

## Yomihon:

### THE APPEARANCE OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL IN LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY JAPAN

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WHEN students of Japanese literary history view the latter part of the Tokugawa period, two developments stand out. First, Edo replaced Kyoto and Osaka as the center of cultural activity. Second, a baffling variety of forms of prose fiction arose. The former stemmed largely from the policies of Yoshimune, the eighth Tokugawa shogun. Although his suppression of "pernicious literature" had a baneful effect on publishing in Kyoto and Osaka, it indirectly improved the competitive position of Edo booksellers.<sup>1</sup> During Yoshimune's reign, also, the city of Edo underwent enormous population growth. Many hatamoto and samurai were forced to resettle in Edo, where they lived on rice stipends rather than on the direct produce of their land. Bureaucracy expanded. Samurai turned from the rigors of rural life to polite urban pursuits. Need for additional services led to a growth in the number of merchants. Likewise, Yoshimune's personal interest in mathematics, science, and even Western learning resulted in the import of books and ideas from the outside world, particularly China. Proscriptions against foreign learning became less rigid.

Complex though one may find the reasons why Edo replaced Osaka and Kyoto as the center of cultural activity, most people feel the baffling variety of forms of prose fiction to be utterly exasperating. Unlike prose fiction in the West, where one distinguishes simply between the novel and the short story, Japanese scholars employ an unwieldy scheme of nearly twenty separate categories that arose from Heian to the end of the Tokugawa period. Fifteen of these refer to fiction of the late Tokugawa period alone. For earlier periods the scheme is lucid enough. First comes Heian fiction, beginning with the *Taketori monogatari*, *Ise monogatari*, and *Yamato monogatari*. That of the Kamakura and Muromachi period follows. Then comes a category known as *san-itsu monogatari*, "lost and scattered tales." During the early Tokugawa period two additional groups emerge, *kanazōshi* and *ukiyo-zōshi*. Although some overlapping exists, chronology mainly determines the category. But for the late Tokugawa period the scheme suggests chaos.

As though adding peanuts and pears and wondering what to call the sum, one would hardly know what to make of the jumble of different terms that refer variously to the size of original woodblock editions (most of which are not readily available, even at ordinary Japanese libraries), the color of the covers, original price, nature and frequency of illustrations, number of volumes per set, type of binding, level of

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<sup>1</sup> Noda Hisao, *Kinsei bungaku no haikai* [Backgrounds of Modern Literature] (Tokyo, 1964), pp. 22-23.

presentation, and vaguely the style and content. No wonder Japanese scholars, to say nothing of foreign students, spend inordinate amounts of energy trying to clarify this bewildering hodgepodge.

The following pages describe how one of these forms of late Tokugawa fiction, *yomihon*, "reading books," arose in Kyoto and Osaka around the middle of the eighteenth century and matured in Edo in the early nineteenth century. Emphasis is placed on several authors who helped make the *yomihon* into historical novels, as one might now define the term.<sup>2</sup>

For several reasons the *yomihon* form deserves to be better known in the West. First, study of the growth of *yomihon* reveals how the center of Japanese literary activity shifted to Edo from Kyoto and Osaka. Then too, the *yomihon*, though never published in such large numbers as other types of prose fiction (various kinds of *kusazōshi*, for example), commanded a more literate audience than other forms common in late Tokugawa Japan. Also, certain aspects of the *yomihon* suggest a transition from classical Japanese fiction to the contemporary novel that began in the Meiji Era. Quite understandably, Japanese scholars treat *yomihon* first among the categories of late Tokugawa fiction.

Although when Yoshimune died, in 1751, Japan still faced another century of isolation, intelligent Japanese began to look beyond existing modes of literary expression to their own past and toward foreign shores, particularly China. Interest grew in not only Japanese national history but also Chinese vernacular literature. The early *yomihon* authors who adapted Chinese tales for Japanese readers wrote pedantic prefaces in Chinese (unusual in Saikaku's time), discussed such matters as importing books from China to Japan, and reveled in minute detail about history, customs, and legends that today may seem more suitable for encyclopedias than novels.

Attempts at precise definition of *yomihon*, as well as most other forms of late Tokugawa fiction, are doomed to failure. Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848)<sup>3</sup> coined the simplest definition. In his pioneer history of Edo fiction, *Kinsei mono no hon Edo sakusha burui* [Edo Authors: The Categories of the Modern Novel], he called them "reading books to distinguish them from picture books."<sup>4</sup> But in older usage *yomihon* connoted, among other things, fiction as opposed to factual records, reading intended to entertain rather than to teach (though a didactic element was always allowed), and broadest of all, any non-dramatic prose fiction.<sup>5</sup>

Almost all books that scholars now call *yomihon* appeared between 1750 and 1850. More specifically, the year 1749 marked the beginning, when Tsuga Teishō (1718?-1795?), an Osaka physician and Confucian scholar, wrote a series of literary tales entitled *Hanabusa zōshi* [Tales of Elegance]. The year 1848, when Takizawa Bakin died at his home in Edo, spelled the end of creativity in the *yomihon*. In the mean-

<sup>2</sup> "A narrative which utilizes history to present an imaginative reconstruction of events, using either fictional or historical personages or both. . . ." Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, *A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms: A Dictionary* (New York, 1960), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> His achievements are treated more fully below. See also my forthcoming book, *Takizawa Bakin*, to appear this year in the Twayne World Authors Series.

<sup>4</sup> In *Kinkō bungei onchi sōsho* [Heritage of Modern Literary Arts: A Collectanea], V (Tokyo, 1892), 183.

