

Sachiko Schierbeck: *Japanese Women Novelists*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1995, 400 pp.

So far, Japanese literature has mainly been known for great male novelists, such as, for example, Oe Kenzaburo who has become particularly known for receiving the Nobel Prize in literature. In her book *Japanese Women Novelists*, Sachiko Schierbeck presents a hitherto rather unknown subject, namely the female novelists in Japan. Ever since the heyday of women novelists in the Heian-period (794-

1185) the impact of female novelists in Japan has been insignificant, but in this century, especially after the Second World War, women have increasingly become actors to be taken into account in the Japanese literary world. With great accuracy Sachiko Schierbeck has made biographies of 104 modern women novelists - all of whom have been active in the period 1900-1993 - and all have received at least one of several literary prizes in Japan. Each biography contains a short curriculum vitae followed by a description of the most important literary production and a list of the concerned author's publications in Japanese and Western languages. Some of the biographies were included in an earlier publication by Mrs Schierbeck (*Postwar Japanese Women Writers - An up-to-date bibliography with biographical sketches*, East Asian Institute Occasional Papers, No. 5, Copenhagen 1989).

As stated in the introduction of the biography it is a reference book, and a very useful one indeed. It gives a well-rounded description of the diversity and great variety of modern Japanese literature as written by women. The topics these women deal with are many, ranging from intentionally subdued descriptions of women's daily life over politics to satire and science fiction. *Japanese Women Novelists* deserves to be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in Japanese literature.

The weakness of the work is found in its theoretical framework. Apparently, the very fact that all the novelists are women provides enough of a reason to treat them in the same volume. Is the criterium for selection strictly biological or is it implied that we are dealing with feminist literature? Is there an assumption that there is a special feminine way of expressing oneself? It would have been interesting if Mrs Schierbeck had addressed these questions. Also, it would have been illuminating if more of the terms she uses were defined, terms such as "self-awakened", "new woman" or "*shinjinrui*".

In the list of contents the authors are divided into groups, partly chronological, partly topical. It would have been interesting to have heard Mrs Schierbeck's ideas concerning this categorisation, but that certainly would have required a larger part of the volume to be devoted to theory and method, which was hardly the original intention.

In the appendix there is a list of 22 novelists divided into groups depending on the topics they deal with. Each category is introduced

by a short description of the category and then followed by short biographies and lists of selected publications. It remains unclear, however, how the 22 writers were selected.

At the end one finds two lists useful for further studies. One is a list of reference works in Western languages on Japanese literature, the other is a list written in Japanese of authors' names and the titles of their publications. This will be very useful to anyone who wish to further study the topic.

Marie Højlund Roesgaard
University of Copenhagen