Introduction

Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 (1875–1962) was a public intellectual who played a pivotal role in shaping modern Japan’s cultural identity. A member of the social elite and a self-taught folk scholar, he has been compared with the fabled Grimm brothers of Germany and the great British folklorist James G. Frazer (1854–1941), author of The Golden Bough. Yanagita is also notable because his career provides a distinctive synopsis of Japan’s turbulent and rapid modernization. Born only seven years after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, he was intellectually active and extremely prolific from the period of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) until well after Japan’s defeat by the Allies in 1945 at the end of World War II. Interested in traditional Japanese culture and folkways, Yanagita saw himself as a progressive activist and a rigorous scholar; he used his unconventional research methods and considerable literary skills to examine modernization and its radical effects on the lives of the Japanese people.

Despite his unassailable membership in the Japanese academy, however, responses to his work, both during and after his lifetime, have been varied and complex. The scholarship on Yanagita’s considerable oeuvre occupies a wide discursive realm, including assessments of his formidable and fertile intellect; the scholarly nature of his approach; his contribution to the study of premodern Japanese traditions; the relevance of his work to contemporary social concerns; and his continued influence on Japanese conceptions of national identity, whether scholarly or popular. Nevertheless, a close examination of his broad reception reveals that specific patterns have continued to inform reactions to his writings.
Introduction

Although a small body of literature extols Yanagita’s virtues, sometimes uncritically, a much larger and diverse contingent finds fault with the man and his work, even while it recognizes Yanagita’s importance. Often these studies take Yanagita to task for failing to live up to his political potential and brand him—though usually not in so many words—an elitist dilettante, a dangerously flawed prophet, a predictable product of his time. In many of these works, Yanagita becomes the means to a fruitful discussion of his own failures, a historical “what if,” a dead end.2

Despite the underlying sense of disappointment and censure in much of the scholarship, there is clearly something compelling about Yanagita’s work; if there were not, the debate would have died a natural death some time ago. “Yanagita’s corpus is so huge and diverse,” writes Leith Morton, that multiple interpretations are both possible and necessary, even though most scholarship has focused on gleaning the “essential unity of thought” represented there.3 However, the “distant reading” that such a project often inspires, Franco Moretti acknowledges, is one in which “the text itself disappears.”4 While this holistic approach is a useful one, I argue that the continuing fascination surrounding Yanagita’s work is rooted precisely in the individual texts: in other words, in the way they express their ideas, rather than in the ideas themselves.

This study thus approaches Yanagita through a rigorous focus on the materiality of his texts. Historically based close readings will demonstrate how Yanagita’s texts work to complicate the dominant ideologies that address modern Japanese identity. Using a variety of dynamic translational processes to examine everyday life, Yanagita’s heterogeneous texts do not show us complicity and political inertness; rather, they highlight the radical potential of translation as a method of resistance to the homogenizing national narrative of Japan’s early and mid-twentieth century.

Such an approach is of course in a vital dialogue with the history of Yanagita scholarship, which is longest and broadest in Japan. It begins with Yanagita himself, who actively built the foundation of his significant scholarly legacy by publishing many of his works in multiple formats and editions, often with the help of supporters and disciples who usually gave him full authorial credit. A plethora of Yanagita anthologies, bibliographies, and dictionaries, put together by his epigones, solidified his reputation as Japan’s most influential folk scholar even during his lifetime. This already vast library also includes no fewer than three collected works of his writings, each numbering well over thirty volumes,
with one collection currently still in production. Other collections include a twenty-two-volume series of previously published articles about Yanagita, dating from near the beginning of his career in 1910 and extending to 1987, twenty-five years after his death. A critical biography, published in 1988, numbers more than 1,000 pages.

Immediately obvious in these works is the unmistakable presence of the proverbial “great man”: driven, formidable, uncompromising, demanding. The prickly Yanagita has been described as someone “without disciples,” but he had no shortage of followers, admirers, and others whose lives and careers he influenced. Many studies and anecdotal reports by those who worked with him describe him respectfully, as a maverick thinker and an imposing character. The cult surrounding him was such that students of his work are often described as engaging in “Yanagitagaku” (Yanagita studies). In these writings, Yanagita is often treated as being synonymous with his work, an indicator of his strong charisma and the scholarly convention of paying obeisance to one’s seniors. That the commemoration of his genius dominates earlier scholarship and commentary is amply demonstrated by the fact that the vast majority of these writings refer to him respectfully as “Yanagita-sensei.” This form of address is found in personal recollections as well as more formal studies of his work. The editors of the first collected works regularly refer to him as such, as do the many friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who contributed their often awestruck and nostalgic personal recollections of him to the geppō (monthly reports,” or pamphlets) that accompany each volume.

