raireki* [trans. *The Stones Cry Out*]. Co-authored *Sensō wa dono yō ni katararete kita ka* [*How Has the War Been Talked About?*] (see JBN No. 23).

An avant-garde novel about an underground jazz musician



Ono Masatsugu

Born in 1970. Earned a doctorate at the University of Paris VIII. Won the Mishima Yukio Prize for *Nigiyaka na wan ni seowareta fune* [*The Boat Carried by the Bustling Bay*]. Currently associate professor of French literature at Meiji Gakuin University.

A new dimension opens up for Ono's fictional coastal community

Shishiwatari-bana **[Lion's Tread Point]**

By Ono Masatsugu

Kōdansha, 2013. 193 x 132 mm. 167 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-06-218207-2.

Ono Masatsugu has set many of his stories in a setting reminiscent of coastal Ōita Prefecture where the author grew up. His characters' quiet, down-to-earth lives are described in a detailed prose that mixes the everyday with ambitious ideas and elements of magical realism. With his latest novel, named after a fictional cape in Kyūshū, Ono has added a new dimension to this world and created a masterpiece.

The central character is Takeru, a fourth-year elementary school student who has moved from the city to a small coastal village to live under the care of a distant aunt. When he arrives in this alien environment, Takeru is a deeply traumatized young boy. Neglected by their mother, Takeru and his mentally retarded brother have struggled to find enough

food to eat. The kindness of strangers and the beauty of the natural environment gradually help him to heal and embrace life. We are never told what has happened to the older brother. As if to fill in for this absence, the ghost of a long-dead youth appears to Takeru from time to time, offering words of encouragement. Writing from a child's perspective, Ono achieves a new level of freshness and clarity in his writing. Few readers will remain unmoved by his sympathetic portrayal of his vulnerable young protagonist. (Nozaki)

Kūhaku o mitashinasai **[Fill in the Blanks]**

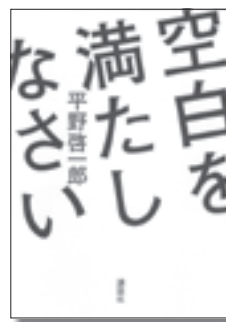
By Hirano Keiichirō

Kōdansha, 2012. 188 x 131 mm. 496 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-218032-0.

This thriller opens with the dead suddenly returning to life. One of the revenants is Tsuchiya Tetsuo, who died three years ago at the age of 32 in a case of suspected suicide. But Tsuchiya has no recollection of killing himself, and can think of no reason why he would abandon his happy life with his wife and young son. His wife, deeply traumatized by the suicide, greets her husband's strange reappearance with distinctly conflicted feelings. His former colleagues at work can scarcely conceal their discomfort. To clear himself of the stigma of suicide, Tsuchiya embarks on a search for his real killer, aware that at least one person regarded him with deep hostility. But his investigations ultimately lead him to a totally unexpected discovery.

Hirano unfolds his bizarre story in a vividly powerful descriptive style. In ad-

dition to masterful storytelling, the novel is buttressed by penetrating insights into the factors behind the high rate of suicide in Japan, where close to 30,000 people take their own lives every year. The novel goes beyond social critique, and its illuminating examination of the inner fragmentation of the self experienced by many people in contemporary society gives it a substantial philosophical impact. Despite its somber theme, the novel ends on a note of hope, holding out the possibility of escape from despair. Fifteen years on from his brilliant debut at age 23, Hirano has taken another major step forward with this latest tour de force. (Nozaki)



Hirano Keiichirō

Born in 1975. Won the 120th Akutagawa Prize for his debut novel *Nisshoku* [*The Eclipse*]. Works include *Kekkai* [*Dam Break*] (see JBN No. 30) and *Dōn* [*Dawn*], which won the 19th *Prix des Deux Magots* Bunkamura.

A dead man comes back to life to solve the mystery of his "suicide"

ESSAY



Michael Molasky

Born in 1956. Holds a PhD from the University of Chicago and teaches at Hitotsubashi University. Works include *Sengo Nihon no jazu bunka [The Jazz Culture of Postwar Japan]* and *Senryō no kioku/kioku no senryō [Memories of Occupation, Occupied Memories]*.

An American sociologist's study of Tokyo's izakaya

Nomeba, miyako **[A Capital Place for a Drink]**

By Michael Molasky

Chikuma Shobō, 2012. 187 x 129 mm. 349 pp. ¥2,100. ISBN 978-4-480-86418-5.

Not quite either a bar or a restaurant, the *izakaya* is a distinctly Japanese establishment that serves relatively inexpensive food and drink. Traditionally, an *izakaya* has a close connection to the local community and reflects the tastes and flavors of its region. Although corporate-run chains have come to prominence in recent decades, these bland spaces hold little interest for American sociologist Mike Molasky. A real *izakaya* offers carefully prepared food and a good selection of sake. It should reflect the individual tastes of the proprietor. A unique atmosphere or “culture” produced by the establishment and its regulars is also essential.

In a proper *izakaya*, people know how to behave. There is room for familiarity, but a certain reserve is maintained at the same time; a well-run *izakaya* provides

the perfect environment for conversation.

