

Circle within Walls: A Comparative Study on Poets of Leprosariums

Robert Ono

Abstract

Many forms of literature are nurtured in circles or salon-like environments, where participants with mutual interests serve alternately as creators, readers, and critics. This was especially true with *waka*, a poetic form with 31 syllables, during the Heian period, which had an immense impact on the formation of Japanese literature. Since the modernization of Japan, mainstream writers have formed a much more large-scale and sophisticated literary establishment called the *bundan*. However, it must not be overlooked that many writers were active outside such mainstream currents. Literary circles within leprosariums, to which this paper pays special attention, are a good example. A dozen or so leprosariums were home to tens of thousands of patients who were forced to leave their families. In such facilities many sought refuge in literature; they expressed themselves freely through *tanka*, the modern version of *waka*, in intramural magazines, and strived to enrich the culture of their very own “leprosy literature.” Using magazines such as *Kikuchino*, *Kaede*, and *Aisei* as primary sources, this paper clarifies that many patients were eager to express their identities through depicting their illness, but were at the same time mindful not to go against authority, since the magazines were scrutinized by staff members of the leprosariums. It must also be noted that for some patients who were seriously committed to literature, the fixed verses of *tanka* were considered insufficient as a means to express one’s true self, compared to more highly regarded forms such as the novel.

Keywords: leprosy literature, *tanka*, literary circle, Hansen’s disease, leprosarium

Introduction

Writing is often done alone, but at the same time, communication is the essential factor in the art of writing, or perhaps any form of art. What is written must be read by the *other*, and what is read, in turn, becomes the source of the next writing. It is, therefore, natural to see literature flourishing in tandem with the development of social ties among writers who cherish similar values, sharing and critiquing each other's works and forming what is often called a salon culture.

For those familiar with French history, it is a well-established fact that it was in such salons, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where poems, plays, and novels developed dramatically. Poems and prose fiction now came to be recognized as important parts of intellectual discourse (Craveri, 2005). In the salons of notable women, such as the Marquise de Rambouillet and Madeleine de Scudéry, many have gathered to exchange their works and ideas, thereby building a refined corpus of poetic language.

Something similar happened in Japan much earlier. It was during the ninth century that aristocrats began to gather and exchange their *waka* (和歌) poems, short but rich texts of 31 morae (syllables) that often deepen their semantic value when aligned with poems prepared by other participants present at the session (Shirane, 2012).¹ Such gatherings, called *uta-awase* (歌合), were crucial for *waka* to reach the position of a means of artistic and even philosophical dialogue among sociopolitical elites. In 905, over a thousand *waka* was compiled into the *Kokin Wakashū* (古今和歌集), or *Anthology of Ancient and Modern Waka*, an official volume of poetry commissioned by Emperor Uda.

Naturally, different genres of literary arts also flourished in the following centuries. In terms of verse, *waka* developed into *renga* (連歌), or linked verses, a form which reached its height during the Medieval period (roughly 1185-1568), while *haikai* (俳諧), another form of linked verse with shorter blocks of 17-syllable *haiku* (俳句), came into fashion during the Edo period. Traditional *waka* was still appreciated then, but it was often composed in the style of *kyōka* (狂歌), or satirical and parodic verse. As Ikegami claims, these forms of verse played an important role in the “surprising number of hobbies and interest groups” that emerged in

¹ Verse with more syllables, such as *chōka* and *sedōka*, may also be included in *waka*, but these forms will not be discussed in this paper.

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan, which covered a wide range of topics from “*haikai* and *kyōka* poetry to appreciating and competing to grow perfect morning glories” (2015, p. 45).

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, in now-modernized Japan, Western-style novels quickly became the central form of creative writing. Forms of prose such as *ukiyo-zōshi* (浮世草子, lit. “books of the floating world”) and *kusazōshi* (草双紙), or illustrated literature, circulated widely during the Edo period, but the torrent of new ideas and cultures that flooded Japan in the early Meiji period inevitably and overwhelmingly impacted Japanese writing. As Ivan Morris argues, the changes Japan went through in such a short time caused “a major break with the past that has no parallel in any of the important literatures of the West” (2005, p. 11).

