Let's Talk about the Book of the Future

A glimpse of Edo bookseller Jūzaburō Tsutaya's busy storefront.
At the time, booksellers were also publishers, collaborating directly
with authors to bring out new books. The shop assistants at the right are preparing printed book pages to be bound.
From *Ehon azuma asobi* (Illustrated Book of Amusements in the Eastern Capital), National Diet Library

Contents

The Age of E-Books for Real

President, Voyager Japan, Inc.

Junko Kamata

Voyager Japan, Inc. was established in 1992 as a company focused on digital publishing. Back when we were first getting started, people would often ask, "Are books on paper going to disappear?" Since print books were still growing strongly toward their peak at the time, I could hardly imagine such a thing, and I responded accordingly. But when I look back from the broader perspective afforded by the present, I'm no longer sure that was the right response. The better answer probably would have been to say that we shouldn't assume print books will always be with us. No matter what we might be talking about, nothing in this world can be expected to last forever unless the time and effort that goes into creating and sustaining it is duly rewarded.

Print books do not break easily. But precisely because this is so, we fail to notice signs that they are at genuine peril of being lost. Not just anyone who wants can put out a book anymore. The commercial publishing business is experiencing disruptions in its distribution infrastructure, and there is also a serious narrowing of genres taking place. Realistically speaking, to bring out print publications requires people who will handle the physical act of publishing, and if those people disappear, so will the publications. It is during this period of crisis for the business that electronic publishing has sprouted up. Let's take a look at developments in the digital book arena to date.

The Role of Digital Books

When we first launched Voyager, we were focused on all the great things digital was going to let us do. In 1993 we released Japan's first e-book authoring tool called "Expanded Book." The software enabled the creation of interactive digital books that melded text with images, audio tracks, and video footage. Books produced with this package were loaded onto floppy disks or CD-ROMs and sold mainly in the software sections of electrical appliance stores, where personal computers were just then becoming a new flagship category. In essence, these expanded books were sold as if they were hardware accessories. We had a few major hits, such as the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* (90-minute movie with synchronized film script plus other features) and *The Shinchō Library 100 on CD-ROM* (100 titles from the Shinchōsha pocket paperback library), but for the most part sales were poor.

When the sales of CD-ROM software went into decline, expanded books hit a wall as well. The novelty had worn off, and the fact that they were not portable—you had to be at a computer to read them—had emerged as a major flaw that could not be overcome with a simple software fix.

We were nevertheless able to keep our chins up because a few others besides ourselves were warming to the advantages of digital. One such person was the late Michio Tomita, who founded Aozora Bunko (http://www.aozora.gr.jp/)—literally "Blue Sky Library"—a still-growing, free Internet archive of works whose copyright terms have expired or whose authors otherwise wish to make their books available to the public. When one of his own books was pulped, he realized that digital offered a way for authors to save their books from being completely lost.

As the Aozora archive was getting off the ground, we also received encouragement from the visually impaired. To them, print books were mere bundles of paper. No matter how much they ran their fingers over the pages, the smooth sheets remained silent to them. But the text in digital books was stored as bits, and those bits could be converted to speech. "This is how books need to
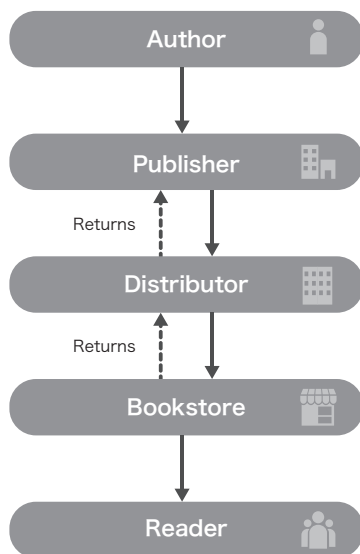
Figure 1: Commercial publishing houses use a variety of distribution channels, but traditionally most common is for books to reach retail stores by way of a distributor. In recent years there has been a gradual uptick in publishers who deal directly with retailers.

be," they told us. We realized that digital books were not just about reading with our eyes. They had a deeper, more versatile role to play.

Conventional Publishing Sees Its Limits

Meanwhile, how has the world of print publishing fared over the last twenty-odd years? The traditional book distribution system is made up of publishers, specialized distributors, and retailers. Finished books from all publishers are channeled through a small number of distributors to bookstores around the country, where they are delivered into readers' hands (see Fig. 1). Some key characteristics of this system are that books sell at the same price at stores throughout the country (thanks to a resale price maintenance agreement); that the books go to retailers on consignment and can be returned; that returned books can subsequently be shipped out to another bookstore; that reshipped returns must be sold at the new book price; and that the system is local to Japan.

Books distributed through this system reached a peak of ¥2,656 billion in sales in 1996 before beginning to fall. By the end of 2015 the market had shrunk to ¥1,522 billion—a drop of more than 40% (see Fig. 2). Meanwhile, the number of publishers in Japan also fell from a peak of 4612 in 1997 to just 3489 in 2015 (*Shuppan News*, mid-June issue, 2016). Similarly, the number of bookstores

has plummeted over the last ten years—from 17,153 in 2005 to 12,793 in 2014 (*Shuppanbutsu hanbaigaku no jittai 2015* [Current Publication Prices 2015]).

To anyone connected with the publishing industry, the declining numbers have long since become common knowledge, but the general public remains almost completely unaware of what is occurring. When I mention these figures to today's college students and point out that the peak was around the time they were born, they invariably express surprise.

Needless to say, the shrinking market has had an effect on publishing trends. Commercial publishers are producing a consumer product. Their books must sell if they are to survive. So they began giving more say to professionals who keep a close eye on the market and can select or commission the kind of manuscripts that will do well, hoping to boost their sales figures. But this has tended simply to reinforce subjects and authors that are already selling well. And when we examine the results to see whether the strategy worked, the answer appears to be that it wasn't that simple. And so, in the increasingly frenetic quest for more sales, tie-ins with other media became the next big thing. For publishers today, the most important criteria for selecting titles has become whether a given property is suitable for adaptation to animation, live-action films, and/or television dramas.

Some have also been trying to compensate for the drop in sales by increasing the number of titles they publish. In 1960, 11,173 new books were
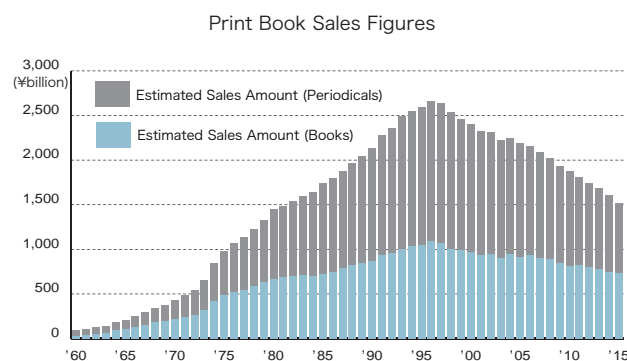

Print Book Sales Figures

Figure 2: Sales of print publications (books and periodicals together) peaked in 1996, and the market has been steadily shrinking in the years since. Based on the *Annual Report of the Publication Market 2016* published by the Research Institute for Publications.

published. The annual figure increased steadily as Japan's postwar economy boomed, and when the publishing market peaked in 1996, the total number of new titles for the year reached 63,054. But interestingly, the number of new titles continued to edge up even as overall sales figures went into decline, and nearly 20 years of falling sales later, the number of new titles published in 2015 was 76,445 (see Fig. 3).

Return rates approaching 40% are also a problem. For the majors, the cost of warehousing product that has been returned to publisher stock reaches hundreds of millions of yen a year. Savings can be achieved by reducing stock, and there may be other measures that can be applied, but there are limits. At some point, publishers conclude that continued storage is no longer justifiable, and the books are destroyed.

The swollen number of titles, high return rates, low unit sales, and endless bookstore closures all suggest the distribution system that has served the industry so well since the mid-Meiji period (1868–1912) is breaking down. Publishers can no longer lean on the system that has been fine-tuned for mass production and mass consumption of print publications on paper. The harsh realities hold for the majors as much as for anybody else. Many publishing houses have decided it's no longer enough to simply get books into stores, and are experimenting with a variety of adjunct initiatives including membership systems, lectures, study groups, and more.
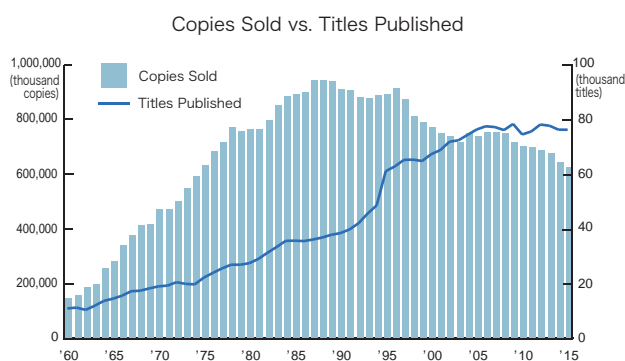

Figure 3: Even with the number of published titles rising, total sales remain on a downward trend. Based on the *Annual Report of the Publication Market 2016* published by the Research Institute for Publications.

