

# A NARRATIVE OF THOSE ON THE MOVE

## The Case of Takeo Arishima

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### Abstract

Takeo Arishima, a Japanese writer in the early 20th century, has a style of writing that is distinct from the other writers of Japan at the time. His work demands a deeper contemplation of the conflicts that take place in the borderlands of cultures. This aspect makes up for the apparent limitedness in the quality of Japanese novels in the early modern period characterized by a lack of interest in life outside the national territory. Dealing with issues concerning migration and Japan's imitation of the West, *A Certain Woman* underscores the conflicts at the point of contact between Japan and the West. As the novel focuses on "migration as conflict," Arishima faces the "mirror," reflecting the imagined "West." By using the motif of migration, the novel exposes the Japanese "Western complex," a blind imitation of the West that is mostly obscured in modern Japanese literature. The significance found in the novel is in its view of the West as a mirror reflecting Japan, and conversely using Japan as a mirror to imagine the West. For the heroine of the novel, the people of the United States are the standard by which to measure up oneself. Imagining herself in the way the Americans might look at her, she has internalized Orientalism, a captive of the mirror that is the United States. If the fashionable society of the United States of America is an imagined West, diaspora is the narrative of an individual who has to leave her home behind to settle there. The novel exquisitely links the imagination of "West-imitation-modernization," a narrative of the nation-state, with the narrative of the individual, suggesting that the territory of the nation-state is fictional. In this context, *A Certain Woman* is a diasporic novel. By depicting an individual on the move to the West as a model to follow, the novel breaks the pattern of Japanese literature that tends to be content with representing life within Japan. The novel reveals a fictitious aspect of modern Japanese society that tries to efface the inferiority complex of Japan in its desire to imitate the West.

### Keywords

diasporic narrative, diasporic novel, imitation of the West, migration, narrative of nation-state, Orientalism, the *Shirakaba-ha*

**About the Author**

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## 1.

Takeo Arishima (有島武郎: 1878-1923), a Japanese writer, philosopher and social critic, was active from the late 1910s to the early 1920s, during which he was known as a leading figure of the *Shirakaba-ha*,<sup>1</sup> a literary coterie that advocated humanism. Exposed to Western culture through his education and travels to the USA and Europe, he was brought up as an intellectual of international sensibilities, which was quite exceptional in Japan at the turn of the 20th century. His novel *Labyrinth* (迷路, 1918) has an engrossing scene: The hero, “A,” is a Japanese youth from Tōkyō who is studying in the United States. He is attracted to an American woman called Julia, who has been very kind to him; believing that the attraction is mutual, he confesses his love for her. Upon this admission, Julia declines by saying to “A,” “You’re an Asian. Do you understand? You haven’t forgotten, have you?” (Arishima 291) Here is a matter that is supposed to be simply about the love between man and woman but which surprisingly turns into a question of race.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this example is not to praise the Japanese writer who had apparently inscribed the problem of Orientalism in his own work written in the late 1910s. In fact, such prejudice had been depicted in his novel long before Edward Said even wrote extensively about the perils of Orientalism.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, in the plot, the protagonist who is on the move is confronted with such scenes defacing his identity. It might be worth mentioning, nonetheless, that it is quite rare to come across scenes like this in the major texts of early modern Japanese literature.

This relative absence may be related to Japan’s isolationist policies that had been in place for a long time before its modernization. It may be conjectured that, once Japan gave in to Western pressure and abandoned isolationism to ultimately accept Western culture, its main concern was to select cultural information coming into Japan from outside, applying it to Japanese conditions rather than to turn towards the outside world. An immense effort was needed to modernize a traditional culture forged out of a long history of fixed and set lifestyles, and Japanese intellectuals did their share by placing utmost priority on promoting and disseminating the modern perspective in their country. Nonetheless, as long as Japanese literature focused on the depiction of the clash between conservative conventions and modern consciousness taking place within Japan, there was no need to shed light on Japan’s inferiority complex toward the West.

As the themes of modern Japanese literature narrowly revolved around the contentment of the Japanese within Japan, Japanese literature of the period did not deal with much more expansive topics such as the inferiority complex of the Japanese in relation to the West. *Kokoro* (1914), the magnum opus of the nationally acclaimed writer Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), is a typical example of a novel

representing the modern mind of Japan staged against the backdrop of Tōkyō. In *Kokoro* the narrator leaves his small provincial town to enter the Imperial University of Tōkyō in the capital of Japan. There, he befriends—“shares the heart,” which is *kokoro* in Japanese—a teacher, a Japanese intellectual who is tormented by a certain agony.

