

Japanese Values:
A Thematic Analysis of Contemporary
Children's Literature

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A few years ago, in connection with the then new and controversial *dōtoku kyōiku* ("moral education") course instituted in Japanese elementary schools in 1964, I made a study of teachers' guides and textbooks (Fujishiro 1967). Comparing their values with those of the wartime *shūshin* or ethics textbooks subsequently banned by the Allied Occupation, I found a number of interesting trends. Among them were the following: a decrease in emphasis on nationalism and the authority of the emperor; pronounced growth of concern for social and individual morality; presentation through foreign biographies and settings of such themes as "pride in nation" or "duty to nation"; use of animal stories, rather than military examples, to develop such a concept as loyalty; contemporary Japanese cultural leaders in science and the humanities in place of military heroes of the past; fairy tales and an occasional Buddhist or Christian story in place of lessons based on filial piety; and a shift from blind loyalty and obedience to understanding of rules and responsibilities in a democratic society.

Subsequently, the importance of children's literature as a reflection of the values of a society has become increasingly recognized. As Zena Sutherland puts it in *Children and books*, the classic college textbook on children's literature: "Realization that children's literature both reflects the values of our society and instills those values in children has made increasing numbers of adults aware that children's literature is a part of the mainstream of all literature and that, like adult literature, it is worthy of our respect both for what it is and for what it does" (Arbutnot and Sutherland 1972, preface).

During 1973-74, I set out to investigate what contemporary Japanese children's literature might reveal as to Japanese values for the period 1968-72. In particular I was interested to learn if there were further indications of the "shift from blind loyalty and obedience to understanding of rules and responsibilities in a democratic society."

Previous research indicated that the value of "cooperation" was most common in American children's literature. Chant (1971) designed a study to investigate the extent to which social-personal values applicable to young children were reflected in mass-produced fiction books. She identified ten social-personal values and discovered that they were present in inexpensive children's books in the following order: cooperation, responsibility, respect, understanding, citizenship, ambition, compassion, individuality, selflessness, and honesty. Cooperation appeared most frequently, selflessness and honesty least.

Likewise McClelland reported that while conducting a research project in social psychology he had read and analyzed children's readers from forty different countries (1963, p. 135). He found cleverness emphasized in Turkey, Lebanon, and Tunisia, kindness and obligation in Chile and Japan. These themes he identified as basic to the values of these people. He writes:

The conclusion is inescapable, that popular stories for children reflect what the people value most, what they think is important. And children learn from reading the stories what adults regard as important (1963, p. 136).

Like Chant, he found the most common theme in American children's books to be that of cooperation and concluded that this was the chief value of the American people.

Thus arose the question that guides this study, the question whether, in contradistinction to the values of loyalty and obligation traditionally associated with Japan, there might be evidence of "cooperation" as a new value in contemporary Japanese

children's literature—and if so, to what extent such evidence occurs.

THE STUDY

Thanks to a chance encounter in Detroit with a Japanese librarian, I learned of the special collection of some 500 Japanese children's books, selected from approximately 150,000 titles published since 1968, now housed at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Outside Japan, this collection is not only the largest single source of contemporary Japanese children's books but also one readily accessible to interested scholars.

Materials and categories. All 500 books were initially scanned for general content and reading level and divided into four categories:

1. Picture Books (and Picture Story Books)—publications of less than 100 pages designed to be read to younger children
2. Folk Literature—books of myths, legends, and folk tales
3. Fantasy—science fiction and works involving talking animals and animated machines
4. Realistic Fiction

Excluded from the study were books of drama and poetry, obvious translations, anthologies and collections, books intended for junior and senior high school students, and non-fiction.

After the cards in each category had been counted and the percentages calculated, twenty books were selected by random sampling procedure, a proportionate number being drawn from each category. The results are indicated in table 1. Approximately half were intended for children between kindergarten and second or third grade, half for children from third to sixth grade.