Aspiring writers who sought fame in the new literary world strived to publish their tours de force in magazines with nationwide circulation. Prizes were given out to promising talents, and successful writers were now celebrities. The literary circle has now evolved into a much more sophisticated and large-scale literary establishment, or *bundan* (文壇), which definitely played a significant role in Japan's artistic and intellectual domains until the late Showa period (1926–1989).

It must not be overlooked, however, that many writers were also active outside such mainstream currents. Of course, there were many who just did not make the cut; but for some, it was simply impossible to join the mainstream. A good example of the latter would be literary circles within leprosariums.

Leprosy has been documented throughout Japanese history. The *Kojiki* (古事記), the earliest book of history, compiled in 712, recounts emperors accommodating patients in temples to save their souls; leprosy was widely believed to be a result of bad karma, and salvation could only be achieved through prayers. Because of this, many patients lived as hermits, and were often treated as untouchables.

During the Meiji and Taisho periods, a number of leprosy colonies were established by Christian missionaries. However, instead of enlightening the public to the scientific fact that leprosy is neither deadly nor highly contagious, the government labeled leprosy as a hindrance to the nation's development. As the Second World War approached, the government was more inclined to eugenics, as was Nazi Germany, and stressed the importance of a

leprosy-free nation. In 1931, the Leprosy Prevention Law was enforced, and this allowed the police to send patients to colonies by force, with virtually every prefecture in Japan competing to realize a leprosy-free community, in a movement labeled the *muraiken undō* (無癩県運動). During the next five years, the number of patients residing in these colonies tripled, and by 1940 there was a total of 8,855 patients living in designated colonies in each region of the country (Ōtani, 1996).²

Since many patients left their families and moved to colonies with the notion that they would never return, colonies were established as something of a miniature city. Churches, temples, and shrines of various denominations were erected next to each other. There were schools for children, usually taught by adult patients. There were spaces to farm. Colonies even minted their own currency so as to control economic activities within the walls, and to prevent the patients from deserting.

Many patients were occupied with manual labor, nursing of patients in critical condition, and farming, but most of their chores were completed in the morning, leaving ample time for the patients to spend on their own (Aoyama, 2014). Therefore it was only natural for them to form various circles, or gatherings of mutual interests. Some were devoted actors and musicians. Some kept improving their vegetable gardens. Some preferred simpler hobbies such as *shōgi* and *go* games. And many others came to enjoy expressing themselves poetically, especially in the form of *tanka* (短歌), the modern *waka*.³

During the 1920s and 1930s, colonies started publishing intramural magazines one after another. Although most of the space was dedicated to articles concerned with reports on current events inside the colonies and essays regarding the lives of the patients, penned by both the patients and resident doctors, a certain number of pages was always allocated to sharing the artistic achievements of the patients.

² A detailed history of policies regarding leprosy, compiled by the Japan Law Foundation in 2005, is available online at the website of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. [Http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/kenkou/hansen/kanren/4a.html/](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/topics/bukyoku/kenkou/hansen/kanren/4a.html/).

³ The difference between *waka* and *tanka* is purely temporal. Any verses created after 1868—the Meiji Restoration—are called *tanka*.

Tanka by Leprosy Patients

Magazines before 1945

The first magazine to be published was *Yamazakura* (『山桜』) at Zenshō Hospital, one of the largest colonies, located in the Tama area of Tokyo. It was first published in April 1919 as a handcrafted magazine, produced by duplicating manuscripts using a mimeograph machine. The magazine called for readers' contributions, ranging from thoughts on religion, essays, and short prose, to *tanka*, *haiku*, anecdotes, and jokes.

In the first issue, we can only find five *tanka*. One of them is composed by a certain Kakotsu (鹿骨), an avid writer contributing to almost every volume in the earlier issues of *Yamazakura*. One of the *tanka* reads:

畑打てば今年も此所の畔の樹で鶯か何か物語るらし

While working on the fields I hear ...

A bush warbler perhaps?

