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Yone Noguchi's Poetics as a Writer of "Dual Nationality"

Dr. Madoka Nagai HORI

Introduction

This paper demonstrates some of the results of my research on Yone Noguchi's poetics and life as a writer of "Dual Nationality". It also looks at the spiritual lineage between a father and his son. In other words, I would like to present an overview of Yone Noguchi's life and poetry in brief, in order to think through the connection with his son, Isamu Noguchi.

1. General Opinion of Yone and Isamu

Yone Noguchi, best known for his role as a Japanese poet up until the end of World War II, has been rather too harshly judged - and almost totally neglected - in the post-war era. Yone Noguchi has been almost totally sidelined, in fact, excepting insofar as he attracts some attention by way of being the father of Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), a highly-regarded versatile sculptor.

In this connection, in any case, the assessment of Yone carries both distaste - and a critical flavour, because Isamu was his *illegitimate* child. In Isamu's biography¹, Yone is usually painted in lurid color, and in several interviews of Isamu², he spoke about his father in a rather negative light, and about his American mother in a more positive manner. If we have regard for the world-wide success of Isamu as an artist, however, it is apparently true that Isamu has inherited from his father's estate - in terms of an international human network - and also, it may be argued, a similar motivation as an artist.

Yone Noguchi, who is not very well studied, even in Japanese literary history, was quite an influential figure as a Japanese-writer or an interpreter of Japanese culture overseas. The main reason for the harsh judgements towards Yone Noguchi in the post-war era is that Yone was stigmatized by his identification as a

'Nationalist' or 'Imperialist'. In post-war Japan, a number of Japanese were targeted with criticism as being inadequate ''Nationalists'' (with the attendant ugly image) and remained under a kind of 'seal of taboo' without any further investigation as to their truth. Noguchi was one of such figures in the post-war era. From 1942 onwards, especially, Noguchi wrote War-effort poetry, intended to whip up pro-War sentiment, along with others such as Takamura Kotaro (1883-1956). They were not alone: almost every literary contemporary did so. In radio broadcasts, Noguchi, well-known as a poet across the world, became the land-mark or signature poet of Imperial Japan. However, in the post-war era of Japan, being labeled a "writer of War Poetry" brought an immediate harsh assessment, not only to all the Japanese-language poetry written by Yone during the War-time era, but also to the totality of his identity as a writer.

2. Yone Noguchi's poetics

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Let us start with a rough sketch from the beginning of Yone's life, before entering into the issue of the lineage of the father to the son. Yone Noguchi - the writer - emerged in the period of the beginnings of the worldwide Symbolist literary movement. Noguchi left Japan for the USA in 1893, and then gained a chance to study poetry under Joaquin Miller (1839-1913) in Oakland, California. During his association with Millar, Noguchi studied the works of such American poets as Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and others, who had also been attracted by Symbolist writers in the period of transition from the latter part of the 19th to the early 20th century. That is, Noguchi, who learned about naturalism, mysticism, the maverick free spirit, and localism³, was aligned with the trends of the time. Noguchi started to write English poems under the influence of both Poe's poetic theory and Whitman's style, mixed with Japanese tradition, harking to MATSUO Basho (1644-1694) or Haiku (1641), and Zen Buddhism. The period prior to 1900 and just after was the heyday of literary Symbolism, foreshadowing Modernism. It had attracted attention to the mysteries of the Orient and of such non-Christian philosophy. Noguchi's literary career began thus as a young Japanese poet providing a breath of fresh air in the literary world of the Pacific Coast of the US, where the local and national literary atmosphere had developed on its own cultural terms. Seen and Unseen; or Monologues of a Homeless Snail (1896), which was Noguchi's first collection of verse, was well-received among American writers. After this success in the US, Noguchi went on to London, which was the place, where in the canonical English literary world, the movement that established modernity in between the traditional and innovative, took place. Noguchi's publication in London entitled *From the Eastern Sea* (1903) was favorably received among the many writers in London, including, for instance, Arthur Symons (1865-1945), and William Butler Yeats (1865-1939).