Sentimental characterizations notwithstanding, what unites these positive reports on a more critical level is their tacit acknowledgment that Yanagita is what Michel Foucault, in his discussion of seminal European scholars such as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, calls a “singular type of author.” The widespread influence of Yanagita’s work shows that he counts as one of these “initiators of discursive practices” who created a distinctive scholarly precedent—and thereby the space for others to challenge, expand on, and develop his folk studies project. Many of his younger followers also became respected folk studies scholars in their own right, with approaches distinct from that of their mentor. Yanagita’s authorial presence is such, however, that none of these younger scholars has acquired Yanagita’s stature: his is still the first name cited in any discussion on folk studies in Japan.
Despite this quorum of supporters surrounding his work, the fact is that even during his lifetime Yanagita was regarded as an eccentric, domineering crackpot almost as often as he was labeled a brilliant, versatile iconoclast. Many of these assessments stemmed from Yanagita’s ambitious and often single-minded advocacy of his own approach. His relentless challenges to neighboring disciplines, several of which are discussed in this book, probably alienated almost as many rival scholars and former disciples as they attracted. These debates usually involved mutual critiques of research goals and methodology, and often became feuds of a more personal sort. Yanagita’s detractors generally agreed that there was something hermetic about his approach, something that willfully rejected the greater scholarly discourse. Yanagita, for his part, felt that he was being unfairly ignored or excluded from vital debates to which he felt well qualified to contribute. These “personalities and issues,” as Ronald Morse has euphemistically described the roiling human politics surrounding Yanagita and his work, took their toll. Despite the formal accolades he received, toward the end of his life Yanagita felt abandoned and stymied, and feared that his newly founded discipline would die along with him.

The liberal politics of Japan in the 1960s and 1970s, however, brought renewed attention to Yanagita after his death. A new generation critical of the scholarship on Japanese culture and history began to ask, “Can the Yanagita school of folklore studies overcome Japan’s modern ills?” Folk studies once again became fashionable and even scholars from outside the discipline seized upon Yanagita’s work as an alternative to the existing views. Indeed, because Yanagita’s disciples had largely been dispersed across a variety of disciplines after the war, in a sense the multidisciplinary approach became the new shape of minzokugaku 民俗学 (folk studies). Symposia commemorating the 10th anniversary of Yanagita’s death, in 1972, and the 100th anniversary of his birth, in 1975, brought together some of these diverse scholars, all of whom sought the contemporary applicability of Yanagita’s ideas.

Tsurumi Kazuko 鶴見和子 (1918–2006), a U.S.-trained sociologist and friend of the Yanagita family, was present at both events. She thought Yanagita’s work could add another important perspective to studies of modernizing nations: as he had advocated, modernity should be studied “not through the concepts of a single model, but through diverse models, probing endogenously oriented development among the
common people as well as the exogenously oriented course of modernization likely to be led by industrializing elites.\textsuperscript{17} Similarly voicing an interest in a local historical perspective, a loose alliance of historians active from the late 1960s, with Irokawa Daikichi 色川大吉 (1925–) and Kano Masanao 鹿野政直 (1931–) at their head, began to promote a “new Japanese historiography” that would be “indigenous.”\textsuperscript{18} To write this \\textit{minshūshi} 民衆史 (people’s history), they “increasingly sought methodological guidance in the works of Yanagita Kunio.”\textsuperscript{19} Influential poet and cultural critic Yoshimoto Takaaki 吉本隆明 (1924–) also discovered Yanagita in the late 1960s; Takayanagi Shun’ichi writes that Yoshimoto, “like many younger activists who in the quiet of a prison cell read Yanagita Kunio . . . converted to a spiritualized version of nativism.”\textsuperscript{20} Although this is an overly romanticized and reductive description of Yoshimoto’s complex relationship with Yanagita, it nevertheless indicates the commonality between these two charismatic figures.\textsuperscript{21} Yoshimoto himself tried to theorize the “déjà vu phenomenon [既視現象 kishi genshō]” he felt Yanagita’s texts produced in the reader.\textsuperscript{22} Like Yanagita, Yoshimoto attracted popular attention through his unconventional appropriation of Japanese rather than Western sources to explain the internal, spiritual life of his countrypeople.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite their varied approaches, then, the major commentators on Yanagita’s work during this period all regarded his oeuvre in a somewhat nostalgic fashion, as a “native” source that promised a return to an alternative cultural origin for modern Japan. While they acknowledged their indebtedness to his work, however, their overall orientation toward postwar leftist politics meant that they remained skeptical of Yanagita’s prewar materials and methods. A scholar present at the 1975 symposium to mark the 100th anniversary of Yanagita’s birth informally summed up the debate immediately after the meeting:

But it is somewhat typical of Yanagita’s thought that, for all the talk about his contemporary relevance and the applicability of his work to the modernization of developing nations, scholars cannot agree on just what was the enduring quality of his contribution. Someone pointed out after the symposium that the participants tore Yanagita’s achievements into pieces, only to arrive finally at the consensus that his greatness lay in that intangible attribute called charisma which is to be found in his many books . . . So the search to explain the mystique of Yanagita continues.\textsuperscript{24}
While the quote captures the curious mix of admiration and rejection that characterized the reception of Yanagita’s work among postwar Japanese scholars, dissatisfaction was expressed primarily in a critique of the work’s serviceability to nationalism: “They warned that when the hermeneutic circle coincides with the boundaries of the nation state, it turns itself into an all-too-familiar exclusionistic discourse of Japanese uniqueness.” For these scholars, Yanagita was an indispensable—even unavoidable—but problematic resource for thinking about the Japanese past.

