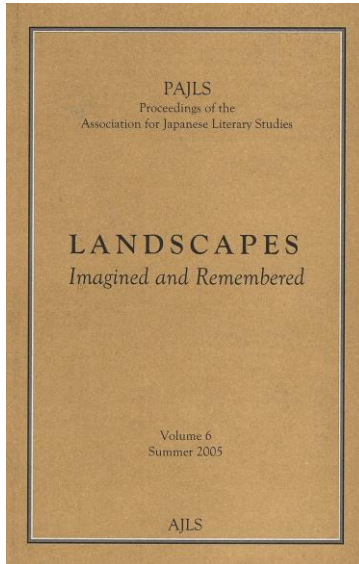


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## Shiga Shigetaka's *Nihon fūkei ron* and Meiji Literature

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On 17 November 1894, *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* and Japan's other major newspapers were preoccupied with Japan's ongoing war with China. Among the belligerent articles, however, an advertisement by the Seikyōsha (Society for Political Education) attracted readers' attention to its latest publication, a book by Shiga Shigetaka with the unspectacular title *Nihon fūkei ron* (On the Japanese Landscape). The article reads:

The situation on the continent had called for the sword; now we win all the battles and we win the war, but recklessly pushing forward is not in the nature of we Japanese. Nonetheless we dare to venture to recommend to the illustrious public, to all poets and painters, *Nihon fūkei ron*, the perfect reading for cool and long autumn evenings. Read it now!

The public did read this work, not only in autumn 1894, but also for years to come. Almost fifty reviews of the book were published during the months following its publication and *Nihon fūkei ron* went through fifteen editions until 1903, making it one of the bestselling works of the Meiji period.<sup>1</sup> Its vast readership was largely comprised of students and intellectuals.<sup>2</sup>

Although later generations found the work less than appealing and it sank into oblivion, in the 1960s scholars began to realize the historical importance of the book. Since that time, three main patterns of interpretation of *Nihon fūkei ron* have developed:

1. *Nihon fūkei ron* is considered a eulogy for the Japanese landscape that aims for the popularization of mountaineering in Japan.
2. *Nihon fūkei ron* is taken as one of the few works "that systematically introduced and applied Western geography methods of the day"<sup>3</sup> at a time when geography was not yet established as an academic discipline in Japan, therefore marking an important development in the history of geography.

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<sup>1</sup> Ōmuro Mikio, *Shiga Shigetaka: Nihon fūkei ron seidoku* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Kamei Hideo, "Nihon kindai no fūkei ron: Shiga Shigetaka, Nihon fūkei ron no ba'ai," *Tsukurareta shizen*, eds. Komori Yōichi, et al., (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Takeuchi Keiichi, *Modern Japanese Geography* (Tokyo: Kokon Shoin, 2000), 76.

3. *Nihon fūkei ron* is understood as a chauvinist pamphlet that intentionally paves the way for Japanese imperialism in the following decades.<sup>4</sup>

However, for the most part, these interpretations pay little or no attention to the aesthetic and literary dimensions of *Nihon fūkei ron*. This is all the more astonishing given the fact that the author explicitly addresses writers and painters, extensively discusses aesthetic questions, and confronts the reader with a text full of quotes from poems and other literary sources.

Shiga's contemporaries, unlike later scholars, appreciated *Nihon fūkei ron* as much for its literary qualities as for its content.<sup>5</sup> The popularity of *Nihon fūkei ron* may be attributed to several factors, but it is mainly because it was in keeping with or even ahead of the zeitgeist of a decade during which (to borrow the famous expression by Karatani Kōjin) "the discovery of landscape"<sup>6</sup> occurred. The years after 1894 saw a flood of travel writing; literary texts ranging from Tokutomi Roka's *Shizen to jinsei* (Nature and Man) to the works of the literary avant-garde of Romanticism and early Naturalism, approached the topic of landscape in a variety of ways. Moreover, traditional poetical forms like *tanka* underwent a number of changes under the influence of Western landscape painting. The popularity of *Nihon fūkei ron* within the intellectual class, its explicit and implicit discussion of aesthetic questions, and the time of its creation make the work a fascinating component in the development of perception and representation of nature in Japanese literature.

