

killed his own crying baby in order not to attract the attention of the Taiping looters to their hideout). Sharing was common, be it food, shelter, transport or cash. In particular, Confucian loyalty and responsibility saved the author's young life repeatedly by servants who would have been expected to join the riot from the dogmatic Marxian point of view. Here, the reader senses where the real value of the Chinese civilization lay: although the author viewed himself as an unworthy little insect (*weichong*), he was safe because of the help he received from other people. In the end it was those ferocious bandits that lost their heads.

The last point I wish to make is that the author came from a well-to-do family from the gentry (based on the facts that he was educated from a very young age, his family had several homes, and his father and grandfather had concubines) but he became interested in joining the bureaucracy only when his livelihood was in difficulty. This challenges the cliché that every man dreamed of being an official in China (this may be true today). Instead, the author's lifetime pursuits were travelling and composing poems, a Confucian middle-class lifestyle that he was brought up in, which seems to have been far more attractive than running an office. Indeed, as far as we can tell, in the Late Qing (c. 1850) the gentry-to-officials ratio was 57:1, and the population-to-officials ratio was 15,136:1! So, the author represented the mainstream of his stratum of the time. If so, all the alleged root causes of China's backwardness associated with Confucianism have become very questionable.

As an important primary source, I highly recommend the English version of this memoir to students of the modern history of China.

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NANYANG GUO:

Refining Nature in Modern Japanese Literature: The Life and Art of Shiga Naoya.

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Many books have been written about the special role played by nature in the Japanese cultural and literary tradition from ancient times until the present day. Indeed, it has become a cliché to claim that the Japanese are uniquely sensitive to natural phenomena. Of course, things are never as simple as that. For example, while it is true that nature's rhythms are strikingly embedded in traditional Japanese literary forms – Court poetry anthologies were divided into sections partly in accordance with the season referenced in the verse – more modern literature such as that describing the newly opened northern island of Hokkaido during the late nineteenth century revealed evidence of a deep aversion to any kind of natural wilderness that had not yet been tamed and humanized through repeated literary allusion over previous centuries.

In her new book *Refining Nature in Modern Japanese Literature: The Life and Art of Shiga Naoya*, Nanyang Guo argues that Shiga Naoya, one of Japan's most famous and revered modern authors, employed what Guo calls "subjective realism" as a way of offering deep insights into art and culture through close observations of the natural world. She makes a convincing case in this very well researched book.

Guo is certainly not the first critic to be drawn to Shiga's impressive literary imagination. In particular, she makes reference to ideas gleaned from a wide range of Shiga specialists from within Japanese academia, and her work should be considered as very much part of the critical tradition emanating from within Japan. On the other hand, she makes less use of the work by non-Japanese critics. For instance, I found little or no reference to important English-language works on Shiga that have appeared in the last few decades; works such as William Sibley's *The Shiga Hero* (University of Chicago Press, 1979), Edward Fowler's *The Rhetoric of Confession* (University of California, 1988), or Irmela Hijiya-Kirschneireit's *Rituals of Self-Revelation* (Harvard, 1996). Having said this, the author's single-minded exploration of Shiga's exceptionally intimate relationship with nature is most welcome. She offers a host of fascinating readings and critical insights that widen our appreciation of this complex and intriguing giant of modern Japanese literature.

In the introduction, her overall argument is that Shiga very effectively used "subjective realism" (which I understand to signify a blend of realistic observation and artistic imagination) when portraying aspects of the natural world in order to develop a particularly insightful and concise commentary on the world in which he found himself. Guo's work is at its best when she weaves together Shiga's literary portrayals of nature with biographical detail. For example, in chapter 2 she examines the profound impact Shiga felt when he sighted the moon over the sea near Mt Chōkai. Guo relates the source of this experience to an actual event in the summer of 1900, only a few years after his beloved mother died. Moreover, Guo goes on to note how Shiga had just been reading Tokutomi Roka's novel, *Hototogisu* (The Cuckoo, 1898), in which the main protagonist's wife Naoko, who is ostracized because she suffers from tuberculosis, commits suicide by the sea coast in a state of desperate loneliness and pining for her absent mother. By highlighting this link between the sea, the absent mother, and death, Guo demonstrates Shiga's subtle skills in weaving together human feelings and the natural world.