Telling a story

On the tree by the furrow

It is that time of the year again⁴

(Kokufūkai, 1919a, p. 19)

Here it is clear that the poem focuses on nature and the changing of seasons, which are the central topics of traditional *tanka*. Although we do not see any direct expressions pertaining to the poet's illness, we can still sense, through the serene scenery depicted here, the happiness of the poet to have lived through another year.

In some poems, however, we see more straightforward expressions. For example, here is a *tanka* by Majima Rika (間島梨花), published in the July issue of the same year:

罪重く世の道登る老の坂是に乗れやと極楽の籠

With my heavy sins

I climb the worldly path

⁴ All English translations are my own. The original Japanese text for sources other than *tanka* will henceforth be provided in footnotes.

The hills of my old age

Then someone offers me a ride:

The palanquin of heaven

(Kokufūkai, 1919b, p. 13)

We must note that it was commonly believed that leprosy was caused because of gods' wrath, or karma from one's doings in a past life. Here the poet is finally greeted with salvation, although it is quite clear that salvation signifies death.

In January 1931, another magazine, *Aisei* (『愛生』), was established in Nagashima Aisei-en, a colony on the island of Nagashima in Okayama Prefecture. Again let us take a look at a couple of *tanka* from the earlier volumes.

海を背にたたずみ仰ぐ島の山かすめる如し眼は病みてけり

Standing with my back to the ocean

I look up to the mountain

The mountain on the island

It appears to be covered with mist

For my eyes are sickened

(Oguma, 1931, p. 15)

Here the poet Katsumata Iwao (勝俣巖) depicts the landscape of the colony, now his home, and observes it through his failing eyesight, a typical symptom of leprosy.

足病の子ら見てゐしがそのあまり淋しくなりて吹くことをやめり

I was watching the children

With their withered legs

Soon I became so lonely

And stopped blowing

My harmonica

(Oguma, 1935, p. 37)

Regarding the *tanka* above by Ōtake Shimaō (大竹島緒), we can learn from the preface that the poet was cheering for the children at a sports event hosted at the school inside the colony; however, his mood starts to decline when he notices the poor physical condition of the children.

The last magazine I would like to introduce from this period is *Kaede* (『楓』), established in May 1936 at Oku Kōmyō-en, the second colony on Nagashima, opposite Aisei-en.

純といふ名のごとく子よいつまでも純であれかし罪の世に出て

Jun, my son

Stay pure my child

Even though you are born

Into this sinful world;

For your name is “pure”

(Harada, 1936, p. 33)

This *tanka* by Tsunoda Kazuo (角田和夫), from the very first issue, also references the notion of sin, which we have seen in the earlier example. But here the poet seems more confident because he sees a light of hope in his son. The poet knows that the sin is not in his son, but is in the world that surrounds him.

It is most likely that his son was born in the colony. This means the poet probably married in the colony to a fellow patient. The patients were allowed to marry, but only each other. Also, having a child was not something the doctors recommended. On the contrary, sterilization was often enforced in the colony to keep the genes of patients from being carried down—an astonishing injustice given that doctors were well aware of the fact that leprosy is not hereditary. Such background, albeit ironically, adds to the hopeful message of this poem.

懼りたる病ひは古りて悲しくも指次ぎ次ぎと蝕みてゆく

The illness has aged

And so have I

Oh how it makes me sad

To see my fingers

Eroding away one by one

(Kameyama, 1936, p. 30)

In this *tanka* by Miki Jakuka (三木寂花), from the July issue of the same year, the poet counts the years of his sickness. However, it is not easy to count, because tissue loss, another typical symptom of the disease, has deformed his fingers.

By the end of the Second World War, ten intramural magazines had been published in colonies all over Japan.⁵ These magazines have similar structures, with all magazines allocating some space to poems and prose written by the patients. Also, it is important to note that these magazines were available to the patients of other colonies, so literary enthusiasts were aware of the talented poets scattered throughout the country. Some magazines, like *Yamazakura*, published a special volume featuring larger numbers of poems and prose every year, dubbed *bungei tokushū-gō* (文芸特集号), and called for works from other colonies as well. In this way, patients from different colonies could communicate through their literary expression, and share their hopes and struggles. The patients of each colony formed their own circles within walls, but these walls were never completely exclusive.