Molasky, who fell in love with *izakaya* during his first visit to Japan in 1976, has explored hundreds of establishments throughout the vast Tokyo metropolis. He is particularly fond of the older parts of the city, where the atmosphere of the pre-war era still lingers—perhaps not coincidentally, these are also the areas with the highest concentrations of old *izakaya*. As a sociologist with an insatiable thirst for knowledge, Molasky has turned pub-crawling into a kind of fieldwork. He unearths nuggets of local history, chats with fellow patrons, and encounters countless thousands of individual lives. Flexibility, spontaneity, and an openness to others—Molasky’s book is marked by the very qualities that encapsulate the pleasures of the *izakaya*. (Yonahara)

CRITICISM

Sekai seigi ron **[Global Justice]**

By Inoue Tatsuo

Chikuma Shobō, 2012. 188 x 130 mm. 400 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-480-01558-7.

What do readers imagine when they see the words “global justice” in the title? Dark episodes from history such as the Crusades, when people used violence to attack their “enemies” in the name of the religion they believed in? Or perhaps some kind of utopia, in which people can live together in peace, without any discussion about the concept of justice? In fact, neither of these is what the author Inoue Tatsuo has in mind.

Given that human beings are social animals who use language in pursuit of their own ideals, some form of justice is essential if we are to live together in peace while still maintaining the diversity of individual visions of life.

From this starting point, Inoue considers the principles by which states and peoples can coexist in a global society and

suggests a concept of justice based on those principles.

The style of justice outlined in this book, through rebuttals of and disagreements with previous theories including *The Law of Peoples* by John Rawls, offers much food for thought. Inoue reconfirms the role of state authority in preserving human rights and successfully suggests how use of state force can be conformed to a systematic principle of action within global society, so that states do not simply protect their own citizens but also pay due heed to the human rights of people in other countries. This book is a must-read volume for anyone interested in thinking seriously about the world order in the years to come. (Karube)



Inoue Tatsuo

Born in 1954. Teaches philosophy of law at the University of Tokyo. Author of *Kyōsei no sahō [Decorum of Conviviality]*, which won the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities, and *Hō to iu kuwadate [The Endeavor of Law]*, which won the Watsuji Tetsurō Culture Prize.

How can states and people coexist in a global society?

ARTS



Nishino Haruo

Born in 1943. Emeritus professor at Hōsei University. Numerous works on noh include *Iwanami kōza nō/kyōgen: nō no sakusha to sakuhin [Iwanami Noh and Kyōgen: Noh Writers and Works]* and *Nō kyōgen jiten [Encyclopedia of Noh and Kyōgen]*.

A comprehensive introduction to the noh mask as a work of art

Nōmen no sekai **[The World of Noh Masks]**

By Nishino Haruo (ed.)

Heibonsha, 2012. 217 x 166 mm. 128 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-582-63471-6.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the noh theater is its use of masks. A fuller knowledge of what the masks mean and an appreciation of their beauty would go a long way to making this traditional stage art more approachable for ordinary people. Despite this, surprisingly few good introductory texts have been available until now.

Starting with the masks used in the ritualistic *shikisanban* dance performed in praise of the gods, the book describes the many categories of masks, including *okina* (used in the play *Okina*), *jō* (old man), *onna* (female), *otoko* (male), *oni* (demon), and *butsu* (Buddhist deity). It details the plays and roles in which the masks are used and explains the meaning of facial expressions with reference to how the masks are used on stage. The

easy-to-follow explanations presume no previous knowledge.

Noh masks are not just stage props but works of art in their own right. As well as describing their theatrical uses, the author also articulates the aesthetic value of the masks as wood carvings. Color photos are provided of all the masks described, along with meticulous explanations of the fine details of the masks' expressions.

The book also contains a list of the most important masks, a brief historical survey, and a description of how they are made. All of these sections help to convey the masks' appeal. An appendix containing information on museums with particularly noteworthy masks in their collections rounds out this comprehensive introduction. (Chō)

PERFORMING ARTS

Meiji engeki-shi **[The History of Meiji-era Theater]**

By Watanabe Tamotsu

Kōdansha, 2012. 193 x 131 mm. 480 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-06-217921-8.

The Meiji era (1868–1912) was a time when “modernization” was synonymous with “Westernization.” In the world of drama, however, most of the major developments came in the kabuki theater. *Meiji engeki-shi* focuses on the changes that took place in the traditional stage arts of kabuki, noh, and bunraku, and their influence on the subsequent development of these arts.

The book narrates three aspects of the Meiji-era evolution of each of the stage arts: accounts of landmark performances, the rise and fall of key actors, and the development of the theaters where performances were staged. By examining what plays were performed, how audiences reacted to them, and the ways in which the art forms were viewed in wider society, the book shows how each form changed.

To a large extent, success in the theater hinges on the quality of the performers. A small number of outstanding actors can have a decisive effect on whether an art form thrives and how it is reformed. By analyzing the performances of individual actors, the author sheds light on how the stage arts in the Meiji era gradually evolved on the model of European drama.

The *shinpa* (“new school”) movement is also given its due as an important element in the drama of the age. Although the *shinpa* is often seen in opposition to the older traditions of kabuki, the author emphasizes their continuities.