Ultimately, in the midst of modernizing Japan, there was mass migration of people into Tōkyō, and modern intellectuals living in this large city strove to settle into an urbanized lifestyle. With the exception of Arishima, the major authors of the *Shirakaba-ha* who considered themselves the successors of Sōseki did not depict Japan in contrast to the West. In fact, initially, the modern literature of Japan thoroughly centered on the literary world of Tōkyō within the territory of Japan, focusing exclusively on the life of Japanese people narrated in the Japanese language. So, it might be asked: why weren't the narratives of migrating people and diaspora sufficiently dealt with in modern Japanese literature? Assuming that such narratives existed, from where does the unconscious strategy to erase them from the history of Japanese literature originate, in spite of the fact that modernity is characterized by the movement of innumerable people on a global scale? Indeed, the modern era is an age when “people were won over to a nation-state separated by national borders, or tried to discover places to live in an imagined nation-state” (Iyotani, “Preface” 6; translation mine). As such, narratives dealing with movements across the national borders might have ruined the framework of the nation-state. In particular, because the migration of an individual entails multifarious cultural clashes as well as complicated conflicts, individuals on the move are sometimes regarded as a kind of irregularity, “a deviation from the normal state, from the situation in which one should be placed” (Iyotani, “Preface” 17).

Yet, as Iyotani writes, on its way to being modern, Japan “sent approximately one million of its people to Hawaii and the Americas for about a century; starting from the mid-nineteenth century . . . up to the beginning of the rapid economic growth after the Second World War” (Iyotani, “Internationalization of Japan” 26). According to statistics from 1939, approximately 1.5 million Japanese people had emigrated overseas. Of this figure, about 300,000 people were living in the United States and Canada. There were around 750,000 people living in Asia alone, including 25,000 people in the Philippines, not accounting for the 650,000 in colonial Korea and 325,000 in Taiwan (Compilation Committee for the Dictionary of National History 806). This clearly shows that migration by the Japanese was widespread, and not confined to the developed countries of Europe or the United States alone.

According to *Migration and Repatriation: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese Empire*, as compiled by Araragi Shinzo, it is evident just how instrumental the phenomenon of migration was, during the formation and collapse of the empire, to the creation

of modern Japan. There were large-scale movements to Asian countries as well, including Taiwan and Korea (called Joseon at that time), which were colonized, and China, which was invaded. Of course, a large number of people emigrated to Japan from the colonies, too, a fact that was elided from the perspective of the nation-state. Due to the extent and diversity of migration, “individual migration cannot be wholly explained by a meta-narrative. The narrative of the nation-state was not written by those on the move but rather by those merely observing it, the scholars and the novelists” (Iyotani, “Preface” 14).

The official history of modern Japanese literature does not list literary works dealing with the experiences of the people who migrated to countries elsewhere in East Asia. What is interesting is the fact that the movement to advanced countries overseas and the themes of subsequent cultural clashes were also ignored in the relevant literature. While sociologists such as Iyotani and Araragi paid close attention to the outward flow of the population and keenly took note of the problems faced by the empire and the nation-state, the literary scholars of Japan did not show any particular interest in the phenomenon.

The study of the spread of imperialism in Asia in relation to migration began only recently with the publication of *Narrating Mobilities, Narrating “Home”-coming* (2014), edited by the sociologist Iyotani and the literary scholar Yumi Hirata. In 2003, I wrote a short article for the Japanese literary magazine *Kokubungaku Kaishaku to Kansho*, entitled “Takeo Arishima’s Place / Reader’s Place,” in which I raised the importance of migrating to the West as a theme represented in Japanese literature (Shin 14-7). Since then, however, the theme of migration has not been sufficiently discussed in modern Japanese literary studies. Even researchers who have shown an interest in Arishima’s experience of the USA only see the US as a motif of his work and have failed to see other possibilities, including the significance of his works’ representation of Orientalism; hence, the focus of this paper.

It is very significant to find an example of an extraordinary text, *A Certain Woman* (『或る女』, 1911-19),<sup>4</sup> which was written by an extraordinary writer. By dealing with the issues of migration and imitation of the West, *A Certain Woman* by Takeo Arishima highlights the conflicts at the points of contact between Japan and the West. With his depiction of migration as a site of conflict, Arishima also faced the mirror that was the West. In deploying the motif of migration, *A Certain Woman* exposes Japan’s feeling of inferiority to the West that is apparently absent in modern Japanese literature.