The Network Age

Behind these ineluctable changes lies the greatest revolution since the industrial revolution of the 18th century: the Internet. As every book lover must know by now, recent years have seen more and more readers turning to online bookstores. A number of traditional Japanese stores have established a presence on the Web—Kinokuniya with it's own site, and Maruzen, Junkudō, and Bunkyōdō with their joint honto.jp location. But the giant of all online bookstores is Seattle-based Amazon of the United States, with Web stores in over a dozen other countries including Japan.

Some of the print books sold on these Amazon sites do not go through distributors. Amazon is willing to deal with anyone: it does not matter whether you are a company or an individual. All you have to do is fill out an application at an Amazon site and agree to the terms of service. In the same way, anyone can sell a digital book through the Kindle Store that Amazon operates.

In addition to Amazon's Kindle Store, other purely digital bookstores have proliferated on the Web as well—Apple's iBooks Store, Rakuten Kobo, Yahoo! Bookstore, Comic C'moA, BookLive!, Kinokuniya Web Store, and LINE Manga, to name just a few of the most prominent. All can be accessed from a smartphone to purchase, download, and read instantly no matter where you happen to be.

It was around 2010 that reading digital books on smartphones began to take off. Young people in their 20s and 30s have grown up in an environment of easy access to video games and other forms of digital entertainment, and they carry their smartphones with them at all times for communicating or gathering information via the Web. In the nine years since the Apple iPhone appeared, ownership of smartphones among this demographic group has reached over 90% in Japan (*Information and Communications in Japan White Paper*, 2015, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).

It is also increasingly common for paper and digital editions of new books to appear at the same

time, allowing readers to choose according to preference. For digital books, the file format known as EPUB has become the open standard for distribution over the Internet. In October 2011, the EPUB specification was modified to enable vertical text layout and pagination, paving the way for Japanese ebooks to be produced in the more appealing traditional format.

The contracts drawn up between publishers and authors now routinely include clauses addressing digital rights, putting the paperwork in place for every publisher to expand into electronic publishing. Publishers make sure to lock down all pertinent rights from the start. For comics and light novels, simultaneous print+digital publication has become the norm. The result has been a jump of 30% in e-comics sales just between 2014 and 2015 (see Fig. 4). With a profusion of portable devices for reading, the proliferation of stores on the Web, and content galore, digital publishing has truly come into it own.

Back to Basics

If publishers are going to take control of all rights from the start, the fundamental dynamics of commercial publishing make it only natural that they will prioritize digital versions of the genres that sell. And the role of ebooks is then essentially limited to being a substitute for print books. Some people deride this as "print under glass," questioning why a sheet of glass should have to come between themselves and the pages of their book. The digital book market has certainly come a long way since the early days. But if ebooks are forever just print-under-glass, then all they will be doing is cannibalizing print books. It's a twisted and reductive understanding of the medium. This is a critical issue for digital books.

The English word *publish* has its roots in the Latin noun *popul*, meaning "people," which became the basis for a verb that referred to the act of informing those people. It can also refer to simply announcing something to the public, but since the invention of the printing press it has often meant informing people by means of print publications. Books are most fundamentally packages of information in which the content has been organized
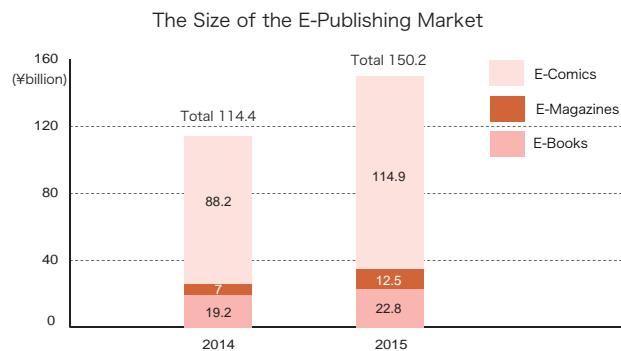

The Size of the E-Publishing Market

Figure 4: The *Annual Report of the Publication Market* published by the Research Institute for Publications finally began releasing data on digital publications in 2014. For paper, the report includes comics in the figures of books and magazines, but here it breaks out e-comics as a separate category.

in an orderly manner for presentation to the reader.

We have long turned to books whenever we want to learn something. Starting with picture books, we soon advance to storybooks, textbooks and supplements, how-to books, fiction, non-fiction, reference books such as dictionaries and encyclopedias, and more. Books have beginnings and ends, and the information they contain is arranged in a carefully considered order. Even when they treat the same subject, they can be targeted at different levels of readers—children or adults, laypersons or specialists. All of this helps us absorb knowledge more easily.

I've had people come up to me and say that we don't need books and magazines anymore because we can find the answer to any question we might ask by simple searching the Web for free. But this ignores the value of books as packages. Books are a medium that brings order to the chaos of limitless interconnected information.

At Voyager, our goal is to meld this advantage of books together with the advantages of digital. Where digital shines for books is in the egalitarian information delivery system that the Internet offers. On the Internet, users write blogs in place of traditional diaries, they report on events they are attending in real time through Twitter and Facebook, they upload their recipes to cooking sites or their videos to Youtube. With everybody able to participate democratically, the Internet has become a massive repository of information. And in turn, all that information is freely available for

anyone and everyone to pull together in whatever way they see fit.

It is from this soil that the ebooks of the future will sprout, and they will embody both the advantages of traditional print books and the advantages of digital. The democratic nature of the Internet is crucial for this—i.e., the wishes of the individual take precedence over the inclinations of a publisher, allowing any individual to publish a book entirely on his or her own. The new challenge will be in how to break out of the frameworks established by conventional publishing. Some ebooks will surely be closely integrated with the Internet. For example, they will contain direct links to audio or video resources on the Web, or they will be designed to connect with community sites—they can be expected to reach beyond the package and, in effect, "join forces" with the Internet.

Why haven't ebooks become like the Internet? Why are they limited to certain genres? I don't think we can really celebrate until we have solved these problems. Perhaps because I have spent more than 20 years toiling away at the soil in what seemed to remain forever a grassless wilderness, a voice in my head keeps telling me that I should not yet be rushing to call our efforts a success.

Melding the Advantages of Digital into Books

But we have no reason to be disheartened. To most everyone today, the Internet has become like water or air, but it was not so many years ago that it was more like the top of Mt. Everest—something the average person considered too difficult and completely out of reach. The advent of smartphones and social media quickly changed that, and today, use of the Internet has spread to every corner of society. As a result, the infrastructure problem for digital books has been solved.

There are two other key requirements that need to be addressed. One is a tool that simplifies the process of turning a manuscript into a packaged book, so that anyone and everyone can publish what is dear to them. Making that process easier will em-

power authors to break away from the print-under-glass mentality and experiment with the host of new features that digital makes possible.

But what does this mean in concrete terms? First and foremost, the tool must be something the author can handle himself, without the need for advanced IT skills. It also needs to be low in cost, and must facilitate easy dissemination of the book once it has been created. Crucial, too, is a built-in mechanism for receiving technical support if and when it is needed.

Voyager's answer to this need is *Romancer* (https://romancer.voyager.co.jp/), a free web service that has been in operation since July 2014. Its principal users are self-publishing authors. In the course of developing this tool, we had to make a number of decisions about what data formats it would accept as input, and what digital book formats it would produce as output. If we wanted to encourage authors themselves to test the waters of this new digital medium for their work, then it only made sense that the tool would be designed to accept files from the widely used Microsoft Word. We also decided it should accept the PDF format. For output, we chose the EPUB format because of its high portability across platforms and devices.

The other key requirement is a means of getting the word out about the finished book. Commercial publishers budget substantial sums of money for newspaper and magazine ads—several tens of thousands of yen at the least, and more typically hundreds of thousand. Since most book reviews as well as listings of new or forthcoming titles in the "Books" section of periodicals tend to be titles from advertisers, the ads are in effect the price of admission, but the costs are prohibitive for an individual.

The best alternative for the self-publisher is probably to take advantage of person-to-person connections. Authors can use email and social media to deliver their books directly into the hands of readers. This can be done in a variety of ways. For example, you can attach your ebook file to an email, or if you have a personal website, you can

provide a download button. But as attractive as these simple methods may seem, they often leave readers puzzling over how to actually read the book they have acquired. If they don't have an appropriate e-reader app on hand, all they've gained after reading the email or web page is a file they don't know what to do with. For ebooks to succeed as books, readers need to be able to read them effortlessly.

Romancer's answer to this problem is to produce a unique URL for each book that it creates. The author simply needs to disseminate this URL by way of email or social media. All a reader then has to do to open the book is click on the URL. This direct link between author and reader is the shape of books to come.

