

〈翻訳〉

‘Mother’s Silence’ by Kanno Jun & 3 Other Essays

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‘Mother’s Silence’¹ by Kanno Jun²

I have an older sister born within a year of me but I also had another older sister who died at the age of two, before I was born. The latter’s name, Yukiko, appeared casually in mother’s conversation just as if she were still living with us. She would say things like, “It’s Yukikochan’s birthday.” “She’s now in her third year at primary school.” “She’s such a sweet child, laughing like this.” “When I’m sick she gazes at me with such mournful eyes.” I also came to think that Yukikochan was growing up somewhere in our large, dark house, in some room, which I did not know about and asked mother things like, “How tall is Yukikochan now?” In this way Yukikochan continued to live in our house until she was twenty. I remember mother saying, “This year it will be Yukiko’s Coming of Age Ceremony.” However after that mother never uttered Yukiko’s name again.

It must have been around the time that she was in her late sixties and I had turned forty that symptoms of dementia became apparent in mother, who had always suffered from a weak constitution. My mother was living in her parents’ house in her hometown in Tohoku with her husband, who had been adopted into her family, and her own mother, my grandmother. Something in mother was damaged as a result of not only looking after her own mother, who lived to the age of 102, but also running the whole household, taking charge of the houses, which they rented out and maintaining good relations with the neighbours. Trouble arose not only as a result of repeatedly being victimized by unscrupulous traders, who targeted elderly households, but included aspects of daily life, such as relations with neighbours and payment of utility bills. The worst of it was that mother was rapidly losing her speech.

The time when I started to have a vague feeling that something was wrong with mother was when I had returned to my hometown with my family and we were having a

chat in the living room. I casually asked mother something which had bothered me for some time. “If Yukikochan’s the oldest daughter, does that mean that Yoko (my older sister born within a year of me) is recorded as the second daughter in our family register.” “No,” said mother, looking off into space. When I asked her doubtingly what she meant by “No,” she uttered something totally unexpected. “I divorced. Yukiko was his child.” Before I knew it I had asked her, “Then who is Yukikochan’s father?” Mother was already beginning to lose her ability to speak, but this time it was different. With an air of indifference, as if talking about somebody else’s affairs, she nevertheless answered me frankly. “He was a bad man. A child. He deceived me.”

Saying only these words, with a serious face, she then fell silent. I also felt unable to ask her anything further. My feelings alternated between being flabbergasted at how well mother had kept her own counsel up until now, on the one hand, and wondering how father had felt listening to her talk about Yukikochan, on the other. Following this event mother never uttered anything meaningful again.

I wanted to find out the actual facts myself so I decided to consult the diary kept by my mother’s father, who was an extremely methodical person. Without fail, every day he recorded the day’s events in a handmade diary, made from the unused sides of scrap paper, bound together with strong cord. On a bookshelf in the alcove in the guest room upstairs, there must be many decades worth of diaries. I have childish recollections of these diaries stacked up like mountains, with a new volume added every year. Amongst these, there must be some mention of mother’s first marriage and Yukikochan’s birth.

However not one volume of grandfather’s diaries remained on the bookshelves, which at one time groaned under their weight. Mother had burned them all. There must have been mention of us grandchildren growing up, but I suppose mother had not wanted them handed down to us.

After this mother’s dementia rapidly advanced and I persuaded father to quickly move to live with us in the suburbs in the Kanto region. Mother had stopped talking altogether. And in place of the lost speech, as I imagined, she began to wander every day. My wife, children, elderly father and I were up practically all night searching for her. We were frequently totally exhausted however mother, an unimaginably good walker, continued to wander around. She was repeatedly discovered at places very far from our home. Following her final utterance to us, mother lived a further fifteen years without saying a single thing. She finally died, without a word, lying in bed.