It is at this point that North American scholars entered the fray, and with their outsiders’ perspective they were less personally invested in Yanagita’s legacy. Prior to this, there had been so few translations of Yanagita or commentaries on his work in English that a list of them fits on a single page. And while folk studies experienced its own renaissance in North America during the 1960s and 1970s, the few English-speaking folk scholars who attended to his work during this period, prominent though they were, have not had a broad impact on scholars in other fields. Instead, Yanagita was taken up in various ways by a relatively small group of younger historians who were in direct contact with the more internationally minded minshūshi historians mentioned above.

These international connections resulted in the first English-language book on Yanagita, by Ronald Morse, who submitted his solid biographical study of the man and his work as a doctoral thesis in 1974. The other U.S. scholars who took some interest in Yanagita, however, tended to treat his work on a more limited scale, usually through the lens of the postwar Japanese scholars who were grappling with his work. The resulting portrait was not terribly positive. Historian Carol Gluck acknowledged the Japanese postwar historians’ critique of Yanagita in her important 1978 article, but faulted them for repeating the mistakes of their predecessor:

The insistence of the popular historians [like Irokawa Daikichi, Kano Masanao, and Yasumaru Yoshio] on indigenous, Japanese forms sometimes sounds like a kind of academic jōi, “repelling the barbarians” from the ranks of Japanese history and historiography. In this, they resemble some of the subjects they study, since Yanagita and the Bakumatsu nativists before him also wielded Japanese tradition as a weapon of protest . . . These scholars know the dangers of the vulgar version of Nihonron—the concern with what it means to be Japanese that has lately pervaded the
press—and perceive that they are dealing with a “double-edged sword.”
They seem, however, unable to relinquish it.30

Here, Yanagita becomes a secondary concern, remarkable only for his
nationalist exclusionism, a “subject of study” rather than a potential
source of ideas or innovation in the historical discipline. In an academic
climate where poststructuralist theories were gaining ascendance, Yanagita’s shortcomings as an unapologetic nationalist and his perceived lack
of international relevance set the tone for subsequent readings of Yanagita by English-speaking scholars.

While a new boom in minzokugaku during the 1980s was filling up
previously neglected sections in Japanese bookstores, the popular fervor
in Japan was inversely reflected in the lack of foreign interest in Yanagita, who continued to have trouble crossing borders.31 Only in the mid-
1990s was there an increased effort among North American scholars to
directly engage with Yanagita’s works, primarily to see what exactly he
had to say about Japanese national identity. As in the 1970s, those who
showed an interest were by and large historians rather than folk scholars.
Dissertations by Alan Christy and Yoshikuni Igarashi, along with
monographs by Kevin Doak, Gerald Figal, Harry Harootunian, and
Marilyn Ivy (all published during the 1990s), made important contribu-
tions to the study of Yanagita and inspired my own project.32

Despite their differences in approach it is fair to say that, as a group,
their most important effect on the study of Yanagita’s work has been to
free it from its largely self-imposed disciplinary boundaries and show how
his texts are linked to the discourse on Japanese cultural and social history
more generally. Whether they seek to revive the diversity of prewar folk
studies, carefully foregrounding the distinctive cultural work of other folk
scholars who were flattened in Yanagita’s prodigious wake (Christy); showcase his role in the explication of the fantastic elements of Japanese modernity, a state or process usually described in terms of the aggressive erasure of such phenomena (Figal); or locate him in a network of important pre-
war intellectuals who struggled to (re)define a fracturing national identity
(Doak, Harootunian, Ivy), these scholars have read closely to explore the
ideological complexity of Yanagita’s work on regional and national culture
and its role in the larger discourse on modern Japanese identity.