From One Author and One Reader to Community

In closing, I'd like to describe a digital publishing endeavor Voyager has been advancing since July 2015: the digitization of bestselling author Yoshio Kataoka's complete works. Including such well-known titles as *Surō na bugi ni shitekure* (Make It a Slow Boogie), *Ore no ōtobai, kanojo no shima* (My Motorbike, Her Island), and *Mein tēma* (Main Theme), the number of works digitized has now passed the 200 threshold. Since the electronic versions are being created in the order of original publication, the current list presents an array of hip 1970s and 1980s stories featuring motorcycles and surfing and the American culture of the time. The collection can be accessed at http://kataokayoshio.com.

As work on the project progressed, we built out the site with an eye to letting readers experience the author and his complete work "in the round." A young staffer launched the "Yoshio Kataoka Essays 365" feature, and we have established a way for readers to register and participate as supporting members as well. The website is becoming the focal point for a whole new community.

In the past, readers simply went out and bought one of the author's books. But the Internet brings authors and readers closer together (see Fig. 5). Author Kataoka is very open, accepting birthday
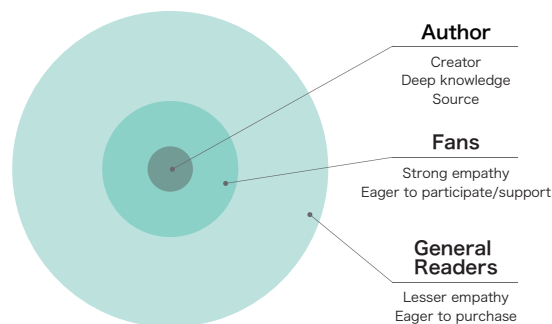

Figure 5: The Shape of the Community

messages, showing his photographs on a "Kataoka Photos" page, and he is eager to expand the ways that readers can get to know him outside his works.

There was a time when we at Voyager were resigned to the inevitability of change and assumed digital books would become unreadable once the hardware moved on. In spite of all the love and care we put into producing them, our early efforts essentially vanished like bubbles on the water. But those painful experiences are now a thing of the past.

The Internet now reaches into every corner of our lives. As film cameras gave way to digital cameras, as horse-drawn carriages gave way to automobiles, once people become used to an environment in which books can be acquired instantly, they're not likely to give it up. The same for an environment in which anyone who wants to can easily publish a book entirely on their own. There is simply no reason for anyone to do without these new freedoms.

Junko Kamata (1957–) worked at Pioneer LDC, where she was involved in bringing the LaserDisc to market as well as in producing multimedia content, before helping found Voyager Japan in 1992. She has produced CD-ROMs and web content, and has also been engaged in the development and sale of electronic publishing tools. She was named president of Voyager Japan in October, 2013.

The Chrysanthemum and the Kitty-Cat: Can the "Kawaii" Replace the "Katana"?

Vice President of AltJapan Co., Ltd.

Matthew Alt

A Very Cute Battleship

The *JDS Kirishima* of Japan's Second Escort Flotilla is a state of the art fighting ship. A guided missile destroyer equipped with the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System, she defends herself with a pair of Phalanx close-in defensive cannons and four Mk 36 SUBROC chaff launcher systems. I know this because, being onboard as part of Fleet Week 2015 festivities, a bunch of super-cute mascots are explaining it to me. Posted on a gray, armored wall is a peculiar poster. It anthropomorphizes the ship's defensive systems as cute characters with warmly smiling faces. "I'm Chaffy, the Kirishima's unofficial image character!"(https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CQ68Q2EVAAACKEg.jpg:large) The chaff rounds are illustrated with a cute *pon, pon* sound effect. To a Westerner, this is a very confusing combination. Cute characters juxtaposed with the context of intercepting enemy warheads before they rip through this warcraft's armored hull. Even the drawings of enemy missiles are smiling. It's hard to imagine how Japan came to see war this way, only seventy years after a vicious battle in the Pacific. My own grandfather served on a battleship then, the USS Alabama. I wonder what he would have thought about all of this.

Japan and the United States are deeply intertwined historically, politically, and economically. Once adversaries, then fierce rivals locked in an economic competition during the Eighties, today the US-Japan alliance is described by the Department of State as the "cornerstone of U.S. security interests in Asia" with a combined diplomatic impact that resonates not just regionally, but globally. A controversial revision of the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines in summer 2015 only served to strengthen the ties between these economic titans.

Yet ever since American "black ships" sailed in to successfully open Japanese harbors to the world in 1853, the relationship has also been fraught with misunderstandings.

In 1946, anthropologist Ruth Benedict published "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword." Written during World War II, it aimed to analyze and predict the "inexplicable" behavior of Japanese during wartime. Although its methodology is dated by modern standards, it proved hugely influential both in its home country and in Japan after the war ended. As the crest of the royal family, the chrysanthemum has long symbolized Japanese patriotism and tradition. In Benedict's era, it was paired with the sword, as Japan used military might to expand its "East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," with disastrous results. But times have changed. Benedict would not recognize the Japan of today, where the only swords being crossed are those wielded by the samurai heroes, giant robots, and fighting bishojo of anime and manga fantasy.

What's Up with Cool Japan?

For in the postwar era Japan projects itself not militarily but economically. In the Seventies and Eighties, this took the form of manufacturing might, as protectionist trade treaties combined with homegrown ingenuity allowed Japanese automotive and electronics manufacturers to flourish and dominate marketplaces throughout the world. In recent years, as manufacturing has shifted out of Japan to China and other Asian countries, this might increasingly takes the form of entertainment products – in essence, what the American political scientist Joseph Nye famously called "soft power."

What is power? In the context of a relationship it

is the ability to bend the behavior of others to your will. In a diplomatic context this means using economic incentives, or military force. By the latter standard, at least, Japan is weak, being almost wholly dependent on the United States for its international security. But in the deeply interconnected information society of the modern world, the real power does not come from the sword. It is mindshare. It is about causing others to do things because they want to, because they are moved or charmed. It is about manipulating image and shaping perception. Japan may never again engage in a military offensive beyond its borders, but it has been waging a "charm offensive" there for decades.

Ironically, only recently has this been recognized and embraced by Japan's political rulers. For many years, Japanese creators operated with only the domestic market in mind, and little concern as to how their creations would be perceived abroad. Although a handful of productions did make it into foreign markets with varying degrees of success, the efforts in English-speaking nations at least were scattershot. Translations were usually left entirely in the hands of the foreign agents who acquired the rights to a property. This often led to amusing "localizations" such as the absurdly rapid-fire dialog of *Speed Racer*, or the wholesale changing of characters and plots in an attempt to camouflage the origin of the material.

In spite of this, Japanese pop culture started having a mysterious impact on the rest of the world. This first became apparent in the US during the Eighties, an era of "Japan bashing" that sometimes took literal form, with infuriated autoworkers smashing Japanese cars with baseball bats in protest. While the grown-ups got angry about imported cars, their kids thrilled to a wholly different type of import: Japanese comic books (Akira), animation (Macross), toys (The Transformers), and movies (Godzilla) made inroads into the popular consciousness of young Americans. In the early 1990s, the trend accelerated with the rise of the Japanese videogame industry, led by Nintendo and a handful of rivals. By the early 2000s, young people raised on this multimedia diet of Japanese pop culture grew into adults who began creating their own; top Hollywood directors such as the
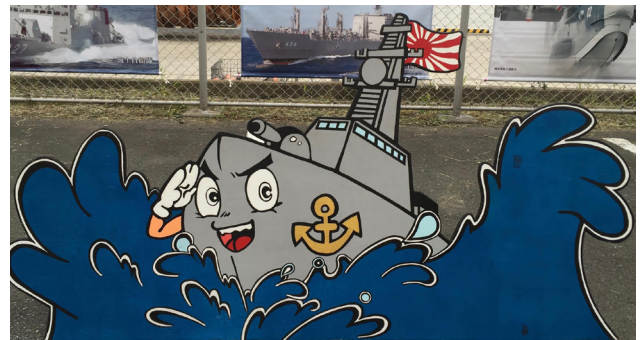
Wachovskis and Quentin Tarantino are open about the influence of Japanese pop culture on their creations.

Today the Japanese government has a name for this effect. They call it "Cool Japan." Although the term had been a buzzword for years, it became reality in 2013 as part of a 10 trillion yen economic stimulus package, part of which launched the Japan Brand Fund — "an organization to fund and support business activities to cultivate overseas demand for Japan's attractive products and services." It's too early to say if this initiative will be successful, or yet another example of politicians wasting money to make it seem as though they are doing something. But for the moment, it is clear that the Japanese government is dedicating significant resources to capturing "hearts and minds" abroad.

Ironically, this push arrived at a time when the content coming out of Japanese studios is less palatable to foreign audiences than ever before. Japanese popular culture is currently dominated by sexualized, infantilized "lolitas" that make many foreigners uncomfortable. There are illustrated forms, such as the *Combined Fleet Girls Collection*, and real-life forms, such as the group AKB48. A great shift has occurred in Japanese tastes, away from the macho heroes and ferocious monsters of old; away from the hard towards the soft; away from the masculine towards the feminine. In other words, away from the sword.