After mother had communicated to me the thing which she had sealed off inside her for so long, she completely lost her speech. Looked at dispassionately, one may say that her loss of speech was due to the progression of Alzheimer's, however one could also say that mother had held her tongue, then said what she had to say and after that parted company with speech. From when I was very young, mother used to say now and then, "I want to appease the soul of Yukikochan by going on a pilgrimage." For those of us out searching for mother, she was simply wandering around, but for mother, going over mountains and walking where there weren't even tracks, she was probably making her pilgrimage.

- 1) Originally published as 「母の沈黙」 in *Gekkan Gengo* in August 2004.
- 2) Kanno Jun (管野純) (1950~) Emeritus professor of psychology at Waseda University.

'My Separation from Father'¹ by Yoshida Tomoko²

I was in the sixth year of primary school when I became separated from my father. I was said to be daddy's girl. This was as compared to my younger sister. For my part I did not feel attached to him to that extent. He never hugged me, played with me nor brought me presents. Only when he scolded me would he become mad with anger. Even when I showed him a good report card, he would say, "The teacher's probably made a mistake." This might have been his own way of expressing love, but a child of ten years old was unable to understand it as such. For work reasons he lived away from home³ for several years and even when we lived together as a family, he was more often away on business trips than not. On the days he was at home with us, he drank from about six o'clock until late at night. When we were eating nearby, he would pack us off saying, "Hurry up and finish" and "Off to bed."

One day at the end of August 1945 at around noon, a Russian soldier turned up and said to father, "You are needed, so please come with me." After Japan's defeat in the war, he went to his government office every day to deal with unfinished business. On this day he was back at home after being away for about a fortnight. He said something to the soldier in Russian and then said that he would return in the evening. I suppose that

he never imagined that he would not be returning home. It didn't seem like that. However I have neither seen, nor heard anything of him for the last forty-six years.

Since we had just crossed over into Sakhalin⁴ in 1945, our first winter there was hard, without father, in a place we did not know. Every night I dreamt that father was dead. For some reason he had been pickled in brine. When I thought to myself, "Ah, right, just as I expected," I would wake up. I felt unable to tell mother about the dream as she had become nervous.

After a decade or so, those who had been interned in Siberia⁵ had mostly returned to Japan⁶. Amongst father's subordinates there wasn't one, about whom no news had been received. For the dead too, the date, place and cause of death were known. Only in father's case was nothing at all known.

My mother's, my sister's and my own feelings towards my father began to change little by little. When circumstances were hard because our family had been reduced to mother and children, of course we felt his absence strongly. This was primarily for financial reasons. In the mid 1960s mother married off her daughters, retired from her job and with her retirement allowance had a house built. Since the matter of father could not be settled leaving things as they were, his death was officially recorded as a death from a disease contracted at the front. With his pension and her own pension, mother lived comfortably, traveling the world and making her favourite clay dolls. How many years after mother had retired would it have been? All of a sudden it was proposed that mother and I should go and search for father in Siberia. Since the proposal came from a TV station, expenses would be covered. As I felt that we might never have such a wonderful offer again, I immediately informed mother. I thought that she would be over the moon but for some reason or other she seemed to be lukewarm about the idea. She said, "What do we do if he is still alive? What do we do if we find him?" Taken aback, I asked her "Why? What do you mean?"

She replied, "I know what he's like. He's probably got an enormous, blonde wife, who's produced a large number of children. What's more he's probably sick and senile by now. That's right. Since he's already old, he'll certainly be in bad health." She said various things but in effect she meant that even if father were to come home now, he would be a burden.

It was good that mother had remained faithful to father. She laid out sets of summer clothes, then winter ones, giving them an airing every year so they would be ready for

father whenever he returned home. She had also had father's name inscribed on the nameplate for the newly built house. When I saw the nameplate I felt that I understood her innermost thoughts, believing that her sole concern was waiting for father's return. When I fell into a shocked silence, mother was still grumbling under her breath. The old man is dirty and disgusting. I can't very well not live together with him. He's bound to still act all high and mighty.

