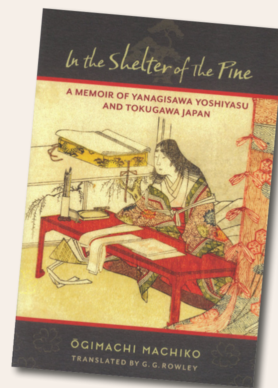
Book Review

In the Shelter of the Pine: A Memoir of Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu and Tokugawa Japan

By Ōgimachi Machiko. Translated by G. G. Rowley



Columbia University Press, 2021
368 pages.

Reviewed by Bettina GRAMLICH-OKA

On the tenth day of the first month of 1793, a woman from Hiroshima noted in her diary: "Cloudy. Mother of Katō pays a visit to exchange New Year's greetings. I start copying *Matsukage nikki*." Seven days later, she wrote, "Finished copying *Matsukage nikki*." Years later she gave the copy to her wedded daughter. The woman, Rai Shizu (1760–1842), offers no explanation why she had copied *Matsukage nikki*, a memoir written by Ōgimachi Machiko (d. 1724) about one hundred years earlier. She was one of many such copiers in the Tokugawa period, and the modern reader is fortunate that G. G. Rowley has now rendered the memoir into fluent, elegant English as *In the Shelter of the Pine*.

This is the latest of Rowley's valuable contributions examining what women wrote during the Tokugawa period. After coediting *Female as Subject* (University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2010), about women from all ranks of society and their reading and writing habits, Rowley's monograph *An Imperial Concubine's Tale: Scandal, Shipwreck, and Salvation in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (Columbia University Press, 2013) traced from fragments the tumultuous life of an aristocratic concubine who once served the emperor. With the translation of Ōgimachi Machiko's memoir, Rowley now takes her readers to the world of an aristocratic concubine serving a high-ranking warrior.

This first translation into a language other than Japanese is important for many reasons. First, as far as we know, Ōgimachi Machiko is the only aristocratic woman of the Tokugawa period to have written this kind of lengthy autobiographical prose account. Tadano Makuzu (1763–1825), the author of the comparable *Mukashibanashi*, lived a century later, was of lower rank, and did not live in a household to which the shogun himself visited a stunning fifty-eight times. Yet, Machiko shares with Makuzu the difficulty of finding an appropriate form in which to write. She, like Makuzu, recollects the world of a man. For Makuzu, it was the world of her father, the domain physician Kudō Heisuke (1734–1800). For Machiko, the world was that of Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu (1658–1714), chief adjutant to the fifth shogun Tsunayoshi (1646–1709). Machiko decenters her own persona—a phenomenon seldom encountered in men's memoirs. Only rarely does she break with this stance. One instance is when she gives birth to her first son: "On the sixteenth day of the Eleventh Month of that year, My Lord's fourth son was born … Though I hesitate to ask, 'From which mother was the child born?' am I to feign ignorance by answering, 'It was

that broom tree briefly glimpsed'? For hidden as I am in the shade of that flower blooming high up on the tree, like a plant sprouting in spring, it may be that I write something of my own place in this world" (p. 28). Through the classical allusion to the broom tree, which can be seen from a distance but disappears up close, Machiko addresses the difficulty of drawing a line between narrator and protagonist, and makes clear that women ought not to be the center of their narrative. Those interested in issues of self-representation and the generic conventions of memoir writing will welcome this translation as a rich resource for comparison.

A second significance is that, unlike other Tokugawa autobiographers, Machiko purposely used the language of the imperial court. Her effort to emulate the *Tale of Genji* in style and create a "classical effect" (p. xxii) was evidently one of the work's attractions for Tokugawa readers. This effect is on full display in the final chapter, where Machiko takes us to the still famous Rikugien garden, one of Yoshiyasu's projects, and comments on his retirement from official positions: "And now he sets out to follow the 'dew on the mountain path,' just as he had long been determined to do, … and [I] jot it all down, bit by bit, just as I remember it, quite heedless of the censure I shall attract for gossiping on so. And yet … like glistening oaks that can never be buried beneath the seaweed are his deeds, shining forth in their own brilliance" (p. 208). In the space of only two sentences, Machiko alludes to an apocryphal *Genji* chapter ("Yamaji no tsuyu"), the "Yūgao" chapter from *Genji*, and Minamoto no Toshiyori's (1055–1129) poem from *Senzai wakashū*. For the general reader three hundred years later, such extensive allusions to the classical Japanese and Chinese canon are formidable, but fortunately Rowley provides just the right amount of information in the notes, enabling us to understand Machiko's display of learning while taking pleasure in the translation.

A third reason is the importance of the broader context, the reign of Tsunayoshi and the Genroku period. The account provides us with information on the political, cultural, and economic history of a period that has been assessed in many divergent ways. Readers get many intriguing glimpses of the world of government. We read about the hundreds of gifts given and received on each formal visit, as in the case of Tsunayoshi's first visit: "The gifts he had bestowed upon My Lord that were piled up here and there were cleared away and, in their place, the many gifts to be presented to him were brought out and arranged. Then His Highness came in again, and as soon as he was seated, My Lord presented a list of his gifts secured with a genuine sword" (p. 9). Such accounts remind us that we ought not to forget the consumer economy underlying these gift exchanges, and the procurers, and record and storage keepers for all the precious scrolls, swords, gorgeous silks, and exquisite foodstuffs. Machiko's description of a court hearing taking place in Yoshiyasu's mansion performs a similar function. With members of the Deliberative Council gathered to judge fifteen cases while Tsunayoshi listened from behind screens, Machiko alerts us that at the end of the day, "the judges were given their rewards. Needless to say, they looked delighted as they went off with their gifts over their shoulders" (1697.11.14; pp. 46–47).

One of the many valuable services translations perform is to open up dialogue between specialists and non-specialists. Readers of this polished rendering of a text that circulated widely and was hand-copied more than thirty times during the Tokugawa period will surely find many other reasons beyond those mentioned here to welcome its publication.