Cuteness as Power

If the macho, the hard, the masculine contributed to Japan's mindshare abroad in the late 20th century, what, then, symbolizes Japanese soft power in the 21st century? I believe the kitty, namely Hello

Kitty and her kind. Japan's cute mascots are powerful symbols of an often discussed but rarely analyzed facet of Japanese culture: *kawaii*.

The literal definition is "cute," but doesn't neatly overlap with Western uses of the word. In its most obvious manifestation it is a visual shorthand, using simplified lines, rounded shapes, exaggerated eyes, proportional deformations, and deliberate imperfections to convey a sense of childish, often feminine purity and innocence. But what started simply as a style to appeal to consumers has grown so ingrained that it has transformed into the equivalent of a Photoshop filter that can be applied to nearly anything. Understanding this filter, cracking this code, is key to unraveling the paradoxes Japanese culture often presents to outsiders. Kawaii is the "dark matter" of Japanese pop culture, infusing everything from best-selling comics and animation to idol girl singing groups. Its power is harnessed not only by entertainment creators but those in positions of authority, ranging from the municipalities and government agencies that create cute mascots for outreach and PR, all the way up to the Japan Self-Defense Forces. Japan is re-envisioning itself as a kawaii nation.

Even having lived in Japan for the past decade, I was unaware as to the depth of the phenomenon until I visited the *Kirishima* and other Japanese warships during Fleet Week in 2015, where I encountered a great deal of kawaii imagery. It turns out that not only the maritime but also the ground SDF use kawaii characters; the ground SDF deployed Cobra attack helicopters adorned with cute anime girls in a public exhibition that same year. Japan is home to one of the world's premier militaries, equipped with state of the art submarines, fighter jets, missile defense systems, and carriers, all of it backed by an even more powerful Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States. There have been many forms of armed forces throughout human history, but the JSDF has managed to become the world's first cute one.

There are many different ways to view this strange juxtaposition of the cute and the military. In a 2014 essay for the New York Times, a Waseda professor wrote that "Japan has developed a mechanism to avoid facing up to its wartime history: It has neutralized issues that are too painful to deal with by rendering them purely aesthetic, and harmless — by making them "cute." (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/opinion/kato-from-anne-frank-to-hello-kitty.html?_r=1)

This is definitely one way of looking at the situation. But I'm not so sure it is the right interpretation. I didn't get the sense any of the JSDF members I interacted with that day took their duty, or the concept of war, lightly. And it is a fact that kawaii mascots play a key role as mediators in Japanese society, popping up whenever there is something uncomfortable to discuss. This happens everywhere: street signs telling people what not to do, pharmacies using cute characters to advertise medicines for embarrassing ailments, even the tax office discussing how to file taxes. Cute imagery catches peoples' attention and makes them concentrate on things they'd rather not think about. And so I don't see it as harmful, because the military truly is something Japanese people should be thinking deeply about.

In my opinion, the time to get worried isn't when the military uses kawaii characters; it's when they stop using them. That would mean that Japanese society had made its peace with the military's role. And even though I deeply respect the men and women who serve in it, I hope the day Japan is comfortable with the military never comes. Because I don't ever want Japan – or any country, including my own – to ever be comfortable about sending troops into war.

Photo © Dan Szpara

Matthew Alt is Vice President of AltJapan. A native of Washington, D.C., Matthew has been working as a professional translator and freelance writer since the early 1990s. His translation experience includes four years as an in-house technical Japanese translator for the United States Patent and Trademark Office. He is the co-author of numerous books about Japan, and a contributor to CNN, Wired Magazine, Slate Magazine, the Independent, Newsweek Japan, the Japan Times, the New Yorker, and many other publications.

The Overseas Challenge

Author

Taiyō Fujii

My First Overseas Edition

When I began writing *Gene Mapper*, I thought of the friends and acquaintances I wanted to read it. This included friends overseas, who I wanted to be able to read it in English and Chinese as well. I hoped they would then tell their friends how good it was, and my audience could expand by word of mouth.

The first hurdle, which was to get the book translated, would be high enough, but I was also aware from the difficulties my previous employer had encountered in the import and export of software that the next hurdle would be even higher. There are two crucial conditions for successfully crossing the language barrier with any kind of media content. One is for the content to be fully *localized* by a native speaker of the target language. The other is to find an advocate who will help get it into the hands of users. No matter how good a book or other product may be, you can't simply produce an English or Chinese edition, put it on a sales table in the target country, and expect it to take off. So for a novel, I needed to find both a local translator and a local publisher to work with.

Fortunately, I was able to quickly find a contact for Chinese. Voyager Japan's Masaaki Hagino, whom I'd gotten to know at a book fair, put me in touch with an ebooks publisher in Taiwan named Bobby Tung. Tung's resumé included a stint working as an editor in Japan, and he was also familiar with the ins and outs of vertical-text EPUBs, where there continued to be gaps between specification and reality, so he was the perfect man to partner with on a publication that was to be in vertically formatted Chinese. And once I had a manuscript in the traditional Chinese characters used in Taiwan, it could be converted more or less automatically to the simplified characters used in mainland China.

In due course, *Ji yin she ji shi*, the Chinese translation of *Gene Mapper*, went on sale through Tung's Wanderer Digital Publishing and other independent ebook outlets in Taiwan, and it subsequently went on sale through the ebooks store Tang Cha on the mainland as well. (Amazon had yet to bring Kindle to China at the time, and still has not brought it to Taiwan.)

For the first hurdle of getting the book translated, Tung hired a translator with a strong background in Japanese anime and video games who goes by the pen name of Wenli Kagurazaka. I'm sure there were many challenges in producing the translation, but since I'm not conversant in Chinese myself, I'm in no position to comment on its finer points. When I later had the opportunity to meet Wenli, he mentioned that the double negatives we use in Japanese had been tricky to deal with, and it made me wish all the more that I could read the Chinese text. I also cringed a little, since I know that double negatives are not considered good style for writers even here in Japan.

At any event, I was able to self-publish a Chinese edition of my book with relative ease, and ac-

Web page for the traditional-character Chinese edition of *Gene Mapper* on the Wanderer site.

cording to the royalty reports I've received, it has reached at least several hundred new readers as a result. The existence of this self-published edition has unfortunately prevented publication of a commercial Chinese edition based on the expanded *Gene Mapper: Full Build* brought out in Japan by Hayakawa Shobō, but having been able to cross borders with my work in this way gives me a lasting sense of achievement.

Like anywhere else, an effort to reach mainland China calls for finding somebody local to smooth the way. As I'm sure my readers are aware, the country is known for its censorship of books deemed to be harmful to the state. This September I have been invited to attend the Seiun Prize ceremony to be held in Beijing, and in conjunction with that, I was asked to submit a story to be carried in the magazine *Ke huan shi jie* (Science Fiction World). I decided to suggest two different titles.

The first, a story called *Kōsei-teki sentō kihan* (Fair Battle Standards) that had appeared in the *Keikaku Itō Tribute* anthology, was one I pretty much knew would be rejected, and my expectations turned out to be right. The main character is the son of a student who was exiled to Xinjiang (Shinjang) in far-western China for having participated in the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989. The son is involved in fighting for control of the Qinghai-Tibet Railroad against terrorists seeking the independence of East Turkistan. The editor laughed and said, "Not a chance. It's like you're trying to see how many censorship trigger words you can string together in a single row."

As I said, I never actually expected to see *Kōsei-teki sentō kihan* translated into Chinese, but one Chinese author I shared this anecdote with told me that all I needed to do was make a few changes. There are apparently any number of translated works that have gotten into print even though they present the Communist Party in a poor light. Sometimes all it takes is to change "China" to "Country C," or to mechanically replace all the place names with places in Vietnam. Of course, we outsiders have no way of knowing such things. There's simply no substitute for having someone local as our guide.

Self-Publishing in English Goes on Hold

Thanks to Bobby Tung, self-publishing a Chinese edition went off without a hitch, but my efforts to do the same with an English edition did not meet with the same success.

I knew from the start that English was the most important language to work on. Once you have an English version, it improves the chances for readers of other languages to learn about the book, and it can be used as a marketing tool. This is especially true in Asia, where titles hailing from the English world have an overwhelming advantage. From a sales perspective, they often actually prefer secondhand translations from an English edition over translations from the original.

But translating a book into English is expensive. I quickly learned that having *Gene Mapper* rendered into English would cost around ¥3 million (about $30,000). I decided to look for a native English translator on a job-matching site.

In talking about publishing in English, it always surprises me when people ask, "Wouldn't it be better to find a Japanese translator who truly understands the original?" The plain and simple answer is no. It would be utterly foolish. The output you are looking for is a novel written in English, which means you want a translator with the same language skills as someone writing original novels in English—preferably someone who lives in a culture where English has deep roots as the language of literature.

