

CONTENTS

Features

6 *Nurturing Talented Translators to Spread Japanese Literature Worldwide*
An interview with Ryohei Miyata, Commissioner for Cultural Affairs



8 *The Pillow Book and the Japanese Mindset*
A tell-all book written over a thousand years ago by a female author captures the essence of the Japanese soul and relationships



10 *Home to the Dreamer: Kenji Miyazawa and Hanamaki City*
The famed author's stellar imagination and incessant curiosity flourished in a little town in Iwate Prefecture

12 *Analyzing Yasunari Kawabata's Snow Country: Japan's First Nobel Prize in Literature Winner*
How the author's turbulent youth and loneliness shaped the subtle beauty of his ethereally erotic novel and other works



14 *Fantastic Realms: The Charms of Japanese Children's Books*
The art, soft touch and humorous themes of children's literature in Japan capture awards and hearts worldwide



Also

4
PRIME MINISTER'S DIARY

22
POLICY-RELATED NEWS
Japan Heritage: Telling the Tales Behind Historical Sites

24
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
A Tiny Electric Car That's Waterproof and Floats

COPYRIGHT © 2019 CABINET OFFICE OF JAPAN
The views expressed in this magazine by the interviewees and contributors do not necessarily represent the views of the Cabinet Office or the Government of Japan. No article or any part thereof may be reproduced without the express permission of the Cabinet Office. Copyright inquiries should be made through a form available at:

www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/mailform/inquiry.html

WHERE TO FIND US

Tokyo Narita Airport Terminals 1 and 2 ● JR East Travel Service Center (Tokyo Narita Airport) ● JR Tokyo Station Tourist Information Center ● Tokyo Tourist Information Center (Haneda Airport, Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, Keisei Ueno Station) ● Niigata Airport ● Chubu Centrair International Airport Tourist Information & Service ● Kansai Tourist Information Center (Kansai Int'l Airport) ● Fukuoka Airport Tourist Information ● Foreign Press Center/Japan ● Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan ● Delegation of the European Union to Japan ● Tokyo University ● Waseda University ● Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University ● Ritsumeikan University ● Kokushikan University ● University of Tsukuba ● Keio University ● Meiji University ● Osaka University ● Kyushu University ● Kyoto University ● Tohoku University ● Nagoya University ● Sophia University ● Doshisha University ● Akita International University ● International University of Japan



16 **Word Magic and Flights of the Imagination**
The author of Kiki's Delivery Service has brought joy and inspiration to readers for over five decades and is still going strong



20 **How Kanji Capture Meaning and Emotion in a Single Character**
The subtle differences in Japan's complex written characters convey a wealth of emotional hues and sensory cues



18 **The Little Robot Still Enchanting Fans Worldwide**
Japan's earless robot cat Doraemon is a trusted companion and guide to children around the globe

THEME FOR **FEBRUARY:**
SHARING JAPANESE LITERATURE WITH THE WORLD

Japanese literature has earned fans all over the planet, inspiring everyone from young readers to the most discerning literati with imagination, humor, warmth and dreamlike fantasy and surrealism. This issue presents insights into some of the most famous Japanese authors and their works, as well as how the original language in these works conveys the subtleties of human emotion.

26

MY WAY
A Swedish Researcher Passionate About Japanese Cinema

28

FROM JAPAN TO THE WORLD
The Origins of G-SHOCK: The World's Toughest Wristwatch

30

A TRIP BY LOCAL TRAIN
A Gourmet Train Journey to Sample Shinshu's Culture

PRODUCTION All About, Inc.
MANAGING EDITOR Izumi Natsuhori
EDITORS Douglas W. Jackson, Chiara P. Terzuolo
EDITORIAL SUPPORT Yoko Nishikawa, Aya Kato, Chiho Negami
CONTRIBUTORS Yukiko Ishikawa, Tamaki Kawasaki, Yoko Koizumi, Yoko Munakata, Bifue Ushijima, Takayoshi Yamabe, Katsumi Yasukura
DESIGN Payoon W., Pakpoom L.
PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY Jun Endo, Hidehiro Yamada, Tatsushi Yuasa

ON THE COVER
Sharing Japanese Literature with the World

G20 BUENOS AIRES SUMMIT

On November 30 and December 1, 2018, Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, attended the G20 Buenos Aires Summit held in Buenos Aires, Argentine Republic.

The main theme of the G20 Buenos Aires Summit was "Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development" and based on this theme the leaders held frank exchanges of views on topics such as how the G20 will maintain unity and strengthen economic growth while facing some of the key risks, including financial vulnerabilities in emerging economies. G20 Leaders' Declaration was adopted.

At the retreat session for a high-level, frank exchange on the "Global Opportunities and Challenges in the Next Decade (e.g., artificial intelligence [AI], robotics)" (G20 members and Spain only), Prime Minister Abe as a lead speaker led the discussion. In his remarks, Prime Minister Abe advocated that new



The Prime Minister being welcomed by President Marci of Argentina



The Leaders' commemorative group photo session

technological advancements have the potential to find solutions to social issues, such as aging population and environmental issues, and all people need to acquire literacy for mastering emerging technologies including AI. In addition, the Prime Minister stated that securing the free flow of data generates new values and innovation, and expressed his determination to continue the discussion in the lead-up to next year's G20 Osaka Summit and to lead rulemaking in the new era.

At the closing session, Prime Minister Abe assumed the G20 presidency from President Macri, and expressed his determination for the G20 Summit to be held in Osaka from June 28 to 29 of next year.

Prime Minister Abe stated that, as countries that lead the world economy, the G20 has a responsibility to discuss global issues and find solutions to them. He hoped that the Osaka Summit in June 2019 can promote the achievement of a free and open, inclusive and sustainable future society by driving world economic

growth through promotion of free trade and innovation, and contributing to the simultaneous achievement of economic growth and disparity reduction and to addressing development and global issues with a focus on the SDGs.

In addition, Prime Minister Abe stated that Japan would continue to take up the topic of "infrastructure for development," which was an Argentine priority. He hoped that the G20 Summit can promote the strengthening of connectivity through quality infrastructure that Japan has advanced, as well as the provision of international public goods essential for global economic growth such as global health. In the area of energy and the environment, the Prime Minister underlined the idea of proactively attracting private investment to create a virtuous cycle of environmental protection and economic growth, rather than choosing one or the other. He looked forward to constructive discussion on the G20's contribution to global issues, including climate change and marine plastic litter.

Sharing Japanese Literature with the World

A robot cat from the future with a four-dimensional pocket full of magical tricks. A juicy tell-all memoir by a lady of the royal court from over a thousand years ago. Japan's first Nobel Prize for Literature winner, Yasunari Kawabata's *Snow Country*. This issue delves into these works and their authors, along with other shining examples of Japanese literature that have thrilled readers all over the world and provide a revealing window into Japan and its people. We also look into the high art of translating the country's fiction and nonfiction, and even the nuances of the complex characters Japanese use to write their powerful poetry and prose.

ng, the dawn – when the slowly paling mountain
ed with red, and wisps of faintly crimson-purple
in the sky.
ner, the night – moonlit nights, of course, but also at
of the moon, it's beautiful when fireflies are dancing
ere in a mazy flight. And it's delightful too to see just
wo fly through the darkness, glowing softly. Rain falling
ummer night is also lovely.
tumn, the evening – the blazing sun has sunk very close
mountain rim, and now even the crows,¹ in threes and
or twos and threes, hurrying to their roost, are a moving
Still more enchanting is the sight of a string of wild gese
e distant sky, very tiny. And oh how inexpressible, when
sun has sunk, to hear in the growing darkness the wind,
d the song of autumn insects.
In winter, the early morning – if snow is falling, of course,
s unutterably delightful, but it's perfect too if there's a pure
white frost, or even just when it's very cold, and they hasten to
uild up the fires in the braziers and carry in fresh charcoal.
But it's unpleasant, as the day draws on and the air grows
warmer, how the brazier fire dies down to white ash.

of year – The first month; the third, fourth and fifth
eighth and ninth; the eleventh and twelfth
ly fresh and

用例はこのみにある。この草子の
二「白く」著しく重なるか。
三空の、山に接するあたり。
四「明り」も赤りも重なるか。「明
る・赤る」も中古に確かな用例がな
い。
五現在の赤紫色。高貴な色である。
六兼形で言ひさした語調。その先の
七「い」もさらなり略。言うまでも
八夜、の出来ない時期。
九明る心菜しい、快い感動を表す。
一〇山の、空に接するあたり。稜鏡
して、山端がすぐ身近だという位置
にある。意と見る。
一一底本記三四二みつ。
一二鳥などは元来あはれの対象では
ありえないのに、の氣持の對象では
三「み」とした感動を基本に据え
た語。
一四日後 睡覚中心のとらえ方。
一五「日出也、豆止女天」(新撰宇
鏡)
一六霜などは置く置かないでも、一説、
雪・霜がなくても
第一段

