

Introduction

In 1932, two stories were written in Japanese depicting the large-scale emigration from Japan to Brazil that occurred prior to the Second World War, and both went on to receive newly inaugurated literary awards. The stories were selected by writers and editors who thought them to be exceptionally valuable for a variety of reasons, both literary and social, and who utilized the awards not only to ascribe value to the texts discursively, but also to impact the dissemination, preservation, and reception of those texts through material means.¹ The result was that they reached significantly expanded reading communities and did so with an imprimatur of authority that signaled the works' particular significance to those communities.²

While the commonalities between these two works and the ways they reached readers are notable, their differences are even more telling. Though both were written in Japanese and thus could be thought to have been directed at a single imagined readership (perhaps “the Japanese”), the reality is that their readerships were quite different. One story was published in a prestigious magazine produced in Tokyo, which enjoyed some circulation and influence among intellectuals throughout the Japanese empire and the globe, not all of whom would have identified as “Japanese.” The other was published in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, in a Japanese-language newspaper whose circulation was limited almost exclusively to one diasporic community, but which played a similarly central role in it. The differences between the material networks within which the stories were created, feted, and then circulated, and the experiences of their authors after these acts of recognition, bring into relief the heterogeneity and multiplicity of Japanese-language reading communities and the vast differences in resources those communities possessed.

The two works and the trajectories of their material instantiations are keys to disentangling the relationship of literature and the nation, particularly as those two have functioned in the case of modern Japan. By following the specific historical reading community for Japanese-language texts that existed in Brazil, we may clarify moments at which the nation was the appropriate frame of reference

for the literary texts and—perhaps more importantly—moments at which it was not. This clarification reveals a more diverse history than is often imagined for “modern Japanese literature”; it also reveals a number of problematic assumptions that attend any analyses of individual literary texts within such a comprehensive rubric, particularly when the actual object of knowledge production either explicitly or implicitly shifts from the individual work or author to a “national literature.”

The first of the two works was “The Emigrants” (蒼氓) by Ishikawa Tatsuzō (1905–85), which he originally composed and submitted to a literary prize competition held by *Kaizō* magazine in 1932; it was not selected for publication, but did receive honorable mention.³ The following year he submitted a revised version to the Osaka literary coterie magazine *Hata*, but the journal ceased publication before the story appeared. It was not until April 1935 that the story finally made it into print, in the literary coterie magazine of the Shin Waseda Bungaku group, *Seiza*. It was this appearance in print that brought the story to the attention of the selection committee for the newly founded Akutagawa Prize for literature. Ishikawa’s fame grew quickly after receipt of the award, particularly with the publication of *Soldiers Alive* (生きている兵隊) in 1938, and he remained an important figure in the Tokyo literary establishment until his death in 1985.

Ishikawa, who had attended Waseda University and was already a published author by the time he reached Brazil in 1930, remained in the country for just slightly longer than ten weeks, leading some (particularly in Brazil) to question the authenticity of his depiction. Upon his arrival, he traveled to Santa Rosa, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where he initially spent time in the home of another immigrant from Japan, Mera Isao; many of the depictions of life in Brazil that appeared in the later sections of his novel were drawn from what he observed there.⁴ He then traveled to the city of São Paulo, where he remained until returning to Japan.

The other work, “An Age of Speculative Farming” (賭博農時代) by Sonobe Takeo (years unknown), won the Colonial Literary Short Fiction Award (植民文藝懸賞短編小説), which had been established in 1932 in São Paulo, Brazil, by the leading Japanese-language newspaper published in that country, on the opposite side of the globe. On 21 April 1932, the *Burajiru jihō* (伯刺西爾時報, *Notícias do Brazil*) announced that Sonobe had won the inaugural competition for his work, which then appeared in four installments between 21 April and 12 May. In his autobiographical note accompanying the announcement of the award, the author claimed to have only been in Brazil for seven months—a short time, but significantly longer than Ishikawa had spent.