From the latter half of the 19th century, and especially after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and both before and after the First World War (1914-1918), the Western literary world had reached a new sensitivity for the modem. In other words, a movement of interest in, and admiration of the Orient had developed, which objected to the predominance of Western thought. English poets, who had acted for social reform and artistic innovation, such as W.B. Yeats, Arthur Symons and Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), were deeply interested in Oriental poetry and poets. With the transition stage of the turn of the 20th century, some Indian English-language poets appeared in London, such as Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) and Sarojini Naidu. Moreover, from Japan, Yone Noguchi too had emerged as a Japanese Englishlanguage poet. It can be said that Tagore becoming recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1913 was a vivid flagship of the movement, a signal of the fluctuating nature of Western power.

3 "Like a Paper Lantern" and Akari ----- Father and Son

To begin with, I will refer to one poem here, from *Seen and Unseen: Monologues of a Homeless Snail*, which is Yone Noguchi's first publication in 1896.

"Like a Paper Lantem"

"Oh, my friend, thou wilt not come back to me this night!" I am alone in this lonely cabin, alas, in the friendless Universe, and the snail at my door hides stealishly[sic] his horns.

"O for my sake, put forth thy honorable horns!"

To the Eastward, to the Westward? Alas, where is Truthfulness? Goodness? Lights?

The world enveils me; my body itself this night enveils my soul.

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Alas, my soul is like a paper lantern, its pastes wetted off under the rainy night, in the rainy world.4

This work was produced under the influence of the Haikus of Matsuo Basho's- "Katatsumuri Tuno furiwakeyo Suma-Akashi 「編手音ふりわけ上線原明石」"; which was used as inspiration for the following lines 在主人は知道中に中主見ている。A関 の業を依頼がないものはない。 Since ancient times, people dream within an inusion. Nothing is as ephemeral as human prosperity (translated by Hori). 'Yone Noguchi was inspired by Basho's idea, and tried to express various levels of lonesomeness and solidarity of human-beings. "To the Eastward, to the Westward? Alas, where is Truthfulness? ---Goodness?---Lights?" This sentence does not refer to the matter of direction or destination, but the matter of the spiritual home. This poem depicts one poor homeless Japanese boy, who is wandering and struggles in the juncture between Western and Eastern cultures, in his search for the place of Body and Soul, Goodness, Truth, and Beauty. It is a subtle and profound symbolic expression of sensibility.

This poetry explains in detail how much he leads a solitary life in the global world, and sings the pain of his soul vanishing into the darkness. And then he casts a reflection on the 'Paperlantern', which he expresses as "its pastes wetted off under the rainy night", not a typical motif of Japanese culture as a colorful image, but of more different or additional esthetics - as a melancholic and gloomy image.

This poetry was the starting point for Yone Noguchi, and expresses his own original motif, which is his own swinging and bewilderment between the East and West - a 'Dual Nationality'. Yone cherished this poetic expression, the suffering in the binary, until his death in 1947. It might be said that the son Isamu followed in his father's footsteps.

The series of Isamu's Akari Light Sculptures (Fig. 1), is widely known as a type of exlectic furniture in the world of interior design. This series was one of his own favorites among the thousands of works. This sculpture, which becomes part of human life, shows the effect of light and shadow, by using Japanese paper and bamboo. The inspiration for the creation of this work series was his encounter with the traditional Japanese paper-lantem (Chochin) in Gifu-prefecture, while he was on a visit to see 'cormorant fishing' in the Nagara-river, on the way to Hiroshima, in 1951. The Nagarariver flows close by Tsushima city, which was the hometown of

Yone Noguchi. That area has been famous for Chochin paperlanterns since the medieval Muromachi-era, of the 14th century. Tsushima is very famous for its Chochin-festival, the Owari-Tsushima-Tenno-Festival (尾張津島天王祭), and its spectacles of the chochin was represented in the Ukivoe-wood block-printing [大一時間之所國會] by Ando Hiroshige'(fig.2-a,b). Yone Nogochi refers to the festival and the Ukiyoe in his essay⁵. These references might well relate to Isamu's curiosity towards the Paperlantern art. Isamu manufactured more than 200 types of Akari Light Sculpture over a period of 35 years. This series of Akari has received recognition across the world as a 'Paper Lantern' or the 'Expression of the Sun and the Moon'6.

The 'Chochin' or Japanese Lantern has been well-known as a typical Japanese motif since the 19th century, similar to the tradition of Geisha and the mountain Fuji-yama – as it has been known outside Japan. However, the *Chochin* was internationally recontextualised by Isamu, from a strange local prototype to a modern life-style form.

