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## Sound Japan

Christopher Yohmei Blasdel

Several people sit in a simple tatami-matted room, enjoying the deliberate movements of the tea ceremony. All is silent except for the susurrant rattle of the teapot’s iron lid as steam rushes out. This murmur is punctuated by the soft whisks of the bamboo stirring brush.

A *shishiodoshi* bamboo ladle, set along the stream in a traditional Japanese garden, slowly fills with water. As critical mass is achieved, the liquid is dropped. The base of the ladle hits a stone on the rebound, sending a report throughout the garden.

In another part of the garden, a *suikinkutsu* jar, partially filled with water, is buried just below ground level. As water slowly drops into the jar from above, sonorous plops escape into the garden, audible only to those who wait, patiently, near the jar’s opening.

Cicada hum in unison from the luxuriant growth of summer. Later, as evening cools to night, the shrill sounds of their *bigurashi* cousins reverberate back and forth, as they call to each other; the same phrases repeated at different pitches and rhythms.

Sounds of a shakuhachi flute drift over the grounds of a quiet temple. The soulful tones lead directly to the heart, as if they were meant for none but oneself. Farther away, in the center of the city, the strains of shamisen lute music can be heard as a delicate punctuation to the traffic noises.

These descriptions of Japan’s soundscape are still not uncommon, although in the cacophony and din of the modern nation one must make an effort to search out such fleeting but richly satisfying sounds. This article will attempt to describe what sound has meant in an artistic and religious context in Japan and briefly outline the idea of “timbre aesthetics” in *hōgaku* (traditional Japanese music) and its relationship to cultural perceptions of sound. I will also describe how awareness of timbre (the tonal overstructure of sound that gives each instrument its characteristic sound) plays a vital role in traditional Japanese music and how modern Japanese composers approach timbre in their compositions. Lastly, the contradictions of the traditional receptivity to sound contrasted with the stressful sound pollution of modern Japanese society will be discussed.

**Ear Cleaning** Before discussing sound we need to talk about one of the most basic of all senses, that of listening. It is both easier and more difficult than most imagine. Above all, careful and sensitive listening is indispensable for the under-

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standing of a culture and its music, and listening must be an active, as opposed to a passive, effort.

We describe our quotidian experiences with visual metaphors and relegate most sensory perception to that realm. Without considering the preponderance of the visual, we use such expressions as “What did you see?” “Take a look,” “Go sightseeing.” Rarely do we ask, “What did you hear?” and never do we say, “Take a listen” or “Go ‘soundhearing.’” Innate understanding of a situation is expressed with the succinct “I see.” Why is it we do not hear here?

Yet it is the auditory sense that gives us our true bearings in the world. Since sound waves actually penetrate our body and are processed by organs deep within the recesses of the ear, listening, like breathing, provides us with a sense of depth and connectivity with the outside world.

Our ears are never turned off. They reach out into the surroundings, like diligent detectives, picking up every rustle and whisper. Unlike our eyes, our ears cannot be closed, and therefore the brain creates a myriad of filtering mechanisms to keep out extraneous and/or unwanted sounds. Such filters are necessary in a world filled with unpleasant or meaningless noise, but when the filters are habitually left on, they create significant obstacles to sensitive hearing.

What is needed is to learn how to control the filters, clean out the ears, and reevaluate the sounds we chose to heed. Such “ear cleaning,” a kind of sensitivity training for the ear, was made popular by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer (b. 1933) in a course he designed for his students at Simon Fraser University in the late 1960s. In his pamphlet *Ear Cleaning*, he describes the process: “I felt my primary task in this course was to open ears. I have tried always to induce students to notice sounds they have never really listened to before, listen like mad to the sounds of their own environment and the sounds they inject into their environment.”<sup>1</sup>

Everyone—student, scholar, casual tourist to Japan, and, most important, the Japanese themselves—would do well to take a hint from this idea and pay more attention to sounds, especially if they are interested in enjoying and understanding Japanese music. To quote Schafer again, “Ears perform delicate operations, and therefore ear cleanliness is an important prerequisite for all music listening and music playing.”<sup>2</sup>

**A Cultural Sensitivity Toward Sound** “The Japanese are a people who have been endowed with a keen receptivity towards timbre from ages past,” writes composer Tōru Takemitsu (1930–96).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one of the earliest chronicles of Japan, the *Nihongi* (720), describes the creation of the land through the imagery of sound—a drum beat. “The noise like that of drums was the sound made by the

gods in constructing this island.”<sup>4</sup>

Where, exactly, does this cultural sensitivity toward timbre arise?

My feeling is that there is a basic and profound connection between sound and the spiritual/religious process of enlightenment, especially in the context of Zen Buddhism. Sound (including everything from song and musical tones to mundane animal cries and accidental sounds of nature) becomes a vehicle for elevating the mind onto higher levels. Like the sirens’ songs, a carefully placed sound has the effect of disorienting the mind, cracking open the door and allowing the soul to slip through into a new space. This can be frightening to someone who is not prepared, but to a person who has disciplined his or her mind through rigorous training and practice, it is a revelation.

Before turning to religious or musical examples to understand the importance of sound in the spiritual awakening, let’s take a look at some literary examples, many of which show a deep sensitivity and innate understanding of the relationship of sound and the listener. Perhaps the most well known is the famous haiku<sup>5</sup> of the frog by the celebrated poet Bashō (1644–94):

At the ancient pond  
a frog plunges into  
the sound of water

The setting is prosaic, but the result is an overwhelming of the senses with pure sound. As Daisetz T. Suzuki (1870–1966) explains it, “This sound coming out of the old pond was heard by Bashō as filling the entire universe.”<sup>6</sup> The sound crescendos to fill the world, subject/object dichotomy ceases, and a state of absolute annihilation of the senses occurs. The frog, the pond, and Bashō all cease to exist in the sound of water, yet still they are. All becomes just “the sound,” which is recreated for us in the haiku.

Other examples of Bashō’s haiku that ring in our ears include:

A cuckoo cries,  
and through a thicket of bamboo  
the late moon shines

Awakened at midnight  
by the sound of the water jar  
cracking from the ice

And my favorite:



Christopher Yohmei Blasdel.

Lonely silence,  
a single cicada's cry  
sinking into stone

The painter and poet Buson (1716–83) also was fond of using sound in writing. His sounds tend toward the dramatic; they jump out and hit the reader like the *keisaku* stick used on Zen meditating novices to keep them awake:

A lightning flash—  
the sound of water drops  
falling through the bamboo

The late evening crow  
of deep autumn longing  
suddenly cries out

The *thwack* of an ax  
in the heart of a thicket—  
and a woodpecker's *tat-tats!*

The poetry and stories left by Buddhist monks also contain a wealth of sound. The Zen priests' experience of *kenshō*, or sudden awareness of the true nature of things, was often instigated by some kind of sound. Dōgen (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō Zen sect, was said to have attained enlightenment upon hearing the cry of a nightingale and the sound of bamboo splitting. Sounds, both musical and nonmusical, were also vital to the experiences of the famous Zen priest Ikkyū (1394–1481).

Throughout Ikkyū's *Kyōunshū* [The Crazy Cloud Anthology], a collection of Chinese-style poetry, there are many references to both music and sound as vehicles for enlightenment. Most revealing is his account of his own moment of *kenshō*, occasioned by the cry of a crow that Ikkyū heard while meditating on a small boat on Lake Biwa.

Now, as ten years ago,  
A mind attached to arrogance and anger  
But at the laugh of the crow  
As adept from the dust arises  
And an illumined face sings  
In the morning sun.<sup>7</sup>

In the Surangama Sutra, the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (known in Japan as Kannon; this Japanese rendering of the original Sanskrit means “seeing/hearing”) gives a lengthy discourse on entry into the supersensible realm, or *samadhi*, through the organ of hearing. The trick for such self-cultivation is to realize the duality of nature and by doing so attain a transcendent state that embraces the opposites. Not an easy task, to be sure, but Kannon says that proper hearing is the most suitable for this exercise.

Through concentration on an external sound, a distinction is created between the listener and the source of the sound. Further meditation on the sound, however, leads into a realm where there is no distinction between

the listener and the listened, between the action and the deed, between life and death. This, stresses Kannon, is the true way to control the mind and look into the essence of nature. It is rather like listening to a frog plunge into the sound of water.

Mantra Yoga—the intoning of certain holy syllables, usually consisting of the name of the historical Buddha—was extensively used as a means for attaining enlightenment. Such “sound yoga” is a mainstay of Buddhism. It is much easier to recite a mantra than it is to concentrate on breathing or to visualize various mandala, because anyone, regardless of learning, can recite prayers or intone mantras. It is no wonder many popular present-day Buddhist sects emphasize chanting as a means to salvation.

### Attaining Enlightenment Through One Tone

The shakuhachi, of all Japan's musical instruments (besides the voice itself), has the longest connection with spiritual seeking.<sup>8</sup> A popular epithet among shakuhachi players, *Ichi on jōbutsu* (“attaining enlightenment through a single tone”), suggests the depth that can be attained through simply playing and concentrating on the single tone.

The idea of tone as spiritual salvation is central to the theme of the *Kyotaku Denki Kokuji Kai*, a shakuhachi-related document published in Edo (present-day Tokyo) at the end of the eighteenth century. This document outlines the putative origins of the Fuke shakuhachi sect, which flourished during the Edo period (1603–1868).

The document begins with the story of an actual Zen monk, Fuke, who lived in China in the seventh century. The eccentric Fuke walked about, ringing his bell and speaking such bewildering sentences as “If attacked from the light, I will strike back in light, if attacked from the dark, I will strike back in the dark, if attacked from all four quarters, I will strike back as the whirlwind. If attacked from emptiness, I will lash out like a flail.”

The purpose of Fuke's cryptic words, along with the sound of the bell, is much like the present-day koan used in Zen meditation, in which a series of sounds and nonlogical ideas act to jog the quotidian consciousness enough to let the reality of another, more spiritual dimension enter.

The document continues with the story of the novice monk Chōhaku, who tried to persuade master Fuke to teach him the secrets of bell ringing. Fuke refused, so Chōhaku fashioned a flute and named it *Kyotaku* (literally, “that which is not a bell”). His idea was to imitate the bell's ringing with the flute. Various shakuhachi pieces extant today with the name “*Kyorei*” or “*Reibo*” suggest the shakuhachi's imitation of Fuke's bell.

The *Kyotaku Denki* also describes the origin of the wandering monks called *komusō*. The *komusō* were a common feature of the Edo-period landscape. Wearing deep



A group of modern-day komusō at the World Shakuhachi Festival 1998, in Boulder, Colorado.