Post-war magazines

With the discovery of new drugs such as Promin, leprosy became curable, at least medically, in the late 1940s. Although most of the patients stayed in colonies and remained segregated from society, at least they no longer had to fear an untimely and gruesome death. But it would be too optimistic to state that the end of the Second World War also marked the beginning of a hopeful era for the patients.

It was also after the war that patients began to stand up for their rights; they deemed the Leprosy Prevention Law to be unwholesome and discriminatory, and requested the government to abolish it. This battle would end only in 2001, with the total annulment of the law in 1996 and the subsequent lawsuit that resulted in the victory of the patients. The government has admitted that their policies were not only wrong but also unconstitutional, and they have publicly apologized to all the patients and their families.

Under such circumstances, writing remained an important part of their lives. The magazines, including new ones, were regularly published, and little had changed in terms of their content. Let us take a look at few examples.

⁵ Many of the documents pertaining to the disease are indexed in the database managed by the publishing house Kōseisha, the publisher of *Hansenbyō Bungaku Zenshū* (Collected Works of Hansen Disease Literature). [Http://www.libro-koseisha.co.jp/cgi-bin/libro/raisch/raisch.cgi](http://www.libro-koseisha.co.jp/cgi-bin/libro/raisch/raisch.cgi).

院内重監房設置反対の訴へも弱々しかりき警官の前に

The voice is raised

To protest against

The new maximum-security cell

The voice is weak, however

In front of the police officer

(Nakano, 1955, p. 32)

This *tanka* by Usami Akira (宇佐見章), who lived in the Suruga colony in Shizuoka Prefecture, was published in the October issue of *Kikuchino* (菊池野) in 1955. It was a special issue, or *bungei tokushū-gō*. Since it is unlikely that a maximum-security cell was to be built anew in the 1950s, he is perhaps remembering the 1930s, when the colony in Gunma housed such a notorious facility (Miyasaka, 2006).

Something similar regarding the conflation of eras can be said about the following *tanka* by Araki Sueko (荒木未子) in the same issue:

手足捕え検束されしと慄ふ声真を伝へ呉れよと寄りぬ

I approached

To hear the voice

The voice that is telling the truth

It is shaking

Her hands and legs are tied

(ibid.)

The last line refers to the practice of *kensoku* (検束), a right reserved for the doctors to physically detain or imprison patients at their will. This too must have been practiced more strictly before or during the Second World War.

Of course, not all *tanka* look back into the past. Some discuss daily life with a tranquil, and often sad, tone:

忙しき勤めの中に点字習ひ我等に便りくれたまふなり

They have sent letters to us

They are written in Braille

They have learned it
 Amidst their busy work
 So they can write to us (Ōmura, 1960, p. 15)

This *tanka* by Tanikawa Akio (谷川秋夫), published in the New Year's issue of *Aisei* in 1960, expresses the heartfelt thanks of a blind patient, thirsty to communicate with the outer world.

黙々と萎えし足あゆますにふさはしけれ明暗に冬の月照る

The winter moon
 Shines in the darkness
 A becoming scene
 Through which to walk silently
 On my withered legs (Kameyama, 1959, p. 39)

And finally, this *tanka* by Ōmichi Tadashi (大路匡), in the March issue of *Kaede* in 1959, depicts the serene state of a patient's mind through nature.

Discussion

With the series of *tanka* we have considered, it should be safe to say that patients were eager to express themselves through poetry, and they were not afraid to share the painful state they were in. While some patients chose to use straightforward phrases such as “illness” and “sin,” others resorted to euphemisms. Both styles, however, demand that readers connect with the health issues and struggles of the patients. As Burns (2004) has argued with the case of more successful writers who suffered from leprosy, such as Hōjō Tamio (北條民雄 1914–1937), who we are going to take a closer look at later, the illness constituted an important part of their identity.