春はあけぼの。やうやうしろくなりゆく山ぎは、すこし
あかりて、紫だちたる雲のほそくたなびきたる。
夏は夜。月のころはさらなり、闇もなほ、蛍のおほく飛
びちがひたる。また、ただ一二つなど、ほのかにうち光
りて行くもをかし。雨など降るもをかし。
秋は夕暮。夕日のさして山の端いと近うなりたるに、鳥
のねごころへ行くとして、三つ四つ、二つ三つなど飛びいそ
ぐへあはれなり。まいて雁などのしらねたるが、いと小
さく見ゆるは、いとをかし。日入り果てて、風の音、虫
音など、はた言ふべきにあらず。
冬はつとめて。雪の降りたるは言ふべきなく
のいと白きも、またしのびぬるも

春はあけぼの。だんだん白んで
としてゆく山ぎわが、少し赤みを帯びて明
くなくて、紫がかかった雲が細く横にびし
ているの。
夏は何といつても夜だ。月のあるころは
言うまでもない、闇もやはり、蛍がたくさ
ん入り乱れて飛びかっているの。また、た
くさんではなく、ただ一二つなど、かす
かに光って飛んで行くのも、夏の夜の快
趣がある。雨などの降るのもおもしろい。
秋は夕暮。夕日がさして、もう山の端す
くというので、三つ四つ、二つ三つなど、
飛んで急いで帰るのまでしみじみとい
じがする。まして雁などの列、
のが、ひどく小さく見
もしろい。日が
風の音や？

NURTURING TALENTED TRANSLATORS TO SPREAD JAPANESE LITERATURE WORLDWIDE

Japanese writing is known to have a singular presence in the literary world. Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Ryohei Miyata speaks about the measures his agency has been taking to disseminate and showcase Japanese literature internationally.

KATSUMI YASUKURA

You are a graduate of the Tokyo University of the Arts and have been its dean for nearly ten years, and have also produced many works as a professional goldsmith. As a creator, what are your views about Japanese literature?

The more the threads of a story unwind, the more strongly I am drawn into another world. It is almost like a condensed treasure box. While reading, we also need to pay attention to the words that come before, after and in between the lines to understand.



Ryohei Miyata, Commissioner for Cultural Affairs



I believe these are the features that make Japanese literature rare within the writing world.

Those elements also make it extremely challenging to translate Japanese literature into other languages without losing its essence. In 2002, the Agency for Cultural Affairs therefore began the Japanese Literature Publishing Project. Works from the post-Meiji Period to modern times were selected and translated into English, French, German, Russian and Indonesian. By 2015, nearly 180 titles had been translated and published. These books were not only sold in various countries, they were also donated to libraries and universities. Among those many titles were some works that were not well known in Japan but became popular overseas and have since been reevaluated here at home. The publishing project ended in 2016, but now there are translation competitions, workshops, symposiums and discussions held to discover and nurture talented translators for modern Japanese literature.

What are the results of this project so far?

Three translation contests have been held since

2011. Japanese literature has gained prominence around the world due to the works of the “triangle” formed by the artist who writes, the readers overseas, and the translator that connects the two. Registration for the fourth competition will take place between June and July of 2019.

The languages for translation will be English or Russian, and are separated into two categories, fiction and critiques/essays, both with two samples as tests. For instance, in the criticism and essay category, there is a work by Tan Onuma that has a tricky line about droplets of rain falling on pear blossoms in the spring. It is not an easy translation, because it is necessary to take the story into consideration while incorporating the dedication and life the author has poured into it. It is vital for the translator to understand and pick up on the nuances. This is the first time we are including Russian translations, and I look forward to many fantastic works.

In 2018, as part of the cultural projects for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, we began the International Festival of Literature TOKYO. We introduced various international and Japanese literary works and the charms of different types of content derived from these works in a distinctive manner. Our goal is to showcase all sorts of art derived from Japanese literature. We hope to transform this event into a forum for sharing information about the value of Japanese literature to the world, and to revitalize both readers and publishers in Japan.

Have any pieces of Japanese literature left a particularly lasting impression on you?

Junji Kinoshita’s play *Yuzuru* (Twilight Crane). This was based on a folktale from my hometown of Sado in Niigata Prefecture. To dramatize this story in our hometown, my father, mother and brothers all worked together to put on a performance, asked locals to act in the play, and took care of all the acting, background sets and costumes. I was only four years old then, but I still clearly remember the silhouette of the crane on the loom against the *shoji* doors. Japanese masterpieces have been made into stage adaptations, live action films and anime. We are doing our best to ensure that more such works are created. 📖

THE PILLOW BOOK AND THE JAPANESE MINDSET

TAMAKI KAWASAKI

Ancient Japanese literature conveys the essence of Japanese people's emotions through subtle descriptions of the seasons and natural elements. Professor Etsuko Akama of Jumonji University, a researcher in Heian literature such as Makura no Soushi (The Pillow Book), illuminates these intricacies of expression for generations less familiar with Japanese classics.



Professor Etsuko Akama of Jumonji University explains the intricacies of Heian literature to generations less familiar with Japanese classics

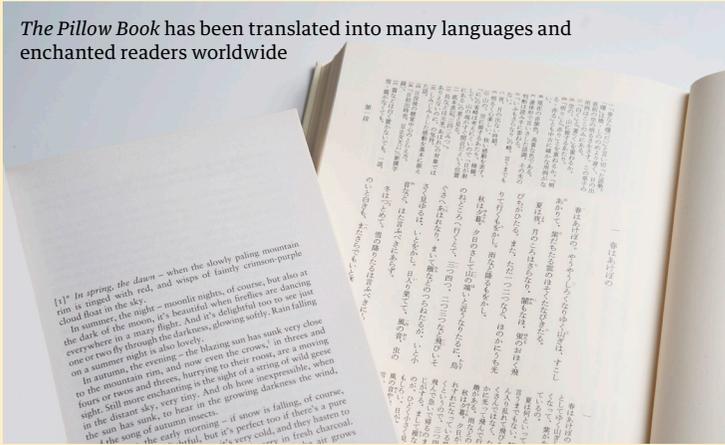
“THE charm of *The Pillow Book* derives from beautiful depictions of the four seasons by Lady Sei Shonagon, who wrote over a thousand years ago in the Heian Period (794-1185),” explains professor Etsuko Akama of Jumonji University. “Starting with the famous opening line, ‘In spring, the dawn—when the slowly paling mountain rim is tinged with red...’ she incorporates seasonality by showcasing the highlights of each season, which are carefully depicted and blended in her prose.”

In the first paragraph that starts with the above line, the writer describes how the sky of Higashiyama in Kyoto changes color as the sun rises, along with the fireflies that illuminate the summer night. “Her descriptions convey a sense of movement, almost like a video posted on social media,” says Akama. Shonagon’s prose allows the reader to visualize the scene, and the distinctive characterizations through the senses—the chirps of the insects, the fragrance of irises and the drenching storm against the face—enthral readers.

As her writing progresses, you

can also spot many noteworthy plays on words and witty ideas. For instance, “near yet far” is used to describe the last day of the year and the New Year, as well as relationships with family members one doesn’t get along with, while “far yet near” is used to portray the Buddhist paradise and relationships between men and women. Her words are similar to those of modern women, mixing humor and sarcasm: the pleasure she finds when a hated person has a bad experience, noting that there is nothing more interesting than gossiping about others, or pointing out that sermons are better when

The Pillow Book has been translated into many languages and enchanted readers worldwide



Kiyohara no Motosuke, was a famous poet, so she grew up surrounded by books, reading, studying *kanji* characters and gaining wonderful writing skills. At the time, upper-class women were hidden away from society once they married. However, Shonagon thought that women should know more about the world. At court, she met Empress Teishi, which resulted in the birth of “seraglio literature” and *The Pillow Book*.

“Although Empress Teishi’s family soon fell to ruin and she died shortly afterward, thanks to Sei Shonagon this florid seraglio literature was preserved for posterity,” Akama notes.

The Heian Period was the longest in Japanese history, lasting for over four hundred years. Although there were political issues, it was a peaceful time without any wars. It was also an age of imperial aristocracy, and through complex human relationships and romantic emotions, many forms of expressions were born through self-reflection, suffering, weakness, craftiness and fear.

“Chirps of insects not being considered noise but rather something soothing is an aesthetic specific to Japanese people,” Akama says. “It’s likely that this form of emotional expression derives from the Shinto belief that trees, insects and even words contain a soul, and that we are surrounded by eight million *kami* (gods).”

These and other emotions of Heian people from over a thousand years ago still live within the hearts and minds of modern Japanese. 7



Sei Shonagon’s humor and intricate observations about life in the Heian Period are at the heart of *The Pillow Book*’s charm

the lecturer is a handsome man. “Sei Shonagon was talented at expressing people’s honest feelings through her writing,” Akama states.