For this reason, even though I felt a little bad about being so cut and dried, I automatically ruled out anybody from Singapore, the Philippines, and India. There are a large number of Japanese-English translators registered from these countries, among whom there may well be some excellent literary stylists, but I had to assume the chances were very small. I also ruled out translators from the United States, England, Australia, and New Zealand, where the existence of translators' associations made it unlikely I'd find someone willing to take the job on at an affordable rate.

This obviously limited my options. Since some Finnish and Norwegian authors write in English, I considered translators from those countries, but I couldn't find any who knew Japanese. Then I happened upon an Irish translator who apparently made his bread and butter with pharmaceutical translations but also mentioned on his blog that he was a fan of Philip K. Dick. I decided to contact him, and he turned out to be traveling in Central America. He had a certain Bohemian air that appealed to me.

From Panama, he agreed to my terms of paying half of the translator fee up front and the rest as royalties from sales. All of our negotiations went smoothly, and his draft arrived on schedule, but unfortunately I was experiencing some health issues due to overwork and didn't have the time to go over the manuscript carefully. Partly for that reason, and partly because I had not yet found a way to promote the English edition, I asked to put the project on hold.

I remain in touch with this translator today, even after a different English version has appeared from Haikasoru in San Francisco. Although I regret that his translation never saw the light of day, I remain grateful for his efforts on my behalf and the best wishes he sent my way. At least to my eyes, the translation appeared to be well done, and I'm quite sure it would have entertained my friends. But I simply couldn't see my way clear to pushing ahead without someone in place to promote the book for me. Even if I could upload it to an ebook sales site and post a few ads to catch the attention of a reader or two, the book would just get buried without someone committed to advocating for it.

This year I learned of a case where a science fiction author writing in Spanish produced his own English edition, then had a native English author edit it before self-publishing. But even though it's a good story and he's been promoting it quite aggressively, he can't get any English reviews. On the one hand, the strategy of having a native English writer polish a draft translation I produce may be something I'd like to try sometime, perhaps with something for an online magazine. But more fundamentally the example serves to underscore the importance of having a locally based marketer for any independent book.
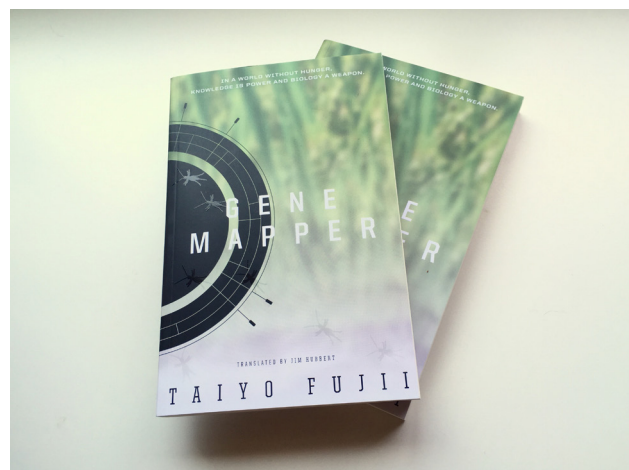
The English edition of *Gene Mapper*, translated from Hayakawa Shobō's print edition and published by U.S.-based Haisaksoru in 2015.

Two Requests from my English Language Publisher

When Hayakawa Shobō published a commercial print edition of *Gene Mapper: Full Build*, it opened up new possibilities for getting my book into English. I had opportunities to speak with a number of different publishers, but I was given pause when two of them expressed the same concern: that a story line extolling the open source movement and associated business models born on the West Coast might fall flat among American readers to whom such things had become old hat. It stung a little to hear this, but they had clearly given the book a serious look, and I was grateful for that.

Thankfully, Haikasoru, an imprint of Viz Media in San Francisco, still wanted to publish the book. The translation work by Jim Hubbert proceeded on schedule, and once they had seen the first draft, my editors came to me with two requests.

One was to change at least one of the characters' names. In the original dialogue, I had naturally followed the Japanese custom of addressing or referring to people by surname plus -*san* most of the time, but in the English dialogue this had virtually all been converted to first names, and in the narrative passages characters were referred to by just their surnames—all according to English custom. The problem that surfaced in this process is that many of the Romanized names looked too much alike.

Once I saw the manuscript, I couldn't help but agree. Three of the main characters were Kuroka-wa, Kitamura, and Kaneda—all beginning with *K* and ending in *a*. The protagonist Hayashida ended in *a* as well. So I changed Kitamura to Yagodoh, and added a bit of interior monolog when Hayashida first hears the name.

The second request was to add an epilogue. My editors were apparently under the impression that *Gene Mapper* was going to have a sequel, and they wanted the story to end with some hooks for that sequel. It's true that at less than 230 pages, *Gene Mapper* is on the short side for an entertainment novel in trade paperback format. By comparison, sci-fi author Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* is 350 pages, and his *The Water Knife* is 384 pages. Based on length, it's hardly surprising that someone might assume there was going to be more to the story, and in fact, I did have some ideas along those lines percolating. So I took the scene I'd been thinking of as a prologue for the next installment and wrote it up as an epilogue for the English translation. I think the addition enhances the ending and makes for a more satisfying read. I'm now looking for an opportunity to publish the Japanese version of this epilogue somewhere as well.

What I Learned from the English Translation

These were the two specific requests I received for changes to the manuscript, but Jim Hubbert had also corrected numerous slip-ups and infelicities in the original. Since this was my first novel and it was originally self-published, I suppose it's not too surprising that it contained mistakes. I was unformed as a writer, and my skills were still wanting. The translation clearly distinguished narrative from interior monologue, and it had removed or merged repetitious material. There were quite a few places where I thought, "That's exactly how I would do it myself now"—and it gave me a sense of how far I'd come.

Not all of the alterations made me feel so good. In one scene the protagonist expresses surprise that a person he's been working with at a distance is a woman, but this was missing from the translation. I never thought I had treated women as any-

thing but equal, but I realized from reading the translation that this wasn't true. For all I know, the deletion may actually have been a purely practical matter, since in English you often have to use *he* or *she* to refer to characters, and it's difficult to hide their gender even when it can remain ambiguous in Japanese. But seeing this change made me realize other potential implications.

Impressed as I was upon first reading Hubbert's translation, I later had an experience that made me realize it was even more skillful than I had thought. Last summer, as I practiced reading a passage out loud in preparation for a public reading at a San Francisco bookstore, I noticed another value-added quality of the translation: the sentences had a pleasing rhythm to them, and the pages seemed to sing. Hubbert had chosen his words for how well they sounded together.

I learned a great deal from Jim Hubbert's English version of *Gene Mapper*, and I couldn't be happier to have had him as my translator.

The bottom line is that you ideally want to look for a translator who is better at novels than an actual novelist.

The Importance of Internationalization

After reading this translation of my work rendered by a better writer than myself, I resolved in the future to consciously work at creating stories that would translate well. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but it was a guiding principle suggested by my previous occupation.

When you're engaged in software development, if you want your product to be viable overseas, you need to be thinking about both internationalization and localization. In this context, "localization" refers to the process of translating the strings that appear in menus and dialogs as well as setting up a local sales network in the target region, while "internationalization" refers to designing the product from the ground up to facilitate localization in as many languages as possible. This is done through such means as storing the strings separately from the program code in an easily-swapped resource, setting the internal character coding to Unicode, and making sure the

program doesn't do things that conflict with the language-handling of the operating system or web browser environment in which it is to run. It's not sexy work, but if you don't do it right at the basic design stage, you end up having a much harder time when you get to the localization stage.

Localization for literature is much the same, encompassing both the work of translating the text and the publisher's marketing efforts. But how about internationalization: are there things the author can do at the original writing stage to prepare the way for localization?

I believe there are. On a macro level, he can choose universal themes and create works that stand on their own. On a micro level, he can strive for consistency of style.

It's easy to see the link between universal themes and internationalization. The sorrows and suffering associated with death or the joys associated with having a child are the same the world over. But I think I need to elaborate on what I mean by "works that stand on their own." The idea here is that the more self-contained a work is so that it can be enjoyed in isolation, the more easily it can cross language barriers. For example, I avoid using references to other literature for any key purpose, and I don't quote poets and critics and such. I may mention that music is playing, but I don't name any specific tune. One reason, of course, is that there is relatively little occasion for such things in science fiction, but the larger consideration is that borrowing from someone else's work to trigger an emotional response is likely to have a different effect on readers of different ages and cultures. I suppose I might do it if I thought I could wrap the borrowed material in sufficiently powerful prose to overcome any such unpredictability, but if I have that much confidence in my own prose, what do I need to borrow someone else's words for? Needless to say, no work can be completely divorced from its context, but I think steering clear of elements that link closely to context can enhance the work's independence, and that should make the language barrier easier to cross.