### The book and its author

*Nihon fūkei ron* is comprised of nine heterogeneous, loosely connected chapters. In the introduction, Shiga stresses the unique beauty of the Japanese landscape, which, according to Shiga at least, is an objective fact obvious to Western and Japanese eyes. He believes the beauty of the Japanese landscape is grounded in the four conditions that he goes on to discuss in the four subsequent chapters. The first chapter, "The Variety and Variability of the Climate and Ocean Currents in Japan" covers causes of the variety of flora and fauna in Japan. In the second chapter, "The High Humidity in Japan," Shiga discusses the seasons using different regions as examples of different seasons. The next chapter, "On the Commonness of Volcanic Rock in Japan," introduces all major volcanoes from the Kurile Islands in the north to Kyushu in the south, and puts particular emphasis on Mount Fuji.

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<sup>4</sup> Masako Gavin, *Shiga Shigetaka 1863-1927* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Ōmuro, *Shiga Shigetaka*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. Brett de Bary (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 11-44.

Shiga follows this chapter with a long digression on the necessity of promoting mountaineering, which takes up more than 20 percent of the whole book and gives advice on climbing preparations, equipment, and survival techniques in the mountains. In chapter five, he finally presents the last condition for the beauty of the Japanese landscape – heavy alluvial erosion – and discusses how landscape is shaped by the impact of different types of erosion on different types of rock.

In the next three chapters, all just a few pages long, Shiga invites “the writers and poets, painters and sculptors and noble minds of Japan” to address the subject of landscape in their art (of course, under consideration of the four characteristics discussed above).<sup>7</sup> He then calls for the preservation of the beauty of the Japanese landscape. Because nature is a spiritual source for the Japanese people, Shiga asserts, its beauty has to be preserved for future generations. Finally, he demands that Japanese strive to lead geographical research in Asia. The last chapter, “On the Depiction of Flowers and Birds, Wind and Moon, Mountains and Rivers, Lakes and Sea in Literature and Painting,” deals primarily with the problem of truth (i.e. realism) in art and literature.

The style of the text – a very *kanbun*-oriented Japanese, which Shiga’s contemporaries found elegant and appealing – and its graphic design also contributed to the success of the book. The numerous illustrations reflect the eclectic nature of the work: Western and Japanese style engravings are mixed with diagrams and schematic drawings. Every new printing of the text came with a different cover image (by Hihata Sekko). Shiga revised the text each time as well.

*Nihon fūkei ron* was Shiga’s second book. After attending a naval school and studying at Sapporo Agricultural College, he worked as a schoolteacher and proofreader. In 1886, Shiga, who had always dreamed of becoming an explorer in his youth, finally got the chance to travel to the South Seas on board the naval training ship *Tsukuba*. After his return, he published an account of this journey under the title *Nanyō jiji* (Current Affairs of the South Seas), which won acclaim from readers and critics alike. In 1888, together with Sugiura Shigetake, Miyake Setsurei, and others, Shiga founded the Seikyōsha, which published the periodical *Nihonjin* (The Japanese). The Seikyōsha members never developed a common program, but simply shared the basic idea that the modernization of Japan should not mean complete Westernization.

### Science and ideology

While essentially a book about Japan, *Nihon fūkei ron* also goes back to Shiga’s experiences in the South Pacific, where he was faced with the

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<sup>7</sup> Shiga Shigetaka, *Nihon fūkei ron* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 317.

devastating effects of imperialism on the native population, which, in Shiga's view, fatalistically awaited its own decline and extinction.<sup>8</sup> These observations, in conjunction with the situation of Japan, which for almost half a century had struggled to hold its ground against the Western powers, form the background of *Nihon fūkei ron*. Moreover, imperialism and social Darwinism dominated the thinking of the age and also shaped Shiga's views. From the pride and conceit of the colonialists and the fatalism of the natives whom he encountered in the South Seas, Shiga drew the conclusion that what Japan needed to survive in the world was a pronounced national pride and identity based on a love for the Japanese landscape. In the introduction to *Nihon fūkei ron*, Shiga writes:

'The beauty of mountains and rivers – that is our country' (Ōtsuki Bankei). . . . Who would be among us today who does not praise the beauty of our land? . . . Transitory are the feelings of man. That one praises the beauty of one's own land is a kind of idealism. But do the Japanese praise the beauty of the landscape of Japan, because it is their country? They do it much more because there is absolute beauty in the Japanese landscape. Foreign visitors all consider Japan to be a paradise in today's world. . . . I think, the whole of Creation, nay, the best of the world is to be found in Japan . . . .<sup>9</sup>

Referring to *The Beauties of Nature and the Wonders of the World We Live In* (1893), a book by the British naturalist John Lubbock (and one of the main sources for *Nihon fūkei ron*), Shiga states that Lubbock effusively praises the unique beauty and variety of the British landscape, even though there is not a single volcano in Britain. He notes how much more justified it is, then, to praise the beauty of Japan.

A few years before Shiga's book was published, Fukuzawa Yukichi lamented that all Japan could be proud of was its landscape, since in all other aspects it was inferior to the West.<sup>10</sup> In a way, Shiga shared this view, but took a more positive approach. Clearly, the point of reference for him was also the West (and not other Asian countries); what mattered to him was that the Japanese landscape could compete with its Western competitors, even in the eyes of Westerners. Inose Naoki calls this a reaction to a specific Japanese inferiority complex.<sup>11</sup> But neither such a complex nor such a reaction is specifically Japanese. North European and American intellectuals looking for

<sup>8</sup> This view is shared by Western authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson, who described his travels during 1888 in his book, *In the South Seas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 28-36.

<sup>9</sup> Shiga, *Nihon fūkei ron*, 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Bunmeiron no gairyaku*, in *Fukuzawa Yukichi zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), 106.

<sup>11</sup> Inose Naoki, *Mikado no shōzō*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1986), 264.

an answer to the seemingly overwhelming cultural and economic superiority of Central Europe adopted the strategy of turning to the scenic beauty of their countries.<sup>12</sup> But what Shiga wanted was more than just a sop to the mistreated Japanese self-confidence. Shiga was convinced that Japan needed to strengthen its economy through modernization. But he was also aware that this process was almost inevitably accompanied by social ruptures (as in Japan) and could even result in the complete decline of a society (as in the South Pacific.) To prevent this, a unifying force was necessary, a force that Shiga believed he had found in the Japanese landscape. Shiga obviously adopted the idea that love of nature could play an integrating role for Japanese society from an article by the missionary Samuel A. Burnett in the magazine *Fortnightly Review*.<sup>13</sup>

Shiga held that the Japanese landscape would become a symbol of national essence (*kokusui*), a symbol for continuity and identity not tainted with the tinge of backwardness and much more easily adaptable to social change than a specific moral system or political institution could ever be.<sup>14</sup>

This blend of science and nativist ideology was not atypical for the times. Geography had begun to become an established academic discipline starting around the mid-nineteenth century. For Japan and many other nation-states, "geography was a necessary tool to clear and foster national identity."<sup>15</sup> While geographical knowledge had been important for a literal understanding of Japan's place in the world at the beginning of the Meiji period, the stimulation of a national consciousness in the people increasingly gained priority. The nation-state tried to weaken regional identities and colonize new areas such as Hokkaido both militarily and ideologically. This was evident in the growing importance of geography in school curricula and the growing nationalism found in geography textbooks. Nonetheless, the first chair of geography in Japan was only established in 1907, which means that all those who previously took the exams to qualify as geography teachers were basically forced to study by themselves. And the books they turned to were works such as *Nihon fūkei ron*, works which introduced and applied the latest geographical methods of the West but were not academic in the strict sense of the word.

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<sup>12</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994), 214. Orvar Lofgren, *On Holiday* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 35. David Lowenthal, "European and English Landscapes as Symbols," in *Geography and National Identity*, ed. David Hooson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel A. Burnett, "The Poor of the World: India, Japan and the United States," in *Fortnightly Review* 320 (1 August 1893), 207-222.

