Poster Title: Being Called Shōkokumin—Yamanaka Hisashi: A Pioneer of Contemporary Japanese Children’s Books

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Poster Abstract
This presentation demonstrates the manner in which Yamanaka Hisashi (山中恒 b.1931) reconciles with his own past as a shōkokumin (a little country man: the wartime name for children). During the years of confusion after Japan’s defeat in World War II, Yamanaka became deeply aware of the foolishness, opportunism, and hypocrisy of the adults around him. Given the environment in post-war Japan, one of the most interesting features of Yamanaka’s literary world is the fact that in his works, he has never depicted his childhood wartime experiences. Instead, he attempts to portray the post-war lives of boys and girls who seek their autonomy without depending on adults. Yamanaka’s profound distrust of adults and authorities may stem from his wartime experiences such as suminuri (blacking out the sections of school textbooks related to militaristic wartime education) and his strong belief that he had to determine his real value by himself and guard against being deceived any longer by grown-ups. In this presentation, I would like to portray the manner in which Yamanaka became reconciled with his traumatic childhood experiences of World War II—not only the fact that Imperial Japan lost the war but the painful betrayal practiced by the adults upon the children of the time.
Yamanaka is a highly acclaimed author of Japanese children’s books and is also known as one of the pioneers of contemporary children’s literature in post-war Japan. His critically acclaimed works include his early trilogy: *Tobetara honko* (You Get Nothing If You Don’t Try, 1960), the award-winning *Akage no Pochi* (Pochi, the Red-Haired Dog, 1956), and *Samurai no ko* (Samurai’s Child, 1960). This trilogy demonstrates the realism-based foundation of his writing since it is coloured by the legacy of his own childhood experiences, that is, his distrust of and antipathy against adults. He stands opposed to the adults who try not to show children a side of life that includes crude social distortions. He asserts that he writes children’s books in order to give children the necessary courage to fight against the distortions of modern Japan and to live through much hardship.

Interestingly, though he wrote about his harsh childhood experiences as a *shōkokumin* in over 30 non-fictional books for adults, of the more than 100 children books he has written since the 1960s, none of them deal with his childhood wartime experiences. Instead, he continues to portray his protagonists as living after the war; they are the post-war children who search for their own autonomy and new values. Yamanaka’s torn heart, which got that way by experiencing a drastic transformation from the *temnōsei* ideology to post-war democracy and sudden betrayal by the grown-ups, is clearly reflected in the paradoxical attitude of the juvenile protagonists in his early works. The ‘children’ in Yamanaka’s works continuously evolve as brand new, never-before-seen circumstances appear. His early trilogy still attracts the interest of children and remains in print along with his other titles, including *Boku ga boku de arukoto* (I Am What I Am, 1969).