Gene Mapper has generated a great many reviews on Amazon and Goodreads in the United States,

and it's interesting to note that for the most part they echo what Japanese readers have said of the work. They praise the lifelike realism of my settings, they like how I've mixed augmented reality and genetic recombination, they couldn't stop turning the pages, and so on. The similarity applies to the negative comments as well, such as that the characterizations are thin or the dialogue is flat.

Besides offering another testimony to the quality of Hubbert's translation, I suppose this implies that my efforts at internationalization can be called a success.

Promoting My Book in the United States

To help promote the English edition of *Gene Mapper*, I decided to attend Worldcon 73, held in August 2015 in Spokane, Washington. With my publisher Haikasoru making the arrangements, I stopped in San Francisco to hold a reading at Borderland Books on my way there.

Readings aren't so widely known in Japan, but they are a common way to promote books in the United States. My Japanese readers may have seen examples in movies. I sat at a table in one corner of the store and read from the opening section of *Gene Mapper*, and then also the passage where the hacker Yagodoh appears in the form of a dog. As I mentioned above, Jim Hubbert's translation read very well when I was practicing, and even without being a native speaker, I felt I was able to do it reasonable justice by paying close attention to the punctuation.

It's important to understand that readings like this are not merely catering to existing fans. They're a way of promoting the book to new readers. The hope is to engage the interest not just of those who've sat down in the chairs to listen but also of those browsing the shelves nearby. After finishing the reading, I remained at the table for quite a while to talk with audience members and sign books when asked. It basically took up the entire afternoon.

From there I proceeded on to Worldcon, where I participated in several panels, held another read-

At the Worldcon booth for the online magazine *Lightspeed*. An English translation of the short story "Violation of the TrueNet Security Act" first appeared on *Lightspeed*, and was then selected for inclusion in Clarke's *The Best Science Fiction of the Year* anthology.

ing, and sat around coffee tables chatting with American sci-fi writers. My biggest shock came when I participated in an improv session with some cyberpunk, horror, and other sub-genre authors. In just three minutes, we were supposed to script a skit that in some way represented our particular sub-genre, to be acted out with three members of the audience. I didn't manage to come up with anything, but the others put together roughly five-minute skits in the allotted time, and performed them admirably with the help of audience members. I felt I learned something new about just how closely drama and literature are linked—a link that my English-speaking colleagues were already thoroughly conversant in and could handle as easily as breathing air.

The week I spent rubbing shoulders and sitting around tables talking shop with so many seasoned writers was a true joy—so much more than the word "rewarding" can express. I tried to interact with people as just another ordinary writer. When you're overseas in a place like that, it's meaningless to tell people you're from Japan. Attendees had gathered from all over—from Alabama and Los Angeles, from China, and even from war-torn Syria. It's true that Japan is known for producing wonderful anime and manga, but that has nothing to do with me. By simply repeating that "I'm here to promote a new cyberpunk title called *Gene Mapper* that's probably different from anything you've read before," I came away having made enough friends that I'm eager to go back to Worldcon again this year.

And Then to the World

I ended up spending all of my earnings from the English edition on airfare and lodging, but I'm already beginning to see some returns. The English version of my "Violation of the TrueNet Security Act" was selected for inclusion in *The Best Science Fiction of the Year* by its editor Neil Clarke, whom I got to know at the conference. The last time a sci-fi story by a Japanese author appeared in an English "Best of" anthology was apparently Suga Hiroe's "Freckled Figure" in the year 2000.

I have been invited to participate in a literary festival in Singapore this November by sci-fi author Ken Liu, whom I also met at Worldcon. And the group that invited me to the Seiun Awards in China includes several people I spoke with at Worldcon as well.

I don't intend to let opportunities like this slip through my fingers, and there is no doubt in my mind what I need to do: Write stories on universal themes that will stand on their own. Travel to each location and promote my books like any ordinary author, meeting my fans and getting to know other authors and editors. I can think of no other way to set myself up for the encounter that will lead to my next great leap forward.

I was already 43 when I made my literary debut, so I have no time to waste. Twenty or so more years is all I can count on for having the energy to produce fully realized works of weight and substance. I already know that's not enough time to write all of the story ideas I have floating around in my head.

I guess that means I never need to worry about running out of material.

Taiyō Fujii (1971–) became a publishing sensation in 2012 when he self-published the ebook *Gene Mapper*. An expanded *Gene Mapper: Full Build* came out the following year from Hayakawa Shobō in both print and electronic editions. His 2014 novel *Ōbitaru kuraudo* (Orbital Cloud) was awarded the 2014 Japan SF Grand Prize and the 2015 Seiun Japanese Novel Prize. He currently serves as the 18th president of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of Japan.

How Shōdo Island's Online Cultural Magazine
On the Boat Was Born

Media Producer

Kimiko Hirano

With the Internet, I Can Live Anywhere

Two and a half years ago I moved to Shōdo Island (Shōdoshima), located in the middle of the Seto Inland Sea, with my husband Kōga Hirano, who designs book covers.

People ask me what made me decide to move and why I chose Shōdo Island, but I've never been able to give a particularly clear answer. I do remember thinking I wanted to get far away from Tokyo after having effectively squandered all our resources in a little-theater venture, but we could have gone pretty much anywhere, and beyond that, my sense is that it was mostly just a vague impulse. I've always been better at *doing* than *thinking*, so I tend to act first and ask questions later, and in this case, too, any explanations I might give at this point are essentially ex post facto. All I can really say is that one thing led to another and the next thing we knew the two of us getting on into what's known as old age had settled into being Shōdo-islanders—with never a dull moment thanks to the cadre of much younger folks surrounding us. I do regret—though perhaps not too terribly much—the way my own impulsive choices keep turning my husband's life upside down, but I suppose he'll just have to shrug it off as another in a 50-year string of bad harvests.

There is one thing I can say for certain, though: if it weren't for the Internet, I'd never have been able to move so far away, especially to a remote island. We owe it to the Internet that my husband has been able to carry on with his book design work as if nothing has changed, and that I've been able to continue with my own writing and event planning as well. It's without question the most important tool for a move like this.

Of course, there's no getting around the fact that things are different when you move to a tiny outlying island. Convenience changes to inconvenience, stress turns to ease, estrangement gives way to intimacy, and simplicity becomes true luxury. My husband who was easygoing to begin with has become even more so, rising early in the morning to work on his hand lettering and cover designs, then spending leisurely hours playing with the cat, pulling weeds in the garden, becoming an expert bonfire builder, and so forth—paying little heed to the day of the week, and so lost in his own little bubble of tranquility that I suspect he'd be diagnosed with dementia if he were to take a memory test. By contrast, I'm a late riser and, never able to get enough of the people and things that make up island life, spend my days busily rushing this way and that, then stay up into the wee hours chatting with my new friends over drinks. With one such day giving way to another, our native Tokyo has steadily faded into the distance.

A Life-Sized Snapshot of the Island

When we left our lifelong home behind, I had envisioned a quiet life of retirement on the island, tending to my plants like Shōdo's own Venetia Stanley-Smith, and I swore to myself that I would keep out of trouble. But to my surprise I soon found myself organizing events with the young people, acting as a counselor to others contemplating a move, helping out at the town hall, planning exhibitions, and so on, unable to reign in my natural inclination to stick my nose in, unable to resist lending an ear. On the day I write these words, we are scheduled to hold Shōdo Island's first evening of *rakugo* entertainment (comic storytelling in the classical style).

In a nutshell, I was inspired by the high energy level of the island's irrepressible young people, who seemed to be driven by something far removed from economic motives or the pursuit of personal profit. Seeing the gusto with which they threw themselves not just into their livelihoods but also into finding diversions, pooling their respective skills and all pitching in together to make things happen, was like a shot in the arm. And so that nasty little habit I have of sticking my neck out and putting everything on the line reared its head once again: I decided to get involved and do as much as I could for as long as I still had the strength.

It first hit me that I could put together a book that would be a life-sized snapshot of the island and its people—except presented entirely in those people's own voices rather than my own. When I ran the idea by an editor I'd worked with in Tokyo, he encouraged me to give it a whirl. I suspect he actually thought nothing would come of it, but I was nevertheless heartened by his response. It gave me a renewed link with my native Tokyo. My next step was to ask 17 young people to write about their work or about a particular event that they had had a role in, urging them to simply write whatever came to mind in whatever way seemed appropriate. Over the next year, Kazumi Obika, an artist living in Takamatsu on the island of Shikoku, drew illustrations of how things work at seven local production sites. When the manuscripts began arriving from my 17 writers, they turned out to be all over the map, from a brief half-page statement to a lengthy autobiographical essay that I wasn't quite sure what to

The authors of *Oide yo, Shōdoshima* pose for a celebratory picture when copies of the finished book arrive. (Photo credit: Hikari Mimura)

make of—and everything in between. When I'd read them all through, I found myself clutching my head at just how difficult it is to relate something to others through writing.

