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'Hinomaru-like' Views on Japan: An Introduction to a Study of Suzuki Bokushi and Country Literati in the Late Edo Period

Takeshi Moriyama

Attempts to dismantle the entity of Japan or its *Hinomaru*-like views

The *hinomaru* flag can be an informative metaphor of views on Japan in historical studies as well as sociology or other disciplines. In the first instance, it seems a highly apt metaphor to represent conventional and persistent views:¹ namely, Japan is likely to be an 'insular', 'single-centred', 'homogeneous' and 'mono-social' as in 'monolingual', 'monolithic', 'monotonous', 'monoracial' and 'monocultural'. *Hinomaru* symbolising the sun may imply 'uniqueness', 'eternity', 'unity', 'perfection' and 'self-sufficiency'.

Against this kind of view on Japan, on the other hand, hundreds of Japanologist arguments have been made across many disciplines. In a sense, over the last few decades many academics who are concerned with such a 'monolithic' entity of Japan have been trying to break it up in many ways. Sugimoto and Mauer's series of work since 1982, which the authors call *han-nihonjin-ron* (Sugimoto & Mauer, 1995:332) are one of the first wedges driven into the monolith.

¹ Perhaps it is not necessary to provide examples of the '*hinomaru*-like' views, but I refer to a history textbook in the Iwanami Shinsho Paperbacks. Inoue Kiyoshi's *Nihon no Rekishi(jo)* begins with:

We, Japanese people, have been living within an identical race at the same place which is now called the Japanese Archipelago since the oldest days traceable back in its history up until present. In the meantime, there was a little 'blood-mixing' with other races. Yet, there has been neither racial replacement by conquering or being conquered, nor significant hybridization. Without discontinuity, the Japanese have been developing their society and civilisation from primitive barbarism to the first class civilisation of contemporary times.

This is one of the most significant characteristics of Japanese history (Inoue, 1963:1).

What is clearly represented here is an 'entity of Japan', from which all alien elements seem to be excluded. Apparently projected is one single 'identical race' called 'we, the Japanese' who have a linear 'development' throughout 'our' history 'without discontinuity' in 'our' exclusive land. 'Our blood' is still pure red like the *hinomaru*, and the red centre is vivid enough to overwhelm some 'mixture' with others as if it is a little obscure 'stain' on the flag.

As far as historical studies are concerned, in such attempts, focuses have been shifted from the main stream to peripheral objects. Conventional objects such as ruling elite, power structures, economic systems and intellectual and cultural figures are no longer able to claim to be exclusively representative of specific periods. Instead, much attention has been drawn to notions of 'periphery' and 'people', relating to categories such as locality, peasants, labourers, women and so-called minority groups.

A recent book *Multicultural Japan*, for example, clearly illustrates the objects to be re-examined in order to upset the idea of 'monocultural' Japan. In short, this book is strongly concerned with an imagined 'identity of the Japanese' or 'Japaneseness', which is seemingly crystallised through one linear history of 'central' Japan. That can be highlighted with several keywords: chronologically, 'paddy cultivation', 'Yayoi Culture', 'Yamato Dynasty', 'ritsu-ryo (law-code) state system', 'shōen (manorial-domain) system', 'feudalism', 'closed country policy or seclusionism', 'the Tokugawa shogunate-clan institution', 'Meiji modern nation-state', and, penetrating such a history, 'Ten'no imperial institution' and 'ie (household) system'. Very much contrastively with these terms, fresh attention for reconsideration of Japan has been paid to 'Jōmon Culture', 'maritime and mountain peoples', 'Ainu', 'Okinawan', 'peasant uprisings', 'frontier', 'women', or 'zainichi-resident issues' (Denoon, Hudson, McCormack & Morris-Suzuki, 1996:1-15).