The author's skillful handling of the many diverse and converging genres provides an easy-to-read guide to a crucial period in Japan's theatrical history. (Chō)



Watanabe Tamotsu

Born in 1936. A theater critic and guest professor at the Open University of Japan. Works include *Onnagata no unmei [The Destiny of the Kabuki Onnagata]* and *Ichikawa Danjūrō IV, which won the Minister of Education and Culture's Art Encouragement Prize.*

An accessible guide to a crucial period for the Japanese theater



Kawai Yū
Born in 1964. Obtained a PhD in home economics from the graduate school of Mukogawa Women's University. Currently an adjunct lecturer at Mukogawa Women's University.

The survival of a remarkable example of popular culture

Watashi wa kikuningyō banzai kenkyūsha **[Long Live Chrysanthemum Dolls—A Researcher's Report]**

By Kawai Yū

Shinjuku Shobō, 2012. 215 x 152 mm. 220 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-88008-433-6.

A chrysanthemum doll is a life-size doll clad in clothing made from real chrysanthemums. The realistic head and limbs are fashioned by specialist craftsmen; the torso, usually made from sticks of bamboo wrapped in straw, is covered in small chrysanthemums that create the effect of a beautiful garment.

Although chrysanthemums have been prized in Japan since ancient times, the history of chrysanthemum dolls dates back only as far as the early nineteenth century, when they became popular attractions at festivals and in the main shopping and entertainment districts of towns and cities. At first, the dolls were mostly used to depict characters from history, but in the early modern era depictions of battle-

field scenes and other topics in the news became popular. Visits to see exhibits of chrysanthemum dolls feature in a number of Japanese novels written in the early twentieth century.

The dolls are decorated with a species of specially developed small chrysanthemum. The author of this book has been obsessed with the history and techniques behind the chrysanthemum dolls for 20 years, in the course of which she has traveled to every corner of Japan. The tradition of the dolls has been on the wane since the end of World War II, but this book provides valuable testimony to the enduring survival of this remarkable example of popular culture. (Yonahara)

Edo no dokusho kai **[Edo Reading Groups]**

By Maeda Tsutomu

Heibonsha, 2012. 193 x 131 mm. 392 pp. ¥3,200. ISBN 978-4-582-84232-6.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many people from various class backgrounds in Japan studied Confucianism. And yet, as is well known, the environment for Confucian studies in Japan was quite different from the one that existed in China and Korea at the time. Japan lacked a route by which Confucian scholars rose via an official examination system to become government bureaucrats and officials; as a result, Confucianism essentially remained a subject of private study without official connections to the government.

These circumstances meant that Confucian scholars in Japan had a greater degree of freedom than their counterparts in other parts of East Asia. The Kyoto-based scholar Itō Jinsai used “reading groups,” in which the teacher and his pupils de-

bated on equal terms, as a method of studying the Chinese classics. The influence of this method eventually spread to many of the private academies run by scholars throughout the country and the domain schools connected to the governments of the regional *daimyō*.

Beyond its immediate impact, the practice later served as the foundations for a Japanese understanding of the Western parliamentary system, which was based on a similar approach to debate. The existence of this system of education by discussion is one reason why the parliamentary system took root so quickly in Japan. This important book clearly reveals a strand of tradition running through Japan's early modern and modern history. (Karube)



Maeda Tsutomu

Born in 1956. Currently a professor at Aichi University of Education. Has a PhD in literature from Tōhoku University and specializes in the history of Japanese thought. Works include *Kinsei Nihon no jugaku to heigaku* [*Confucianism and Military Science in Early Modern Japan*].

Confucian studies and debating groups in early modern Japan

BIOGRAPHY



Kobayashi Kisei

Born in 1968. Debuted in 1995 with *Asian Japanese, which depicted young travelers in photographs and words*. His 1997 *Days Asia* won the Newcomer's Award of the Photographic Society of Japan.

Probing questions on the nature of photography and tragedy

Memowāru [Memoir]

By Kobayashi Kisei

Shūeisha, 2012. 193 x 136 mm. 295 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-08-781517-7.

This nonfiction work traces 20 years in the life of photographer Furuya Seiichi. Born in 1950, Furuya moved to Europe in 1973 and got married in Austria. His wife Christine, who was his frequent subject, took her own life in 1985, leaping to her death from a window of their East Berlin apartment. Furuya took photos of the aftermath. He then moved with his son to Austria, where he published five volumes of photographs of his late wife.

How could Furuya bear to take photographs of his own wife's suicide, and why did he spend more than two decades compiling photos of her in life and death? In retracing Furuya's path, Kobayashi Kisei, a photographer himself, asks a series of probing questions on the meaning of photography. His life too has been marked by a similar compulsion to take photographs

at virtually any time or place. He was in New York on September 11, 2001, and, after some hesitation, traveled to the disaster areas of northeast Japan five months after the tsunami disaster of March 2011. Despite an awareness that the camera lens can be a "cursed eye" through which to see the world, he continues to probe the nature of the profession in his conversations with Furuya.

Confronting the facts head-on, Furuya used his camera to bring indelible memories back to life. Ultimately, however, the book concludes that he never found what he was searching for. But as a result of his continuing dialogue with his wife through photographs, he found a way to live on after her death. (Yonahara)

Okazaki Kyōko ron [On Okazaki Kyōko]

By Sugimoto Shōgō

Shinyōsha, 2012. 194 x 130 mm. 380 pp. ¥3,400. ISBN 978-4-7885-1306-8.

