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## Essays

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### Japan's Dual Identity: A Writer's Dilemma

By KENZABURŌ ŌE Is Japanese literature decaying? I, as one Japanese writer, stand before you harboring not unfounded suspicions that Japanese literature is indeed decaying. A confession such as this from a writer from the Third World should undoubtedly disappoint an audience that is expecting a genuine "challenge" from our discussion titled "The Challenge of Third World Culture."\* There are reasons, however, why I have willingly accepted to act the part of the disappointing clown. There is an element in the Japanese nation and among Japanese that makes us unwilling to accept the fact that we are members of the Third World and reluctant to play our role accordingly. Japan appeared on the international scene clearly as a Third World nation from about the time of the Meiji Restoration (1868). In her process of modernization ever since, she has been a nation blatantly hostile to her fellow Third World nations in Asia, as evidenced by her annexation of Korea and by her war of aggression against China. Her hostility toward her neighbors continues even today.

The destruction we wrought upon China during the invasion is so great that what has been destroyed can never be restored or compensated for. However, even now, more than forty years after the end of the war, I do not think that we Japanese have done enough to compensate for what we *can* compensate for—either economically or culturally. The annexation of Korea in 1910 is no bygone matter when we consider the discriminatory status that some 600,000 Korean residents in Japan are now suffering. Furthermore, when we see our government supporting a South Korean government which oppresses aspirers to democracy in that nation, we see clearly that Japan is indeed one of the powers that oppresses the Third World. Such must also be the national image of Japan not only to seekers of democracy in South Korea but to democratic forces throughout Asia as well.

I must listen with undivided attention to the criticisms of my colleagues, and especially to our participant from the Philippines, Kidlat Tahimik. Japan and the Japanese betray democratic aspirants in Third World countries. We are often aggressors toward nations of the Third World, of which we ourselves are in fact a member. The burden of that image weighs heavily on my back as I stand before you now.

What, then, is the image of Japan and the Japanese in the eyes of the industrialized nations? If I, during

my stay here in the United States, am welcomed by neutral smiles, that is because I am a Japanese whose job is to produce Japanese novels and not automobiles, TV sets, or audio equipment—which are highly competitive in the international market. I am free from the hearty welcomes of the happy users of Japanese products. At the same time, I am free from the overt antagonisms of workers engaging in the manufacture of products that must compete with Japanese ones. Nevertheless, when I compare this visit with my first one to this country twenty years ago, I, by the mere fact of my being Japanese, cannot help but feel a strong sense of crisis. Although I have always sensed that crisis in Japan, coming here has made me feel the crisis more acutely.

The crisis that I feel is the crisis of living in a country which, though an economic giant with its huge trade surplus, is dependent on imports for most of its food and resources. It is a nation where the livelihood of its people will be devastated if the balance of imports and exports is disrupted. I feel the crisis of living in a country which, in its process of rising to the status of a technically advanced nation, has spread pollution everywhere and is unable to find a solution to it. I feel the danger of living in a country which, though having experienced the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, is now run by a government that can only support the United States' SDI program, thereby helping spread the nuclear-deterrence myth in the Far East.

Because of her wealth, Japan is now a member of the advanced nations, but, to be sure, she is not an independent nation which implements plans of her own to establish world peace. I feel the crisis of being a citizen of a nation of self-satisfied people—as evidenced in the recent national election (1986) by the landslide victory of the party led by Prime Minister Nakasone, President Reagan's good friend and colleague. As one Japanese intellectual, I have come to sense the crisis stronger than ever through my visit here. I shrink back in fear when I think that the people on those four islands in the Far East are heading for destruction without knowing it, but in a few weeks I will have to go back to those islands and become lost in the crowd there.

Such is the frame of reference with which I, as a Japanese writer taking part in this discussion titled "The Challenge of Third World Culture," will be

talking to you. I therefore must admit that my talk may be confusing, because I speak from a standpoint of twofold or perhaps threefold ambiguities. Nonetheless, I wish for myself that I will be able to overcome those ambiguities. I also hope to envisage for myself an idea of Japanese culture that could perhaps play a unique role among the cultures of the Third World. In order to accomplish these wishes, I will present to you the ambiguities as ambiguities and would like to ask my fellow panelists to guide me out of them.

As I mentioned to you in the beginning, I suspect that Japanese literature is decaying. That is to say, I suspect with good reason that the Japanese are losing their power to create an active model for the contemporary age and for the future. I suspect that modern Japanese culture is losing its vital force and that we are seeing, as its outcrop, the waning of Japanese literature. In recent years it is said that the one realm of intellectual activity which has seen the sharpest decline is literature. To the younger generation who respond so sensitively to new cultural developments, literature no longer seems to be within their focus of attention. This, I believe, is already an established theory in cultural journalism. I fear that this is an ominous phenomenon foreboding the total destruction of Japanese culture, let alone cultural journalism.

It is not unusual for Kurt Vonnegut to draw figures of Japanese in his tender, pathos-filled, but inferno-like paintings of the future world. One such piece is a painting of a city destroyed by a neutron bomb: a city in which human life has been terminated but where the machinery of the highly mechanized Matsushita and Honda factories are still in motion. The roof of one of the buildings is painted with a sharp semblance of Mount Fuji, and the apparently Midwestern U.S. city is the Japanese archipelago in metaphor. I cannot deny the possibility wherein Japanese culture, after losing its strength to create a human model to direct its culture toward a new future, shatters and crumbles, only to leave behind in motion such products as automobiles, TV sets, and microcomputers—and the younger generation taking no notice of the oddity of the situation. I would like to examine the present situation of Japanese literature by delving into the foreboding elements of these phenomena.