A sankyoku-style shakuhachi ensemble. From left to right: Mariko Yamamoto on koto, Satomi Fukami on shamisen, Christopher Yohmei Blasdel on shakuhachi.

basket-shaped hats, these monks walked the countryside, visited various Fuke temples, and played shakuhachi. Their aim was spiritual enlightenment through sound, a practice they called *suizen*, “blowing Zen” (as opposed to *zazen*, “sitting Zen”). They enjoyed considerable protection by and support from the government and, in a time when internal travel in Japan was stringently controlled, they were allowed to move around freely. *Komusō* were also highly visible in the literature, theater, and woodblock prints of the time; in the Kabuki play *Suke-roku*, the eponymous protagonist is a shakuhachi-wielding *komusō* dandy.

Although the historical references in the *Kyotaku Denki* were specious and the *komusō* had grown quite decadent by the Edo period’s end, their original motives were pure. They used the shakuhachi as a discipline for enlightenment and blew their flutes with the realization that just one tone has the power to bring about buddhahood.

**Aesthetics of *Hōgaku*** Much Japanese music, especially of the Edo period, was not overtly religious; nonetheless, it was influenced by Buddhism and the awareness of sound as a holistic experience.

Japanese musical tastes and aesthetics vary, of course, according to historical period, but love of timbre seems to transcend all the ages, continuing into the present. A highly evolved awareness and use of timbre is, therefore, a definitive aspect of traditional Japanese music. Both the music and the instruments are structured in a way that requires the performer to consciously manipulate tone color in order to bring about the full effect of the music, and appreciation of the various timbres is a key to understanding the music. It is also a key to appreciating much Japanese contemporary music.

Again, literature provides us with an example of ancient Japanese sensibilities toward sound. An important subtheme in the *Genji Monogatari* [Tale of Genji], the novel describing Japanese court life of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, is the feelings and sentiments provoked by the timbres of various *hōgaku* instruments, such as the *biwa* lute, shakuhachi vertical bamboo flute, *fue*

transverse bamboo flute, koto thirteen-stringed zither, *shō* bamboo mouth organ, and *bichiriki* double-reed vertical flute. Many of the characters in *Genji* played these instruments, which were used in the *gagaku* classical court orchestra of the times.

The individual timbres of the above-mentioned instruments all differ according to the unique sonic properties of their construction and playing techniques, but a few common aesthetic points are evident. One of these is the idea of the perishing tone. Rather than the beginning, or incipit tone, the tone that remains and lingers into fade-out is more important; and many techniques, like *biki-iro*, *oshide*, *ato-oshi*, *tsuki-iro*, and *yuri-iro*, executed on the perishing tones of the koto are employed to alter and ornament the perishing tones.

Another salient aesthetic point, common to all instruments, is the use of “nonmusical” sounds. In nineteenth-century Western orchestral music we are much accustomed to hearing pure sounds, with no scratching of the strings or breath in the wind instruments. Indeed, such extraneous noise suggests musical incompetence. Not so in traditional Japanese music. Scraping the strings of the koto, breathy sounds on the shakuhachi, and the unique pitches from the *kotsuzumi* hand-held drum are highly appreciated as the pinnacle of the art. Especially intriguing is the *sawari* twang of the shamisen, a three-stringed plucked lute that came into Japan via China and Okinawa in the sixteenth century and quickly became the most widely used instrument in Japan. Somewhat reminiscent of the twang of the Indian sitar, *sawari* is created by allowing the shamisen string to come into slight contact with the hard wood of the instrument’s neck. The result is a slightly impure ringing of sound that remains and builds in intensity after the string is plucked.

Japanese instrumental timbres are greatly influenced by and imitative of natural sounds; wind in the pines, insect cries, waves, etc. In fact, many Japanese-music scholars have suggested that the premodern Japanese didn’t make strict distinctions between the sounds of nature and the sounds of art music.

A third aesthetic point—closely related to the others

—is the fact that traditional Japanese music is extremely economical and uses very limited materials to create the maximum effect, something often pointed out in the lectures and writings of the noted Japanese-music scholar Dr. William Malm.

Simplicity can be observed, foremost, in the construction of the instruments themselves. For example, the shakuhachi is basically a piece of hollowed bamboo, fifty-four centimeters in length, with five finger holes and a simple mouth-piece insert, yet there are endless possibilities for producing a variety of timbres. Likewise, the three strings of the shamisen are able to handle extremely complicated melodic lines that often undergo rapid modulations.

It is because of these structural and sonic limitations inherent in the instruments and music that the individual tone and its timbre take on such importance. The single tone and its timbric richness create a microcosm of total aesthetic expression, much as the sparse lines of a haiku poem suggest images that reach far beyond the actual words.

Any serious discussion of traditional Japanese music and aesthetics should include the rich vocal tradition—from the *shōmyō* Buddhist chanting to the dramatic recitative and song of the *gidayū* in the Bunraku puppet theater. Song comprises more than eighty percent of all Japanese music, and timbre in voice is just as important as it is in instrumental music.

Space constraints prevent a further and detailed analysis of these aesthetic points, but I believe that any listener with a sensitive ear can hear and respond to them. Awareness of this aesthetic makes a heretofore formidable and distant tradition accessible and understandable; it is also the key to understanding the process by which many successful contemporary Japanese composers approach their work.

**Timbre in Contemporary Compositions** In discussing contemporary Japanese composers, it is helpful to realize that until relatively recently there has been a distinction between composers who were trained in Western compositional techniques, with influences primarily from German, French, and more recently, American composers, and those composers whose musical influences stemmed from their association and immersion in traditional Japanese



A shakuhachi.

music. The Western-trained composers worked to assimilate mostly European-style orchestration and musical sensibilities, while the *hōgaku* composers, who were for the most part performers themselves, worked upon expanding the limits of their tradition. It is only recently that the Western-trained composers have begun to cross over and experiment with Japanese instruments in their compositions, perhaps the most famous and earliest example being Tōru Takemitsu's 1964 composition *November Steps*, which successfully combined the shakuhachi and *biwa* with a Western orchestra.

In their own thinking, most Japanese maintain a conscious division between *hōgaku* and Western music, due to a very Western-oriented music-education system and a feudalistic structure pervading the *hōgaku* world. Takemitsu was no exception. It was at the suggestion of John Cage that he began using the shakuhachi for his composition.

Because of the very nature of *hōgaku* instruments, however, it is easy to ensure traditional aesthetics in contemporary compositions that use these instruments—indeed, that is the reason many composers write for them in the first place. What I want to point out here is how *hōgaku* techniques and subtleties are translocated to Western instruments to obtain a similar effect.

In this, Takemitsu was a master. His style, characterized by long, deftly articulated phrases that move through time, seems to pay a kind of homage to the traditional aesthetics of timbre. “The sensing of timbre is none other than the perception of the succession of movement within sound.”<sup>9</sup> Timbre in *hōgaku* also plays a very important spatial role. Whereas in Western classical music the highly developed harmonic system confers a sense of spatial expansion and structure, the individual tone color and its minute variations do the same for traditional Japanese music. Takemitsu unites the spatial and temporal aspects as he creates fascinating timbres that metamorphose through time. For him, this shifting of sound “is symbolized by the word *sawari* (which also has the meaning of touching something lightly), something of a dynamic state.”<sup>10</sup>

Takemitsu also allows for various “nonmusical” sounds in structuring his work; an appreciation of natural sounds reminiscent of *hōgaku*. This use of cacophony in well-tempered music can be heard in his *musique concrète* compositions, such as *Ki* (Tree, for temple bells, prepared piano, and wooden instruments) and *Yuki* (Snow, for shakuhachi and stone instruments). This latter piece, helped by the consummate ability of the shakuhachi to alter tonal colors, celebrates timbre through both time and space.

Ryōhei Hirose (b. 1930) is contemporary with Takemitsu and was also trained in Western compositional techniques. Although the majority of Hirose's works are for Western orchestral instruments, he writes much

more extensively for Japanese musical instruments than did Takemitsu. Nonetheless, Hirose's pieces for Western instruments demonstrate a similar approach to the importance of timbre in providing temporal and spatial depth.

Especially important for Hirose's development of timbre aesthetics is the shakuhachi. "For better or worse, the tone of shakuhachi is the soul of the Japanese."<sup>11</sup> The absolute control of the breath, the wide range of musical dynamics, and the subtle possibilities of variation in rhythm and melisma (the elongation of sung vowel sounds) were aspects of this instrument that Hirose could incorporate into his music. The list of compositions Hirose wrote for the solo or duo shakuhachi from the early 1970s through the 1980s is quite impressive,<sup>12</sup> but equally interesting are the works for solo or small-ensemble Western wind instruments that are clearly influenced by shakuhachi techniques. Perhaps the best examples are the series of compositions he wrote after several trips to India in the 1970s.

*Kalavinka* (1973), for recorder, oboe, strings, and percussion, has for its theme the mythical bird of the same name, which lives in the Western Paradise of the buddha Amida (Amitabha or Amitayus). The oboe sings back and forth (reminiscent of bird calls) with the recorder in a call and response technique, *kakeai*, that is found throughout Edo-period shamisen and koto music. *Pippala* (1973) features a bassoon playing delicate portamentos, microtones, and nonmusical sounds (overblowing and double tones) in very meditative, long phrases (the name of the title signifies the bodhi tree under which the historical Buddha attained enlightenment). The bassoon strongly suggests a shakuhachi timbre, and the harp punctuates these tones with short arpeggiated chords, sounds very much like koto techniques that alter the perishing tones.

Of this series, however, perhaps the most significant composition is *Paramita* (1973), for solo alto flute. The playing techniques of the flute are very closely patterned after the shakuhachi. These techniques include a dynamic overblowing of the sound, which produces an explosive rush of air (*muraiki* on the shakuhachi), delicate portamento and pitch bending (*nayashi*), finger trills (*korokoro*), and the long, meditative tones that are the shakuhachi's hallmark.

Lastly, let us take a look at the work of a postwar-generation Japanese composer. Somei Satoh, born in 1947, combines in his music a high degree of sensitivity to traditional timbre with the powerful expressionism of nineteenth-century Romanticism and the cleverness of electronics. His sonorities of sound and the sensation of pulse in his music—almost like the vibrations of the vocal *kobushi* melisma found throughout all Japanese vocal music—create, as in Takemitsu's work, a sensation of the tone that exists only for the sake of itself, and in which time seems to be caught in a rhythmic "limbo." In Satoh's

own words, "My music is limited to certain elements of sound and there are many calm repetitions. There is also much prolongation of a single sound. I think silence and the prolongation of sound [are] the same thing in terms of space."<sup>13</sup>

The title piece of Satoh's CD *Litania* is for two pianos with a digital delay. The piece uses the reverberative aspects of the piano (aided by the electronic delay), with which a basic tremolo is repeated, ever undulating in intensity and volume. "This creates a sonic interference resulting in an extremely rich harmonic texture, which is further intensified by the overlaying of second or third piano."<sup>14</sup> In addition to the intense concentration of the tonal sonorities, we have in this composition another aspect that is common to *bōgaku*, that of creating the maximum effect with the minimum amount of material. Although compared with traditional Japanese instruments, there is nothing minimal about a piano, Satoh is able to create on it the effect of great economy, and among the rich tapestry of quick tremolos and massive pianic reverberations, one begins to hear drones that suggest the lucid intensity of the single tone.