Meanwhile, in Japan the emerging scholarship on nationalism and its
critique had penetrated a variety of fields, including Yanagitagaku. By
the late 1990s, this ideological lens had produced an even more diverse range of symptomatic readings than could be found abroad. Like their foreign counterparts, many Japanese readers of Yanagita were taking the now-familiar Jamesonian stance by reading his texts against the grain, thus “disclosing the absent cause that structures the text’s inclusions and exclusions . . . [and] restor[ing] to the surface the deep history that the text represses.”33 For example, historian Oguma Eiji demonstrates this approach toward Yanagita when he writes in 1996 that “an analysis of Yanagita . . . constitutes a valuable case study for understanding the character of the myth of ethnic homogeneity [in Japan].”34 In 1992, Iwamoto Yoshiteru makes a similar interpretive move in exploring Yanagita’s relationship to the controversial emperor system, which became the instrument of a growing ultranationalism that encouraged the sacrifice of self to state.35 Murai Osamu’s controversial 1995 book goes beyond Iwamoto’s acknowledgment of Yanagita’s “limits” by accusing Yanagita of complicity with prewar Japanese colonialism.36 Kawamura Minato, in 1996, makes the related claim that Yanagita’s early rejection of a comparative approach to Japanese and Korean folk studies “aborted” the possibility for better cooperation and understanding between colonizer and colonized.37 Itō Mikiharu, writing in 2002, reflects a more moderate view. But while he objects to “the fashion for criticizing Yanagita’s national folk study [ikkoku minzokugaku] spurred by recent postmodernist thought,” he too frames his analyses of Yanagita’s texts in the context of cultural nationalism.38 In other words, assessments of Yanagita have gravitated toward a deconstruction of his texts, treating them as natural though not particularly desirable symptoms of larger historical, political, and cultural trends.

These penetrating readings have formed a vibrant and ongoing debate about Yanagita by employing a “hermeneutics of suspicion” that has been effective in demystifying his work.39 Nevertheless, particularly in the necessarily more limited context of non-Japanese scholarship on the subject, their approach has also had the effect of consigning Yanagita to an intellectual dead end. For example, historian Carol Gluck comments in her seminal 1985 book that Yanagita’s ideal of Japanese rural life was naive and had an ultimately negative effect on his object of study: his “folkish views of village customs unwittingly reinforced those of the agrarianists and the imperial army.”40 Anthropologist Mariko Tamanoi, in her detailed 1998

Introduction
study of Japanese rural women, expresses similar disappointment in
Yanagita’s lack of real resistance to the increasingly nationalistic and mili-
taristic government policies of the 1930s and 1940s. Because he eventually
included every Japanese citizen in his term jōmin 常民 (ordinary people),
rather than limiting the term to the rural underprivileged, Tamanoi ar-
Rages that Yanagita “could no longer place himself in a location from which
he could challenge the power of the state.” In a 2003 article, folklorist
Takanori Shimamura concurs that Yanagita falls short of political expec-
tations: “During the foundational stage of his career, Yanagita failed to
realize the potential inherent in his early academic work—establishing the
kind of folklore studies discipline that attends to cultural diversity.” In
these cases and many more examples than can be recounted here, scholars
have discussed Yanagita in language that suggests what is misguided
about, buried in, or absent from his work. This delimiting of Yanagita’s
limits, however, has also placed a limit on other ways of reading his texts.

I count my study as part of a new category of scholarship on Yanagita
that continues to examine his significance in the political/cultural dis-
course on nation and modernity in Japan, but by shifting to a focus on
what his writing does do. My choice to make his oeuvre itself the main
focus of analysis is endorsed by developments in the larger literary field,
where emerging ways of reading are seeking to revalorize the text by
allowing it “to be something more than an epiphenomenon.” Although
these approaches do not constitute a single movement, they clearly ex-
press a renewed interest in the close reading techniques originally associ-
ated with early to mid-twentieth-century European and North American
criticism. These clusters of reading strategies, which are acquiring labels
like “new formalism” and “surface reading,” are not rejections of the ide-
ological, a critique leveled at many of their New Critical and other for-
malist forebears. Rather, they tend to emphasize the text’s specificity
over its status as one ideological symptom among many. Where symp-
tomatic reading often moves “beyond the text,” these alternative reading
practices address it as something that “insists on being looked at rather
than what we must train ourselves to see through.” Such a reading, one
that maintains “a true openness to all the potentials made available by”
Yanagita’s complex and diverse texts, can yield new insight into his work
and its relevance to a wider range of disciplinary and methodological
questions than has previously been acknowledged.
A study of Yanagita like this one, which privileges both the historical context and the materiality of his texts, would have been much more difficult without the groundwork laid by the new collection of Yanagita’s copious writings, the *Yanagita Kunio zenshū* (Yanagita Kunio’s collected works; hereafter, *YKZ*), which is to have a projected thirty-six volumes. This series differs significantly from the previous standard collection, the *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū* (The standard collected works of Yanagita Kunio; *TYKS*), the first volumes of which were published while Yanagita was still alive and which was finally completed in 1971. The prominence of *TYKS*, which groups texts by genre, has caused readers to internalize the editors’ selections and categorizations. Since texts from different periods are grouped together according to theme, *TYKS* has both erased historical distinctions and drawn generic boundaries within Yanagita’s oeuvre. In contrast, the *YKZ* edition organizes the texts chronologically in an attempt to create a “data archive” that makes the original milieu of Yanagita’s texts more visible. This organizational principle, combined with a detailed *kaidai* (annotation) in each volume that relates publication details and other provenance for every text, creates a more objective structure in which texts can (re)acquire relationships with others Yanagita published around the same time. Given Yanagita’s prolificacy, *YKZ*’s relational structure makes more traceable the ways in which Yanagita’s ideas and vocabulary evolve over time, as well as how largely consistent ideas perform differently in several disciplinary and chronological contexts.