<sup>5</sup> Nakamura Yukihiko, *Kinsei shōsetsu-shi no kenkyū* [Studies in the History of the Modern Novel] (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 245-260.

time, publishers in Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo produced nearly 700 items now cataloged as *yomihon*.<sup>6</sup>

Modern scholars distinguish between the early examples written in Kyoto and Osaka and those later produced in Edo. The Kamigata *yomihon*, as the former are called, dominated between 1750 and 1800, after which the Edo *yomihon* prevailed. More often than not, the Kamigata authors, notably Takebe Ayatari (1719-1774) and Ueda Akinari (1734-1809) wrote in *gabun*, "elegant style," and sought the flavor of Heian romances or *Man'yōshū* poetry. Typically, the early *yomihon* consisted of adaptations of Chinese vernacular fiction, collections of tales with a historical setting, Buddhist narratives, or anthologies of supernatural stories. Edo *yomihon*, by contrast, though also in a literary style, recall to the reader, because of their greater use of Chinese idiom, not court romances but military tales. Mostly they were historical novels set in the Kamakura or Muromachi period.

By far the greater number of Edo *yomihon* were written by Santō Kyōden (1761-1816) and Takizawa Bakin. Their efforts during the first decade of the nineteenth century to create historical novels about Japanese heroes gave the *yomihon* its ultimate form and marked the last great achievement of Tokugawa literature. Complex though unified plots, a didactic tone, character development, Chinese flavor, supernatural elements, and a bold mixture of colloquial and classical idiom distinguished Bakin and Kyōden's work from most Kamigata *yomihon* and from earlier prose fiction. Bakin himself attested to their conscious artistry when, for example, in 1810 he asserted that a moral stance and a well-written story must accompany each other. The former, he explained, required vast learning and the latter deep understanding of human feeling. Without "penetrating feeling and a successful plot, a novel is hardly worth reading."<sup>7</sup>

Edo *yomihon* especially bring to mind gothic novels and the pageantry and drama of Sir Walter Scott, in that they are based on national history and supernatural legends. But firm moral purpose and lofty themes lent them a distinctive character. Edo authors and to a lesser degree writers in Kyoto and Osaka espoused Confucian ethics and used techniques of Confucian scholarship and popular literature of Ming and Ch'ing China.

Both in Kyōden and Bakin's typical *yomihon* and in the best of the earlier examples, Chinese and Japanese elements were blended with consummate skill, until the uninitiated reader could hardly tell Chinese inspiration from Japanese creativity. Although the books themselves were published for profit, the educated samurai and townsmen who wrote them created serious fiction that occupies a unique position in Japanese literature. The techniques for dressing foreign literature in Japanese guise, perfected by Kyōden and Bakin, provided a ready-made tool for early Japanese students of Western literature. During much of the Meiji Era and even later, the *yomihon* contributed to Japanese popular ideals, modern Japanese morality, and even Japanese nationalism.

Thus Kyōden and especially Bakin's *yomihon* foreshadowed the adoption of Western literature and paved the way for the Meiji political novel of the eighteen

<sup>6</sup> Yamazaki Fumoto, *Nihon shōsetsu nempyō tsuki sōmokuroku* [Chronological Table of Japanese Fiction with Complete Index], *Kindai Nihon bungaku taikei*, XXV (Tokyo, 1929), 86-124.

<sup>7</sup> *Jo wo ugachi shu wo tsukusazareba, miru ni tarazu*, "Heiben" ["Horsewhippings"], *Kyōkutei ikō* [Kyōkutei's Posthumous Manuscripts] (Tokyo, 1911), p. 296.

seventies and eighteen eighties. Finally, for a while in the eighteen nineties and during the early years of the twentieth century, when cheap movable-type editions of older classics became common, Edo *yomihon* found a wider audience than ever. Their influence on readers and writers alike reached a new peak.

Kamigata as well as Edo *yomihon* usually appeared in sets of five *kan*, "sections," [Chinese, *chüan*] of quarto size, bound separately in soft, heavy paper. Sometimes an embossed pattern or design enhanced the appearance. The covers offered shades of beige, amber, peach, blue, or green tinted paper. For display purposes, booksellers wrapped the sets in colored paper envelopes illustrated and designed to suggest the contents. Inside the first *kan* the prospective customer found several black and white *kuchie*, "frontispieces," printed on paper heavier than that of the other pages. Several more modest *sashie*, "inserted illustrations," usually adorned the text of each *kan*. The frontispieces and decorative covers approached the highest quality of the printmaker's art, and the format itself resembled that of Chinese popular fiction, but the Japanese illustrations usually excelled the Chinese in artistic skill.

Fascination with Chinese vernacular literature, which reached a peak toward the end of the eighteenth century, played a special role in the growth of the *yomihon*. Even before the Tokugawa rulers officially began to support Confucian learning, unknown samurai returning from Japan's Korean expeditions of 1592 and 1597 brought back Chinese collections like *Ch'ien teng hsin hua chü-chieh* [New Night-time Tales, Annotated].<sup>8</sup> Scholars in the seventeenth century paid increasing notice to these texts, and during the Kyōhō Era (1716-36) there arose several Chinese study groups that stressed colloquial language rather than literary texts. These groups infused new life into Chinese studies and participated in a movement that led not only to the expansion of foreign learning but also to revived interest in national history, language, and literature.<sup>9</sup>

To single out a member of several such groups, Okajima Kanzan (1674-1728), a disciple of Ogyū Sorai, in particular urged the reading of Chinese vernacular fiction, not for its own sake but as a means of studying the Chinese spoken language. Kanzan was a native of Nagasaki, where he served as a Chinese interpreter. Later, for a time, he lived in Edo. After deciding that the Confucian regimen in the east was too strict for his taste, he proceeded to Kyoto, where he mingled with scholars and men of leisure to whom literature meant more than mere study of language. The early *yomihon* authors emerged from groups like those that Sorai and Kanzan participated in. Kanzan himself, besides making a number of scholarly compilations, translated *Shui-hu-chuan* (Water Margin) for Japanese readers. His edition remained the standard text until the summer of 1805, when two booksellers asked Bakin to begin a new translation in *yomihon* form.