Okazaki Kyōko was one of the leading manga artists of the 1980s and 1990s, carving out a hugely influential position with her realistic depictions of the inner lives of women and girls in the highly evolved consumerist society of modern urban Japan. She began her career at a time when the longstanding rules governing girls' manga were beginning to break down, and in her later work she turned her attention to darker topics including drug abuse, prostitution, anorexia, sadomasochism, and murder.

Although Okazaki has not published since an automobile accident in 1996, her work remains popular. A film version of her best-known book, *Herutā sukerutā* [Helter Skelter], was released in 2012. In recent years, Okazaki's work has been studied from a wide range of perspectives,

including sociology, literature, art, and subculture studies.

Based on Sugimoto's recent doctoral thesis in sociology, this book reconsiders the era from which Okazaki's work emerged and analyzes the depictions of the characters in her manga.

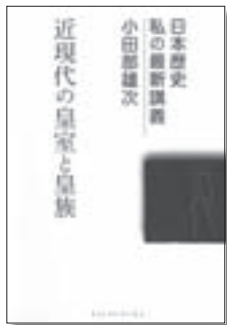
As the fictional, artificial, stage-set character of the city becomes stronger, the girls who appear in Okazaki's works resist and collide against the city even as they accept and enjoy what it has to offer. Okazaki's works explore the unassimilated power of girls to resist the blandishments of the consumer society. She was an artist who asked serious questions about the relationship between women and society. (Yonahara)



Sugimoto Shōgō

Born in 1979. Received his PhD in literature from Tsukuba University. Currently a researcher at his alma mater, where he specializes in manga and cultural theory.

A manga artist's questions about women and society



Otabe Yūji

Born in 1952. Teaches at Shizuoka University of Welfare, specializing in the modern history of Japanese royalty. Main works include *Kōzoku ni totsuida joseitachi* [*The Women Who Married into the Imperial Family*] and *Tennō to miyake* [*The Emperor and the Imperial Line*].

A comprehensive guide to the modern emperor system

Kingendai no kōshitsu to kōzoku **[The Japanese Imperial Family: A Modern History]** By Otabe Yūji

Keibunsha, 2013. 194 x 132 mm. 320 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 978-4-906822-04-1.

Despite the important position it occupies under the Japanese Constitution, few general introductions to the Japanese emperor system or monarchy exist in English. Of course, several books have been published on the subject. But most of these have been written by historians from a critical position, many of them dealing with the figure of the emperor in modern history.

If this book were published in English, it would probably be the first work to record the facts objectively and comprehensively. The author Otabe Yūji is a historian whose long career has been dedicated to concrete research on the Japanese imperial family and aristocracy. Unlike his previous works, this latest book is a broad-perspective study that illustrates the current state of the systems and practices pertaining to the imperial family. The

clear explanations are illustrated with well-chosen historical examples, ensuring that the reader maintains interest throughout.

This book allows the reader to gain a clear understanding of the Japanese royal family—a subject often veiled in mystery. This will help to bring the reader much closer to a true understanding of Japan in a historical context and in the present. (Karube)

Sengo Okinawa to beigun kichi **[Postwar Okinawa and US Military Bases, 1945–1972]**

By Taira Yoshitoshi

Hōsei University Press, 2012. 216 x 151 mm. 422 pp. ¥5,700. ISBN 978-4-588-32129-0.

The presence of US military bases in Okinawa has been a heated political issue for many years. The basic structure of the political dynamics is that the Japanese and American governments negotiate and decide on a direction for policy first, and then the Japanese government informs the local prefectural government in Okinawa of the results of these talks. This sets off another round of negotiations, this time between the central government and the regional authorities within Japan.

During the postwar period of American rule in Okinawa, however, which continued until 1972, a different setup controlled the behavior of the political actors. In those days the American government would first negotiate directly with the political leaders in Okinawa. The Japanese national government was involved in po-

litical developments almost as an outsider.

The history of postwar Okinawa tends to be discussed in terms of diplomatic history between the United States and Japan. This book takes a new approach, showing the situation in a different light by depicting the unique power relations between these three protagonists. In particular, one is struck by how doggedly local leaders in Okinawa sought to find a navigable path between the ideal of reducing the size of the US bases and the reality of living under American military rule. This valuable piece of historical research by an Okinawa-born scholar owes its success to a keen sensitivity to the issues involved and to the growing accumulation of contemporary studies of Japanese diplomatic history. (Karube)



Taira Yoshitoshi

Born in 1972. Completed his PhD at Hōsei University, where he is now adjunct lecturer. Works include *Nichibeiki kankei no naka no Okinawa gunyōchi mondai—1956-nen no Puraisu kankoku o megutte* [*The Problem of Okinawa's Military Bases in Japan-US Relations: The 1956 Price Report*].

A fresh look at the US-Japan-Okinawa relationship

No. 4: Sakaguchi Ango and Toride

In 1939, reeling from a failed love affair and an unsuccessful attempt to write his masterpiece, the writer Sakaguchi Ango moved to the small town of Toride, outside Tokyo. The discoveries he made in this dark and fog-bound town would provide vital inspiration for the series of works that made his name after the war.

In May 1939, the writer Sakaguchi Ango arrived in Toride, Ibaraki Prefecture. At the time officially known as Toride-machi, Kita Sōma-gun, Toride was a worn-out staging post on the old Mito Kaidō road, home to an old-fashioned inn called “Isejin” and two small eating and drinking establishments. He seems to have struggled to find a place to stay; in a letter to his editor at Takemura Shobō in Tokyo dated May 17, he wrote that although the proprietor of Isejin and the local temple priest had done everything they could, he still couldn’t find anywhere suitable: “I spent my first night in Toride at Isejin, where I was shocked by the extent of the silence. I heard an owl hooting in the nearby woods.”