It’s been said that female writers first appeared in Japan during the Heian Period and women’s literature flourished. Prior to that time, Japan’s written language was entirely based on *kanji* (Chinese characters), and it was considered vulgar for women to learn to write in this “men’s language.” However, during the Heian Period a new and simpler form of writing called *hiragana* was devised. This made it

possible to print an anthology of poetry called the *Kokin Wakashu* in native Japanese instead of the classic Chinese characters. This sparked a revival in Japanese literature.

According to Akama, women became leading figures in literary studies during this time, with a focus on intricate descriptions derived from observation and emotions. Even in the modern dictionary of classic Japanese words, explanations for emotional adjectives are referenced from women’s literature.

Sei Shonagon’s father,

Home to the Dreamer: Kenji Miyazawa and Hanamaki City

YOKO KOIZUMI

Three hours by bullet train from Tokyo Station, Hanamaki City is known as the place where one of Japan's most prominent and prolific Japanese authors, Kenji Miyazawa, was born and lived. Unsung in his short lifetime, the highly intellectual writer left behind a legacy of imaginative worlds that have enchanted readers for decades.

GINGA *Tetsudo no Yoru* (Night on the Galactic Railroad), *Chuumon no Ooi Ryouriten* (The Restaurant of Many Orders), *Sero Hiki no Goshu* (Gauche the Cellist), *Yodaka no Hoshi* (The Nighthawk Star)—most Japanese people can name these Kenji Miyazawa literary works, many of which are read in elementary schools.

During his lifetime, however, Miyazawa was an unknown who wrote his fiction while working a day job. From 1921, Miyazawa was a teacher at Hanamaki Agricultural School (currently Iwate Prefectural Hanamaki Agricultural High School) for six years from the age of twenty-five. He then founded the Rasu Chijin Kyokai, or Rasu Farmers Association, which was actually a private school where he lectured on subjects such as agricultural technology and agricultural art theory. He supported local farmers by teaching them about fertilizers and effective agricultural techniques until his untimely death at the age of thirty-seven.

“Kenji Miyazawa was a prolific writer,” says Akihiro Miyazawa, curator of the Miyazawa Kenji Museum and the grandson of Miyazawa’s brother Seiroku. “Besides about a hundred works of fiction for children, he also wrote between 900 and 1000

poems, and also wrote *tanka* poems, plays, song lyrics and more. He wrote such an enormous number of *tanka* that many are not well-known.”

Miyazawa’s erudition was the foundation of this immense body of work. He was knowledgeable about various fields and quick to pounce on the latest in world news. “*Night on the Galactic Railroad*, for example, has a scene about people who died on the *Titanic*. Although he lived in a remote region, he had a tremendously sensitive antenna for world events,” notes the curator.

The Miyazawa Kenji Museum divides its exhibits into five themes that represent the author’s views of the world and the universe: science, art, space, religion and agriculture. However, “the extent and



A mural of *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, one of the many spots in Hanamaki dedicated to the author



Photo courtesy of Rinpoosya



- 1 The home of Kenji Miyazawa, while he taught at the Rasu Farmers Association
- 2 A view from Shimonekozakura (now Sakuramachi), Hanamaki, where Miyazawa lived after setting up the Rasu Farmers Association
- 3 Miyazawa would leave messages on this blackboard so visitors would know where he was headed
- 4 The author nicknamed this area the “English Coast,” as it reminded him of Dover
- 5 Miyazawa at twenty-eight, wearing a jacket made from a deerskin tabard
- 6 A memorial stone engraved with Miyazawa’s poem “*Amenimo Makezu*” in Shimonekozakura, where the author lived for three years from 1926

the depth of his interests went well beyond this categorization,” says Miyazawa, admiring the author’s inexhaustible interest in the world around him.

The writer gathered information from the world over, reflected upon it and then reconstructed the world into a form that the students in his classes or farmers in Hanamaki would understand. His ideas may well have been ahead of their time. In an age when phones were still uncommon and the Internet only a distant dream, it is not difficult to imagine how people must have reacted to these glimpses of distant worlds. Although Miyazawa’s global perspective is at the heart of what makes his works interesting, very few likely understood his worldview back then. The museum’s curator reckons that he wanted to send *something* out to the world from Hanamaki, but it is now impossible to know what.

Another element running through Kenji Miyazawa’s writing is his devotion to Buddhism. “Although time passes, his works never feel out of date,” says Miyazawa, “probably because they are based on the Buddhist concept of universality. That may also be the reason his works have been translated and read in more than twenty countries.”

Kenji Miyazawa left behind a tremendous trove of writing, most of which seemed to be just scrawled and tossed aside. His brother Seiroku Miyazawa organized, categorized and preserved it all after his death. “I took over the work my grandfather deeply cared for, and now people in Hanamaki care for it as well,” the curator says. “The Miyazawa Kenji Museum was built in commemoration fifty years after his death. About ten thousand visitors come to visit the museum from all over Japan and the world every year.”

Hanamaki also preserves various places associated with its native son, including the “English Coast”—a rock formation that reminded the author of Dover; the former site of the Rasu Farmers Association, marked by a monument featuring his poem “*Amenimo Makezu*” (Strong in the Rain); and his home. Miyazawa’s footsteps can be found here and there in Hanamaki, mirroring the community-wide respect for him.

When in Hanamaki, take time to gaze over the landscape and put yourself in his shoes. Only here can you immerse yourself in Kenji Miyazawa’s world and connect with the fantastical worlds this beloved author created. **▼**

From the Tsurumi University Library collection



Snow Country was published as a full novel in 1948, after Kawabata revised the story that had been published in installments in a magazine from 1935 to 1941

ANALYZING YASUNARI KAWABATA'S SNOW COUNTRY JAPAN'S FIRST NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE WINNER

YOKO MUNAKATA

*Over fifty years ago in 1968, novelist Yasunari Kawabata became the first Japanese writer to earn the Nobel Prize in Literature. Tsurumi University professor Rintaro Katayama recounts Kawabata's seventy-two years of life as well as his masterpieces *Thousand Cranes* and *Snow Country*, which are well known and treasured outside Japan.*

YASUNARI Kawabata winning the Nobel Prize in Literature twenty-three years after the end of World War Two was a sign that the world was taking note of Japanese literature, and caused a great stir within Japan. The Nobel Committee for Literature, remarking on the selection process, praised Kawabata's work for its narrative mastery, which expresses the essence of the Japanese mind with great sensibility.

That sensibility was due in no small part to the author's early years. His childhood and upbringing were both unhappy. Born in 1899, he lost his father,

mother and older sister at the age of ten, and then lost his grandparents who had taken him in at fifteen, becoming an orphan. Raised by strangers, he was always assessing how those around him were feeling, and spent his youth believing that he was not normal.

According to Katayama, “Kawabata’s works reveal a strong influence from the various emotional ripples caused by a lonely upbringing, more so than the upbringing itself.”

Snow Country focuses on Shimamura, an “idler and third-rate writer writing about ballet he hasn’t even seen,” a geisha named Komako, who works in a hot springs town, and another girl named Yoko. Kawabata spent 1946 to 1947 revising the story that had been published in installments in a magazine from 1935 to 1941; the full novel was published in 1948. The novel’s famous opening lines are: “The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky.”

Katayama states that *Snow Country* possesses three noteworthy traits. First, while it is written in the third person, the novel’s fantastical worldview is the exact opposite of objective. “You could say that we see all of Shimamura’s delusions, which was an unprecedented way of writing a novel. In the opening scene, we could substitute the word ‘I’ for ‘Shimamura’ and it would still read naturally.”

The second trait is the subtle beauty of the writing style. According to the professor, the beautiful portrayal of each scene is like observing a painting. By watching a world that is very much not reality depicted as if it were, the reader is lured into a lovely fantasy.

The third trait is its eroticism, even though there are no direct depictions of lovemaking in



Professor Rintaro Katayama of Tsurumi University’s Department of Japanese Literature

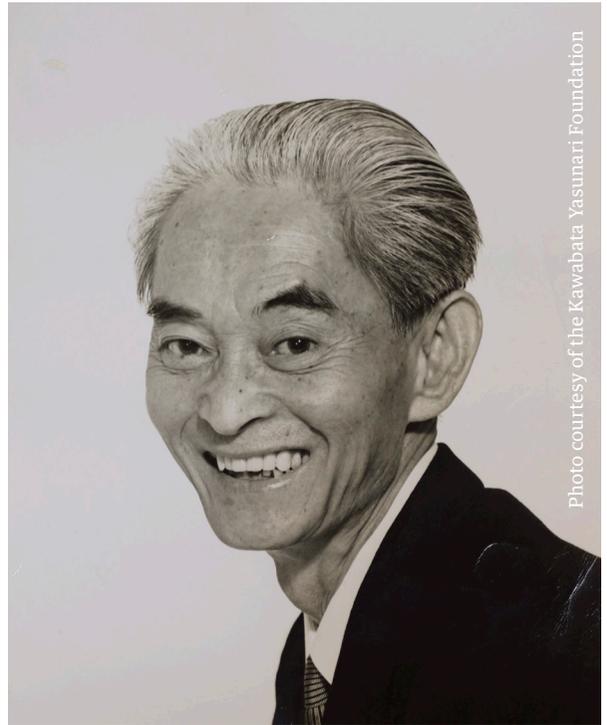


Photo courtesy of the Kawabata Yasunari Foundation

Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese author to win the Nobel Prize in Literature

Snow Country. That could be deliberate on the part of Kawabata, or he may have wanted to avoid using language expressly prohibited by postwar censors. Instead, he conveys the action to the reader with indirect phrases such as “Now, there was something between the two of them.” In doing so, the reader’s imagination is stimulated and the main characters—especially Komako—appear more beautiful, free and bold.