The three categories of folk literature, fantasy, and realistic fiction are literary genres. The fourth, however, is merely a publishing format utilized in this study in order to insure that books for younger children be included in, but not dominate,

TABLE 1
INITIAL CATEGORIZATION OF SAMPLE ITEMS

Category	No. of Items
Folk literature	1
Fantasy	5
Realistic fiction	5
Picture book format	9
Total	20

the sample. Consequently, after the sample books had been drawn from the four categories, the titles in picture book format were redistributed in accordance with their proper literary genres (see table 2).

TABLE 2
FINAL CATEGORIZATION OF SAMPLE ITEMS

Category	No. of Items
Folk literature	5
Fantasy	8
Realistic fiction	7
Total	20

The author and title (in English translation), classification, and grade level of each of the twenty sample items are listed in table 3.

The analytical instrument. Though the twenty books were carefully analyzed for literary content utilizing the traditional elements of setting, plot, characterization, theme, and style, the step most significant for present purposes is to identify the values they express. To this end, and in lieu of a more appropriate instrument, Louis Rath's method of identification was employed. Rath's theory focuses on the processes of valuing rather than on the "particular value outcomes of any one person's experience"

TABLE 3
SAMPLE ITEMS

Classification	Grade
Folk literature	
Imanishi, <i>Yata crow</i> (pb)	K-3
Nakamura, <i>Beaver star</i> (pb)	1-6
Saigō, <i>Duck catcher Gonbe</i> (pb)	K-3
Sakamoto and Nakaba, <i>Serpent of Yamata</i>	2-6
Yoshizawa, <i>Long ago badger times</i> (pb)	K-3
Fantasy	
Aman, <i>Taxi, the color of the sky</i>	2-4
Furuta, <i>Paper robot</i> (pb)	K-3
Kishida, <i>Jiojio's birthday</i> (pb)	K-3
Ōishi, <i>The necklace that disappeared</i> (pb)	K-3
Satō, <i>General Baby went to sea</i>	1-4
Tani, <i>The elephant that shrank</i> (pb)	K-3
Yamanaka, <i>Village with goblins</i>	4-6
Yamanaka, <i>The man who made ghosts</i>	4-6
Realistic fiction	
Furuta, <i>Friends of mole meadow</i>	2-4
Kawaguchi, <i>Wipe your tears, Monta</i>	4-6
Kishi, <i>Tatsu the charcoal maker</i>	4-6
Matsui, <i>Four-eyed Happy</i>	4-6
Ōishi, <i>Good morning, Dai-chan</i>	3-5
Takashi, <i>Monkeys of the north</i> (pb)	1-6
Teramura, <i>The other country</i>	3-5

NOTE: The parenthesized symbol "pb" identifies an item as one in picture book format.

(1966, p. 28). For Raths, "valuing" comprehends a total of three processes and seven criteria organized in the following combinations: *choosing*, performed: (1) freely, (2) from alternatives, and (3) after thoughtful consideration of the consequences of each alternative; *prizing*, which entails: (4) cherishing, that is, being happy with the choice, and (5) being willing to affirm the choice publicly; and *acting*, which involves not only: (6) doing

something with the choice, but also doing so (7) repeatedly, in some pattern of life (1966, p. 30).

Results of the combined valuing processes are called "values." Where the attitudes and beliefs of characters in the books meet some but not all the criteria for recognition of a value, they are recorded as "value indicators." Value indicators, according to Raths (1966, p. 30), are those "expressions which approach values, but which do not meet all of the criteria," expressions such as purposes, aspirations, beliefs, and attitudes. They "could indicate the presence of a value," but "are different from values" (1966, p. 30).

In making a content analysis for all the values and value indicators in the sample books, particular attention was devoted to the value of cooperation. A careful distinction was drawn between cooperation that is essentially a matter of conforming to authority and cooperation expressed in the form of working together voluntarily for a common and usually altruistic end. Cooperation was identified as equally distinct from blind loyalty or obedience to authority and from the fierce independence of total self-sufficiency. It involves recognition of the limits of an individual's power and is expressed in willingness to give or receive help in order to achieve a common goal.