A characteristic lexical item employed among the writers of Japanese literature is the term *junbungaku*, which in English would translate as “sincere or polite literature” or in French as “belles lettres.” It was only after the Meiji Restoration that modern literature, with strong European influences, was established in our country. The precursory treatise that provided the rationale for literature in Japan was Shōyō Tsubouchi’s *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel), published in 1885—i.e., seventeen years after the Meiji Restoration. By then, Tōkoku Kitamura, the pioneer in modern Japanese romanticism, who was keenly aware of the goings-on of the society

of that period, had already started to use the term *junbungaku*. He wrote, “[That man], with his iron hammer named ‘Historical Treatise,’ preaches that ‘junbungaku’ needs to be crushed and thus endeavors to assail its realm.” From what I have quoted, we are able to know that the term *junbungaku*, as employed by Tōkoku Kitamura, was used as an antithesis to the sciences of philosophy and history with which the Japanese of the early and mid-Meiji era strived to establish the spirit of modernization by borrowing European ideas. Therefore, the term *junbungaku*, when used nowadays, does not denote what it once did. It is used today to refer to, as it were, literature that has passively secluded itself from the literature of the mass media; that is, it is used to denote literature that is not “popular” or “mundane.”

My talk on what is “sincere” literature and what is not may ring strange in the ears of a non-Japanese audience, but I, as a Japanese writer, would like to elaborate on it for the purpose of confirming my identity. Although the term *junbungaku* is now used to differentiate the writer’s passive withdrawal from mass-media literature, to Tōkoku, the young poet of romanticism and the rationalist of literature who, during the Meiji period, took the matter of the quest for his identity so seriously, even to the point of suicide, *junbungaku* constituted the antithesis to philosophy and history and was an active intellectual genre that he hoped would help create a spirit of modernization among the Japanese. I feel that it is now necessary for us to reevaluate the term *junbungaku* in light of its two definitions.

The role of literature—insofar as man is obviously a historical being—is to create a model of a contemporary age which envelops past and future and a human model that lives in that age. In Japan, where the history of modern and contemporary literature spans a period of over a hundred years, there have been a few men of letters who, as individuals, have created works which surpassed their times. However, it is only for a short period in the history of modern Japanese literature, a period which we refer to as the postwar era, that a group of writers, as a definite literary current, have clearly provided a contemporary age and a human model which inhabited that age. It was a new literary phenomenon that started immediately after the defeat in the Pacific War, in which Japan, in 1945, experienced the bombings at

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\*Ed. Note: Kenzaburō Ōe’s paper was delivered at Duke University in Durham, N.C., on 25 September 1986 as one of the featured addresses at the conference “The Challenge of Third World Culture,” sponsored by Duke’s Center for International Studies. It appears here with the expressed permission of the author. On Ōe, see also *WLT* 58:3 (Summer 1984), pp. 370–73, and 60:1 (Winter 1986), pp. 38–39.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This postwar literature was a vital force especially during the first ten years after the war. Although it is hard to say exactly when it ended, I believe it continued to thrive while postwar writers vigorously continued to produce their works, even amid various other literary currents.

Were we to look at specific examples, such as Shōhei Ōoka's novelistic account "The Battle of Leyte" (1969) and Taijun Takeda's "Mount Fuji Sanitarium," the year 1970 seems to serve as a fair guideline. That was also the year Yukio Mishima committed suicide after calling for a coup d'état by members of the Self-Defense Forces—the de facto armed forces of Japan. A comprehensive analysis of the postwar writers brings to light a contemporary age and a human model they created, and it is to that age and model that Mishima tried to produce a counterpart. Mishima too, however, from a broader perspective can be counted as one of the postwar literati.

With this chronology, we find that postwar literature was, in the history of modern and contemporary Japanese literature, the literature that strived to provide a total, comprehensive contemporary age and a human model that lived it. It was literature that endeavored to grapple squarely with the needs of intellectuals, and in fact "postwar literature" did win firm support from intellectuals in various fields. *Junbungaku*, which Tōkoku had proclaimed in defiance of philosophy and history in order to assert his *raison d'être*, was still in its embryo stage in the middle of the Meiji era. Tōkoku, calling out desperately for the protection of *junbungaku*, built a fence around a lot next to the edifices erected by the philosophy-and-history architects who had imported know-how and material from Europe, so that he and his compatriots would at least later have something on which to build their house. It can rightly be said that Tōkoku's toil and labor bore fruit in the form of postwar literature.

How was it possible for postwar literature to accomplish this? The feat can be attributed to historical reasons. The postwar literati started to publish their works within two or three years after Japan's defeat. Yutaka Haniya's "Ghosts," Hiroshi Noma's "Dark Pictures," Yukio Mishima's "Cigarette," Taijun Takeda's *Saishi kajin*, and Haruo Umezaki's *Sakurajima* are works which appeared only a year after the war. (For Mishima, however, *Confessions of a Mask*, published in 1949, is more characteristic of postwar literature than "The Cigarette.") The year 1947 saw the publication of Rinzō Shiina's "Midnight Feast." A year after that came Toshio Shimao's "Island's End," Shōhei Ōoka's "Prisoner of War," and Kōbō Abe's "Road Sign at the End of the Street"—and here already we have the whole array of the postwar literati. These are writers who had to endure silence while fascism prevailed prior to and during the war years. Their pent-up frustrations became the springboard for forming their identity as intellectuals. On Japan's day of defeat their ages ranged from twenty to

thirty-six; Mishima was the youngest and Shōhei Ōoka the oldest.

During the years of intellectual suppression—that is, during the immediate prewar period and the war itself—Haniya experienced Marxism through the peasant movement, Noma through the liberation movement of the *buraku*, a socially disadvantaged class of people. Takeda and Shiina suffered oppression for having participated in leftist activities while a student and laborer respectively. Ōoka had been taken prisoner by the U.S. forces. Noma, Takeda, and Umezaki had been drafted. When report of defeat reached Shimao, he was a Kamikaze pilot awaiting orders for a suicide attack. Neither Abe nor Mishima—the youngest of the writers—was free from the turmoil of the colonies or from the effects of student mobilization.

