

# Takasugi Ichiro in the “Age of Kaizo-sha”

OTA, Tetsuo

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## Summary

This essay is an abstract of my dissertation, *Takasugi Ichiro in the "Age of Kaizo-sha"*. Takasugi Ichiro (1908~ ) is the author of *Kyokko no Kage ni (Under the Aurora)*, which is now regarded as a Japanese classic. This book is about his experience being detained in Siberia.

Before writing this book, and before he was drafted into the army, Takasugi served as an editor of the monthly magazine, *Bungei (Literature)*, from 1935 to 1943, which was published by Kaizo-sha, a publishing company in Tokyo. The main theme of the dissertation covers Takasugi's activities as an editor of *Bungei*.

When Takasugi became the magazine's editor around 1935, he made an effort to print works connected with Chinese literature. The highlight was to publish letter exchanges between literary figures, right at the same time the Sino-Japanese War began in July 1937. The first one (the June 1937 issue) was between Nakano Shigeharu and Xiao Jun. Nakano was a Japanese poet and novelist who opposed the war. Xiao Jun was a Chinese novelist who had been introduced to the Japanese literary world through recommendation by Lu Xun.

Both anti-Japan movements in China and anti-China feelings in Japan seem to have been on rise in this century. There are a number of factors behind these feelings. But one factor, I believe, is the ignorance of the modern period. So it is important to recognize the history of the relationship between Japan and China. This essay is an attempt to recognize an aspect of the history from the viewpoint of Takasugi's works. Another important work of his during the *Bungei* age was his introduction of contemporary European literature, which belonged to the stream against the war.

Takasugi's works during his time at Kaizo-sha must be part of Japan and China's cultural heritage, which is worth looking back.

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## I.

This essay is an abstract of my dissertation, *Takasugi Ichiro in the "Age of Kaizo-sha"*. Takasugi Ichiro<sup>1)</sup> (1908~) is known to well-read people as the author of *Kyokko no Kage ni (Under the Aurora)*, published in 1950.

Answering the call for military service, he went to China as a soldier in 1944. After the war ended in 1945, the Soviet army detained about 700,000 Japanese soldiers and took them to Siberia for servitude. Takasugi was one of these soldiers. Returning to Japan in 1949, he wrote a memoir, entitled *Kyokko no Kage ni*, about his experiences in Siberia. This book is now considered a Japanese classic, and is still read today. Many former Japanese soldiers wrote books about their detention in Siberia after the war.<sup>2)</sup> Takasugi's book is one of the most outstanding books among them. This is because he found the true nature of the Soviet Union from the inside and wrote it through his experience.

He also wrote *Stalin Taiken (My Stalin Experience, 1990)* and *Ikite Kaerishi Hei no Kioku (Memory of a Soldier Who Went to the War and Returned, 1996)*. In addition to this, he is also known as a translator of children's literature. For example, *Tom's Midnight Garden (1958)* by Philippa Pearce, translated by him, has been a long time best seller in Japan.

Oe Kenzaburo (1935~), the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994, expressed great admiration for Takasugi's works; both for his excellent prose and his translations of children's literature. How had this man, who established such works, lived before the war? Before writing *Under the Aurora*, and before he was drafted into the army, Takasugi had been an editor of a monthly magazine, *Bungei (Literature)* from 1935 to 1943, which was published by Kaizo-sha, a publishing company, in Tokyo. The main theme of my dissertation is not about his time in Siberia as a detainee, but about his activities as an editor of *Bungei*.

During his editorship of *Bungei*, a network of intellectuals was

unintentionally being formed around it. In this point, another theme of my dissertation is to describe the history of the intellectuals from the 1920s to 1945. These intellectuals also played a number of roles in the history of thought after the war in Japan. Therefore, the consideration to the history of the intellectuals before the war is important in studying their contributions in the postwar period.

