

Review article: Writing in Japanese on Irish history¹

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Even under *sakoku* (policy of national self-isolation), Japan observed the outside world. The result of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 was to create or reinforce close engagement with the world by writers, artists, officials and diplomats alike. While the first foreign language of most Japanese was to be English, some were more conversant with French or Italian (and in many cases, as late as the 1930s, with German). There has also been a handful variously able to read, write or speak a minoritised language like Irish; or an immensely challenging language like Finnish.

Western historiography was introduced by Ludwig Reiss, a disciple of Leopold von Ranke, laying the basis for rigorous Japanese editorial work in the first decade of the twentieth century. An interest in Irish land reform emerged in the 1920s and the genius of W. B. Yeats was recognised from the same decade. The correspondence between Oshima Shotaro (professor of English Literature in Waseda University) and Yeats dates from 1925, and he was to visit Yeats several times between 1929 and 1938. He has left a long account of Yeats in his *Studies in Irish literature* (Japanese title translated) in 1956.² In 1970, as founder of the Yeats Society of Japan he invited Roger McHugh, innovator in the teaching of Anglo-Irish literature, to lecture to the society.

Interest in Irish history was much slower to develop. The pioneers were Ueno Itaru, who visited Ireland many times from the 1960s onwards, and, from 1972, Matsuo Taro. Matsuo was a student of Otsuka Hisao. Otsuka (1907–96) was a key figure in Japanese historiography of the interwar years and regarded English history as having lessons for Japan. He encouraged Matsuo to study Anglo-Irish relations.³ Though never forgetting politics, Matsuo's interest over time increasingly concerned the social structure of rural society.

Matsuo was to recall in 1991 that there were only thirty Japanese nationals in Ireland in the early 1970s compared with 500 at the later date. Ueno and Matsuo by their example over the years laid the basis for the graduate study of Irish history in Japan. Some Japanese students graduated in Ireland. Others were supervised in Trinity College Dublin for theses finally submitted in Japan. The numbers may

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¹ SEKAI REKISHI TAIKEI AIRURANDO [COMPENDIUM OF WORLD HISTORY: IRELAND]. Edited by Ueno Itaru, Mori Arisa and Katsuta Shunsuke. Pp 419 + 67. Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha. 2018. In Japanese, surname precedes given name. However, in texts likely to be used by others as well as Japanese readers, there is often an inconsistent citation of given name first. In this text, surname in all cases appears first.

² Oshima Shotaro, *Gendai airurando bungaku kenkyu* [*Studies in Irish literature*] (Tokyo, 1956).

³ Saito Eiri, 'Otsuka Hisao (1907–1996)' in Hugh Cortazzi (ed.), *Britain and Japan: biographical portraits*, vol. viii (Leiden, 2013), pp 580–95. See also L. M. Cullen, 'Professor Matsuo Taro, 1931–1997' in *Keizai-Shirin*, lxxvi, no. 2 (1998), pp 47–70.

seem small, but Ireland as a subject of study drew added strength from the association with the prestige that Anglo-Irish studies gained in Japan. The Irish Troubles, reported in the press, likewise made Ireland better known, and several Japanese books on the Troubles were reprinted. From personal experience, awareness of Ireland — not least among taxi drivers, a barometer of opinion — had become positive by the outset of the 1990s. By then the day was long past of having to explain the what and where of Ireland.

The volume under review, a compendium or *taikei*, is the sign of Irish studies in Japan coming of age. Its publisher, Yamakawa Shuppansha, is considered the most prestigious house in Tokyo in the field of history. It is responsible for a remarkable series on *Sekai rekishi taikai* [*Compendium of world history*]. The volumes have both critical apparatus and history narrative. For major countries, their history has been covered in as many as four or five volumes. For Ireland there is a single — but large — volume.

The idea of a volume was broached in the 1980s, probably by Ueno Itaru, at the time the longest standing historian of Ireland, but without result. Irish studies grew apace in the 1980s and 1990s, the increasing awareness of Ireland adding to the case for an Irish volume in a series intended to have world-wide coverage. Preparation began in 2000 under the editorship of Ueno and Mori Setsuko, at the time the doyenne of historians of Ireland. Progress was at first slow but the growing number of students holding a doctorate quickened the advance.

The death in 2012 of Mori Setsuko, editor and also author of a key section on early Ireland, and in 2013 of Horikoshi Tomo, writing on Northern Ireland, appeared a setback. Mori Arisa became caretaker editor along with Ueno. Already an active historian of Irish politics, her Gakushuin University Ph.D. was published in 1999. In 2015, she and Ueno were joined as editors by Katsuta Shunsuke for the final drive in completing the volume. In the finished volume, which appeared in 2018, Mori Setsuko's chapter was completed by Tatsuki Akiko, who also wrote a separate chapter on the Normans. Mori Arisa, who wrote two chapters on modern Ireland, had the assistance in her second chapter of Ikeda Maki for the twentieth century. Horikoshi's work does not appear to have posed major problems, and it appeared in due course in the finished volume.