In contrast to Ishikawa, the author Sonobe Takeo, whose real name seems to have been Inoue Tetsurō, is often considered to have possessed a more legitimate connection to Brazil.⁵ Inoue, a graduate of Hokkaidō Imperial University’s Department of Animal Science, arrived at the Instituto de Prática Agrícola de São Paulo as a leader of the first group of practicum agricultural students. He traveled

to Brazil on or around 14 July 1931 and remained there until around 1939.⁶ By his own admission, when he wrote “An Age of Speculative Farming” he had not yet set foot on a coffee plantation; instead, he found himself in a situation “unsuited for someone of my age, fiddling around with tomatoes and potatoes, doing nothing more than playing farmer like some idiot son of a wealthy family who spends his days growing flowers.”⁷ During the remainder of his stay in Brazil, Inoue did publish some additional pieces that we know about, such as “Shi to fukutsū to on’na” (誌と腹痛と女), which appeared in the fourth issue of the literary magazine *Nanteki* (南迪).⁸

Subsequently Inoue’s life course diverged from Ishikawa’s about as dramatically as one could imagine. He seems to have left Brazil around 1939, but apparently did not return to Japan—or, if he did, he did not stay long. In July 1950, he was arrested in the name of the commander of the army of Northern Sumatra, as he was (according to him) “working peacefully as an advisor to the Regular Army Farm and Construction Corps near Lake Tawar in (what was then) the Karo region.”⁹ He had been there for perhaps as long as a decade at that point, having traveled to Sumatra after his return from Brazil. According to his own account, in Sumatra he had participated in the construction of an agricultural training camp and then led a group of individuals fighting for Indonesian independence. When the government demanded that they relinquish their arms, they fled into the jungle, where Inoue lived until he was arrested.¹⁰ It was not until 7 June 1952, two months after Ishikawa was appointed an officer (理事) of the Japan Writers’ Association (Nihon Bungeika Kyōkai), that the Japanese government received word that Inoue (along with 170 other Japanese nationals) was still in Indonesia, had been arrested for political crimes, and was apparently known as the “Sumatran Tiger” (スマトラの虎).¹¹ Inoue Tetsurō went on to write about his experiences in an article in *Kingu* magazine and then in a book; it would seem that he did very little writing subsequent to these publications from 1953, so little is known about his later life.¹²

The different life trajectories of the two authors are stark, and perhaps not unrelated to the literary opportunities their different circumstances allowed. More instructive for our purposes, however, are the different trajectories their two stories have experienced since their initial publication. Though “The Emigrants” did initially appear in a small literary coterie magazine, that magazine was published in Tokyo and thus enjoyed a far higher likelihood of coming to the attention of the newly formed Akutagawa Prize selection committee. There it entered into the matrix of national literature or Japanese literature, a complex institutional structure comprising print capital, literary discourse, and academic reinforcement.

“An Age of Speculative Farming,” for its part, entered into a different matrix, separate but not unrelated, which would go by many names over the subsequent decades: *shokumin bungei* (colonial literature), *koronia bungaku* (colônia literature), *Burajiru Nikkei bungaku* (Brazil Nikkei literature), and *Nikkei Burajiru imin bungaku* (Nikkei Brazil migrant literature), to name only a few. The differential

material and discursive resources of these spheres undoubtedly affected the trajectories of these works in ways that cannot be attributed solely to inherent differences in literary value. To conclude that the differences in terms of reception are solely due to such intrinsic value and to the ongoing literary production of their authors would be to miss the consequential fact that the two works, despite their similarities (of topic, of language) have remained in two different literary spheres.

This study addresses not only the nature of the literary sphere within which “An Age of Speculative Farming” emerged, that is, the sphere of Japanese-language prose literary activity in Brazil prior to World War II, but also the ongoing relationship between marginalized literary texts such as this one and the dominant sphere of national “Japanese” literature in Japan. Though a powerful normative notion, the nature of this national literature is itself ambiguous (a fact that, counter-intuitively, contributes to its continuing influence.) Part of the ambiguity centers on what supposedly makes the literature “national” in the first place. Consider the oft-cited “National Literature Debate” (国民文学論争) begun by Takeuchi Yoshimi, which went on between roughly September 1951 and February 1954.¹³ During that debate, the author Yamamoto Kenkichi wrote an article titled, “National Territory, National Language, the Nation: A Note on National Literature.”¹⁴ In it, he referred to a “holy trinity” (三位一体) made up of *kokudo* (national territory), *kokugo* (national language), and *kokumin* (the people of the nation). It was Yamamoto’s belief that this holy trinity was the legitimate basis of “our” (われわれの) literature, despite the unfortunate form he felt it had come to assume (dominated by the elite literary establishment of the time.) For Yamamoto, the trinity was a self-evident and positive foundation for thinking about works of literature (and the individuals who read and write those works) collectively.