FINDINGS ON COOPERATION

Folk literature. The value of cooperation is conspicuously absent in the folk literature sample. Only once is there an instance of cooperation as a value indicator. In the Japanese version of an American Indian myth (Nakamura 1969), the relationship between the noble youth Otolap and his guardian spirit, Beaver, appears to be a cooperative one as they fight the evil Reindeer to bring peace and plenty back to the tribe. The relationship, however, is not a voluntary one (the first of Raths's seven criteria); it is ordained by the Great Spirit. The relationship between Beaver and the boy is vital, for they do work toward a common goal of benefit to others, but the vertical bonds take

precedence. The primary relationship of each is obedience to and fulfilment of the will of the Great Spirit.

In the remaining books of this category, the horizontal relationship of cooperation fails to appear. Simple Gosakudon never questions the instructions of landlord Shoemon in the folk tale *Long ago badger times* (Yoshizawa 1969). In the hilarious tall tale of *Duck catcher Gonbe* (Saigō 1968), the hero serves dutifully as apprentice with characteristically feudal docility until quixotic winds blow him into the sky. Punishment is swift and dire to all who fail to pay due allegiance to the Heavenly God in the well-written version of familiar myths from the *Kojiki* entitled *Serpent of Yamata* (Sakamoto and Nakaba 1970). In *Yata crow* (Imanishi 1969), a poorly told version of the myth of Prince Kanyama who “founded the Empire of Japan,” loyalty to his brother Isse no Mikoto includes revenge on his killer Nagasunehiko. These examples show that the traditional Japanese vertical relationship is reinforced in book after book.

The most common values found in the folk literature samples are courage, cleverness, loyalty, and cultural pride.

Fantasy. In the majority of books from the fantasy category, cooperation appears as desirable. Six of the eight fantasy books promote cooperation. In five of the six, it appears as a value indicator, in one as a value.

In *The man who made ghosts* (Yamanaka 1970), a science fiction work that combines ghost story and murder mystery, cooperation emerges as a full-fledged value. The book begins with a traditional structure of human relationships, in this case pupil, teacher, principal, and school board. It concludes with an unorthodox, refreshingly free and easy relationship between Ichimatsu, the class dunce, and Mr. Shimamura, the fourth-grade teacher, a relationship that leads to the cooperative solution of a murder mystery and pokes fun at pompous authority.

As a value indicator, cooperation appears in five fantasies. In *General Baby went to sea* (Satō 1968), the infant-hero Tat-chun

speaks both animal and machine language and is thus able to tame the rambunctious half-power shovel/half-dinosaur creature with the help of his friends, Flying Squirrel and Clock. Cooperation is evident when the self-centered dinosaur, after thoughtful consideration, voluntarily goes to rescue Tat-chun from drowning. Inasmuch as the dinosaur loses his life in saving the lad, the cooperative act cannot be repeated. Hence it is not classified here as a value.

In *Village with goblins* (Yamanaka 1969), a modern fourth grade city boy goes to the mountains for the holidays, falls over a cliff chasing a gold beetle, and finds himself back in feudal times. Cooperation occurs when Ichirō leads the village refugees to safety from the armored warriors, and helps and is aided in turn by the forest children. The emphasis is on his exploits, however, rather than on any cooperation he chooses to render. There is no thoughtful consideration or evidence of prizing cooperation as a value.

In *Paper robot* (Furuta 1970), two kindergarten children, Takeshi and Yōko, work together to make a robot out of cardboard, but the robot turns out to be an ungrateful, disobedient, willful creature. By the end of the story, however, it is the robot who freely chooses to cooperate, who proudly affirms his belief in cooperation, and who cooperates to the end by saving a child's life at the cost of his own. Had he been able to repeat the act, cooperation would have been listed as a full-fledged value.