It's possible that the reason that we haven't heard anything of him is because he promptly became a Soviet citizen and severed all connections with us. For many years father's work involved gathering information related to the Soviet Union and he was well informed about the situation there and had a good command of the language. Even if I, his daughter, met him, I wouldn't know what to say or what kind of facial expression would be suitable. Be that as it may, there was a big difference between the way my mother felt about him as her husband and my own feelings for him as my father. I had never thought that it would be unpleasant to have father come home or felt troubled by the idea or suchlike.

This year, 1991, the list of Siberian internees was widely publicized. Father's name of course did not appear. Nevertheless mother announced that she would be joining a group visit to the graves in Siberia. It didn't appear that father had been engaged in forced labour, nor did she hope that by joining the visit to the graves that she would find the place where he had died. Nevertheless I cannot oppose mother's visit to Siberia and in fact it turns out that she does visit I'd like to go along with her.

- 1) Originally published as 「父との別れ」 in *Chuo Kouron* in September 1991.
- 2) Yoshida Tomoko (吉田知子) (1934~) Writer. Winner of various literature prizes beginning with the Akutagawa Prize in 1970.
- 3) The author's home until the end of the war was in Manchukuo, the puppet state established in 1931 by the Japanese, consisting of the northeastern Chinese provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang.
- 4) Sakhalin is Russia's largest island, also known as Karafuto by the Japanese. Located north of Japan, east of Russia and shared, by formal agreement in 1855, by Russia and

Japan until August 11th 1945, when the Soviet army invaded the Japanese-populated southern part.

- 5) After the Second World War there were around 600,000 Japanese interned in the Soviet Union. Japan refers to these people as (unlawfully captured) internees whereas Russia refers to them as (legally detained) prisoners of war.
- 6) The author herself returned to Japan in 1947.

‘Father’s Tears and My Tears’¹ by Ishikawa Yoshimi²

Father died of cancer of the oesophagus this May. Since he lived for eighty six years, I think that he had a good innings. Soon after graduating from middle school, he left his birthplace, Oshima³ and went up to Tokyo to work as an apprentice at a timber yard in Fukagawa, in order to become a ship carpenter. Since then, up until just before his death, he lived and worked as a carpenter on Oshima. Even after turning eighty, he carried timber on his shoulder and climbed up onto roofs on his ladder. I loved my father, who throughout his life was hired by the day as a carpenter, never had what you would call a real illness and aside from rainy days and days when there was no work, never had a single day off work and raised eight children.

Father was a man of few words who seldom talked with his family and even when his grandchildren came to visit hardly said anything either. After the war when people were more concerned with getting enough food to survive than securing a roof over their head, it was downright impossible to feed eight children on the wages of a carpenter hired by the day. I suppose that he was aware of this and so he got up early and before starting his carpentry job, he weeded the field, where he grew vegetables. After finishing his carpentry job, before dinner, as long as there was still some daylight remaining, he would stop off at his field to continue what he had been doing that morning. Father never went on a trip even once. As far as I know he spent his whole life in just three places, home, the place where he was working as a carpenter and his field.

There was always a shortage of money in our house, however father’s remedy was neither to consult mother nor to pay attention to her complaints, but simply to continue working. He must have wanted to say on at least one occasion, “As long as I’m still

physically able and I have time, I will continue to work without taking any holiday. If I still can't make enough, then there's nothing I can do." At home, father didn't show his emotions through his facial expressions. But then even when I asked his fellow carpenters, they said that he didn't go in for idle talk nor did he ever get angry, so this was probably indicative of his character. Unless he needed to, father wouldn't speak to mother. With his children too, for example at the end of the school year, he wouldn't say, "Show me your report card." Or if you came first in an event at sports day, he wouldn't praise you or say anything. He was that kind of father. However to my knowledge, on three occasions, he wept his heart out.

Towards the mid 1960s, on the day that my oldest brother was leaving for America on a two year contract as a short-term agricultural trainee, when the whole family had turned out at Motomachi Pier on Oshima Island to see him off, unperturbed by what those around him might think, father's eyes suddenly turned red and he began to sob. Continuing to cry after he had returned home, he said, "My son has left for America because I couldn't earn enough," and then burst into tears again. At that time nobody thought anything when my older brother announced that he was going to work in America and did not expect him to return to Japan. Up until his departure, he was at farewell parties with friends, day in and day out, feeling that he might never see them again.