## II.

Kaizo-sha, established in 1919, was one of the most prestigious publishing companies in Japan during the first-half of the twentieth century. The monthly magazine, *Kaizo (Reconstruction)*, was the most prominent magazine, along with another monthly magazine, *Chuo-Koron*, published by Chuo-Koron-sha, during that time. Both *Kaizo* and *Chuo-Koron* were known as journals carrying articles on politics, literature, culture and contemporary affairs. Kaizo-sha began publishing *Bungei* in 1933; the year Takasugi entered the publishing company. He became an editor of the magazine around 1935, which dealt mainly with literature. Soon he became the Chief Editor.

The Sino-Japanese War began on July 7, 1937. Just before this war, in the June 1937 issue of *Bungei*, letters between Nakano Shigeharu (1902~79) and Xiao Jun (1907~88) were printed. Nakano was a Japanese poet and novelist who opposed the war. Xiao Jun was a Chinese novelist who had been introduced to the Japanese literary world through recommendation by Lu Xun (1881~1936).

Takasugi planned to print these exchanges of letters between literary figures on three separate times. The first one (the June 1937 issue) was between Nakano Shigeharu and Xiao Jun. The second one (the September issue) was between Hisaita Eijiro (1898~1976), a Japanese dramatist, and Kia Yua (1900~95), his Chinese counterpart. These two projects were carried out in *Bungei*. But the third planned project, between Miyamoto Yuriko (1899~1951), a Japanese novelist, and Ding Ling (1904~86), a Chinese novelist, was not carried out because of the expansion of the war. These letters, particularly between

Nakano and Xiao Jun, were not very long. In fact, the contents were mostly a kind of greeting that expressed a sense of solidarity. But in my opinion, the publication of these letters was significant because they were published at the time the Sino-Japanese War broke out.

In the spring of 2005, the anti-Japanese movement in China was exaggeratedly and extensively reported in the Japanese mass media. In Japan, anti-Chinese feelings have been on the rise after the beginning of this century. There are a number of factors behind these feelings, but they occurred partly because of the ignorance of each other in the modern period. For example, most Japanese have forgotten the history of the exchanges between Chinese and Japanese intellectuals. Takasugi's projects, mentioned above, and his other efforts were only one example of these exchanges.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt wrote about "veritable holes of oblivion into which people stumble by accident and without leaving behind them such ordinary traces of former existence as a body and a grave".<sup>3)</sup> The forgetfulness that I mentioned here may not be as serious as Arendt's "holes of oblivion", but I think that "holes of oblivion", which many Japanese people have stumbled into, definitely exist. Japanese people, I feel, should find the important things to remember and fill in the "holes of oblivion" by recognizing the history of the relationship between Japan and many Asian countries.

Here I'd like to mention some of my methods of research in this dissertation. Takasugi wrote several autobiographical books. But the theme of his books is his experience in Siberia; mainly his "Stalin-experience". He wrote various things about his time as an editor, but the descriptions are fragmental.

Tagkasugi is still living today. So, these past several years, I have conducted many personal fact-finding surveys. I wrote his biography concerning the first half of his life using both his own books and information I gained from interviews with him. My dissertation is thus based on the oral history, related by Takasugi himself.

I mention here one example of the oral history results. Takasugi translated several English and Chinese short novels and essays and

printed them in *Bungei*. But he did not name himself as the translator because Yamamoto Sanehiko, the president of Kaizo-sha, prohibited it. But through my conversations with him, I was able to find out which translations were his.

### III.

The contents of this dissertation are as follows:

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Age of *Kaizo*

Chapter 2: Tokyo Teachers' Training College and *Yen-pon*

Chapter 3: Entering Kaizo-sha and Becoming an Editor of *Bungei*

Chapter 4: The Age of Letters Exchanged Between Chinese and  
Japanese Writers

Chapter 5: Life As a Journalist

Chapter 6: Takasugi's Translations of European Novels

Chapter 7: From the Beginning of the Pacific War to the Dissolution of  
Kaizo-sha

The Epilogue: Takasugi Ichiro in Postwar Times

It is quite uncommon to write a dissertation in a biographical format, at least in Japan. But since this dissertation is a kind of biography, I feel I should write a justification for adopting this form. Looking back on ancient history, biography was a prominent form of history-description both in the East as well as in the West. It was probably an important historical genre in modern England.

