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As Thoreau's acceptance in Japan up to the 1960's has already been discussed in Katsuhiko Takeda's "Thoreau in Japan" in *Thoreau Abroad* (1971), it is my purpose here to explore Thoreau's acceptance after the 1970's in an attempt to determine what has both delayed and accelerated recognition of Thoreau in contemporary Japan. Until recently Thoreau's readers in Japan have been largely limited to American literature professors, their students and some members of intellectual elites. Despite the facts that more than a dozen translations of *Walden* have come out (the first one dates back to 1911), and that studies on Thoreau have gradually increased in number, he has not still been fully appreciated in Japan. The situation has, however, changed for the better recently.

The obstacles most Japanese face in reading *Walden* are not only in regard to the quality of translations, but are related to Thoreau's vast knowledge and his broad perspectives on time, place and thought. Thoreau's interests range "without bounds" from the ancient Egypt to slavery, from Tierra del Fuego to the North Pole, and from Homer and Plato to Darwin. In addition we Japanese are often confused by the variety of his rhetorical expressions. Practically speaking, we are fascinated by the title (in most cases *Walden* is translated into Japanese as *Life in the Woods: Walden*), which reminds us of a kind of ideal way of life, but we soon find out that the subject of the book is elusive. As a result, Thoreau has remained little known to us.

Looking back on the three decades since the 1970's, we find that things in Japan gradually changed in the 1970's, when rapid economic growth resulted in several outbreaks of pollution-related diseases. In 1972 Michiko Ishimure, one of Japan's important nature writers today, published *Kugai Jodo (Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease)* and warned us about the danger and tragedies of the mercury poisoning. It was followed by Sawako Ariyoshi's *Fukugo Osen (Compound Pollution, 1975)*, obviously influenced by *Silent Spring*. Then we came to recognize that our civilization has been made possible at the expense of the natural environment. Clearly these books must have served to prepare us for a wider acceptance of Thoreau's writing and ideas.

It seems that our major change of attitude toward Thoreau was brought about, in large part, by a bestselling book, *Seihin no Shiso (The Idea of the Poor and Pure Life, 1992)* by Koji Nakano. He discussed the Japanese classic writers who have looked to nature as the primary source of spiritual insight and articulated the idea of "the poverty that enjoys true wealth"—our traditional theme of "plain living and high thinking" in Japan. This became a guidebook to the higher life for those in Japan who were leading "lives of quiet desperation."

It was not until the 1990's that Thoreau received his now-increasing attention in Japan. With Nakano's book a number of other books on Thoreau as well as TV broadcasts have appeared. A distinctive feature of the publications in the 1990's was that the authors were not academicians, but a popular journalist and nature writers. First of all, Shigeyuki Okajima, a journalist at the newspaper *The Yomiuri Shinbun*, and the author of "Thoreau & Qomolangma" in *Heaven Is Under Our Feet* (1991) published *Amerika no Kankyohogoundo (The American Environmental Movement, 1990)*. He encouraged us to pay attention to Thoreau, regarding him as a pioneer of the American conservation movement and even referring to "The Walden Woods Project."

Secondly, in 1994, two nature writers Hiroshi Takada and Kazuhiro Ashizawa, wrote books on nature writing and told us that there was a poet named Hajime Nozawa who, inspired by *Walden*, built a hut near a lake in the woods in 1929 and lived a secluded life there for five years. He wrote his experience into a collection of poems *Koppadoji Shinkyō (The Book of Songs by Foliage Child, 1934)*. The most widespread interest in Thoreau was brought about by TV broadcasts. In 1994 Thoreau was featured on NHK (the nationwide public broadcasting corporation). In a 45-minute program, *Amerika Walden Shisaku no Tabi (A Meditative Journey to Walden in the United States)*, C. W. Nicol, a Wales-born famous nature writer living in Japan for more than thirty years, showed viewers around Concord and Walden Pond. He encouraged them to read *Walden* and to call for the protection of their own loved places just like Thoreau did. Probably this provided a suitable introduction to Thoreau for most of the Japanese people.

Recently, the writer Tadashi Inamoto has played a crucial role in promoting Thoreau's popularity, adding to the influence of the TV program. Also inspired by *Walden*, he has pursued a Thoreauvian way of life in the country. As a nature writer he has written many books on nature and the environment. His book *Thoreau to Soseki no Mori (The Woods of Thoreau and Soseki: A View from Environmental Literature, 1999)*, deals with Soseki, the most well-known novelist in Japan. According to Inamoto, both

Thoreau and Soseki were writers who questioned the Western civilization and criticized its materialistic and homocentric thought. His book's subtitle "Environmental Literature," provided the first wide-spread public exposure in Japan to this term. It is expected that the book will strengthen the study of environmental literature in Japan ( ASLE-Japan was founded in 1994 and has helped to strengthen the recognition of the genre). What is most remarkable about Inamoto's activity is his forming an organization named Oak Village. Originated as a place for producing superior quality wooden furniture, it is also used as a place for environmental education, where he tries to develop children's environmental awareness through sharing nature with them.

Two more facts should be taken into consideration in terms of Thoreau's recognition. The popularity of Kenji Miyazawa(1896-1933), a natural scientist, poet, children's story writer and naturalist, renowned as a pioneer of modern Japanese ecology, seems to be related to the current popularity of Thoreau's work, though Miyazawa did not know Thoreau. Miyazawa "travelled a great deal" in his native country and wrote about his ties to the land. In his writings (most of them have been translated into English) his unique view of sharing the world with other creatures and of stressing human's ethical responsibility for the land are expressed. Miyazawa and Thoreau seem to have a lot in common. Unfortunately, our tradition of nature writing has mostly discontinued with Miyazawa, but it is expected that the recognition of Miyazawa among the Japanese readers today will strengthen the acceptance of Thoreau.

The other important fact in developing our knowledge about Thoreau and *Walden* is the appearance of the recent translations of interdisciplinary studies: Donald Worster's *Nature's Economy*, Roderick Frazier Nash's *The Rights of Nature*, and William Cronon's *Changes in the Land*. And Thoreau's posthumous works *Faith in a Seed* and *Wild Fruits*, which were recently translated, also have contributed to his reputation.

As more Japanese people are awakened to the environmental crises occurring on a global scale, they are beginning to acknowledge the green tradition of their own. We have a long tradition of living in harmony with nature, and incorporating nature into daily lives, as shown by our involvement in the arts of bonsai, haiku and flower arrangement. Though Japanese response to *Walden* during these thirty years has shifted from attention to his hermitage to his environmentalism, interest in *Walden* as a book of plain living and high thinking has not changed at all.

We are rediscovering in Thoreau's philosophy a way of thinking so close to our own. The thoughts and words of Thoreau seem to have found more and more pertinence in our society, because traditionally we have cultivated a fertile soil for Thoreau as a nature lover and as a spiritual seeker. Some people who have heard of , but not read *Walden*, have begun to be interested in his work. Also, we are moved to read the familiar quotations from *The Confucian Analects*. "Renew thyself completely each day," in *The Great Learning*, for example, is still very much part of our vocabulary. The wealth of wisdom in *Walden* may open a whole new world before us and "save the universe from annihilation." I hope many people will date a new era from the reading of *Walden* in Japan.