At the turn of the twentieth century, European novels began to depict the inner workings of the writer’s mind. Kawabata wrote about the inner mind in a way that did not simply mimic the West, and also expressed Japan’s classic, traditional beauty. Westerners responded to this and felt an admiration for the East, which is why Kawabata’s works have been praised as a “a bridge between East and West.”

Sadly, four years after receiving his Nobel Prize, Kawabata took his own life in 1972 in his workroom. But his works live on, and have been translated into English, German, French, Chinese and Korean, among many other languages, and are still read and appreciated by many people outside Japan. If you have not read a Yasunari Kawabata novel, pick up a copy of *Snow Country* and experience its wonderfully dreamlike world. 7

FANTASTIC REALMS

THE CHARMS OF JAPANESE CHILDREN'S BOOKS



Yumiko Sakuma, president of JBBY and renowned translator of children's books

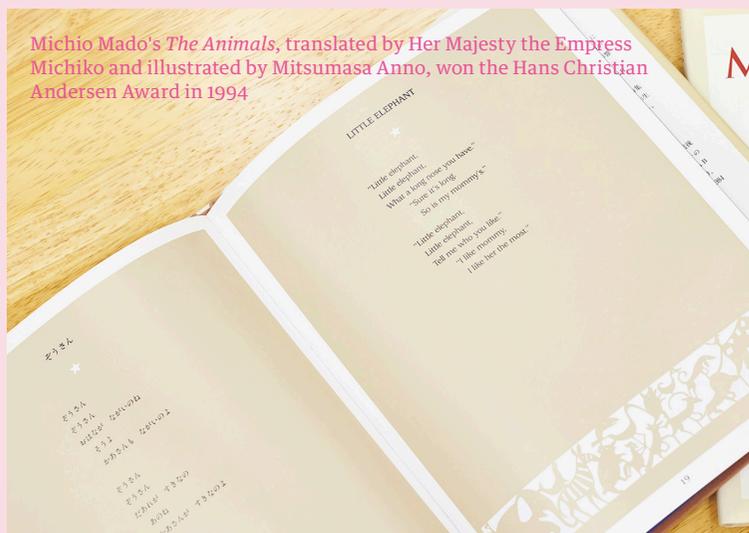
TAMAKI KAWASAKI

Yumiko Sakuma, president of the Japanese Board on Books for Young People, discusses the particular characteristics Japanese children's books share, and how they are regarded throughout the world.

YUMIKO Sakuma, president of the Japanese Board on Books for Young People (JBBY) and a well-known translator of children's books, has a great deal to say about the many charms of Japanese children's books and their place in the realm of literature.

Sakuma notes that each author and artist naturally has a distinctive style, but Japanese picture books tend to have a soft touch and humorous themes that garner popularity inside and outside Japan. Picture books are a visual medium, so they can easily overcome language barriers and gain international notice. Illustrators Suekichi Akaba and Mitsumasa Anno received the Hans Christian Andersen

Michio Mado's *The Animals*, translated by Her Majesty the Empress Michiko and illustrated by Mitsumasa Anno, won the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1994



Illustrator Award in 1980 and 1984, respectively, proving that illustrators receive international acclaim sooner than writers aiming for the Author Award. “You could say the animation-like scenery of Akaba’s *Sora, nigero* is more Japanese-looking compared to traditional European picture books. However Anno’s appealing illustrations combine the charms of both Japanese and Western art,” Sakuma explains.

On the other hand, in Japanese children’s literature “there are many authors who perfectly capture the minute workings of a child’s heart and the landscape they see in their minds,” says Sakuma. “Japanese nonfiction books also tend to be carefully researched, and that accuracy is another defining trait. I’d like to see writers broaden their horizons to include more social and international topics, to make

children aware of their role in society and show them a vision of the future, the way Western authors do.

“Many Japanese works are well worth spreading to readers outside Japan,” she adds, “but unfortunately not many are translated and published.”

Thanks to the proactive recommendation efforts of JBBY, however, authors such as Michio Mado (*The Animals*, 1994), Nahoko Uehashi (*Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*, 2014), and Eiko Kadono (*Kiki’s Delivery Service*, 2018) have won the Hans Christian Andersen Award. Chinese author Cao Wenxuan won the award in 2016, so Asian authors have received the award three times in recent years.

The translator who must leap over language barriers and convey the fun of Japanese literature to readers across the world is essential. Her Majesty the Empress Michiko,

for example, translated Michio Mado’s *The Animals*. “In translating poetry to English, you must be aware of the unique sense of the line lengths and the rhyme scheme. Empress Michiko has been writing picture books and translating poems for a long time, so Tayo Shima, who was a JBBY board member at the time and a fellow alumna of the University of the Sacred Heart, felt that she was the only one who could translate the book and sought her out,” explains Sakuma.

It was an exhaustive process, with the Empress considering not just the topic of the poems but also the visual balance, and carefully checking in with Mado himself along the way. “The translation was very well received abroad, and contributed greatly to his winning the Hans Christian Andersen Award,” Sakuma points out.

When asked about what Japanese works need to be more visible in the world outside Japan, Sakuma answers: “If the authors, translators and editors all broaden their horizons and keep their eye on books published inside and outside Japan, Japanese children’s books will change for the better. JBBY curates recommendation lists of children’s literature from all over the world to introduce Japanese readers to high-quality works from many countries and vice versa. We want to raise children who read these life-affirming books that show a variety of cultural values.” 📖



Sakuma wants to introduce children to a wealth of culturally diverse, life-affirming books



Children's author Eiko Kadono still publishes one or two books each year

WORD MAGIC AND FLIGHTS OF THE IMAGINATION

TAMAKI KAWASAKI

Sometimes called the “Nobel Prize for children’s literature,” the Hans Christian Andersen Award is the world’s highest distinction awarded to children’s literature. Children’s author Eiko Kadono, who won the author’s award in 2018, discusses her creative environment and behind-the-scenes stories related to writing works such as her most famous book, Kiki’s Delivery Service.

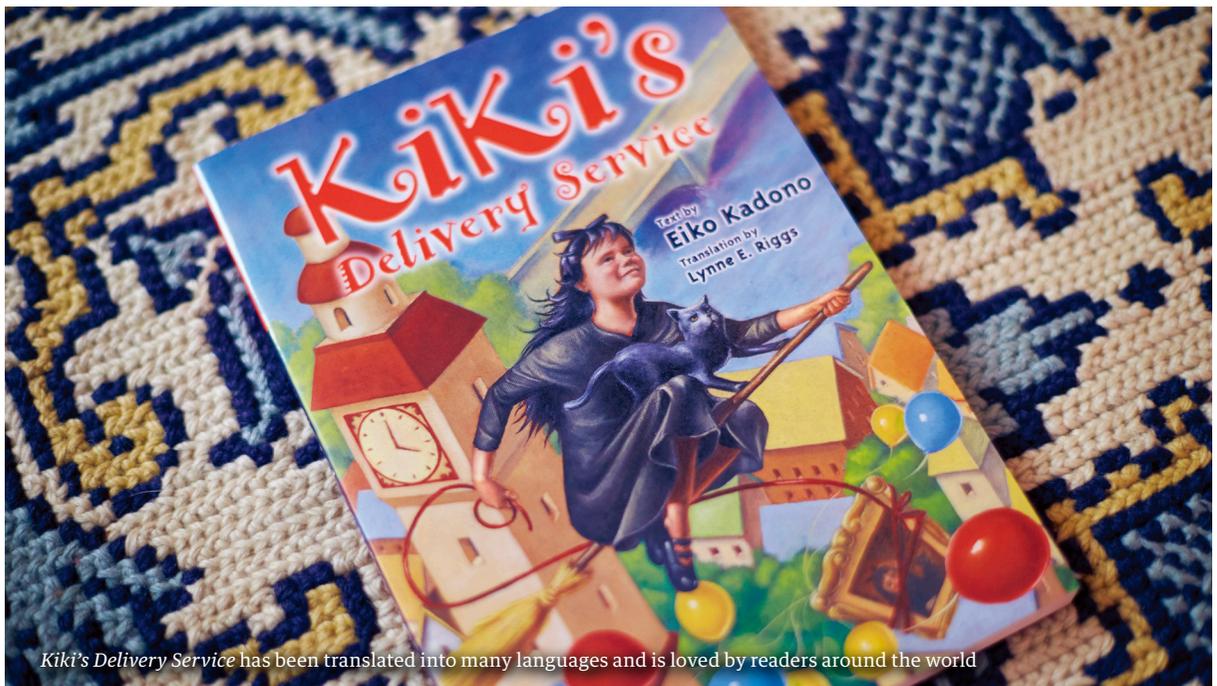
TRANSLATED into multiple languages, including English, Italian, Chinese and Swedish, and even animated by the renowned Studio Ghibli, *Kiki’s Delivery Service* has a massive international fan base.