Hagiwara Nobutoshi (1926~2001), a prominent historian, who had been studying at Oxford University for several years, noticed the significance of biography and wrote several biographies. For example, he wrote biographies on Baba Tatsui (1850~88) and Ernest Satow (1843~1929), a British diplomat and Japanologist. Although I am not as eminent as Hagiwara, I too was motivated to write a biography.<sup>4)</sup>

In Chapter One, I am writing about Takasugi's childhood. He was born in Shizuoka prefecture in 1908. Parallel with this, I am also writing

about the changes in Japanese society after the First World War. Economic growth was a remarkable by-product of the war. And with this growth, the phenomenon of mass society appeared, which was similar to what F. L. Allen (1890~1954) described of the United States in his *Only Yesterday*, published in 1931. Though we can observe this phenomenon in different aspects, one example was that the number of universities and other institutions of higher education grew considerably. This resulted in a vast increase in the number of readers.

Kaizo-sha, the publishing company established by Yamamoto Sanehiko in 1919, grew rapidly in this context. In 1921, Yamamoto invited the British philosopher Bertrand Russell, and in 1922, the physicist Albert Einstein to Japan. The following year, the Great Kanto Earthquake, followed by large-scale fires, destroyed much of the Kanto Region, including Tokyo and Yokohama, with a huge loss of life and property. A few years later, in 1926, Kaizo-sha began its publication of a sixty-three volume series entitled *Gendai Nihon Bungaku Zenshu* (*Selected Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature*). Each book was called a *yen-pon*, which literally means “one-yen-book”. This name came from the fact that the base-fare of a taxi in those days was one yen. The books in this series sold extremely well. Through this success and other enterprises, Kaizo-sha acquired a great reputation and *Kaizo*, the main magazine of Kaizo-sha, grew into a prestigious monthly magazine.

Chapter Two takes up Takasugi’s college life. He entered the Tokyo Teachers’ Training College in 1926 and majored in English literature. He enjoyed watching many plays at *Tsukiji Sho-Gekijo* (Small Theater), the site for the “New Drama Movement” in Japan. This new form of drama was extremely popular at that time. Its leader was Osanai Kaoru (1881~1928). Takasugi went to many of these plays, and through them he became familiar with various kinds of literature.

He also participated in a summer school held by the International Cultural Institute in the summer of 1929, right before the onset of the Great Depression in the fall of that year. There he learned French and found out about Esperanto, which was widely practiced in areas such as

Germany, the Soviet Union, and China. Takasugi began to study it himself and became an Esperantist. It seems that Takasugi has a special linguistic talent as a Japanese. He can read English, French, German, and Esperanto. He also later learned to speak Russian, during his time in Siberia.

After his time in the summer institute, Takasugi became interested in the works of John Dewey (1859~1952), especially those concerned with education. Dewey took a sabbatical leave from Columbia University in school-year 1919-20, and came to Asia. He visited in Japan for a few months, and then went on to China. Dewey observed firsthand the democratic movement in China and comparing it with Japan's case. When Takasugi read Dewey's *Letters from China and Japan*, his eyes were opened because of Dewey's criticism of Japanese democracy.

Entering the Tokyo University of Humanities and Sciences, he majored in pedagogy instead of English literature. In addition, he joined in the private-sector education movement. Because of this, the school authorities, which were quite conservative, expelled him from the university. After staying in his hometown for a while, he began working for Kaizo-sha, passing through bitter competition, in 1933. This was still the age of the Great Depression.