#### Modern Insensitivity to Sound?

Now that we've seen how awareness of the beauty of timbre and the single tone informs and enriches Japanese religion, poetry, and music, let's go back to the elegiac soundscapes evoked at the opening of this essay. They make Japan sound like the most sonically pleasing place on earth; a nation of silence punctuated only by most delicate and sublime sounds.

Actually, the opposite is closer to the truth. Like all urban spaces, Japanese cities are filled with noxious noise from trains, cars, and planes that bombard the ears from all directions. The interiors of buildings, walkways, and shopping streets that might escape the noises of the city are filled instead with announcements and incessant background music.

Ride any escalator in Japan and you are reminded, by hidden loud speakers, to keep a firm grip on the handrail and on your children and remain standing in the center. Bus rides are punctuated with shrill voices announcing the bus stop in between commercial advertisements and warnings that the brakes might be applied suddenly so you should hold on tightly. While queuing for a museum show, young men with intimidating loudspeakers order you to stay in line and get your tickets ready. In between the loud bells and inane little melodies announcing the train doors' closing, the station attendants on the platform yell at the passengers through loudspeakers, ordering them to stop running for trains.

Perhaps it would be better in the countryside, one might think, but it is actually worse there. A townwide speaker system informs the residents, minute by minute, of every meeting and town activity. Escaping to moun-

tains or beach offers no relief either. The sounds of wind through the pines and the swish-swish of skis plying fresh snow on the ski slopes are now replaced with loudspeakers blaring heavy-beat popular music throughout the mountains. On the beaches, loudspeakers periodically exhort the beachgoers to swim within the buoys, exercise before entering the water, not drink too much liquor, and be careful of the tides, hot sands, pickpockets, and food poisoning. Whence the healing sounds of the waves and water?

Some of the modern-day cacophony, especially the ubiquitous use of loudspeakers, can be explained in terms of power. Simply put, the bigger sound system you have, the more power of control you exert over the listeners. Volume reigns supreme. That is one reason for the ubiquitous loudspeakers mounted on the trucks of politicians and right-wing groups in Japan, blaring rhetoric in megadecibels. Content of message is secondary; what is important is the overpowering violence of the sound itself.

Even well-intentioned announcements in public places can be obnoxious; for example, periodic train announcements telling the passengers not to use cellular phones. Such announcements tend to cause more bother than the cell phones themselves. My favorite example of irritating “helpful” announcements is the endless tape at the famous rock garden of the temple Ryōan-ji in Kyoto “explaining” to the visitors how to enjoy the peace and stillness of the environs.

The majority of these announcements are completely useless, except, perhaps, as examples of how the Japanese people tend to be prodded and controlled in public places. What is most troubling about their presence, however, is that they indicate a severe lack of awareness by the Japanese of their soundscape. Very few Japanese realize how ubiquitous sound pollution—and its concomitant stress—has become. Yoshimichi Nakajima, in his 1996 book *Urusai Nihon no Watashi* [Noisy Japan and Me], gives excellent examples—some of which I’ve used here—of the prevalence of noise in public places and how it generally passes unnoticed by the general population. These sounds manipulate, control, and ignore the rights of the silence-loving minority, all in the name of the “public good.”

Japanese society embraces many contradictions, and attitudes toward sound is one of them. On the one hand there is Bashō’s frog, and on the other is background music. It might be easy to conclude that the Japanese have lost their cultural sensitivity to sound, but that is not exactly correct. It is precisely because the Japanese were traditionally receptive to and tolerant of all kinds of sounds that present-day society is such a cacophonous helter-skelter. The filters need to be readjusted to allow a conscious and intelligent decision about which sounds to accept and which to reject. Along with modernization and its attendant problems, sounds have changed, and

now we have the ranting rightists or nanny-like admonitions in public places overpowering the insects cries, bamboo splitting, or plaintive plunks of the shamisen.

What is needed, more than ever, is awareness and selectivity, that people realize the problems of negative, destructive sounds in the environment and regain an appreciation of the subtle qualities of timbre that make the Japanese soundscape so spiritually rewarding. I have found training in *bōgaku* invaluable for urging awareness of this problem while sensitizing the ears and the mind.

## Notes

1. R. Murray Schafer, *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an Experimental Music Course* (Don Mills, Ontario: BMI Canada, 1967), 1.
2. Schafer, 2.
3. Tōru Takemitsu, “My Perception of Time in Traditional Japanese Music,” in *Contemporary Music Review* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1987), 1:9.
4. W. G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (1896; reprint, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1956), 2:366.
5. All haiku here are quoted from *The Sound of the Water*, translated by Sam Hamill, © 1995 by Sam Hamill. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston <<http://www.shambhala.com/>>.
6. Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and the Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959; Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series, 1970), 228 (page citation is to the reprint edition).
7. English translation by the author.
8. For more information on the history of the shakuhachi, see Christopher Yohmei Blasdel and Yūkō Kamisangō, *The Shakuhachi: A Manual for Learning* (Tokyo: Ongaku no Tomo Sha, 1988).
9. Takemitsu, 1:9-10.
10. Takemitsu, 1:9-10.
11. Ryōhei Hirose, liner notes, *Hirose Ryōhei no Ongaku* [Ryōhei Hirose’s Music], conductor, Shigenobu Yamaoka, instrumentalists, Kōdō Uesugi, Yōko Kojima, Saburō Ueki, and Fumiko Shinozaki (Denon, 1995), 3.
12. Some of these include *Concerto for Shakuhachi and Orchestra* (1976), *Aki, for Two Shakuhachi* (1969), *Chikurin, for Shakuhachi Solo* (1973), *Izayoi, for Shakuhachi and Koto* (1983), *Byō, for Shakuhachi Solo* (1972), and *Tamafuri, for Shakuhachi Solo* (1972).
13. Somei Satoh, quoted in the liner notes, *Litania*, piano, Margaret Leng Tan (New Albion, 1988).
14. Margaret Leng Tan, liner notes, *Litania*. Two other pieces on this CD, *Incarnation II* (1977) and *A Gate into the Stars* (1982), exhibit a similar approach.

## New Web Site

The Yokohama 2001: International Triennale of Contemporary Art’s official Web site has been launched. The first of a series of exhibitions will run from September 2 to November 11, 2001, at the Minato Mirai 21 quay-side development in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture. This site provides information on artists and events and news from the Secretariat in English and Japanese. The URL is <<http://www.jpff.go.jp/yt2001/>>.



## From the Japanese Press

(January 1–May 31, 2000)

### AWARDS

#### Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The joint winners of the 122d Akutagawa Prize for belles-lettres by new writers were Gengetsu for *Kage no Sumika* [Dwelling in the Shadows], which appeared in the November 1999 issue of *Bungakukai*, and Chiya Fujino for *Natsu no Yakusoku* [A Promise for the Summer], which appeared in the December 1999 issue of *Gunzō*. The 122d Naoki Prize for popular fiction by more established writers was awarded to Rei Nakanishi's *Nagasaki Burabura Bushi* [Ballad of Nagasaki Ramblings], published by Bungeishunjū Ltd. *Kage no Sumika* portrays members of an ethnic Korean community in Osaka and their interactions, centering on an old man. The novella *Natsu no Yakusoku* sketches the day-to-day lives of a group of contemporary young people, including a gay couple and a transsexual beautician. *Nagasaki Burabura Bushi* is modeled on the real-life encounters between a geisha and a local historian who collected old songs of Nagasaki together.

(A, M, N, S, Y: Jan. 15)

### HISTORY

#### Yasujirō Ozu's Diaries Found

Two diaries of the film director Yasujirō Ozu (1903–63), who is internationally renowned for such works as *Tōkyō Monogatari* [Tokyo Story; 1953], have come to light. The diaries, which had been kept by the director's sister-in-law, cover the years 1918 and 1921, when Ozu was a student at what was then middle school (now high school). They bring to life his fascination with movies, revealing, for

example, that he went to the cinema on the day of his college entrance exams. The address sections contain names and addresses of American movie stars, and the diaries also mention sending fan letters.

(M: Jan. 29)

### MISCELLANEOUS

#### Record Number of Foreign Students

According to figures released by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Culture, the number of foreign students in Japan, after declining for several years, rose by 8.7 percent over the previous year to a record high of 55,755 as of May 1, 1999. Privately funded students accounted for about 80 percent of the total, and a 10 percent year-on-year rise in their numbers was responsible for the overall increase. The Ministry suggests the higher numbers may be due to "greater availability of funds for private students, and the upturn in the Asian economies, since 90 percent of the students come from Asia."

(A, M, N, S, Y: Jan. 13)

#### National Diet Library Launches Online Service

A new "Electronic Library" service on the Web site of the National Diet Library provides online access to a catalogue of 2.2 million Japanese and Western publications in the library's collections. Searches can be made by title (or words that occur in the title), author's name, subject, etc., and the displayed results will include the full title, author's name, publisher, year of publication, and call number. Also newly accessible online is the Rare Books Image Data-

base, which contains some twenty-three thousand items, including *ukiyo-e* genre pictures from the Edo period (1603–1868). The URL of the National Diet Library site is <<http://www.ndl.go.jp/>>.

(M, N, Y: Mar. 22)

#### International Library of Children's Literature Opens

The first stage of the International Library of Children's Literature, Japan's first national library specializing in children's books, has opened in Ueno, Tokyo. A branch of the National Diet Library, it presently houses almost forty thousand books and related materials from seventy countries. In addition to its reading rooms and copying services, visitors can use its computer terminals to enjoy digitized copies of picture books of historical value from around the world. The library's Web site can be accessed at <<http://www.kodomo.go.jp/>>.

(A, M, N, Y: May 6)

### OBITUARIES

Toshi Maruki, 87, Western-style painter, January 13. With her husband, the late Japanese-style painter Iri Maruki, she returned to his birthplace, Hiroshima, just days after the atomic bombing. Haunted by the terrible scenes they witnessed there, in 1948 they began a series entitled *Genbaku no Zu* [Hiroshima Murals], a collaborative project that continued for more than thirty years. The series of fifteen pairs of screens has been exhibited in over twenty countries. The Marukis's other collaborative works include *Nankin Daigyakusatsu* [The Nanjing Massacre] and *Aushubittsu* [Auschwitz].

