

Japanese Language and Literature

Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese

jll.pitt.edu | Vol. 54 | Number 2 | October 2020 | <https://doi.org/10.5195/jll.2020.168>

ISSN 1536-7827 (print) 2326-4586 (online)

REVIEWS

The Uses of Literature in Modern Japan: Histories and Cultures of the Book

By **Sari Kawana**. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. ix, 288 pp. \$120.00.

**Reviewed by
Irena Hayter**

Sari Kawana's richly detailed and very readable study sets out to do things differently from the approaches that have dominated Japanese literary studies so far: textual readings (both close and historicised), investigations of how literary movements shaped particular works, and articulations of the complicity of literature in the larger projects of Japanese modernity, nation and empire (5). Through the optics of "use" and "use value," the book traverses a diverse field of extraliterary forces and agents that have repurposed and adapted literary works trans-medially and trans-historically, creating a dynamic "canonical universe" (126) around them. Often such transformations were driven purely by the profit motive, such as the *enpon* boom of cheap paperback series sold by subscription in the late 1920s, or the 1970s revival of the pre-war detective novels of Yokomizo Seishi (1902–1981) by the publisher Kadokawa Haruki in tandem with film adaptations. There are also, however, cases where such forces become the pretext for creative appropriations and deviant readings



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beyond those prescribed by war-time ideological apparatuses or the education system.

Chapter one explores the extraordinary success of the *enpon* series in the context of stagnant wages and shrinking urban living space during the 1920s. Kawana focuses closely on the advertising campaigns of the pioneering publisher Kaizōsha and its competitors, and traces how they “connected book ownership with other political, intellectual and cultural fantasies that were prevalent at the time” (13): ideas of civic participation, social advancement, and cultural sophistication. In a glimpse of consumerist attitudes to come, owning books was cast as a means of self-expression. The *enpon* boom had profound effects beyond the book business: it is through the publishers’ advertising campaigns that Dentsū rose to become a rival of Hakuōdō, the more established agency.

The *enpon* series created “a deep literary repository” (52) rediscovered during wartime by evacuee children sent to the countryside—the bigger countryside houses had more storage space for books. In chapter two Kawana also highlights reader responses to ideological texts that differed from prescribed readings. Her case study here is the prolific speculative fiction writer Unno Jūza (1897–1949). Kawana contends that the contradictions and inconsistencies in his stories weaken propaganda messages and make them secondary to the “mesmerising images of science and technology” (69) that were at odds with the highly spiritualist slant of war-time propaganda. This argument is used to challenge the orthodoxy that during wartime the cultural sphere was under the total control of the state.

Chapter three, a reading of Sōseki’s totemic *Kokoro* (1914), puts forward a sensational new interpretation of the novel (spoiler alert!). Kawana argues that *sensei* murdered K. and that *sensei*’s own suicide is not an exemplary ethical act atoning for his guilt (as most prescriptive readings of *Kokoro* would have it), but a way to ensure that the truth of his crime would be buried forever with him. Kawana demonstrates how existing uses of the text (textbook excerpts supplemented by floor plans of the house where *sensei* and his friend K. lodged as students; visual incarnations of the story in manga and film) can guide attention towards gaps and incongruities in the narrative and produce deviant readings like hers.

This focus on visual adaptations and their dynamic relationship to the original text is there in chapter four as well. Kawana shows how Ozaki Kōyō’s *Konjiki yasha* (The gold demon, 1897–1902) became an

intermedial matrix, despite Kōyō's reluctance to relinquish authorial control and let go of the story. At the other extreme is Yokomizo Seishi, who actively participated in the promotion of his reissued novels and their film adaptations, embracing the new canonical universe. For Kawana, the Yokomizo case represents the practice of media mix (cross-media franchising and circulation). Kadokawa Haruki's massive advertising campaign included TV ads and dramatizations, flashy covers, and bookmarks to use as discount coupons for the movies, amongst others (145). The results were the creation of a "new synergy" between the film and publishing industries and the introduction of revolutionary methods for bestseller promotion that reshaped the image of *bunko* paperbacks (16). The simultaneous consumption of different media incarnations of the same story was billed as "the *only* proper way to enjoy the fictional world of the work" (126, emphasis in original).

The final chapter expands the idea of the media mix into the real world and the practice of touring literary landmarks ("literary ambulation," in Kawana's phrase) and other active and creative explorations of writers' fictional and biographical worlds. Kawana points out that the dynamics and implications of such practices have not been examined in detail so far and makes a case for literature's potential as tourist attraction and, conversely, the use of tourism to deepen literary understanding. The book concludes with a discussion of intellectual property and copyright. It is argued that online non-profit resources such as Aozora bunko (Blue Skies Publishing) and the freedom it allows (content can be re-used even for commercial purposes as long as the people who worked on the online publication of the texts are credited) have the potential to liberate the literary corpus for creative re-use and keep works in the popular imagination.

The concepts of use and use value that should serve as the organizing center of this wide-ranging study are not actually discussed in detail. Their meanings emerge gradually, through accumulation. "Use value" is used more literally, without its philosophical baggage and implications, divorced from its central position in the classical Marxist theory of the commodity. Kawana quotes approvingly Terry Eagleton's critique of the post-Romantic stance that finds the value of art in its utter uselessness, as a reaction to the utilitarian ethos of capitalism. What Eagleton actually opposes (in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2011) are ahistorical liberal-humanist views of art and ideas of literature as a privileged object, separate from social determinants. Eagleton's critical position is that of

symptomatic (Marxist and psychoanalytical) reading. Kawana's own discussion, on the other hand, often takes the value of literature as self-evident, intrinsic, and immune to political and social forces.