In this refugured collection of his works, the dominant image of Yanagita as “folklorist,” a label that has served to ghettoize his work abroad and at home, loses the clear outlines it has acquired over the years. With the historicity of his work restored by *YKZ*, the Yanagita who appears in the following chapters does not much resemble the common stereotype of the folklorist, a collector of traditional folkways who has little but disdain for the present. Always topical, and demonstrating a distinctive kind of multidisciplinarity, his works sustain a complex engagement with modernity. Woven throughout his oeuvre, as will be apparent in the close readings that follow, is his belief in the ability to solve the “problem” of modern Japanese identity through the critical analysis of everyday life.

In an attitude less overtly ideological but not unlike that of Marxist sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), Yanagita saw in
the daily behavior, rituals, and beliefs of Japan’s rural population a manifestation of cultural history, as well as a way of rendering comprehensible the rapid changes occurring in Japan in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{53} Existing academic disciplines and other meaning-making institutions, he argued repeatedly, had neither the will nor the ability to successfully identify and interpret this material. Not content to leave it at that, Yanagita also modeled his own method, using the neglected and undervalued elements of cultural history to expose what he saw as the oppressive ideologies implicit in conventionally accepted, homogenized, and homogenizing views of Japanese identity. Of particular interest to this reading-focused study is how Yanagita developed and executed his method, which is as prominent in his work as are his ideological and cultural concerns. Always in development, Yanagita’s writing was characterized by an insistence on the feasibility and necessity of representing in text the unrepresented, the repressed, and even the unreadable.

Many scholars have debated whether Yanagita’s method was scientific enough for the cultural phenomena he wished to examine, or whether he was simply an accomplished writer rather than a social scientist—or indeed whether he had a “method” at all.\textsuperscript{54} None, however, has compared his approach to that of the translator. This is curious, since translation is a prominent motif in the discourse on Japanese modernity and modernization, which has made much of the foreign influence on post-1850 Japan, from literature to law and beyond.\textsuperscript{55} I argue that translation is both a literal practice and an extended metaphor in Yanagita’s work, which engages so closely with this particular discourse. By this I mean that Yanagita himself regarded what he was doing as translation in a conventional sense, even if he did not use the term: he saw his job to be the production of faithful and current interpretations for others of a cultural history they could not (yet) identify or read themselves. By extension, my readings of Yanagita’s texts focus on their translational functions and effects—whether he intended them or not.

While recent scholarship on translation shows that the “broadening of the horizon of translation” as a conceptual category is already a fait accompli, a reading of Yanagita as translator clearly entails a more flexible view of translation than its most common definition: the “transfer of ‘meaning’ contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs.”\textsuperscript{56} Yanagita, though not directly concerned with interlingual translation, was involved in an analogous process, even if his
texts do not have a clearly circumscribed “original.” In his quest to make the past relevant to the present he, too, sought to mediate a transfer of meaning. A critical analysis of his stance must take a double-pronged approach: accepting Yanagita’s view of himself as translator, while also recognizing that his intentional “interpretive choices” are at another level more “dimly perceived” and “determined by a wide range of social institutions and cultural movements.”57 This dual awareness recognizes the agency of the translator, Yanagita, and the special qualities of his “translated” texts, while at the same time affirming that his efforts to translate unacknowledged cultural phenomena model “a process of mediation which does not stand above ideology but works through it.”58

Yanagita’s undeniable role in inventing traditions or imagining community at the national level indicates that his translations are ideologically charged, but it does not show how they actually function intratextually. Any translation appropriates its object by (re)writing it; however, neither the ideological ramifications of the act nor its results are predestined or predictable. As translation scholar Lawrence Venuti points out, “The violence wreaked by translation is partly inevitable, inherent in the translation process, partly potential, emerging at any point in the production and reception of the translated text, varying with specific cultural and social formations at different historical moments.”59 While Venuti’s remark suggests the inevitability of a negative outcome, the distinction between production and reception is key in Yanagita’s case. To borrow Venuti’s terms, the reception of Yanagita’s texts—especially in the decades since his death—has definitely underlined his assistance in the “maintenance” of conservative and “dominant conceptual paradigms” regarding Japanese cultural identity.60 But this argument assumes his translations are discursively inert, incapable of resisting dominant ideologies by virtue of their intrinsically acquisitive nature.