The inspiration for the story, which portrays the growth of a cute young witch, came when author Eiko Kadono saw a picture her daughter drew that depicted a witch listening to the radio. “I found this idea fascinating,” Kadono recalls. “What kinds of things would she see if she got on her broomstick and flew through the sky? What kind of life would

she lead? I thought that if I wrote a story, I might be able to see all this in my imagination, and my interest just kept growing.”

The story traces the life of the heroine, Kiki, from age thirteen to when she becomes a mother at thirty-five. The Japanese version is a six-volume series created over the course of twenty-five years, with over 1.5 million total copies sold.

Reflecting on the work, Kadono says: “It wasn’t my intention to write about someone growing up. I simply followed the idea of a thirteen-year-old girl finding herself in that difficult period between



Kiki's Delivery Service has been translated into many languages and is loved by readers around the world

childhood and adulthood. The story was the result of wondering how she could overcome her situation and rise to the next level using the single type of magic she knew.”

While *Kiki's Delivery Service* is sometimes linked to the progress of women in contemporary society, Kadono says that as an author, having “a reader imagine and interpret the story freely represents the best kind of reading experience for each individual,” and wants the series to be read with that kind of freedom. Letters from readers have expressed how deeply the story touched them. They read the book again and again when they faced challenges in a new environment, such as moving from their rural hometown to Tokyo or going overseas to study abroad.

As a writer of children's stories, Kadono believes “the sense of curiosity cultivated in our childhood is what makes us who we are.” Her formative experience with language came through the sound of onomatopoeias that appeared in old stories her father would tell her in a singsong voice. This was after Kadono lost her mother at the age of five. As a girl, Kadono read everything she could get her hands on. In her twenties, she briefly lived in Brazil. She worked hard to communicate with and understand other people in a country with a different language and religion than Japan. This reaffirmed for her the great power of words, which goes beyond just their

meaning. It was only as an adult, however, that Kadono discovered her love of writing.

Kadono wrote her first book, a nonfiction work, at the age of thirty-four; she made her fiction debut at forty-two. “While there were some hard times, I enjoyed it, so I was able to continue,” she says. “My policy was to avoid setting deadlines but to write each day. I did not leave my desk, and when I could not write stories I did things like writing letters. You set things up physically to ready yourself for writing.” The 84-year-old writer explains with a smile that you first must ensure you are in good health. She adds that she has been a writer for about five decades, yet still maintains her publication pace of one to two works a year.

Those who grew up reading Kadono's works have become parents themselves, and look forward to having their children read the same stories they enjoyed. Along with many of her other representative works, Kadono's recent book *1945 The Forest Tunnel* was highly praised at this year's Hans Christian Andersen awards. It candidly depicts the loneliness, fear and absurdity Kadono experienced at the age of ten in the days before the end of WWII. “Moving on, I'd like to write about my growth after *1945 The Forest Tunnel*. I'd also like to gather manuscripts for horror stories and essays I already have and turn them into a book,” she adds, showing her still-powerful drive to write. **7**

A wide variety of readers across ages, national borders and languages have loved the Japanese manga series *Doraemon* since it first appeared fifty years ago. The little robot cat is so popular outside Japan that the manga series has been translated into a dozen languages.

TAMAKI KAWASAKI



Children always enthusiastically welcome their pal Doraemon during school visits

THE LITTLE ROBOT STILL ENCHANTING FANS WORLDWIDE

NOBITA Nobi is a boy who struggles with everything from schoolwork to sports and friendships. Naturally this is a source of frustration for his mother, who scolds Nobita daily. But one day Doraemon—an earless robot cat traveling back in a time machine from the twenty-second century—jumps out of Nobita’s desk drawer and changes his life.

A science-fiction manga series for children, *Doraemon*

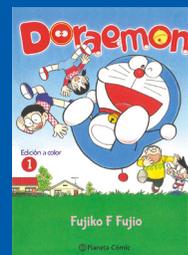
is the representative work of Japanese manga artist Fujiko F. Fujio (the pen name of Hiroshi Fujimoto). The manga storyline follows Nobita and his friends, who overcome challenges in their everyday lives aided by the amazing futuristic gadgets that Doraemon pulls out of his “four-dimensional pocket.” Since it was first published in 1970, the series has been adapted into an anime series as well as films. Over the past five decades, Doraemon

has gained numerous fans both within and outside Japan. The series has been translated into twelve different languages and published in seventeen countries, and the anime series has been broadcast in fifty-five countries.

Translated *Doraemon* manga are particularly popular in Asia. “In particular, Vietnamese fans’ love of *Doraemon* is unprecedented,” says Mitsuru Saito, chief producer



Highly popular in Vietnam, the *Doraemon* series occupies a third of the manga section in bookstores



So far the series has been translated into twelve different languages and published in seventeen countries

of international media at publisher house Shogakukan. Even before Shogakukan and their counterpart in Vietnam concluded the official licensing contract, *Doraemon* was already famous in Vietnam due to unauthorized copies. Fujio opted not to receive royalties accrued from this official licensing, requesting instead that the money be spent on promoting education for children who wish to learn. The Doraemon Scholarship Fund, founded to honor Fujio's wishes, has allowed over ten thousand Vietnamese children to pursue their education.

When Doraemon—now a traffic safety mascot throughout Vietnam—appears at schools, children welcome him enthusiastically. The *Doraemon* series occupies a third of

the manga section in local bookstores.

“The *Doraemon* manga series was originally created for magazines that Shogakukan used to publish for school-aged children, so the character is like a friend to young readers,” says Saito, explaining the reason for the character’s celebrity and popularity. “The simple and easy-to-understand artwork, the fun plots where Doraemon makes children’s innocent wishes and dreams come true using his gadgets, and the gentle and encouraging worldview that encompasses the characters are universally appreciated, going beyond generations and national borders.”

As the publisher responsible for preserving the original artwork from the manga series, “it is Shogakukan’s wish to

preserve the manga’s form and value as it is, and continue to pass it on to future generations,” Saito says. However, they continue to improve the quality of their publication. For instance, in pursuit of better picture quality, they renewed the printing films for the original volumes of the series.

“We’ll keep sharing *Doraemon* manga with the world,” Saito says. “While it may have a long history, we want to continue to emphasize the appeal of this wonderful, timeless work.” Thanks to the efforts of the publisher that took over Fujio’s creative philosophy, through the pages of manga *Doraemon* will continue to be a trusted friend to children for generations while staying true to himself. **17**

Written Japanese uses three writing systems: kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Kanji characters are quite complex, with multiple meanings and various pronunciations. Professor Hiroyuki Sasahara, a kanji research specialist, shares the evolution of these characters as well as the logic and intricacies behind their meaning and appearance.



HOW KANJI CAPTURE MEANING AND EMOTION IN A SINGLE CHARACTER

TAKAYOSHI YAMABE



Professor Hiroyuki Sasahara of Waseda University's School of Social Sciences

KANJI characters originated in China and spread to East Asian countries, with Japan assimilating the writing system by the fifth century. *Hiragana* and *katakana*—two simpler syllabic alphabets based on *kanji*—were created in the ninth century. At first intellectuals read documents in Chinese and Korean, and only used *kanji* as a written language. According to Professor Hiroyuki Sasahara of Waseda University's School of Social Sciences, however, *kanji* began to evolve as people shaped the system to suit the Japanese language and pronunciation.

"Individual letters in the Roman alphabet basically only have one pronunciation, whereas Japanese *kanji* characters can be read in multiple ways," Sasahara notes. "Since *kanji* originally come from a different language, Japanese people had to match the equivalent sound with a similar meaning in Japanese. For instance, the character for mountain (山) was originally pronounced 'san,' while in Japanese it was changed to 'yama.' The

character for life (生) also contains many meanings, and depending on the usage can be read as *sei*, *shou*, *i*, *ha*, *u*, *nama* or *ki*."