The poetics accumulated through *waka*'s long history naturally offered patients an ideal starting point. When Kakotsu uses the bush warbler to express his joy at having lived through another year, for example, the reader is simultaneously reminded of the negative aspect of the motif. Although the bush warbler, which chirps enthusiastically in early spring, was usually used in *waka* to celebrate the commencement of a new year, it was also used to express desolation, since the phonetic value of the Japanese word for bush warbler, *uguisu* (鶯), is

closely associated with that of the adjective *uku* (憂く), or melancholy (Katagiri, 1999). A classical example for this would be the poem composed by Ariwara no Muneyana (在原棟梁), included in the *Kokin Wakashū* (vol. 1, no. 15):

春立てど花もにほはぬ山里は物憂かる音に鶯ぞ鳴く

Here in the mountains

We smell no flowers

Although the Spring has risen

Only the bush warblers

Chirp in languorous tone

(Ozawa and Matsuda, 1994, p. 36)

This classical association adds duality to Kakotsu's *tanka*; the poet is happy in the sense that he has survived another year, but at the same time he feels lost because the illness is also here to stay.

What makes the *tanka* of the patients more unique and relevant is, however, an entirely new semiotic layer pertaining to leprosy that was added to the existing sets of poetic resources. It should be noted, for example, that the poets are almost unanimous in dealing with leprosy with some sort of resignation, since the illness is seldom the result of the choices they have made. In this sense leprosy was preordained, and therefore had to be accepted as a god-sent ordeal. As a matter of fact, the Chinese character for leprosy, *rai* (癩), already entails the meaning that the disease is imposed by heaven, since while *yamai-dare* (災) signifies illness, *rai* (癩) often implies that something is heaven-sent (Shirakawa, 2007).

Such a view of leprosy should further clarify the connotations of the word “sin” or *tsumi* (罪) that is often used by the poets. As Majima deplures in his *tanka*, the sin was obviously an unbearable burden. However, like all sins, there is a chance that its weight could be lifted. In Majima's case, the salvation took the form of death; but in Tsunoda's work, his immaculate son sheds a ray of hope on the otherwise darkened world. Sin, like the disease itself, will not let go of the poet, but would not necessarily affect the next generation. In other words, it is possible to break the karmic cycle.

Although the handling of leprosy as a sin in Japan largely has its roots in Buddhism and Shintoism, a similar view was held by Christian patients as well. In the collection of *tanka*

composed during the years 1933–43 by Ito Tamotsu (伊東保), who resided in Kikuchi Keifun-en in Kumamoto Prefecture, there is a following piece:

病む身契りて看護りあひつつ睦めればわが主イエスの許し給ふべし

However diseased I am

Jesus our Lord shall forgive

With my resolution to nurse the sick

And to befriend them

Out of our mutual respect

(Ōoka, 2006, p. 107)

Although modern scholarship suggests that what was thought to be leprosy depicted in the Bible may refer to other medical issues (Pilch, 1981), it could, however paradoxically, encourage the patients to endure their illness, since in the end God will wash away their sins and save their souls. Regardless of religious beliefs, therefore, patients have manipulated the notion of “sin” in their works to better cope with the reality and, if possible, to give sense of mission to their struggles.

One difference between poems from before and after the war would be that post-war poems are less afraid to challenge authority, as we have seen in the works of Usami and Araki. Up until this point it would have been impossible for the patients to compose a poem that would criticize the colony’s policies. Before the end of the war, especially from the 1930s, censorship was enforced both inside and outside the colonies (Arai, 2011). Any negative sentiments against the government, especially ideas even remotely related to communism or socialism, were thoroughly expunged from the text (Maki, 2014). So even when the patients were supposedly expressing themselves freely, they had some bottom-line rules to abide by.

On top of this, even though the patients did play a major role in the editing process of the magazines, we must not overlook the fact that they were carefully supervised by the doctors. As a matter of fact, many of the colony doctors themselves contributed articles about their views toward leprosy and their recent findings about the disease. Some doctors were also casual poets, and these doctors played the role of editors; many of the poems published in the magazines were, in fact, chosen by none other than the doctors (Tanaka, 2015).