**2.**

Japanese literature of the early modern period was built on the importation of Western genres (Kamei 12). Arishima's work, like most Japanese writers of the period (e.g., similar to Sōseki and Ōgai Mori [1862-1922] who had travelled to Germany to study), was also deeply influenced by Western literature. Particularly, the profile of Arishima<sup>5</sup> shows that he was brought up as an intellectual of international sensibilities, which is quite surprising given the atmosphere of parochialism that marked the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, in the contemporary literary circle in Japan, he was regarded as a writer of Western sensibility that "smelt of butter" (Yasuoka 12), with a style of writing which was distinct from the other Japanese writers. In fact, Japan's critical assessment of Takeo Arishima during his lifetime was rather harsh. For example, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, a major writer of his time, harshly criticized *A Certain Woman* for its lack of artistry (541-2).

Yet truthfully, Arishima's body of works demands a deeper contemplation of the conflicts that take place along the borderlines of cultures. This distinction compensated for the limitations of Japanese novels in the early modern period engendered by the lack of interest in life outside of the national territory. Consequently, a certain discrepancy can be felt between the harsh criticism of the literary world and the ordinary readers' responses. For instance, with Takeo Arishima publishing his works, his popularity soared: "At least 300,000 copies were published in about 6 years during Arishima's lifetime" (Yamamoto 275). Considering that one of Japan's leading writers, Sōseki, sold 10,000 copies of his collection yearly, it was amazing that Arishima's collection of work sold more than 50,000 copies a year. Perhaps due to the fact that the author committed simultaneous suicide with a married woman, the reception from contemporary literary circles was unusually critical. Still, a notable difference emerged between the harsh literary reviews and the general public opinion (Yamada 3).

*A Certain Woman* is a story about the passionate life of Yōko, daughter of a déclassé upper-class family. The novel begins with a scene of the heroine preparing to depart for the United States in order to get married for the second time. A single mother at 24 and once divorced, Yōko comes from a well-to-do family. Her father was a doctor who ran a large hospital while her mother was a social activist and vicechairperson of the Christian Women's Federation. After a failed marriage, she becomes recklessly involved with many men until Kimura, a young businessman who is an immigrant living in the USA, visits Japan and pesters Yōko's mother before her death for his marriage to Yōko. Before sailing back to the United States, Kimura obtains the mother's consent based on the strength of his credit with the Christian community.

She is a beautiful and talented woman enough to attract people's attention, but with the death of her parents, Yōko now has to worry not only about her livelihood but the future of her two younger sisters and her daughter from her first marriage. Although betrothed to Kimura, a very calculating man and a spitting image of bourgeois hypocrisy, Yōko has a strong dislike for him. Yet Kimura never stops wooing her. However, during the obligatory long sea voyage to the US, she falls passionately in love with Kurachi, an officer on the ship. When she eventually meets her fiancé Kimura on the ship while at anchorage, she feigns illness and taunts him. The first part of the novel concludes with Yōko returning to Japan before actually setting foot on American soil. She has given up on her second marriage.

The second part depicts the cold shoulder that Yōko receives from the Japanese society, the unwanted scrutiny that she experiences, and the punishment that befalls her. As she clings closer to Kurachi, expressions of affection between the lovers lead to misunderstanding, and with Yōko's bouts of jealousy, Kurachi becomes increasingly distant. In the entangled relationship reminiscent of the love affair between Anna Karenina and Vronsky, Yōko eventually becomes hysterical. As Kurachi grows apart from her, she is diagnosed with a uterine condition and the novel ends with Yōko on the brink of death.

In a way, *A Certain Woman* may be said to be a narrative of a self-destructive heroine with a strong ego, similar to well-known characters like Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary, who commits adultery at the expense of social and economic comfort with a man of strong sexual appeal while being betrothed to another man. But considered one of the five best novels in Japan (Maeda 138), *A Certain Woman* drew the attention of Modern Literature School critics such as Shugo Honda (1908-2001) in the light of the progressive perspective on literature developed in Japan after its defeat in World War II. The novel's initially cold reception stemmed in part from the fact that the heroine had feminist ideas that were far beyond the norms about women of the times. In the novel, in defiance of her parents' objection, Yōko married a man of her choosing; after only a few months of marriage, she files for divorce and raises her daughter as a single mother. She even contrives a way to persuade her husband to give up their daughter by convincing him that the child was born from a relationship with another man. Moreover, the novel is scattered with incidents of her seducing numerous men and engaging in reckless love affairs—obviously too scandalous to even imagine in its time – which may be regarded as symptomatic of deep resentment and protest by women due to the unfairness they endured in the patriarchal Japanese society. It is also notable that since the novel's release, various analyses within the field of comparative literature have focused on the gender question.