The main topic in Chapter Three is Takasugi's early work in Kaizo-sha. The Japanese Kanto Army began its invasion of Manchuria, in northeast China, on September 18, 1931. Takasugi had become friendly with some Chinese students studying in Japan during his time at the Tokyo Teachers' Training College. Most of them returned home to China after Japan's invasion of their country. Since Takasugi could do nothing about this state of affairs, he felt deeply sad. It was his regret, which I will touch upon in more detail later.

#### IV.

Chapter Four comprises a key part of the dissertation. Yamamoto Sanehiko, Takasugi's boss, had a particular concern with Chinese



affairs, having traveled in China numerous times. Men such as Yamamoto, Asianists in their outlook, were not unusual in pre-war Japan. *Kaizo* carried a wide variety of articles and reports on contemporary China, including essays and novels. Yamamoto's attitude had a great influence on the publication of these works. Essays by Sun Wen, Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Jiang Jieshi, and Mao Tse-Tung were some examples.

In these days, Guo Mo ruo (1892~1978) and Yu Da fu (1896~1945) were influential young leaders in the "New Movement" in literature, which had started in 1917 as the Baihua movement, the vernacular language movement in China. Guo Mo ruo left China in 1927 because of oppression from Chiang Kai-shek's government. In 1937, Yu Da fu visited Japan in order to persuade Guo Mo ruo to return to China with him and fight the invasion of Japanese army. Glancing at the news of Yu Da fu's visiting in Japan, Takasugi immediately visited the hotel at which he was staying. Yu Da fu introduced himself to Takasugi as an avid reader of *Bungei*. They then had a long discussion about various literary topics in the hotel room. Through this meeting, Takasugi sympathized with their cause and voluntarily mediated between the two Chinese literary men.<sup>5)</sup> It went without saying that Takasugi informed Yamamoto of this state of affairs.

When Takasugi became the Chief Editor of *Bungei*, he made an effort to publish works connected with Chinese literature. The exchange-letters project, to which I have referred to above, was one example of this. The reason Takasugi made his plan to print the exchanged letters in *Bungei*, aside from the idea from Yamamoto Sanehiko, was that he longed for a connection with his Chinese friends. These former college classmates had returned to China because of the invasion of the Japanese army in China, as I have stated above.

In addition to the aforementioned exchange-letters, Takasugi translated into Japanese a Chinese novel and a couple of short works, whose themes were connected with China, by Agnes Smedley (1892~1950), an American journalist, and printed them in *Bungei*, Smedley was still relatively unknown, though she later became quite famous for

her *Battle Hymn of China* (1943). This book, translated by Takasugi himself, was published in 1957 and sold really well.<sup>6)</sup>

Let us return to the topic of the 1930s. In several instances, Takasugi gained trustworthy support from members of Chugoku Bungaku Kenkyukai (Society to Study Chinese Literature). One of them was Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910~77), who later became famous because of his study of Lu Xun. He was one of the most outstanding thinkers in postwar Japan.

In Chapter Five, I am writing about Takasugi's journalistic difficulties in the 1930s. Because the crackdown by the authorities became more and more violent as the 1930s progressed, especially after the start of Sino-Japanese War, it became very hard to continue his editing of the magazine. For example, Nakano Shigeharu and Miyamoto Yuriko, whose works frequently appeared in various magazines including *Bungei*, were often prohibited from writing for any magazines by the authorities.

In these days, probably around 1937 and 38, Takasugi visited Miki Kiyoshi (1897~1945), a well-known and popular philosopher, Katayama Toshihiko (1898~1961), and Chujo (Miyamoto) Yuriko once a week. They talked about the current situation and various things, especially about literature and about writers who could write for *Bungei*. Such conversations would give Takasugi quite useful information, and also the courage to challenge the situation of the age.