Subsequent thinkers have shown that this trinity is neither self-evident nor necessarily a salutary formation. Komori Yōichi addressed and slightly modified the metaphor in his 1998 book <Yuragi> *no Nihon bungaku* (<ゆらぎ>の日本文学). Komori describes how a reified notion of Japaneseness emerges as an amalgam of the notions of a “Japanese” ethnicity or race (民族), a sense of affiliation to the nation-state (国家) as a “Japanese” by means of citizenship, and the use of “Japanese” as one’s language (言語). He then adds that a fourth element, “Japanese culture” (文化), results in a holy quadrinity, hypostatizing an imagined mode of being that is distinct from all other individual or social modes of being.¹⁵ Komori acknowledges his debt to the work of Naoki Sakai in conceptualizing the problem in this way. Sakai’s work reveals not only the arbitrary and constructed nature of this ambiguous national paradigm, but also its capacity for exclusion and discrimination.¹⁶

My own previous book, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature*, examined certain aspects of the normative, national sphere, centered in Tokyo. In it, I contended that a combination of discursive and material mechanisms allowed for

certain works to be valorized as “modern Japanese literature,” and then to enter into an ever-expanding system of distribution and marketing that brought these texts to markets not only through the islands that now comprise the nation-state of Japan, but also to Japanese-reading populations throughout its colonies, the puppet state of Manchukuo, semicolonial spaces in China, emigrant communities, and beyond. Its ultimate argument, however, was that the texts were rarely available as the totality implied by the concept, and that, at least in terms of readership, the communities impacted by the works did not enjoy any of the homogeneity, consistency, or simultaneity suggested by the notion of a “national readership.” Rather than specific texts, I proposed, what was most successfully propagated through this network was the concept of a modern national literature itself, which could then be activated through discursive and material mechanisms to valorize certain works and marginalize others. By winning the Akutagawa Prize for literature and thus being not only labeled as “pure” (putatively autonomous) “Japanese literature,” but also backed by the economic power of the publishing company Bungei Shunjūsha, a story like “The Emigrants” (and its author) enjoyed a number of benefits that impacted its subsequent dissemination, reception, and preservation.

This book will examine the sphere that “An Age of Speculative Farming” entered, that of Japanese-language literary activity in Brazil. It should be noted at the outset that these spheres are being discussed as entities, and as separate entities, as a heuristic expedient; it would be a mistake to hypostatize these spheres, which are actually only metaphors for a series of related material institutions and discursive relationships. More importantly, as will be discussed in detail, these spheres were intimately connected, although often unilaterally. Seen from a different angle, this book examines related issues but moves the focus from the “center” to the “periphery” and also expands its purview to include the production of literature as well as its consumption.¹⁷ While this change in perspective reinforces the argument of the first book, which challenged the notion of a modern national literature, it also begs the question of the function of normativity and the concomitant rise of notions of transgressive alterity with regard to “national literature.”

The chapters that follow will be loosely organized around the metaphor of the holy quadrinity discussed above: state, culture, *ethnos*, and language. This is largely an organizational conceit, meant to help arrange different problematics and objects of research that are often quite distinct in terms of methodology; it should be noted in advance that many of the elements being examined have a place in other categories as well. Within each of these categories, the heuristic of alterity will be utilized, with various forms of othering presented depending on the case. In this, the study joins a growing body of scholarship that both highlights and problematizes assertions of alterity in modern Japan. Most importantly, though this book will focus exclusively on the particulars of this case, this should not be taken as an argument that this phenomenon in Japan is in any way unique. While

the precise historical events and logical formations that lead to an assertion of categorical identity for literary texts revolving around the nation, however imagined, may differ, the phenomenon itself is not singular, and thus could be put into dialog with critiques of other national literatures and collective textual identities.