Despite his pessimistic characterization of translation’s complicity with dominant paradigms, Venuti is an advocate of its radical potential. Indeed, the context in which Yanagita produced his texts, I argue, also reveals them to be what Venuti hopes for: “a strategic intervention into the target-language culture, at once dependent on and abusive of domestic values.”61 Like Venuti’s idealized translator, Yanagita consistently looks outside mainstream domestic discourse, or the metaphorical target culture, “eschew[ing] fluency for a more heterogeneous mix of discourses” in his texts by showcasing archaic and obscure localisms to
Introduction

write his version of the Japanese cultural narrative. Yanagita’s purposeful “foreignizing” of Japanese identity for his contemporaries, however, also intervenes in the homogenizing national narrative in a way he did not intend. In seeking to challenge prevailing ideas, his texts repeatedly expose the constructedness of cultural identity, thus undermining his own quest to repair the fissures he perceived in the national body. As a result, Yanagita’s uneven texts read like a process of becoming rather than a finished product, ultimately rejecting narrative closure and the stable sense of identity that accompanies it.

The texts that anchor the discussions in the following chapters are all examples of Yanagita’s translation as a method of resistance. His relentless drive to identify, synthesize, integrate, and reinterpret overlooked historical and cultural sources is matched only by his willingness to experiment with various ways of doing so. Each chapter discusses distinct though clearly related identities that Yanagita explored in developing his métier: an unlikely poet who challenged mainstream views of literary modernization; a domestic travel writer seeking to renew a fading genre and thereby rewrite the contemporary national landscape; an eclectic scholar struggling to define and defend his object in an already crowded academic field; an unorthodox linguist who disagreed with the government’s language-standardization policies; and a reluctant pedagogue who critiqued dominant conventions in education. Over his long career, his increasing valuation of the translation process over its result led to dynamic texts that provide conceptual openings even as they conceal others, recognize and dismiss various alterities, and ultimately propose that the ability to translate is a necessary prerequisite to successful self-definition. Reevaluated in this way, Yanagita’s texts can be used to re-imagine his significance as a scholar and provide new insight into Japan’s drive to modernity.

The first chapter examines the form of translation most commonly associated with the folklore scholar: the transformation of oral narrative into written text. This chapter deals with Tōno monogatari, a unique collection of 119 fragments of local legend, anecdote, and song from the rural castle town of Tōno in northern Japan. Gathered by Yanagita from Tōno native Sasaki Kizen 佐々木喜善 (1886–1933), the slim volume was self-published by Yanagita in 1910 and was met with ambivalence by its few readers. Today it is Yanagita’s most famous work and is usually read as an early foray into fieldwork and
folklore research: a hugely expanded edition appeared in 1935, at the height of Yanagita’s career. The first edition, however, had a distinctly different character: born from Yanagita’s ties to the close-knit literary community of the late Meiji period (1868–1912), it represents a vehement response to contemporary literary culture. Objecting to the way literary convention served to marginalize texts that did not conform to the prevailing conceptions of “modern” narrative, Yanagita’s \textit{Tales} are an intervention, an experiment in testing the limits of the literary.

Folklore, a popular and often oral genre, was generally excluded from the Western literary canons of the early twentieth century. Japan’s modern system of canonical privilege, which conforms to this pattern, was accompanied by an increasingly limited notion of what was considered literary. Doubtful about the success of the then-current vogue for vernacular realism, Yanagita participated in contemporary literary debates on a variety of issues, from the limits of the Japanese written language to the realistic but morally questionable content of naturalist novels. Written in the immediate context of these criticisms, \textit{Tales of Tōno}, despite its unusual format and neoclassical style, is clearly as much an attempt to narrate contemporary “reality” as the more novelistic efforts of peers Tayama Katai (1871–1930) and Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1943). What emerges from Yanagita’s anomalous text is an innovative and distinctly modern narrative position that purposely creates a dialogue between the mainstream and the marginalized. Instead of using the introverted “I” that abounded in contemporary realism, Yanagita recreates the village storyteller by transposing him from the intimate hearthside to the national stage. As a socially engaged voice devoted to involving the reader in the stories it tells, the narrator in \textit{Tales of Tōno} foreshadows the public, mediating role Yanagita subsequently adopted for himself.

Chapter 2 addresses another literary genre with both ambiguous artistic status and close ties to translation: the travelogue. In Japan, the classical and medieval identity of this genre was strongly shaped by literary and poetic precedent and defined by domestic travel. This chapter considers the emergence of modern Japanese travel writing, a less-discussed but vibrant literary and cultural development to which Yanagita contributed actively. \textit{Kainan shōki} (South sea notes, 1925), the major text discussed in this chapter, is one of several celebrated domestic travelogues Yanagita produced as a contributing editor at a large national newspaper during the 1920s. Most recent readings have
pointed out that this text desires to bind politically and culturally marginal Okinawa more closely to the Japanese mainland by casting a dominating gaze on the landscape, like the “ordering eye” that Mary Louise Pratt describes in her seminal book on imperialism and travel writing. But reading *South Sea Notes* within Yanagita’s significant travel-writing oeuvre, and in comparison with other contemporary domestic travel accounts, reveals a much more aggressively unconventional relationship between traveler and (national) landscape.