Speaking of Miki Kiyoshi, in 1945, when Takasugi was in China as a soldier, he was arrested on suspicion of violation of the Peace Preservation Law. He died in prison on September 26, 1945, right after the end of the war. Miyamoto Yuriko had lived in the United States so she could read English well. Takasugi and Yuriko often talked about books and essays by Agnes Smedley and Edgar Snow (1905~72), an American journalist. Snow had written a biography of Mao Tse-Tung, *Red Star Over China*, which was published in 1937. Just after it appeared, Yuriko and Takasugi read it enthusiastically.

Based on today's observations, Mao Tse-Tung seems to have been

only a totalitarian leader through and through. However, before the Chinese Revolution in 1949, or at least in the 1930s, information about the Chinese Communist Party and its movements were important for both the Japanese establishment as well as the people who were against the war. Mao's manifesto of a protracted war was translated into Japanese, passed the censors, and was printed in the October 1938 issue of *Kaizo*.

The pressure placed upon publishing companies from government authorities was so strong that Takasugi considered resigning from Kaizo-sha.<sup>7)</sup>

## V.

Chapter Six concerns Takasugi's attempts at translating European novels. Takasugi did not resign from Kaizo-sha after all. He translated and printed several European short novels and essays in *Bungei*, which were remarkable works around 1940. Almost all these pieces were against the war, militarism, Fascism and Nazism. André Gide (1869~1951), Thomas Mann (1875~1955), Stefan Zweig (1881~1942), E. M. Forster (1879~1970), and Maksim Gorky (1868~1936) were the main authors whose works he translated.

But Takasugi could not publicly claim himself as the translator of these works, because Yamamoto, the president, had prohibited it. Since it is impossible to distinguish which of the translations in the magazine were Takasugi's, I asked Takasugi straightforwardly. From his response, I knew which translations were his. To explain more deeply the meaning of Takasugi's translation of European novelists, I will use an essay by Thomas Mann, for example. This essay was about T. Masaryk (1850~1937), who was the first President of Czechoslovakia when the country had won its independence in 1918. When Masaryk passed away, Thomas Mann wrote a eulogy for him, which was printed in *The Nation*, and which Takasugi translated into Japanese. It was published in the February 1938 issue of *Bungei*. Mann praised Masaryk for taking a reasonable and fair attitude about a document on the history of

Czechoslovakia. He argued against the forgery of history. This praise implicitly criticized Germany, because forgery of German history, a myth of the twentieth century, was then rampant in Germany.

In spite of the fact that this essay by Thomas Mann in itself had no relationship with Japan, many Japanese readers must have taken this essay as a criticism of Japan, because forgery of history was tremendous in Japan as well. Japanese ancient mythology was taught as real history and was considered to be the basis of the imperial monarchy.

In those days, Takasugi was friendly with Watanabe Kazuo (1901~75), Katayama Toshihiko, and Nakano Yoshio (1903~85). Watanabe was a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, whose field was the French Renaissance. He also later translated F. Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*. Katayama was a professor of the Tokyo Higher School, a school in the older educational system, whose field was German and French literature. When Katayama went to Europe to study literature, he met both Romain Rolland (1866~1944) in Switzerland and Stefan Zweig in Vienna. Nakano was an assistant professor of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University in pre-war days. He continued to study English literature after the war as well. At the same time, Nakano became one of the most influential activists in the democratic movements in postwar Japan. His name is found in most of the important social movements. The people in the network on which Takasugi depended were high level intellectuals in those days, as well as after the war in Japan. Thus, my dissertation, though a biography of a remarkable individual, also gives a broad cross section of postwar Japan's intellectual thought.

Japan colonized Korea in 1910. After the colonization, several Korean novelists wrote their novels or essays in Japanese. Takasugi edited a special issue of *Bungei* for Korean novelists, whose working language was Japanese.