(A, M, N, S, Y: Jan. 14)

Abbreviations used here: A: *Asahi Shimbun* M: *Mainichi Shimbun* N: *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* S: *Sankei Shimbun* Y: *Yomiuri Shimbun*



# Depiction of the Family in Contemporary Japanese Cinema

*Eija Niskanen*

The prevalence of the family as the central setting of a story is obvious in Japanese films. My interest lies in the ways that both classic and contemporary Japanese cinema handle this theme and the ways the theme has diversified over time. I make no claims about the nature of Japanese family life. My aim is not to use cinema to study the nature or history of the Japanese family system in a sociological sense, but to study the ways cinema as a popular discourse and an art form has used the family both to tell stories and to articulate ideological and stylistic constructs. An example of the latter is the postwar cinema during the Allied occupation, when the SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) censors tried to instill Western values in Japanese society. This effort was reflected in the way such issues as women's roles, the family system, and the concept of marriage were handled in films. I have relied mainly on post-nouvelle vague cinema, from the 1970s to the present, but I draw comparisons with earlier cinema to highlight the debts contemporary cinema owes to or its departures from earlier cinema.

Methodologically I study these films through three approaches: (1) Thematic: the main themes and their handling as the themes differ from those of earlier films and transform traditional Japanese film genres (*bōmu dorama* [family drama], melodrama). (2) Stylistic: the way that postmodern aesthetics, other popular arts, entertainment (*manga* [Japanese comics]), advertising, television, popu-

lar fiction, etc.), and other film cultures (Hollywood, European art cinema, Hong Kong cinema) influence the style of Japanese cinema. (3) Production: the change from films produced by major studios to those produced by independent companies (starting in the 1960s with Nagisa Ōshima [b. 1932] and Shōhei Imamura [b. 1926]) and then to sponsored productions and coproductions with television stations (for example, Japan Satellite Broadcasting, Inc. [WOWOW]).

## An Era of Change

The production-marketing-consumption pattern changed greatly between the 1960s and the 1990s. The independent production system exists alongside the major studio production system, but the number of independently produced films currently exceeds that of films produced by major studios. One important factor is the Pia Film Festival, inaugurated in the late 1970s, which has become influential in introducing and encouraging young filmmakers and brought many directors domestic and international attention. The changes in the film production system have also affected the position of the director: the previous studio mentorship has become more flexible, but it is also more competitive, since anyone can gain training in film and art schools and make films.

The internationalization of Japanese cinema affects the production and marketing of Japanese films. Many art house films are premiered at foreign film festivals prior to their Japanese theatrical release. A prize from a foreign festival is a marketing tool for a film even in the domestic market. This raises the questions of whether international film festival tastes will affect the kind of films

made in Japan or the way certain stylistic or narrative structures are handled.

The 1960s *nouvelle vague*, or new wave, cinema brought a change to the formula films made by the major studios when filmmakers like Ōshima criticized such directors as Yasujiro Ōzu (1903–63) for perpetuating the societal status quo with their films. Ōshima clearly saw films not only as stories of families but as symbols of social order. The younger directors broke away from the major studios and established independent production companies, ATG (Art Theatre Guild of Japan Co., Ltd.) being the most famous. The 1960s political turn in filmmaking led to a rebellion against the entrenched topics and styles of films. Cinema had “to confront rather than appeal to its audience”; “Films must not depict feeble complexes, shabby emotions, or quiet virtue,” Ōshima proclaimed,<sup>1</sup> thus questioning the pseudo-individuality of such film genres as melodrama, one of the genres often depicting families.

As Japan pursued its middle-class economic miracle, the new-wave directors called for a generational war challenging societal homogeneity. For them personal desire was an antidote to a society that showcased state-promoted nuclear families (advantageous for the new capitalist consumer society) and sexuality confined to marriage. Abrupt changes of scene, extreme ellipses in the narrative, surprising camera angles, and so forth created a Brechtian model, making the audience aware of the narrative strategies of cinema itself. This is evident in such highly formalistic films as *The Ceremony* [*Gishiki*; 1971], in which Ōshima used various family ceremonies (funerals, weddings) to explore power relations within the family.

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The 1970s saw a turning point, when political filmmaking tangled with the problems of postindustrial society. After that, depictions of the family split into two different narrative strategies: the nostalgic and the ironic.

### Nostalgia for a Reinvented Past

Shochiku Co., Ltd., a producer of *bōmu dorama* films, came up with a big hit in the early 1970s with Yōji Yamada's (b. 1931) series *Otoko wa Tsurai yo* [It's Tough Being a Man, aka *Tora-san*; 1969–95], which was a return to a more sentimental depiction of the family. The fixing of the *Tora-san* films in a clearly defined existing locale—Tokyo's *shitamachi*, or old downtown district—also fixed the social class and family relations of *Tora-san* films. Instead of living in a nuclear family, in *Tora-san*'s world the Kurumas live in a family in which the *ie*, or household as an economic entity, and the *uchi*, or family as the center of emotional attachment, coincide. The family's *dangoya* traditional confectionery unites them economically. The younger generation—the wife, Sakura; the husband, Hiroshi; and their son, Mitsuo—live under one roof with the senior Kurumas until the early 1990s. From then on Sakura, Hiroshi, and Mitsuo are seen living in their own house. Thus originally the three generations formed a family in Japan's traditional small merchant-family business structure, but later the *ie* and *uchi* separated partly, a sign of the Kurumas' modernization. But *Tora-san* himself stayed the same, a relic from the past.

The *Tora-san* films exist—to use the term coined by Professor Masao Miyoshi, of the University of California, San Diego—in a “‘chronopolitical’ dimension,”<sup>2</sup> a condition typical of Japan, which throughout its history has had to reconcile its inner time with the outer time of enforced modernization. But a stronger current in the *Tora-san* films is the nostalgic longing for the authentic traditional Japan, a condition, according to Professor Fredric Jameson, of Duke University, typical of postmodern society.<sup>3</sup>

Japan's nostalgia boom began in 1970, around the time that the *Tora-san* series

began, and was popularized through mass media coverage of package tours, local villages, traditional lifestyles, and *matsuri* (festivals) of different areas of Japan. This boom was most clearly exploited in the Japan National Railway's “Discover Japan” tourism campaign.<sup>4</sup> Professor Marilyn Ivy, of Columbia University, uses the word “phantasmatic” to describe this nostalgic tendency in the current popular culture of Japan. By this, Ivy means the past can never be reexperienced in its original form; the attempt to return to it is already a re-creation of the original. But this term does include the real losses experienced by people because of rapid industrialization, losses that sent people in search of these manufactured recreations of authenticity. A similar kind of nostalgic longing for a traditional past can be seen in many of Studio Ghibli's animated films, such as *My Neighbor Totoro* [*Tonari no Totoro*; 1988].

A more complex approach to the past is taken in Kon Ichikawa's (b. 1915) film *The Makioka Sisters* [*Sasameyuki*; 1983], based on the novel by Junichirō Tanizaki (1886–1965). The novel has been filmed three times: in 1950, 1959, and 1983. The first adaptation, by Yutaka Abe (1895–1977), faithfully follows the plot twists of Tanizaki's novel, in a somewhat epic style. In contrast, Kōji Shima's (1901–86) 1959 version gives the story a melodramatic treatment, highlighting situations with dramatic plot twists. He brings action and confrontations to the fore. As in Abe's version, scenes are shorter and more intense. Interestingly, this version was set in the late 1950s, which was a convenient way to avoid the topic of the rising militarism of the 1930s, a theme central to the novel. The Makiokas of this version live in a postwar industrialized society, shown through details in the stage setting.

Kon Ichikawa's 1983 adaptation differs remarkably from the other two. Ichikawa, typical of many contemporary Japanese directors, is concerned as much with style as with plot twists. As Professor Markus Nornes, of the University of Michigan, has noted in his article about this film, Ichikawa omits many

dramatic situations that were given a lot of space in the original novel.<sup>5</sup> For example, the role of the youngest daughter, Taeko, whose actions offer the most melodramatic situations (several lovers, pregnancy), is smaller than in the 1959 version. In Ichikawa's version style takes over and becomes the most dominant feature of the film. Apropos here is a comment by Professor Kōichi Iwabuchi, of International Christian University, Tokyo, about the general consumer culture of Japan: “What is significantly conspicuous in Japan is that its own traditionalism is exoticised and becomes a part of the range of postmodern, international cultural commodities available to the domestic consumer. . . . In so doing, the gaze of Others appreciating Japanese otherness or exoticism sells perhaps most to the Japanese themselves.”<sup>6</sup>

What has actually happened is the reexotization of Japanese cultural artifacts, as described by Professor Norma Field, of the University of Chicago, in her article on Yasuo Tanaka's (b. 1956) novel *Nantonaku Kurisutaru* [Somehow, Crystal; 1980], lending them “a glossy novelty—much as do scenes from Kyoto or Kamakura when they are featured on [*sic*] the pages of magazines bearing such names as *An-an* or *Non-non* [*sic*].”<sup>7</sup> Thus Kon Ichikawa's version, as an example of the many contemporary films that deal with the Edo period (1603–1868) or the prewar twentieth century, finds this past exotically beautiful, highlighting such elements as kimonos as the normal attire of the women, traditional Kyoto scenery, traditional Japanese houses—all in contrast to the earlier film versions of *Sasameyuki*, both of which incorporated many signifiers of modernization (the wearing of Western dress, having permanents, going to the cinema). While Ichikawa deconstructs the previous adaptations through plot by depicting the economic power structures within the family, he at the same time glamorizes the story through style.

### *Obayō* as Modernization,

#### *Kazoku Gēmu* as Postmodernism

Yoshimitsu Morita's (b. 1950) *The Family Game* [*Kazoku Gēmu*; 1983] launched a flow

of films about the nuclear family. These films satirize a very stereotypical family—structurally resembling the families of 1950s American films and TV programs—with a father employed as an office worker, a homemaker mother, and two kids. *The Family Game* takes education fever as its topic; *The Yen Family* [*Kimura-ke no Hitobito*; 1988] by Yōjirō Takita (b. 1955) looks at the economic miracle—everybody in the family concentrates on making money; *The Crazy Family* [*Gyakufunsha Kazoku*; 1984] by Sōgo Ishii (b. 1957) tackles the housing issue with the story of a family digging a hole in the middle of their new house; while *The Funeral* [*Osōshiki*; 1984] by Jūzō Itami (1933–97) deals with the meaning and understanding of traditions in contemporary society. *A Sandcastle Model Home Family* [*Suna no Ue no Robinson*; 1989] by Jun'ichi Suzuki (b. 1952) is about a family that poses in advertisements as a happy family living in a new house. All these films found the exaggerated nuclear family to be a setting through which to examine the problems of 1980s Japan. The directors made these films with independent production companies, which allowed them to transform the *bōmu dorama* genre into a weapon for satire. By the 1990s, this independent production style started to influence the style of major studio productions as well.