The picaresque adventures and loyal comradeship of the 108 heroes of Liangshan-po endeared *Shui-hu-chuan* to Japanese readers, and it became one of the most widely read books of the time. Bakin, in his preface, "*Yaku Sui ko ben*" ["On trans-

<sup>8</sup> Literary tales in 4 *ch.*, compiled by Ch'u Yü (1341-1427), preface dated 1378. Consists largely of tales of the supernatural.

<sup>9</sup> See Nakamura, *Kinsei sakka no kenkyū* [Studies on Modern Authors] (Tokyo, 1961), pp. 131-144. See also Sagara Tōru, "Seisaku no ronri: naze Ogyū Sorai wo mi-naosu ka" ["Logic of Work: Why Re-evaluate Ogyū Sorai?"], *Nippon* (June, 1965), pp. 156-172, N.B. p. 164.

lating the Shui-hu"]], told of his own first encounter with the book years earlier. "I found *Shui-hu-chuan* so engrossing," he wrote, "that I forgot about food without regret, and read far into the night without feeling tired."<sup>10</sup> Although Bakin criticized Kanzan's version as "one you could read with your lips but not taste in your belly; one that you could hear with your ears and yet not feel,"<sup>11</sup> it won him plaudits from three generations of readers before being superseded.

In the years that followed Kanzan's achievement, three collections of Ming tales known as the *San-yen*, as well as other Chinese vernacular fiction, attracted an increasing share of readers. By 1749 authors who had grown weary of imitating Ihara Saikaku and Ejima Kiseki's *ukiyo-zōshi*, and the *hachimonjiya-bon* that followed, discovered in their search for fresh themes Chinese vernacular fiction, as well as their own Japanese past. The title of the first story in Tsuga Teishō's *Hanabusa zōshi*, for example, reads "*Go-Daigo no Tei mitabi Fujifusa no isame wo kujiku koto*" ["Emperor Go-Daigo Thrice Ignores Fujifusa's Remonstrance"]. Teishō's debt is obvious. The third tale in the Ming collection *Ching-shih t'ung-yen* (Common Tales to Warn the World) is "*Wang An-shih san nan Su Hsüeh-shih*" ("Wang An-shih Thrice Corners Su Tung-p'ō").<sup>12</sup> In the early *yomihon*, close adaptations or translations were common, as this example suggests. Later authors like Takebe Ayatari, Ueda Akinari, Santō Kyōden, and Takizawa Bakin, however, showed greater selectivity. A Chinese concept of form and structure maintained its appeal, but the exposition grew highly original. Collections of tales gradually gave way to the historical novel.

While the first *yomihon* were being written, Sorai and Kanzan's resolute efforts and Yoshimune's encouragement of learning several decades earlier began to pay dividends in other aspects of Chinese studies as well. New compilations, such as *Ku-chin t'u shu chi-ch'eng* (Synthesis of Books and Illustrations of Ancient and Modern Times), which Ch'ing scholars produced during the reigns of Kang-hsi (1662-1723) and Ch'ien-lung (1736-96), stimulated Japanese scholars. From the *Ku-chin t'u shu chi-ch'eng* and similar works, Japanese scholars learned to compile their own scholarly tools. Ozaki Masayoshi (1755-1827), for instance, prepared the first Japanese annotated bibliography, the *Gunsho ichiran*.<sup>13</sup> Hanawa Hokiichi (1746-1821), a great scholar, despite his blindness, began in 1779 to edit texts for his ambitious series, *Gunsho ruijū*,<sup>14</sup> completed in 1819.

One influential school of Ch'ing scholarship, the Han-hsüeh-p'ai, "school of Han Learning," and its inductive method, had a special impact on later *yomihon* authors.<sup>15</sup> Out of the quarreling groups of Japanese partisans of Sung and Ming Neo-Confucianists, the Setchū Gakuha, "Eclectic School," arose in Japan to champion the teachings and techniques of rigorous Chinese scholars like Ku Yen-wu (1613-1682), Yen Jo-chū (1636-1704), and Tai Chen (1724-1777). Confucian scholars like Inoue Kinga (1732-1784), Minikawa Kien (1734-1807), and Yamamoto Hokuzan

<sup>10</sup> *Yo metoyori Suikoden wo yomu ni, ū wo wasurete itou koto naku, tomoshihi wo torite umu toku nashi, Shinhen suiko gaden* [Water Margin: Newly Edited and Illustrated], *shohen*, I (Edo, 1807), 9a.

<sup>11</sup> *Kuchi ni yomu to icdomo hara ni ajiwau koto naku, mimi ni kikite kaerite kanzuru koto ari*, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> (Peking, 1957), pp. 24-37; tr. John Lyman Bishop, *The Colloquial Short Story in China: A Study of the San-Yen Collections* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 104-122.

<sup>13</sup> See Herschel Webb, *Research in Japanese Sources: A Guide* (New York, 1965), p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Nagasawa Kikuya, *Kambungaku gairon* (Tokyo, 1959), p. 118.

(1752-1812) pioneered Han-hsüeh in Japan. *Kokugaku-sha*, “students of national learning,” and finally *yomihon* authors like Bakin and Kyōden, acquired the Han-hsüeh taste for revitalized classical scholarship and high ethical conduct. Unfortunately they also took over certain less desirable traits, notably a penchant for minutiae.

By the seventeen seventies two authors emerged as the outstanding writers: Ueda Akinari and Takebe Ayatari. Both men were poets and students of *kokugaku*, not Confucian scholars like earlier *yomihon* authors. Akinari favored *waka*, *on’ingaku*, “phonetics,” and study of the *Man’yōshū*, whereas Ayatari preferred haikai and painting. Both men, moreover, studied under Kamo Mabuchi (1697-1769), the teacher who helped to educate an entire generation of *kokugaku-sha*.

