

## Pursuing the Depths of Language: In Memoriam Satake Akihiro

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On the First of July, 2008, Satake Akihiro 佐竹昭廣, Professor Emeritus of Kyoto University and the National Institute of Japanese Literature, and Member of the Toyo Bunko Board of Councilors passed away at the age of eighty.

While mourning the passing of this erudite leader in the field of Japanese Language and Literature, we can rest assured that Professor Satake's brilliant contributions to the field will live on. Born in Tokyo in 1927, Satake Akihiro entered the Kyoto University Department of Letters in 1948 after graduating from the former Tokyo Higher School. Having completed his undergraduate studies in 1952, he continued on as a graduate student at the university until his appointment in 1957 to the faculty of Gakushūin University as a lecturer and then assistant professor. In 1960, he returned to Kyoto University in the capacity of assistant professor, then as full professor (1973), teaching there until 1985. From there, he went to teach at Seijō University and then served as head of the National Institute of Japanese Literature between 1993 and 1997. In 1994 he was awarded the Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon by the Emperor for his outstanding contributions to scholarship.

Professor Satake's scholarly debut actually occurred in 1946, while still a high school student, with an article in the journal *Bungaku* 文學 (Vol. 14, No. 5) entitled “*Man'yōshū tanka ji-amari kō*” 萬葉集短歌字餘考 [Some Thoughts on *ji-amari* 字餘 in the *tanka* 短歌 of the *Man'yōshū* 萬葉集]. The article concluded that *tanka* with more syllables in a line than the standard 5-7-5-7-7 pattern allowed did nonetheless exhibit a fixed rule; namely, that the verse in question would without exception contain an independent syllable consisting of a vowel, either a, i, u or o. Needless to say, the explanation of such an anomaly, called *ji-amari* 字餘<sup>り</sup>, was not only an epoch-making find in the over 1000-year history of research on the *Man'yōshū* itself, but also marked the discovery of a fundamental feature of the Japanese language during ancient times. The fact this discov-

ering was made by an eighteen-year-old high school student stunned the academic world. The discovery led to major advances in deciphering the poetry of the *Man'yōshū*.

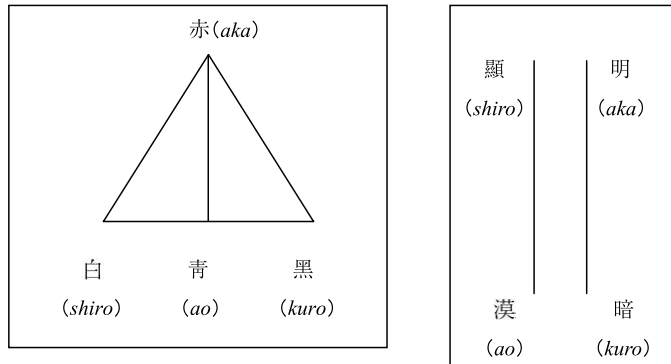
One major characteristic of the *Man'yōshū* is that it was compiled before the development of *kana*-script, and the poetry was recorded phonetically using Chinese characters to represent the sounds of Japanese. Over the long historical transmission of texts of the collection, this cumbersome method of transcription resulted in distortion of the original text. The consequent difficulties involved in reading and understanding the poetry has puzzled and vexed scholars for centuries, resulting in verses that remain enigmatic to the present day and many others that seemed decipherable, but were misread. Professor Satake's discovery of the "*ji-amari* principle" made it possible to read the poetry more accurately than ever before and unravel much more of its true meaning. The principle was found to be applicable to verses that did not at first seem to be subject to it, and this resulted in revised readings of those verses and allowed for a deeper level of textual criticism.

This brought about great strides in textual criticism and the deciphering of verse. Professor Satake then sought to perfect his method of textual criticism through an extensive reinvestigation of the extant sources, resulting in the publication in 1994 of *Kōhon Man'yōshū shin zōho ban* 校本萬葉集新增補版, a revised and expanded version of a *Man'yōshū* variorum under his executive editorship. After further revisions and additions, this version has become the fundamental authoritative text for the study of the *Man'yōshū*.

From the time of his epoch-making first article, Professor Satake had always been interested in methodologies developed in other disciplines, such as bibliography, linguistics, psychology, and cultural anthropology, and their potential for developing a fresh approach to reading *Man'yōshū* poetry. This resulted in the accumulation of a great body of research, including the most authoritative work to date on the names of colors in ancient Japanese, "Kodai Nihon-go ni okeru shikimei no seikaku" 古代日本語における色名の性格, which was later reprinted in *Man'yōshū nukigaki* 萬葉集抜書 [Excerpts from the *Man'yōshū*] (1980). In this brilliant piece of research, Professor Satake argued that most color names had been derived from methods of preparing dyes, that these names were used metaphorically for the resulting pigments and that there were four pure, primary colors: *aka* 赤 (red), *shiro* 白 (white), *kuro* 黒 (black), and *ao* 青 (blue), which, incidentally, are the only color names that are declinable

adjectives in Japanese.