Eventually, through the intercession of Takemura Shobō, he was able to rent a room in the Toride hospital, closed at the time following the recent death of the hospital director. Ango moved into a detached cottage on the hospital grounds, equipped with lavatory and washing facilities, where the pharmacist had previously lived. “It’s a huge building that looks as though it could comfortably accommodate all the sick people in Toride and still have plenty of room left over,” he wrote, boasting of his new lodgings as though he had become head of the hospital himself.

To the north across the Tonegawa River was Toride, Ibaraki Prefecture; to the south, Abiko, in Chiba Prefecture. Today the area is just 40 minutes from Ueno on the JR Jōban Line. Abiko is accessible from central Tokyo via the Chiyoda subway line. Today, the area is a dormitory town that has become completely absorbed into the Tokyo commuter belt, but when Sakaguchi Ango moved here the place was a middle-of-nowhere town with little to offer. In the days before a bridge was built, the only link be-

tween the two sides of the Tonegawa River was by boat, and the town was officially categorized as a “ferry crossing.” These were small, isolated settlements that had grown up around a ferry crossing point or as a base for fishing, typically surrounded by wide expanses of wetlands and marshes. Lakes like Furutonenuma and Teganuma extended across the surrounding countryside like jellyfish, and a prolonged period of rain was enough to cloak the area in fog that would cover the dykes and dams, concealing houses and forests, and turning land and sky alike into a dimly lit and indistinct watery world. It was a village, a kingdom of water, surrounded by a lonely landscape of white fog and mist.

What prompted Ango to move to this small town on the river? The previous year, he had separated from his lover of five years, Yada Tsuseko, and moved to Kyoto. Living in a second-floor room above a cheap restaurant in front of the Fushimi Inari shrine, Ango devoted all his efforts to writing a long novel with the title *Fubuki monogatari* [Tale of a Blizzard]. For two whole months, he poured himself into the work, “bursting with confidence,” before grinding to a halt after 700 manuscript pages, unable to write any more. “My faith in my own ability was torn up by the roots. This was no simple loss of confidence, but nothing less than absolute despair.”

In spring the next year, having managed to bring his novel to an unsatisfactory conclusion, he moved to Tokyo. The novel was published, but vanished without a trace.

“I knew that this time it was now or never: if I did not manage to write something worthwhile this time, I would be better off dead. I moved to a town called Toride, on the shores of the Tonegawa River.”

This is the only “reason” Ango gave for his decision. He had lost his confidence, lost his direction. He felt he had lost touch with his emotions and was living his days in a dry stifling environment like “an endless desert.” He felt himself clunking heavily with every step he took. Summer ended, autumn passed, and winter arrived. “The winter in Toride was cold. The water in the flask by my bedside turned to ice, and in the mornings the ink was frozen solid on my desk.”

Comments like this may give the impression that Ango was writing at fever pitch through the night. In fact, he wrote only sporadically and was not able to write a single line of the kind he longed to write. He would embark on a project only to hurl his pen aside before lying back and staring up at the ceiling. “This town on the Tonegawa was unspeakably cold.”

Ango was 33 at the time. Although he describes his days as “utterly empty, barren, days devoid of meaning,” this was only one aspect of his life at the time. All through his despair, Ango was always observing himself and the people of the town with a humorous, observant eye. There



Sakaguchi Ango at work. Photo by Hayashi Tadahiko. From the collection of the city of Niigata; courtesy of the Ango Kaze no Yakata museum.

were only two places to eat in Toride: a fried pork cutlet shop and a soba (buckwheat noodles) specialist. Day after day Ango ate pork cutlets and drank at the local “tonpachi” sake shop at night. Tonpachi was a measure of sake, in which the owner of the shop would divide a large bottle into eight servings. Each generous serving contained 180 ml or more. According to his essay “The Wine Shop Sage,” the shop’s regular customers were the local farmers, who would get raucously drunk. “The drunkenness of the farmers exceeded anything I could have imagined.”

In Tokyo, rowdy drinkers in high spirits would start boasting about work or talking about their workplace. But the farmers never bragged about their eggplants or potatoes. They never discussed work at all. As soon as they had a few drinks, they would start arguing, and asking “What’s the prime minister doing?” In no time at all, the bar would be full of any number of “prime ministers,” and all hell would break loose. “This simple eating and drinking house was turned into a raucous free-for-all version of the national Diet.”

The “sage” of the title came from Ango’s reputation among the local sots, as a wise saintly figure who would sit calmly and quietly listening to the rowdy disputes of the drinkers around him. In the end, he writes of the “moral” he has learned: “You have to let yourself go and get uproariously drunk with the best of them. So long as you are called a ‘sage,’ even in error, you will never get any work done.”

Whenever he had time to spare, he went out for a walk. But in fact, he always had time to spare. Time hung heavy on his hands, and drove him to despair. He borrowed a boat from Isejin and took it out on the Tonegawa. He tied the boat to an iron bridge and lay back to look up at the sky. One time, he watched as a “drowned corpse, swollen a dark purple color,” floated by.