Over and beyond their experiences of harsh reality, these writers were either researchers in some special field of interest or, at the least, very careful readers. Haniya and Shiina studied Dostoevsky. Takeda read Lu Xun, Noma immersed himself in French symbolism, and Ōoka read Stendhal. In fact, all the postwar writers were young intellectuals who had endeavored to establish their identity by absorbing the literary impact from Europe. Unable to give vent to self-expression during the war years, these intellectuals honed their intellectualism and lived reality with a spirit of defiance against the battlefields and the fascist government that ruled them. Postwar literature was, in other words, a literary activity which these intellectuals had started simultaneously, once given the freedom to express themselves.

The defeat in the Pacific War, which brought about a decisive period of transition among the postwar writers, was, needless to say, the most important of events that ever took place in Japan's history of modernization since the Meiji Restoration. For Japan, which had pursued modernization all the while and had dared to compete with the imperialist nations of the West, the defeat was nothing less than the revelation of a multifarious impasse for an imperially underdeveloped nation. The surrender also led to an examination of askew elements in Japanese culture and tradition of premodernization days. Moreover, the defeat spurred a reform which supplied momentum to Third World-oriented liberation opportunities both within and outside the nation.

Were we to search for a metaphor for this situation in literature, I would suggest Dickens's novels, which are studded with "units" that convey diverse meanings. As we read on, the "units" progress along the path Dickens plots for each of them. When the novel is completed, he affixes to each of the units a retrospective light by means of which each comes to bear full meaning. The individual units are alive already and have significant import in themselves within the story as it progresses, yet the light which emanates from the denouement reveals to us not a contradiction but a new import; and because of the fact that

the final light imparts a new significance to the individual units in addition to the one they bore amid the progress of the story, the units take on twofold meanings, thus giving the story itself a new significance.

The diverse units which modernization bore ever since the Meiji Restoration came to reveal twofold meanings upon surrender, that light which shone retrospectively from the finale. That is to say, the Japanese, through defeat in the Pacific War, saw for the first time the entire picture of the modernization of a nation called Japan. At that time it was postwar literature which depicted most sensitively and most sincerely that very picture of Japan and the Japanese.

At the international level Japanese modernization took the form of annexation of Korea, invasion of China, and wars of aggression in other regions of Asia. However, the intellectuals who had had to participate in these incidents and who witnessed the utter downfall of such imperialistic expansion, wrote of what they saw in various ways. Taijun Takeda and Yoshie Hotta wrote about what they saw in China. Hiroshi Noma and Shōhei Ōoka wrote of what they witnessed in the Philippines. The literary activities among Korean nationals in Japan correspond to those by Japanese writers who wrote from the standpoint of Japan as an aggressor nation. Korean writers in Japan wrote in Japanese and delved into the matter of Japan's colonial rule over the Korean peninsula, a matter which has ramifications and legacies even today. Okinawa, under the Ryukyu Empire, long maintained its own political system and a culture with strong cosmological features. After being taken over by Japan, however, Okinawa was victimized in the process of Japan's modernization to an extent incomparable to that of any other prefecture. The fact that Okinawa became the sole battlefield on Japanese soil speaks for itself. The Pacific War culminated in the battles at Okinawa and left the islands in a state of total devastation. Even after the signing of the peace treaty, Okinawa remained under the dominion of the U.S. forces for years to come, but all the while she strived and managed to accomplish her own reconstruction. Because of this experience, Okinawa has a self-expression of her own.

The self-expression of the people of Okinawa is a product of their realistic ideas, efforts, and cultural tradition. We can find, in their expression, direct and important clues by which Japanese can search for a life-style which does not pose a threat to any of the nations in Asia. The writers who start by asking how to revive from the experiences of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings bear in mind the movement which seeks the enactment of the A-Bomb Victims' Relief Law. The movement is also one which is making a continuous effort for the eradication of all nuclear weapons. Those writers gaze squarely at the destructive impasse to which Japan's modernization from the Meiji Restoration brought us. It is here that we can discover for ourselves a principle as to how

Japan and the Japanese should live in Asia in this new nuclear age. An examination of whether or not this principle has become a general one among the Japanese in the past forty years should be the basis for criticism of Japan and the Japanese today.

If we were to add to the list of postwar writers the name of Tamiki Hara, who wrote of his experiences as an A-bomb victim in Hiroshima and who chose to commit suicide as soon as a new conflict—the Korean War—broke out, it will become all the more clear that the major preoccupation of postwar writers was to examine, with the force of their imagination, what, in pursuit of modernization, Japan and the Japanese had done to Asia and to the vulnerable elements within the nation, how the impasse foreboded defeat, and what means of resuscitation were possible for the nation after it died a national death.

We should also examine how the postwar writers dealt with the problem of the emperor system, for this was the cultural and political axle upon which Japan's modernization revolved. One of the conditions necessary for the nation's modernization was national unity. Thus, the emperor was made the absolute figurehead, and modernization was pursued under the pretext of his inviolable authority. What this actually meant was the deification of the emperor. At the beginning of the new year following the defeat, the emperor issued a proclamation that he was no deity, a proclamation to which MacArthur expressed satisfaction. The fact that soon afterward another "emperor," a certain "Emperor Kumazawa," appeared, claiming to be the descendant of an emperor in the Middle Ages, is an indication of one of the diversities and the astounding amount of total energy which the deified emperor had been suppressing.

The Great Japanese Imperial Army which invaded all regions of Asia was nothing but the emperor's armed forces. In Okinawa, the only Japanese soil on which any battle was fought, many citizens died. Analysts claim that the tragedy the Okinawans had had to suffer was exacerbated by their sense of loyalty to the emperor, a loyalty stronger than that embraced by Japanese on the mainland, for they took greater pride in the fact that they, after the Meiji Restoration, were admitted as children of the emperor for the first time in their history.

The aims of the postwar writers were to "relativize" the value of the emperor, who had had absolute power, and to liberate the Japanese from the curse of the emperor system which haunted their minds, even at the subconscious level. Were we to view the emperor system as positioned at the peak of the structural hierarchy, Hiroshi Noma depicted the lowest, the social outcasts for whom he had been working since before the war. Noma continued to write even after it was common knowledge within journalistic circles that the period of postwar literature was over. "Ring of Youth," a novel on which he spent many years, was completed a year after Mishima's suicide.

