

# | Introduction

## Beata Kubiak Ho-Chi, Jędrzej Greń

The texts contained in this volume constitute the second part of the publication *Unique or Universal? Japan and its Contribution to World Civilization*. They were presented at the international conference under the same title, organized by the Chair of Japanese Studies at the University of Warsaw on October 23–25, 2019. The conference, held to commemorate the 100 years of Japanese Studies at the University of Warsaw and to celebrate the centenary of establishing diplomatic relations between Poland and Japan, has been described in detail in the Introduction to the first volume of this publication.<sup>1</sup>

This second volume consists of two parts. Part I: *Literature and Language* begins with a chapter by Katarzyna Sonnenberg-Musiał, who examines selected short stories by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the tension between the historical and the universal as expressed by this master of Taishō period literature. The author demonstrates that although Akutagawa, who drew extensively from Western literature, may have believed in its universality, the antithetical structure of some of his works can be hard to understand for readers from other cultural circles.

In the second chapter, Inoue Takashi discusses relationships between the unique and the universal in the works of another famous Japanese writer – novelist and playwright Mishima Yukio. The author analyzes several of Mishima's early novels as well as his masterpiece, the tetralogy

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<sup>1</sup> See B. Kubiak Ho-Chi, J. Greń, "Introduction," [in:] *Unique or Universal? Japan and Its Contribution to World Civilization. 100 Years of Japanese Studies at the University of Warsaw*, eds. B. Kubiak Ho-Chi, J. Greń, vol. 1, University of Warsaw Press, Warsaw 2023, pp. 15–20.

*The Sea of Fertility*, which he considers the writer's most unique yet universal work.

Next, Matthew Königsberg examines whether Mizumura Minae's novel *Shishōsetsu from left to right* does indeed belong to the unique Japanese genre of *shishōsetsu* or 'I-novels,' or whether it rather represents an example of realist, postmodernist literature.

Representing research on classical Japanese literature, the text by Iwona Kordzińska-Nawrocka offers a reconstruction of the literary portrait of Kiritsubo in *The Tale of Genji* as an illustration of the aesthetic concept of *mono no aware*.

Agata Bice in her chapter describes the steadily-growing popularity of Japanese literature in the West. She focuses on translations into English, presenting related statistical data and examining the question of uniqueness and universality of Japanese literature which, undoubtedly, is gaining its global audience.

Anna Zalewska's paper focuses on Japanese poetry. She discusses the works of an early twentieth-century Japanese poet Yosano Akiko, who was often criticized by fellow poets and literary critics for her 'scandalous' language. The author of the chapter examines Yosano's language and the peculiarity of the versification she used.

Last but not least, the first part of the volume introduces a chapter by Arkadiusz Jabłoński, who investigates the nominal elements of the Japanese language, which are often neglected in the grammatical descriptions of the language.

Part II: *Theater and Film* consists of subsequent four chapters. The eighth chapter, by Jadwiga Rodowicz-Czechowska, introduces the issue of the often-neglected works of contemporary *nō* texts (*shinsakunō*), which refers to plays written from the beginning of Meiji Era until today. The author examines how the format of *nō* offers ways of expression of appeasement and reconciliation which may be universally needed.

In the ninth chapter, Iga Rutkowska discusses one of the most famous kabuki plays – *Kanadehon chūshingura* [*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*] – to shed new light on the uniqueness of Japanese culture juxtaposed with the universal value emerging from the play.

Hiranoi Chieko in the tenth chapter examines how *nō* theater influenced Kurosawa Akira in his adaptations of Shakespearean plays. The famous director used various artistic tools which have originated in *nō* and which made his movies unique in the world-universal context of adaptations of the Bard's oeuvre.

The eleventh chapter by Sean O'Reilly focuses on depictions of food-related artistic visions of time travel and continuity in recent Japanese cinema. The author dubs the phenomenon "culinary continuity" and examines the use of unique Japanese flavors not only as a means to attract audiences to cinemas, but also as a tool for reimagining and de-villainizing the country's history.

The concepts of 'unique' and 'universal' have served in this publication as a starting point for reflecting on Japanese culture and how it intermingles with other cultures. We hope that the papers included in both volumes have shown explicitly that numerous areas of Japanese culture constitute a great and inseparable part of our contemporary transcultural world.