

MELEK ORTABASI:

The Undiscovered Country: Text, Translation, and Modernity in the Work of Yanagita Kunio.

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Few academics have been to East Asian Libraries and not come across this sight (above). This is not surprising considering the immense number of books with Yanagita Kunio's 柳田国男 (1875–1962) name on them. Especially visible are the collections of his complete works, which appear in major compendia such as *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū* (Standard Collected Works of Y.K., 31 vol., 5 suppl.) and *Yanagita Kunio zenshū* (Y.K.'s Collected Works, 34 vol. to date). Although numerous Japanese scholars have taken up the subject of Yanagita and his writings, Melek Ortabasi is one of just a handful of scholars to publish a detailed study on this public intellectual in English. Other books on Yanagita include: Alan Christy's *A Disciple on Foot: Inventing Japanese Native Ethnography, 1910–1945* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); Kawada Minoru's *The Origin of Ethnography in Japan: Yanagita Kunio and His Times* (trans. Toshiko Kishida-Ellis, Kegan Paul International, 1993); Ronald Morse's *Yanagita Kunio and the Folklore Movement: The Search for Japan's National Character and Distinctiveness* (Garland Publishing, 1990); and Victor Koschmann, Ōiwa Keibō and Yamashita Shinji's (eds) *International Perspectives on Yanagita Kunio and Japanese Folklore Studies* (Cornell University Press, 1985). In *The Undiscovered Country*, Ortabasi is the first to undertake a close reading of selected works by Yanagita in an attempt to demonstrate that his writings accomplished more than his critics have been willing to acknowledge over the years.

Considering the incredible breadth of Yanagita's work, which covers subjects ranging from literary and narrative style to Japanese village life, dialects, and national history and identity, one naturally feels daunted at the task of reading a monograph on the topic. If readers do decide to attempt Ortabasi's book, they will be put at ease by the short, straightforward table of contents. In the nineteen-page introduction, the author starts well by presenting some of the criticism Yanagita has been dealt, which includes his being perceived as nationalistic, naïve, complicit, subjective, arbitrary, and more. It is clear from the start that the author wishes to repair this intellectual's tarnished image and show that his work is still worth reading today. One of the problems, she writes, is that critics focus too often on what Yanagita's work does not achieve. Thus, the author sets out to illustrate what it *does* achieve. She also asks readers to reconsider Yanagita as a cultural translator, who used translation as a form of resistance.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the book has five chapters. Chapter 1, "Translating orality, reinventing authorship: *Tales of Tōno*", examines Yanagita's first book (*Tōno monogatari*), self-published in 1910. Ortabasi's argument is that the first edition of this work was an experiment in testing the limits of the literary, and represented a vehement response to contemporary literary

culture. Chapter 2, “Translating landscape, rewriting the travelogue”, analyses Yanagita’s travelogue *Kainan shōki* (South Sea Notes, 1925) and argues that it rejected the narcissistic, passive tourist found in many contemporary travelogues, and showed readers that travel could become a critical mechanism for revealing continuity between landscape and cultural history. Yanagita’s co-written *Minkan denshō ron* (A Study of Popular Oral Transmission, 1934) and *Kyōdo seikatsu no kenkyū hō* (Methods for Researching Everyday Home-place Life, 1935) are the focus of chapter 3, “Building a discipline, building national identity: scholarship as self-translation”. These books examined how language (particularly naming) could embody cultural change and asserted that the ideal(ized) folk scholar must give voice to the unspoken cultural subtext within the mind. They also show, the author argues, that Yanagita’s analysis of folk material resisted and transgressed the bounds of scientific method. Chapter 4, “Dialect, standard Japanese, and translating everyday experience”, is about Yanagita’s study of dialect and his push in *Kagyūkō* (Thoughts on the Snail, 1930) for bottom-up rather than top-down (i.e. centralized) language reform. Chapter 5, “Translating folk studies for children: education and disciplinary politics revisited”, presents a close reading of *Hi no mukashi* (A History of Fire, 1944) and *Mura no sugata* (Village Forms, 1945), which were written for young readers and addressed them as though they were colleagues. Both wartime and occupation era censors approved these texts and this, it is implied, serves to show that Yanagita neither took sides nor subscribed to political ideologies.