The work depicts a scene in which the outcasts demonstrate a show of force in a mass movement and emerge victorious. The victory is a short-lived one, but the mere fact that Noma depicted a victory by those who had been most oppressed is in itself very meaningful.

Mishima's call for a coup d'état in the compounds of the Self-Defense Forces in Ichigaya and his subsequent suicide constituted essentially a theatrical performance. In his later years Mishima's political, ethical, and esthetic principles centered on his deep lamentation for the emperor, who had proclaimed he was not a deity but a human being. Mishima's suicide is an incident which can never be effaced from our memory, for he supposedly had prepared a baleful ghost to appear time and time again whenever Japan encountered a political crisis. This is one of the reasons why I have set 1970 as the year in which the curtain fell for postwar literature—literature which, through Japan's defeat in 1945, was begun as a means of giving vent to cultural energies that had been suppressed since the prewar days. What I mean now by the portents of the decay of Japanese literature is nothing other than the loss of the unique status which postwar literature had established in the realm of Japanese culture. In other words, the literary force which postwar literature had once possessed to enlighten Japan and the Japanese to reality and culture is now being lost.



KENZABURŌ ŌE (© *Shinchōsha*)

What, then, is the situation of *junbungaku* in the latter half of the 1980s? Young intellectuals who respond quickly to intellectual fads say that *junbungaku* is already dead, or that it is about to breathe its last. They believe that although there still may be some literary activity shoved away in some bleak corner of journalism where the survivors are barely making a living, the latter will sooner or later fade away as a natural course of events. This group of young intellectuals is composed of critics, playwrights, screenwriters, and introducers of new and diverse literary theories from America and Europe. It even includes writers whose works are not considered to be in the realm of *junbungaku* as well as journalists in various fields and a group who nowadays in our country enjoy the greatest popularity among the younger generation: the copywriters of commercial messages. One might also add almost all the "cultural heroes" of today's grotesquely bloated consumer society in Japan. Lack of activity in the realm of *junbungaku* can be substantiated objectively when we compare the volume of its publication with that of other literature such as popular historical novels, science fiction, mysteries, and various nonfiction categories. Although, obviously, the prewar period and the war years provide no basis for comparison, never have there been so many publications in Japan as in the past forty years. The number of *junbungaku* publications, however, is inversely proportional to the increase in the amount of the other publications. Moreover, there is not one work of *junbungaku* to be found in the 1985 list of the ten best-selling Japanese books in either fiction or nonfiction.

Amidst such a trend, Haruki Murakami, a writer born after the war, is said to be attracting new readers to *junbungaku*. It is clear, however, that Murakami's target lies outside the sphere of *junbungaku*, and that is exactly where he is trying to establish his place. It is generally believed that there is nothing that directly links Murakami with postwar literature of the 1946–70 period. (As a hasty aside here, I believe that any future resuscitation of *junbungaku* will be possible only if ways are found to fill in the wide gap that exists between Murakami and pre-1970 postwar literature.)

Another indicator of the long downward path that *junbungaku* is taking can be seen by the long business slump for literary monthlies peculiar to Japan, those magazines which had helped nurture and develop short stories unique to Japanese literature. I am sure that those literary magazines are periodicals of least concern to the young intellectuals who now are the vanguard of Japan's consumer society. However, looking back on the first ten years after the war, such magazines, together with numerous general-interest publications, played an important role in maintaining high cultural standards. Almost all the representative literary works—e.g., the ones I have mentioned above—were, as was common practice in

the publishing system of our nation, first published in literary magazines. It can be said that the slumping literary magazines are eliciting derisive criticism among the young intellectuals who have no direct means of recalling the glory and grandeur of those magazines, except as myth.

Mention must be made of the season of rationality which started to flourish from the latter half of the 1970s and lasted through the first half of the 1980s, a period which coincides with the decline of *junbungaku*. So strong was its force that it overwhelmed intellectual journalism. Rationality was the fad among new cultural theories, all of which were imported from Europe and the United States. Here we must not forget that the intellectuals who established postwar literature were those who had been educated before or during the war years and had acquired a certain cultural sophistication. Almost all of them had been greatly influenced by cultural theories of Western Europe or of Russia, whose thoughts reached Japan via Western Europe. The eyes and ears of Japanese intellectuals after the Meiji Restoration had always been directed toward the West. Rare specimens among the postwar writers were Rinzō Shiina and Taijun Takeda. Instead of pursuing higher education, Shiina spent his youth as a laborer. What prepared him for literature was his involvement in the Marxist socialist movement, but what converted him from Marxism was his encounter with Dostoevsky. Takeda studied Chinese classical literature while Japanese imperialism was quickly preparing to invade China. Takeda was greatly influenced by Lu Xun, but for him too Dostoevsky was a thinker without whom he would not have been able to establish his identity.

It is from these writers, and from others who had been influenced by Western literature and thought, that postwar literature was born. Their methodology for delving deep into Japanese traditional thought and culture was also, first of all, Western. The same fact is evident when we examine the manner in which Masao Maruyama established his school of Japanese political thought. Maruyama was a salient contemporary of the postwar writers. By studying those writers, Maruyama in turn opened new horizons for them. The predilection for Western culture which prevailed among the intellectuals who were the vanguard of Japanese modernization carried over to the generation that came after them and continued to characterize their culture.

The Mexican thinker Octavio Paz marks 1968 as an extremely significant year and calls our attention to the series of protest movements and riots that occurred in Prague, Chicago, Paris, Tokyo, Belgrade, Rome, Mexico City, and Santiago. Student riots raged everywhere like a medieval plague, affecting the populace regardless of religious denomination or social class, only on a broader scale. Because the riots were spontaneous, they were all the more universal, and Paz analyzed their significance in light of the situation in which all technological societies, East or

West, found themselves. In Japan it was the time when the United Red Army, formed three years after the Tokyo riots, trod the path toward annihilation. The bodies of numerous Red Army members executed in cold blood by their colleagues were dug up after the Asama Mountain Villa Incident of 1972, a year which happens to coincide with the approximate time when postwar literature came to a close. As if in reaction to the political years, the new generation's cultural trend of the 1970s and 1980s swung toward antipolitics. What Paz had pointed out about identical subcultural trends having global horizontal ties had become apparent also in Tokyo.

