



Roads of Oku: Journeys in the Heartland

Dennis Kawaharada

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"Roads of Oku: Journeys in the Heartland" is a collection of seven essays on Japanese history, culture, and literature, based on the author's research and travels in his ancestral homeland. Pat Matsueda writes in her review, "It's a revelation and a pleasure to travel with Kawaharada on his journey from Hawaii to homeland and heartland. ("Literary, personal pilgrimage comes to life in new book," Pat Matsueda, Honolulu Star Advertiser, May 10, 2015). Excerpts from Matsueda's review: After summarizing how his grandparents [immigrated to Hawai'i from Japan], were affected by World War II and influenced the way he grew up, the book alternates between two voices. The first is Kawaharada's personal voice recounting the trips he made to Japan, each time recovering some part of his family's culture and history. The second is that of a third-person narrator presenting deeply researched accounts of Hawaiian history and Japanese religion, customs, geography and archaeology. The last three essays in the book are perhaps the most moving and insightful. The title essay recounts the journey by Basho, "possessed by wanderlust," to set out on foot from Edo. "In Snow Country" examines the work of Nobel laureates Yasunari Kawabata and Kenzaburo Oe, among other writers. "Hokule'a in Yokohama" describes the traditional Hawaiian voyaging canoe's 2007 journey to Japan. By this time a reader has grown to understand the relationship between the thoughtful, poetic voice of the traveler and the distant, seemingly dispassionate voice of the scholar. Seven Essays 1. "Child of History"—about the author's grandparents from Hiroshima and their early twentieth century immigration to Hawai'i with thousands of other Japanese settlers; reflections on the history that led to the 1941 attack by the Japanese navy on the US fleet anchored in Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i and to the 1945 US atomic bombing of Hiroshima City; visits to Gonomura and Tomo, the Hiroshima hometowns of the author's grandparents. 2. "Where Kami Alight"—about the roots of Shinto religion and the worship of the sun goddess Amaterasu and numerous other kami (deities); an overview of Shinto shrines and annual festivals and rites of passage for individuals. 3. "Tracking Mankai"—about the tradition of celebrating sakura, or cherry blossoms, at mankai, or full bloom; a spring 2008 journey to track mankai along two historic roads between Edo and Kyoto—the Tokaido (Eastern Sea Road) and the Nakasendo (Inland Mountain Road). 4. "Fujisan and Mountain Worship"—about the worship of Mt. Fuji and other mountains in Japan; the history of Shugendo, a practice of mountain asceticism combining elements of Shinto, Buddhism and Taoism. 5. "Roads of Oku"—about the Zen Buddhist haiku poet Basho and his famous 1689 journey from Edo to northern Japan (Oku). 6. "In Snow Country"—about the novel "Snow Country" by Yasunari Kawabata, Japan's first Nobel literary prize winner (1968); a January 2008 visit to Snow Country to see Echigo Yuzawa, the setting of Kawabata's novel and to attend a winter fire festival in Nozawa, Nagano. 7. "Hokule'a in Yokohama"—about the summer 2007 sail into Yokohama by the Hawaiian voyaging canoe Hokule'a, commemorating Hawaiian King Kalakaua's visit to Yokohama over a century earlier; reflections on multiculturalism, race relations, and identity in contemporary Japan through the eyes of authors such as Ryu Murakami, Haruki Murakami, and Kenzaburo Oe. The text includes 6 maps and 63 black and white photos. "Roads of Oku: Journeys in the Heartland" is the third in a trilogy of essay collections. The first two are about journeys at home—"Storied Landscapes: Hawaiian Literature and Place" (1999) and "Local Geography: Essays on Multicultural Hawai'i" (2004). Both collections are distributed by the University of Hawai'i Press.

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