There are also certain weaknesses to the book. In terms of overall structural balance, some of the chapters are extremely short compared to others; chapter 7 on "The supernatural and nature" numbers only eight pages including notes. If such a subject is really worthy of attention, as I believe it is, it should have been addressed in greater detail. Also, it requires quite a stretch of imagination to see how chapter 9, which discusses Lafcadio Hearn's influence on Shiga's literary style, has anything but a very loose connection to the overall theme of nature.

In part, I think that apparent weaknesses to a book arise due to the differing expectations we sometimes bring as readers. As a scholar of Japanese literature firmly rooted in the Western tradition, I cannot help but notice the lack of a strong critical argument in Guo's book. Instead, its strength lies in its descriptive approach and in its extremely close attention to detail. This is very much in the style of Japanese scholarship. For example, Guo alludes to the spectacular scene at the end of Shiga's single full-length novel *An'ya kōro* (Dark Night's Passing, 1921–37) when Shiga describes the protagonist Kensaku waking at dawn after having passed the night resting on the side of Mt Daisen, and witnessing a spiritually uplifting vision of the rising sun. Guo then refers to an identical journey she made at the same time of year noted in the novel in order to share a similar experience with the author. In her desire to create a sense of verisimilitude, she even goes so far as to note that the sun rose at 5:11 a.m., and the sun's compass point at that very moment was 67° 21' from the north.

While these details undeniably add a strong sense of authenticity to the experience portrayed in the novel, I would like to have seen Guo spend more of her time placing this scene of natural splendour into a broader cultural context. For

example, she could have questioned why Shiga sought to make sense of the conundrums of human life in the natural world of flora and fauna rather than in the world of human nature. Moreover, although Guo points out that Shiga's awe-inspiring literary account of sublime nature alludes to a real experience from 1914, the text itself was produced in 1937, a point in Japanese history when Japan was heavily involved in military conquest in mainland Asia. I do not for one moment suggest that the work of a great writer such as Shiga can be reduced entirely to its historical context, but how can such a scene be read without at least some allusion to the broader circumstances of the times?

I do not wish to sound too negative here. After all, no book can cover all the points, and every reader brings along their own set of expectations that can never be satisfied. The fact is that Guo's book provides a fascinating new angle from which to explore and come to a deeper understanding of one of Japan's most important modern authors. Guo is to be thanked for all the research and thought that has gone into this work, which will be welcomed by all readers with an interest in Shiga Naoya and the Japanese relationship with nature.

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JAHYUN KIM HABOUSH AND KENNETH R. ROBINSON (ed. and trans.):

A Korean War Captive in Japan, 1597–1600. The Writings of Kang Hang.

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The *Kanyangnok* (The Record of a Shepherd) is one of the most important texts on the Imjin War (1592–98) when the troops of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98) invaded Korea in their quest for conquering China. Its author is Kang Hang (1567–1618), a scholar and official who was captured during the war by the Japanese and spent some three years (1597–1600) as a captive in Japan.

This work, translated and annotated by JaHyun Kim Haboush and Kenneth Robinson, is a very welcome addition to the growing literature on Korean–Japanese relations in general and the Imjin War in particular.

The work deserves close attention due to its author's special standing within Korean society and the Chosŏn administration. Kang Hang, a fifth-generation descendant of the famous Kang Hŭi-maeng (1424–83) – high official, outstanding scholar, painter and calligrapher – and himself a graduate of the civil service examinations of 1593 and official, possessed an especially acute sense of Korea's Confucian civilizational achievements, and therefore, when in Japan, was horrified by the “barbarian” Japanese manners and customs. Nevertheless, in his second place of confinement, Fushimi (near Kyoto), he met Fujiwara Seika (1561–1619), an early scholar of Neo-Confucianism, with whom he conducted philosophical discussions. Indeed, it is believed that Kang introduced to him the works of T'oegye Yi Hwang (1501–70) and thus contributed to the emergence of a Neo-Confucian school in Edo Japan. After his return from Japan, Kang, plagued by feelings of guilt for having failed his king, never assumed office again. Instead, he devoted himself to teaching an ever-greater number of students.