

Red-haired Anne in Japan

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It was in 1952 that *Anne of Green Gables* was first translated into Japanese as *Akage no An* (Anne of the red hair) by Hanako Muraoka. Ever since then *Anne* has been one of the most popular books among children and young people in Japan. Nowadays even small children can meet Anne through picture books published after an animated version of *Anne* was broadcast on TV in 1979. For the publishers, *Anne* is certainly a big yen earner. So far at least sixteen publishers have brought out about thirty Japanese versions of *Anne of Green Gables*. As a matter of fact, almost all L.M. Montgomery's works are available in Japanese translation.

Moreover, many non-literary books related to Anne have been published, especially for young ladies; for example, *Akage no An no Oryori-note* (*Anne's cooking notes*, ed. by Bunkashuppankyoku, 1979), *Akage no An no Okashi-ehon* (*Anne's picture book of cakes*, by Kimiko Tonogai, Shufu no Tomosha, 1979) and *Akage no An no Tezukuri-ehon I-III* (*Anne's handicraft picture book*, ed. by Kamakura Shobo, 1980). The first two consist of cooking recipes together with quotations from *Anne*. The last one is an expensive but attractive set of three volumes which is often used as a wedding gift. It contains beautiful pictures of all sorts of handicrafts and dishes on the left hand page and passages from *Anne* with plentiful illustrations on the right. You can find, for example, "Rag dolls of Anne and Gilbert," "Sweaters for Anne and Gilbert," "Canadian pudding," "Potato chowder Marilla style," "Mrs. Spencer's apple coffee cake," and so forth. The rest of the text is devoted to the description of how to make these handicrafts and dishes. These books are of purely Japanese origin. These non-literary by-products of *Anne* seem to make up a new genre with promising prospects, because there are devoted readers of *Anne* in this country.

Here in Japan books are usually sold with a special pre-paid postcard which can be used to send comments to the publisher. It is interesting to read these postcards because they reveal the direct reactions of the readers. One publisher has already received six boxfuls of those postcards from the readers of L.M. Montgomery's works. I had a chance to look through them, and they provide ample proof that *Anne* has a considerable number of keen readers among Japanese women.

Why is *Anne* so popular in Japan? One reason is that it has become one of the several titles commonly read by Japanese school girls. An analysis of

Japanese children's reading tendencies for the period from 1955 to 1980 has been published.¹ The results indicate that there are some books which most Japanese children read while they are growing up. The most popular titles among elementary school girls are as follows: *Sara Crewe* by F.H. Burnett, *Heidi* by J. Spyri, *Sans famille* by H. Malot, *Little women* by L.M. Alcott, biographies of Nightingale, Madame Curie, Dr. Hideyo Noguchi, President Lincoln and Mr. Edison, *Andersen's fairy tales*, *Aesop's fables*, *Japanese folk tales* and *A dog of Flanders* by L. de la Ramée. At the junior high school level, the girls most commonly read the following: *Anne of Green Gables*, *Little women*, *Anne Frank*, *Nijushi no Hitomi* by S. Tsuboi, *Daddy-long-legs* by J. Webster, *Poil de Carotte* by J. Renard, *Botchan* by S. Natsume, *Wagahai wa Neko de aru* by S. Natsume, *Robo no Ishi* by Y. Yamamoto, *Sherlock Holmes* by A.C. Doyle and *Arsène Lupin* by M. Leblanc.

When we compare the readers of *Little women* and those of *Anne*, we notice a clear difference. The former is popular among the girls of both elementary school and the first two grades of junior high school, while the latter is popular among the girls from the first to the third grade of junior high school. This seems to imply that most Japanese girls move from *Little women* to *Anne* at a certain age. At the senior high school level, however, both titles become less popular and the students' interests turn to *yujo* by S. Mushanokoji, *Une Vie* by G. de Maupassant, *Wuthering Heights* by E. Brontë and *Chieko Sho* by K. Takamura.

According to public opinion research, Japanese women's "reading age" (i.e., the period when they read many books) continues until the age of twenty-five.² Generally speaking, the variety of books they read is narrower than that of men. Japanese women seem to be fond of reading stories with female protagonists; i.e., they tend to read girls' stories while they are young and then women's stories until around twenty-five years of age.

It is now clear that *Anne* has an important position in the Japanese women's reading career. Since it is difficult to find such a unique character as Anne in girls' stories written by Japanese authors, some of the readers who have enjoyed reading *Anne* in their school days continue to support her even when they are grown up; they become life-long fans of *Anne*. Some critics say that *Anne* is too sentimental and its sequels are dull. For Japanese "Anne enthusiasts," however, it is difficult to evaluate *Anne* as literature. They don't care what critics may say or whether *Anne* has literary value. They like *Anne* and its sequels flaws and all. They are willing to accept *Anne* as it is and curious to know everything about Anne and L.M. Montgomery.

