

Introduction to Japanese Literature Studies

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Here are four articles on Japanese literature, each one of which tries to elucidate its not-well-explained aspects from a different point of view. The first one, María Jesús De Prada Vicente's "The self-organization of Japanese Literature", shows us the fundamental character of Japanese literature in terms of self-organization through oscillations between two poles and shifting of central axes. The author's surprising use of Prigogine's thermodynamic theory to explain the formation of Japanese literature as a system is just revealing. The second article, Min Byun-hoon's "Mythological Heroes in Korea and Japan", gives us a significant hint to understand the similarity and the difference of literary archetype between Korea and Japan, geometrically and culturally so close to each other. Restraining himself from a diachronic method, the author succeeds in showing up the prototype of Japanese narratives. The third one, Oshima Hitoshi's "The literary value of Basho's poetry", treats one of the most famous Japanese poets, Basho, aiming at showing the universality of his poems. By this, the author tries to liberate his poetry from philosophical or religious interpretations in vogue in the West, by introducing structural analysis and semiotic interpretations. The last one is Cynthia Daugherty's "The Decorative and the Poetic in Rimpa Art", which treats a problem concerning the relation between literature and visual art in Japan. The author's insistence on the link between Rimpa Art and Japanese classical poetry leads us to rethink the cliché about the art in Edo period. With these four articles, I hope the reader will capture something essential of Japanese literature and its tradition.