Issues related to the function of politics in thinking about literature will be addressed indirectly in the chapter on “The State.” The combination of physical distance from the sovereign territory of the Japanese empire and the legal barrier of national (or, in the case of Japan at the time, imperial) borders significantly divided the Japanese-Brazilian marketplace from the one that existed within the formal Japanese empire (and Manchukuo). As a result, the marketplace did not benefit from state incentives to unify it (standardized shipping costs, for example) or industry incentives to expand and stabilize it (such as fixed retail prices); on the other hand, the marketplace did not suffer directly from state intervention, particular in the form of censorship (until intervention by the Brazilian state in 1941). This chapter will trace the development of the literary marketplace for Japanese-language texts in Brazil prior to World War II, with a focus on the bookstore that would become the most important during that period: *Livraria Yendo*, also known as *Endō Shoten*. This chapter will show the nature and scope of texts, primarily out of Tokyo, that were available for purchase in Brazil. What we see from this example is consistent with studies of other local markets for Japanese-language literature outside of Tokyo: that while the Tokyo-centered publishing industry was, unsurprisingly, the dominant force in producing the texts available for sale, the selection of texts actually available was both limited and locally determined. That is, it represented a locally-curated subset of “modern Japanese literature,” one that did not always conform to the normative vision being advanced by academics and critics at the center of the Tokyo literary establishment.

The chapter on “Culture” will examine the dominant form of literary texts during this period: newspaper fiction. This chapter will draw from two sections of the newspaper that were literally separate: the “popular” fiction that almost always appeared on the first or last page, and the “pure” fiction that appeared on an inner page dedicated to literary activities in general. In examining the “popular” fiction, we will find texts that are (almost?) exclusively drawn from existing texts produced in Japan, but which are curated in a particularly extreme (and perhaps arbitrary) way. They are selected by the editors, and result in a very limited (and perhaps somewhat random, depending on the availability or affordability of sources) group of texts that do not come from the valorized sphere of “pure” literature and, particularly in the earlier years, were not originally produced in Tokyo. In examining the “pure” fiction, we will find a very conscious effort not only to print texts written locally that address local concerns, but also to cultivate the production of that sort of literature. While this goal surely had economic motivations of nurturing local writers and engaging more local readers, it was also motivated

by the goal of community-building. The chapter will conclude by suggesting that perhaps this local reading community was less exceptional than it might appear; though it is beyond the scope of this study, it seems likely that the ideal of a normative national literature that dominates academic study of Japanese-language literature would have in fact been experienced at a local level in very individual and incomplete ways.

After this chapter come translations of ten works of fiction, all written in Brazil. By including these translations, I hope to allow the writers to speak for themselves, and in so doing somewhat redress the objectifying and instrumentalized gaze of this book. These texts do not represent an attempt by this author to provide either a representative sample of the literature produced within the rubric adopted by this book, nor a subjective (masquerading as disinterested) selection of the greatest works within the category. Rather, these ten works are ones that have enjoyed the benefits of the mechanisms of value ascription available in this sphere of literary activity: they have been selected by editors for publication, by judges for literary awards, and by scholars for their (allegedly) intrinsic merits. The totality implied by these texts, then, is (as with all such selections) a motivated one, curated by individuals who had agendas (whether laudable or not) of their own. If they are representative of anything, it is the story that has been told (by individuals with access to these mechanisms of valorization) about Japanese-language literary production in Brazil. That is not to say that these texts are unworthy of their reproduction, or that they share any culpability in the nature of their reproduction.

The chapter on “Ethnos” will look at these ten literary works produced in Brazil during this time, in order to see how an imagined ethnos functions within them. Contrary to what might be expected, these literary works, written by authors who had been immersed in a world of more obvious phenotypical, linguistic, and cultural diversity than they likely had ever experienced before, were not preoccupied by that form of alterity. Instead, the works show a preoccupation with two more complicated forms of alterity: acquired alterity, in which an individual once thought to be self-same comes to identify or be identified as an Other, and a postlapsarian alterity—a sense of ethnic betrayal—in which an individual recognized as nominally self-same betrays expectations thought to accompany that identity. Put simply, the writers are preoccupied with “fellow Japanese” as Other. The texts are riddled with moments of surprise, when expectations are subverted: either when the actions of a fellow Japanese fail to meet an ideal of ethnic solidarity, or when the actions of a non-Japanese fail to meet an expectation of racial animosity.¹⁸ At the same time, the chapter will address an apparent discomfort with the specific ambiguity existing between a racial identity as Japanese and a political identity as Japanese, hinted at by a (perhaps unconscious) tendency to use terms indicating common descent (such as 同胞, which originally meant “of the same uterus,”) or abstracted kinship as countrymen (such as 邦人), rather than as Japanese. The chapter shows that the ambiguous amalgam of state-culture-ethnos-language reveals its unsustainability

under these moments *in extremis*, even as it fails to capture the historical diversity of experiences of individuals who self-identified as Japanese.