It is not very well known that the concept of the Chochin originated in the hometown of Isamu's father, because it is something that Isamu never mentioned. The Akari series is not usually connected to the subject matter of his father. Nonetheless, it might be argued that Isamu has empathized with his father's poetry, in a manner cloaked in the *love-and-hate* relationship he appears to have had with his father. Comparing the piece of writing "Like a Paper Lantern" and the Akari series appears a little romantic, perhaps, but might well be a symbolic example of transmitting this conception.

4. To fulfill my "heritage"

Yone Noguchi, who found himself in the ambiguous situation of a bilingual writer especially in the War-time era, referred to himself as possessing 'Dual Nationality'. And his son Isamu was bom into dualism - with a dual citizenship practically, and as the racially mixed son of a Japanese father and a US mother.

However, the fact that he was the son of Yone Noguchi was the starting point and operative label for Isamu. When Isamu set his sights on becoming an artist, he was destined, one might say, to follow in the footsteps of his father. Isamu made the choice to call himself Noguchi. Thanks to his father's connection, Isamu

can connect with various other famous artists, such as Michio Ito, Tsuguharu Fujita, Brancusi, and others.

Isamu was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for travel to Paris and the East in 1927. In his proposal written in 1926, he said:

I have selected the Orient as the location for my productive activities for the reason that I feel a great attachment for it, I having spent half my life there. My father, Yone Noguchi, is Japanese and has long been known as an interpreter of the East to the West, through poetry. I wish to fulfill my heritage.⁷

私が創作活動のための場所として東洋を選んだのは、私が学生を選ごしてきた東洋に大いなる要者を 据じているからです。私の父ヨネ・ノグテは日本人であり、詩を通じて西洋に対して東洋を理解せる めた人物として早くから知られています。私はこれと同じ仕事を、解制によって行いたいのです。*

It can be said that Isamu has the intention of inheriting his father's genealogy, though with a different artistic way of expression.

Yone Noguchi wrote about the use of language in the critical essay titled "the essence of the poetry" in 1926, as below:

Words are very important as an intermediation of expression, but can also be extremely dangerous. It is because the language selected is sometimes a compromise, or because it doesn't have genuine freedom, the power of artistic construction might be broken down in order to express the philosophy and emotional feeling through the medium of explanation. From this point of view, the sculptor is much more fortunate than the literary writer, because of the minimal danger of misapprehension and misconception in expressions. The marble stone or the clump of earth for a sculptor does not weaken the power of artistic expression, unlike that of language for writer. (Translated by Hori)

言葉は表現の媒介として必要なものであるが、これを意識なものはない。加得となれば言葉は受益的で、教育の自由を持たないが為め、その保介の変素として思想感情をもる時自然に連続的力を弱める事になる。この動から見ると、文學者より思想家の方が基か幸福な進化に立つてある。表現上の意識が少い、疑問家が飲分物として使用する大理切にしても土地にしても、文學者に関する言語のやうに、地談の力を適問ならしめるやうな姿態をなりない。*

This book of Yone was published just when Isamu had started on his way to becoming a sculptor. It might be said that it was some form of commutative consciousness between Yone and Isamu.

Let me show you another example of Yone's poem titled 'Satujinki' (The Murderer: **), which was written from the viewpoint of the stone carver - in other words, the view point of the sculptor.

The old rock carver from the stone quarry said: 'The Stone is alive, have a look at it'

'Smooth skin and blood vessels like an animal,

We can not compare the aesthetic symmetry of muscles, Yes, the human being is blind; they don't see the bloody internal organ of the stone,

When I boldly quarry the stone,

it feels as if the blood cascade down from the blood vessels.

Alas, am I demon; a murderer.... I tremble with fear.

Perhaps a comparison to autopsy is presumptuous,

but I kill the living tendons and boldly cut the rock like tofu Yet, when I pass by the mason in the city,

I gaze at the piled up corpses of volition

Oh Dear! Sometimes I even cover my nose from the stench. Yes, lucid airy skies in autumn, I confine myself to the solitary stone mountains,

and grin. The work of this 'murderer' should be spectacle.' (Translated by Hori)