It is interesting to compare *The Family Game*, the quintessential film of this genre, with Yasujiro Ozu's *Good Morning* [*Ohayō*] from 1959. Both films tell the story of a family that has hired a tutor to help with the education of the sons and both depict neighborhood communication. Ozu's film could be seen as spotlighting the modernization of Japan—though with typical Ozu irony—with its subplot of buying a television set, the eagerness with which the boys study English, and the contrasting of the family's cozy neighborhood with the nearby high-rise apartment buildings. Morita, on the other hand, shows post-modern stagnation, in which the education of the sons will only lead them to an alienating trap similar to their father's and in which nobody knows their neighbor in their high-rise housing complex.

### New *Hōmu Dorama*?

In the 1990s a different type of *bōmu dorama* emerged. The aim is no longer to satirize society via the family but to deconstruct the family by taking a closer look at its mechanisms. A recent example is Kiyoshi Kurosawa's (b. 1955) film *License to Live* [*Ningen Gōkaku*; 1998]. In an interview in the influential biweekly journal *Kinema-jumpō*, the director himself said that he found the opening situation, the coma of the son and the breakdown of a family, a good start for a film in a dramatic sense. Thus, interestingly, his topic is not the breakdown of the family but the compromises the family makes afterward. The story centers around a boy who, after ten years in a coma, discovers that his family has vanished through divorce and the individual pursuits of each family member. He sets about reconstructing the family.

In the 1990s a new term, neo-*bōmu dorama*, appeared in Japanese film writing. The term was associated with films dealing in more depth with the conflicts of modern life. *Moving* [*Obikkoshi*; 1993] by Shinji Sōmai (b. 1948) takes divorce as seen through the eyes of a twelve-year-old girl as its theme. In *Traffic Jam* [*Jūtai*; 1991] by Mitsuo Kurotsuchi (b. 1947) a family travels three days to get to the grandparents' for the New Year holiday and along the way solves its domestic problems.

*License to Live* and other recent films, such as *Osaka Story* [*Osaka Monogatari*; 1999] by Jun Ichikawa (b. 1948), *M/Other* [*M/Other*; 1999] by Nobuhiro Suwa (b. 1960), and *Wait and See* [*A, Haru*; 1998] by Shinji Sōmai, take new kinds of family situations, such as divorce, breakdown of the family, gender roles, and children's roles as topics. In *License to Live* the role of the father is a central topic: for most of the film the son is with a surrogate father, his father's former friend. Oddly, the only scene in which the viewer senses a feeling of togetherness among the family members is when the rest of the family sees the father on TV news, after he has been involved in an accident—a media-mediated family.

Japanese directors very knowingly comment on previous films of the same

genre. For example, Yōji Yamada deals in his film *My Sons* [*Musuko*; 1991] with the same topic as in Ozu's *Tokyo Story* [*Tokyo Monogatari*; 1953]: a father goes to Tokyo to meet his children. Often family films incorporate the same ritual events—funerals, weddings, and so on. *Wait and See* begins with the scene of a Buddhist memorial service for the late husband. This is a very familiar scene from Yasujiro Shimazu's (1897–1945) films from the 1930s and 1940s. Here, however, it has become an empty gesture, since the husband turns out to be alive and returns as a drunken bum.

Besides rituals, Japanese films and TV dramas dealing with family situations always have scenes in which the family is sitting at the table, having a meal. According to Kuniko Mukōda (1929–81), a Japanese TV drama writer, "Such a scene is certainly one of the most important elements of home drama. Meals would instantly reveal a family's economic status, and the state of their physical and mental health."<sup>8</sup> The same is true of *bōmu dorama* films as well. In *License to Live* one of the happy occasions for the main character is the scene in which his mother and sister cook for him, but the audience knows this is only an illusion, since the family has already ceased to exist. What Kiyoshi Kurosawa does with his film is take the genre of *bōmu dorama* and deconstruct the very essential aspects of that genre.

### Conclusion

Above I have described some general tendencies in Japanese cinema seen through one theme. One conclusion is that melodrama as a style for depicting family life disappeared, as Professor Mitsuhiko Yoshimoto, of the University of Iowa, claims, because the shift from modernism to postmodernism in Japanese society seems to have precluded the emergence of melodramatic situations.<sup>9</sup> Instead, such genres as comedy, satire, and contemporary art film—influenced by European art cinema—have taken the family as their central setting. Often, as in the case of 1980s art cinema, these films used the family as a vehicle to make certain statements about society in gen-

eral, and thus the depiction of the family per se did not need to be “realistic.” Lately there has been a new interest in a more analytical study of family life per se. At the same time, a tendency toward nostalgia reigns in several films, especially in major studio productions.

### Notes

1. Nagisa Ōshima, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Nagisa Oshima, 1956–1978*, trans. Dawn Lawson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 5, 38.

2. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds., *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1989), xvii.

3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 15.

4. Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 22, 34–40.

5. Markus Nornes, “Context and *The Makioka Sisters*,” *East-West Film Journal* 5, no. 2 (July 1991), 52.

6. Kōichi Iwabuchi, “Complicit Exoti-

cism: Japan and Its Other,” *Continuum* 8, no. 2 (1994): 68.

7. Norma Field, “Somehow: The Postmodern as Atmosphere,” in Miyoshi and Harootunian, *Postmodernism and Japan*, 173.

8. Katsumi Ōyama, “The Shōwa 50’s and After,” in *A History of Japanese Television Drama: Modern Japan and the Japanese*, ed. Masunori Sata and Hideo Hirahara (Tokyo: The Japan Association of Broadcasting Art, 1991), 187–88.

9. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, “Melodrama, Postmodernism, and the Japanese Cinema,” *East-West Film Journal* 5, no. 1 (January 1991), 45.

## Masao Maruyama: Some Considerations on His Analysis of Japanese History and Modernity

Joël Joos

Is Japan a modern country? Though nowadays few people would doubt it, fifty-five years ago, in the immediate postwar era, the same question aroused considerable discussion. Members of the so-called modernist current lamented the imperfect state of modernity in Japan and vociferously condemned prewar social and political anomalies. Only a few years earlier, members of the Kyoto school (an interdisciplinary group of scholars at Kyoto University) had proclaimed Japan’s “overcoming of modernity” and justified its status as a world leader, combining the best of the Confucian East and the modern West. This argument was strongly refuted by the modernists. First, they did not consider the Meiji Restoration of 1868 to be a modern revolution, since it had left too many feudal relics that were believed to impede truly modern progress in Japan. Second, they saw the militarism of the Shōwa era (1926–89) as the

tragic yet logical consequence of an absolutist regime that had suppressed any possible sign of fundamental social reform or modern political thought.

Modernists complained that too many people had previously associated modernity with merely technical issues, and they stressed the intellectual or social aspects of the modernization process. In this respect they faced a daunting task in 1945: new and open debate had to be reintroduced into an area that for decades had been subjected to censorship, especially when the apex of prewar society, the imperial institution (and constitution), was involved.

### Masao Maruyama’s Intellectual History

One of the most representative members of the modernist current was Masao Maruyama (1914–96), professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo. He was convinced the modern model was far from established in Japan and continually published incisive criticism on prewar ultranationalism. His analyses of the traditional elements that had supported its rise and, conversely, had disturbed full-fledged modern development in so-

cial and intellectual life are still regarded as most enlightening by many. However, Maruyama did not repudiate the whole of Japanese tradition—quite to the contrary. One characteristic that marked his thought was his attempt to find traces of modern thought in Japan’s intellectual heritage, usually typified as utterly different from any Western tradition. During the 1950s he took active part in political movements that challenged conservative government policies and advocated international neutrality. After the dramatic events of the 1960 Japan-U.S. Security Treaty struggle, Maruyama started stepping back from ongoing political discussions. He concentrated on the elaboration of a larger interpretive framework, a backdrop against which the peculiar course of intellectual history in Japan was to be understood. What can we discern about the foundations of his historical approach and the position attributed to modernity within this framework?

Fundamentally, Maruyama, like most of his colleagues at that time, accepted a Hegelian-Marxist view of history. History meant the unstoppable journey of humanity toward liberty, according to a

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dialectical pattern of progress, in universal stages and leaving no part of the world unaffected. He did, however, encounter a variety of influences that challenged this model: Neo-Kantian epistemology, Weber's ideal-typical sociology, and Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. Japanese authors who inspired him, be it on a less theoretical level, included Shigeru Nanbara (1889–1974), Nyozeikan Hasegawa (1875–1969), and Tsuda Sōkichi (1873–1961). It is the combination of these influences, rather than the separate effect of each of them, that marked Maruyama's method in the early part of his career. He believed that the intellectual sphere of society was not dominated solely by material conditions and could develop quite autonomously and thus run ahead of economic changes or political reforms. As a consequence, he attributed great importance to the analysis of psychological mechanisms operating beneath the surface of social relations and expounded detailed accounts of the changes in political and historical awareness or even entire world-views that Japanese intellectual history had witnessed.

Because of his great admiration for the accomplishments of Western social thought, he was and is often criticized for Eurocentrism. But it should be noted that he seldom published on non-Japanese topics, and although his depiction of European tradition may at times seem overly optimistic, it is not an uninformed idealization. Rather, it is typical of Maruyama that he did not take the Western/European precedent as an immediate and infallible model but tried to discover signs of growth of indigenous modern thought within Japan's own intellectual tradition.

### Sorai and Fukuzawa:

#### Exponents of Modern Thought

The considerable attention Maruyama devoted to the thinkers Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728) and Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901) should be seen against this backdrop. He endeavored to situate these thinkers in a scheme of intellectual history that transcended traditional historical boundaries. They were depicted

not just as products of their age but also as exemplars of the growth of universal patterns of thought in the Edo period (1603–1868) and Meiji era (1868–1912). Nationalist historiographers had upheld an image of the Meiji era as a golden age of single-minded patriotism in which the initial blind admiration for the West was vanquished by typically Japanese values like sacrifice or loyalty to the enlightened imperial rule and of the Edo period as a China-oriented and premodern period, one therefore barren of any philosophy that would be useful in the Restoration—except the lingering imperial ideology, of course.

Maruyama never wrote extensive descriptions that covered the whole of intellectual history in these periods. He singled out a few cases that he then scrutinized most thoroughly. Widely recognized is his treatment of Sorai, one of the foremost Confucian scholars of the Edo period. Owing especially to the publication of Maruyama's essays, Sorai is esteemed by many as the direct or indirect initiator of some major intellectual developments in pre-Restoration Japan: the philological thoroughness of National Learning and its political implications, Tokugawa Yoshimune's (1684–1751) pragmatic statecraft and the political realism of later generations, the spread of Dutch (Western) Learning, and the economic pragmatism of Sorai's pupil Dazai Shundai (1680–1747). It was these ideal/structural underpinnings that helped prepare the swift importation of Western/modern ideas on law and economy.