Today Ueda Akinari is held in higher esteem than Takebe Ayatari, but in the early nineteenth century Bakin credited Ayatari rather than Akinari with being the father of the Edo *yomihon*.<sup>16</sup> Ayatari spent much of his life as an itinerant teacher of haikai. He was born the second son of the *karō* of the daimyo of Hirosaki Han (now part of Aomori Prefecture) in northernmost Japan. Despite his family’s high position, he was banished from his clan, owing to an affair he had with his sister-in-law. Subsequently, he wandered about as a haiku poet, studying under a number of masters. By the time he reached his thirtieth year he gained wide recognition for his talent. Later, in 1762 or 1763, he enrolled as a disciple of Kamo Mabuchi, but the two men did not get along well.<sup>17</sup> Ayatari’s first *yomihon*, *Nishiyama monogatari* [Tale of Nishiyama] (Osaka, 1768) remains noteworthy first because it was a novel cast in a historical setting and secondly because the incident that inspired the novel recalls the youthful affair that led to Ayatari’s banishment. The year before *Nishiyama monogatari* appeared, a certain young man from a village on the western edge of Kyoto murdered a young woman on the way to her wedding. The motive was that she had earlier been engaged to him, but her father broke it off and tried to marry her to another man.<sup>18</sup>

Partly because he completed his best-known *yomihon*, *Ugetsu monogatari* [Tales for the Rainy Moon]<sup>19</sup> before *Nishiyama monogatari*’s publication, Akinari felt deep personal rivalry toward Ayatari. Whereas Ayatari wandered widely, Akinari, despite many personal tragedies in Kyoto and Osaka, remained mostly in the Kamigata, the area of his birthplace, where he wrote his haunting tales about the vanity of human wishes and the suffering that war leaves in its wake. Each man in his own way belonged to the ranks of the discontented. Akinari eventually became a grumpy solipsist, and Ayatari to the end of his days felt driven from pillar to post as an itinerant teacher. In this connection he once visited Bakin’s father, when Bakin was too young to remember the event. Possibly Bakin’s personal feeling of closeness influenced his judgment, but he believed that Ayatari’s work directly anticipated the Edo *yomihon*.<sup>20</sup>

Although born to wealth, Akinari in later years spent much of his time in poverty, loneliness, and gloom. A pair of his stories, “*Asaji ga yado*” [“Transitory Hut”] and

<sup>16</sup> “Honchō suikoden wo yomu narabi ni hihiyō” [“Criticism upon Reading the Japanese Water Margin”], *Takebe Ayatari-cho honchō suikoden kōhen yura monogatari* [Takebe Ayatari’s Japanese Water Margin: Part Two and The Tale of Yura], ed. Seikadō bunko (Tokyo, 1959), p. 277.

<sup>17</sup> Takada Mamoru, *Ueda Akinari nempu kōsetsu* [Ueda Akinari: A Chronological Study] (Tokyo, 1964), p. 55, and Maruyama Toshio, “Kaidai,” *Takebe Ayatari-cho honchō suikoden*, pp. 354-355.

<sup>18</sup> Takada Mamoru, *Akinari nempu*, p. 320.

<sup>19</sup> Written 1768; pub. 1776.

<sup>20</sup> Asō Isoji, *Edo shōsetsu gairon* [Introduction to the Edo Novel] (Tokyo, 1956), pp. 170, 180.

"*Jasei no in*" ["Lure of the White Serpent"], both included in *Ugetsu monogatari*,<sup>21</sup> show typical elements of his outlook. Part of the idea for "*Asaji ga yado*" comes from a legend found in the *Man'yōshū* about a flirtatious girl, Mama no Tekona, renowned for her beauty. A tale in the *Ch'ien-teng hsin-hua* furnished the form. Such a combination of Chinese and Japanese elements makes "*Asaji ga yado*" typical of stories in early *yomihon*. Except for Ayatari's writings, most early *yomihon* consisted of collections of short stories. Historical verisimilitude was seldom of deep concern.

"*Asaji ga yado*" opens against the background of internecine warfare in the middle ages, when rampaging armies pillaged the length and breadth of Japan. Mama no Tekona becomes no longer a spiteful tease, as in the *Man'yōshū*, but the chaste wife of an ambitious merchant who wishes to seek his fortune in the capital and return to his native province to enjoy his wealth. Akinari therefore attributes to his heroine the feminine ideals of Tokugawa times. When her husband, the prudent though avaricious merchant, fails to return home at the appointed time, she dies broken-hearted. War devastates the district. Years pass by. One evening the husband returns, shocked to see his village in shambles and the fields neglected. An old, crippled peasant, who has somehow survived amidst the desolation, leads him to his wife's grave.

As night falls, the husband proceeds to the spot of his former hut. It seems to stand as before. He enters, and his wife, chaste and loyal as always, appears to welcome him. They spend the night together, but as dawn breaks and he awakens, he finds that the moistness comes not from his wife's love embrace but from the cold dew forming in the weeds among the ruins of the hut.

Thus amidst war, death, devastation, and poignant sorrow, an essential morality emerges. The husband is left with a painful memory that presumably will guide his conduct in the future.

In "*Jasei no in*," Akinari attempts a bold rendition of a Chinese story about a man and a bewitching creature that appears now as a beautiful woman and now as a white serpent. Akinari's version differs from his Chinese model in that his scenes and characters are Japanese. To a reader unaware of the Chinese original, "*Jasei no in*" seems utterly to be a product of native genius. The Chinese tale "*Pai Niang-tzu yung chen lei-feng-t'a*" ["Madame White Haunts the Thunder Peak Pagoda"],<sup>22</sup> is set in the Hsi-hu, "West Lake District," during the Chin Dynasty. From Hangchow the action moves to Soochow, Chen-chiang fu,<sup>23</sup> and once more to Hangchow. "*Jasei no in*" begins near Miwagasaki (present-day Shingu), on the tip of the Kii Peninsula, where Toyoo, the third son of a wealthy fisherman, suffers from an "inordinate taste for elegant things."<sup>24</sup> After passing by stages through Nara and Yoshino, the action returns to the hero's native place, as in "*Pai Niang-tzu*," the hero at last absolved of the spell of the white serpent who in the form of a lovely woman enticed him.