So this was my starting line, but how was I to begin?

In cases where I thought the authors could revise their own work, I asked them to do so, this time giving them specific parameters for length. For the others, I went back over the manuscripts one by one, picturing the author and what I'd come to know of him or her in my mind as I edited, cutting excess, adding little bits here and there, swapping out material, and making other changes. With manuscripts flying repeatedly back and forth between myself and the editor in Tokyo, it wasn't until near the end of 2015 that I could see the shape of the whole. Finally, in February of this year, the book came out with the title *Oide yo, Shōdoshima* (Come to Shōdo Island).

When I reread it now, I'm embarrassed by the number of mistakes I see. It makes me want to crawl into a hole. But the truth is that the book has served to draw interest in Shōdo Island from many unexpected places. I was especially surprised to hear from someone on the northern tip of Hokkaido one day. And even right here on Shōdo Island itself, the contributors to the book made new discoveries when they read each other's work.

My Encounter with Local Literary History

During the time I was editing this book, my work at the town hall led me to get involved in another project.

Shōdo Island has the rare distinction of being home to three literary figures who were born and grew up at around the same time: Sakae Tsuboi, Shigeji Tsuboi, and Denji Kuroshima. It is also the place where the wandering haiku poet Hōsai Ozaki met his demise. Before arriving on the island, I'd only known about Sakae Tsuboi of *Twenty-Four Eyes* fame. Once here, I began reading voraciously through her oeuvre, said to in-

clude some 1600 titles, as well as Denji Kuroshima's. I learned that the houses where they had lived were both still standing, and the people at town hall took me to see them. When I visited the house within sight of the school that appears in the film adaptation of *Twenty-Four Eyes*, and the house with the exact configuration of rooms Kuroshima described in an essay eight decades ago, I came away thinking there had to be a way to bring these writers' works back into the light of day. I began by holding a small public reading, and started up a reading group. Learning that even the longtime residents hadn't read their local authors, I was able to share in a rediscovery of their works by reading them aloud together.

But I wanted to do something more concrete. I was now a resident of the island, too, and if I didn't do it, who else could I expect to do it?

Sakae Tsuboi's skill as a storyteller had struck a chord with me. I was convinced that life on the island a hundred years ago must have been exactly as she described in her vivid, well-observed stories. And I didn't doubt that those stories accurately reflected the lives of ordinary people living in outlying areas all over Japan around the same time. To put it even more strongly, I could feel in her stories the very pulse and breath of the ordinary Japanese of a hundred years ago. She truly had an eye for detail. I began asking myself whether there wasn't some way to bring out a newly selected collection of her short stories, and perhaps a collection of some of her children's stories as well.

Then the answer finally came to me, and I slapped my knee: ebooks. I didn't actually know the first thing about digital publishing, but I immediately got in touch with Masaaki Hagino at Voyager Japan. "Sure, you should be able to do it yourselves," he told me. "I can easily show you how."

So I was at another starting line.

In the months since *Oide yo, Shōdoshima* appeared, I'd become all too painfully aware of how much hadn't made it into the book, and new people and things I didn't even know about before

The electronic magazine *Sono fune ni notte* (On the Boat) set sail on July 1, 2016, at http://sonofune.net. Some of the interviews, essays, and videos are offered as free content.

kept capturing my attention as well. We may not be able to do another book every time we feel this way, but how about something that can continue to grow with the ever advancing present? Could that same venue include an electronic bookshelf featuring the island's literary figures, so that it would fulfill both of my desires at the same time? Consulting further with Mr. Hagino as I tried to piece the puzzle together, I ultimately concluded that an electronic magazine was the medium I was looking for.

Our E-Zine Sets Sail

When I pitched this idea to my husband, he interrupted me to say that before anything else I needed to come up with a title. Which I suppose I could have predicted, since in his work he always starts with a title. At this point I had only a vague overall idea of what I was after, and none of the specifics had taken shape in my mind yet, such as who would write the articles and stories, what kind of web site to build, and who would actually run the operation. Then one day the title *Sono fune ni notte* (On the Boat) popped into my head, and I immediately liked it. When you live on an island, you have to get on a boat whether you're coming or going. And boarding that boat always made me feel for some reason as if I could truly go anywhere on it, all the way to the ends of the earth. As soon as I told my husband, the master of hand lettering went to work, and by the end of the day we had a logo. There was no turning back now.

The magazine will ultimately carry articles and

stories by young people not just from Shōdo Island but from across the seas as well—Okinawa for starters, and in time, places like Taiwan and Hong Kong, too. Boats carry all manner of cargo, and so will this magazine. My husband has said that he wants to do the covers for all our ebooks. The bookshelf will begin by offering new editions of Shōdo's storied literary figures, and expand from there to include new writers as well as entertainment fiction. The beautiful covers are ready and waiting. Thanks to what the Web makes possible, the magazine will include up-to-date event information, as well as eye-catching photos and videos, but the plan is to make it primarily a magazine of stories and features to be read. Although we have few professional writers at the outset, I'd like to envision this as a place where new writers can be born. I also hope to see cross-pollination between our electronic publishing endeavors and print publications, and I'm eager to have people everywhere sample the products of Shōdo Island that the magazine will cover.

Sono fune ni notte set sail in July 2016 with an editorial team of four—all of them newcomers to the job. We have no outside funding. Although content on the Web is typically free, we are taking the risk of asking readers to pay a modest ¥2000 for an annual subscription to help defray expenses and sustain the site.

Kimiko Hirano (1945–) is a native of Kanda, Tokyo. She has published widely and produced numerous stage productions as a media producer. From 2005 until 2012 she was manager of the little theater "Theater Iwato." In 2014 she moved to Shōdo Island in the Inland Sea, where she serves as a cultural promotions adviser to the town of Shōdoshima and edits the magazine *Sono fune ni notte* (On the Boat).

VOYAGER TIMELINE

1998.7	T-Time Internet Vertical Writing and Reading Model (Hybrid edition), a software which converts HTML files into book-like text in a vertical layout, was released.
1998.10	Adapted TTZ format into T-Time, a predecessor of dotbook format (.book).
2000.6	Adapted .book file format.
2000.9	.book was adopted as the standard ebook format in the PABURI electronic library, the collaborative electronic bookstore of four major publishing companies (KADOKAWA GROUP PUBLISHING, Kodansha, SHUEISHA, SHINCHOSHA Publishing).
2006.2	Implemented low-brightness mode in T-Time. Made it possible for visually impaired persons to read .books by providing choices in font size, brightness of screen and a magnifying glass.
2006.10	Cooperated with CELSYS and INFOCITY. Adapted BookSurfing, a reader for mobile phones. Started distributing .book files in BookSurfing format.
2008.5	Announced T-Time Crochet. Started distributing encrypted .book files in increments for faster access. Realized a distributing system for high capacity content, such as comics, that can instantly respond to users' requests regarding display mode.
2008.7	Released T-Time for iPhone. Started providing comic books for iPhone and iPod touch in App Store.
2011.10	Released the "EPUB3 Japanese Basic Standard" in Japanese and English. Jointly launched the EPUB Japanese Standard Study Group (EPUBJP).
2011.12	Released "BinB", a new reading system by Books in Browsers. At the same time, opened "BinB store" running on this BinB system.
2012.7	Started providing the "BinB" reading system to Yahoo! Japan Bookstore.
2012.12	Provided the "BinB" reading system to Shueisha's "Ultra Jump Magazine Official Website".
2013.2	Published "Book: A Futurist's Manifesto – Japanese Edition –" edited by H. McGuire and B. O'Leary, originally published by O'Reilly Media. Provided the "BinB" reading system to Kodansha's special bookstore site "Denponya San (Mr. e-Bookstore)".
2013.4	Provided the Chinese-compatible "BinB" reading system to Taiwanese e-Bookstores, "eCrowd Media Inc." and "Wanderer Digital Publishing Inc.".
2013.10	"BinB" reading system, adds support for Aozora Bunko. Launch new site "Aozora in Browsers" which features vertical writing display of public domain eBooks registered in Aozora Bunko.
2014.7	Released "Romancer", a web service for eBook production, publishing, and promotion.
2015.2	Start providing "BinB", a browser based reading system, to a digital comic promotional site "Mugenshi" by CHING WIN PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
2016.5	Co-developed Digital Library System which enabled visually impaired people to read digital books. The system complies with the Law to Eliminate Discrimination against the people with special needs, which took effect in April 2016.
2016.6	Romancer introduced a new read-aloud function supporting tablets and smartphones.
2016.9	Shueisha adapted Voyager's promotion support system "Power Thumb" to create promotional video of over 130 manga titles for the digital manga festival "Aki-man!"

A Writer on the Family Tree

Author

Yoshio Kataoka

I've long been told that if I trace my ancestry back about two hundred years through my maternal grandfather, there was another writer in the family. All indications seem to be that it's true. Two hundred years ago means the beginning of the 1800s. When I look at a chronology, it tells me this was the era when cartographer Tadataka Inō was traveling about surveying the countryside, and when the first edition of Jippensha Ikku's comic novel *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* (tr. *Shank's Mare*) appeared.

