

Review of Saitō Tadashi, *Bunshitachi no Amerika ryūgaku: 1953-1963* (Tokyo: Shoseki Kōbō Hayama, 2018)

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World War II and the decades prior had been a sustained effort on the part of the US government to alienate, intimidate, and even destroy Japanese and Japanese-Americans. No sooner had the war ended, though, than the same government, operating through the quasi-governmental Rockefeller Foundation, invited ten Japanese writers and public intellectuals to the United States for the purpose of cultural exchange. Fukuda Tsuneari (1912-1994), Ōoka Shōhei (1909-1988), Ishii Momoko (1907-2008), Nakamura Mitsuo (1911-1988), Agawa Hiroyuki (1920-2015), Kojima Nobuo (1915-2006), Shōno Junzō (1921-2009), Ariyoshi Sawako (1931-1984), Yasuoka Shōtarō (1920-2013), and Etō Jun (1932-1999), writers from a wide variety of backgrounds (Ishii Momoko wrote children's books, for example, while Agawa Hiroyuki was a historical-fiction novelist), were given full travel and living stipends and asked to spend time getting to know the United States in any way they chose. Where once the American authorities had spared no effort in excluding the Japanese, now the door was thrown wide open.

From the Americans' perspective, of course, the welcome-wagon was at the caboose of the hard-charging war train. The Rockefeller Foundation's tactics may have differed from the US military's, but the strategy was the same. The Japanese had gone from being existential rivals in the Asia-Pacific region to partners. As such, the Americans had decided to instill "freedom and democracy" in their new allies, and the Japanese authors were allowed to tour the US in order to taste of the ideological fruit directly from the vine. Afterwards, it was expected that the same authors would share of this fruit with large audiences in their home country. But what of the authors themselves? How did they feel about the arrangement, and what were their real impressions of

their host country? Saitō Tadashi's new book, *Literary Figures Studying Abroad in America: 1953-1963*, tells the story of American life from the perspective of the Japanese writers who experienced, firsthand and as representatives of a defeated nation, the same United States that had only recently discontinued its longstanding anti-Japan national policy.

Divided into ten chapters, Saitō's book is a literary investigation of prominent litterateurs. Saitō was for many years the editor of the highbrow journal *Bungei Shunjū*, so his knowledge of the writers covered in the book, and of their works, is superb. Saitō is also a gifted historian. The first two chapters of *Literary Figures Studying Abroad* lay out the social, cultural, and political backdrop to the Japanese authors' foray into America. Likewise, the remaining chapters are studded with rich detail setting the historical scene for individual authors' experiences in the US.

The driving force behind the Rockefeller Japan-in-America program, and one of the main figures in Saitō's narrative, was an unusual man, Charles Burton Fahs (1908-1980). Fahs had done post-doctoral work in Kyoto and Tokyo in the mid 1930s and later worked for American military intelligence during World War II. Keen on promoting America's image among the Japanese public, and confident that bringing a wide range of Japanese intellectuals to the US would produce a ripple effect in Japanese public opinion, Fahs, who served as Minister for Cultural Affairs in Tokyo during the 1960s, championed the Rockefeller Foundation's funding of the Japanese authors' sojourns in the States. Most other people, however, found the arrangement bizarre, at least at first.

For one thing, many Americans still held deep

prejudices against Japanese. For example, Yasuoka had trouble renting an apartment near Vanderbilt University, in Nashville, Tennessee, because of the belief that, as Yasuoka was told by one prospective landlady, “Japanese people dirty the rooms”. (126 ff.) Ōoka overheard a child on a train, who stuck her tongue out at him, tell her mother, “I hate to see Japanese.” (114 ff.) (Ōoka later, in New Orleans, was thrown into confusion by a black person on a city bus, who told him to sit with the whites in the front, and then by a white person on the same bus who told him that his place was with the blacks in the back. (147 ff.)) Sakanishi was shocked to discover the existence of a cocktail named, in jest, the “Yellow Peril”. (44 ff.) Virtually all of the Japanese authors who stayed in the US mentioned racial discrimination and ethnic animosity against the Japanese people; some of them, such as Ariyoshi Sawako, featured racial tension in their subsequent works, such as *Hishoku* (Kadokawa Bunko, 1976) and *Puerto Rico Nikki* (reissued by Iwanami Shoten in 2008). Many of the writers and their hosts could not quite figure out why the Japanese, so lately the objects of a propaganda campaign of ethnic hatred, had been sent to America by the same government just yesterday hell-bent on destroying them.

But for at least two of the writers, Fahs’ vision won out and there developed, for them, a deep and abiding relationship with the United States. Shakespeare translator and English literature scholar Fukuda Tsuneari and Japanese literature expert Etō Jun (né Egashira Atsuo), Saitō shows, overcame the inevitable feelings of uselessness, loneliness, and even paranoia which befall those who try to make their way in foreign lands and forged real bonds of affection with Americans. Fukuda, on his return to Japan, became one of the most articulate and reasonable defenders of the Japan-US alliance. Etō, for his part, would go on to explore how literary output, and open inquiry in general, had been stymied by certain US government programs designed to censor Japanese (and American) thought in the wake of World War II. These two authors’ mature works grew directly out of their experiences in the US—in particular Etō’s, whose tenure on the faculty of Princeton University and his friendships

with scholars there such as Edmund Wilson and Marius B. Jansen led to Eto’s fundamentally rethinking postwar Japanese-American history. (See esp. 289 ff.)

Saitō’s insightful reading of his subjects also leaves us with questions that are not easily answered. For example, Saitō cites a landmark exchange carried on between Fukuda and his critics in the pages of the left-leaning journal *Chūō Kōron* (“Heiwaron ni taisuru gimon,” February 1955 et seq.). In this exchange, Fukuda queries whether, when Japanese people use the term “Western,” they are not really thinking about just the United States. (274 ff.) It could be that Fahs’ vision exceeded beyond his expectations, and that America has so eclipsed the Japanese foreign imagination that the US has truly become a virtual stand-in for “the West,” or even, to some extent, “the world”.

At a time when only a very select few Japanese people were allowed to leave Japan, the Rockefeller Foundation ensured that leading Japanese literary figures would help set the Japanese stage for the emerging “American century”. This bold remodeling of the episteme came with a cost, historiographical and cultural—and also personal. Saitō’s brilliant study is a long-overdue consideration of the men and women who pioneered the postwar, as it were, taking the first mincing steps from a “new Japan” to an America which, though changed greatly, seemed also, to the Tokyo literary pilgrims, to have changed in some respects very little at all.