One example is Hayashi Fumio (林文雄 1900–1947). A doctor and a devout Christian, Hayashi served in three different colonies. While working at Aisei-en colony at Nagashima, he was the editor of the *tanka* section in the magazine *Aisei*, under two homophonic assumed names romanized as Oguma Sei (小熊生 and 小熊星). When he left Aisei-en in 1935 to serve at Keiai-en, a colony in Kagoshima Prefecture, patients of Aisei-en contributed an article in the November issue to thank Hayashi for his guidance, and even dedicated a series of *tanka*, of which one by Horikawa Sunajirō (堀川砂二郎) reads:

若き師が力のかぎりうち拓く薩摩の国は住みよからまし

Oh how nice it should be
To live in the land of Satsuma
For the land shall be doubtless
Cultivated by our young master
With all his might!

(Nagashima Tanka-kai, 1935, p. 65)

So what did the colony staff think about the literary endeavors of the patients? In the August 1934 issue of *Yamazakura*, Ishibashi Ihachi (石橋伊八), a superintendent of Zenshō Hospital, writes in an article that “it is nice to have a hobby or two,” and literature is an especially admirable pastime, because:

Literature has the capability to let us stay within certain norms, and it allows us to introduce to the reader elegant and wholehearted thoughts, which would move their hearts along with ours. That is why literature is so intriguing, and that is why having a hobby is valuable. (1934, pp. 5)⁶

In other words, Ishibashi believes that writing can serve as a spiritual training of sorts, and it will, in a way, improve one’s nature. Allowing some freedom of expression was no doubt a great way to vent the frustration of patients, and at the same time it could serve as a catalyst for communication between patients and staff members.

Let us also take a look at a patient’s opinion. Mitsuoka Ryōji (光岡良二 1911–1995), one of the few poets in Zenshō Hospital who would actually gain some popularity outside the

⁶ そうして我等は苟且にも常軌を逸するが如きことなく、常に品性を陶冶し真心から出た、偽りのなき思想を紹介し、そうして自分を動かし、人を動かすだけの努力をしたい、其処に文学の興味津津たるものがあり、又趣味を持つ人の生活として価値があると言へやう。

colony, shared his thoughts about *ryōyōjo bungei* (療養所文芸), or “colony literature,” in the July 1934 issue of *Yamazakura*. On *tanka*, he says the following under the pseudonym Kishine Mitsuo (岸根光雄):

I see that the *tanka* section is the most powerful in all magazines. We do love this short form of poetry, which we have carried down for more than 12 centuries, from the time of the *Manyōshū*. On top of that, it is natural for the patients, weakened by the disease, to hide behind the flower bed of fixed verses; one needs so much more energy to write prose. (Kishine, 1934, p. 11)⁷

As a young writer with ambitions, Mitsuoka was more concerned with the literary movements outside the colonies. Therefore he wishes that more patients would work on freestyle poems or prose, rather than on traditional genres. From his viewpoint, intramural magazines with a strong focus on short, fixed poems, which sometimes seem to be too easy, and often seen as a hobby rather than serious work, was not sufficient as a platform for expression. However, his tone is moderate compared to the radical voice of his close friend, the writer Hōjō Tamio.

Hōjō is arguably the only Japanese short-story writer diagnosed with Hansen’s disease who has won significant critical acclaim and popularity among contemporary readers. Right after he hospitalized himself at Zenshō Hospital, Hōjō, 19 years old at the time and full of ambition, joined the *Yamazakura* circle. His debut in the magazine was in the July issue of 1934, where he contributed a short piece of prose.

But apparently, he was promptly disillusioned by the small scope of the intramural magazine. On August 27, 1934, he wrote this in his diary:

In this kind of atmosphere, literature should be fed to dogs! That is why literature at the hospital is so detached. And decent enthusiasts take refuge in the world of verse; they have lost the passion for struggling in the world of fiction (the novel). (1980, p. 154)⁸

Like Mitsuoka, Hōjō considered fixed verse like *tanka* or *haiku* rather out-of-date, and insufficient as a means to express the true struggle of one’s spirit. And perhaps this is why he decided to form a smaller circle within the circle of *Yamazakura*, with friends such as Mitsuoka and Tōjō Koichi (東條耿一 1912–1942).