It must be borne in mind that it was these events which prepared the way for the advent of the season of rationality, a trend for new cultural ideas imported from the United States and from Europe. Speaking for myself, I, as one writer, evaluate very highly the diversified cultural thoughts springing forth from structuralism, for they provide a strong and vital incentive in the field of literature. Later I shall elaborate on one example of the effectiveness of its introduction. So strong has been its influence that I am even tempted to offer a comparison of the diverse influences of the structuralism-based cultural ideas of the seventies and eighties with the strong galvanizing influence Marxism had exercised on the Japanese mentality when it flourished for a short time before the war.

So great was the influx of new cultural theories following the advent of structuralism that it appeared they were going to permeate the whole of the nation's intellectual climate. An excellent summary of the new cultural theories of the West, "Structure and Power" by a young scholar named Akira Asada, was read everywhere on university campuses. The book sold equally well outside academe and became the most widely read work by any of the postwar writers. "Structure and Power" was by no means easy reading; however, no work of *junbungaku* published during that period was able to generate as much intellectual interest among the younger generation. There followed a time in which many new French cultural ideas—some of which came via the U.S.—were introduced and translated, including poststructuralism and postmodernism and particularly the work of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, and the Yale School of deconstructionists. As far as translations are concerned, aside from those works of mere journalistic faddishness, works of sincere toil and labor started to appear in the latter half of the 1980s. Despite this fact, however, by then intellectual enthusiasm among the younger generation for these new cultural thoughts had come to an end, as it had within the realm of intellectual journalism which had staged, directed, and reflected that enthusiasm. I was by that time no longer a young writer and had never been part of that boom; but as I stand amid the wrack and ruin of the voluminous introductory works and translations and look back upon that age, I notice several interesting characteristics.



First, the young Japanese intellectuals, true to our national character, analyzed and systematized diachronically the various structuralism-based theories and also the criticisms thereof in order to “accept” and—to use an antonym not quite appropriate for this word—“discharge” those theories. For acceptance of Foucault, Barthes had to be discharged. Only after Lacan was dismissed could Derrida be accepted—but only to await the next new thinker. The shuttling of new cultural theories was, up to a point, an easy task for the introducers and translators who advocated their influx. Cultural heroes came and went. However, the curtain dropped on new cultural trends in our country as soon as these advocates found there was no one thinker or cultural theory for them to shuttle on the American and European conveyor belt.

At the height of the ongoing process of accepting and discharging new cultural theories, very often such phrases as “the performance of ideas” or “the frolicking with texts” came to be used. Without having to refer to any authority on words, I believe that those expressions were indeed very appropriate ones for those who could involve themselves only passively in coping with the kaleidoscope of ideas, for they were, by using those expressions, providing a definition of their identities. Also, amid this cultural trend, a very Japanese connotation was added to the usage of the prefix *post-*. By speaking of “poststructuralism” or “postmodernism,” or even of cultural thoughts that were yet to come and for which they were unable to envisage any positive ideas (although obviously we could never expect them to do so, since all they did was passively accept and then discharge), the young Japanese intellectuals conjectured optimistically that, insofar as some cultural theory was in existence, a new one would follow if they simply added the prefix *post-* to the existing one. I am sure that there were not a few young intellectuals who were stricken by a series of self-destructive impulses when they learned that the concept of “post-such-and-such” was in fact insubstantial and when, in turn, they learned that the “such-and-such” thoughts in themselves meant very little, if anything at all.

Second, despite this remarkable trend for absorbing new cultural theories, almost no effort was made to interpret them meticulously in view of specific situations in which Japan found itself. Why then did the new cultural theories from Europe and the United States become so popular among the young intellectuals and in the realm of intellectual journalism? This is indeed the strange part of the story. However, I believe the phenomenon can be attributed mostly to the special characteristic which our nation’s intellectual journalism had nurtured ever since the Meiji Restoration. To put it very bluntly, there was an inclination for people to think that an intellectual effort had been accomplished merely by transplanting or translating the new American and European cultural thoughts into Japanese; and both

the translators and those who read the translations were inclined to think in the same manner. Such a tendency exists even today.

Since the most important skills required in the task of introducing new cultural ideas were the abilities to read the foreign language in which those thoughts were presented and to translate the works into Japanese, the spokesmen for those ideas were often specialists in literature or languages. Even when cultural theories were replaced in rapid succession, the replacement did not apply to the spokesmen, because they were not necessarily advocates—or critics, for that matter—of what they spoke for. This fact brought about the lukewarm situation whereby a handful of literature and language specialists became the importers of new cultural theories. Obviously, the responsibility does not rest solely with these specialists. If the readers had read their introductions and translations in a way that would have enabled them to apply the new cultural theories in interpreting Japan’s reality, their understanding of these theories would have been raised to a higher level. Such an understanding would have fostered the ability even to offer feedback to the sources of those ideas. It would then not have been possible for each new cultural theory itself and for those who had had a hand in introducing it in Japan to remain free from criticism. However, such was not the case. As soon as an introduction or translation was made, the one-way flow from Europe and America to Japan was completed. That is to say, its “acceptance” and “discharge” was over. That is how the continual expectation of new trends in theory became a convention.