The concern of this study is quite different. Instead, it focuses on how the dynamic life of a certain woman who ended her life in the 1920s, at the age of 26, betrays the fissures of a nation-state. By introducing the theme of migration, the novel uncovers various problems not revealed on the surface of the narrative. In *A Certain Woman*, the protagonist's decision to move to the USA reveals certain underlying problems that are concealed within the framework of a nation-state that emphasizes the unity of people and homogeneity of culture.

### 3.

It might also be added, however, that the novel links the critique of gender oppression with the critique of the nation-state. Using the USA as a trope to represent a "feminist" perspective, the novel also raises the issue of discrimination against Japanese women who constituted half of the nation, barring them from integrating with the nation-state as full-fledged citizens who are equal to men. For instance, in one of her monologues, she exposes the contradictions of Japan, the place of her departure, criticizing it in juxtaposition to the US, the mirror of her imagined "West," the point of her destination.

The supposed freedom of a woman's life, the woman's life that can stand shoulder to shoulder with men and set itself forth. . . . Whenever the feudal conscience corrodes her heart, Yōko longed to see the so-called conscience of foreign people. In the deepest corner of her heart, Yōko sometimes secretly envied Geisha. She even wondered whether it wasn't only as a Geisha that a woman could live the life of a woman in Japan. (Arishima, *A Certain Woman* 42)

Yōko's monologue contrasts the freedom of Western women and the suppression suffered by Japanese women. It might be recalled that having come from a fairly well-off background, she never needed to sell her body for sex as a commodity. She could play the violin, and her command of the English language was proficient enough for her to converse with the American captain of the steamship bound for the USA. In other words, she received a rather fine public and private education. In addition, she was able to express a strong resistance towards the educational system in Japan that suppressed basic human rights. Despite all of these, she yearns for the life of a geisha, who sells sexual pleasure in the demimonde quarters, a space located in the margins of society, deemed to be outside of Japan's modern paradigm. Ironically, she views it as a profession that allows a woman to "live the life of a woman," reflecting the fissures in the established system which makes women feel alienated from home, school, and society, reducing them to being mere tools or instruments of the nation-state.

Nevertheless, the novel is a product of a different time, reflecting perspectives that are quite different from today's awareness in which the commodification of sex and the issue of gender are viewed as not just problems of the individual, but also as multilayered problems involving politics, economics, and socio-cultural issues of the society at large. Furthermore, it is notable that Yōko's thoughts have been formed through a kind of "utopian" mirror reflecting the imagined freedom of foreign women. Her awareness of the "conscience of foreign people" is due to her certainty that her own existence would be transformed into "the woman's life that could stand shoulder to shoulder with men." She assumes that foreign countries have a system to guarantee women's rights; in contrast, the lives of women in Japan did not even allow for either mental or physical freedom. Her behavior and attitude which might have been viewed as reckless and self-destructive, are expressions of her beliefs; even if she had to walk in the shadows of society like an outcast, she would rather choose to have the sexual freedom of a geisha. Yet it is noteworthy that the heroine's imagination is preoccupied not only with feminism as such. In the novel, she begins to imitate the physical, bodily characteristics of the West:

Naturally, Yōko wondered about life in the land of the so-called United States to which she was about to go. In what ways would the American people approach her? Anyway, it was a fun to be able to break away from the pain and narrow-mindedness of the past and start anew in a society with which she had no connections. Western clothes suited Yōko better than Japanese clothes, and she was confident that in terms of fashion she would not be an object of ridicule to the Americans of high society. Undoubtedly, there must be a life full of pleasures and sadness.

There must be a life in which feminine charm is freed from customary bridle, and with that power alone one would be able to work. There must be a life in which even a woman, if she is talented and competent, could win recognition from the people around her without requesting the aid of men. At least somewhere in this high society, there must be such a life allowed to women. (*A Certain Woman* 88)

Before getting on the ship, Yōko goes to Yokohama to spend her last penny on paraphernalia and clothes to wear in the West. How she might appear to the Westerners is the focus of the journey, thinking that Western rather than Japanese attire becomes her; she imagines that in fashion she will be equal to the Americans. This can be read as a "desire to enter Western society manifesting itself as fashion . . . by securing a 'physical' equality to the Westerners." Thus, the United States is an object of "the desire to obtain identity through fashion at least." Yōko's belief derives from her aspirations to possess the physical features of the "Western" body and her disdain for the Japanese body. But this reflection foreshadows the ending in a kind of ironic twist where, "although yearning to be an American" (Shin, "Occident or Artistry" 40), she is unable to become one because she imagines American high

society as nothing but a mere collection of bodies, oblivious of any intellectual or cultural dimensions.