「新校生きてある、新賀なさい……」石田県の老人女は語る。
「動物のやうな疾患に生き……」石田県の老人女は語る。
「動物の肉を乳は何に整えることが世来ない。
ない、人間は盲目だ、石の西い種膳を見ずに挟むが、
犯はかうざくりと初を切つてゆくと。
恐らく生管から血膚が膿のやりに流れるであらう。
ああ、夜叉だ殺人鬼だ……かり思つてきよつとすることがある。
外科院の知明に以数するのは極極だが、
別は生きた無をはらして石を頂顔のように切る、かうざくりさくりと……
だが、私は私会に出て石間の前を過る。
第十たる窓上の死骸を飲めて、いやけやその臭気に鼻を歌らことがある。
はい、鬼みきつた天の布い秋、獨り石油にたて籠り。
にやりと気を殺人鬼の仕事も、考えると社快なものだ。まり

It might be said that the idea, intention, and vitality of Yone Noguchi had been handed on to Isamu and Isamu's works. Isamu

was an international artist who emerged beyond the domain where lay the 'Danger of linguistic expression' and ambiguity, which most concerned his father.

5. 'In island sea' and the plan of "the theater of the Sun" of the Seto Inland Sea

There are some other symbolic examples for looking at the artistic expression of Isamu's *father* and *son* relationship. It involves the 'Seto Inland Sea'. As you may know, Isamu constructed two ateliers/studios; one is located in New York on Long Island, and the other in Mure, in Kagawa-prefecture, which is located on the eastern end of the Seto Inland Sea. Why did Isamu decide upon the location of Mure on the Seto Inland Sea? Well, one reason was the quality of the stone in the ground. But there may also be another reason:

We may find the answer in Yone's poetry, 'In the Inland Sea' in *The Pilgrimage* (1909).

(...)

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Oh, here the twilight of the Inland Sea, Here I hear a song without a word,

(Is it the song of my flying soul?)

That's the song of my dream I dreamed a thousand years ago, Oh, my dream of the fairy world, oh, the beauty of the Inland Sea!

O birds with white souls, steer my soul with white love, Here the sea of my dream, Oh, the beauty of the Inland Sea!¹¹

This piece of poetry entitled 'Inland Sea' is abstract, and it is quite plain and undistinguished. However, when he translated this original English version into the Japanese version by himself later with the title 'Seto Inland Sea' in his 'Symbolism poetry collection' in 1925, it can be said that it is a much better and more symbolic one than in English.

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瀬戸内海の藻明界に離れ続へ……
私は無髪の取を聞く。
推羅する本の。現 の歌を聞く、
千年も以前に参見た私の参の訳を聞く、
他女の世界の夢を聞く……ああ、瀬戸内海の美はしさよ。
(中略)
白い塊の鳥よ、白い痴愛の力で私の心を結本れ、
ここは私の夢の権だ、美はしい瀬戸内海が流れる。12
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In this poem, the poet has fixed his eyes on a specific scene and locality, and listened to his own voice - the voice of the soul which takes flight, and then sees and listens to the 'dream' which goes beyond time and space. Isamu has tried to *come-and-go* between *West and East*, *New York inland-sea and Seto Inland Sea*, which was sung by his father in the USA and Japan. In contrast to this poem, I am led to wonder whether Isamu might have had any knowledge about the plans for 'the theater of the sun' in regard to the imagery of the Seto Inland Sea.

During the War, in 1944, Ito Michio formed a plan for the construction of the 'Laboratory of Performing Arts for the Greater project, which was called 'the plan of 'the theater of the Sun' Larging mismute in German, where Ito Michio had studied in 1915 and had formulated the plan as an Asian concept from that time. Yone Noguchi and Fujita Tsuguharu were among the supporters of this idea. Ito Michio - a dancer based in USA, and Fujita Tsuguharu - an oil painter with much success in France, were friends of Yone Noguchi, and they were both father figures for Isamu from the 1920s. The background of both Ito and Fujita had similarities with that of Yone: they also debuted as Japanese artists internationally, were used as national propagandists in the War-time era, and were then criticized in the post-war period. It is not certain which part of the Seto Inland Sea is formulated in the plan of 'the theater of the Sun'. But I wonder if Isamu knew about the plan of 'the theater', or whether he may have had some inspiration, which was the same way as that of his father as well as his friends

Conclusion

After the War, Isamu read his father's English book "Japan and America" (1921) and underlined several parts. The following passage was underlined and 'Importance' was written alongside it in the margins:

From somewhat cynical attitude, they even looked back longingly toward the period of spiritual insularity or many hundred years ago, when our ruling class ovserved the old homogeneous ethics to their advantage. The Western civilization, generally speaking, intoxicated our Japanese mind like strong drink; and as a matter of course we often found ourselves, when we awoke from that intoxication, sadder and inclined even to despise ourselves.¹³

他分表内な態度で、彼らに独当年前の緩神的な話との時代をなっかしく契り返りさえした。その場時の支配器をは含むからの均減な近地を自分ともにからよく維持していた。著作文明は、一般的にいって強い係のようにわれわれる本人の心を脅かせた。そして言葉のことながら、動いから関めるとしたわれれればしば、自分が前より一種みじめに思われて、自分自身を軽度したくさえなるのである。

It seems clear that Isamu was conscious about inheriting something of his father's mission.

This essay did focus on the influence of Yone's symbolic poetry around the subject of Isamu, and consider the artistic and spiritual lineage between father and son, with special focus on the post-war period. This will concern the capacity for the artistic connection between father and son, citing some of Yone's poems and writings. Yone Noguchi was sidelined as a poet in the post-war period. However, his father's existence should have been quite decisive for Isamu who decided to live in solitude with art. Isamu's artistic spirit and his strength and solitude as a citizen of the world, were, in some senses, handed down from his father.

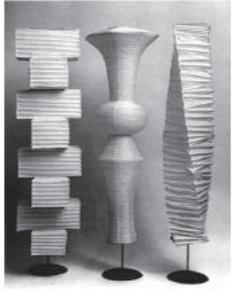


Fig.1 AKARI

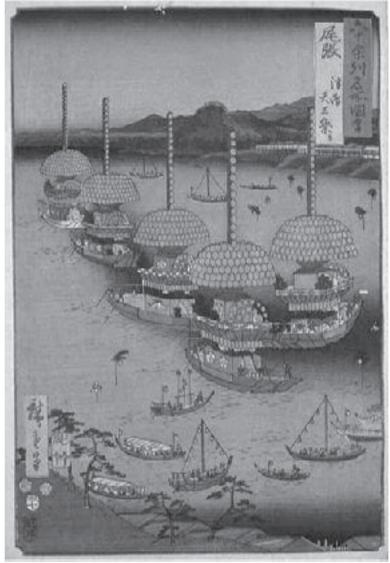


Fig.2-a
Ando Hiroshige (Fig.2) the Ukiyoe-wood block-printing



Fig.2-b

Contemporary 'Chochin-festival (Owari-Tsushi ma-Tenno-Festival= Festival= Fes



Fig.3
Isamu with Father's poetry

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'සුළඟේ ශීතයට සවන් දෙනු' නවකතාව පිළිබඳ විමසීමක්

*ස*මත් විකුමා*රව්*වි

මහාචාර්ය කුලතිලක කුමාරසිංහ සුළඟේ ශීතයට සවත් දෙනු (Hear the Wind Sing) යනුවෙන් පරිවර්තනය කරන්නේ හරුකි මුරකම් නමෝ විත්තියෙන් ලියූ නවකතාව ය. එය ඔහුගේ තුන් ඇඳුතු නවකතාවක පළමුවැන්නයි. එහි අනෙක් නවකතා දෙක නම් Pinball, 1973 (1980) සහ A Wind Sheep Chase (1982) යන නවකතා ය. මෙම නවකතා මඟින් සාහිතා ලෝකය මුරකම් හඳුනාගන්නේ පශ්චාත් නූතනවාදී ලේඛකයෙකු වශයෙනි. එහෙත් මුරකම් පිළිබඳ මගේ කියවීම නම් ඔහු තරම් තියුණු ලෙස දේශපාලනික නවකතා ලියන අන් ලේඛකයෙකු නැති බව ය. ඔහුගේ නවකතා දේශපාලනික වන්නේ ස්වකීය පුශස්ත වචන හරඹය මඟින් ගෝලීයකරණය වූ පාරිභෝගික සංස්කෘතිය පිළිබඳ තියුණු කියවීමක් සම්පුදනය කරන බැවිනි.