One of the most prominent historians in this regard is Amino Yoshihiko. Since his first book *Muen, Kugai, Raku* made a sensation in 1978, his term *muen* [literally: non-connection] has become a key for disclosing the 'other' side of Japan. He argues that while socio-political institutions (which can be understood as places of *yūen* [literally: with connection]) have been being developed throughout history, Japanese societies from time to time tolerated the places of *muen*. One could disconnect oneself from such social institutions based on 'secular connections' such as 'lord-vassal relationship' and 'kinship', and be 'free' in both the positive and negative senses of the term (Amino, 1987:116-130). Amino has been focusing on such 'disconnected' people (wandering performers and priests, runaway peasants and women, etc) and places (refugee temples, special markets, etc) in order to contest the conventional emphasis on 'the imperial and elite-controlled, rice-field based, Kyoto-centred, male-dominated warrior and scholarly traditions'.²

As called *nihon-kaitairon-ja* ('Japan' dismantlist) by Tsushiro Hirofumi (Tsushiro, 1995:19), Amino's intention to dismantle the entity of Japan is unyielding, and perhaps seems a little resentful of any remains of a so-called

²Translator's introduction by Gavan McCormack in Amino's, 'Emperor, Rice and Commoners' (Denoon, Hudson, McCormack & Morris-Suzuki 1996:235).

'*kokokushikan* (imperialist perspective on history).³ He believes that there is an illusion that the Japanese are 'one single race' based on 'rice cultivating culture exclusively' living in 'isolated islands', and have been governed under 'the *Ten'no* sovereign' since the establishment of 'the Yamato Dynasty' (Amino, 1993:28–29). This warped image of Japan and the Japanese must be contested, because it is merely an ideological 'fabrication'. He writes, for example:

It was the modern state's 'reactionary' ideology which relinked rice and emperor. Though in reality it was just a fabrication remote from the reality and history of Japanese society, nevertheless this ideology continued to hold the minds of the people firmly in its grip, so that many came to believe in this fabrication as 'the special quality of Japanese culture' or 'the ethnic identity of the Japanese' (Amino, 1996:244).

To disclose this ideological fabrication, historians should pay attention to what has been ignored by such ideology, deliberately or not, and reveal an 'alternative' Japan.

Problems of schematisation: the centre vs. the peripheries

The focus on those alternatives is indeed revealing 'other' parts of Japan in many senses. Accordingly, now we know that: Japan has *not* been only a paddy agricultural society; it has *not* been monoracial, *not* been totally isolated in terms of material and cultural intercourse; *neither* all people *nor* every individual were completely subjugated by the power of the *Ten'no* sovereign state and the *ie*-household institution.

This shift of focus surely appear to challenge the valorisation of the 'entity' of Japan. However, the schematisation of such an argument is problematic. Those subject-matters tend to be objectified in terms of the periphery in opposition to the centre. The *hinomaru* flag, again, may be a metaphor of this schema of binary opposition. In Edo studies, for example, the elite in terms of politics, economy or culture is placed at the centre, and the nameless and faceless people are in the peripheries. To put it in terms of the *hinomaru* metaphor, the two are clearly separated as either red or white.

Given this dichotomy, we are tempted to the peripheries in current discourses of historical studies. Some historians are, of course, aware of this

³One of Amino's strong arguments against 'conventional views on Japan' is seen in a round table discussion with Sasaki Takaaki and Tanigawa Ken'ichi. Amino is strongly concerned about the conventional emphasis on an 'insular-Japan' and a 'one-dimensional view on paddy cultivation', and advocates dismantlement of such views on Japan. Meanwhile, Tanigawa expresses his reservations against Amino's argument, because the reasons for Amino's criticism is not clear to him. (Amino, Sasaki and Tanigawa, 1986:1–16)

problem, and concerned, for example, with historians' 'privilege of interpretation of the document in relation to their object' (Walthall, 1991:1). However, with a particular aim of, for example, attempting to speak *for* the peasants in order to break up a 'central' history, historians may fall into the reification of a particular 'anti-central' object under a particular term like 'the peasants' regardless of their 'diverse range of social standings and economic classes' (Walthall, 1991:2).