The essence of Maruyama's argument is that Sorai introduced the idea of society as a human-made and thus historically contingent order. Sorai believed a perfect society once existed in ancient China. It was a creation of sage-emperors and not a part of the natural or even cosmic order. Leaders of later ages were supposed to follow this model, described in the Confucian Classics. Still, they should be guided by pragmatic rather than moral considerations and should correctly assess the specific circumstances of their own era. His uncoupling of natural order and politics,

of political and moral judgment made Sorai a forerunner of modern political thinkers in Japan. Indeed, the introduction of the decisive concept of contingent, human "creation" into the understanding of society denoted no less than the first occurrence of a distinctively modern thought pattern in the East. It was a development comparable to the one that had taken place in Europe, in the theories of Macchiavelli, Luther, and others.

A second instance of modern thought in Japan to which Maruyama paid great attention was the *oeuvre* of Yukichi Fukuzawa. Maruyama focused mainly on Fukuzawa's propositions regarding the building of a civilized nation: the acquisition of a genuinely civil mindset, national awareness, and a free spirit that does not wither because of criticism of the authorities or any form of inquiring debate. This free spirit would in turn affirm Japan's strength on the international scene and be the ultimate safeguard against foreign domination. Fukuzawa was convinced that Japanese tradition contained elements that could lead to the swift adaptation of Western civilization and to the development of an indigenous equivalent.

Maruyama was very enthusiastic about the first part of Fukuzawa's career, in which he expounded his democratic and liberal thought, but refused to attribute similar importance to the later part, in which nationalist and even expansionist views were prominent. Fukuzawa's worth was to be found in his systematic opposition to the old Confucian worldview and his perspicacity in discovering an alternative to blindly copying Western models. This alternative implied the creation of an enterprising and nationally conscious middle class; the pragmatic exercise of politics, as one social force among a variety of others; the introduction of a vibrant debating culture into all levels of social activity; and an unremitting effort toward the ultimate goal that is "civilization." Maruyama felt the nationalist puffery and even expansionist propaganda of the later days did not detract from these innovations.

Certain historical factors are crucial in understanding why Maruyama interpreted Sorai and Fukuzawa as he did: (1) his resistance against the ultranationalist ideology that prevented or prohibited any association between Japan and Western modernity; (2) his reluctance to accept the assumptions of narrow-minded Marxism, subordinating any intellectual development to changes in the means of production and thus excluding modern thought in the Edo period; (3) his opposition to the association of Fukuzawa with his nationalist stance in the discourse of patriotic historiographers and to the scathing criticism of Marxists, both of which disregarded the modernist implications of Fukuzawa's early thought; and (4) the identification of Maruyama's historical role and position with those of Fukuzawa, and to a lesser extent Sorai, that is, attempting to sow the seeds of a new and sound nationalism, of true modernity in postwar Japan. Maruyama felt that many of the insights of both thinkers had been lost and had to be rediscovered. In this respect, Maruyama's analysis is as much a depiction of modernity's failure as it is an account of its successful appearance.

### Foreign Influence and Indigenization

Maruyama's emphasis on indigenous developments does not mean he rejected the notion of any foreign influence; to the contrary, the further along his career the more he stressed the historical weight of cultural contacts. His general picture of Japanese intellectual history was one of repeated influx of foreign ideas and their assimilation. This assimilation entails an alteration of foreign concepts, an adaptation to the Japanese context. This alteration is the outward expression of an invisible "prototype" of Japanese historical thought, which does not pertain to any specific age or place in Japanese history but is a negative category that is to be deduced from what one can observe as the modifications occurring in foreign thought once it enters Japan. Maruyama's argument is circular: the effects that are thought

to sprout from the cause (prototype) determine it, albeit in a negative way. The prototype operates much like the continuous bass in Baroque music, repeating itself and thereby altering the melody, surfacing at times but mostly resonating somewhere beneath the main theme.

At some specific moments in time, the influx of foreign ideas, products of a higher civilization outside Japan, is massive and seems to overwhelm any previous paradigm. After the initial period of indiscriminate and all-pervasive importation, specific considerations emerge and start transforming, moderating, and sometimes eviscerating the foreign influx. Maruyama held that a closer look at such transformations of Buddhism, Confucianism, and modern Western thought revealed a pattern that can be traced back to the first importation of Chinese ideas on statecraft in the sixth and seventh centuries.

Japanese thought tended to eliminate references to any transcendent, universal being and to neutralize idea(1)s with far-reaching social or political implications. It was prone to regard novel ideas as superior and older ideas as no longer relevant, without assuming any causality between the two, and as a result to introduce any new theory very easily—bearing in mind the transformations it would be subjected to later. Maruyama did not, however, regard these transformations as "distortions," and his description of the prototype should not be confused with neoconservative attempts to discover a purely Japanese identity. Still, the unchanged Japanese intellectual "old layer" looms large as a thorny (or slippery) subject, which tends to leave the reader with an impression of particularity and irreducibility, regardless of Maruyama's intentions.

The product of a Hegelian-Marxist heritage, Maruyama was strongly committed to a universal course of history, advancing toward freedom for humanity and slowly enveloping the whole world. At the same time, he adopted the dialectic approach and the strong conviction of geographical distinctiveness. Universality as a category is buttressed by

particularism, and, being a product of Western civilization, it can only be differentiated from others, for example, the Japanese civilization. Since universality, the values it stands for, and the modern social environment it is identified with are actively sought after, that which differs from them is often interpreted as socially inadequate, historically incomplete, and geographically restricted. The great attraction of the early Maruyama was his indication of how this all too obvious pattern could be overcome by showing the emergence of modern and, in the end, universal elements in the Japanese particular tradition. Nonetheless, the somewhat puzzling interpretations of his later work may lead one to conclude that those developments did not measure up to the greater current of Japanese intellectual tradition. Here lies the theoretical or methodological weakness of the "continuous bass" concept: it cannot adequately account for particularity *within* a universal context.

### The Fate of Modernity in Modern Japan

What, then, can we discern about Maruyama's interpretation of modernity within this historical context? The actual modern social order that Maruyama envisioned is not particularly original: a politically engaged, nationally committed citizenry, a neutral state that embodies the will of the people, and self-aware individualism, all supported by moral independence, pluralistic debate, and so forth. Here he borrows extensively from Western authors, drawing on German idealism and an Anglo-Saxon liberal heritage (for example, Locke). All these modern traits are pitted against the lingering premodern features of Japanese political, social, and, above all, intellectual life. Instances of modern thought in Japan are mostly relegated to the past, and the so-called modern era in Japan may have produced individual modern people (Maruyama himself?) but no overall modern social environment.

It is awkward to note that Maruyama never informed his public of any advancements of this modern project in the decades following World War II.

One reason could be a global degradation in the modern idealistic content of present developed societies; another could be more fundamental: Maruyama's understanding of modernity basically coincides with modernization, a continuous, asymptotic process, coming closer and closer to the ideal but never close enough to one day in the near future proclaim its fulfillment. It is not entirely clear if the nonfulfillment in Japan results from the transformations of the modern condition itself, or if it is due to the workings of the "continuous

bass." How active is the continuous bass at this time, and to what extent are social scientists aware of its workings? Maruyama remains vague on this point, and this vagueness is suggestive: few recent theories would support the idea of a "continuous bass" after all.

Still, what is to be valued most is that Maruyama erected an intriguing construction in which were placed a variety of elements (thinkers, ideas, ideologies, and so on) that until then had seemed unrelated and been considered the product of an impenetrable tradition. The

framework he provided is not faultless, but it is a framework that leads us to a vantage point few others are able to offer. The mechanisms, functions, and fundamental changes that his writings have brought to light should be valued as operational rather than ontological descriptions. That is to say, not as exact demarcations of existing matter but as a set of tools to interpret, as a contingent yet plausible analysis of an infinite mass of data all too often linked to fixed categories like identity, Asian values, or cultural authenticity.

## Reclaiming Cultural Identity, Rejecting Deviance, and "Doing Homelessness" in Ueno Park

*Abby Margolis*

Coming and going, and giving and receiving are said to express the complexity of Japanese social life. I stop at Pū-san's door; "*Gomen kudasai*," I call out, to see if he is home. "Yes, yes. Welcome. Come in." I take off my shoes and repeatedly excuse myself for barging in, while he continues his welcome. He offers me a seat on the only cushion on the floor and begins to boil water for coffee. Having brought some tangerines, I offer them to him. He accepts them with self-humbling speech, insisting that I should not have troubled. The coffee is brewed, and he urges me to drink. With the customary courtesies, I do so. As I sip, I am suddenly overcome by and aware of how familiar all this is, of how comfortable and proper, of how I learned about it all in my Japanese language and society courses. Yet, while the actions seem ordinary to those familiar with the rituals

of Japanese hospitality, the setting is unfamiliar to most. I am in a blue plastic-sheeted tent in Ueno Park, in Tokyo's Taitō Ward, where Pū-san is one of three hundred resident homeless. More striking, perhaps, is that the structural components of society that are argued to constrain and determine the peculiar quality of Japanese social behavior are lacking. Pū-san is not tied to an *ie*, a corporate or family structure. Nowhere around him are there family, company, rice agriculture, community organizations, or even government bureaucracies. Yet here I am experiencing the very "Japanese thing" that the social organizations of Japanese society have been argued to produce. These culturally contextualized and socially proper encounters composed the bulk of my social life with the homeless.

### Problematizing Homelessness

The homeless pose both a theoretical problem for the anthropological debate on Japanese identity and an ideological problem for the Japanese state's insistence on a homogeneous society. The Japanese homeless, precisely because

they are homeless and consist mostly of single men and itinerant laborers, force a reexamination of our concepts of Japanese identity, the locus of which, most Western and Japanese scholars argue, rests in culturally specific and sedentary patterns of work, family, and marriage. Yet, while the homeless seem to offer this critique simply by being Japanese and yet displaced by their own cultural discourse, it is essential to note that their challenge is more than a passive one. More important for our reexamination is recognizing the homeless fluency in and engagement with Japanese culture. There is a tendency, in both the United States and Japan, to define the homeless as social dropouts. Yet the homeless do not believe themselves to be cultural anomalies, and their enactment of "core" elements of Japanese culture challenges dominant representations of them as deviants. I argue that the homeless critique national and disciplinary discourses on Japanese homogeneity through their rejection of a circumscribed status as deviant and through their adherence to rules of propriety in an unlikely place.

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### The Homeless Landscape

Surveys released in December 1999 recognize approximately 5,800 homeless people on the streets of Tokyo,<sup>1</sup> the majority of whom are men over fifty years of age.<sup>2</sup> Many tumbled out of the informal day-labor system that flourished in postwar Japan. These are men who in their youth were tempted from the countryside by job opportunities in the city but who are now jobless due to economic decline, new recruiting strategies, and their advancing age. Still others are homeless due to personal bankruptcy or corporate restructuring.