Japanese "Anne enthusiasts" seem to enjoy entering the created world of Anne by reading through the entire series, just as the readers of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis enjoy such "sub-creative worlds" as Middle Earth and Narnia. However, there is a big difference between the world of Anne and Middle Earth. You can actually reach the former not only by imagination or magic but by

your efforts. If you work hard and save some money, you may be able to fly to Canada and visit Prince Edward Island. Every summer a publisher organizes a tour to PEI for Anne's readers. And for those who can't join the tour, it smartly provides a collection of photographs of P.E.I. The Japanese version of *Spirit of place, Lucy Maud Montgomery and Prince Edward island* (by Francis W.P. Bolger *et al.*) was sold out only two weeks after publication. It must be emphasized that to Japanese people Canada with her abundant space and natural beauty seems a sort of heaven on the earth and fascinates them.

Now let us see how Anne appears to the Japanese school girls. In this country a nation-wide competition for the best student essay on a book is held annually. The boys and girls from elementary school to senior high school join this competition. Each year the prize winners' essays are published in book form.³ Every year among the prize winners there are at least a few who have written about *Anne*. Reading through their descriptions, one can discover how Japanese readers appreciate *Anne*. Summing up their impressions, the following image of Anne appears:

Anne was born under an unlucky star. She is an orphan and not a good-looking girl. However, she never gets discouraged and perseveres through adversity by using her imagination. No matter how adverse the circumstances, she is always hopeful, keen in spirit and gains happiness by her own efforts. Her cheerfulness always brings gaiety, happiness and love to those around her.

Anne in a way satisfies the emotions and the literary taste of Japanese. Japanese people are often moved by and sympathize with poor and pitiful protagonists. Recently a TV series by NHK, which depicted a small girl called "Oshin" moving up the social ladder from poverty, gained very high audience ratings. Most Japanese lived in poverty until recently, hence they sympathize with such poor protagonists. Although Japan is now a major economic power in the world, modernization started only about a hundred years ago after a period of national seclusion lasting over two hundred years. Then she was completely defeated in the last World War with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Anne* was introduced to Japan seven years after the end of the war. Teachers, librarians and parents at the time welcomed Anne as a protagonist who had all the virtues which Japanese children should possess. Anne was an ideal heroine who showed the readers how to live in such difficult circumstances with hope and cheerfulness.

It is interesting to note that many of those prize winners emphasize that Anne is always considerate of people around her and that she gives up going to college for the sake of old Marilla. In a small island like Japan where over one hundred million people live, it is always necessary to consider other people and to live peacefully with them. In such a situation, individualism, which is highly respected in western society, is often difficult to maintain. Often people are asked to sacrifice their personal interests for others. No wonder Japanese

readers get attached to Anne.

Stories which bear some similarities to *Anne*, for example *Pollyanna* by E.H. Porter and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* by K.D. Wiggin, are also available in Japanese translation. But why is *Anne* especially loved by Japanese readers? For one thing Montgomery has more insight into nature than other writers of girls' stories. Almost all of the prize winners point out that Montgomery's descriptions of nature are quite vivid and real, which seems to be another reason why the Japanese, who love nature, come to love *Anne*.

Nowadays some of the young girls who have read Japanese versions of *Anne* go to universities or colleges with the hope of reading it in English. In the English departments of Japanese universities, however, *Anne* does not seem to be considered proper material for serious study. Nonetheless, the number of students who want to write their graduation paper on *Anne* is increasing and professors of Chaucer and Shakespeare are forced to supervise them because of lack of specialists on Montgomery among their colleagues. I believe that once Montgomery's diaries are published Japanese scholars will show more serious interest in her and her works.

Sometimes *Anne* is criticized as being too old-fashioned for modern readers. Recent statistics, however, indicate that it is still loved by many Japanese children. This probably means that children's hearts have not changed much since the days of Montgomery. They are like Anne in that they grow up by getting over all difficulties through their own efforts. I am sure that Anne will always have "bosom friends" in Japan.

NOTES

¹Mainichi Shinbunsha: *Gakko Dokusho Chosa 25 nen* (Survey of school children's reading tendency for 25 years), 1980.

²Ibid., p. 27.

³Zenkoku Gakko Toshokan Kyogikai (The School Library Association of Japan) ed.: *Dokushokansobun* (The prize winners' essays on a book), 1955-65; renamed as *Kangaeru Dokusho*, (Thinking through reading) 1966-, Mainichi Shinbun.

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