Chapter Seven deals with the affairs happening around Takasugi, which occurred after the outbreak of the Japanese-American War in December 1941. Takasugi changed his attitude toward the war after its

outbreak. In 1943, he was transferred from his post as the Chief Editor of *Bungei* to editor of the newly published magazine *Jikyoku-Zassi* (*Magazine for the Present State of Affairs*). An interesting event in this period was Takasugi's meeting with Chandra Bose (1897~1945), a revolutionary leader of Indian nationalism and a fighter for Indian independence. Bose came to Japan in 1943. Takasugi visited and interviewed him. But Takasugi was drafted into the army in 1944, as I mentioned above. This was shortly before Kaizo-sha was ordered to shut down by the authorities. Chuo-Koron-sha also shut down. Both Kaizo-sha and Chuo-Koron-sha were started-up again after the war. But Kaizo-sha went out of business for good after the death of Yamamoto Sanehiko in 1952.

The dissertation's Epilogue concerns Takasugi's famous book, *Under the Aurora*, and his postwar works. He summed up his life in Siberia as Stalin-experience. Generally speaking, Stalin-experience has become a kind of historical relic. But Takasugi's works during his time at Kaizo-sha must be part of Japan and China's cultural heritage, which is worth looking back today.

#### Notes

- 1) In this essay, all Japanese names are written in the Japanese order, with the family name first.
- 2) A phrase 'after the war' or 'the post war period' means after the Second World War both in Japanese context and in this essay.
- 3) Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979, p. 434.
- 4) After the war, Takasugi himself wrote a biography of V. Y. Eroshenko (1889~1952), a blind Russian poet and a noted Esperantist, who lived in Japan for several years after the First World War. Takasugi also wrote a biography of Agnes Smedley. In addition to these works, he also translated *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, published in 1899, which is the autobiography of P. A. Kropotkin (1842~1921), one of the most famous Russian anarchists. The reason why Takasugi was attracted to Kropotkin's stormy life was not because he sympathized with Kropotkin's ideology of anarchism, but because of Kropotkin's stand against Bolshevism, which had soon turned into Stalinism. In another words, Takasugi criticized Stalinism with the help of Kropotkin. And, as can be deduced from the above, Takasugi himself was deeply concerned with biography.
- 5) When Takasugi was invited to China in 1960s, he met Guo Mo ruo, then one of the key

government officials, in Beijing. Takasugi told me that Guo Mo ruo had remembered him well and hosted a tea party in his honor in one of the rooms at the Great Hall of Peace in Beijing.

- 6) Takasugi was also invited to China during the reign of Deng Xiaoping. Takasugi assumed that the reason he was invited was his translation of Smedley's works.
- 7) Chujo Yuriko married Miyamoto Kenji, who had been in prison because of a violation of the Peace Preservation Law from 1933 to 1945, and who became the foremost leader of the Japanese Communist Party from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s.

Takasugi married Omori Junko in the 1930s. Junko's brother proposed that Takasugi and Junko come to Manchuria after his resignation from Kaizo-sha. This brother had a high position in the army and said he could have helped Takasugi find employment in a good position. Since Mr and Mrs Takasugi were quite close to Chujo Yuriko, Takasugi and his wife consulted with her about whether they should take this offer or not. It was a difficult choice for them.

When Omori Sueko, Junko's younger sister, who had lived in Manchuria during the war, returned to Japan, Junko asked Yuriko if she could assist Sueko in getting a job. Immediately Yuriko hired Sueko as her secretary. When *Under the Aurora* was published in the fall of 1950, Takasugi sent a copy of his new book to Yuriko. Yuriko appreciated the book in spite of the anti-Stalinism it contained. But Miyamoto Kenji's opinion, who lived with Yuriko, was completely different. In January 1951, Yuriko died. Soon thereafter Kenji married Sueko. Though interesting, I have not discussed the complicated relationships between these individuals in my dissertation because it falls outside the period with which I am dealing.

Postscript: At the time of this writing, Mr Takasugi was still living. However, he unfortunately passed away of acute heart failure at his home in Tokyo on January 9, 2008. He was 99 years old.