Even taken as a series of essays, however, the book makes for an engaging read and indeed does new and interesting things. It comes in the footsteps of recent Japanese scholarship that has approached literature through media theory and history and through histories of the book and publishing in general: works by Toeda Hirokazu, Tanji Yoshinobu and Hibi Yoshitaka, among others. Kawana situates her study alongside the media-archaeological investigations pioneered by Seth Jacobowitz's *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan* (2016). Unlike Jacobowitz and against media archaeology's (anti-humanist) focus on impersonal media circuits, the book relies on the intentionality of concrete agents: publishers, advertisers, illustrators, manga artists, playwrights, filmmakers, and others.

The *enpon* boom has been discussed before and previous studies have stressed its paradigm-changing historical meanings: massification and commodification of literature (Minami Hiroshi, Maeda Ai); canonization and linguistic homogenization (Komori Yōichi). In English, Edward Mack's important study (*Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature*, 2010) argues that these paradigmatic transformations became possible through the concentration of print capital in Tokyo and that the first *enpon* series, Kaizōsha's *Collected Works of Modern Japanese Literature* established an organizational framework that implied the organic relationship of texts to one another through the nation and through modernity, and could represent the nation's literary production and the nation itself (1–2). What Kawana brings to this debate is a close focus on the language and the rhetorical strategies of the advertising campaigns and the ways they interpellated readers and subscribers. Her analysis is situated in some refreshingly new social contexts: not only the shortage of print and reading materials after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, but also the disappointing reading experience provided by public libraries and *kashihon'ya* rental ones. The point about the shrinking of urban living space, however, is not supported by actual data or contemporary accounts, apart from a reference to a book on modern housing. Kawana's analysis of the wartime rediscovery of *enpon* collections in the countryside is illuminating, although the term "nostalgic reading" feels like an anachronistic projection of an accelerated logic of consumption and obsolescence more common to our present moment: after all, the *enpon*

collections were only around fifteen-years old during the war. The “mesmerizing images of science and technology” (69) in Unno Jūza’s wartime novels are conceived in opposition to “propagandistic” effects but it could be argued that being mesmerized, with one’s critical thinking suspended, was exactly how fascist spectacle worked: sensorially and affectively rather than rationally.

The chapter on *Kokoro*, with its whodunnit dynamics, is lively and engaging, with Kawana using landmark readings of the novel that all embody a hermeneutic of suspicion (by Komori, Ishihara Chiaki, and Keith Vincent), along with visual and other variants of the story to make a compelling case for *sensei* as murderer. Any reading that closes up on the evasions and unarticulated elements of the text could take us back to positions that see literature as an unproblematic reflection of referential reality, but Kawana is reflexive about this danger: she admits she “[takes] full advantage of interpretive freedom” (119).

It’s interesting to see media mix, a common conceptual lens in studies of new media (which often insist on a radical break with “old,” analogue forms), used to analyse the production tie-ups and the promotion of simultaneous consumption of novels and film adaptations in the 1970s. Similarly, very perceptive is Kawana’s point about Edo-period practices of consuming the same story in different formats that have been largely neglected by modern literary studies. Theatre, popular fiction and business were closely interconnected, not only in terms of plots and characters, but also through “frequent cross-promotion, commercial tie-ins and product placement” (124). The media mix, in other words, is anything but new, and Edo popular culture did away with the dialectic of originals and copies long before new media and Azuma Hiroki’s theorisations of “database” and “narrative.” The practice of “literary ambulation” discussed by Kawana might also be traced back to the custom of visiting and admiring natural sites famous as poetic topoi. The contemporary disappearance of the author and the singular work of art into the media mix, on the other hand, forms a curious and contradictory dynamic with the fetishization of the biographical author.

Kawana’s study shows that some media-archaeological approaches can be productive and insightful when applied sensitively to the study of literature. Another thing we can take from media and film studies is also the concern with embodied spectatorship, with audiences as shaped by positionalities of class, gender and locale. Although Kawana refers to “myriad anonymous lay fans” (12), “ardent fans” (156), “zealous

pursuers” (157), readers remain an abstraction, with some notable exceptions. In the case of the *enpon* collections, Kawana writes that “it is reasonable to say that ... women readers were not necessarily less interested than men in the discourses of book ownership and cultural edification” (30) or that “it is reasonable to assume that ... *enpon zenshū* still had an intellectual impact on [working class] readers” (45): both of these qualified statements are backed up by references to Japanese scholarship. With media mix and literary tourism, one wonders what is at the root of the passionate pursuit of the intermedial world of the story, what psychic investments could be at play. The book analyses mostly elite actors: writers, critics, publishers, manga artists, film directors, memoirists, literary journalists. If indeed various forms of intermediality and literary tourism bring in modes of sensory engagement with the story that are not limited to the modern paradigm of silent, privatized, disembodied reading, then ethnographic studies of such experiences might be one possible way for future scholarship to build on Kawana’s ground-breaking approach.

Idly Scribbling Rhymers: Poetry, Print, and Community in Nineteenth-Century Japan

By **Robert Tuck**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
xxxv, 280 pp. \$75.00 (hardcover), \$74.99 (e-book).

**Reviewed by
Ivo Smits**

Robert Tuck’s new book, *Idly Scribbling Rhymers*, is an ambitious study of the place of poetry in a modernizing Japan in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As his fascinating book maps the modernization debates of traditional poetic forms (*haiku*, *waka* or *tanka*, Sinitic poetry), it becomes apparent that the modern nation-state not only expressed itself in poetry but also that poetry was an important battleground where the contours of the nation-state were given shape. The battles were fought through print media, mostly newspapers and poetry journals. However, unlike what one at first might expect, Tuck does not follow the Benedict Anderson model as outlined in his classic *Imagined Communities* (1983, revised 2006), which gives pride of place to print media and fiction as the