A Japanese Publisher's Blog on the Newest Work by Atsuhiko Wada

Tsuneharu Gonnami

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RESEARCH NOTES


A partial English translation of the Japanese-language blog of the publisher Shinyosha, about Prof. Atsuhiko Wada’s most recent work, Ekkyōsuru shomotsu (Books Across Borders), with permission obtained from the publisher, Shinyosha, through Professor Wada. Full text of the blog is available at http://www.shin-yo-sha.co.jp/mokuroku/books/978-4-7885-1250-4.

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Outline:

Prof. Atsuhiko Wada at Waseda University has published his most recent work, which is an adjunct volume to his previous book entitled Shomotsu no Nichi-Bei kankei: Riterashi shi ni mukete [The Japan-US Relationship viewed from book circulation: toward a literacy history]. The bibliographical information of his new book is as follows:


This sister volume as well as his previous book have been highly rated by librarians and scholars in Japan as a uniquely well researched publication. He has advocated the new bibliobgy (booklore and bibliography) doctrines by raising questions such as: Why is a collection of certain books located in a specific library? Who has acquired these books? How and when have they been delivered? For what purpose have they been used? Who are the readers of these books? How did the habit of reading Japanese books develop in the new library environment of North America? How should we incorporate these queries into principles of librarianship regarding books, libraries, and their users? There is no appropriate single term covering these issues collectively. This is the very reason why Prof. Wada has created a new word: “Literacy History” in order to describe them holistically.

In the postwar period, a great number of Japanese books have crossed the Pacific Ocean to North America and many Japanese Collections have been built up at North American institutions in order to support Japanese study programs there. Thanks to world-wide technological change and globalization and its result in the rapid development of social networking in recent years, nowadays we observe that the relationship between Japanese books and their foreign readers has become borderless. However, this point
of view has been missing in world discourse on the international importance of books and reading.

Prof. Wada has arduously traced the historical path of major Japanese Collections successfully established in North America from his standpoint of “Literacy History.” He is pioneering this new field of books, readers, and libraries, which makes mutual connections and interactions. Many academic and library people such as Profs. Ryusaku Tsunoda and Yasaka Takagi as well as librarians, Ms. Naomi Fukuda and Ms. Miwa Kai, and book-traders, booksellers & publishers such as Charles E. Tuttle, as well as many others on both sides of the Pacific, have also played important intermediary roles for the advancement of international librarianship in a broader context of this “Literacy History” from prewar days to the present time, seen from the perspective of libraries and librarians.

As a Faculty member at the School of Education, Waseda University and also as Deputy Director of the University Library, Prof. Wada has established a new field of “Literacy History” by shedding new light on the history of books and reading and by exploring the intersection between them. In his view this new field of study will also promote the distribution of “Knowledge,” more freely than ever. It seems to us that he has constantly tried to integrate the academic aspects of scholarship and the practical aspects of library services into a comprehensive whole in his concept of “Literacy History.” In fact, not only is he a desk researcher, but he is also vigorously in favour of engaging in field work by visiting many institutions, archives, libraries, and museums in North America. Shinyosha favours us with the fruits of the author’s considerable time and effort, revealed in the table of contents below, in this handsome book of 362 pages.

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2) What is a history of literacy?
3) The framework of this book.

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