Both "*Asaji ga yado*" and "*Jasei no in*" are set, according to the convention of the time, in the Japanese middle ages. The role of the supernatural and the poetry of

<sup>21</sup> Ueda Akinari-shū, ed. Nakamura, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, LVI (Tokyo, 1959), 59-70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ching-shih tung-yen*, pp. 420-448.

<sup>23</sup> Present-day Kiangsu, *ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>24</sup> *Tsune ni miyabitaru koto wo nomi konomite*, Akinari-shū, p. 98.

place names underscores the belief that Japan is a country rich in gods and spirits. Woven into the fabric of each story is a typically Confucian moral and a Buddhist concept of karma. Virtue must be rewarded and vice punished, in the present as in ages past. In each case a man who displays avariciousness and an excess of ambition loses the thing he loves most and suffers great hardship and deep emotional pain. In "*Asaji ga yado*," Akinari implies that man must rest content in his place of birth and accept his lot in life. Ambition brings only sorrow and misfortune. In "*Jasei no in*," Akinari attempts to show the consequences of incontinence. Man must avoid, in addition, the spell of woman, who would use her charms to debilitate him and ultimately to destroy him.

During the latter half of the eighteenth century other authors besides Ayatari and Akinari contributed to the growth of the *yomihon*. A certain Itan Chin'en, whose dates are unknown, published in the seventeen seventies and seventeen eighties several collections that, like Tsuga Teishō's works, were based on various Chinese tales.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Teishō himself in his later work showed increasing skill and polish. His reliance on Chinese texts grew less obvious, and his interest in national history increased, as in *Yoshitsune banjaku-den* [Adventures of Yoshitsune] (Osaka, 1806), which tells of Yoshitsune's legendary exploits after he supposedly crossed from Ezo to the Asian mainland and became a Mongol emperor. Yet another early *yomihon*, *Shōchū hachiyūden* [The Eight Heroes of Sagami] (Osaka, 1785), by an obscure author who signed his work Shūsuiian, deserves mention, because the main character was Asahina Yoshihide, a warrior of the Kamakura period who appeared later in Bakin's *yomihon*, *Asahina shimameguri no ki* [Asahina Yoshihide's Travels] (Osaka, 1814-27). The title *Shōchū hachiyūden* also anticipated that of Bakin's best-known *yomihon*, *Nansō Satomi hakken-den* [Satomi and the Eight "Dogs"] (Edo, 1814-42). But most pertinent of all, *Shōchū hachiyūden*, besides being adapted in part from the Chinese novels *Shui hu chuan* and *P'ing yao chuan* (Story of the Subjugation of the Evil Phantoms), also betrayed theatrical qualities reminiscent of numerous *hachimonjiya-bon*.<sup>26</sup> Later Kyōden's *yomihon* also included *kabuki* and *jōruri* elements. Although Bakin decried this to be an unhealthy influence, the Japanese theater contributed every bit as much to the development of *yomihon* as did Chinese vernacular fiction or increasing awareness of the past.

A certain Dōmyaku (d. 1802),<sup>27</sup> one of the writers who played a role in the growth of *yomihon*, also took special interest in the drama. An eccentric, poet, scholar of Chinese, and contemporary of Akinari, he published in Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto in 1790 a book in three fascicles presenting what he termed a translation of a Chinese drama in four acts performed in 1687 in China. The supposedly Chinese original, alleged to be by a celebrated scholar, bureaucrat, and playwright of early Ch'ing, Li Yü (1611-1680?), was entitled *Ch'ien-tzu-wen Hsi-hu liu* [The Thousand Character Classic and the Willow of the Western Lake]. Dōmyaku entitled his so-called translation "*Senri ryūtō engetsutō*" ["Thousand League Willow Dike and the Scimitar Bladed Halberd"]. To the book itself he gave the more general title of *Morokoshi*

<sup>25</sup> Mizuno Minoru, "Yomihon," *Nihon bungaku-shi: kinsei* [History of Japanese Literature: Modern], ed. Hisamatsu Sen'ichi (Tokyo, 1964), p. 634.

<sup>26</sup> Nakamura, *Shōsetsu-shi no kenkyū*, p. 282.

<sup>27</sup> Nakamura, *Sakka kenkyū*, pp. 187-200.



*kidan* [A Chinese Marvel Tale]. In the first of his three volumes, Dōmyaku presented a brief outline of the history of Chinese vernacular literature, a glossary of technical terms used in the Chinese theater, paired with their Japanese equivalents, and facts that supposedly related to the original performance.<sup>28</sup> He also compiled a list of Chinese novels and dramas, mostly imported during the eighteenth century. Soon afterward an obscure scholar published a phrase book, entitled *Shōsetsu jū* [Fiction Reader's Vocabulary], containing an expanded list of 160 novels and dramas.<sup>29</sup> These and similar books introduced Chinese popular literature to many educated persons and widened the potential circle of *yomihon* readers.

By the seventeen nineties Edo booksellers were familiar with the new developments in prose fiction that had been taking place in Kyoto and Osaka. One of the first authors they turned to was Takizawa Bakin, who began his career in 1791 as a *kusazōshi* author. A native of Edo, Bakin was born the third son of a low-ranking samurai. His father died in his early youth, and his mother fell victim to famine and plague that struck Edo in the seventeen eighties. After much drifting, Bakin relinquished samurai status, married a merchant's widow, for security not love, and began a distinguished career that lasted till his death, only five years before the coming of Perry's "Black Ships."