The Undiscovered Country is an absorbing, well-written monograph. The first two chapters are the strongest, because they offer the most convincing argument that Yanagita was a resister, a theme to which Ortabasi returns throughout the book. As shown in chapter 2, Yanagita rejected the tradition of travel writing in which an educated elite (men) took a superior stance over provincial others. Though his interpretations of Okinawa in *Kainan shōki* can be impressionistic and naïve, if not elitist, it still remains clear that he was concerned with factual reporting and maintaining an observatory, honest style. He resisted customs and conventions of “landscape” and argued that travel should be for observation and interpretation of the external rather than self-examination. Yanagita detested writers such as Tayama Katai, who seemed to be concerned with little more than themselves.

Yanagita’s focus on “translating” the periphery may be what prevented him from being hailed as great scholar in his own day, but his unconventional, oppositional approach necessarily demands a rethink in the way he is assessed. Ortabasi contends that Yanagita was not only a resister of the Tokyo literary establishment and Tokyo-centrism, but also a resister of elitism, fascism, white domination, nationalism and wartime political agendas. This argument serves Yanagita’s legacy, but it is not entirely convincing primarily because Yanagita’s studies of the Japanese “folk” evolved (devolved) concurrently with nationalistic ideologies. Yanagita grew increasingly concerned with locating Japanese identity in its purest form, somewhere in the past, as if Japanese people are of homogeneous origins. At the end of the book, Yanagita unquestionably stands as a remarkable thinker who wrote an incredible amount, challenged literary trends, and inspired the Japanese folk studies (*minzokugaku*) movement, but the fact that his cultural nationalism was softer in tone than others’ does not qualify him as a fearless critic those in power. If Yanagita was a (government) resister, he chose to resist in such a way that he could avoid being reprimanded. This intellectual had to be concerned with self-preservation, and at this he was more successful than many.

The Undiscovered Country is a qualified success because it offers readers a new, comprehensive take on Yanagita and his work, and will force readers to think seriously about re-evaluating them. It will also encourage a reconsideration of what translation entails, and how it both creates and destroys. The book is best suited for academics and graduate students and will be particularly useful to those interested in Yanagita, *minzokugaku*, modern literature, pre- and postwar language education, minority studies and translation studies.

Matthew W. Shores
University of Cambridge

BURGLIND JUNGMANN:

Pathways to Korean Culture: Paintings of the Joseon Dynasty, 1392–1910.

392 pp. London: Reaktion Books, 2014. £40. ISBN 978 1 780 23367 3.
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Recent scholarship has opened up exciting and unexpected understandings of the contexts, purposes and standing of the different schools and traditions of Korean painting. The latest generations of Korean art historians have enriched their discipline by drawing on literary, archival and biographical sources to supplement scholarship previously reliant on close examination of works of art. Burglind Jungmann, one of a very small number of art historians of Korea working and teaching outside of the Korean peninsula, has set herself an ambitious task: “to embed art-historical developments into the larger context of political, socio-economic and intellectual developments” (p. 11). It is inevitable that her focus on selected works leads to inadequate treatment of some periods, artists and stylistic developments which are deemed less representative of key cultural and economic trends. To her credit, she brings clarity and balance to her discussion of these choices. The 17-page bibliography also guides readers to a wide range of (predominantly Korean-language) sources. The colour and black-and-white illustrations include many previously unpublished outside Korea. They underpin the narrative well, although the intractable problem of conveying scale and format is frustratingly apparent, for example when a monumental hanging scroll is reproduced side-by-side with an album leaf, giving a misleading impression of equivalence between the two.

The book follows a broadly chronological arc, beginning with Neo-Confucianism and engagement with the philosophical ideals of ancient China, which dominated artists’ practice during the fifteenth century. The place of women as patrons and artists in the Joseon social order is discussed in chapter 3, with a clear-eyed analysis of the plant and insect paintings once attributed to Sin Saimdang (1504–51), mother of the philosopher Yi I, well known in Korea as a paragon of Confucian virtue. Jungmann notes that although none of the works traditionally associated with Sin are authentic, her reputation and position as “ideal Confucian woman” and “mother of the nation” are to a large extent built on an evaluation of “her” paintings (now credibly dated to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century) as embodying the gentle, picturesque qualities that a female artist might possess. The discussion moves on to Korean artists of the “Southern School” during the seventeenth century and then to the great landscape painter, known above all for his Diamond Mountain paintings, Jeong Seon (1676–1759), six of whose works are reproduced; Yun Duseo (1668–1715), best known internationally for the much-reproduced self-portrait,