This tendency has produced another characteristic phenomenon in today’s Japanese cultural climate: namely, the absence of any and all effort to accept a variety of cultural thoughts synchronically. Never have we witnessed, in intellectual journalism in our country, the synchronic existence of two opposing new schools of thought—for example, structuralism and deconstructionism—and the resulting combination of antagonism and complementarity, which can lead, in turn, to a mutual deepening of the two schools. That is why—with the exception of the architect Shin Isozaki, who in his works substantiated his criticism of postmodernism—the cultural anthropologist Masao Yamaguchi, the forerunner among introducers of new cultural theories, stands out as unique and is now being subjected to a reappraisal. Going against the general trend, Yamaguchi, in his work “Periphery and Center,” employed a structuralistic methodology and provided substantiation for his unique cultural interpretation of Japan’s reality. In his discussion of postwar literature and its importance, his theory, together with its diverse implications, was extremely effective in clarifying the significance of the emperor system. Yamaguchi had been originally a specialist in monarchism, with field-study experience in Nigeria.

Criticism arose claiming that, in any examination of Japanese reality, placing importance on peripheral



cultures and energizing them will not lead to the reversal of the relationship between those peripheral cultures and the central one. In other words, Yamaguchi's ideas were attacked as being nonrevolutionary. Critics of his theory asserted that stimulating the periphery would function effectively only in establishing a more solid central authority and that therefore the ideas in Yamaguchi's "Periphery and Center" were reactionary. A political short circuit was the pith and the marrow of their critiques. Their charges overlooked the fact that Yamaguchi's structuralism was one scrupulously calculated—that is to say, that he had something prepared for later which a methodology based on deconstructionism would reveal. Because Yamaguchi's ideas in "Periphery and Center" were based on structuralist methodology but from the outset coexisted synchronically with criticism based on deconstructive methodology, these ideas were made even more profound, thus allowing them to bear more realistic validity. In fact, Yamaguchi proved, by citing from Japanese mythology and from literature of the Middle Ages various examples of ways in which, despite the dichotomy between those who were driven away from society into the periphery and the chosen ones in the center (i.e., the imperial family), that the two often "blended together like fresh ink spots on blotting paper."

Although Yamaguchi's political thought overlaps with that of Yukio Mishima, the two point at diametrically opposite poles. To be sure, Mishima, who lamented the fact that the emperor made his "Human Proclamation" after the defeat and who called for the Self-Defense Forces to rise up in a coup d'état as the emperor's forces, sought to absolutize the emperor system in the context of a cultural principle and in it to seek a paradigm of political unity among the Japanese. In short, if Yamaguchi's ideas as expounded in "Periphery and Center" were to activate the peripheral aspects of Japanese culture and that, in turn, were to result in the strengthening of the center—namely, the emperor system—the resulting system would be totally different from the one Mishima advocated. What is more, Yamaguchi's emperor system would never be the kind which might serve as a guiding principle for the Self-Defense Forces to carry out a coup d'état. When we reread Yamaguchi's cultural theory in light of contemporary reality, we find that there is no room in his thought that would allow for a political short circuit or a political reaction. With its truly free laws of behavior, Yamaguchi's ideas on culture, as evidenced also in his unique "trickster" theory, left no room whatsoever for short-circuited criticism stemming from uncompromising political ideologies. However, Yamaguchi's precursory work leading to the rise in new cultural theories was not followed up well by the introducers of these theories—in other words, the cultural heroes of the late seventies and early eighties. It is precisely here that we can find the means to illuminate the full scope of the question I have raised.

I began my presentation by stating that Japanese literature is decaying and referred specifically to post-war literature, which represents the highest level of literary achievement since the Meiji Restoration and the onset of Japan's modernization. I also noted the evident decline of Japanese literature at that highest level—termed *junbungaku* in Japanese—and how various cultural theories and critical isms, which replaced *junbungaku* in capturing the minds of young intellectuals, came to be accepted and discharged in a manner quite peculiar to our nation. I believe what these phenomena pointed to as a natural course of events was the following situation. Young intellectuals during the late seventies and early eighties felt the decline of Japanese literature most keenly and fell head over heels for new cultural theories from Europe and America. In fact, so great was the number of introductory books and translations that these seemed to outnumber each year's new literary works. However, enthusiasm for new cultural theories was short-lived, coming and going after only a short craze.

In the context of the cultural climate of Japan, the new cultural theories, as one organic part of literature's decline, fell prey to the general flow toward decay faster than that of literature. I believe that the two phenomena—literature and its readers on the one hand, and, on the other, new cultural theories and the young intellectuals who accepted them—should be viewed not as dichotomous adversaries but as one entity "blended together like fresh ink spots on blotting paper."

In a broader perspective, one can say that the young intellectuals were not truly intellectuals as such, but merely young Japanese living a subcultural fad in an urbanized, average consumer culture. Moreover, if one were to extrapolate from the analyses of sociologists which point to the fact that the prevalent middle-class consciousness, though filled with disparities when seen in light of the actual lives of the Japanese on the whole, is shared far and wide in Japan, one could say that such a phenomenon attests to the fact that, in comparison to the days of the student riots, young Japanese have indeed become conservative. Political scientists have attested to the fact that the conservative trend among the younger generation in the large urban areas has played an important role in the recent landslide victory of the ruling conservative party. What this means is that signs of a conservative trend have begun to emerge quite noticeably in the big cities, where the bulk of the younger generation dwells; and such signs will soon start to appear in small cities as well, since the younger generation is conjoined by an urbanized culture that spans the nation.

Now, the problem, in the context of our discussion, is that this younger generation, so closely conjoined subculturally on a nationwide level, is abandoning literature. Moreover, this is the same younger generation which promptly interred, as things of the

past, the trend toward new cultural theories which in many respects overlapped with the subcultural fad they embraced. Akira Asada's treatise "Structure and Power" at one time became a fad on university campuses and occasionally was referred to as the "Asada phenomenon." I cannot simply dismiss this as a mere fad, because it is possible for such a trend among the younger generation to merge with the new cultural theories and then bear positive fruit. When we look back on the various cultural phenomena, that is what actually occurred in many countries after World War II. However, as mentioned earlier, that is not how things turned out in Japan.