<sup>14</sup> Obviously Shiga is aware of the problem of modernization leaving its traces on the landscape (cf. chapter seven), but he does not consider it a serious concern.

<sup>15</sup> Hooson, *Geography and National Identity*, 4.

## Shiga's aesthetics of landscape

While the word *fūkei* in the title of Shiga's work seems to imply that the author is advocating a Western view of landscape, by the end of the nineteenth century even painters used terms for landscape such as *fūkei*, *sansui*, and *keshiki* quite indiscriminately.<sup>16</sup> A closer analysis of *Nihon fūkei ron* shows that Shiga's aesthetics cannot so easily be classified as modern or premodern. Beginning with the second edition, Shiga added a long passage to the introduction in which he tried to characterize the unique beauty of the Japanese landscape by way of three concepts: *shōsha*, *bi*, and *tettō*. While *shōsha* (grace) is a quality that, according to Shiga, can be found especially in the Japanese autumn, *bi* is linked to the Japanese spring. Shiga does not define these concepts, but tries to explain them by means of exemplification. For *shōsha*, his examples include the following:

2. Somewhere the voice of a nightingale, a green leaf is drifting by a mooring on the Yodogawa.
3. The clear green water outside the hut of the poet Bashō lures a frog  
[. . .]
5. At the old station of Suma between gnarled pine trees, smoke is rising from a shabby hut where salt is made.
6. The song of the crickets in the bush clover blossoms along the way, the cool autumn wind in Miyagino.
7. The cry of an old wild goose, cold fulling blocks in front of many houses, and in the middle of the river Tama you can see the white autumn moon. [. . .]
10. After the first snowfall the night sky clears up, three or four lights of a colonization post (Hokkaido) are clearly visible in the distance. Such is the *shōsha* of the Japanese landscape, but the essence of *shōsha* is the Japanese autumn.<sup>17</sup>

These examples show the extent to which Shiga's aesthetics are indebted to premodern literary codes and *topoi*. Literary representation of nature in premodern literature is characterized by the importance attached to the seasons, a fact that led to the development of conventionalized *kigo* (season markers) in the haikai poetry of the Edo period. A second concept central to Japanese poetry since early times is the concept of *utamakura*: *meishō* (famous places) that gained their aesthetic power not from their visual beauty but from the wealth of allusions their names evoke. Therefore, travel diaries of the middle ages "provide little realistic place description and refer more to the

<sup>16</sup> Matsuura Akiko, *Nihon fūkei ron no ichi*, in *Shiga Shigetaka - kaisō to shiryō*, ed. Toda Hiroko (Tokyo: Ōtsuka Kōgeisha, 1994), 181.

<sup>17</sup> Shiga, *Nihon fūkei ron*, 14-15.

myths, legends and history as well as to past poets and poems connected with such 'famous places.'<sup>18</sup>

Shiga makes good use of these literary devices; many of the plants he mentions in the text are canonical season markers, and many of the locations he mentions are "famous places." For example, in premodern poetry, the place name Miyagino is conventionally associated with autumn, as are crickets and bush clovers. And although Shiga is not writing poetry, he quotes many poems (mostly *kanshi* [Chinese poetry]), especially when describing landscapes.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Shiga transcends traditional literary conventions by integrating elements alien to premodern literature. This becomes even more obvious in some of the examples he gives for *bi* (beauty):

2. The falling blossoms in Momoyama (Yamashiro) are whirling like a purple rain and cover the ground like embroidered brocade.

3. The cherry blossom clouds in Arashiyama are grazing the pale moon, dim light [. . .]

7. At its foot the cone of the volcano Sakurajima (Satsuma) is girded by persimmon trees and surrounded by green bamboo groves. In between, mandarins, *yuzu* lemons, bitter oranges, kumquats, and grapefruits grow everywhere and irregularly shaped tobacco fields spread out.

8. In the mountains of Higo, looking down into a valley several hundred feet deep, some human dwellings jut out from the fresh green, hens cackling, dogs barking, and smoke rising to the sky.