This reminds me of Sakai Naoki's argument about the relationship between Japanese-particularity and Western-universalism. (Sakai, Ueno & Tomio, 1986:18–21; Sakai, 1989:95) He writes that 'although the emphasis on 'Japanese particularity' seems an objection against the 'West-centric universalism', it does not criticise effectively such a universalism but on the contrary structurally reinforces it.' In other words, he argues, the more we emphasise the particularities of the Japanese culture in comparison with the West, the more strongly the Western universalism is reinforced. This relationship seems applicable to the 'centre vs. peripheries' issue in historical studies of Japan. In the *hinomaru* terms, if we merely emphasise the white surroundings, the red centre would be more greatly contrasted.

So a question remains. Against these '*hinomaru*-like' schema in historical studies of Japan, what or who can contest them as subjects of study? What approach could possibly overcome such binary oppositions?

'New history' and people's culture

Such '*hinomaru*-like' views on Japan are based on the so-called the 19th-century-style discourses, which employ terms such as 'nation-state', 'national identity' and 'national history'. According to Fukui Norihiko, for example, such histories tend to be written 'about their nation-state', 'from an ethno-centric view', 'in chronological forms', 'with the idea of progress'. In recent historical studies, however, such approaches are criticised in terms of their ignorance of multi-layered and multidimensional socio-historical structure with regard to time and space (Fukui, 1995:13–20).

It is believed that the first strong criticism against this kind of the 19th-century-style histories was made by the so-called *Annales* School starting from Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch's advocacy of 'total history' in 1929. Since then, it can be said that historians' new interests and methods have been developed and expanded particularly into more socio-cultural areas under the term '*nouvelle histoire*' or 'new history' (Duby, 1992; Burke, 1991).⁴

⁴ George Duby's lecture in 1982 points out four tendencies/directions of French historical studies:

In this trend, cultural histories have been also given different focuses and significance with special reference to semiotics/textual studies, popular culture, poststructuralism or postmodernism (LaCapra, 1983; 1985; Attridge, Bennington & Young, 1987; Hunt, 1989; Burke, 1992; Windschuttle, 1994; Ninomiya, 1994). Given the tendency of the 19th-century-style modernist discourse that constructs their cultural history with a series of 'monumental works', a single genealogy of elite culture is often emphasised as the national culture. To contest this, many cultural historians have been attempting to re-present the multi-dimensions of people's culture with reference to several terms. For example, concerning geographic plurality, some pay attention to 'local histories' in relation to national-central history (Sharp, 1991). Meanwhile, to depict multi-layered time and space within individuals and societies, some deal with a so-called 'microhistory' (Levi, 1991).

With such emphasis on people's culture for 'new' historical understanding, a number of studies have dealt with the 17th and 18th-century popular culture particularly of Europe (Ginzburg, 1980; Burke, 1994; Zemon-Davis, 1975). In the case of Japanese histories too, we can observe the same trend, although historians of Japan by and large seem more conservative in their use of such terms as 'new history'. Nevertheless, the popular culture in the previous centuries attracts many historians and students with the intention of contesting the 19th-century-style positivist histories.

(1) less attention to economic factors, but more application to anthropological approaches,

(2) questions about the causality of phenomena, but emphasis on their 'interconnection',

(3) much attention to popular culture and local culture which are regarded as an alternative culture hidden behind monuments of civilization, and

(4) re-valuing of 'events' in historians' consciousness, moving from the dominance of 'structure' (Ninomiya, 1992:3-13).

Peter Burke's illustration is also helpful in understanding the 'new history' in contrast with 'old history'. I refer to a few relevant points to my discussion here:

(1) 'new history has come to be concerned with virtually every human activity' which 'is now viewed as a 'cultural construction', while in 'the traditional paradigm, history is essentially concerned with politics' and 'the state';

(2) 'the traditional history offers a view from above...concentrated on the great deeds of great men...The rest of humanity was allocated a minor role', on the other hand, 'a number of the new historians are concerned with 'history from below'...with the views of ordinary people and with their experiences of social change. The history of popular culture has received a great deal of attention;

(3) new historians are 'often concerned with collective movements as well as individual actions, with trends as well as events' (Burke 1991:3-5).