The postwar writers and those who created cultural theory for their contemporaries were people who had gone through the hardships of war. Their being one with the younger generation enabled their works to effect a positive influence upon the younger generation, who sought a means of resuscitation at a difficult time in a society that had recently suffered defeat. It is thus that they were able to educate the youth of a generation which followed their own. Speaking for myself, as far as literature is concerned, it is the postwar writers who laid the foundations for my own writing. As far as politics goes, the conservative party has been monopolizing the political scene for a long time. However, I believe that the generation which overlapped with the readers of postwar literature demonstrated its strength by casting enough votes for opposition-party members so that the latter won enough seats to keep the ruling party in check. The people's movement in 1960 to protest the ratification of the new Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was a movement which had actively incorporated the opinions of the postwar writers and those of the cultural theorists. It was a movement which was equally as powerful as, and more animated than, the opposition progressive parties and the labor unions. A comparison of the political and cultural situation of those years—i.e., twenty years ago—with that of today sheds light on what it is exactly that has been lost and how we lost it. The light shines upon the road along which twenty years have taken us and also upon a very symbolic phenomenon: literature treading its path to wrack and ruin.

So, what is to be done? I, as a writer, think of what the critical path has been and what it should be for Japan and the Japanese from the standpoint of literature. I believe that by reflecting on the cultural climate of Japan in the latter half of the seventies and the first half of the eighties, we can see therein glimpses of what course of action we should take. What occurred during that period was the recurrence of short cycles of introductions of new cultural theories from America and Europe. It seemed that the acceptance and discharge of those theories was gradually accelerated, but in the end all enthusiasm for cultural theories died out. Although the diachronic, one-dimensional acceptance and discharge of new cultural theories continued, no effort had been made

to interpret those theories in light of Japan's reality and culture. This sort of situation can never occur in societies that produce cultural theories; it can only occur in a country where the vast ocean separates it from the country that produces those theories, where the introduction of theories follows the overcoming of linguistic barriers, where there exists a fad-sensitive intellectual journalism that transmits those ideas, and where there are receivers of what such journalism transmits. In other words, with only a few exceptions, the Japanese were not able to establish a cultural theory of their own—something which could have been realized if they had examined the theories they imported in light of Japan's reality and culture. If that had been done, the resulting feedback from such an examination would have enabled the Japanese to establish a new cultural theory of their own. Though Japan experienced a period of great enthusiasm for new cultural theories, the theories essentially had nothing to do with Japan's reality and culture, and we have today as a result a situation in which those theories have become as remote an existence as they had been from the very outset.

In light of this situation, we see clearly what is lacking in terms of cultural work that is being done by Japanese today. Japan's modernization beginning with the Meiji Restoration had run into a fatal impasse—namely, the Pacific War—and culminated in defeat. Upon very sincere reflection, the Japanese searched for various principles to guide them in making a fresh, new start, and the aim of the postwar writers was to provide literary conviction and expression of such principles. However, the intellectuals of the new generation, those of the seventies and eighties, have not followed up on these principles, nor have they taken a critical stance toward them. They had no intention of developing such principles in the first place. There is indeed a wide gap between the postwar intellectuals and those of the younger generation, as is clear when we look at how the younger intellectuals of the seventies and eighties, by not probing into the various accomplishments of the postwar writers or what they tried to achieve, severed any continuity with the postwar intellectuals.

Many of the postwar writers even went through the bitter experience of fighting in the war as soldiers, and following defeat, they delved into the matter of Japan's new direction, a direction contrary to that which Japan had taken in her process of modernization. In other words, they envisaged a way for Japan to live as one nation in Asia, as one of the Third World nations in Asia. The path Japan had taken prior to the defeat was one in which she had set up the central nations of the world—namely, the U.S. and the European countries—as paradigms to follow. The postwar writers, however, envisaged a path quite the contrary and aimed at establishing an awareness of a principle in which Japan's place in the world would be not in the center but on the periphery. What the Japanese had abandoned in pursuing a

center-oriented modernization, the postwar writers endeavored to revive by also learning domestically from Okinawa, which had a cultural tradition of its own, and internationally from Korea, which was instilling a typically Asian prosperity and diversity.

I would add that, as a writer who has engaged in literary activities with the awareness that I carry on the heritage of the postwar writers, I have while writing always borne in mind the island of Okinawa, a peripheral region of Japan, and South Korea, a peripheral nation of the world—and in the latter case especially the works of the modern Korean poet Kim Chi Ha. Also, I have employed in my writing the image system of grotesque realism as my weapon. I would note as well that by considering the cultural characteristics of the peripheral regions of Japan and those of Asia, I have trod a path leading to the “relativization” of an emperor-centered culture. In that regard, I have chosen a course exactly the opposite of that taken by Mishima, who strived to absolutize the emperor system. My novel “Contemporary Games,” which I completed at the end of the seventies, is a work in which I aimed at creating a model regarding reality and culture for the kind of Japan I envisage.

I believe that the problem Japanese literature faces today lies in the fact that the attitude toward reality and culture which the postwar writers had nurtured and which was followed up by the writers who came after them was severed completely by the young intellectuals of the seventies and eighties. It was amid such discontinuity in attitude toward reality and culture that the fad for new cultural ideas flourished.

Japan as a Third World nation has an ambiguous place in the world and an ambiguous role to play. The young Japanese intellectuals had a still more ambiguous place in Japan and an equally ambiguous role to play. An examination of these ambiguities in light of the new cultural theories and the providing of an interpretation for them would have been a difficult task but one well worth undertaking, for I believe it would have resulted in the development of a cultural theory unique to Japan; if not, at least it would have taken us beyond the realm of the almost automatic process of “accepting” and “discharging” imported theories.

Among intellectuals of the present new generation, there are some who are taking an increased interest in the singularity of the Okinawan culture, and their interests correspond with the self-expression of the new generation on Okinawa. Many young Japanese who participated in the protest movement for the release of the poet Kim Chi Ha still empathize with the grass-roots movements for the democratization of South Korea. There is also a movement to keep a close watch on Japan’s economic aggression against the Philippines and other Asian nations. The youths involved in that movement are now seeking an alliance on a grass-roots level with the younger generation of other nations. A joining of hands with such

youths by the young intellectuals who had played a part in introducing new cultural theories can be readily realized, if the latter make an effort to determine how the theories ought to be interpreted in light of Japan’s reality and culture, and also if they seek to learn how to plan for the reconstruction of that very reality and culture. Such a merger could bring about direct, concrete results in energizing Japanese literature of the new generation.