Giving new meaning to “the road less traveled,” Yanagita’s travel writings seek to minimize what he saw as the erasure and dismemberment of the landscape, caused by burgeoning mass transportation and the advent of modern domestic tourism. While many of his literary peers wrote sentimental travelogues and practical tourist guides that embraced the ballistic pace of train travel and its contraction of the landscape into a patchwork of conveniently located hotels and tourist attractions, Yanagita consciously wrote against the rhetorical conventions of past and present travel writing to provide an alternate view. Preferring to tease a landscape apart from its poetic or touristic associations, or—as in the case of neglected landscapes like Okinawa’s—newly insert it into the cultural imagination, Yanagita advocates travel as a critical form of translation. Instead of becoming the narcissistic, passive tourist found in many contemporary travelogues, Yanagita insisted that the traveler exile himself from his surroundings in order to read the landscape more closely for alternative meanings. By recovering the meaning of travel as process in his popular writing on the subject, Yanagita hoped to show his reader that, when done “correctly,” travel itself could become a critically rigorous mechanism for revealing the continuity between landscape and cultural history, thus connecting past and present.

Chapter 3 examines how Yanagita, at the height of his career in the mid-1930s, again used translation to distinguish his own approach within an already crowded academic field. In rapid succession Yanagita published two major methodological texts: *Minkan denshō ron* 民間伝承論 (A study of popular oral transmission, 1934) and *Kyōdo seikatsu no kenkyū hō* 郷土生活の研究法 (Methods for researching everyday homeplace life, 1935). As a result, 1935 is commonly described as the founding year of folk studies as an academic discipline in Japan. Although intended to mobilize and cultivate new researchers on a national scale, these texts are not so much a stable crystallization of folk studies’ method
and scope as a challenge to existing academic conventions. The inevitable attack on rival disciplines in these texts is rather predictable; more unexpected is the fact that Yanagita’s challenge forms a debate on the defining role of language in academic and cultural meaning-making. In other words, for Yanagita the battle is about words, and their ability to shape discourse just as much as they limit it. A comparative reading of these twinned texts with others Yanagita wrote around the same time shows that he both relied on and distrusted the power of language to delineate the discipline itself, as well as its “method.”

While Yanagita creatively employed language to write against generic distinctions in his previous works, in these two texts he begins to examine how language can embody and engender cultural change. A major thematic concern of these overlapping texts is the importance of naming: of naming the discipline and its object. Offering to his readers the plethora of existing Western-language labels that refer to the study of human culture, Yanagita openly discusses the merits and demerits of translating them into Japanese in the process of trying to name his own venture. The problem of translation continues to loom, though now at a more abstract level, as each text moves on to an explanation of the proposed research. Arguing, fundamentally, that language is the only link between thought and visible behavior, both texts present the ideal(ized) folk scholar as a translator who must give voice to the unspoken cultural subtext within the mind. Since Yanagita’s project is a nativist one, however, the translator who emerges is not a disinterested third party, impartially and invisibly brokering the transfer of intangible ideas into legible form. As a Japanese, Yanagita’s putative researcher is part of the unwritten cultural text she or he hopes to decode. Yanagita’s “method,” therefore, is ultimately an argument for the necessity of self-translation—the implication being, of course, that the foreign is already within.

The dislocating presence of foreignness even in an apparently intralingual context was a concern that also motivated Yanagita’s study of dialect, the subject of Chapter 4. During his lifetime, the changes in the Japanese language were radical enough that many average Japanese born near the end of Yanagita’s life would not have been able to read texts written around the time of his birth. For the elite Japanese of his generation, then, it is no overstatement to suggest that translation was unavoidable if one wanted to stay in touch with one’s own language. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Japan, like other late-developing
nations, sought to bolster the national image at home and abroad by standardizing written and spoken Japanese.\textsuperscript{65} The decades leading up to World War II were particularly fraught with reform, and the linguists, literati, and educationists charged with the task increasingly debated whether the poetic or the pragmatic aspects of language were more conducive to attaining national goals. Yanagita believed these debates ignored how rapid linguistic change disrupted both the daily life of its speakers as well as larger cultural patterns. In a pioneering and unique work, *Kagyūkō* (Thoughts on the snail, 1930), first published as a series of articles in 1927, Yanagita makes the case for a bottom-up rather than top-down reform of language by defending the utility, complexity, and creativity of dialect.