The significance found here is the perspective of viewing the West as a mirror reflecting Japan and conversely using Japan as a mirror to imagine the West. The heroine declares that she is confident she “would not be an object of ridicule to the Americans.” The Americans are set up as the standard by which her identity is measured. The heroine, who imagines how she might measure up to the Americans, becomes a captive of the mirror that is the US, a self-Orientalizing and Orientalized image of herself.

Such Orientalism as found in this context also mirrors the inner psychological landscape of the Japanese that Japanese literature hesitated to tackle in spite of its own potential sense of inferiority to European literature. It might help to recall that after the victory in the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, a new awareness emerged in Japan that the country was now vying neck and neck with the Western powers. Published in 1910, the novel is set in the period between the two wars. In *Yōko*, the pride of the Japanese people in the belief that they excelled beyond the boundaries of Asia and had entered the advanced Western world was itself based on Orientalism rooted in the country’s inferiority complex. In this sense, as the Japanese insisted on equality with the West even as it repressed elements of self-Orientalism in literary representations, Japan faced the mirror reflecting an image of the West.

As suggested earlier, the oppressed and repressed woman yearns for the USA in her desire for freedom. In fact, growing up, *Yōko* “constantly used to say ever since her childhood that she would go to the USA to take a course for newspaper reporting.” The child who once dreamed of becoming a newspaper reporter, now depicts how the grown woman, alienated from the patriarchy of Japanese society, imagines the USA as a place where freedom of communication exists. In contrast, in Japan, she could not even communicate with anyone in order to express her own thoughts; as a result, in the novel, she lives a life of self-abandonment, as it might have seemed to some of the novel’s readers at that time.

Furthermore, the heroine is depicted to be full of rebellious spirit against the patriarchal system, but the only path available for her to obtain self-identification seems possible only with the West as her mirror. This is because there was no other way for independent women to live a life equal to men in Japan of the 1910s. First, women could not be candidates for high-ranking officials, nor could they be politicians or entrepreneurs. In the educational system of the time, high school and imperial university courses were only available to men. Understandably, with so many constraints tying her down, the heroine of *A Certain Woman* has a tragic

sense of life. Here, in this fictional space, the USA is fantasized as the land of freedom for women. No longer able to live in Japan, the heroine gives herself up to the “what if” of living in the United States. This is the birth of a heroine in early modern Japanese literature that takes the USA as her mirror and turns it into a benchmark, like a utopian vision.

It might be added that although the author did not seem to have been aware of it when writing the novel, Yōko’s craving for the United States is very similar to what happened in Japanese literature. The heroine yearns for the USA as the ideal, which could be said to reflect how modern Japanese literature mimics the West, virtually drawing up a parallel between Yōko and Japanese literature; Yōko felt a sense of accomplishment in seeing her body covered in Western clothes, as modern Japanese literature unconditionally accepted and blindly imitated Western literature.

As an imitation of Western literature, Japanese literature was self-conscious about its inferiority complex. Scholars of Japanese literature had the “conviction that ‘modern literature’ existed in Europe, and it should be realized in Japan as well” (Kamei 6). Japan “regarded the ‘novel’ as an essential item in the tide of modernization (or imitation of the West)” and attempted to “provide the perfect answer to ‘modernity’ through it. . . . This was probably because the novel was a very suitable genre that could offer the ‘modern’ image of humanity to intellectuals who ‘wished to be modernized’” (Shin, “Occident or Artistry” 29).

Still, the problem is that, like Yōko, who has idolized the West to the point of wishing to imitate even the “Western” physical body, Japanese literature has turned away from a representation of conflicts that embody the negative aspects of Japan. Therefore, as we can see from the heroine who uncritically copies the West, it is unusual to find Japanese literature that uses the realist technique of straightforwardly depicting a Japan that is degrading in comparison to the West. Particularly, “[w]hen the culture and institutions of Western countries shone light upon Japan as a normative model,” Japanese literature tended to “regard what the two had in common as the universal aspect of Japan, and what they did not share as representing the uniqueness of Japan” (Kamei 7). On the contrary, when imitation of the West presented any difficulty, Japanese literature dismissed it as showing qualities of uniqueness, thereby reflecting the distinctiveness of Japan. This strategy was meant to conceal the complex perspective that Japan had concerning the “West.”