One day in summer, seeing his child drowning in the river, a father panicked and jumped in to save the boy, and both father and child sank. Ango, who was a good swimmer, leapt into the water without hesitation and searched the bottom of the river for the bodies. Suddenly, “an arm loomed up out of nowhere” in front of his eyes, moving back and forth in the water, as if beckoning to him. Grabbing hold of it as if plucking a stick of burdock from the ground, Ango pulled the body to the surface. The crowd of people who had been looking on broke into a chorus of applause.

From that day on, Ango was a hero in the small town. The local people put up notices all down the river in search of the beloved walking cane he had lost when he plunged into the river. But this newfound local celebrity did little to improve Ango’s mood of despair. He continued to spend his days “in futile searching for my soul, staring all day at the blank paper on my desk, and attempting to chase away the dark shadows of ennui that seemed to cloud everything I did with a feeling of hopeless futility.” When he hadn’t written a single line for more than a year, what good did it do him to become a hero to a bunch of snotty kids in some small town for having dredged up a drowned body?

The year he spent by the banks of the Tonegawa turned out to be an extremely significant time for Sakaguchi



Ango as a writer. The bottomless emptiness and despair he felt during his time in Toride seem to have brought him to a more human and cool awareness of life. He would no longer trust words that had been prepared for others except as a pose. Shared laughter and tears were seen as mere vanity. The flowing passage of time brought nothing new into view. He was like a “swollen dark purple corpse” afloat on the river, poling along with the current and stopping still for an instant, looking at eternity. What reaches the ears in this instant of eternity is an exhalation of breath like a heavy sigh.

In these revelations lay the roots of the dazzling activity that made Ango such a darling of the literary scene in the immediate postwar years: works such as “Nihon bunka shikan” [A Personal View of Japanese Culture], “Darakuron” [Discourse on Decadence], and “Hakuchi” [The Idiot]. From this point on Ango would never take seriously again anything that becomes fixed in time and takes on the appearance of an authority. The characteristics of his life were also the characteristics of his writing. The man was not fixed in place by anything, but rather defined and developed by the slow accumulation of occurrences that took place over the course of life. Everything was like the flowing of a river, positioned within limitless possibility and movement.

Toride today bears little resemblance to the place that Ango knew. Toride International Golf Club . . . Tsukuba Country Club . . . Jōsō Country Club . . . Ibaraki Golf Club . . . The place has become the haunt of golfing enthusiasts of indeterminate nationality, sporting bright underwear and scorched red faces, the proud children of international capitalism. But Toride suited Ango precisely because it was a town with nothing to recommend it. Its very emptiness and desolation, enveloped in white mist, suited him down to the ground. It was the perfect match for his empty heart. As he wrote after leaving this town on the banks of the flowing river:

“Since leaving that town, I have never gone back. Just to remember it makes me sad.” This is the perfect encapsulation of how Sakaguchi lived his life, and how he used his experiences in his writing.

(Ikeuchi Osamu, essayist and scholar of German literature)

(Continued from page 3)

manga-style covers and illustrations. However, these are not hard-and-fast rules; some light novels are not illustrated at all. Essentially, they are books driven more by a concern with commercial appeal and the demands of the market than by literary merit. A surprising number of writers work in the genre and their turnover is quite rapid, making it difficult to single out any writers in particular. Light novels can typically be found piled high in a corner of the bookstore, bearing the names of specialized divisions of the major publishing houses—Dengeki Bunko, Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko, Kodansha Novels, and so forth.

Critically speaking, light novels are much less prestigious than literary publishing, existing more or less on a level with manga. Critics scarcely deign to look at them, and many adult readers (especially those over 40) are unaware of their existence. Recently, however, some have begun to argue that such a popular phenomenon should not be ignored, and some newspapers have begun to carry capsule reviews. A number of novelists writing today made the transition to literary fiction after achieving commercial success with light novels, written under another

pen name. Examples are Ubukata Tō, Kirino Natsuo, Yui-kawa Kei, and Iwai Shimako.

How will the light-novel genre and its relationship to mainstream literary publishing evolve in the years to come? Only time will tell. One thing we can say with confidence is that as long as our society remains in flux, the way people read, write, and publish novels will continue to change as well.

Chō Kyō (Zhang Jing)

Born in Shanghai in 1953. Received his doctorate in comparative culture from the University of Tokyo. Currently a professor at Meiji University. His previous publications include *Koi no Chūgoku bunmei shi* [A Cultural History of Love in China], for which he won the 1993 Yomiuri Prize for Literature, and *Kindai Chūgoku to “ren’ ai” no hakken* [Modern China and the Discovery of “Love”], for which he won the 1995 Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities. Recent works include *Ibunka rikai no otoshiana* [Pitfalls in Cultural Understanding] and *Umi o koeru Nihon bungaku* [Crossing the Border: A New Aspect of Japanese Literature]. Member of the JBN Advisory Board.

Events and Trends

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The winners of the 149th Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes have been announced. The Akutagawa Prize was awarded to Fujino Kaori for *Tsume to me* [Nails and Eyes], published in the April issue of *Shinchō*. The Naoki Prize went to Sakuragi Shino for



Prizewinners Sakuragi Shino (left) and Fujino Kaori (photo courtesy of Sankei Shimbun)

Hoteru rōyaru [Hotel Royal], published by Shūeisha.