Three reasons for this targeting are observable. First, the period around the 18th-century is often regarded as the dawn of the popular. Most books of Japanese history have a volume or a chapter to describe the period with a strong emphasis on the popular culture, and regard it as, for example, the age of 'cultural popularisation' (Takeuchi, 1993). Secondly, there may be a sentimental factor. We may have somehow emotional or psychological attachment to those days as a sense of nostalgia for 'ancestors' culture' or 'tradition'. This is related to what Tsushiro categorises as 'folklorist concerns' among academic interests in 'Japanese fundamental culture', which is somewhat inspired by 'a sense of nostalgia' (Tsushiro, 1995:21–23). Thirdly, in a practical sense, there is a crucial limitation to tracing the people's culture with regard to historical materials. It is difficult to obtain substantial materials relevant to the historical study of popular culture in older periods, because of people's literacy and cultural behaviour, as well as problems with their material availability and preservation.

The reification of the popular

'The popular' seems indeed to work against conventional histories. There is, however, a crucial problem of the reification of 'the popular' itself. This seems one of the common concerns among many cultural historians regardless of their research areas or periods (Burke, 1991; 1994; Sharp, 1991; Fukui, 1995; Ninomiya, 1986; 1992; 1994; 1995). Peter Burke, for example, regards this as one of the 'problems of definition' in the 'new history'. He writes that 'history from below was originally conceptualised as the inversion of history from above, with 'low' culture in place of high culture.' But now 'scholars have become increasingly aware of the problems of inherent in this dichotomy' (Burke, 1991:10). Thus, the question to be considered is simply 'who are the people?'⁵

⁵ Burke writes that 'if popular culture, for example, is the culture of 'the people', who are the people? Are they everyone, the poor, the 'subordinate class'...? Are they the illiterate or the uneducated?' (Burke, 1991:10)

Jim Sharp also discusses this problem, and considers two points in reference to 'history from below'. First, there is a matter of 'evidence' in case of the inevitable limitation of historical materials to deal with the popular which is usually thought as an unlimited mass. Secondly, more importantly, he points out the problem of the theoretical framework regarding 'below': 'from below' means exactly from where? He writes that:

As far as I can see, apart from regarding it as some sort of residual category, no historians has yet come up with a fully comprehensive definition of what popular culture in that period [early modern Europe] actually was. The fundamental reason for this is that 'the people', even as far as back the sixteenth century, were a rather varied group, divided by economic stratification, occupational cultures and gender. Such considerations render invalid any

Meanwhile in Japan, corresponding to this point, a so-called folklorist view on history has been problematised by a number of cultural historians. Particularly, Yanagita Kunio's term *jōmin* [literally: ordinary people]⁶ and his perspectives on people are often criticised with regard to its static and ahistorical sense. According to Tsukamoto Manabu, Yanagita assumes 'the uniformity of an "ethnic group" in the premodern as the predecessor of "the Japanese people" of the modern nation-state'. There is a lack of consideration of 'proper nouns' and 'dates' in his perspective on history (Tsukamoto, 1976:342). The same criticism against people's 'history without "proper nouns" and "dates"' can be found in Haga Noboru, who writes, in addition, that '*jōmin* tends to be an ahistorical and non-characteristic idea' in opposition to the 'intellectual elite' (Haga, 1985:11–16). As a result, 'people' are seen as if they live in an apolitical space away from power conflicts' (Tsukamoto, 1976:342) or exist in a 'different dimension from state politics and the economic system' (Takatori, 1976:255).

Having been aware of this discursive problem of 'the popular', namely, an ahistorical, static and indiscriminate ideation, those cultural historians are now seeking ways of synthesis to overcome such binary oppositions as mentioned above. According to Burke,

Microhistory and the history of everyday life were reactions against the study of grand social trends, society without a human face...[It] is now possible to observe a reaction against this reaction, a search for the centre. Historians of popular culture are increasingly concerned to describe and analyse the changing relations between the high and the low, *'the intersection of popular culture and the culture of educated people'* (Burke, 1991:19, emphasis added).

