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## Forty Years of the Bernard Shaw Society of Japan

Hisashi Morikawa

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## FORTY YEARS OF THE BERNARD SHAW SOCIETY OF JAPAN

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[The year 2011 marks a milestone for the Bernard Shaw Society of Japan: forty years of continuous research toward a better understanding of the life and work of Bernard Shaw. Members of the BSSJ, to my knowledge the world's oldest non-English-language Shaw society, can rightly be proud of their legacy of ongoing published essays and series of meetings. I count myself privileged to have attended those gatherings in 1995, 1996, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, where I witnessed a true dedication to advancing Shaw scholarship. It is in the spirit of gratitude and comradeship that I offer the BSSJ my warmest congratulations and, on behalf of Shavians everywhere, my very best wishes for continued exploration of the mind and art of Bernard Shaw!]

Michel W. Pharand]

Although fairly popular in the 1910s and 1920s, in the 1970s Bernard Shaw was not often discussed by Japanese academics and was hardly known to the public except as the writer of the play made famous by *My Fair Lady*. After the musical premiered in Japan in September 1963, people became familiar with “I Could Have Danced All Night” and “Get Me to the Church on Time,” but it was not bloody likely that they had seen a Shaw play onstage or read one at home.

Deploping Shaw's unpopularity in Japan, Matahiko Ichikawa (1886–1982) called on scholars of Shaw, Shakespeare, and other British and Irish playwrights to form a Shaw society in Japan. Ichikawa, a professor emeritus at Waseda University, was a pioneering Shaw scholar who, in the 1920s, translated *Widowers' Houses*, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny*, *You Never Can Tell*, *The Devil's Disciple*, *Man and Superman*, and many of Shaw's one-act plays. When Shaw visited

Japan in March 1933 during his world cruise on the *Empress of Britain*, it was Ichikawa who escorted him to Waseda University on the last day of his ten-day stay in Japan.<sup>1</sup> Legend has it that, fed up with the throng of reporters and cameramen waiting outside, Shaw refused to get off the ship, which was harboring at Yokohama. Ichikawa then went on board, met the elderly playwright in person, and successfully persuaded him to go ashore and to the university.<sup>2</sup>

The inaugural assembly of the Shaw Society of Japan (SSJ) was held on 27 November 1971 at Ohkuma Hall of Waseda University, the campus that Shaw himself had visited nearly forty years before. Attending were approximately fifty scholars. In founding the SSJ, Ichikawa, who was its first president from 1971 through June 1980, expressed three purposes: (1) to raise the level of Bernard Shaw studies in Japan; (2) to offer young students an opportunity to present their studies on Shaw; and (3) to impart Shaw's sophisticated laughter and humor to the desiccated mind of the public.<sup>3</sup> The journal of the society, *GBS*, was first issued in November 1972 and has been issued almost annually since then.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the efforts of the society, however, it took time for Shaw and the SSJ to become known. One reason is that "Shaw" and "show" are pronounced and written identically in Japanese, and so the society was often misunderstood as the society of "show business"! The name was changed to the Bernard Shaw Society of Japan (BSSJ) in June 1980.

The BSSJ holds meetings twice a year, in the spring and fall. At each meeting, usually three papers are read, and sometimes outside lecturers are invited and films are viewed, notably the 1938 movie of *Pygmalion*, which was not shown to the public in Japan. During the last forty years, the BSSJ has invited not only Japanese writers and critics but also a number of foreign Shavians: Sidney P. Albert (1976), Stanley Weintraub (1977 and 1982), Katherine J. Worth (1987), Michael Horne (1990), Thomas Kilroy (1992), Heinz Kosok (1998), and Jay R. Tunney (2007). We also have non-Japanese members, including Michel Pharand and Nicholas Williams, both of whom have read papers at our meetings.

Under Masahiko Masumoto (1934–2006), the fourth president from 1988 to 1996, the BSSJ expanded its activities in meetings and publications. In addition to regular meetings, it instituted Shaw workshops, in which free discussion is held following a keynote speech. Since the first one (on *Widowers' Houses*) in September 1989, workshops have been held every March and September. The first round of discussion on major plays concluded at the thirty-fourth workshop (on *Fanny's First Play*) in September 2005, and the second round is now under way with two (rather than one) keynote speakers.

The BSSJ has also published collections of papers on Shaw. In order to commemorate our fifteenth anniversary, in 1986 we published a hardcover volume, *Shaw Studies*, containing twelve papers. But as the BSSJ's resources did not allow for further hardcover publications, to provide a place for members to publish their research on a more regular basis, we decided to publish a paperback series entitled *Bernard Shaw Studies*. Volume 1, a collection of six papers with a foreword by President Masumoto, was published in March 1991. The series has been a valuable opportunity for Japanese Shaw scholars, especially younger ones, to publish their work. Volume 12, the fortieth anniversary special issue, will appear in the fall of 2011.

The BSSJ has made further efforts to promote Shaw's work in Japan. In November 2006, to commemorate Shaw's 150th birthday, our society published *Welcome to the Shavian World*, a guidebook to Bernard Shaw, with then president Kiyoshi Shinkuma as general editor. The book outlines Shaw's life, his activities as drama and music critic, his relationships with Shakespeare, Ibsen, Wilde, and other writers, and introduces twenty-two of Shaw's major works. Seventeen BSSJ members contributed to this book,<sup>5</sup> the fruit of a cooperative effort to make Shaw known in Japan. To our great joy, several new members joined the BSSJ after having bought and read the guidebook.

The Bernard Shaw Society of Japan turns forty in November 2011. A small society, its membership rarely exceeds sixty. Although not all of Ichikawa's goals have been achieved in these forty years, BSSJ members have successfully passed the torch of Shaw studies in Japan to younger generations. In June 2010, Toshihiro Iida (1952–) became our eighth president, and not a single board member is over sixty. Today the BSSJ is an important venue for the study of modern British plays in Japan. In 2009, we revised our articles to allow those who study Shaw's contemporary dramatists to read papers at our meetings. Indeed, one of our younger members is a specialist of Terence Rattigan. Although none of Shaw's plays may be as popular in Japan as *My Fair Lady* has become, we believe that what Shaw said in his plays and other writings is more than ever relevant in the twenty-first century and should be understood more keenly in our far-eastern country. The BSSJ may be a small group, but it is a vibrant community of devoted Shavians.

## Notes

1. For the details of Shaw's visit to Japan in 1933, see Sidney P. Albert and Junko Matoba, "Shaking the Earth: Shaw in Japan," in *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies* 5 (1985): 239–70.

2. This is reported by Kiyoshi Shinkuma (b. 1941), who, while a doctoral student under the tutelage of Ichikawa, often heard Ichikawa's reminiscences about Shaw's visit. Shinkuma also attended the inaugural assembly of the BSSJ in 1971 and was its seventh president from June 2005 to June 2010.

3. Condensed and translated by the author from Matahiko Ichikawa, "Mission as a Pioneer," in *GBS*, no. 1, ed. The Shaw Society of Japan (November 1972), 1.

4. The latest issue of *GBS*, no. 34, was published in June 2011.

5. Michel Pharand could be called the "eighteenth" contributor, as he kindly allowed us to use the chronology of Shaw's works he provided for the International Shaw Society website.