Some characters were altered to suit the Japanese language, and others were created. For instance, in ancient times the character for "beech tree" was originally written as 榧. While retaining the tree (木) radical on the left-hand side, they replaced the other character with one that meant "firm" (堅) to represent the hardness of the wood, and so it became 榧. By the eighth century, it is clear from documents such as Muromachi Period (1336-1573) courtiers' journals that other original Japanese *kanji* also came into use. For instance, sardines are known as a fish (魚) that needs to swim in a school for protection and spoils easily, so they added the character for weak (弱) to the fish character to represent sardines (鯖). On the other hand, the codfish is known as a fish that is white as snow and delicious during the winter, so the character for cod (鱈) incorporates the character for snow (雪).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHINESE AND JAPANESE *KANJI*

	China	Japan
鮓	<i>shiokara</i> (salted fermented seafood)	sushi
堀	<i>horu/ana</i> (hole)	<i>hori</i> (moat)
悃	<i>kashikoi</i> (clever)	<i>shinobu</i> (to reminisce)
儂	<i>bonyari</i> (idle)	<i>hakanai</i> (ephemeral)

NEW OR ALTERED *KANJI*

China	Japan	
×	躰	(<i>shitsuke</i>) a new character was created for “discipline” as there was no Chinese equivalent
×	鰯	(<i>iwashi</i>) as fish (魚) that need to swim in a school for protection and spoils easily, the character for “sardines” includes the <i>kanji</i> for weak (弱)
鳳巾 →	凧	(<i>tako</i>) this original Japanese character for “kite” closely resembles its meaning
檜 →	榲	(<i>kashi</i>) the character for “evergreen oak” was improved to make it easier to understand
蝦 →	海老	(<i>ebi</i>) the Japanese characters for “shrimp” create a mental image of whiskered old man (老), stooped with age, who lives in the sea (海)
咖啡 →	珈琲	(<i>kohi</i>) instead of using the character for mouth (口), which has connotations of throwing something away, the character for coffee was changed to incorporate the more positive <i>kanji</i> for gems or beads (玉)

“*Kanji* in Japan are not just phonetic symbols—they portray a specific meaning or feeling through the character,” Sasahara explains. “Even when creating *kanji*, the Japanese people preferred to combine characters to create new meanings—as demonstrated by the original characters for ‘beech tree’ and ‘cod.’ To describe the meaning of each character, people added their own way of reading characters that originated in China.”

Sasahara points out that *kanji* also help express emotions. For instance, both 思 and 想 are read as *omo*, and mean “thought” or “thinking.” However, the latter is most frequently used when expressing thoughts of faraway family and lovers or when reminiscing about old times, loneliness and love.

“It’s common in literary works to use different *kanji* to reflect emotion,” he adds. “There are also cases in which non-Japanese words are written out in *kanji* as well. The famous novelist Natsume Soseki was the first to create a *kanji*-fied word for romance, 浪漫 (*roman*). These characters create the impression

of romance by using 浪 for the ‘waves’ of emotions and 漫 to describe how they spread,” Sasahara explains.

Japanese is a complex language in which characters can be read in various ways, and is also combined with *hiragana* or *katakana*. Sasahara states that it is fascinating how this written language that began well over a thousand years ago still maintains its basic principles while continuing to evolve.

“I believe the evolution of *kanji* is driven by the thoughts and intentions behind each writer’s work and how they wish to express their feelings on paper. For instance, simply changing the character for ‘thought’ (思 and 想) can change the weight of the words, and replacing certain *kanji* with *hiragana* can make a phrase less formal or easier to understand,” the researcher muses.

New ways of using *kanji* and new readings continue to appear. Those adopted by the majority survive and help the language thrive. *Kanji* reflect the changes in Japanese people’s hearts and lifestyles. 📖

JAPAN HERITAGE: TELLING THE TALES BEHIND HISTORICAL SITES

World Heritage Site listings and the designation of Cultural Properties are primarily intended to protect sites. But Japan Heritage introduces the stories and historical context behind local Tangible and Intangible Cultural Properties in various regions, showcasing their appeal in a new light. The recognizing body of Japan Heritage—the Agency for Cultural Affairs—shares its aims for the project.

TAKAYOSHI YAMABE

SINCE 2015, the Agency for Cultural Affairs has been recognizing Japan Heritage stories, responding to applications from municipal and prefectural governments across Japan. This project recognizes local community efforts to introduce their culture and traditions through the unique historical elements and cultural properties they prize, including sites, architectural structures, industries and customs.

Only communities that meet certain criteria receive the Japan Heritage treatment and recognition. In May 2018, the Agency for Cultural Affairs recognized an additional thirteen regional stories, including a joint application from four cities in Okayama Prefecture entitled “Okayama, the Birthplace of the Legend of Momotaro—Ancient Kibi Heritage Conveying Tales of Demon Slaying” and another from Fukuyama City in Hiroshima Prefecture, which put forward “Japan’s Leading Port

Town of Early-Modern Times -Tomonoura, with its Sepia Tones Enveloped in the Evening Calm of the Seto Inland Sea.” Sixty-seven Japan Heritage stories have been recognized so far.

Mitsunobu Nakajima from the cultural resources utilization division at the Agency for Cultural Affairs explains that the Japan Heritage project was created to recognize the value of cultural properties in local communities in greater historical and geographical contexts rather than independently.

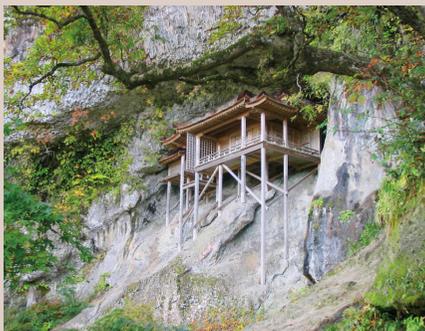
“Learning the historical and cultural background of fine arts and crafts allows us to appreciate them on a deeper level,” he explains. “For instance, the knowledge that another piece of art in a distant region affected the creation of an Important Cultural Property creates a new dimension for enjoying the object. Japan Heritage calls this contextualization ‘stories of Japanese cultures and traditions.’ The key criteria for recognition include the appropriateness of the story—whether the tale is built upon traditions and customs rooted in the community’s history and climate—and whether the story’s theme clearly addresses the whole community’s unique characteristics.”

Nakajima says that creating and presenting these framed narratives makes it easier to strategically and effectively promote the area, both within



and outside Japan. For example, the story of Misasa Town in Tottori Prefecture, which was recognized as Japan Heritage in 2015, “A Site for Purifying the Six Roots of Perception and Healing the Six Senses—Japan’s Most Dangerous National Treasure and a World-Famous Radon Hot Spring,” integrated the arduous mountain paths and steep slopes up to Nageiredo, a small Buddhist temple designated as a National Treasure, into the tale. Spreading the story overseas on social media with the help of the town’s international residents boosted the number of tourists from abroad in 2017 by 2.7 times that of 2014, before the Japan Heritage recognition.

The story of Kurashiki City in Okayama Prefecture, “From a Single Cotton Plant—A Textile Town Weaving Together Japan and the West” is based on its history of reclaiming land from the sea four centuries ago and raising cotton. The story shows how this textile town grew and became renowned for the quality of its products and pretty whitewashed houses, which



many visitors now come to see. The city constantly promotes its local identity by suggesting model routes that showcase the town's many interesting spots.

Municipalities with stories recognized as Japan Heritage receive financial support for three years and assistance from expert advisors. The Agency for Cultural Affairs also lists Japan Heritage stories in domestic and international promotion activities. Given those merits, more municipalities are expected to clamor for this recognition.

“Japan Heritage aims to revitalize local communities by linking cultural properties that aren't currently connected, so the recognition process also looks at how the applicants plan to promote themselves after recognition,” Nakajima says. “Tsuwano Town in Shimane Prefecture was recognized in 2015 for their story ‘Tsuwano Then and Now: Exploring the Town of Tsuwano through the One Hundred Landscapes of Tsuwano.’ They established a guidance center to explain the story with images and

panels, and offered new ways to explore the town. As a result, compared to 2014 the number of international visitors staying in Tsuwano in 2016 grew by 1.6 times.”

Japan Heritage sites allow you to see the links between history and culture rooted in the communities, and find new ways to experience Japan. 

- 1 Okayama Prefecture is the birthplace of the legend of Momotaro. Kibitsu Shrine (above), Kinojo Castle (below)
- 2 Tomonoura Port in Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture. Stone lamp at dusk (above), a streetscape recognized as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings (below)
- 3 Misasa Town in Tottori Prefecture, known for its radium springs. Nageiredo Hall of Sanbutsuji Temple (above), Misasa Onsen Hot Spring (below)
- 4 Tsuwano Town in Shimane Prefecture. One of the One Hundred Landscapes of Tsuwano (above), the traditional heron dance (below)
- 5 The textile town of Kurashiki City in Okayama Prefecture. Whitewashed houses in the Bikan Historical Quarter (above), Kojima Jeans Street (below)



1



A TINY ELECTRIC CAR THAT'S WATERPROOF AND FLOATS

BIFUE USHIJIMA

A small Japanese startup has invented an electric vehicle that floats on water, a new take on mobility that will enrich lives and save people during tsunamis and floods. The company, called FOMM, aims to start mass production and sales in Southeast Asia, and hopes local production will energize local economies there.