As far as recent historical studies on Japan are concerned, we can also note his observation on the matter, although I have my reservations about the re-return to 'a search for the centre'. Rather, this reaction may be more understandable for Japanese histories in comparison with European histories. It is often said that Japanese societies by and large have not been divided into the antithesis: 'the high' and 'the low', 'the elite' and 'the

simplistic notion of what 'below' might mean in most historical contexts. (Sharp, 1991:27)

⁶ Takatori Masao argues that the term *jōmin* does not suit Japanese society essentially, as it is a translation of 'folk' in English or *folk* in German, both of which were nurtured in totally different contexts from Japanese communities. While English 'folk' and German *folk* imply the somehow independent nature of people away from the political and economic system of the state, Japanese people hardly hold such an independent consciousness from the central system in terms of politics, economy and culture. For the Japanese, the term 'nativity' or *dochaku* usually hold a negative connotation (Takatori, 1976:255–258).

popular', or capitalists and labourers as clearly as European societies are supposed to have been. This does not mean, of course, that the Japanese society has been homogeneous and harmonious at all. On the contrary, no doubt there have been various discriminations in terms of socio-political institutions and people's consciousness. It can be said, however, that those discriminatory measures are far more complex than the notion of simple binary groups or classes may suggest. (This is in fact probably true in any society.) As for the Edo period, its four-fold classification of social status, *shi-nō-kō-shō* (samurai-farmers-artisans-merchants), has been almost always stressed in characterisation of the society. Yet, this emphasis is now seen in many recent studies as a cause of Meiji ideology which intended to contrast its 'modern' 'egalitarian society' with previous 'premodern' 'feudal' darkness as a sort of self-justification. This was followed and reinforced by some Marxian class perspectives (Kumakura, 1988:1).

Given this understanding, it seems more meaningful to pay attention to the fuzzy, fluid and overlapping nature of the socio-cultural formation of Tokugawa Japan. It includes not only discriminations of social standing but, more importantly, also people's cultural positions particularly in the process of the so-called popularisation of culture.

***Bunjin* or literati in Tokugawa Japan**

With special reference to the significance of 'the intersection of popular culture and the culture of educated people' mentioned above, I am very much interested in people called *bunjin* (literati) of early modern Japan. Particularly, I would like to focus on their functions in terms of cultural formation and transformation in the late Edo period. It is presumed that they had a great deal of significance as vehicles of 'cultural transmission' when popular culture first ever flourished in the period around *Bunka-Bunsei* eras (1804–1830).

It is interesting to note how the subject of '*bunjin*' has been dealt with in the context of the transition of perspectives on cultural history as discussed above. We can categorise discussions on *bunjin* into three types, in terms of their approach: intellectual history, literary history and local history. First, from intellectual history, the subject of *bunjin* was first given attention by Nakamura Yukihiko's 'Bunjin Ishiki no Seiritsu' [Foundation of Literati Consciousness]. He notes that '*bunjin* is neither an occupation nor of course a class status, but a designation based on their attitude toward literary life or their own works'. What matters is their 'consciousness' that is characterised by 'the hermitic', 'the seclusive', as well as 'anti-secularity', 'versatility' and 'advocatinality' (Nakamura, 1959:3–24). In other words, Nakamura attributes an anti-establishment but elite nature to *bunjin*.

Such characteristics of *bunjin* have been affirmed by succeeding intellectual historians such as Haga Noboru. However, it is interesting to

note a change of focus in Haga's series of books on Edo literati. In his *Kinsei Chishikijin-shakai no Kenkyū* (1985), Haga's focus is placed on a limited number of elite intellectuals. But in 'Edo Bunkajin-shakai no Seiritsu' (1993), his attention seems to be brought to the less prominent figures of intellectuals and literati, or to have moved to study the contact point of intellectuals with common people. Then in *Edo Jōhō-Bunka-shi Kenkyū* (1996), his focus has been further broadened.

