

One Asia Foundation International Lectures, Fall 2019 Semester

“Humanities General Education: The Asian Community:

The Construction and Transformation of East Asiaology” Lecture Series (16)

Title: Reading “Frog” in Japanese Literature History from the View of Critical Animal Studies

For the 16th lecture, we invite Masashi Saito, Associate Professor of the Department of Japanese Language and Literature at Chinese Culture University as our speaker. From the aspect of “literature, art, and philosophy,” Professor Saito viewed “multicultural phenomena” in “modern media space” and “popular culture” as “representation.” From the aspect of analysis, he classified “academic studies based on critical theory” into the studies of culture and representation. He introduced Mitsuyoshi Numano (沼野充義) (2018)’s argument that “critical animal studies” is a part of the studies of culture and representation. Numano argued that we should “reexamine the symbiosis and sympathy relations between animal and human beings” and we should critically review the bias world view that depreciate animals unilaterally from human beings’ point of view. This method was used in other disciplines when describing the relations between animals and human beings. Although there are publications on culture and representation in Europe, United States, Japan, and Korea, in this lecture Professor Saito focused on “frog” which has not yet studied with this method.

Frog can be seen on unearthed cultural relics in ancient China like painting on silk and bronze mirror and it was painted as an animal living in moon. There were other animals and plants on the bronze mirror and some of bronze mirror was disseminated to Japan. In Japan, frog was viewed as the weak and as patron saint of ancient rice culture or as god's messenger and thus received special curtesy. The descriptions of frog still remain in modern novels.

There are two reading of frog in Japanese. One is the general reading “Kaeru” and the other is the poetic reading “Kawazu.” Ancient dictionary listed five types of frog and frog in moon painted in China’s ancient tomb is considered a contrast with crow in sun. Frog was written in myths and legends in an early Japanese classic “*Kojiki*” (古事記, “Records of Ancient Matters”). In the preface of the *Kokin Wakashū* (古今和歌集, "Collection of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times"), a frog croaking in water was written to contrast with an oriole twittering on the tree. Many Japanese books, like many *chokusen wakashū* (勅撰和歌集), such as the *Gosen Wakashū* (後撰和歌集 Later Collection of Japanese Poems), and the *Ise monogatari* (伊勢物語 Tales of Ise) all use “frog croaking in rice field water” as a theme in poet (Waka).

The usage of frog was also appeared in female literature. In the *Kagerō Nikki* (蜻蛉日記, The Mayfly Diary), which was famous for its telling of jealous story between wife and

concubine, female author wrote a poem masochically about how her husband described her as a frog. In pre-modern times, in the *Chōjū-jinbutsu-giga* (鳥獣人物戯画, literally "Animal-person Caricatures") frog appeared with rabbit and monkey. The painter wrote many scenes with personification approaches and at the end the presence of snake caused the collapse of personification paradise. On the other hand, the *Kokon Chomonjū* (古今著聞集, A Collection of Notable Tales Old and New) appeared thousands of toads and they conflicted and killed each other. In order to stop the conflict, snake was thrown into the battle. However, unlike other peaceful world in scroll, frogs were not afraid of snake and at the end snakes retreated.

In early modern period, “old pond, frog jumps in, sound of water” is one of the most famous Haikairenga written by Matsuo Basho. The sound of frog has changed from frog croaking in the *Kokon Chomonjū* to the sound of a frog leaping into the water. This description of sound is the beauty of Haikai.

As mentioned above, there are various descriptions of frogs, whether peaceful frog in waka, renka, and painting scroll, or aggressive frog in myth, legend, and story. However, the most important work of frog is Haruki Murakami’s “Super-Frog Saves Tokyo.” This short story was one of the story in a collection *after the quake* (神の子どもたちはみな踊る (Kami no Kodomo-tachi wa Mina Odoru), “All God's Children Can Dance”). The six stories in this book were written in response to Japan's 1995 Kobe earthquake and to the 1995 Tokyo gas attacks. It was originally published in a literary magazine *Shincho* (新潮, New Tide) as the last story in a series “after the quake.” The preposterous story depicted a speaking frog fought against earthworm monsters and tried to save the world from Tokyo earthquake. This battle is purely “in imagination.” Though the frog stopped the quake successfully with hero’s assistance, the frog did not gain the full victory and probably lost his life at the end. This story is not based on a peaceful world view in traditional poems but based on bloody world view in legend. The story implied that because the frog did not completely defeated earthworm monsters, subway terrorists’ attacks happened in replace of quake. Nonetheless, this story created a new image of frog. A frog was considered small animal and belittled by human beings (though the frog in Murakami’s story was portrayed as a huge frog) and a frog was used as a metaphor to belittle woman by man in the Heian period. The image of frog transformed from peaceful in ancient times and aggressive in the pre-modern times. In Murakami’s story created a new image of frog as a tragedy hero who sacrificed for the world. At last, professor Saito concluded that human beings should not belittle small animals and should coexist with small animals peacefully.

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