Takayuki Morita,
general manager of
FOMM's development
division

THE compact electric vehicle FOMM ONE is a floating car. Thanks to its specially designed turbine-shaped wheels, this EV can slowly move across water.

Many lives were lost in the huge tsunamis that hit Tohoku's coastal regions after the Great East Japan Earthquake that struck on March 11, 2011. That disaster inspired CEO Hideo Tsurumaki, who saw a need for a floating waterproof car, to found his startup FOMM in 2013.

"Our earliest experimental car was like a floating bathtub with tires and doors," recounts Takayuki Morita, who headed the development of the FOMM ONE. "We designed it to float for about one day during times of flooding, so it wasn't built for both land and sea."

Development engineers have flocked to FOMM. That's not surprising, because founder Tsurumaki was in charge of COMS—Toyota's ultra-small single-rider EV—from planning to development. FOMM took about a year to complete its first concept model, however, and Morita recalls running into difficulty sourcing parts and other issues as an unknown startup.

The current FOMM ONE can seat four despite its body size being classed as the world's smallest. To ensure



2



3



4

- 1 The visionary compact electric vehicle FOMM ONE is waterproof and floats
- 2 Demonstration of the car's ability to move through water at a motor show
- 3 Specially designed wheels allow the vehicle to not only stay afloat but also move
- 4 FOMM aims to start selling vehicles in Thailand by February 2019

adequate space in the car, FOMM ONE has motors in its front wheels (for front-wheel drive), and the steering wheel and accelerator are integrated. The driver's hands control the accelerator while braking is done with the feet, so drivers won't mix up the brake and accelerator. Morita says this may help elderly people in depopulated areas remain mobile.

The company name, FOMM, stands for "First One Mile Mobility" and represents the company's belief in helping people cover the "first mile" needed to link them to greater mobility. The car's top speed is eighty kilometers per hour, and it has four rechargeable lithium ion batteries. On a full charge, the FOMM ONE can travel for 160 kilometers (or 100, if the air conditioner is used).

In Southeast Asia, where floods occur regularly, an unsinkable car could be a true lifesaver. Since it was founded, FOMM has focused on a target market of developing countries in Southeast Asia, and aim to start selling vehicles in Thailand by February 2019. The sales price there is 664,000 baht (about US\$21,000). While this is fairly expensive compared to the cost of a gas vehicle in the same class, the price reflects the importance the Japanese

automobile manufacturer places on safety. FOMM aims to reduce the cost further so the car can be marketed more widely.

A local subsidiary in Thailand is handling production and sales for the FOMM ONE, and FOMM would like to grow the business into a regional industry. To accomplish this, the assembly is made as simple as possible, requiring only a small number of parts and using components that can be sourced locally.

"One of our founding principles is to eradicate poverty, and our goal is not simply to make electric vehicles but to develop cars that can enrich people's lives," Morita emphasizes. "Through the spread of the FOMM ONE, we'd like to help solve Southeast Asia's problems of poverty and environment."

After Southeast Asia, FOMM has its eyes on the European market, where EVs are already popular, and the company hopes to release the vehicle in Japan by 2020. As this startup and its visionary Japanese engineers seek to enrich people's lives with small electric cars that can float above floods, the world is taking notice. **1**

Growth of record industry



A SWEDISH RESEARCHER PASSIONATE ABOUT JAPANESE CINEMA

TAMAKI KAWASAKI

Stockholm native Johan Nordström, who first came to Japan in 2001, currently lectures on Japanese film history at Tsuru University's Department of Global Education and also promotes contemporary Japanese films as a curator at international film festivals.

JOHAN Nordström's research focuses on prewar Japanese films and modernism in popular culture. A native of Stockholm in Sweden, Nordström grew up familiarizing himself with Japanese culture, influenced by his author father. He started watching Japanese anime and films at a very young age, and began reading translated works of great Japanese authors such as Naoya Shiga, Junichiro Tanizaki and Yukio Mishima. "I was watching Kurosawa's period films and seventies anime, such as *Galaxy Express 999* and *Space Battleship Yamato*. I was the type of teenager who was infatuated with *Kinkakuji* by Yukio Mishima, even calling it one of the world's best novels," Nordström laughs.

In 2001, while majoring in Japanese at Stockholm University, Nordström fulfilled a long-cherished

dream of visiting Japan through a short study-abroad program. This strengthened his ambition to study Japanese films in the Japanese language, which led him to complete his Ph.D. at Waseda University's Department of Theatre and Film Arts at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in Tokyo. He then worked as a postdoctoral researcher at Meiji Gakuin University, funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. He now teaches at Tsuru University near Mount Fuji.

Since 2010, Nordström also regularly curates international film festivals, often in collaboration with the National Film Archive of Japan. He has helped organize international film festivals showing Japanese films—such as masterpieces of silent cinema, early sound cinema from the 1930s, Japanese color cinema from the 1950s and anime—



- 1 Johan Nordström, lecturer on Japanese film history at Tsuru University
- 2 Nordström's secret to living happily in Japan is to wholeheartedly embrace local culture and customs

at overseas museums, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York. “I’m very glad the Japanese government cares for the country’s film culture and supports activities to preserve it,” says Nordström. “Films visualize culture, and they become a good entrance point for the world to better understand Japan.”

He says that people have always treated him with warmth and kindness in Japan. “Just like Sweden, Japan is a safe and comfortable country to live in. As long as you behave in accordance with Japanese customs, they welcome you with open arms and make you feel you are part of the local community. And Swedish people are generally inclined to follow the proverb, ‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do,’” Nordström adds in fluent Japanese.

A concern for family-oriented Nordström is that he has little time to spend with his parents in Sweden. “I chose an academic job partly because it has long holidays,” he notes. “It allows me to spend a month back in Sweden every summer and take a break at the end of year.”

Sweden and Japan are both aging societies. “As a welfare state, Sweden may be ahead in the availability of elder care facilities and systems,” Nordström shares. “However, when possible, I believe it’s preferable for family to take care of their aging parents. I often see elderly people in Japan living with their families and being warmly cared for. I find that spirit of filial piety beautiful, and am happy to see it is alive and well.” Besides family bonds, he’s impressed with the courtesy and strong ties that exist between senior and junior students and colleagues, as well as teachers and students in different communities.

Nordström is working on a book based on his doctoral dissertation, which will focus on early talkies and how the Japanese film industry changed during its transition to sound in the 1930s. “I hope to publish my book through a Japanese publisher, and to continue introducing Japanese film culture abroad,” says Nordström.

The beauty of traditional houses and nature also fascinates him. “I’m thinking of purchasing an old folk house away from Tokyo and renovating it to live there.” It’s clear that even outside the world of film, Nordström enjoys living in Japan to the fullest. **7**

THE ORIGINS OF G-SHOCK THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST WRISTWATCH

KATSUMI YASUKURA

Over a hundred million G-SHOCK wristwatches have been shipped for sale to customers around the world since the brand debuted in 1983. This shockproof line of timepieces—a prime example of Japan's high-quality manufacturing—came into being as a result of serendipity and one engineer's bitter personal experience.



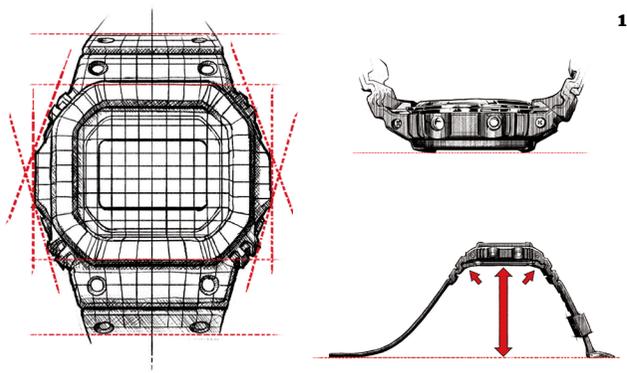
WRISTWATCHES reportedly spread all over the world as military gear during the First World War. While Europe and the United States initially led global production, Japanese manufacturers improved their technology and started competing in the global market after the Second World War. Made-in-Japan quartz watches became known for being affordable yet accurate. CASIO COMPUTER CO., LTD. took this even further by pursuing the goal of making their products shock-resistant and creating a whole new market with their trademark G-SHOCK watches.