Another amazing discovery was that the names of these same four colors also refer to perceptions of light: *aka* the sound for red is also written 明 and means bright, *shiro* the sound for white is also written 顯 and means clear, *kuro* the sound for black is also written 暗 and means dark, and *ao* the sound for blue is also written 漠 and means opaque.



These facts correspond to the case in ancient Greece, where, for example, there were a few pure, primary colors, whose names also described perceptions of light. Most other colors were expressed by way of analogy to other phenomena. This suggested to the author that there could have been a human evolutionary development from perceptions of the quality of light to a more concrete sense of color.

Such new findings about the ancient Japanese language, which greatly contributed to the study of comparative language and culture, led Professor Satake to an examination of the interrelationship between vocabulary structure and patterns of thought, which was published in 1956 as “Goi no kōzō to shikō no keitai” 語彙の構造と思考の形態 and reprinted in *Man'yōshū nukigaki*. In this study, he turned his attention to both the conflicts in meaning as well as complementary nature of the four colors (perceptions of light), and indicated that together they formed a single set. In terms of color, *aka* and *kuro* (red and black), *aka* and *shiro* (red and white), and *kuro* and *shiro* (black and white) stand in opposition to one another, and *ao* (blue) occupies an intermediate position between *kuro* and *shiro*, but and in terms of the perception of the quality of light, *aka* and *kuro* (bright and dark) and *shiro* and *ao* (clear and opaque) also form contrasting relationships, creating a dual structure.

These examples appear to have important international ramifications in the study of structural linguistics in that they clarify and provide

concrete examples of vocabulary and meaning found in ancient Japanese. The presentation of these clear examples as part of an exemplary study in semantics thereafter clearly exerted tremendous influence on the fields of Japanese language and literature.

Moreover, Professor Satake's research not only shows how the lexical structure of color names reflects the inner workings of the ancient Japanese mind, but also indicates it has a determining effect, and as a result indicates that the structure of vocabulary is intimately and inevitably related to patterns of human thought. In other words, this has also become the theoretical basis for the view that the study of language, or linguistics, can become the study of the human mind in the form of the study of literature, and conversely, the study of literature must be based on linguistics. Thus the study of literature is seen as linked to the study of the language. By consistently adopting this scientific, rational approach, the field of literature, which has tended toward excessive subjectivity in the form of impressionistic criticism and expressions of sentiment and advocacy, can now lay claim to and embrace an objective methodology. Certainly, such a radical scholarly understanding means a sharp departure from the endless search of historical evidence and bibliographic inquiry deriving from a researcher's need for self-satisfaction.

To quote the phrases used in Professor Satake's work on textual interpretation "Kunko no Gaku" 訓詁の學 (1969), reprinted in *Man'yōshū nukigaki*, we are talking here of "linguistic research as part of the human sciences" and "this is the human science that treats language as its main source material." In his pursuit of language, he discovered in its depths the *kokoro*, which may be translated as mind, spirit or true meaning, of human beings. It was this same methodological consciousness that enabled him to further his pursuits within the study of language and literature.

In this regard, he made three different attempts at a modern translation and comprehensive annotation of the *Man'yōshū* resulting in the *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 日本古典文學全集 (1971–1975), the *Kanyaku Nihon no koten* 完譯日本の古典 (1982–1987), and the *Shin-Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 新日本古典文學大系 (1999–2003) editions. Related research on the collection can be found in his *Man'yōshū nukigaki* 萬葉集拔書 [Excerpts from the *Man'yōshū*] (1980), which received the Kadokawa Minayoshi Prize in 1981, and *Man'yōshū saidoku* 萬葉集再讀 [Re-reading the *Man'yōshū*] (2003). Secondly, his application of semantics to nearly all aspects of the Japanese language continued for over 20 years and culminated in the widely acclaimed *Iwanami kogo jiten* 岩波古語辭典 [Iwanami Dictionary of

Classical Japanese] (1974). Other important studies can be found in *Kogo zōtan* 古語雑談 [Conversations about Classical Japanese] (1986).