Fujino’s story depicts a young woman living together with her married lover and his daughter in the final days of their affair. The awkward relationship between the woman and the daughter is sensitively portrayed from the daughter’s perspective.

Many of Sakuragi’s stories take place in the author’s native Hokkaido, and focus on relationships between men and women. She won the prize with a collection of short stories set in an isolated love hotel in northern Japan. The collection describes the various backgrounds of the customers, from the hotel’s early years through to its closing days. The author’s family really did run a love hotel of the same name; Sakuragi said she had always wanted to write about her memories of the hotel.

Mishima and Yamamoto Prizes

The winners of the 26th Mishima

Yukio and Yamamoto Shūgorō Prizes have been announced. The Mishima Yukio Prize went to Murata Sayaka for *Shiro iro no machi no sono hone no taion no* [The White-Colored Town, Its Bones, Its Body Temperature], published by Asahi Shimbun Publications. Ono Fuyumi received the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize for *Zan’e* [Stain], published by Shinchōsha.

Set within a rapidly developing suburban community, Murata’s work portrays the physical and emotional changes undergone by an adolescent girl as she enters puberty. *Zan’e* is a horror story in which strange phenomena start to occur in an apparently nondescript apartment building. An investigation reveals the remarkable truth that lies hidden beneath the surface of the land.

Dazai Osamu Diary, Notes Made Public

A collection of 22 early manuscripts, including diaries and notebooks, by

Dazai Osamu (1909–48), the well-known author of *Ningen shikkaku* [No Longer Human] and other modern classics, has been donated to the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature, located in Tokyo's Meguro district. The notebooks contain frequent references to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, including several caricature likenesses of the writer, providing new evidence of Akutagawa's influence on Dazai's early development as a writer.

Andō Hiroshi, professor of modern Japanese literature at the University of Tokyo, says the documents are revelatory: "Until now, there were very few handwritten manuscripts that showed what Dazai's interests were before he became a writer. It is a real treasure trove." The Museum of Modern Japanese Literature describes the collection as "primary sources that shed light on the period of Dazai's school days, when his literary aspirations were starting to take form."

The notes were donated by the family of the late Yokoyama Takeo (former vice governor of Aomori Prefecture), who received them as a gift from Dazai's older brother.

Novels Set in Publishing Houses, Bookstores

One trend that has been catching the eye recently is a sequence of new novels set in publishing companies and bookstores. At a time when the publishing industry is struggling, the trend perhaps demonstrates readers' and writers' lingering sense of affection for publishing and books.

In *Yume o uru otoko* [The Man Who Sells Dreams] (Ohta Publishing) by Hyakuta Naoki, an eccentric editor works in "shared-cost" publishing, in which authors are required to cover the publishing costs of their books. The story of a man who makes money by catering to the vanity of people who dream about publishing their own books satirizes people's egotistical desire for "self-expression." Despite his line of work, readers are likely to be attracted to the main character, who sells his clients the "dream" of seeing their own book in print.

Aono Kei describes a real bookstore and the working lives of two

employees in *Shoten gāru 2* [Bookstore Girl 2], published by PHP.

Shining light on the sales and publicity side of the business, Satomi Ran's *Mirion serā gāru* [Million Seller Girl] (Chūōkōron-Shinsha) looks at the ins and outs of selling books and sheds light on some of the challenges confronting the industry through numerous realistic events. Satomi says he was inspired to write the book by hearing his editor talk about the teamwork that goes into selling books, involving not only the author and editor but also sales and logistics staff and bookstore employees.

Dictionary of Chinese Cultural History Published

In the works since 1992, *Chūgoku bunkashi daijiten* [Encyclopedia of Chinese Cultural History] (Taishūkan Shoten) has been released. It is a comprehensive listing of 7,800 terms covering the whole scope of China's vast cultural history in one volume for easy research.

Chikusa Masaaki, emeritus professor at Kyoto University and one of the leading editors on the project, explains that "the parameters were widened to encompass all aspects of culture. All the entries were written by specialists in that field. Having experts from so many fields participate made it possible to avoid biases of interpretation and allowed us to produce what I am confident will serve as a dependable resource for Chinese studies in Japan."

Some 482 writers contributed to the project. Terms well known in Japan, such as *ūroncha* (oolong tea) and *Tanabata* (a summer festival), are listed along with other words, such as *tōryūmon* (a gateway to success), which many people use without any awareness of their Chinese origin. The dictionary also includes references to China-related cultural phenomena from wider East Asia, including Japan and Korea.

Nakamura Fuminori Participates in US Book Festival

Nakamura Fuminori enjoyed interacting with readers at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books 2013, held in

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April. Nakamura was a finalist for a prize in the mystery/thriller category for his novel *Suri* [The Thief] (see *JBN* No 64, p. 6). "It's all about entertainment," he said. "I've always asked myself how to keep the reader happy. An event like this really brings all that together as a system. It was a lot of fun. It reminded me that a writer's job is to keep readers entertained."

Suri is the first of Nakamura's works to be translated into English. The author has attracted attention after the *Wall Street Journal* included his book on its Best of Fiction 2012 list. There is talk of possible interest from Hollywood.