Then two years later my brother returned from America, however by this time he had already secretly married an American and intended to return to the States. When my brother was about to return to America, my father cried even more than he had previously, clinging on to his son who was trying to board the ship, in order to convey his strong desire not to let him go back.

The third time was in the spring of 1965. Heading for America myself, relying on my oldest brother for help, my father again broke down at the quayside. Parting is hard to bear at any time, however, as might be expected of bidding farewell to someone leaving on a ship, which takes some time, it is tough both on those being seen off as well as those doing the seeing off. On this occasion too my father wept buckets.

As these examples show, father's tears flowed when his children set off for a foreign country. Naturally if we consider the matter of internal tears, as a human being, he would have experienced these on many occasions but the tears he shed openly, at least, were limited to the tears of sadness at losing his children to America. Of us five brothers, four have resided for many years in America, and of these, two have taken American wives and

have made families of their own there. Father probably thought simply that his children had gone overseas because his pay was low.

Father took good care of his possessions. He never threw anything away, saying that it only needed a little fixing to be usable again. Most of the things he needed to repair he kept in a shed, which he had built in his field. When mother once asked him why he was putting away such threadbare overalls, looking serious, he replied, “What are we supposed to do if our children are no longer able to survive in America and come home?” Although it was hardly likely that his children, who had become American citizens, would ever return to live in Japan, this might have always seemed a possibility to father right up until he died.

Two days before father took his last breath, I witnessed his final tears. His body had wasted away to something like that of a mummy due to the cancer. When he had almost lost consciousness and the doctor told us that death was just a matter of time, I was at his bedside. Mother said in a loud voice, “Father, can you hear me? Your son’s...” She then guided my hand to my father’s chest. Father made a very slight movement. Then from his tightly closed eyes, I became vaguely aware of water welling up. For about five days he had been unable to take even a drop of water, much less food and although I couldn’t believe there was any water left in his body, he seemed to be giving the last water of his life to me, as tears.

This last water was not the water that a living person gives to one who is dying, but was probably the water that a dying person shows to a living person as his source of life. These tears caused me for the first time ever in my life to break down in tears in front of my father.

- 1) Originally published as 「父の涙とぼくの涙」 in *All Yomimono* in March 1991.
- 2) Ishikawa Yoshimi (石川好) (1947~) Non fiction writer, journalist and critic.
- 3) Izu Oshima Island lies about 100 km south of Tokyo and is administered by the Tokyo Metropolitan government.

'A Tale of a Pickpocket'¹ by Nakanishi Susumu²

This is a tale about the limited express train called the Hakuchou³, which runs from Osaka to Aomori. It happened one summer. I boarded at Kyoto and soon after removed my jacket and placed it on the hat rack above me, where I could see it. As I had planned to read, it would have been better to have opened the book, however in just a few minutes I fell into a doze. I'm not sure how much time had passed, but when the train was about to stop at Tsuruga⁴, suddenly someone from behind tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Is your wallet still in your jacket?"

Alarmed, I thrust my hand into my jacket pockets and discovered that it was no longer there. As soon as the man behind had confirmed this, he started to quickly run forward. Aren't there frequent announcements on trains, warning passengers not to leave their wallet in their jacket when placing it on the hat rack? I had had my pocket picked in exactly the manner described.

At once I ran after the man. How lucky I was that my fellow passenger was so kind. When I entered the next carriage, another man ahead of both of us was attempting to make a quick getaway. When the kind passenger caught up with him, he punched him and then shoved him down on to a seat.

Then something dropped out from under his arm. Lo and behold, it was my wallet. The pickpocket was quickly dumping it. If, by good fortune the wallet had fallen down under the seat, he could have claimed that he hadn't pickpocketed anything. He was out of luck as I had seen everything from behind.