Like many other folk scholars, Yanagita was interested in dialect, and worked tirelessly to preserve it in a series of *go’i* (glossaries).\textsuperscript{66} His drive to foster the study of dialectology from the late 1920s, however, was fueled less by a desire to preserve history than by an urge to counteract the effects of government-mandated language standardization. The suppression of dialect use that had long accompanied such policies, he argued, meant that for many Japanese, standard language was an imposition; it was foreign and therefore inauthentic. While a shared national idiom was a priority, for Yanagita it would be genuine only if the people felt ownership of that language. In *Thoughts on the Snail*, Yanagita discusses regional variation in the terms for “snail” to show how dialect has been more than sufficient in addressing the expressive needs of the people. The diversity of dialect, he argues, is balanced by an organic, shared process of “word-making” (*kotobatsukuri*) that constantly occurs on a grassroots, community level. Government policies that denied the validity of such homegrown methods for developing a national language, Yanagita maintained, quashed linguistic agency and thus individuals’ self-expression and independent thought. While many of his peers argued that national identity was somehow intrinsic to the Japanese language, Yanagita’s texts posit that national language can be only the product of a shared sense of Japaneseness—not its origin.

Chapter 5 examines how Yanagita developed his role as translator in the later years of his career, adapting how he regarded the relevance of his research to everyday life and transposing his objectives from a pre-war into a postwar context. Just as Chapters 3 and 4 examine Yanagita’s attempts to illustrate the relevance of translation to the lives of the
researcher and the common citizen, respectively, this chapter shows how those two figures eventually come together in his previously neglected writings on education, which span the war period. A critic of standardized teaching practice and curriculum from very early in his career, Yanagita disliked how the modern school system in Japan had supplanted the community in preparing the next generation for its role in the newly formed national society. The stress on uniformity and credentials, he reasoned, did not serve students well, especially those from rural communities. Even when *kyōdo kyōiku* (homeplace education) became wildly popular with the education establishment in the early 1920s, Yanagita remained unconvinced by educators’ implementation of it, despite his affiliations with the movement. Folk studies research was not sufficiently developed, he argued, to be used directly in the classroom. Yanagita’s resistance during the 1920s and 1930s to the translation of what he saw as raw data into curriculum, however, changed during the war years.

A close reading of texts he wrote for youths during the war—*Hi no mukashi* (A history of fire, 1944) and *Mura no sugata* (Village forms, 1945)—reveals a Yanagita who for the first time addresses his young readers as though they are colleagues. While the books did not attract the negative attention of wartime censors because of their folksy content, their presentation of Japan’s cultural history is far from orthodox in comparison with other nonfiction of the period written for children. Clearly having rethought his earlier reluctance to involve the uneducated and inexperienced in the research endeavor, Yanagita presents his material on rural Japanese society as an open-ended process of self-discovery. The implicit criticism of unthinking conformism in these works is undoubtedly what won him a niche in the postwar regime, when all school subjects came under close scrutiny from Occupation forces for their role in propagating ultranationalism. Viewing this as an opportunity for folk studies to gain a foothold in the school curriculum, Yanagita defends his position in terms that are clearly a postwar translation of his earlier critiques of modern education. Children who could neither speak nor think for themselves, he reiterated, would not become the informed voters needed to help rebuild Japan. According to Yanagita, the process of becoming a self-aware (Japanese) subject was both passive (a product of the right training) and active (an ongoing negotiation and interpretation of unfolding cultural history). Although his new
interpretation of “the folk” as “voting citizens” is obviously devised to fit the times, it indubitably represents the evolution and expansion of the solitary, autotranslating narrator first encountered in Tales of Tōno forty years earlier.

Even at the close of his career, there is no question that Yanagita’s goal, to reach an authentic understanding of Japanese identity, continued to elude his grasp. Although some critics view Yanagita’s project as a failure, it is precisely this compelling sense of incompleteness that still spurs others to build on and react to the many facets of his work. The conclusion of this book is a short meditation on the various afterlives of his texts, particularly those that go beyond considerations of how his work can serve the search for a limited (and limiting) conception of national identity. New approaches have much to gain by judging Yanagita’s writing on its ability to reinterpret and resist more powerful cultural discourses, rather than on how it conforms to them. Translations are often blamed for flattening and domesticating difference, but their intrinsic capacity for introducing the new and “foreign” despite themselves—a feature shared by Yanagita’s nonconformist texts—can also provide a subversive view of the larger domestic narrative.

Yanagita’s work spanned more than half a century and finds its material form in dozens of books and editions and nearly countless essays, chapters, newspaper articles, letters, interviews, and the like. His collected works fill more than thirty volumes; his writings deal with a wide array of topics, from agricultural policy to classical Japanese literature. The enormous amount of scholarship in Japanese on this eminent figure shows that no single monograph could ever constitute a “complete” overview of his writings. What this book delivers is a close rereading of selected major works, connecting them to the larger flow of Yanagita’s own scholarly thought as well as to the disciplinary debates in which they initially participated. What becomes visible are not just effects of the political, social, and historical constraints acting on Yanagita but rather a more complete view of how the texts themselves negotiate with, resist, and sometimes even reshape the larger discourses. A unique reminder of Japan’s recent cultural history, Yanagita’s work continues to provide a rich textual resource for addressing old ideas about modernity in new ways.