Finally, in the chapter on “Language,” I will be focusing primarily on the ways in which the notion of a single, stable language as a completely transparent mode of communication with clear boundaries is undermined time and again both within the literary texts themselves, and in the metadiscourse about the texts. At the same time, the chapter will argue that language may still be the most reasonable logic by which to group texts, if such a need exists at all. In the course of the chapter, I will examine the phenomenon of *koronia-go*, the use of (primarily Portuguese) loanwords in Japanese-language discourse in Brazil and the issues of literary technique raised in the representation of a multilingual environment. Similarly, I will address the ways in which the dialogic portions of the stories discussed show a marked interest in linguistic diversity within “Japanese” in the form of dialectical difference. Differences within the notion of a single language are not only visible (audible) to that language’s speakers, they are also key markers of alterity. The chapter will argue that while comprehensibility seems, at first glance, to be a clear standard for the linguistic grouping of texts, in fact this not only raises questions about degrees of linguistic intelligibility, it also raises question about the impossible notion of an ideal reader. The goal will be to call into question a normative relationship between a “native speaker” and a literary text, which renders all other readers to a subordinate, inferior, and artificial position.

The book concludes with a discussion of the conception of *Nihongo bungaku*, Japanese-language literature, and both its propriety and actual impact. While the legitimate motivations of its proponents must be acknowledged, the conclusion will argue that as long as the concept exists alongside a notion of *Nihon bungaku*, Japanese literature, it will almost inevitably connote a derivative, artificial, second-order form of literary activity in Japanese, and in so doing will reinforce a normative vision. The very act of seeing the Japanese-language literary production of Brazil as Other automatically reproduces an unproblematic norm of modern Japanese literature (written, presumably, by Japanese people in the Japanese language in Japan for Japanese people.) Rather than offer new terminology, the conclusion will urge its readers to consciously delink the elements of the amalgam, making certain that each time the term “Japanese” is employed it is done in full awareness of the assumptions and implications contained therein. Finally, the book will conclude with a discussion of possible outcomes for the Japanese-language literature of Brazil, discussing how economic realities likely demand that the works either be assimilated into a unified notion of Japanese literature or exotized as an Other, all the more seductive for its proximity to an imagined Self.

For the sake of analysis, this study will posit an historical reading community determined geographically, temporally, and linguistically (acknowledging but not affirming a contemporary presumption that it would also contain an ethnic component) that is not the imagined nation. Instead, it is an imagined community of

Japanese-language literary readers in Brazil from the opening of mass migration in 1908 until the outlawing of the publication and circulation of Japanese-language texts in 1941. Since there is little evidence that these texts circulated outside of Brazil in any significant quantity during this period, the community is presumed to be limited to those national borders, and in the main to the borders of the state of São Paulo. Most of the readers will be assumed to have been first-generation immigrants to Brazil, either coming as adults (the *issei* 一世 immigrants) or as children (the *jun-nisei* 準二世), as there is limited evidence of a significant number of readers during this period who were born in Brazil.

This alternate notional community, however, is no more organic or inevitable than was that of a national readership. This is true both synchronically and diachronically. During the period in question, there is no way of knowing for certain how widely the texts circulated, or to how diverse an audience, how uniformly they reached this potential reading community, nor how consistently the members of such a community might have been affected. The uncertainty expands dramatically when we realize that the history of these texts' reception is not over. While their authors may never have dreamed this possible, the texts are now available to readers of extreme diversity, in terms of geographical location, personal experience, and national identification. If we presume that original texts can be experienced, at least to an extent, through translation, then the translations included in this volume allow the potential reading community to cross linguistic boundaries as well.

As Lisa Lowe writes, "the historical narrative not only disciplines the criteria for establishing evidence; it also identifies the proper units for the study of the past, whether the individual, family, polis, nation, or civilization. In short, the historical narrative . . . constitutes, organizes, and gives structure, meaning and finite contours to the historical past." This is more than just a problem of narrating the past. Lowe continues, "Since the very ability to conceptualize the contemporary predicament is shaped by the historical reconstructions of the past, we cannot conceive the present, or imagine its transformation, without this interrogation. Only by defamiliarizing both the object of the past and the established methods for apprehending that object do we make possible alternative forms of knowing, thinking, and being."¹⁹ This study will have succeeded if it helps make the problem itself visible, and in so doing helps make clear the need to rethink the most fundamental concepts through which we read and understand Japanese-language texts—and perhaps all texts that are approached through a lens of national literature.