Japanese novels clung stubbornly to the penchant for representing the inner world of individuals set within the boundaries of the nation-state of Japan. In addition to this constraint, however, the representation was further limited in

its scope. For example, conflicts arising from the imperial system were out of the question in terms of literary representation. What they were allowed to depict were only obvious themes, such as the inner conflicts of intellectuals who resembled the authors themselves, the conflicts between the main figures and the people around them, or maladjustment in a nearby society. By covering up the internalized complex following the import of Western culture, Japan saw itself as “the possibility of westernized modernization” (Nagahara 43) and attempted to differentiate itself from other Asian countries through “a contempt for Korea and China and an understanding of itself as a superior nation” (Nagahara 47). Combined with enhanced nationalism following the victories in the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, Japan succeeded in forming a culture based on the imitation of the West, yet at the same time, laid claim to its purportedly distinctive qualities.

By raising women’s issues, also ironically revealed in the novel is the indiscriminate admiration by the Japanese for the West expressed through imitation. But interestingly, in *A Certain Woman* this strategic question of imitation points to a fissure, revealing Japan as a counterfeit of the West. In the narrative, it may be inferred that there is no place for the heroine in the USA. Given the setting of the novel, there is little possibility that she would be able to brush shoulders with the high society of USA as a migrant from an entirely different economic basis, social network, and cultural ethos. It would have been possible if this fashionable society consisted of immigrants, but from the beginning of the novel, Yōko has made it clear that the reference is to the “conscience of foreign people.” By setting up the USA as the ideal and imitating what she imagines are the Americans’ ways, one might infer that the novel problematizes the notion of “unity” of the Japanese “nation-state.”

#### 4.

It might be helpful to summarize the circumstances surrounding Yōko’s emigration. Her motivation for going to the United States does not seem compelling because she is not going there with the intention of pursuing an education in journalism as she had once dreamt, nor is she on a business trip as a public official. Instead, she is going to the USA for her second marriage to someone she does not even like. She has to drift away from Japan to the USA as she has no financial security or social roots back home, only to fall in love with Kurachi, the purser of the steamship who is a married man in the first place. For this new-found love, she decides to give up living in the USA and takes the return voyage back to Japan. Most previous studies have read this as “a narrative of carnal desire pursued to the extreme” (Kawakami 198) derived from Yōko’s enthrallment with

potent masculinity. Such a reading is possible and interesting, and as discussed earlier, reading the novel as a feminist critique opens up a number of interpretive possibilities. Still, I refrain from engaging in a feminist analysis in order to stay on track of the argument. While emphasizing that *A Certain Woman* is an exemplary piece of feminist text, the paper suggests a link between the gender question and the claims for identity of the nation-state by foregrounding the diasporic character of the novel.

By highlighting the novel's importance in terms of diaspora mediated through the Western elements of the novel, a deeper understanding of its historical context may be reached, and a more enriching appreciation of the novel's significance may be achieved. From this perspective, it should be pointed out that the heroine's apparent resistance to the forced migration makes the union with Kurachi almost natural. Rather than take the course taken by most women of her time, Yōko, having hankered for the life of a geisha, could choose this apparently self-destructive life. On one hand, she could live the life of diasporic wandering; but on the other hand, it is such a life that she so fears; hence, living with Kurachi provided a possibility for escape. The following quote is a scene in which Yōko, in the midst of internal vacillations, comprehends that going over to USA would mean living a life in diaspora:

Yōko was indifferent about her situation in that she had to be separated from her family and leave alone as far as to the US. . . . Now in this state, it made no difference whether she was in the US or Japan, whether she had some property or none at all. Perhaps if there had been a change in circumstance, there might have been a difference. Or, perhaps not at all. Come whatever may. (*A Certain Woman* 41-3)

It should be mentioned that here the two-dimensional narratives—the narrative of the desire for membership in America's fashionable society and living the rest of her life in diaspora—are intertwined with each other to eventually unfold themselves in the plot. "The last resort of rejecting immigration as a diasporic individual" functions as "a foreshadowing of returning to Japan instead of landing in the United States" (Shin, "A Study on *A Certain Woman*" 64). The high society of America in the imagination of the heroine and the diasporic fate of wandering away from home are disparate choices. The USA that Yōko has imagined is derived from a vague longing for the West. Yet this turns out to be just an illusion in the face of the reality that she has to choose to migrate to the USA anyhow due to her economic plight if she stayed in the homeland. Also, if the narrative of longing for the fashionable society of the USA is a desire for an imagined West, diaspora is equally the narrative of an individual who has to leave her home behind and is caught in between through the course of her journey. The novel exquisitely links the imagination of West-imitation-modernization as a narrative of the

nation-state, with the narrative of the individual whose imagination underlines a critique of the nation-state as an enclosed and bounded territory. In this context, *A Certain Woman* is indeed a diasporic novel. The narrative of the nation-state constitutes the dichotomy of the East/West as well as the notion of most Japanese people about their country that has succeeded in modernizing itself. If the novel had been about the life of a Japanese protagonist who was born and raised among the Japanese people, the idea of the nation-state must have been accepted as a paradigm to define the life of the individual, as a matter of course.