Correction

In the review of *Murayama Tomoyoshi: gekiteki sentan* [Murayama Tomoyoshi and the Dramatic Avant Garde] (see *JBN* No. 76, p. 10), we mistakenly gave the author Iwamoto Kenji's year of birth as 1936. Professor Iwamoto was in fact born in 1943. We apologize for the error. In the same review, we ought to have made clear that the director and actor referred to as "Senda Korenari" was also commonly known by the name "Senda Koreya." Apologies.

A Man of Letters and a *Bel Esprit*

It is a sunny afternoon when Horie Toshiyuki welcomes me to his corner office on the 11th floor of a new building in Waseda University—a wonderful vantage point from which to look out across campus. Not that Horie appreciates the view. Jokingly, he laments: “I was allocated this room at random. Rather than all this scenery, I’d rather have had walls on all sides. I need space for my books.”

Hundreds of books in French and Japanese line the shelf space that covers one side wall from ceiling to floor. Teetering piles of books and literary journals cover much of the floor and half of the desk.

In this setting, Horie, 49, looks very much the part: professor of creative writing, scholar and translator of French literature, and award-winning author and critic. Surprisingly, though, Horie says he never intended to become a full-time writer or scholar. He decided not to finish his graduate studies at the University of Tokyo and started teaching French at the Tokyo Institute of Technology.

“The writing really got going when an editor of a monthly journal about France asked me to do a series of articles,” he explains. “The idea was that I could write about anything I liked, so long as it was something to do with France,” a country where Horie had spent three years at the University of Paris III on a French government scholarship.

Always drawn to the unconventional, Horie wrote a series of essay-like fictions, in which a first-person narrator promenades through the suburbs of Paris, taking readers on a comfortably paced and meditative stroll through the French arts, including the poetry and prose of Jacques Réda, the novels of François Maspero, and the photographs of Robert Doisneau. A winning combination of fiction, essay, literary criticism, and travel writing, Horie’s ruminative pieces marked the arrival of something totally new in Japanese writing.

His relaxed and graceful prose is marked by subtle insights and allusions, enticing readers to find out more about the books and art works mentioned in his stories. “That’s my hope,” Horie says in his soft voice: “That readers will be induced to pick up some of the books I refer to in my writing, just as I learn about new writers from things I read about in other people’s works.”

Charmed by Horie’s unflustered, down-to-earth tone, the editor who discovered him published his columns as a book, *Kōgai e* [To the Suburbs]. This debut volume soon led to approaches from other editors, and Horie started to win a succession of literary prizes.

“Everything I’ve written so far has been in response to an editor’s request,” Horie says. “I’ve never submitted anything to competitions or gone begging for an opportunity to write.”

Despite this passive approach, his second book, *Oparaban* [Auparavant (Earlier)], won the Mishima Yukio Prize. *Kagan bōjitsu shō* [Riverbank Days] and *Seigen kyokusen* [Sine Curves] (see *JBN* No. 64) both took the Yomiuri Prize for Literature, and his first full-length novel, about a single man raising his niece, *Nazuna* [Nazuna] (see *JBN*

No. 71), was awarded the Itō Sei Literary Prize. He won the Akutagawa Prize for his best-known work, *Kuma no shikiishi* [The Bear’s Paving Stone], which centers on the unlikely reunion between the Japanese protagonist and an elderly Jewish friend who lives in rural Normandy.

Yukinuma to sono shūhen [Yukinuma and Its Environs], a collection of smartly observed pieces about small incidents in the lives of a group of villagers, won the Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize. These last two books have also been published in French, as *Le pavé de l’ours* and *Le marais des neiges*, by the prestigious French publisher Gallimard. “I’m lucky that a prominent scholar of Japanese literature like Anne-Bayard Sakai took the time to translate my pieces, and that Gallimard, which is known for only putting out things it really likes, took a chance on printing my books,” he says with a perplexed tilt of his head.

Gallimard’s commitment to publishing Horie’s work in translation is testament to the author’s artistic sensibilities as well as his intellectual rigor. Through arresting visual images, including a photograph of a pork-smoking hut and a teddy bear whose eyes are closed over with X-shaped stitches, these tales and events come together to form a powerful evocation of personal sorrow. The book’s title, which means “an unwelcome kindness” in French, was taken from a La Fontaine fable.

Horie’s insistence on high standards extends to exterior details of his books such as binding and printing. Just like the two books published by Gallimard, Horie’s books in Japanese feature austere but attractive cover images—something that is unusual in Japan, where graphic designers tend to favor eye-catching finishes.

Horie explains by pointing at his library full of French novels, all of them sporting similar white covers: “One of the things that first attracted me to French literature was the plain white covers marked with just the title and the author’s name. I loved the sense they convey that books should compete on the quality of their content. There’s nothing superficial or extraneous about them.”

“Probably my publishers think I’m being ridiculously headstrong,” Horie adds with a smile, “but I’ve always insisted that they use gray for the spines of my books. That way, when my books are all out of print, bookstore owners can bundle them together with a plastic band and poor students can buy them for next to nothing, just like I used to do.”

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Horie Toshiyuki

Born in 1964. Author, critic, translator of modern French literature, and professor of creative writing at Waseda University. Awarded the Mishima Yukio Prize for *Oparaban*; the Akutagawa Prize for *Kuma no shikiishi*, which is also available in French and Korean; the Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize for *Yukinuma to sono shūhen*; the Yomiuri Prize for Literature for *Seigen kyokusen*; and the Itō Sei Literary Prize for *Nazuna*.