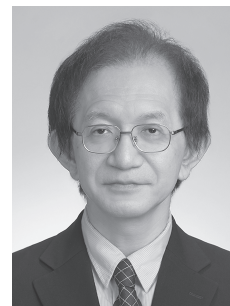


***Japan Academy Prize to:***

Hiroshi ANDO  
Emeritus Professor, The University of Tokyo  
Visiting Professor, The Open University of Japan

for *Dazai Osamu: The Work and Life*



***Outline of the work:***

In *Dazai Osamu: The Work and Life* (The University of Tokyo Press, 2021), the author, Prof. Hiroshi Ando, appreciates the uniqueness of Dazai's "verbose and too self-conscious" narrative style, and analyzes the process through which his peculiar self-image and forms of expression – his "dramatized self-presentation" – were conceived and developed. The author achieves this by dividing Dazai's novel-writing career into four periods, taking up important works from each in turn.

"Part I: The Cradle" discusses Dazai's childhood and upbringing, tracing the ascent of his landowning family, the Tsushimas, up the social ladder. In his hometown of Tsugaru, the adolescent Dazai published juvenilia in local literary magazines. In these sketches, Dazai is driven by his own sense of guilt to denounce the sinful "blood of debauchery" running in the landowning class. According to the author of the book, Dazai's effort in this direction ended in failure, and he moved on to thematize the despair and downfall of his own clan.

"Part II: The Landscape of *The Final Years*" focuses on the said novel collection (published in 1936), which includes Dazai's works subsequent to his relocation to Tokyo. There, following a failed suicide attempt with a woman and a period of drug addiction, he became a professional author. Dazai's expulsion from his birth family and his departure from leftist activities, however, plunged him into an identity crisis. His destroyed self-esteem, combined with his novelistic theme of downfall, led him to be obsessed with the representation of death as is apparent in *The Final Years*, and to woefully poeticize it as one who has lost his home.

"Part III: The Middle Years" discusses Dazai's works from the late 1930s through the early 1940s, when he was in his 30s and trying to write while struggling to rebuild his life after his divorce and remarriage. Dazai's novels during this period brought to the fore his awareness of sin, as he examined himself in perspective of the chasm that lay between him and his family, and attempted to justify himself through telling his narratives. The author uncovers Dazai's psychological landscape as such through an analysis of the collections *On Love and Beauty* and *Schoolgirl* (1939) and *Eight Views of Tokyo* (1941).

"Part IV: Through and Beyond the Wars" examines how Dazai's views on war and his experiences during the Sino-Japanese War and World War II figured in his works from 1941 through the postwar period, up until his suicide by drowning in 1948. Dazai came during the war years to conceptualize "the family state", a community of the Japanese people with the imperial family

at its center, as a frame against which his own position in it should be made clear. The author argues that Dazai sought to rebuild within this fictitious frame his spiritual ties to his clan and his hometown. It is reported that Dazai described such a narrative as being born out of the “pathos of distance”, which arises from recognizing the gap between the great and the low, the protector and the protected. This is exemplified in *Tsugaru* (published in November 1944), a novel considered to be the culmination of Dazai’s wartime writings.

However, Dazai’s conceptual framework described above collapsed upon Japan’s defeat, and the “vertical” relationships that supported his wartime narratives lost its validity. Dazai then attempted to create “horizontal” dialogues by positing new binaries, such as the city and the country and men and women. When this vision also failed, he transformed himself into a writer who spoke downfall and despair in the first person. The works produced in this period include *The Setting Sun* (1947) and *No Longer Human* (1948), which are regarded as Dazai’s postwar masterpieces.

This monumental work of criticism includes an introduction, 43 articles, and 48 mini-essays discussing the historical background and other information pertaining to Dazai’s oeuvre. Conducting a thorough review of the dauntingly voluminous existing literature on Dazai, this book adds further depth to it by adopting a still wider cultural and literary perspective. It is outstanding in that, in addition to discussing the themes and sources of Dazai’s novels, it investigates how Dazai’s narratives are structured, why he needed to construct them in such a peculiar manner, and what effect the narratives produce. The author achieves this feat by what may be called a diachronic questioning – that is to say, by conducting a close analysis of the individual works while also tracing the arc of their transformation, and thus successfully illuminates the path of Dazai’s career through the vicissitudes of his life, all the way to his destined end as a man and writer.

Furthermore, instead of discussing these issues as exclusive to Dazai, the author of this book links them to a larger question relevant to the entirety of modern Japanese literature: the question of what narrative style makes the expression of “I” possible. It has been explored already in the author’s previous books such as *Kindai Shosetsu no Hyogen Kiko* (Iwanami Shoten, 2012) and “*Watashi*” *wo Tsukuru* (Iwanami Shinsho, 2015), both of which have received high critical acclaim.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the accomplishments of this book have broken new ground in the study of modern Japanese literature, making it worthy of the Japan Academy Prize.