However, the representation of Yōko migrating to a Western nation in Arishima's story highlights the narratives of individuals who have not been able to fit into the norms of conventional Japanese society. Through this, the novel reveals the discrepancy between the cherished notion of the nation-state and the individual's life. A large part of the first half of the novel is devoted to the scene of Yōko across the Pacific Ocean on her voyage to the USA. This underscores a sense of border-crossing in the narrative of people on the move, the stateless wanderers who cannot be easily made to belong to a nation, whether it be Japan or the USA.

By portraying someone on the move, Takeo Arishima deserves to be called a pioneer of diasporic literature in Japan. No other study has made this assertion, something that might have escaped Japanese scholars but is visible to an outsider who sees in the novel, a narrative of diaspora. The novel *Labyrinth*, as mentioned earlier, is about a Japanese student studying in the United States. In that novel, there is a serious and symbolic scene in which the protagonist proposes to an American woman, yet is rejected because of his Asian ethnicity. Japanese literary scholarship has not been able to explore the cultural conflicts suffered by a Japanese living in a foreign country. What has seemed important for Japanese mainstream literary scholarship is only the fact that the Japanese character has lived in that physical space called the United States of America. There seems little appreciation for the significance of the complexity of the experience of encountering a different culture, may it be American or Western. Might they be simply indifferent to the inner conflicts of the Japanese who were imitating the West? Could it have been a case of Japanese scholarship being afraid of any conflict or discord with the West, after Japan's defeat in war?

Interestingly, *Labyrinth* offers a diasporic image of a Japanese young man who has moved to the United States as a wanderer. "A" has diverse experiences while studying at a university, living together with "P," who is an anarchist and a lawyer, and having a physical relationship with "P's" wife. Volunteering at a mental hospital and growing to maturity in a foreign country, "A" lives a life of journeys, during which he discovers himself to be a morass of contradictions. He ultimately concludes his

journeys with an awareness of himself as “a vagrant with no nationality” (*Labyrinth* 326). Doing manual labor, “A” witnesses and recognizes the following scenes:

A majority of the laborers were Poles who left their country with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War and wandered their way into the United States. Most of them could not communicate in English. However, when one said he was Polish, my feeling of intimacy surged. Except for four to five Polish Jews, they were all fresh men picked as if from nature. (*Labyrinth* 341)

The “Poles who left their country with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War and wandered their way into the United States” are people who today can be defined as a diaspora. “A’s” strong empathy toward them can be said to originate from a diasporic solidarity. However, we cannot directly apply the concept of diaspora to the novel as we do today. As might be noted in the quoted passage sentence above, “A” has discriminatory feelings towards Jews from whom the word diaspora actually originated. As the title suggests, *Labyrinth* is a novel that portrays the complicated state of mind of a young Japanese intellectual, although it cannot compete with *A Certain Woman* in terms of artistic skills. Nevertheless, Takeo Arishima spontaneously reveals the imagined boundaries of nations and the contradictions of the nation-state through his depiction of the life of a figure that is on the move, crossing territorial boundaries as well as imagined boundaries.

Although modern Japanese literature faithfully adhered to a political stance in covering up the problems of the nation-state, *A Certain Woman* spoke up along with other voices. Moreover, it might be relevant to ask: what if Yōko had landed in the USA and lived there? Would she have been able to see the “conscience of Americans”? Why was she unable to take the first step toward actual emigration as she had thus far already attempted to imitate the physicality of the Americans? It might be argued that her refusal to choose the diaspora reflects the fact that Japanese literature at that time did not have the literary and critical infrastructure to tackle the theme of migration and diaspora, like living in the USA as an ordinary citizen. In fact, the concept of “inland” formed in modern Japan refers to the center of the imperial territory. Curiously, as such, only the literature of inland Japan belongs to mainstream modern Japanese literature. As a result, although immigrants in the United States and other places formed their own literature, it is still categorized in Japan as the literature of immigrants. Before themes dealing with crossing borders, migration, transnational movements, and exchange could appear in “inland” literature, a new order had to be established after Japan’s defeat in war (Shin, “A Study on *A Certain Woman*” 70).