“It all started when Kikuo Ibe, one of our engineers, accidentally dropped his wristwatch and shattered it. That watch was a gift from his parents when he entered high school,” explains Haruka Yanagihara from Casio’s public relations department. “Watches were much more delicate back then, so dropping one was almost certain to break it. Ibe submitted a one-sentence product proposal for ‘a wristwatch that does not break when dropped.’ The

company approved it, and started the research and development process.”

Ibe’s initial idea was to protect the module—the heart of a wristwatch—by surrounding it with some rubberized buffer material. He tested the shock resistance of over two hundred prototypes by dropping them on the floor from a height of about ten meters, which resulted in one failure after another. By the time a prototype passed this test, the buffer material encasing the module was as big as an apple, which would naturally be impossible to sell.

Feeling stuck, Ibe found inspiration when he happened to see a little girl playing in a park. “She was bouncing a ball on the ground, and Ibe had a vision of the wristwatch module in the core of the ball,” Yanagihara explains. “This led to the invention of a wristwatch with a hollow structure, in which bearings inside the body of the watch support a floating module. He also came up with the omnidirectional covering that prevents vulnerable parts of a wristwatch—such as buttons and the LCD screen—from hitting the ground when dropped. These two



1



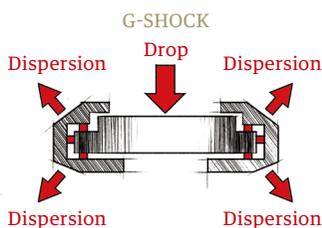
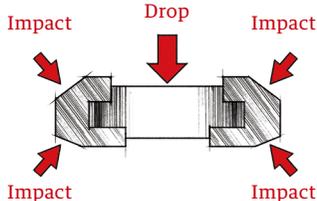
3



4

Conventional watches

2



- 1 The G-SHOCK's original module and curved watchband soften the impact of being dropped
- 2 The wristwatch's hollow structure was inspired by a bouncing rubber ball
- 3 Casio collaborated with the Kobe City Fire Bureau to create a special watch to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary
- 4 A TV commercial featuring an ice hockey player shooting a G-SHOCK instead of a puck sparked the watch's worldwide popularity

features are included in all G-SHOCK products and are at the heart of the brand's concept of 'absolute toughness.' ”

After two years of product development, the G-SHOCK debuted simultaneously in Japan, the United States and Europe in 1983. A TV commercial produced in 1984 in which an ice hockey player shoots a G-SHOCK instead of a puck and the wristwatch remains whole sparked the brand's worldwide popularity. The commercial was criticized as being all hype, but an American TV program later tested it and proved the product's extraordinary shock tolerance. Since then, outdoor enthusiasts, firefighters, police officers, U.S. armed forces personnel and other people who need highly durable wristwatches have bought the G-SHOCK.

“In the 1990s, the G-SHOCK's sturdiness and style also caught the eye of skateboarders on the West Coast of the United States, which then brought it to the attention of young people in Japan in a form of reverse import, leading to domestic popularity,” says Yanagihara.

Since then, Casio has expanded to over a thousand authorized distributors and collaborated with international athletes, musicians and fashionistas, as well as automobile producers, fire departments and other groups. In addition to Europe, the United States and Japan, the brand is also wildly popular in Asia, which helped the G-SHOCK series achieve a cumulative global shipment of a hundred million units as of September 2017.

While remaining loyal to their core concept of absolute toughness, the G-SHOCK has also evolved to include elaborate functions, including radio wave solar power, GPS radio wave reception, weather forecasts, and time synchronization through smartphone interlocking. “Every time we attempt to incorporate an innovative new technology or material, we add new criteria to the overall product testing process to ensure shock resistance and other qualities are maintained. We now have over two hundred testing criteria,” Yanagihara notes.

This beloved wristwatch will keep evolving in the pursuit of absolute toughness and accuracy. **17**

A Gourmet Train Journey to Sample Shinshu's Culture

YUKIKO ISHIKAWA

Rokumon is a sightseeing train run by the Shinano Railway that puts you in touch with the Shinshu region's culture and cuisine. Take a ride and spend a leisurely time enjoying stunning scenery and delicious dishes.

The Rokumon Train

THE Rokumon train takes approximately two hours to run between Karuizawa—one of Japan's leading resort areas—and the prefectural capital of Nagano City. Inaugurated in July 2014, the train's name comes from the Rokumonsen, the crest of the Sanada family, a warrior clan associated with Ueda City, which is on Rokumon's route. The crest of six lined-up coins graces the body of the train, interior furnishings and even the tickets. It appears alongside other clan emblems, such as the *musubi karigane* (coiled goose) and the *suhama* sandbar. The Sanada clan's armor and weapons also inspired the train's striking deep-red hue.

Industrial designer Eiji Mitooka, recognized for his many train designs, created this distinctive motif. In fact, Mitooka designed every detail of Rokumon, from the tickets and limited-edition souvenir packages to the Shinano Railway Karuizawa Station building, including the private

Rokumon lounge. The design is noteworthy for how it carefully matches local character. For example, most of the wood used for the interior furnishings is from Nagano Prefecture: the three-car train's first car incorporates larch, the second cedar, and the third cypress wood. The food offered on board is made by renowned local chefs, who use their talents to create inspired dishes using Shinshu produce.

Rokumon offers a number of different delightful dining options, including *kaiseki* cuisine and a wine-pairing course. This particular trip on the Rokumon No. 1 from Karuizawa to Nagano featured a tempting Western cuisine course. As trumpeting calls from a conch shell announced the train's departure, the station staff and children playing in the station's kids' area saw passengers off with beaming smiles.

The drinks service begins after departure. Those who fancy making a toast should sample the local wine or cider, made from Nagano's famous grapes and apples, respectively. Chefs aboard the train serve



1



2



3



4



5



6

- 1 The popular retro train is painted in the Sanada clan's iconic deep-red hue
- 2 In the second car, guests can take in the view while enjoying dishes made with local produce
- 3 The train's departure is announced using a samurai-worthy conch shell trumpet
- 4 Dishes are carefully placed to resemble the Rokumonsen, the Sanada family crest
- 5 At Ueda Station, you can pose for photos with the armored stationmaster
- 6 From Karuizawa Station, take a bus to visit the graceful Shiraito Waterfall

up the dishes, so guests can enjoy the cuisine while it is piping hot. The menu is graced with the names of many locally produced ingredients, such as prized Shinshu salmon and Tateshina beef.

As you savor your meal, you'll hear an announcement that Mount Asama is coming into view, its majestic form filling the windows. About an hour after departure the train reaches Ueda, the fifth station on the line. Here stationmaster Hikoya Sakai, clad in bright red armor, greets passengers and sees them off the train. When Sakai—known as the “armored stationmaster”—announces the train's departure with the full-throated cries of a samurai, passengers can't help but smile. After you take in the view of Ueda Castle, the Sanada clan's residence, and drink some Japanese tea made with water from a hot spring at the sixth station, Togura, the train soon arrives at Nagano Station.

According to Shomaru Yamamoto of the Shinano Railway management strategy division,

one reason they launched Rokumon was the railway's declining yearly passenger numbers. While Rokumon was their plan to attract more people, it seems that this bright train is becoming even more famous than the railway that runs it. “People tell us how proud they are that the train runs through their town, and that makes us happy,” says Yamamoto. “The train is imbued with all the charms of the areas along its route, and I hope it will serve as a symbol for the region in the future.”

While on board and looking at the scenery from the train window, it is not unusual to see passersby waving at Rokumon. As Yamamoto says, locals clearly love this charming train. With scenery, food and regular events, a journey on the Rokumon is packed full of things for passengers to enjoy. Experience the love that the people of Shinshu have for their region and their spirit of hospitality for yourself. 

A large, ornate building, likely the Sapporo City Hall, is illuminated with bright green lights at night. The building features multiple gables, arched windows, and a central entrance with a balcony. The lights create a vibrant, festive atmosphere. The title 'SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image in a white, stylized, serif font.

SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL

The Sapporo Snow Festival is a snow and ice extravaganza held annually in early February. Considered one of the world's three largest such festivals, it spreads the festivities over three sites: Odori, where you can admire fantastic snow sculptures; Tsudome, featuring giant snow slides; and Susukino, lined with intricate ice sculptures. The festival welcomes some two million visitors from Japan and around the world each year.

The massive snow sculptures at Odori Park are particularly striking, reaching up to fifteen meters in height with each just as elaborate as the next. These breathtaking sculptures are lit up at night, turning the pure-white snow into an enchanting display of color. Stay warm by sampling the offerings at the many food and beverage stalls while you enjoy the sights.

HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

PLEASE VISIT the top page of Highlighting Japan for links to all our past issue including videos.

www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/

HIGHLIGHTING JAPAN



ALL PAST ISSUES available online

PLEASE VISIT the Government of Japan's official English-language website



JAPAN GOV
THE GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

<http://www.japan.go.jp/>

The official JapanGov website functions as a portal for users to access a broad range of information from policy-related information to cultural content.