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Exploring the New Horizon for Literature Research in the Age of Society 5.0

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to explore the new horizon for literature research suitable in the age of Society 5.0. The paper discusses the existing style of literature research by referring to the latest source. It further examines the compatibility of the research with the present time and delves into changing circumstances concerning the study of literature. The paper lays out new possibilities of research that may be more engaging with time and contribute to fulfilling the need of society.

Introduction

In late November 2019 Japan's three prominent societies for the study of Japanese Literature, the Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies, the Association for the Study of Showa Literature, and the Association for Japanese Social Literature, jointly organized an "International Research Conference" under a theme, 'The Survival of Literature: Post-Neoliberalism Literature Research'. [Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies, 2019] The theme itself gives a very negative impression, which has the potential to discourage young and emerging researchers in the field of literature. It leaves the audience with a very significant question, would a field in which many globally renowned awards including the Nobel prize are conferred need survival? The theme should have, rather, talked about the "survival" of the literary research. As one may find in the special issue published by the Association for Japanese Social Literature in August 2020 as a report of this international conference. [Association for Japanese Social Literature, 2020] The special issue includes three articles under the section "Special issue 2 *The Survival of Literature Research – Post-Neoliberalism Literature Research: A Report of the Roundtable of Joint International Research Conference of Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies, Association for the Study of Showa Literature, and Association for Japanese Social Literature* (文学研究のサバイバルのために—ネオリベラリズム以降の文学研究 —日本近代文学会・昭和文学会・日本社会文学会合同国際研究集会ラウンド・テーブル報告)". One of the three articles talks about "Dreaming for the Future of Japanese Literature Research" (「日本文学研究の未来を夢見て」). [Ishida, 2020] In this article Ishida looks at neoliberalism as the core of the present condition of literature research in Japan. Accordingly, he examines the relation of literature research with neoliberalism. He sees the "basis of globalization of capitalism lies with neoliberalism" [Ishida, 2020] and argues, "thinking little of humanities in Japan" and "the exclusion of literature education from the revised course of study" are the result of neoliberalism. [Ishida, 2020]

What is neoliberalism? Neoliberalism, which arose after the demise of state socialism [William Nicholas, 2021], is not only "a policy paradigm or institutional template, but a mode of subjectivity, operating via networks of capillary power inside and outside the state". [William Nicholas, 2021] It "is being corroded and

displaced by logics and rationalities that share some of its formal qualities: its suspicion of the state, its emphasis on decentralization, its re-formatting of individual subjectivity.” [William Nicholas, 2021] Neoliberalism is against the conservatism [Hayek, 1978] and unlike conservatism it does not show protective nature and rather welcomes new ideas. It has become a standard keyword “to categorize the present regime of accumulation, especially after the 2008 financial crash that made the term “globalization” seem inadequate.” [Sharae Stephen, 2019] Since 2008, however, “the existential state of neoliberalism has been repeatedly questioned.” [William Nicholas, 2021]. It appeared to some as “to have acquired newly ‘authoritarian’, ‘illiberal’ or ‘antidemocratic’ qualities” [Bruff, 2014; Rose, 2017; Hendrikse, 2018; Brown, 2019 in William Nicholas, 2021]. Peck and others raised the possibility of “post-neoliberalism” [Peck, 2010; William Nicholas, 2021] by continuously questioning the very existence of neoliberalism. [Peck, 2010].

Be it a shift from socialism or neoliberalism or as in recent years it has been talked about post-neoliberalism or such, these are attempted to fulfill the need of the hour that changes with time. What is important is whether an –ism is able to satisfy the need that may arise due to changing circumstances or not. Decades ago when society was very much concerned about developing the ability to write in the upcoming generation, departments of letters were opened in almost all the big higher education institutions. In the present time, when many things are done with the help of Artificial intelligence (AI), people’s requirements have changed. The new generation that is growing up with smartphones, smart tablets, and such, does not need a similar kind of expertise as many in their fifties or so had once needed. In this new age, Chat Generative Pretrained Transformer, or as it is popularly known as Chat GPT is a form of AI, which became available in November 2022 is capable of writing high school and college term papers, short stories, and novels. [Kim, 2022; McGee, 2023] The product quality of a writing might not be up to the mark, but that could improve with time. This AI might be a threat to traditional writers if they don’t develop the expertise suitable to deal with the AI systems.

This is very important to examine, 1) Whether the literature research is up to date, 2) In what way they are contributing to society? If the literature research is futuristic and contributes to fulfilling society’s needs, no neoliberalism or such can pose a question mark to its survival. In this paper, I would attempt to look into the present state of literature research while examining its compatibility with the present age. Furthermore, I would also try to explore new possibilities for literature research in the age of Society 5.0.

The Dilemma of the Researchers of Modern Japanese Literature

The research of Modern Japanese Literature in Japan typically involves a rigorous approach of reading the literary texts between the line and analyzing the work accordingly. Broadly two terms have been used to define the literature research: *sakuhinron* (作品論) and *sakkaron* (作家論). In the case of *sakuhinron* the arguments and discussions are very focused on the writing itself. Whereas, in *sakkaron* the discussion includes life term works, personal life experience and such of a writer. In both the cases the research is done by a close reading of the text and

subsequently analyzing while referring to the writer's personal experience and the ideas or thinking that got developed out of those experiences [Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies ed., 2016]. However, after 1970s a different approach named as "cultural studies" that focused on cultural background and social circumstances in which a writing was written, got developed under western influence. [Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies ed., 2016] Other approaches that have been developed in the past decades are comparative analysis, socio-historical approach, gender approach, and so on. It worth pointing out that these approaches are normally not considered as "pure" literary research that one may find at a literature department of a national university in Japan.

The Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies published a handbook discussing the methodology of the research on Modern Japanese Literature in 2016 and re-printed it in 2018, is the recent source that discusses the research methodology of the of Modern Japanese Literature in Japan. Although the Japanese title of the book is 『ハンドブック：日本近代文学研究の方法』 (Handbook: The Methodology of the Research of Modern Japanese Literature) the English title given to the book is "The Handbook of New Paradigms in Modern Japanese Literary Studies". The two titles present two different pictures in the mind of a reader. Unlike the Japanese title the English title gives an impression of newness and lays down an expectation of futuristic methodology of the research of Modern Japanese Literature. It is worth mentioning that this handbook is a collection of columns first contributed to the Journal published by the Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies from November 2013 (『日本近代文学』 Vol. 89) to November 2014 (『日本近代文学』 Vol. 91). The afterward of the book mentions that all the columns have been "widely revised" [Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies ed., 2016], however, the core of the columns remains same.

The handbook attempts to widely discuss what kind of approaches have been used for the research of Modern Japanese Literature over the past half-century. The book is divided into five sections named as 1) Text and Readers (テキストと読者), 2) Writer and the History (作者とその歴史), 3) Cultural Aspects (文化の諸相), 4) History and Society (歴史と社会), 5) Diverse Viewpoints (視角の多様性). Each section includes five to six articles written by different scholars. [Association for Modern Japanese Literary Studies ed., 2016] The first two sections are greatly identical to the aforementioned style of literature research, *sakuhinron* and *sakkaron*. For instance, in the first section, Mayoshi Fujimori's article focuses on the narratives and greatly discusses the expressions and terminologies used in the pieces of literature [Fujimori, 2016], Osamu Takahashi centers the discussion to the analysis of the story [Takahashi, 2016], and Kazuhiro Matsuzawa to the textual analysis [Matsuzawa, 2016]. In the second section Miharuru Nakamura [Nakamura, 2016], Yasuyoshi Sekiguchi [Sekiguchi, 2016] and others either focus their discussion on the writers directly or bring the analyses to the writers by talking about the biography or history of literature. The articles in the third section focus on cultural studies that include discussions on media, popular and sub-cultures, and so on. The fourth section go beyond the traditional style of literature research and

discusses the writings from historical and social perspectives. The fifth and last section gives an impression of diversity, but the discussion in the papers are very much similar to what has been presented in the first and second sections of the book.

Examining the Compatibility of the Literature Research with the Age of Society 5.0

First of all, let's get acquainted with the term Society 5.0. The term has come up in 2017 in Japan. It refers to the fifth step in the evolution of human civilization following the era of "Information Technology" or IT age. Society 5.0 is a knowledge-intensive society powered by the combination of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data with information and communications technology. It offers a future where the barriers of distance and ability, borders and language have no meaning, and all can take part in society on their own terms. However, the technology alone is not enough and it requires social engagement. Society 5.0 mainstreamed the concept of a human-centered and technology-based society and strives to minimize the negative impact of AI technology in which the role of humanities and social sciences education increases manifold.

An appropriate question arises; how would the study of literature contribute to the age of Society 5.0? As it is evident from the above discussion, the method of literature research is outdated, and not able to go with the line of contemporary demand. We need to put the following questions besides many others while developing a research project for literature.

- 1) How would the literature research contribute to society?
- 2) How would the literature research output help to solve the social issues?
- 3) Is the literature research directed towards connecting with the popular subjects of the time?
- 4) Does the literature research connect to the efforts of achieving the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)?

The Science Council of Japan in its statement issued in 2013 included a renewed proposal for a "Code of Conduct" and added a section entitled "Science in Society". The statement declares, "it is not enough for scientists to just properly do their everyday research; rather, they need to bear in mind a concept of "science in society," taking responsibility for making scientific contributions to society." [Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 2015] The book brought by Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), which is used as a resource for e-Learning Course on Research Ethics for the "scientists engaged in all fields of research, including the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences" [Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 2023], states in "Section VIII: For the Progress of Society", "scientists need to communicate, not just within the scientific community, but also with people in society at large. In the past, these roles and responsibilities of scientists were not that emphasized, so insufficient consideration was given to them when nurturing scientists in these matters." [Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 2015] Are these implemented in the research of literature?

Literature is a very powerful source that may be used to spread awareness regarding many social issues, environmental problems, and such. It may be an

effective tool for social innovation, to develop critical thinking, to train the new generation with creativity, to develop human behavior suitable for a peaceful world, and so on. Besides, interdisciplinary research of literature with different disciplines may open new doors for innovation. Furthermore, cross-disciplinary research has a potential to create new horizons of research. Such attempts would open windows for top-class research with useful outputs beneficial for contemporary time.

Conclusion

It is important to realize that the fall of demand in the research of literature is not because of the field of literature but rather due to the absence of *kaizen* in the research methodology. The research output of the literature shall be on the line of social needs. It is the demand of the time that we move beyond the so-called pure literature research and attempt cross-disciplinary as well as inter-disciplinary research. Importantly, the research shall be targeted at solving the problems of the society. For instance, an inter-disciplinary research with the well-being or artificial intelligence would certainly boost the interest of the new generation of researchers and bring attention of the funding organizations.

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