Since there is little work opportunity without a fixed address and most landlords demand an initial six months' rent for an apartment, once homeless, the possibilities for gaining employment and permanent residence are limited. In recognition of these limitations and in desire for stability, those in Ueno Park began to take up semipermanent residence there. They have created a place where they can be contacted, make companions, store goods, rest, and come home. They see themselves as privileged among the homeless. They have stoves and shelter from rain, but, more important, they have their independence and pride. Yet this tent community is also a response to dominant ideology. Ueno Park serves as an alternative site from which the homeless can act and demonstrate a "pure" cultural identity in order to reclaim their cultural location and resist an ideology of deviancy.

#### Discourses on Homelessness:

##### Denied Cultural Identity

Notions of Japanese identity have been constructed around two basic principles: (1) Japan is ethnically and culturally homogeneous and (2) homogeneity is melded by unique patterns of home, family, and work that take primacy in self-identity. While the first principle has been critiqued by scholars and representatives of ethnic minorities, less attention has been paid to the second. The social organizations of family and work are still seen as key loci of the "Japanese self"; in fact, one's position within these institutions (*uchi*) has been

called the "zero-point" of entry into Japanese society.<sup>3</sup> Some authors even claim that it is impossible to speak Japanese or participate in Japanese culture without referencing one's membership in a particular household or corporate group. Given that most Japanese homeless do not maintain conventional homes or family ties, and if they work, do so as itinerant day laborers, it would seem to follow from the anthropological literature that the homeless are not part of Japanese culture and are void of cultural identity.

The national discourse, too, seems to deny the homeless identity and location. The Japanese state views the homeless as lacking in national identity, as choosing not to work, be with their families, or participate in a productive society. Thus, while there were welfare, health, and day-labor-related policies that applied to some homeless, there was long no policy on homelessness in Tokyo. This "othering" and denial of the homeless, however, is not new. The first "discovery" and definitions of poverty and vagrancy in Japan coincide with the nation-building strategies of the Meiji-era (1868–1912) state.<sup>4</sup> Difference was a threat to Meiji policy and the ideology of homogeneity; thus the poor were cast in the emerging national narrative as uncivilized others and used as one benchmark from which to measure modern progress. Their individualism, broken marriages, and residential mobility marked them as less human, less civilized, and less "Japanese" as it was then being defined. Current poverty cannot be viewed apart from this genesis; poverty from its very inception in Japan was linked with failure to preserve family, with indolence, and with abnormality. The poor were brought into the nation of Japan as essential exclusions in the state discourse of national identity, and thus the nation-state was defined, in part, in contrast to the poor and other excluded groups.

Even advocates of a state homeless policy tend to strip the homeless of their national and cultural identity by focusing appeals on their basic human needs and their natural (i.e., precultural, pre-

national) right to food, shelter, and clothing. Householders strip the homeless further, denying the homeless even their humanity, by calling them dirty, dangerous, and smelly. Householders have mobilized to prevent shelters from being built in residential neighborhoods with the complaint that shelters would make the area unsafe for women and children.

The homeless, however, have responded to these personal challenges with national pride and a deep engagement with and commitment to traditional values and modes of propriety. The homeless do not see themselves as dropouts or victims in need of specific aid or welfare. In fact, most say welfare should be reserved for those among them incapable of supporting themselves. The homeless engage in a variety of activities to satisfy their daily needs for food and shelter while preserving their dignity and autonomy by refusing welfare, charity, and other handouts. Japanese homeless do not panhandle. They tend to view their homelessness as a personal problem and not one for the state or society. Thus many find themselves situated outside the Japanese national culture. Yet those in Ueno have found a way to resituate themselves, to maintain their cultural ideals, in fact to essentialize and romanticize samurai ideals, through actively pursuing and perfecting a homeless lifestyle. It is by "doing homelessness"—which involves not only "shadow jobs," such as itinerant labor and recycling, but also the maintenance of social relationships embracing traditional values of reciprocity and virtue—that the homeless locate themselves within Japanese society and (re-)produce their national identity.

##### "Doing Homelessness"

It is through this notion of "doing homelessness" and the way they root this activity in Japanese history, culture, and ideals of propriety that the homeless reclaim a pure cultural identity in the face of public challenge to deny it. It is precisely in response to this denial of cultural identity that the homeless have essentialized, even exaggerated, their own Japaneseness.

In talking with the homeless in Ueno Park, I was repeatedly struck by the way that most of them referred to themselves. Often they used the word “homeless,” as in “*Hōmuresu o suru*,” or “I am doing homeless.” Only supporters and activists used the passive phrase “to become homeless” (*hōmuresu ni naru*). Still the homeless in Ueno most often referred to themselves as *yama no ningen*, or “people of the mountain.” The “mountain” (*yama*) refers to Ueno Park and is an archaic appellation from the Edo period (1603–1868), when Ueno hill was the site of a shrine and the family temple of the Tokugawa shoguns.<sup>5</sup> Through this *yama* reference the homeless connect themselves to Japan’s national past and, furthermore, distinguish their cultural identity from other homeless who live more nomadically in other parts of the park or city, where permanent tents are prohibited. While all homeless are declared “deviant others” by the state, the *yama no ningen* privileges the *yama* and declares other homeless deviant. This effectively rejects their own deviance while preserving the essential contrast and hierarchy somewhere else. The *yama no ningen* associate themselves with a romanticized and idealized diet (i.e., rice), work ethic, pride, and livelihood and use the not-on-the-mountain homeless as the symbol through which to do this. Often it was pointed out to me the way in which “other homeless” line up in soup lines, don’t cook with stoves, have dirty skin, don’t do laundry, and make no effort to “properly” do homelessness.<sup>6</sup> In other words, they have less pride, determination, and commitment and are, therefore, lesser people and lesser Japanese.

The *yama no ningen*, on the other hand, was described as an *inaka no ningen*, a person of the countryside. Through this association with the countryside, the homeless inject themselves into the pristine national past that the countryside has come to represent. They reject a sullied urban living and claim their purer Japanese-ness; as one *yama no ningen* put it, “Unlike in town, on the mountain there is true human feeling; mountain people are good people. True people.”

Thus the homeless reject the state’s definition of deviance, or at least displace it, and begin to reclaim both their humanity and their cultural identity.

Homeless identity is further tailored by notions of tradition and propriety. Cultural ideals of duty, obligation, and reciprocity are a real fabric of social interaction on the mountain. The homeless claim to commit to their social relationships as a way to express their commitment to these ideals. Often I heard praise of and commitment to one’s companions: “If I quit [doing homelessness and scavenging food] others will suffer”; “In this lifestyle, human relationships are most important.” Opportunity for mutual exchange, provided by a tented mountain life, is highly valued. It is because of this ideal that most on the mountain reject the soup lines. In true human relationships, I was told, offerings are mutually exchanged and given with words of acknowledgment, such as “You must have had a hard day” (“*Otsukare-sama*”). But churches make you sit, orate long sermons, and give to anyone who will listen. Those on the mountain view others who line up, who merely receive without giving, and who do so in anonymity as void of humanity. They dismiss these others along with churches and limit their relationships to those directly involved in life on the mountain.

Of course the homeless recognize the fragility of relationships held among strangers. The proper way to deal with breached commitments is to leave the mountain. One man, for example, did exactly that. Den-san was praised for “understanding human relationships” and said never to have fought with anyone on the mountain. I was very surprised to arrive one morning and find him gone. He had violated a commitment to the mountain by selling an appliance he was supposed to be holding for another *yama no ningen*. So he descended. Still no one mentioned to me what he had done. I had to pry the information from another outsider involved in the community; rather what was stressed was that Den-san did the right thing. Den-san betrayed a social relationship and, therefore, following

samurai ideals he banned himself from the mountain, abruptly and immediately. His choice was looked upon favorably, and Den-san retained his respect and the possibility of returning or establishing relationships somewhere else.

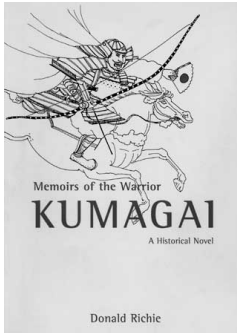
### Reclaiming Cultural Identity and Resisting the State

Homeless action must be looked at within a relationship of power, as the state in many ways defines the parameters of meaningful homeless action. Since the Meiji era, the state has defined homelessness as deviance. The state interprets the problems of poverty and vagrancy as problems of the individual, not social, economic, or political problems. Thus it has provided little in terms of policy measures. Currently activists are pushing for the state to recognize the larger problems of labor, economics, and welfare surrounding the homeless issue; yet the entrenched ideas of deviance remain. The option of a shelter, for example, is regulated—with curfews and restrictions on eating, drinking, and sleeping. Furthermore, an interview to receive support requires the applicant to provide a family and work history, which most homeless feel will only bring shame to their relatives and former colleagues. State recognition, therefore, is seen by the homeless as an invasion of privacy and an acknowledgment of deviance. Most homeless, then, do not resist via protest, nor demand policy or support, nor even panhandle. Rather they have found another means to resist—“doing homelessness,” embracing propriety, and rejecting deviance. They have mobilized their homeless identity rather than organizing to eliminate it; thus they have rescued homelessness from deviance and redefined it in terms of Japanese propriety.

Among the mainstream, whose Japanese identity is unquestionable, difference may be seen as a quirk, but among the homeless, with their cultural identity in question, any difference becomes rendered to and evidence of deviance. Given the Japanese state’s insistence on the homogeneity of its people, the only

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## Books in Other Languages



*Memoirs of the Warrior Kumagai: A Historical Novel.* Donald Richie.

Rutland, Vermont, and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1998. 247 pp. ISBN 0-8048-2126-7.

*Memoirs of the Warrior Kumagai: A Historical Novel* is reviewed by Stephen Comee, who has taught Japanese classics at Meiji Gakuin University; is a professional Noh actor; and is coauthor, with his mentor, Chifumi Shimazaki, of a volume on Noh forthcoming from Cornell University Press.

### *Memoirs of the Warrior Kumagai: A Historical Novel*

Donald Richie is perhaps best known as the foremost Western expert on Japanese film, on which he has written numerous works, including the definitive *Japanese Cinema* (1971), and he actually made about a dozen highly successful experimental films himself. His works were also instrumental in introducing both Kurosawa and Ozu to the West. Also known for his intriguing essays, the classic *Inland Sea* (1971), and the fascinating *Japanese Tattoo* (1980), he has written about many aspects of Japan and its culture. What he is not as well known for is his writing of novels, although this is not his first. Among his previous works, perhaps *Companions of the Holiday* (1968)—a novel about upper-class life in Japan—is a good example. But of all his writings, it is perhaps *Zen Inkings* (1982; a thought-provoking, irreverent, yet endearing book of stories illustrated with original prints by Richie himself) that itself gives a few inklings of the present incredible work, which was well over a decade in the making.