Secondly, the notion of *bunjin* has been studied in literary history. Beside conventional views, Tanaka Yuko has offered fresh attention to 'networks' of literati by focusing on their social group organisations called *ren* (Tanaka, 1986; 1991; 1993). With reference to the functions of *ren*, she emphasises some active information networks of vast extent, which involve various kinds of people in terms of social and occupational status. The term 'network', which is probably applied from historical studies of European societies, has been increasingly used to describe the lively interpersonal activities of the intellectuals and literati in the Edo period around the 18th century (Geinō-shi Kenkyū-kai, 1988; Hirota, 1994; Okada, 1996). With such a focus on the '*bunjin*-network', the vast extent of intellectual knowledge and cultural activities among people of Tokugawa Japan has been being unveiled in many layers of literati (Asakura and Owa, 1993; Atsumi, 1995; Okada, 1996).

Meanwhile, regarding the place where cultural knowledge or information moves between intellectuals and ordinary people, or an intersection between 'high culture' and 'popular culture', some literary-historians are particularly concerned with antithetical terms '*ga/miyabi* (refined taste)' and '*zoku* (common)', and their transformations (Konishi, 1991; Geinō-shi Kenkyū-kai, 1988).

Thirdly, some researchers of local history such as Tsukamoto Manabu and Takahashi Satoshi are also working on this cultural transformation from a viewpoint of people's everyday life. While dealing with personal documents of the country literati or educated people who were mostly doctors, priests, merchants or village administrators, the historians attempt to re-present those people's cultural consciousness and conditions (Tsukamoto, 1991; 1992; 1993; Takahashi, 1996). In a sense, their subject can be regarded as the transmission of culture between cities and villages, or centre and peripheries.

Suzuki Bokushi: one figure of the Country Literati

On the basis of this understanding, I examine one particular country literatus, Suzuki Bokushi (1770–1842), in Echigo province (present Niigata prefecture) with reference to the cultural conditions surrounding him. For a brief profile, Bokushi is currently regarded as follows. He is known as the

author of *Hokuetsu Seppu*,⁷ which was published and widely read in Edo from 1837. While running a trading merchant house dealing with crepe and money lending at Shiozawa, a small post-town on *Mikuni-kaidō* highway between Echigo and Edo, Bokushi socialised with hundreds of literati and *haikai*-poets nation-widely, then devoted all his leisure time to write and publish the book. The book was eventually published after four decades of planning and negotiation with leading writers/artists of popular literature of his time: Santo Kyoden, Okada Gyokuzan, Suzuki Fuyo, Takizawa Bakin, and Santo Kyozan.

As a subject-matter for historical understanding, Bokushi potentially offers a great deal for consideration with regard to the cultural transformation among people of the age, particularly, as a place of 'transmission' between the centre and the peripheries.

First, his position in terms of the cultural 'hierarchy' is worth considering. Bokushi shall not be regarded as a 'monumental' figure. Rather, he is better seen as one of many literati or educated people in the countryside, although his name has been well regarded in history owing much to the publication of *Hokuetsu Seppu*. In this sense, he is more likely to represent people widely in that period than small numbers of intellectuals, and, more importantly, exemplify a person in the middle of 'cultural popularisation'. As Ito Tasaburo regards the significance of Bokushi and *Hokuetsu Seppu* highly in the light of popular culture, it is expected that the study of Bokushi will enable us 'to recognise the thickness of the ground of popular culture and its manifest characteristics' in the late Edo period (Ito, 1983:27).

