

A Bibliography of Pynchon Scholarship in Japan

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The following bibliography covers mostly the previous decade or so of publications concerning Thomas Pynchon by scholars in Japan. The earliest publication listed is from 1983;^{*} one or two are from 1985–1986, and several are from 1987. Since 1987, interest has surged, probably stemming from the translations of Pynchon's works into Japanese (*V.* in 1979, *The Crying of Lot 49* in 1985, *Slow Learner* in 1988 and *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1995: see below for details). I have tried to be as inclusive as possible; unfortunately, however, the bibliography remains incomplete since a number of small university and college journals are not listed in the library. Also, there have probably been a few papers published recently that have not as yet found their way into the library system. Furthermore, the system here is not fully computerized, so it is difficult to identify, let alone track down, all pertinent articles, especially in my case, since I am not fully proficient in the Japanese language (I daresay a similar disadvantage affects foreign scholars dealing with libraries in the U.S.).^{**} Since I have limited this bibliography to Japan, publications in other Asian countries—notably South Korea, with several active scholars, China and India—are obviously not included.

Readers should be aware of several technical limitations of the bibliography itself. First, since most of these papers are written in Japanese, the translations of some titles may not be entirely accurate. I have worked hard to approximate each author's intention, and when there was doubt, tried to be as literal as possible; however, translation always entails an element of misunderstanding. Second, there is always the risk of error during transcription: Anyone familiar with Pynchon's work knows about the impossibility of eliminating noise and the statistical inevitability of entropy. I have endeavored to minimize the

^{*}For earlier studies, see Yoshiaki Sato, "Pynchon in Japan: A Bibliography," *Pynchon Notes* 8 (1982): 61–62.

^{**}The *Bibliography of English and American Literature in Japan*, compiled by Masaru Ando (Nichigai Assoc.), written in Japanese for Japanese researchers, is a quite valuable resource which helped fill gaps in my research.

problem. Finally, because of my own language difficulties and time constraints, I have not provided summaries of the articles.

In view of my lack in Japanese-language fluency, it might seem impossible for me to offer much commentary on the articles and their writers; however, I have lived and taught in Japan for nearly fifteen years now, and have been active in various literary groups, such as the Kyushu American Literature Society, as a speaker, moderator and even journal editor (for articles written in English). Thus I have learned much about the work and workings of my Japanese colleagues.

Japanese scholars face a number of limitations. First, their research can be incredibly time-consuming because, naturally, they do not read English with the speed or facility of native English speakers. Thus their analyses tend to depend on a few major critical resources. This dependence is exacerbated by the fact that the English reference section of Japanese libraries can be under-resourced in materials and knowledgeable staff. I am fortunate with Seinan Gakuin University's library, but it is exceptional. Another limitation has to do with the practices of the journals: many college journals do not review or reject papers. Given this lack of editorial oversight, a certain amount of carelessness can develop, and writers are not always challenged to think their ideas through. This system does allow many new voices easy access to publication, but some guidance might add more power to those voices.

As for their content, almost all the publications listed here, other than the translations, fall into two main categories: Cross-cultural comparison and conventional critical analysis. The first offers Western Pynchon scholars cultural comparisons and connections they would not normally have access to. The second category of more conventional criticism is, of course, a further expansion of Pynchon studies, and the topics covered offer new research opportunities. Both categories can be of considerable interest because they afford a new perspective on what might be commonplace—either culturally or linguistically—to a Westerner. They also allow a Westerner insight into what Japanese find of interest. They can give a more distant, and thus, perhaps, more objective, outsider's reading of Pynchon's written world.

These studies have another strength as well, though unfortunately mixed with weakness. The Japanese tend to read English very slowly, paying careful attention to each word and making liberal use of the dictionary. This kind of attention is useful and can lead to fine insight; however, since Pynchon often uses offbeat or idiomatic expressions with meanings that are difficult to identify from a list of possible definitions, the result can be a gross misreading.

This brings us to the four main negative points stemming from a relative lack in English linguistic, cultural and literary knowledge. Again, linguistic mistakes are easy to make, especially when dealing with idiomatic expressions in a second language. Next, it is also easy to miss or misconstrue the many references—especially to popular culture—that an outsider would not be familiar with. Third, the non-native reader of English does not normally have the range of background reading his/her Western colleague has, a limitation which oftentimes results in the “discovery” of the obvious or mundane. Finally, Japanese have a distinctive methodology for their research and writing, and it is not so logic-dependent.

The logic problem is not necessarily a flaw. Always striving to reach consensus, the Japanese have a reputation for vagueness (“the devil is in the details”) that is not entirely unmerited. Unfortunately, this tendency can be destructive to focus, development, continuity and coherence, especially for those attempting to write or deliver a presentation in English. Moreover, for a Japanese, to make a point too strongly can seem rude to a fellow Japanese, even more so if the idea is new or idiosyncratic. Be that as it may, vagueness does carry a certain undeniable power that Pynchon himself recognizes and exploits—as in the Nefastis-Box episode in *Lot 49*, where a refusal to explain the communication mechanism of the box explicitly (the sensitive *somehow* gets through) allows for the possibility of its successful operation. I don’t want to push the analogy too far; Oedipa, after all, does not succeed in her attempt. Japanese studying Western culture can be caught between the two worlds and seem to fail in both. Nevertheless, when cross-cultural scholarship is done well and appreciated sensitively, it can create the bridge for a negentropic sharing of information.

Since Japanese conventionally write their names with surname first, I have not inserted commas between Japanese authors’ surnames and given names: thus, “Osterhaus, Frank E.” but “Asada Akira.” I believe all the papers listed below are published in Japanese and not available in English, except for those by Aso Takashi, Richard Harris, Ishiwari Takayoshi, Iwasaki Hiroshi, Nagano Yoshihiro, Nakatani Hitomi, Takada Shuhei, and me. The others have Japanese titles which have been translated for this bibliography.

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Special Issues of Journals

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General

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V.

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