An interesting thing was that the pickpocket with trembling hands immediately tried to have a smoke. The man who had chased him yelled at him to stop. Then he opened his holdall. I watched as he took something out. It was a pair of handcuffs. He snapped them on to the pickpocket's wrists. They glinted in the light.

The man who had pursued the pickpocket was a detective who had been on the lookout for him. When he had handcuffed the man, this time it was his turn to take out a cigarette. Japan Tobacco⁵, cigarettes are strange things, aren't they?

I did as I was asked and gave the detective my name. I agreed to drop by Kyoto Police Station when I returned in the evening, then I returned to my carriage. Then I noticed for the first time that I wasn't wearing my shoes. I had fallen asleep with my

shoes off and had pursued the man in the same state. Furthermore I noticed that I had become the centre of attention. For the passengers who had been bored to death, the arrest seemed to be a splendid spectacle. This participant was even bare footed!

However what was worse was that the passengers in my carriage had not witnessed the arrest itself. When they saw me returning to my seat, they asked me, “What happened?” and “What’s the matter?” They seemed to get excited again watching me. However I was dumbfounded when one of them said, “Oh, is that right? We were discussing whether you were the criminal.” When he said, “All the same, we are lucky to have witnessed something in real life that we can usually only see on TV,” I thought what the hell are you talking about?

On my return journey, when I stopped off at Kyoto Police Station bringing some biscuits as a small token of my gratitude, the same detective was there. I realized that he was a strong-minded, veteran detective. He said, “He has 18 previous convictions and hadn’t been active for a while but then last week a passenger had some money taken on the same train. I guessed it might be this fellow so I was on the lookout for him.”

Now that he mentioned it, I remembered this detective boarding the train at Kyoto and sitting a little bit behind me. On the desk was the record of the investigation. I saw that the suspect was 60 years old. It was probably because of his age that he had made the mistake of committing a crime twice in the same place. His name was Lee Eikichi. (I’m assigning him a fictitious name.) In short just by seeing the name it was clear that he was a Korean passing as a Japanese. He was probably a Korean resident of Japan⁶.

My feelings towards the suspect underwent a complete change. Considering his age, I suppose that he would have been born in Japan as a Korean. This was a period when the Japanese government did outrageous things like forcing Koreans to do things like change their names to Japanese ones. By tradition, in both Korea and China there are rules about assigning names. There is almost no room for choice when giving names as they are chosen according to how others are named in the generation one is born into as well as with regard to how one’s own siblings are named. Under such a state of affairs, some parents also had the bright idea to give Japanese first names to their children in order for them to be able to fit into Japanese society more easily. They did so for the sake of their children’s happiness. There are many examples.

I could easily imagine the extent of the ups and downs in this man’s life. For all that,

this doesn't mean of course that we should simply forgive his crimes. I also don't mean to say that I am happy to have had my pocket picked either.

However knowledge of the conditions in Japan at the time when this Korean person became a pickpocket rapidly began to affect my feelings towards him.

I came out of the police station recalling a little painfully how those passengers, not knowing anything about the nationality of the pickpocket and his hardships had been overjoyed at witnessing a movie-like action scene and how I too had enjoyed it with them.

A long summer's day had come to an end and night had completely fallen on the city.

- 1) Originally published as 「スリの話」 in *Bungeishunju* in March 1998.
- 2) Nakanishi Susumu (中西進) (1929~) Scholar of Japanese literature in particular the Manyōshū (the oldest collection of Japanese poetry). Recipient of Order of Culture in 2013.
- 3) The *Hakuchō* (Swan) limited express train service operated between Osaka and Aomori from 1961 until 2001.
- 4) Tsuruga is a city in Fukui prefecture on the Japan Sea coast, about 100 km northeast of Kyoto.
- 5) Japan Tobacco was formerly a state monopoly but became a publicly traded stock company in 1985. Since then the government has reduced its holding but by law is required to own at least one-third of the stock.
- 6) This refers to Koreans who came to Japan during the occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945 and their descendants. Those who chose to remain in Japan after the end of the war were typically those who came of their own free will rather than those who had been mobilized.

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