9. On the summit of Mount Komagatake (Shinano), green mountain pines creep over the snow-like granite, the green heightening the white, the white deepening the green.

Such is the *bi* of the Japanese landscape, but the essence of *bi* is the Japanese spring.<sup>20</sup>

These examples may be lyrical, but they are not poems. While there are conventional elements such as cherry blossoms, many of the places mentioned, places such as Hokkaido and Sakurajima, are not canonical.

Shiga's transgression of traditional Japanese modes of representation is even more pronounced in examples from the third category, *tettō*:

2. The *takenoko iwa* (bamboo rock) rises out of the endless Pacific. Western visitors call it Lot's wife, after a tale in the Holy Scriptures of Christianity in which Lot's wife errs against the command of heaven and

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Plutschow, *Four Travel Diaries of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University China-Japan Program, 1981), 3.

<sup>19</sup> See Yamamoto Norihiko and Ueda Yoshimi, *Fūkei no seiritsu* (Osaka: Kaifūsha, 1997), 160-178.

<sup>20</sup> Shiga, *Nihon fūkei ron*, 17.



is turned into a pillar of salt as a punishment. The rock is located between Hachijōshima and the Ogasawara islands. White waves are breaking against it when an albatross with extended wings lands on its top.

3. The old Yakushi temple (Shinano) is built on top of a high, steep cliff and it looks like it could fall off any moment.

4. A wild goose flies through cold clouds, a horse neighs in front of the barrier of Shirakawa at dawn.

5. In the middle of autumn, the air is clear, Mount Fuji rises in the cloudless sky. The silhouette of the mountain is being reflected in the sea [. . .]

10. The island of Shashikotan (Chishima) is completely covered by snow. From the top smoke streams at an angle in the sky [. . .]

12. A thundery shower is moving over the Naruto channel (Awa), under the black clouds a whirlpool is emerging [. . .]

16. Wherever one is looking – just plum blossoms, the white moonlight, nothing else.<sup>21</sup>

These examples lead one to assume that *tettō* is the translation for the concept of the “sublime,” which had such a tremendous influence on Western aesthetics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In his famous treatise “Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful” (1757), Edmund Burke gives the following definition of the “sublime”:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible . . . or is analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*. . . . When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications . . . they are delightful, as we [*sic*] every day experience.<sup>22</sup>

But in the *tettō* category, as in the categories mentioned previously, not all examples fit into the common concept of the sublime; this is especially obvious in the example of the plum blossoms. Shiga is clearly trying to transgress the borders of these concepts, to expand and blend them. His intention is not to break with tradition, but to extend it into the future. He mixes East and West, the language-oriented aesthetics of premodern poetry and the “picturesque” aesthetics of Western painters and tourists.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Edmund Burke, “Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,” in *The Works*, vol. 1/2 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1975), 110-11.

The result of Shiga's blending was probably less irritating to the contemporary reader than one might suppose. As early as the eighteenth century, alongside the genre of the poetic travel diary (from Ki no Tsurayuki's *Tosa nikki* to Bashō's *Oku no hosomichi*), a "realistic" type of travel diary emerged. This realistic travel diary, while it was literary, also aimed at describing the outside world.<sup>23</sup> This type of travel literature is very much associated with Tachibana Nankei (1753-1805), whom, not surprisingly, Shiga quotes at length. The reasons behind Shiga's eclecticism are complex, but they are all grounded in the ideological alignment of the text: geography as a science *and* a tool for fostering national identity.

In "Miscellaneous," the final chapter of *Nihon fūkei ron*, Shiga declares that art and literature must not be in conflict with natural science.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in his understanding, if traditional literary conventions get in the way of "truth," they have to be eliminated. But much more than scientific correctness or the dissemination of geographical knowledge, the core of Shiga's intention is instilling love for the Japanese landscape as a basis for a national identity.

For landscape to become the basis for a Japanese identity in a rapidly changing world, it has to provide an identity not only in space, but also in time: an ahistorical continuity, from ancient times into the future, had to be manufactured. It was not enough that the Japanese landscape had more or less remained the same since the Middle Ages; the way the Japanese perceived the landscape should remain basically unchanged. The only source on how the ancients perceived the Japanese landscape were the literary works that were left behind. This explains Shiga's many references to premodern works and aesthetics.