In Bakin's hands *yomihon* took on its ultimate form. Although he borrowed from many sources—not only Chinese vernacular fiction but also court romances, military chronicles, *nō* plays, popular dramas and legends—he added much that was original. Few authors have ever matched his tenacity and devotion to craft. Altogether he wrote more than thirty *yomihon*, notably *Chinsetsu yumiharizuki* [Crescent Moon: The Adventures of Tametomo] (Edo and Osaka, 1806–11) and *Nansō Satomi hakūden*, the longest piece of prose fiction hitherto written in Japan. Both of these treated his favorite theme, the restoration of a declining family's fortunes. In addition to his *yomihon*, Bakin produced nearly three hundred titles, including *kusazōshi*, miscellaneous essays, diaries, journals, and other writings.

Bakin freed prose fiction in Edo from subservience to actor, illustrator, and raconteur. Loyalty, filial piety, and the restoration of once-great families comprised his main themes. His special attention to Chinese civilization, Buddhist philosophy, and national history was tempered by a concern for his fellow man and a belief in human dignity. Still, the samurai tradition and his own innate stubbornness led him to support the established order and made him less an original thinker than an interpreter of his age.

He wrote his first *yomihon* when an enterprising Edo bookseller, Tsutaya Jūsaburō (1750–1797), asked him in 1795 to do a story that combined elements from *Shui-hu-chuan* and *Meiboku sendai hagi* (The Disputed Succession).<sup>30</sup> Bakin obliged him with *Takao senjimon*<sup>31</sup> [The Ciphers of Takao] (Edo, 1796), a modest book,

<sup>28</sup> (Edo, 1790), *kan* 1,2. Aoki Masaru, *Shina kinsei gikyōku shi* [History of Modern Chinese Drama] (Tokyo, 1930), p. 521, points out that *Senri ryūitō* was Dōmyaku's creation. In Dōmyaku's day translations were often valued more highly than original works.

<sup>29</sup> (Edo, 1791), pp. 1a–4b.

<sup>30</sup> *Kabuki* play by Nakawa Kamesuke, first performed at Edo, Nakamura-za, in 1778. Although the action takes place in the time of Yoshimitsu, third Ashikaga shōgun, the play alludes to the licentiousness and dissipation of Date Tsunamune and the succession dispute of 1658 known as Date Sōdō.

<sup>31</sup> Ed. Hinokiya Akihiko, *Kinsei shōsetsu: kenkyū to shiryō, Kokubungaku ronsō*, ed. Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Kokubun Kenkyū-kai, VI (Tokyo, 1963), 233–261.

little more than a short novel, in octavo rather than the quarto size that later prevailed. The beginning consisted largely of a pastiche of *Shui-hu-chuan* and *Sendai hagi*. During Ashikaga Yoshimitsu's reign, Yamana Hirouji (Tokihito, in actual history?) upon breaking the bird-shaped rock that seals a tomb, releases a flock of birds that forms the number "eighteen" in the sky, portending grand events to come. Years later, in the reign of Ashikaga Yoshimasa, a plot to take over the provinces of Mutsu and Dewa is disclosed. Kinugawa Tanizō, loyal retainer to Ashikaga Yorikane, the dissipated lord of the provinces, eventually puts the attackers to flight and saves the domain.

Breaking the sealed tomb calls to mind how at a temple in the prologue to *Shui-hu-chuan* a black cloud rises from a sealed well high into the sky, bursting forth into more than a hundred rays of light that disappear in all directions. Eventually Sung Chiang, leader of a robber band, emerges as the epitome of *chung-i*, "loyalty," destroys the Liao "barbarians" in the north, quells the Fang La Rebellion in the south, and saves the dynasty.

Both commercially and artistically, however, *Takao senjimon* failed. In Edo it sold barely 300 copies.<sup>32</sup> Of 150 copies sent to Osaka, over half came back unsold. According to Bakin himself, the Chinese element was too obvious. Still, his and Tsutaya's efforts show how authors and booksellers in Edo emulated their Kamigata counterparts. Actually, not until 1803, a year after Bakin made a long journey to Kyoto and Osaka "for the sake of art," did he write a successful *yomihon*. Even it was published in Osaka. *Geppyō kien* [Love Is Made in Heaven], as it was called, amazed its backers by selling 1,200 sets. Bakin proved to the booksellers of both Osaka and Edo that his *yomihon* could earn them a tidy profit, and during the next five years almost a dozen publishers sought his work.

Santō Kyōden, also after a first abortive attempt in Edo, himself emerged as a leading *yomihon* author early in the nineteenth century. Like Bakin in *Takao senjimon*, Kyōden's early effort combined a Japanese drama with the by-now-ubiquitous *Shui-hu-chuan*. After *Geppyō kien's* appearance, Kyōden tried to rival Bakin's furious pace with *Udonge monogatari* [Tale of the Udumbara Flower], *Sakurahime zenden akebono zōshi* [Story of Princess Cherry Blossom], and *Ukibotan zenden* [Floating Peony Incense Burner]. These gained him enduring fame but little money. Kyōden's *yomihon* failed to appeal to the samurai readers, who made up the largest part of the Edo audience, and he relied too heavily on *kabuki* and *jōruri* texts for his ideas and manner of presentation. After 1813 he gave up writing *yomihon*, whereas Bakin's achievements still lay ahead.

In terms of both intellectual curiosity and eclectic spirit, *yomihon* authors showed a greater sense of pride than the "vulgar" authors of the "floating world." This was especially true of Akinari and Bakin. Akinari's preface to *Ugetsu monogatari* called attention to both Chinese and Japanese literature. "Lo Kuan-chung," he began, "wrote *Shui-hu-chuan*, and for three generations he begot deaf mutes. For writing *Genji monogatari*, Lady Murasaki was damned to hell. . . ."<sup>33</sup> He carefully placed the two traditions on parallel planes, but his Confucian attitude toward fiction remained unmistakable. At every turn Bakin's attention to both language and content

<sup>32</sup> Bakin, *Sakusha burui*, p. 229.