In *The elephant that shrank* (Tani 1970), cooperation is registered as a value indicator because, though the changed and humbled elephant, Bobby, works under no orders from any authority to help the mice against their enemies, it is the value of kindness that is cherished and affirmed rather than cooperation.

Plain to see in *Jiojio's birthday* (Kishida 1970), a story about a spoiled and sweet-toothed lion who orders a birthday feast for himself, is the cooperation of the little animals. Their motivation, however, is fear for their lives. They neither possess any alter-

native nor affirm before others the significance of their acts. Cooperation emerges, therefore, not as a value but as a value indicator.

In the fantasy sample, loyalty or obedience to a superior appears once as a value and once as a value indicator. There is growing evidence of a preference for voluntary horizontal relationships rather than predetermined vertical relationships.

The most common values found in the fantasy category are kindness, honesty, responsibility, and resourcefulness.

Realistic fiction. None of the realistic fiction books recommend loyalty to a superior, allegiance, or blind obedience. Authority is questioned and even, on occasion, defied. In four of the seven books, cooperation occurs as a value. There are no books in the sample that do not contain some evidence of cooperation.

In *Tatsu the charcoal maker* (Kishi 1971), old Tatsu treats his wife as a teammate rather than a domestic slave (a form of treatment not uncommon in the traditional vertical concept of marriage before the Pacific War). In one isolated incident between the wars, he works with fellow charcoal makers to protest unjust taxes, and is accused of being a troublemaker and a communist. He does not repeat the performance. Accordingly, cooperation emerges only as a value indicator. The outstanding characteristic of this simple man of the mountains is his strong sense of independence.

In *Wipe your tears, Monta* (Kawaguchi 1968), a lengthy story about a fifth-grade orphan boy from the country and his maturing experience in a Christian orphanage and school in town, cooperation is clearly identifiable as a value because Monta repeatedly chooses to work with others toward a common purpose in contrast to his fellow orphan, Gorō, who believes in working alone. The conclusion, where Gorō changes his mind, retraces his steps, and joins Monta and his friends in a common cause, reveals the author's emphasis on cooperation rather than independence.

Cooperation is seen in the behavior of the village children and their schoolmaster who, in the beautifully illustrated ecological story *Monkeys of the north* (Takashi 1971), work together for and with the monkeys to enable them to survive a particularly bitter winter. The villagers who set out to hunt down and destroy the vicious wild dogs that threaten the monkeys can also be regarded as cooperating in a common purpose. The teacher and children clearly volunteer, affirm their choice, and act consistently in feeding the starving monkeys throughout the long cold months. Cooperation and compassion alike appear as unmistakable values.

Four-eyed Happy (Matsui 1970), the longest and most involved of the twenty books in the sample, treats of four fourth-grade children and their parents. They come from four different socio-economic levels representing different aspects of the competitive automobile industry. On the highest level is an international executive, on the lowest an unskilled worker in the plant. Cooperation is identified as a value because both Yuri and her father choose to cooperate with others (at some cost to themselves), both prize the "friendly strength" of cooperation, and both act more than once to demonstrate it. Yuri's cooperation, however, is limited to other children and excludes the adults. Her father's cooperation excludes the boss. The horizontal relationship is set clearly in opposition to the vertical.

In the hilarious tale of irrepressible ten-year-old Dai-chan, constantly in and out of mischief, cooperation is unplanned and spontaneous on the rare occasions the hero works with others. The elements of thoughtful consideration and affirmation are lacking. Cooperation is present as a value indicator, then, rather than as a value in *Good morning, Dai-chan* (Ōishi 1968b).

The most extensive example of cooperation as a value is in *Friends of mole meadow* (Furuta 1968), a story about four third-graders who protest the destruction of the hills and meadows where they play to make room for a new housing development. The children repeatedly choose to work with one another, with

other children, and with other adults toward a specific goal. They prize their ability to work harmoniously with each other. They succeed collectively in accomplishing their objectives, even at the cost of defying their parents, teachers, the school principal, and City Hall. Such a revolutionary stance vis-à-vis authority is a far cry from the unquestioning blind obedience of the past. Part of it stems from the attitude that even children have rights and should be heard, part from a spirit of independence that refuses to bow to authority.