But why did Shiga integrate new elements? Here again, the ideal of the homogenous centralized nation-state plays a part. All regions have to be represented, not just those areas that become literarily canonized as *utamakura*. Hokkaido, for example, because its colonization had only begun in the Meiji era, had never been a topic in literature. Hokkaido had to become "literary," so Shiga spends much energy on calling attention to its geographical features. The principle of centralization finds its symbolical expression in the stylization of Mount Fuji as the middle point of Japan.

The integration of Western visual aesthetics through the concept of the sublime is part of Shiga's attempt to universalize the beauty of the Japanese landscape: its aesthetic qualities have to be obvious by Western and by Japanese standards. Moreover, the idea of the "sublime" is closely connected to the concept of the "picturesque," which shaped the view of the tourist in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Shiga is aiming exactly toward this tourist gaze. This becomes especially clear in Shiga's promotion

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<sup>23</sup> Marcia Yonemoto, *Mapping Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 69-100.

<sup>24</sup> Shiga, *Nihon fūkei ron*, 331.

of sport mountaineering, a pastime brought to Japan by Western tourists and residents but still unfamiliar to most Japanese. It should be noted that not once in his lifetime did Shiga himself ever climb a mountain.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, he very emotively describes how the experience of nature is most intense and pure in the mountains. His advice regarding preparations for mountain climbs, survival tips, and hiking route recommendations are all taken from guidebooks of Japan, particularly Ernest Satow's *Handbook for Travellers in Central and Northern Japan* (1884), Basil H. Chamberlain's *Handbook for Travellers in Japan* (1891), and Francis Galton's *The Art of Travel* (1872). Shiga, like Lubbock, considers the representation of landscape in art and literature legitimate and necessary, but nonetheless secondary to real experience.<sup>26</sup>

### Shiga's impact on Meiji literature

In what ways and to what degree did *Nihon fūkei ron* influence Meiji writers? To my knowledge, the only major author who openly claimed that he was influenced by Shiga's work was Tokutomi Roka. In his autobiography *Fuji* (1925-28), Roka noted that when he read *Nihon fūkei ron*, he was deeply impressed, but at the same time he felt the need to write something in a style that was less stiff.<sup>27</sup> In this way, *Nihon fūkei ron* became the stimulus for Roka's *Shizen to jinsei*, a collection of essays and short stories that addresses the subject of nature in various ways. *Shizen to jinsei*, like *Nihon fūkei ron*, is oriented toward the aesthetics of Chinese literature, but offers a new sensibility and even a few experiments with writing in colloquial Japanese. Both works seem to provide the link between premodern literature and the avant-gardism of Tayama Katai, Kunikida Doppo, and Shimazaki Tōson. Even if these authors had not read *Nihon fūkei ron*, they could not escape its influence on the discourse on nature and landscape at that time. They are even more focused on the visual; they break completely with the aesthetics of seasons, find symbolic references to landscapes in Western literature and art (and not in Japanese and Chinese classics), write in colloquial Japanese, and are uninterested in Shiga's nationalistic aesthetics. What was a means to an end for Shiga was for them an end in itself: enjoying nature and writing about it.

In many ways, Shiga paved the way for later developments and provided a link to premodern modes of literary representation. The "discovery of landscape" in the 1890s and later was not a sudden switch from a symbolic concept of landscape to a realistic view of landscape that was tied to the change from writing in classical Japanese to colloquial Japanese. Rather, it was a complex process in which social conditions and intellectual and

<sup>25</sup> Yamamoto and Ueda, *Fūkei no seiritsu*, 34.

<sup>26</sup> See John Lubbock, *The Beauties of Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1900), 18.

<sup>27</sup> Tokutomi Roka, *Fuji*, in *Roka zenshū*, vol. 16 (Tokyo: Roka Zenshū Kankōkai, 1928-30), 355.

aesthetic coordinates gradually shifted. *Nihon fūkei ron* provides valuable clues for understanding this process.