The topic of our discussion, “The Challenge of Third World Culture,” raises the very relevant question of whether Japanese culture can find a clue for saving itself from the downward path to decline that is so ominously portended by the decline in literature. I can think of no people or nation as much in need of a clue for self-recovery as the Japanese, neither among First or Third World nations; no other people but the Japanese, whose culture evidences a strange blending of First and Third World cultures; no other people but the Japanese, who live that reality.

I would like to close by offering as a hint to the Japanese intellectuals of the new generation a positive directive for embarking upon their self-examination vis-à-vis our topic of our discussion. One reason why I decided to participate in this symposium is the fact that I myself want to learn, for what I have talked to you about is a bigger question for me than for the young intellectuals. There is in Japan a poet and writer of children’s stories, Kenji Miyazawa, who had been assigned a peripheral place in contemporary literature and modern history but whose importance is being recognized slowly but steadily. Miyazawa was born in Tōhoku, a peripheral district of Japan. Being an agronomist, he worked for the Tōhoku farmers, who tilled the soil under adverse conditions. He was a believer in the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra. Under the influence of contemporary Western poetry he established a world of his own expression and imagination. He wrote prolifically while continuing to work as an agronomist, a profession he pursued until his death in 1933 at the age of thirty-seven. His audience was not limited to readers of literature as such, and posthumously he has won—and is winning—an even wider spectrum of readers. Very recently, his epic children’s story “The Night of the Galaxy Railway” was made into an excellent animated movie, increasing his popularity even more. The question of what is genuine people’s literature has been a topic of debate throughout modern and contemporary Japanese literature, but now people have started to realize that it is Miyazawa who deserves to the fullest degree the title “Writer of People’s Literature.” Sixty years ago, at the dawn of the Shōwa era (1926–), Miyazawa wrote a treatise titled “Outline of the Essentials of Peasant Art,” which epitomizes his ideas both as an agronomist and as a writer. I shall close by quoting its opening paragraph:

We are all farmers—we are so busy and our work is tough.

We want to find a way to live a more lively and cheerful life.

There were not a few among our very ancient forefathers who did live that way.

I wish to hold discussion where there is communion among the facts of modern science, the experiments of the seekers of truth, and our intuition.

One person's happiness cannot be realized unless all the world is happy.

The awareness of the ego starts with the individual and gradually evolves to that of the group, the society, and

then the universe. Isn't this the path the saints of yore trod and taught us?

The new age is headed in a direction in which the world shall be one and will become a living entity.

To live strong and true is to become aware of the galaxy within ourselves and to live according to its dictates.

Let us search for true happiness of the world—the search for the path is in itself the path.

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## An Interview with Kenzaburō Ōe

By SANROKU YOSHIDA The following interview took place on 7 June 1986 at Kenzaburō Ōe's residence in Tokyo. The text was translated into English from the Japanese and edited by the interviewer with the permission of Mr. Ōe. The research and the trip to Japan for this interview were supported by a 1986 summer research grant from the Faculty Research Committee of Miami University and by a 1986 travel grant from the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies.

SY: I met with Yōtarō Konaka yesterday. He said that recently Japanese society has created a peculiar mood in which it is rather difficult to discuss matters antinuclear, and that one may be considered childish or immature if one is antinuclear. The major theme of your "Flood unto My Soul" (1973), "The Pinchrunner" (1976), and other works is the deracination of mankind by nuclear holocaust. As the author of these novels, do you agree with such an assessment of the social climate?

KO: I published a book called *Hiroshima Notes* (1965; Eng. 1981) twenty-three years ago. So it has been about a quarter of a century since I started to think about "Hiroshima." During that time, I have participated in the activities of a group called the Japan Confederation of A-Bomb and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations; I have written and spoken in public in support of such movements as "Abolishment of Nuclear Weapons" and "Relief for Victims"; I have organized committees and councils for these movements as well; yet I do not think things are particularly difficult today. Twenty-four or twenty-five years ago, they were difficult—oh, well, not really difficult, but I was not supported by the majority of Japanese intellectuals. Many victims talked at those meetings, and they wrote about their ordeals. Nevertheless, Japanese scholars, whether they were

scholars of English literature, sociologists, physicists, or well-known writers, seldom paid serious attention to such things—except for a handful of fine scholars such as Kazuo Watanabe, Masao Maruyama, and Professor Shūichi Katō. The situation now is about the same.

Four or five years ago, when American medium-range nuclear missiles put Europe in a very precarious position, an antinuclear movement spread from Europe to the United States. When there are such fervid antinuclear movements in Europe and the United States, Japanese intellectuals tend to follow their lead. Therefore, we had a large-scale antinuclear movement in Japan at that time. Now very little is going on. I have not been influenced by these ups and downs of the movements. I do what I have to do in writing my novels and critical essays.

If Japanese critics say it is childish and naïve to oppose nuclear weapons, let me tell you the following: the American political scientist George Kennan, whose judgment I trust, argues in his book *The Nuclear Delusion* that political figures and nuclear-weapons experts always ridicule antinuclear movements as manifestations of naïveté or childishness. However, it is the naïveté of the expert, in both diplomacy and nuclear weapons, that makes the existence of the world precarious. This is what George Kennan says, and I think this is also true in Japan. So there is no need to keep silent when you are called "childish." To be frank, I have to admit that there is perhaps something indeed quite childish about Japanese antinuclear movements. Nonetheless, one must try to embody one's ideals in one's works. If you don't do this, and you are called "childish," it is in part your own fault.

SY: In your works, Mr. Ōe, there are many themes that had not been treated in Japanese literature before. When you started writing fiction, some readers were shocked because of your unique style, new