Secondly, its textual richness should be noted. Despite such a non-'monumental' or less prominent position in terms of the elite/popular classification, Bokushi is quite visible, for the purposes of historical research, owing to the large preservation of his writings and collections. Unlike countless numbers of people in the past, he left us substantial and various kinds of texts. This includes several manuscripts of books intended for publication, a lengthy note for his descendants, copies of letters to him (from Bakin, etc), hundreds of *haikai* or *waka*-poems (his own, and those of his family and his correspondents around the country), pictures, maps, and

⁷ The first volume of *Hokuetsu Seppu* was published in Edo in 1837 with Santo Kyozan's introduction and annotation and his son, Santo Kyosui's illustration (partly). It is thought that some 700 copies or more were printed and sold to book shops and book rentals, which were very popular practices at that time in Edo city. It was reprinted several times by different publishers during the Meiji period, and in 1935 published as an Iwanami Bunko paperback. (See *Hokuetsu Seppu*, Nojima Shuppan, 1993 and *Suzuki Bokushi Zenshu*, 1983, *Niigataken-shi Tsushi-hen 5*, 1988) An English translation *Snow Country Tales* appeared in 1986 by Jeffrey Hunter and Rose Lessor with an introduction by Anne Walthall.

so on. This preservation of the materials over the two centuries is most fortuitous for Bokushi and historians indeed, but it was perhaps initially directed by Bokushi's strong self-consciousness. For, in an autobiographical essay, *Yonabeshiki*, he told his descendants to read it once a year to ease his soul and never dispose of it (*Suzuki Bokushi Zenshu (jo)*, 1983:436). Such materials are expected to present a great deal of knowledge to us. As for internal subjects for research, his self-consciousness, perspectives on the social world and of course his knowledge and interests may possibly be examined from the texts. As for external relationships, we will see the range of his socialisation, particularly based on *haikai*-poetry networks, and his economic and social activities which are presumably related to his literary socialisation. With regard to this, Aoki Michio considers the 'creation of local culture' in reference to Bokushi and his locality (Aoki, 1995:267-71, 286-87), and Sugi Hitoshi precisely characterises 'in-village culture (*zai-son bunka*)' as the duality of 'economic interchange for production, technology and merchandise' and 'cultural interchange for *haikai*-arts' (Sugi, 1995:200-09).

Thirdly, due to the substantial materials preserved, Bokushi is expected to offer a remarkable example of the 'cultural intercourse' of the country literati. Especially, his collection of letters from Edo literati such as Bakin, Kyoden and Kyozan, and their relationship reflected in the letters have been 'paid attention to by researchers since the end of the Meiji period [1912]' in order 'for the study of Edo literature, research about Bakin, or concerning book publication at that time' (Takahashi, 1981:85). Bakin-Bokushi correspondences and related description in the diary/notes of the two seem particularly fertile in enabling us 'to understand the rise of popular culture in the late Edo period' 'with reference to literati's letters' (Haga, 1994:50, 55-58). Close examination of those letters and related materials shall identify, hopefully, how one country figure of the literati developed his cultural connection with leading literati at the centre, and, in a more broad sense, how 'culture' was formed through such communication as that between Bokushi and Bakin.

Beside the relationship with the centre, Bokushi's 'horizontal' network is also striking. Inoue Noritaka assumes that Bokushi's correspondents were some four hundred literati in actuality,⁸ who were spread from Morioka in the north to Kumamoto in the south. Among the sixty-eight provinces of Japan at that time, in twenty provinces Bokushi had his acquaintances by meeting, in other twenty provinces he had correspondents, and from other

⁸ Nominally, we find more than 2000 of their names in Bokushi's records and collection. (Inoue in *Niigataken-shi Tsushi-hen* 5:621) This is because, most literati in the Edo period often had several names apart from their real name and nickname/s. They used each one depending on the time, the nature of the art, and so on.

eleven provinces he collected artifacts (*Niigataken-shi* vol. 5, 1988:621–22). Given this fact only, we may imagine a degree of ‘proliferation of culture’, and at the same time, wonder about on what sort of social and cultural bases, such a communication ‘net’ was created. If Bokushi was merely an ‘upper level’ person in terms of ‘village culture’, who could be found in any of several villages⁹ (Sugi, 1995:201), we must be prepared to accept a tremendous scale of cultural practices in terms of participants outside the centre.