Anyone who reads Richie's bibliographical notes carefully will realize that he adores the work of the brilliant French author Marguerite Yourcenar—especially her beautiful and lyrical *Memoirs of Hadrian*. Her novel creates a vivid and historically accurate portrait of the Roman empire in the second century under the rule of Hadrian (r. 117–38), who built the great wall across northern Britain. It is an *Ich-Roman* (tale narrated in the first-person) written in the form of Hadrian's letters—mostly to his nephew Marcus Aurelius—written shortly before his death. Thought-provoking and painfully honest examinations of his accomplishments, his aspirations, and his personal relationships, the letters reveal Hadrian as an extremely intelligent, sometimes wise, man who was very conscious of the power he wielded.

Richie has achieved the same richness of texture in his tale about a Japanese hero from the late twelfth century—Kumagai Jiro Naozane, a man who fought on both sides of the Taira-Minamoto struggle for control of the land. In Japanese legend, Kumagai is renowned for his hand in the death of the young, beautiful, noble Taira warrior

Atsumori. According to the tale, the youth had played exquisitely on his flute, which the retired emperor Toba had given to Atsumori's grandfather, the night before the battle. Confronting Atsumori alone upon a strand, Kumagai, not realizing who the youth is, sees he is the same age as his own son and wants to spare him. But just then a group of Kumagai's fellow warriors appears, and to spare the lad prolonged suffering, he beheads him. Disgusted by war and death, Kumagai becomes a monk and ever prays for the repose of Atsumori's soul. This tale is even taken up by the Noh and Kabuki repertoires, which portray it as a true and sentimental tale. But is the popular tale true—and if so, in what way?

Richie asks that very question. Purporting to be the recently discovered memoirs of Kumagai himself, the work represents Kumagai's own attempt to come to terms with his past. He tries to undo the untruths that have become his legend even during his lifetime and crept into the *Tale of the Heike* [*Heike Monogatari*]. He takes up his pen and writes this account.

As Kumagai remembers and retells his past, ever comparing it with the fictional version, he paints glorious pictures of Heian-kyo (Kyoto); the pain of the wars that almost ripped Japan apart; the famous battle of Uji River; life in the imperial court of the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa; and the final defeat of the Taira at the bay known as Dannoura, where the infant emperor Antoku was drowned.

At the same time, Kumagai must create his own version of the truth. He writes: "I want to put my life in some kind of order, and to create a permanence where none exists." In order to be able to do so, he has first to determine the real meaning of his life. As he investigates and recalls his own past, he discovers to his surprise that the hardest task he has ever faced still awaits him—he must decide who he will become.

The greatest epic in this novel, as in Yourcenar's books, is always in the readers' minds. We receive from Richie, as if from some Kurosawa of the psychic realms, not only moving pictures of the distant past but vivid shots of spectacular battles and close-ups of people that give us a better understanding of the forces tearing away at

Japan's Golden Age, as if some terrible demon were eating away at the proud, young, beautiful body of a noble warrior from deep inside.

*Memoirs of the Warrior Kumagai* is a tour de force combining a commanding mastery of historical fact and detail, a comprehensive understanding of the human spirit, and a poetic quality of expression that transforms the hearts of all those it touches. In the bibliographical note to her *Memoirs of Hadrian*, Yourcenar writes: "A reconstruction of an historical figure and of the world of his time written in the first person borders on the domain of fiction. . . . It can therefore dispense with formal statements of evidence for the historical facts concerned. Its human significance, however, is greatly enriched by close adherence to those facts." It is obvious that Richie has followed her precept closely. Basing his work upon some two dozen classical texts and another three score works in translation, Richie evokes the humanity of this man, and, in so doing, not only gives us an incomparable view of the Kamakura period (1185–1336) but also makes us reflect on what we believe to be history.

Yourcenar poetically portrays Hadrian's love for Antinoüs as something that was natural, but

she also embarks upon a reflective, complex analysis of the dynamics of human affairs. Like her, Richie beautifully portrays the love between Kumagai and Atsumori—as both platonic and nonplatonic love for someone of the same gender—as something normal, yet he also delves deeper into the psyche of the medieval Japanese warrior than ever before.

Richie is terse in how he has Kumagai describe the youth's flute-playing on the night before the battle of Ichinotani (p. 147): "It was a flute. And beautiful it was—its voice rose and fell, speaking of sorrow and transience, houses falling and men perishing and all things changed. It soared into the dark air, a wordless tongue that told the truth."

Ironically, it is precisely because Richie's pen is so fluent with words that he has been able to create this brilliant chronicle of how the sheer humanity of this honest, hopeless, fearless man transcends his time to speak directly to us, here and now. Indeed, to paraphrase Edward Seidensticker's praise of the book, Richie's superior narrative powers will carry readers easily along to the subtle implications of the "truths" in their own lives. S. C.

## From the Editor

*The Japan Foundation Newsletter* is now being published on the Japan Foundation's Web site at <[http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/media/publish/4\\_03right.html](http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/media/publish/4_03right.html)>. For those who wish to

continue receiving the *Newsletter* by postal mail, we ask that you please notify us of any corrections and/or changes to your current address.

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official space for the homeless is as "others." Within this context, denying difference becomes a key element of homeless resistance. As the homeless reject the state's discourse defining them as cultural deviants they challenge ideas about Japanese homogeneity. The state's deviant definition of homelessness makes it possible even for those that sympathize with the homeless not to challenge their fundamental ideas about Japanese homogeneity. The homeless, on the other hand, demand even nonsympathizers to question. By declaring themselves the same, staking a place in history and culture, embracing propriety, and denying the state the ability to place them outside the cultural norm, the homeless challenge the very basic notions of a

homogeneous cultural identity in Japan. They claim to be Japanese via the practice of propriety, but do so in an unlikely place. While this might do nothing to change their situation, it restores their dignity, protects their autonomy, and challenges the idea that to be Japanese one must conform to uniform social patterns and life pathways.

### Notes

1. *Super-J Channel* (weekday evening news), Asahi National Broadcasting Co., Ltd., January 10, 2000. Support groups, however, estimate up to thousands more.
2. Surveys by the nonprofit organization *Furusato no Kai*, in Taitō Ward, the labor organization *San'ya Sōgidan*, also in Taitō Ward, and the Resource Center for Homeless Human Rights, in Shinjuku Ward.

3. See Dorinne K. Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) and Jane M. Bachnik and Charles J. Quinn, Jr., eds., *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

4. Masayoshi Chūbachi and Kōji Taira, "Poverty in Modern Japan: Perceptions and Realities," in *Japanese Industrialization and Its Social Consequences*, ed. Hugh Patrick (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

5. After the Meiji Restoration (1868) Ueno was relandscaped into one of Tokyo's first public parks.

6. Those not living on the mountain, by contrast, say the *yama no ningen* are "stuck" because they have given up and given in to a "real" homeless lifestyle. Thus, seeing "other" homeless as deviant works both ways.

## Exhibition of Children's Picture Book Illustrations from Korea

In conjunction with the opening of the International Library for Children's Literature in May 2000, an exhibition titled "The World of Original Illustrations for Children's Picture Books from Korea" was held at the Japan Foundation Forum in Tokyo from April 28 through May 13, 2000, under the sponsorship of the Japan Foundation, the League of Diet Members for the Establishment of the International Library for Children's Literature, and the National Liaison Committee for the Establishment of the International Library for Children's Literature.

The need for an international library of children's literature had long been recognized and the project finally reached fruition thanks to the concerted efforts of many people. The International Library for Children's Literature, in Tokyo's Ueno district, was officially opened on May 5, 2000, and the exhibition was one of many commemorative events held during 2000, which was designated "Children's Reading Year" by the upper and lower houses of the Japanese Diet.

In addition to serving as the national repository for Japanese children's literature and culture, the new International Library for Children's Literature is also expected to play a major role in the international exchange of children's books in the twenty-first century as an international documentation center in the Asia-Pacific region. In view of these aims for the library, an exhibition of children's books that would stimulate exchanges with Korea was seen as a particularly apt celebration of the inauguration of the library's activities.

The exhibition presented approximately two hundred original illustrations selected from twenty-five picture books by seventeen leading contemporary Korean authors of children's books. All the

works reflected Korean artistic sensibilities and daily life. The illustrations in a wide variety of genres depicted houses, foods, clothing, Korean-style quilts, traditional events, old tales, and folk music, and all conveyed a strong sense of being firmly anchored in Korean culture. Because Korean picture books for children are not yet widely known in Japan, many exhibition visitors commented with surprise and admiration on the rich expressiveness of the illustrations. Thus this exhibition introducing the essence of picture books from Korea—Japan's nearest neighbor, in both historical and cultural terms—was significant.

The word *orini*, which figured in the exhibition's Japanese title, means "child" in Korean. However, this word was coined only about eighty years ago by Pang Jung-Hwan (1899–1931), a writer of stories for children; he defined it as "a young but complete human being." An essay in the exhibition catalog by Sang Keum Lee, professor emeritus of Ewha Woman's University, fills in the background of this word, explaining that the Korean words *nulguni* and *cholmuni* refer to "elder" and "younger," respectively, and ascribe to each an autonomous personality, but that ever since its invention, *orini* has been used to refer to children. In his short life, Pang devoted his energies to the *orini* movement and succeeded in changing traditional perceptions in an adult-oriented society strongly influenced by Confucianism that gives precedence to older over younger, and thus contributed to the development of children's literature and culture in Korea. This movement has been continued to the present day by people who perpetuated the *orini* spirit and struggled to make it grow, even during the years of Japan's colonial rule over Korea. Korea has the reputation of

being a very education-conscious society, and in South Korea in particular, as the economy has grown, so has the number of children's books, including picture books, being published. The vibrantly creative spirit of the many young and talented picture book authors who participated in this exhibition is convincing evidence that Korean children's picture books will continue to develop.

Many comments in the exhibition's guest book—"I was surprised to learn that there are so many beautiful and enjoyable picture books, and this exhibition has made me interested in Korea" or "I'm happy that we are getting to know our nearest neighbor better"—made it clear that children's books readily cross national boundaries and contribute to better mutual understanding. Now that Japan is experiencing a sharply declining birthrate, all child-related fields, such as education, will see concerted efforts to ensure a better future for children. Clearly, the times demand further development of children's culture, including picture books and other forms of children's literature; and the Japan Foundation can play a valuable role in such development, particularly in connection with international exchanges in the field of children's culture.

We at the Japan Foundation are happy that this exhibition introduced visitors to the peerless artistic sensibilities embodied in Korean children's picture books and that we could contribute to the stimulation of a deeper understanding between the peoples of Japan and Korea through these books. Although this exhibition may be but a tiny first step in comparison with the tasks ahead in nurturing further international exchanges of children's culture, it has proved to be an initiation into a new field of endeavor for our organization.