In *The other country* (Teramura 1971), a story with a weak plot about a boy who sees a cheetah nobody else can see, cooperation is registered as a value indicator because Hiroshi chooses cooperation only in the epilogue when it is no longer possible to affirm or repeat his choice. In the body of the book he had chosen for the value of independence. As the story progresses, however, his mother's rudeness toward the eye doctor, policeman, and even her own husband reveal the breakdown of conventional social attitudes of respect.

CONCLUSIONS

General observations. A preliminary review of the history and development of Japanese children's literature prepared the writer for the wide variety of literary content and quality found in books for children of elementary school age in Japan today. Contemporary literature reveals a society that is growing, changing, questioning old values and authority, and also criticizing new ones.

Values reflected in the literature generally seem more convergent with current American values than divergent from them. Cultural differences are more apparent in customs and attitudes than in values.

Literary analysis suggests, however, that whether the values an author intends to emphasize are in fact communicated depends on the success of the book with children. Even the most worthwhile values will be overlooked in a book the children

reject by reason of unconvincing characters, inconclusive plot, or unappealing style.

Content analysis further reveals that values vary markedly from genre to genre.

Specific values. In the *folk literature* sample, the most frequently found values of courage and cleverness are typical of myths and folk tales around the world. Cultural pride, frequently encountered in the sample, is a familiar aspect of the traditional literature of all people. The North American Indian tale with its unique belief in a Great Spirit offers an interesting contrast to the Japanese *Duck catcher Gonbe* with its reliance on the popular oriental belief in a quixotic fate. The most striking contrast, however, occurs in two books that utilize the same source, the ancient *Kojiki*. One writer praises the "peaceful" nature of Japanese myths in contrast to the wars of Greek and Roman mythology; the other extols revenge. Both affirm their cultural heritage, but use folk literature to advance diametrically opposed themes. These examples illustrate how folk literature can be used for intercultural understanding or for ultranationalistic purposes.

Among the common values found in the *fantasy* sample, kindness, honesty, and responsibility emerge as universal values. Belief in the supernatural or magical lead the list of cultural values. Closer study of some of the other values reveals several interesting trends. The virtues of resourcefulness or usefulness are employed to encourage self-reliance in one book, cooperation in another. Fairness, cooperation, scientific logic, and respect for human life appear as new values in contrast to the more traditional concept of authority. Self-sacrifice, which lay at the heart of feudal loyalty, is still evident in the value indicator of selflessness, but is now motivated by compassion or gratitude rather than duty to one's lord.

Among the common values found in the *realistic fiction* sample, the universal values of kindness, honesty, responsibility, and

resourcefulness reappear. Changing societal values and attitudes, however, are reflected in the concern for ecology and the common good as well as in the frequency with which cooperation and independence emerge as values. Righteous indignation, presented as the topic of a Christian sermon, shows the acceptance of a western value in what has been termed "the spiritual vacuum" of postwar Japan. Anti-war sentiment is a frequent value indicator in these books written in the late sixties.

Inasmuch as folk literature derives its values from the past, it is not surprising to find the democratic concept of cooperation referred to more frequently in fantasy or to find its most extensive application in realistic fiction. What is surprising in the realistic fiction is the open rebellion and resistance to authority, as when children defy their teachers or parents, or when a wife argues with her husband. The type of cooperation found where children work together despite their parents or where workers unite against their boss raises the question, however, whether such horizontal relationships are in essence democratic or derive from some other ideology.

This study of contemporary Japanese children's literature has been of an exploratory nature, limited in time-span and scope, and hence only suggestive of direction. The writer hopes it may lead others to undertake more extensive investigations that will yield findings of greater import.

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