Professor Satake's pioneering semantics-oriented approach to literature, which had begun with interest in the *Man'yōshū*, then spread to other works and historical periods. One example would be Professor Satake's study of the turbulent late-medieval period, *Gekokujō no bungaku* 下剋上の文學 [Literature of Upheaval] (1967), which focused on the main character of the fairy tale (*otogizōshi* お伽草子) *Monokusa Tarō* as the embodiment of the notion of "nosa," which combines "a passive lassitude with an active brazenness." He saw an overflowing vitality in those *nosa-mono*, who are conventionally considered as anti-social shirkers, and he also argued this trait was the "energy of a chaotic age." He also suggested that *nosa* could be understood as the concept integrating Monokusa Tarō's contradictory personality: "mame" (diligent and trustworthy) vs. "monokusa" (indolent). Satake's startlingly innovative conceptions of "literature of upheaval" and "energy of a chaotic age" also brought about upheaval in the field of medieval Japanese literature and overwhelmingly influenced research trends from that time on.

Another stunning contribution came in his direct application of semantic analysis to the genre of orally transmitted folk tales, known as *minwa* 民話, in his *Minwa no shisō* 民話の思想 [The Intellectual Aspects of Folk Tales] (1973). There Professor Satake focused on the typical main character found in the genre, an honest, forthright fellow, whom he called a *mataudo*, a noun stemming from the adjective *matashi* or *matai*, which describes the main character's personal qualities. In terms of semantics, Professor Satake argued that the word *matashi* can be interpreted to mean honest, humble and good, but also weak, assiduous and stupid, and he clarified the characters, motifs and plots appearing in *minwa*. From these he extracted the ways of thinking, worldviews and values of Japanese people, which had been formed within a sphere of literature that had originated among the common people and had not been the work of self-conscious authorship.

Thereafter, Professor Satake's interests spread further, extending into each and every genre and period of Japanese literature. Exercising his comprehensive knowledge and extraordinary insights into Japanese literature and armed with a firm methodological consciousness, he explored and collected primary sources and let his intellect soared freely among works and authors as diverse as the *Hōjōki*, Ihara Saikaku, Motoori Norinaga, Natsume Sōseki, Nagai Kafū and more.

In addition to such ground-breaking achievements in research, Professor Satake was also responsible for editing the award-winning six-volume series *Ima wa mukashi mukashi wa ima* いまは昔 むかしは今 [Then as Now, Now as Then] (1989–1999), which contains elaborately illustrated stories that transcend historical, regional and genre boundaries, with the purpose of allowing children to experience the richness of Japanese culture. The book received the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award in 1989.

Regrettably, just as he was embarking on his long awaited foray into the world of modern literature, he suddenly passed away, having completed his final essay, entitled “Kōchi kenbun ki’ shō: Futsukoku Masse naru mono” 『高知見聞記』抄：佛國マッセなる者 [Excerpts from *Things Seen and Heard in Kōchi: The Frenchman Masse*], which appeared in *Bungaku* 文學 Vol. 8, No. 5 (2007), and leaving his shocked and saddened students the task of publishing his complete works.

In addition to his extensive career in research and publishing, Professor Satake always found time for his students, many of whom became scholars in their own right. Professor Satake also inspired and encouraged, both directly and indirectly, the intellectual development of a significant number of other leading scholars.

He also served as a central figure in the editing of Iwanami’s new series of classical Japanese works, the *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 新日本古典文學大系, its encyclopedia of classical literature, the *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten* 日本古典文學大事典, and its lecture series on Japanese literature and Buddhism, *Iwanami kōza: Nihon bungaku to Bukkyō* 岩波講座 日本文學と佛教, etc.

His energetic efforts to find and then introduce newly discovered primary sources is exemplified by his mobilization of Kyoto University’s Japanese Language and Literature Department in the bibliographical survey of the archives of the Manshu-in Temple, which resulted in a large body of new source material being introduced to the scholarly world, and which won the 1981 Kyoto Shimbun Cultural Award.

Such activities resulted in large collections of reports and introductions published by Kyoto University as *Kyōto Daigaku kokugo kokubun shiryō sōsho* 京都大學國語國文資料叢書 [Kyoto University, Department of Japanese Language and Literature’s Collection of Primary Source Materials], the National Institute of Japanese Literature as *Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan eiin sōsho* 國文學研究資料館影印叢書 [National Institute of Japanese Literature’s Collection of Photographic Reproductions], and the Toyo Bunko as *Iwasaki bunko kichōsho shoshi kaidai* 岩崎文庫貴重書書誌解題

[Bibliographical Introduction to the Toyo Bunko's Iwasaki Rare Book Collection].

In the course of Professor Satake's long scholarly career, he clarified many of the fundamentals of the *kokoro* of the Japanese people. And in that process, he also established a new methodology for literary study and confirmed its validity and potential. These were his greatest contributions to the study of Japanese literature.

Not only will the light of Professor Satake's remarkable achievements continue to shine brightly over the scholarly world, but his stream of thought will long fill the academic fields with intellectual nourishment.

Therefore, while deeply mourning the loss of this pioneer in the study of the Japanese *kokoro* and its literary expression, we pledge that his dedication and genius will continue to inspire us in completing the important work he has left behind.

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