<sup>33</sup> *Akinari-shū*, p. 35.

singled him out from the hack writers and grub street authors of his time. The preface to one installment of *Satomi hakḡenden* contained, for instance, the following passage:

Writers of quality and writers of trash are as different as white foxes and field foxes. Like seeing cassia and kindling in the same bundle, people look and call them both foxes, but just as white foxes and field foxes do not travel on the same plain, quality and corruption each goes its own way. Writers of trash are like village schoolmasters who cannot distinguish between stone and jade. . . .<sup>34</sup>

Bakin criticized Shikitei Samba's *yomihon* for using hackneyed phrases like *makeji tamashii*, "dauntless spirit," because the scholars of the *Man'yōshū* use them to excess.<sup>35</sup> His associations with the Setchū Gakuha and his mildly tempered nationalism spared Bakin from both the extremes of Confucian orthodoxy and fanatic patriotism, while his abiding interest in scholarship saved him from the worst excesses of lesser authors. He simultaneously instructed and entertained his readers, and his best *yomihon* reflected his deep learning and his discretion. Still, prefaces in Chinese, difficult compounds, and a hodgepodge of archaic expressions mixed with colloquialisms prevented his and other *yomihon* from replacing less edified fiction in popular acclaim. *Yomihon* appealed chiefly to educated readers.

Yet the labor and investment needed to publish *yomihon* called for strict commercial standards. Bakin explained this as follows:

A professional author does more than compile books. It may seem egotistical of me to say so, but an author's prime consideration should be to think about selling, about how much the publisher will have to invest, and how many hundred copies he must sell to recover his outlay. One must think of all this beforehand, including even the price of paper for that year. . . . To do otherwise is the mark of an amateur. I pay close attention to fashions and try to appeal to all classes of readers. . . .<sup>36</sup>

To take the matter of price, for example, one may roughly estimate that a cheap, illustrated, *ḡusazōshi* in three thin volumes of five double pages each, usually cost the reader less than thirty cents.<sup>37</sup> A set of *yomihon* in five *ḡan* cost the bookseller, not the reader, somewhere between eight and twelve dollars.<sup>38</sup> A reader must, of course, have paid more. Since it required an investment of more than 2,500 dollars to pay the author, illustrator, engraver, printer, and take care of other overhead expenses, the bookseller had to sell 250 or 300 sets in order to recover his investment. Few readers, moreover, could manage to buy *yomihon*, though many could afford

<sup>34</sup> *Kano taihitsu to rōhitsu aru wa, nao byakko to yaḡo aru ga gotoshi. Katsura mo shiba mo hitokarage ni, hito mite nabete kitsune to yobedomo, byakko wa yaḡo no no ni asobazu, kudoku mukudoku kotonareba nari. Saru wo kotoji ni nikawaseru songakkyū wa tama to ishi to wo erami mo esezu. . . . Hakḡenden, IX (Tokyo, 1941), 279.*

<sup>35</sup> "Heiben," *Kyōkutei ikō*, p. 294.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Suzuki Bokushi, April 5, 1818, *Kyōkutei ikō*, p. 359.

<sup>37</sup> In the currency of the time, 20 *mon* for 10 pages, 30 for 15. Bakin, *Kujirazashi Shinagawa haori* [Measuring a Whale with a Shinagawa Cape] (Edo, 1799), p. 12. The *mon*, pierced copper cash, or common currency of the people, was worth just under \$.01, calculated at the rate of 4,000 *mon* to 1 gold *ryō*. Around 1800, 1 *ryō* equaled about 1 *ḡoku* (5 bushels) of rice, or about \$34.00, at current U. S. retail prices. Exchange rates in Tokugawa Japan fluctuated too much to permit precise calculations. One can only approximate exchange values.

<sup>38</sup> 1/3 to 1/4 *ryō*, or 15 to 20 silver *momme*, since 60 *momme* of silver equaled 1 gold *ryō*. Copper *mon*, silver *momme*, and gold *ryō* were used interchangeably.

more popular forms that in terms of price resembled modern weeklies, comic books, and cheap paperbacks. *Yomihon* cost at least the equivalent of expensive scholarly texts or illustrated art books.

If private individuals rarely bought *yomihon*, who did? Book rental merchants, somewhat like English chapmen, dominated the market. They served as *nakōdo*, “go-between,” for the author and the bookseller on the one hand and the reader on the other. In 1804–31, for example, over a thousand such merchants existed. Edo alone accommodated 500 or 600 shops, and Osaka supported 300 additional establishments. They stocked chiefly *yomihon*, though occasionally manuscript copies of the military chronicles and lesser books also circulated. The proprietors of the larger, urban shops would commonly resell old stock to smaller places. Books therefore tended gradually to drift from the major urban centers to remote towns and villages. In the cities, if not in the rural areas, the book rental merchants made regular rounds to visit customers every ten days or so and recommend titles.<sup>39</sup>

Rarely did the first printing of a *yomihon* exceed 500 sets, owing partly to the book rental shops that handled them and partly to their limited appeal and high price. The size of the editions, however, may be deceptive, because the book rental merchants, who catered to all readers but the most illustrious daimyo and hatamoto, were the chief customers. Sometimes they themselves ventured into publishing, when they could spare the capital. Eventually an edition of 500 or 600 sets could reach 10,000 readers or more, though it might take three years for an Edo *yomihon* to reach an Osaka reader and ten years before it reached a reader in some remote village.