මෙම නවකතාවට පුස්තුත වන්නේ 1970 අගෝස්තු 08 සිට අගෝස්තු 26 දක්වා කාල පරාසයක විහිදෙන එකටෙක සම්බන්ධයක් නැති සිදුවීම් ගණනාවකි. මෙහි කථකයාට නමක් නැත. ඔහුගේ මිතුරා Rat යන ආරූඪ නාමයෙන් හඳුන්වයි. ඔවුන් දෙදෙනා නිතර හමුවන්නේ J යනුවෙන් හඳුන්වන චීනයෙන් සංකුමණය වූවකුට අයත් අවන්හලක දී ය. ඔවුන් දෙදෙනා ම විශ්වවිදාහලයීය ශිෂායින් ය. මෙම නවකතාව දේශපාලනික වන්නේ මුරකම් එය ලියන කාල රාමුව (time frame) අනුව ය.

1970 වූ කලී ජපානයේ ශිෂා අරගල පුබලව මතු වූ කාල වකවාතුවකි. එහෙත් ඒ පිළිබඳ ව නවකතාවේ යන්තමින් සඳහන් වන්නේ අවස්ථා දෙකක දී පමණකි. ඉන් එක් අවස්ථාවකි ඔහු විස්තර කරන්නේ එබඳු විරෝධතා රැළියක් පැවති දිනක තමා තරුණියක සමඟ නිදිවැදුණු බව කීමටය. ඒ අනුව ශිෂා අරගල පිළිබඳ කතාව නවකතාවේ ආඛාභනික නොසිදුවීම්ය. (narratively non events) එහෙත් සමස්ත නවකතාව ම එකී නොසිදුවීම් වටා ගෙතුණ ශිෂා අසහනය පුරාවෘතයක් (myth) වෙයි.

මු රකමිගේ මෙම නවකතාව පිළිබඳ මෙබඳු කියවීමකට මා පොලඹවන්නේ සයිමන්ය. සයිමන් නවගත්තේගම සාපේක්ෂනී ලියන්නේ තුවක්කු සංස්කෘතිය මෙරට ගිලගෙන සිටි 1990 කාලවකවානුවේ දී ය. අංග ඡේදනය කළ කැරලි නායකයෙකුගේ සිහිනයක් තුළ ඔහුගේ පුරුෂ ලිඟුවට සමාන්තර ව කුඩා පිස්තෝලයක්

---, Shi no Honshitsu (The Essence of the Poetry), Daiichi-Shobo (The Essence of the Poetry).

---, Ware Nihon-jin Nari (The Example) I am a Japanese), Dai ichi-Shobo (Example): Tokyo, 1938.

Winther-Tamaki, Bert. Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years, University of Hawai'i Press: Honolulu, 2001.

Footnotes

- 1. Ashton, Dore(1992) and especially Duus, Masayo (2004) are Isamu's biography, both quite negative towards Yone.
- 2. Hakutani, (1990) 'Father and Son: An interview with Isamu Noguchi'.
- 3. This term is a translation of the Japanese Phrase "chiiki shugi (***)", which relay to an artistic methodology of elevating rural culture and tradition in art.
- 4. one Noguchi, *Seen and Unseen*, no. xix; also in *Selected Poems of Yone Noguchi*, p.9.
- 5. Yone Noguchi, Ware Nihon-jin Nari, p. 180.
- 6. Noguchi, Isamu. (Translated by Ogura, Tadao.) *Aru Chokokuka no Sekai*, p.39.
- 7. Isamu Noguchi, 'Proposal to the Guggenheim Foundation' (1927) from http://www.noguchi.org/intext.html (2009/3/22). And also, Dore, Ashton. (*Hyoden Isamu Noguchi*, pp.32-33.) mentions about Isamu's intention of using his father's name.
- 8. This Japanese translation is used from the Pamphlet Isamu Noguchi, the journey toward the Landscape—The seeking and visit of Eurasiamonument with Bollingen Fund (The Japanese exhibition organized by the Noguchi Museum N.Y. in 2004)
- 9. Yone Noguchi, Shi no Honshitu, 1926, pp.7-8.
- 10. Yone Noguchi, 'Satsujin-ki', Ware Nihonjin Nari, pp. 142-143.
- 11. Yone Noguchi, 'In the Inland Sea', *The Pilgrimage*, 1909, pp. 47-48.
- 12. Yone Noguchi, *Hyosho-Jyojyou-Sisyu*, pp.78-79.
- 13. Yone Noguchi, *Japan and America*, 1921, Orientalia: NY&Keio University Press; Tokyo, p.3.
- 14. Dore Ashton, Translated into Japanese by Sasaya, Sumio. *Hyoden Noguchi: East and West*, 1992, p.122