The strength of the volume rests on ten narrative chapters written by a total of nine authors with, in two instances, the help of an assistant on some aspects. In addition to the two assistants, a further three authors contributed parts of the text. In other words, the volume as published is the work of fourteen authors. In 2016, in a major study of the Great Irish Famine, six of the eight authors were Japanese.⁴ The two volumes represent the high point in Japanese writing on Irish history.

Outside the authors involved in these two major tasks, there were also active scholars of whom two, Suzuki and Doi, are the most striking. Doi Toshio edited *Studia Celtica Japonica*, recruiting papers by Irish authors on language and literature. Financed out of his own pocket, work ceased with his retirement (all nine volumes up to 1998 are in the library of the Royal Irish Academy and are well worth consulting). Suzuki, an author on modern history, is described below. There are also several histories on specialised subjects: for instance a work on

⁴ Katsuta Shunsuke and Takagami Shinichi (eds), *Airurando Dai Kikin: Jagaimo, 'Jenosaido', Jyon Buru* [*The Great Famine of Ireland: potato, 'genocide' and John Bull*] (Tokyo, 2016).

land reform by Takahashi Junichi in 1997, and a large volume on Edmund Burke edited by Nakazawa Nobuhiko and Kuwajima Hideki in 2017.⁵

The compendium is concerned almost exclusively with history. Literature of course had its own independent recognition. Irish studies at large gained much in prestige from Yeats, J. M. Synge, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett. Moreover, Oshima Shotaro founded the Yeats Society in 1965. There is also an active Joyce Society. The Japan-Ireland Society caters for history and literature alike. Some interest in literature in the Irish language exists, as in a study of Nuala Ní Dhomnaill's poetry by Ikeda Hiroko, and *Pharaoh's daughter* (2001) by Ohno Mitsuko with Ní Dhomnaill's poetry in Irish and in Japanese translation (2010). A small amount of material in early Irish has been translated. Outstanding in this context is the work of Matsuoka Toshitsugu who has in addition to such work written two books, one on Celtic sacred writing (*Keruto no shisha monogatari* in 1999) and a highly original *Airurando no bungaku seishin* [*The spirit of Irish literature from the seventh to twentieth century*] in 2007. He has also along with Nishida Minoru annotated in Japanese Synge's *The shadow of the glen* and *Riders to the sea* (1975).

The scholarly heart of the compendium lies in a substantial mass of detail (67 pages of bibliography, chronology and detailed index). The narrative chapters take up 419 pages, but as the Japanese characters in which they are written make for an economical text in length, if converted into Roman script, the length may appear perhaps 40 per cent longer. The central narrative of ten chapters is supported by short freestanding sections on narrower issues, which the reader may skip or return to later. The narrative of the Great Irish Famine has an inserted section illustrating how the poor law system worked, and another explaining the significance that the Famine has continued to have for Irish people. The chapter on Northern Ireland has sections on Belfast city and its remarkable growth from small beginnings and another on the linen industry and its unique place in Ulster. In all, there are eighteen of these sections. They serve to provide detail of topics that would otherwise halt the flow of the narrative.

Many papers in Japan are first published in journals attached to a university and later appear elsewhere. Two prolific authors have helped the reader by collections of their papers. The first is Matsuo Taro. His studies of relations between Ireland and Japan and of social structure and change in landholding were collected into two volumes in 1980 (reprinted in 1987 and 1998). In addition, there appeared posthumously in 1998 a large volume (500 pp), with its papers on Achill the dominant but not sole subject (there is elsewhere no comparable study of Achill).⁶ This memorial volume on Matsuo and his career, prepared by Shimizu Yoshifumi, has a bibliography of his writings, mostly in Japanese but some in English.

Matsuo in his study of social structure paid attention to the growth of larger tenancies, decline of small landholders and both encroachment on traditional rights, and survivals of communal patterns. He has used the valuation documents in a striking illustration of how to deploy them to advantage. He was well aware also of the importance of the records of the Land Commission, and though he actually

⁵ Takahashi Junichi, *Airurando tochi seisaku* [*History of land reform in Ireland*] (Tokyo, 1997); Nakazawa Nobuhiko and Kuwajima Hideki (ed.), *Baku tokuhon* [*Readings of Burke*] (Kyoto, 2017).

⁶ *Airurando noson no kenkyu* [*Research into Irish rural communities*] (Tokyo, 1998). Matsuo Taro was posthumously attributed as author.

saw them, he never secured active access to them. They remain closed decades later despite promises of opening access.

The other author with many collated papers is Shimizu Yoshifumi, whose papers on family structure have appeared in a volume in English (2016) and in a much fuller one in Japanese (2017).⁷ His contribution at large is to move from the anthropological approach associated notably with Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball to a statistical one, drawing on census data of household composition and changes in it. There is also from 2002 a volume of the collected papers of Yamamoto Tadashi, already the author of a history of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, under the heading (in translation) of *Kingdom and colony* (Kyoto, 2002).