Nobody has been able to determine what sort of works my ancestor might have produced, but considering the times, he would have written them in a brush script that I would probably find difficult to decipher today, and once he had a book's worth of text committed to paper, he would have turned the manuscript over to a woodblock carver to cut the text onto blocks of wood for printing. Then I imagine the final labor of printing the pages from those blocks and binding them into books probably fell back to my ancestor himself.

How many copies did he print? How much did each copy cost? How did he sell his books? What kind of people bought them? Although nobody knows the answer to any of these questions, it is interesting to speculate.

My guess is that his books weren't something just anybody could buy. Buyers probably were limited to those above a certain economic as well as intellectual threshold. I can picture my ancestor visiting the homes of wealthy families one by one in door-to-door salesman fashion, looking for people interested in his latest work. Perhaps a copy or two would turn up if I conducted a systematic search through storehouses belonging to the older families of the Ōmi Hachiman area. Or perhaps my ancestor's readers would have been the sort who belonged to temples instead. Then

again, if his works were merely knockoffs of knockoffs of *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige*, his distribution system and readership would have been something else altogether.

The evidence suggests that writing was his sole occupation. His labor apparently wasn't needed in the family trade. I should note that my maternal grandfather was a Buddhist rosary maker in Ōmi Hachiman who could trace his roots all the way back Prince Shōtoku (574–622). The supremely practical-minded prince was interested in promoting local industry. Urged by him to go into making either roof-tiles or rosaries, a distant ancestor of my grandfather chose the later.

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I mention all this because I'm interested in illuminating the differences between my own writer's life today and that of my ancestor from 200 years ago, who didn't just write his books, but printed, bound, and sold them as well. Except for needing to have someone else carve the woodblocks for printing, he was in effect a one-man publishing house. I, on the other hand, have been able to give my undivided attention to writing in the half century since my work began appearing in print. Furthermore, all the writing I have done in that time has been in response to publisher demand. Sometimes an editor calls me up to ask what I might have for him and I suggest ideas, other times I bring story ideas to an editor without being asked, but in either case I'm working with the knowledge that an editor who works for a publishing company is looking for things to publish. Even though what to write and how is left entirely up to me, I'm responding to publisher demand.

For every one of the many books I have written, a publisher has always stood between myself and the printed book. The world today takes this for

granted and thinks nothing of it, but it seems to me it's quite a remarkable thing. Let's take a look at the full process. It begins with me writing the original manuscript, after which I follow it through the various editorial stages until I've read the proofs and arranged for all the necessary corrections, but once that much has been done, I'm relieved of any role in the rest of the book's journey. I have no further contact with the book as it is actually being made, when the finished book is released into the distribution network, or after it reaches retail store display tables where readers can pick it up. Does that not seem remarkable?

That's simply the difference 200 years make, comes the glib response. The technological progress the world has seen during those two centuries fine-tuned industrial specialization to the nth degree, and now compensates each business and occupation for expertly filling its particular function. But those who say this are merely describing the current status quo, which turns writers into nothing more than single-function cogs.

A writer could in fact remain engaged with his book beyond the proof stage, following it closely through actual production of the physical book. It would not be particularly difficult for him to participate in book design, as well as in the actual printing and binding work if he wished. He could enjoy the satisfaction of a book that reflects his wishes in every way and that was produced with his own hands. But if the chance was then offered to personally go out and sell the entire initial print run to readers, I'm quite sure virtually every author would demur. It's all too obvious that the effort required far exceeds the potential reward.

Which brings us to the central problem facing publishing today.

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The books a publisher produces flow by way of a distributor into retail bookstores, which then have the task of actually selling the books to readers. In recent years Japan's retail bookstores have been going out of business in droves, sometimes more than a thousand in a year's time. One editor I know said to me that if he were to go into the retail business, the very last kind of store he would want to have is a bookstore. This was a

man who worked for quite some time in the marketing department of a well-known publishing house before being reassigned to the editorial division. He listed a number of reasons for his aversion to running a bookstore, including the large number of inventory items and the meticulous work needed to track them, the tiny profit built into each sale, the inordinate amount of labor demanded to capture even those small returns, the consequent necessity for the whole family to help out, and never getting a day off.

As pretty much anybody with an interest in books will tell you, there are a great many bookstores today that have little to recommend them in terms of customer appeal. To my mind, this is most fundamentally an issue of profitability. Bookstores must maintain a certain level of sales per square floor space per day in order to be profitable, and that calculation can be seen not just on the shelves but in every aspect of the store. The bigger the publisher, the more they like to spout high-minded rhetoric about publishing being a cultural activity, but you can see just how shallow their cultural aspirations are when declining manga sales send them into a tizzy. And it is these very publishers, the major houses, who are creating the retail store conditions described above: low profits, onerous labor burdens, stores without any appeal, and the endless string of closures. How so? By keeping cover prices low because they know that their size will let them make the difference back in volume.

Suppose I walk into a store and buy a book for ¥3000. The store needs to get at least 25% of this amount—¥750 in this case—in order to cover it's labor and other operating costs. And this 25% figure has to be considered an absolute minimum just to survive; it leaves nothing to apply towards creating a more appealing environment that would let the store distinguish itself from the competition. In order to support those who wish to run bookstores as their personal value proposition to society, a minimum of 25% profit needs to be sacrosanct.

Yet because the large publishers depend on a business model that calls for keeping prices as low as possible, they are the least likely to produce books that enable retailers to take a 25%

margin. This dynamic in which the major publishers get their profits by squeezing the small retailer represents the most serious crisis facing Japanese publishing today.

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As I say, every one of the books I've written has been ushered into print by a publishing house, but it's also worth noting that in each case the person I have worked with is a single editor. I've almost never given any thought to the company behind this editor. After all, I'm not working for the company. I'm an individual independent writer, and I get an individual editor to work with me on each book I write. It's a comfortable relationship. On those rare occasions when something uncomfortable happens, it invariably involves the company behind the editor.

It extends from this that the ideal arrangement for a writer is to work with a single accomplished editor on each project, and for that accomplished editor to also be a devoted operator of a very small publishing house. If the editor is at the same time the publisher, it means he will also be heavily involved in the sales process. Extending this a step further, we must also ask the question of whether writers should be satisfied with just being writers and nothing else. Shouldn't we also be involved in sales? When it comes to the difficult question of actually selling the finished books, shouldn't I as the writer be engaged right alongside my one-man editor/publisher?

I've argued for some time now that every publishing house should have at least one company-owned retail outlet where it sells its own books directly to the public. The outlet needs to be an independent, self-supporting entity so that each publisher's editorial and sales staff can see first-hand how the financials of running a retail bookstore actually work out. Having long felt both the tremendous difficulty involved in selling books as well its tremendous underlying appeal, I arrived at this idea as one way we could begin bridging the divide.

The low-price strategy that has become conventional among big publishers emerged from using the advantages afforded by size to compensate for the many difficulties associated with selling books: basically, keeping books cheap makes them easier to sell. But the burden of this, as amplified by the distribution system, is falling on the small retail stores, which, under the crushing weight, are failing in record numbers with seemingly no end in sight. Quite simply, selling is hard. We need to look more closely at exactly what it involves. To sell books as a business implies an expectation of profit, but we need to look more closely at the nature of those profits. The most effective way of doing this is to begin by reducing the scale to the smallest possible unit. In that sense, I think we can look to one-man publishers as our greatest hope.

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I suppose my writer-ancestor's most important sales routes would have been located in Kyoto. Bookstores no doubt did exist, but even in the bustling ancient capital, they wouldn't have been on every corner. Since we're talking about 200 years ago, it might be a stretch even to picture five stores in the entire city. But let us assume there were five. If my ancestor made the rounds of those stores and learned that a single copy of his book had sold in three of the stores, he would surely have settled into his room at the inn that evening with a feeling of great accomplishment.

[Editor's note: A version of this article originally appeared in the September 2002 edition of the Japanese-language quarterly *Hon to konpyūta* (The Book & The Computer) under the title *Shigoto aite wa itsumo hitori no henshūsha* (Always Working with an Individual Editor).]

Yoshio Kataoka (1939–) was born in Tokyo. His family evacuated to Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture during the war, then later moved to Kure in neighboring Hiroshima Prefecture before returning to Tokyo when Kataoka was 13. He began contributing columns to *Misuterī magajin* (Mystery Magazine) while still a student at Waseda University, and made his literary debut in 1974 with the novel *Shiroi nami no kōya e* (To the Wasteland of White Waves). In 2016 he published the autobiographical novel *Kōhī ni dōnatsu-ban, kuroi nitto no tai* (Coffee, 45s, and Black Knit Tie). Besides being a prolific writer, he has translated numerous works into Japanese, and is also an accomplished photographer.

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