Moreover, Bokushi’s geographic position and its implication for his writing are also worth considering with regard to the centre-periphery issue. As far as *Hokuetsu Seppu* is concerned, he constantly emphasises the differences of his ‘snow country’ to Edo or ‘warm countries’. In this emphasis, there may be a so-called marketing strategy for publication in the process of Bokushi’s writing (and, perhaps, Kyozan’s supervision as a producer). Yet, Bokushi’s attitude seems ambiguous. We see his grievance against the deep snow and dark, long winter in many places, but also feel some strong sense of local identity, which Aoki Michio considers as a ‘formation of snow country consciousness (*yukiguni-kan*)’ referring to *Hokuetsu Seppu* (Aoki, 1994). What is presumed here is a complex consciousness between ingratiation or obeisance to the centre and the local consciousness against the centre. This seems to correspond to a socio-economic fact that Echigo province was, on the one hand, becoming more dependent on the Edo economic sphere in accordance with its remarkable growth and urbanisation, in which Bokushi worked actively as a crepe merchant, and, on the other hand, people’s cultural activities were flourishing based on widely received elementary education and an increase in people’s mobility (Oka, 1976; Haga, 1996; Sugi, 1995).

Indeed, Bokushi and *Hokuetsu Seppu* make us curious as to why such a text as ‘snow-graphy’ was written, published and read widely in certain moment and places of history. Like the author, this text should be regarded as one prominent example of popular culture, or a crystal of writing of

⁹ Sugi Hitoshi argues that ‘in-village culture (*zaison bunka*)’ is characterised by the dual purpose of ‘production (*seisan*)’ and ‘culture (*fuga*)’, and was widespread throughout Japan in the middle to late Edo period. The participants of the in-village culture can be categorised into three layers.

(1) ‘Lower layer’ is general participants in *haikai* practice, who were like middle-upper class farmers. As for population, several would be found in each village.

(2) ‘Middle layer’, a few a village, acted as leaders in *haikai* practice, who mingled with others beyond their own county.

(3) ‘Upper layer’ is the so-called ‘country literati (*chiho bunjin*)’, who exchanged inter-provincially or, in many cases, on a nation-wide basis. Sugi estimates that such ‘country literati’ existed at the rate of one or two per several villages (Sugi, 1995:200–1).

innumerable literati and educated people of the time. In other words, this text can be found 'unique and typical' in the same way as its author Bokushi.

In conclusion, the significance of Suzuki Bokushi for historical study shall be found in both his particularity *and* generality. Bokushi as a subject may help us to overcome the failure of the Yanagita-folklorist perspective which is characterised by 'people's history without "proper nouns" and "dates"'. His texts will identify how he was a person of patience and stubbornness, as well as highly self-conscious, hardworking and thrifty. In a word, he is '(re)markable' in history. Meanwhile, in terms of literary talent and knowledge, Bokushi shall be regarded as mediocre or perhaps a little more than that. This, perhaps, 'upper-middle' position of his is also observable in terms of his socio-economic status as a local leader of a small town. In that sense, we may be able to imagine the existence of his counterparts in almost every town¹⁰ of Japan, and their vigorous activities in economic, social and cultural spheres. Within this context of highly active and widespread literati, Suzuki Bokushi can be as a fascinating exemplar. In response to the term 'history from below' of the 'new history', my attempt to re-present the cultural conditions of those country literati could perhaps be called 'history from the middle'.

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¹⁰ It is of course difficult to know how many towns or places there were, which enabled people to practise such cultural activities as Bokushi did. However, if we regard his town Shiozawa as one of the post-towns (*shuku*) on highways (*kaidō*) in the Edo period, the total number of *shuku*, 609, on five main highways (*go-kaidō*) and nineteen branch highways (*waki kaidō*; one of which is Mikuni Kaidō of Bokushi) would help us estimate it (*Kadokawa Nihon-shi Jiten*, 1974:1245–46).

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