⁷ 各誌とも短歌が最も盛んなことが目につく。実際万葉以来千二百年の間私達の祖先の血の中を流れて来た此の少詩形への愛着はなかなか根強いものらしい。散文の世界よりは、瞬間的抒情を、もるにふさはしい此定型の花園に隠れ家を求めるのは全く自然なことなのであらう。

⁸ この雰囲気の内では文学など糞喰えだ。だからこそ、こうこの院内の文学が断れ断れなんだろう。そして本気でやっているものは詩か歌の世界に通れて、創作（小説の）世界に戦おうとする熱意は消失してしまっている。

In the following year, Hōjō would achieve large acclaim outside the colony thanks to his short stories “Maki Rōjin” (間木老人, Old Maki) and “Inochi no Shoya” (いのちの初夜, The First Night of Life). Backed up by Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), a prolific writer who was in his late thirties at the time, and already a prominent figure in the literary world, Hōjō became the central figure of so-called *rai bungaku* (癩文学), or “leprosy literature.”

Such success of a patient, however, was a bit of a nuisance in the eyes of the colony’s authorities. Hōjō was now in a privileged position of being able to share his views with possibly thousands of readers outside the colony. He could easily tarnish the reputation of the colony and its doctors by simply depicting his life at the colony in a melancholic manner. The authorities, therefore, had to keep a keen eye on his manuscripts and, if necessary, make corrections.

The censorship, of course, enraged Hōjō. He wrote in his diary on September 4, 1936:

I have finished my thirty pages for Kaizōsha, so I have passed them over to the censorship office. No matter how you look at it, the idea of censorship irritates me.... He is a lovable character at heart, but he makes me *** once I look at him as a ***. By censoring our works, he feels ***. What kind of a *** man would *** working at the censorship office? (ibid., 253)⁹

Note the erasure of proper nouns and harsh words. This was probably done after Hōjō’s death in 1937, when the diary was passed on to Kawabata. It is an ironic example of censorship of a document that deplores censorship.

But Hōjō’s achievements also brought on a positive change, at least in the eyes of fellow patients in the colony. Renowned authors and critics were now joining the community, and started to serve as editors of intramural magazines. This meant that the circles within walls were now less secluded; the walls were still there, but at least they were lowered a little.

Shikiba Ryūzaburō (式場隆三郎 1898–1965), a psychiatrist and a critic, was one of those “outside authorities” who joined the community of “colony literature.” In January 1936, he served as an editor for another *bungei tokushū-gō*. Perhaps he was greatly interested to participate in a magazine full of poems and prose composed by leprosy patients, given that he

⁹ 改造社からの依頼の原稿三十枚が昨夜書き上がったので、今朝検閲に出した。どう考えて見ても検閲は腹立たしい。[中略] 根は可愛い男なので憎めないのだけれども、××としての彼を見ると××を覚える。我々の原稿を検閲することに彼は××を満足させているのだ。検閲官であることに××を覚えるとは、××の男であろう。

was also a member of the medical community. Let us take a look at an essay he contributed to the same issue:

Not only works of leprosy patients, but also those of people with health issues in general, have a tendency to become masterpieces that surpass the works of professional writers, because of their peculiar material and rich experience.... I truly hope to see many more intellectual achievements, even those outside the realm of creative writing, among leprosy patients. (1936, p. 67)¹⁰

Although his statement can be viewed as empowering for the writers within walls, we must note well his bias against the patients. It is very much possible to interpret his words as suppressing voices of power. That is to say, he sees value in the writings of the patients only because they *are* ill. In other words, Shikiba might not have found their works intriguing if they were written in such a manner that no reader could associate them with leprosy.