It is a fact that there were already considerable cases of movements to foreign countries when the novel was published. Students and government officials went

overseas to study. There were many cases of emigration, too. In addition, the Japan of this period was preoccupied with colonizing Korea and Taiwan, which again generated innumerable incidents of transnational mobility between these countries. Indifference to this fact simplifies many aspects of early modern Japanese literature. Of course, some Japanese writers went to the outskirts of the Japanese Empire and wrote about their experiences. However, the undervaluation of these works or their failure to be registered in literary history was often precipitated by the complacency or indifference about the significance of the experience of being caught in the boundaries of culture. The individual placed on the boundaries of cultures has an ethical relationship with others.

Some Japanese writers went out into the colonies and saw the people there as objects of discrimination, yet they seemed to have remained oblivious of it. This could be said to speak of how much a number of Japanese writers might have intended to be content with writing about Japan itself within Japan. By doing so, the tendency to efface the inferiority complex of the Japanese, which is manifest in their imitation of the West, could only underscore, instead, Japanese qualities. It also suppresses all that is outside the purview of the nation-state. Another example is that of the emigrants from Japan to the United States or South American nations, who have produced literary works dealing with the conflicts and realities of their lives experienced out there. To all these realities, unfortunately, the history of Japanese literature has remained blind.

## Notes

1. The *Shirakaba-ha* (the *Shirakaba* group; *Shirakaba* means “white birch”) refers to the literary movement of the members of the literary magazine *Shirakaba*, which was launched in 1910 and discontinued in 1923. The members of the magazine mainly consisted of aristocrats and descendants of rich families and were greatly influenced by Tolstoy. The group is characterized by its emphasis on individuality; it was also described as a humanist group. The group also took great interest in painting; it introduced Impressionism and Post-Impressionism into Japan and made contact with Rodin. Overall, they contributed significantly to the importation of Western art into Japan (Nisigaki 2-7).
2. “A” seems to be the initial of Takeo Arishima’s surname. Although *Labyrinth* is an autobiographical novel based on the author’s experience of studying in the United States, the story itself is fictional.
3. The limitations of the novel are obvious given the way it is intertwined with the cultural situation of the 1910s. As will be discussed later, in his disparaging remarks about the Jews, the protagonist plays the role of the subject who unconsciously discriminates against others even though he himself is an object of discrimination.
4. *The Glimpse of a Certain Woman* (『或る女のグリンプス』), the first part of the novel, was published in *Shirakaba* (『白樺』) between January 1911 and March 1913. The second part was finished in June 1919, with changes in the names and characteristics of figures.
5. A short survey of Takeo Arishima’s chronology (Yamada and Uchida 93-183) would be helpful for our understanding.
  - 1878: Born as the first son of Takeshi Arishima, who was a high official of the Meiji Ministry of Finance.
  - 1883: Received English education from the age of five; entered a mission school in Yokohama to receive the most advanced modern education available at the time.
  - 1887: Entered the prestigious preparatory school, Gakushuin Peers’ School, where he was chosen as a companion to the crown prince, the future emperor Taishō.
  - 1896: Entered the Sapporo Agricultural College (the present-day Faculty of Agriculture at Hokkaido University).
  - 1901: Became a Christian.
  - 1903: Went to the United States at 25 to obtain an MA degree from Haverford College in 1904. Afterwards, took courses at Harvard University (a three-and-a-half-year system). Greatly influenced by Tolstoy, Arishima avidly read Western literature and philosophy, including Dante, Brandes, Turgenev, Ibsen, Kropotkin, and Whitman, and was inclined toward socialist ideas.
  - 1906: On September 1, traveled from New York to Italy to stay in Europe; returned via London to Japan on February 23, 1907.

- 1908: Appointed as an English lecturer at the Imperial University of Tohoku. Inherited a farm in Hokkaido and became its owner.
- 1910: Joined the launch of literary magazine *Shirakaba*. Published his first novel *Kangkang Insect* in December.
- 1915: Resigned from his university lecturer position to focus on writing.
- 1916: Death of his wife and father.
- 1917: Began working as a full-time writer. Published *The Descendants of Cain* (*Kain no Matsuei*) and *Labyrinth*.
- 1919: Published his best-known work, *A Certain Woman*.
- 1922: Published *A Manifesto*, an essay expecting a socialist revolution, and handed over the tenant farm in Hokkaido to his tenant farmers.
- 1923: Committed suicide with Akiko Hatano, a married woman.

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