The vigour of research is reflected in the emergence of volumes collecting papers by contributors. Noteworthy from 2009 in writings on literary topics is Furomoto Taketoshi's *Airurando keruto bunka o manabu hito no tame ni* [*For those studying Ireland's Celtic culture*] with seventeen papers. As early as 1981, Horikoshi Tomo (1930–2013), in years by far the most senior historian, had edited a volume of six papers on Irish nationalism. In a category of its own is *Airurando no Keizai* [*The Irish economy*] (Tokyo, 2009), edited by Goto Hiroko and consisting of sixteen papers delivered at the Comparative Economic Research Centre, Hosei University, between 2005 and 2008 under the heading *Colonization, nationalism, and economic integration*. A large collection of essays was Kimura Masatoshi's *Daburin, bungaku toshi: yukari no bungakusha tachi* [*Dublin: city of literature: selected authors*] in 2017. Apart from three general chapters on poetry, drama and fiction respectively, there are biographies of fifteen selected writers by as many contributors.

There is a number of illustrated books on Ireland. They are not travel guides as such, and some have an interesting historical text and many period illustrations. A handsome large-format volume (163 quarto pages) by Sakuraba Nobuyuki and Hirukawa Hisayasu is (in translation) *Irish history and literature* (Tokyo, 1986). An outstanding work by Tsujii Takashi and Tsuruoka Mayumi is a study of early art, architecture and monuments under the title (in translation) *Bathed in a Celtic breeze* (Tokyo, 1994).

An interesting author who spent time as visiting academic in both Cambridge and Trinity is Suzuki Ryohei, who pursued an independent furrow in isolation from other Japanese scholars. He had a keen interest in modern Irish troubles, writing two very full books: one on the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) and its historical background (1988, four times reprinted), and in 2003 a work entitled (in translation) *1916 Rebellion and its place in Irish history*. He also wrote *What is the Irish problem: from struggle with England to peace* (title in translation) in 2000. In addition, his translation of Richard Killeen's *A short history of Ireland* appeared in 2000.

The Suzuki translation apart, there have been four short histories: Matsuo in 1994 (reflecting his distinctive interests); Hatano Mitsuru, also in 1994 (a readable book by a former ambassador in the prestigious *Chukoshinsho* series by the Chuokoronsha publishing house, and greatly updated in a 2017 version); Ueno Itaru in 1999 (profusely illustrated); and Yamamoto Tadashi's 2017 masterpiece of text, presentation and illustration (179 quarto pages).

⁷ Shimizu Yoshifumi (with the assistance of Jane Gray), *Studies of post-1841 Irish family structures* (Osaka, 2016); idem, *Airurando no nomin kazoku shi* [*History of Irish farm families*] (Kyoto, 2017).

Monographs in Japan on Irish history have mostly had their origins in Ph.D. dissertations, variously written in English or Japanese, and in many cases later published (in a sole case in both English and Japanese versions). If in English (almost all in the Trinity College Dublin library), they serve to provide access to the substance of some later monographs in Japanese. Their research-based work in recent decades, with the benefit of long stays in Ireland, is well abreast of modern Irish writing. The bibliography in the Yamakawa compendium provides a useful guide to written sources in both languages.

Some authors stand entirely outside this circle. Koseki Tadashi studies Chartism as a feature of both British and Irish history. His *1848: Chartism and Irish nationalism* appeared in 1993 and at a later date his detailed *Revolution in Ireland, 1913–23* (translated titles) (Tokyo, 2012). Another scholar from outside the Dublin circle was Matsui Kiyoshi who studied at the University of Ulster and published in 2015 an insightful history of the Scottish context of Irish Presbyterianism, *Arusta Chorokyokai no rekishi: Scotlando kara Airurando e*.

Some of the writings are on entirely new themes in history, while others have within their framework highly original content. The list, which is not exhaustive, includes women's reading in early modern times, flour milling, the British naval base in Kinsale and the navy's role on Munster coasts, Fenians (a highly innovative in-depth study of Dublin organisation and membership), the Rockites in the early 1820s, and the ties between Arthur O'Connor, Wolfe Tone and Thomas Russell.

The vigour and reach of Irish studies at large in both history and literature is testified to in the Japan-Irish Society, which apart from meetings in Tokyo and Osaka, has a well-attended annual conference and a regular journal with papers in either English or, more commonly, Japanese. Irish history has a place in teaching in a number of universities. Students who advanced to doctorate level have supplied the teachers of the subject, though the demands of administrative work have over time drawn some of this generation away from research and writing. There are two circumstances which may be decisive in determining the future. One circumstance, as in other countries, is whether graduate studies retain an appeal despite the cost involved and uncertainties of later employment. The other is whether within graduate work Ireland as a subject remains an attractive option. While that is assured for literature given the appeal of Anglo-Irish studies, it may or may not be so for history.

The growth of Irish history as a scholarly topic has rested on Otsuka's advocacy in the years after the Second World War of the study of the history of Britain and Ireland. Following up on this approach, Matsuo in both his own university and elsewhere promoted an interest in Irish history, and finally the successful recruitment of a small but capable generation of students up to and including Ph.D. studies. By comparison with Irish studies in non-English speaking countries, this is a very impressive record. The question remains of course as to whether, given the many issues which affect graduate studies at large and within them the choice of individual areas of study, this profile will retain a capacity for future growth. What can be said with confidence is that so far it has preserved its vigour.