Behind the achievements of the *yomihon* authors like Akinari, Ayatari, Bakin, and Kyōden lay the efforts of Chinese and Korean merchants who imported Chinese vernacular texts and other books to Nagasaki. From here Japanese merchants laboriously transported them, and last of all aspiring writers from Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo adapted them to Japanese taste. Ship captains carried books as well as other goods only at great personal risk. Unforeseen incidents were commonplace, as when the bakufu inspectors in 1817 found a proscribed Christian book among a shipment and retaliated by sinking both the ship and the entire cargo.<sup>40</sup>

**Without the discovery** of Chinese vernacular literature and its impact on *yomihon*, the later discovery of Western learning and the modernization of Japan might have proceeded in a somewhat different manner. Perhaps the lack of a similar tradition of foreign studies in China impeded Chinese modernization. In any case, most learned Japanese of the eighteenth and nineteenth century naturally focused their attention overseas, on China, Japan’s powerful neighbor with whom she had strong linguistic and cultural ties, although a small circle of enthusiasts pursued Dutch studies. The strength, richness, and potential of the West were largely unknown. Students of Dutch were motivated more by curiosity than by conviction that the West could enrich Japanese life. The West was far away. China was close. The very idea of ships evoked thoughts of China, as in the following comic haiku verse:

<sup>39</sup> Hamada Keisuke, “Bakin ni okeru shoshi, sakusha, dokusha no mondai” [“Bakin and the Matter of Readers, Writers, and Publishers”], *Kokugo kokubun* (April, 1953), pp. 27–31.

<sup>40</sup> *Nihon zankoku monogatari* [Accounts of Cruelty in Japan], ed. Heibonsha (Tokyo, 1960), III, 42.

Money spent on trade—  
The ships that come from China  
Sail the waves with fleas.

*Nage kane ya  
Morokoshi fune ni  
Nami to nomi.*<sup>41</sup>

Because Chinese fiction, along with more scholarly books during the last half of the eighteenth century, was punctuated, translated, and adapted to Japanese taste, booksellers learned to profit from the fascination with foreign literature. After the Meiji Restoration, publishers readily financed attempts to introduce Western literature. By the eighteen eighties their business methods were well established.

Once the *yomihon* gained acceptance, the modern novel proved a natural successor. Japanese readers knew enough to crave exotic reading as well as outlandish goods like foreign umbrellas and pocket watches. After being isolated from the world for so long, they savored every possible contact overseas.

In Akinari's "Shiramine" ["White Peak"], of *Ugetsu monogatari*, for example, the *waka* poet, Saigyō (1118–1190), engages the ghost of the Emperor Sutoku in a dispute about the relative virtues of Buddhist and Confucian world views. Saigyō reprimands the emperor's ghost for defending Mencius's mandate of heaven theory:

Strange to say, all kinds of Chinese books—classics, histories, and poetry—have come to us; but how odd it is that the Book of Mencius has yet to reach Japan. Ships that bear this book, I heard, always encounter storms and sink.<sup>42</sup> This is because in our country, ever since the Sun Goddess founded it, the imperial succession has continued. If people bandied about such verbal tricks, some felon might eventually usurp the line of the gods and deny his crime. The eight hundred myriad gods hate the very thought, it is said, and send divine winds to overturn the ships. So you see, the teachings of sages from other lands do not necessarily fit our realm.<sup>43</sup>

In one sense, Saigyō and Emperor Sutoku have revived a dialogue as old as foreign intercourse itself. National custom clashes with foreign ways. Yet, one may note with amusement, Emperor Sutoku, himself a descendant of the "eight hundred myriad gods," supports a foreign institution, while Saigyō, a follower of a foreign religion, Buddhism, defends Japanese customs.

Although the *yomihon* authors steeped themselves in Chinese fiction and wrote with a Chinese model in mind, the final product was Japanese. Bakin's *Hakkenden*, the most famous of all *yomihon*, written in 181 chapters between 1814 and 1842, especially employed the suspense, action, and didactic tone of Chinese fiction, notably *Shui-hu-chuan*, but Bakin, like his fellow authors, abhorred uncritical imitation. The theme, characterization, and setting were his own. He and his fellow authors conceded that Japanese fiction was in some ways inferior to Chinese, but they strove to overcome all shortcomings. *Hakkenden* has been referred to as a summit and synthesis of Edo culture, and even today some scholars pair it with *Genji monogatari* as one of the two most distinguished books to appear in traditional Japan. "High above the ranges of Japanese literature, two peaks are towering in the sky: one is Lady Murasaki's *Genji Monogatari*, 11th century, the other being Bakin's *Hakkenden*,

<sup>41</sup> Ishiuchi Chōsō, quoted in Bakin, *Kataki-uchi nomi-tori manako* [Mr. Fleacatcher Managorō V] (Edo, 1801), p. 8b. See my "The Vendetta of Mr. Fleacatcher Managorō, The Fifth," *MN*, XX, Nos. 1–2 (1965), 130.

<sup>42</sup> According to a note in the Japanese ed. of Hsieh Chao-che (fl. 1592), *Wu tsu tsu* [Five Grass Blades], a Chinese miscellanea, printed in Japanese ed. of 1661 and 1795.

<sup>43</sup> *Akinari-shū*, p. 35.

19th century.”<sup>44</sup> In *Hakkenden*, as in much of Edo fiction, the rough, warrior spirit of the eastern samurai continued to prevail.

Modern critics have relegated the *yomihon* to the role of classics to be studied rather than books to be enjoyed, but the habits of life and thought that created them remain a strong undercurrent. Just as Tokyo, Osaka, and even Kyoto seem to hide the few landmarks left from the Tokugawa period, modern Japanese literature belies its debt to former times. Still, the spirit of old pervades, usually unrecognized, in the nation and in its authors. Although the wit, imagination, and concern with social and moral values now wear foreign garb, the underlying qualities abide. Behind the steady flow of commercialized fiction, as well as in serious modern novels, the attitudes that created the *yomihon* linger.

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<sup>44</sup> *Tenri Central Library Photo Series, No. 21: Kyokutei Bakin*, ed. The Tenri Central Library (Tenri, 1963), p. 1.