Here lies the greatest paradox of “leprosy literature.” It is as though the patients can only be an asset to the world of literature as long as they are ill. But how can artists freely express themselves if they are only expected to produce works with a single theme? Hōjō, though unable to escape such paradox, was very much aware of it. As early as July 4, 1935, he wrote this in his diary:

Most importantly, our lives here have no sociality. Therefore, our works, written in such an environment, also lack sociality. Does society even need our works? Even if it did, on what terms? This is what I think: people will be interested because of the peculiarity of “leprosy,” before anything else. (1980, p. 206)¹¹

Even before his stories were published, he already knew that, to some extent, his “market value” as a writer depended on the fact that he suffered from leprosy.

Even after the war, professional artists, both famous and obscure, often supervised poems and prose written by the patients. And most of them, although perhaps unintentionally, kept segregating the patients. For example, Maruyama Yutaka (丸山豊 1915–1989), who advised on freestyle poetry in the October 1955 issue of *Kikuchino*, made the following comment:

¹⁰ 癩者の文学ばかりでなく、病者の文学は、その材料の特異さと経験の深さによつて、職業的文人の及ばない傑作が生れるものである。[中略] 私は文芸のみならず、もつと多方面な知的作物が癩者の中々からも続々生れるやうに希望する。

¹¹ 先ず第一に僕達の生活に社会性がないということ。従つてそこから生れ出る作品に社会性がない。社会は僕達の作品を必要とするだろうか？ よし必要とするにしても、どういう意味に於てであろうか。僕は考える。先ず、第一に「癩」ということの特異さが彼らの興味を惹くだろう。

If your poems are good, then your physical illness should jolt our souls; and your healthy spirits should hit us hard, for it exposes our pretended health. Perhaps you live in a more serious world than we do, where people deceive each other less. That is where you should train your critical spirits. (1955, p. 31)¹²

Note the constant use of “you” and the exclusive “we.” To Maruyama, the poets of the colonies are denizens of a different world; the fact that they are poets, just like Maruyama himself, does not convince him that they are on the same side. Similarly on the same issue, the poet Nakano Kikuo (中野菊夫 1911–2001), who served as the editor of the *tanka* section, writes thus: “Winter is just around the corner. You should all take good care of yourselves” (1955, p. 35).¹³ While there is no reason to doubt his warm consideration for the patients, his words remind the poets that it is almost their duty to stay frail. They are the weaker half of society, and have to be protected by authority, even in the supposedly free realm of self-representation. The circles gave the patients hope, but the walls were never torn apart.

Conclusion

In this paper I have analyzed several *tanka* composed by the residents of different leprosariums in Japan during the years 1919–1959. Many poets, within their circles, strived to express themselves through the traditional form of *tanka*, and shared their views toward the world. However, there has been limited scholarship concerned with the works of patients, especially those who never attained a certain amount of fame amongst the writers and critics of the mainstream literary establishment.

Although many poets recount their struggles and illness rather straightforwardly, poems that would question the authority of the colony staff or the police appear only after the Second World War. This was inevitable given that the magazines were constantly under the supervision of the officials, and here we can see the limit of freedom of expression the poets enjoyed.

It must also be noted that for patients with a serious commitment to the art of literature, such as Mitsuoka and Hōjō, *tanka* seemed to be insufficient as a means to express one’s true self, because young and enthusiastic writers tended to believe that stories and novels were now the central forms of fiction, while short, fixed verse like *tanka* could not fully convey the

¹² 詩がすぐれて居れば、あなた方の病患はわれわれの魂の疾病をゆりうごかし、あなた方の精神上的健康は、われわれの見せかけの健康を痛打するはずです。たぶん、われわれよりはごまかしの少い、真剣勝負の世界で、きびしい批評精神をきたいあげて下さい。

¹³ すぐ冬です。一層、からだを大切にして下さい。

agony of the serious situation they were forced to endure. However, we must not underestimate the therapeutic value of creation the patients enjoyed, regardless of the degree of social impact their works have had. There is no doubt that the poets of leprosariums have glimpsed a sense of salvation when they were given a voice, even though they were aware that their voice would seldom reach outside the walls.

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Author email: robert@jcsu.ac.jp.