HINAGESHI

HINAGESHI is the name for field poppies in Japanese, but I never saw them in my childhood.

The small town where I grew up was in the middle of a vast, fertile farm land with mainly rice paddies, some wheat fields and occasional lotus ponds, and a large river slowly flowing into the Pacific. Every spring, our town rested as an island in the sea of brilliant yellow rape-seed flowers.

Usually in June, the rainy season arrived. After the skeletons of rape-seed, loaded with long, triangular cases of seeds, had been taken away, the farmers planted slender, young rice grasses one by one by hand, in the same, ploughed, muddy paddies. As summer deepened, they quickly grew tall and thick and made another sea of fresh green. The weedy narrow paths, which run amidst the field, were decorated by yellow dandelions, white clovers and purple RENGESO, Chinese milk vetches. But there were never any HINAGESHI to be seen. I had known HINAGESHI by their tender name and pictures in books for so many years, and I longed to see them some day.

I once read a story called GUBIJINSO, which is another name for field poppies, written by SOSEKI NATSUME.
He was one of the most celebrated authors of the MEIJI period, the weighty epoch between 1868 and 1912, under the reign of the Emperor MEIJI. It started with his restoration to power after the collapse of the TOKUGAWA Shogunate and its feudal rule, and it shifted ardently toward western enlightment.

In my father's book-shelves, I found a complete volume of SOSEKI's works, including reviews, lectures, speeches and diaries. I was about ten, but for some reason I was allowed to read his first two books. SOSEKI wrote those books while he was still a lecturer at the Tokyo Imperial University for English literature, and they were extremely witty and humorous, yet sharp satires of modern Japan. And of the Japanese in their dilemma between the old tradition and the forceful, impatient influence of western culture and civilization. The first book was written as the monologues of a wise house-cat. The cat belonged to the family of a school teacher, who happened to be an honest but peevish, very stubborn middle-aged man.

His second book was produced after the great success of the philosophical tom-cat. This one was a story of a young man, who was sent to a remote corner of Japan for his first teaching post. Born in Tokyo and having freshly finished

school himself, the naive, righteously orientated young man was thrown into the muddy swamp of country hypocrites and the intrigues of his mundane colleagues. He was bewildered and extremely annoyed. In no time, he opened his idealistic campaign against them and against his impertinent, rustic pupils, who were manipulated by his clever colleagues. He fought a difficult, frustrating war, like Don Quixote fighting with the wind mill.

Though my understanding as a child was limited, by some means or other I managed to understand the humours and pathos in the book.
I sat on ENGAWA, a veranda, under the deep eaves while my back rested against the pole, my eyes were fixed on the pages of the book, which I held on my knees. I rolled in laughter till my belly actually began to ache. As the ugly intrigues mounted, my indignation gave hearty cheering and applause for the fighting spirit of the daredevil young man. My father was enticed out of his room once or twice by my laughter, and was amused also, but cautioned me mildly that I should not forget to handle his book carefully. My mother shook her head half reprovingly as my laughter appeared outrageous and ill-mannered for a girl.

GUBIJINSO was published in 1907 by the same author, but it was an entirely different kind of book. It was not another tragicomedy but a love-story of a woman, at the beginning of the century in Tokyo.
FUJIO, a beautiful but haughty woman from a well-to-do family was excessively egoistic and vain. She was intelligent and exercised poesy and romanticism in her real life. Her sophisticated manner, her erudite, refreshing conversation as a modernized woman charmed her brother's friends. Among them, a promising young scholar, who had a weaker character and came from a modest background, was extremely attracted to her. He was ashamed of his poor childhood, from which he was gradually escaping by his own brilliant record at the university, which resulted in his receiving a silver watch from the Emperor as outstanding scholar. But his ambition blinded him. He did not wish to realize FUJIO's real character, and he nearly abandoned his fiance from his home town.

FUJIO enjoyed the role of a queen-bee. She favoured wearing violet KIMONOS, and she tied her hair with wide, silk ribbon also in violet, the colour which in the book symbolized her proud, arrogant personality. Violet in ancient Japan was considered precious, and it represented honour and nobility. For instance, only the highestranking Zen priests were permitted to wear a robe of the colour.

It was strange, my mother, who was rather strict in her taste in selecting books for her children, in comparison to my far more lenient father, did not snatch the book away from me, which she did from time to time when she considered it unsuitable for a child. She might have anticipated that I would give it up myself soon, because of the elaborate prose and complicated symbols SOSEKI particularly practiced in this book. It was indeed a love-story, but a book of deep philosophy, and concerned the problems of life such as the conflict between love and rationality and the problems of moral principle and truthfulness against ego and egoism.
Above all, it dealt with man seeking for the first principle in life, which I only recognized when I read the book again many years later. I might have continued reading mainly because of my expectation caused by the title of GUBIJINSO, as to how and when I should encounter the flower in the book.

Meanwhile the young man was more and more drawn to FUJIO, while her sensitive older brother became a near recluse. This was due to his step-mother's concealed petty tricks, resulting from her love for her own daughter, and her desire that FUJIO should inherit all the fortune her late diplomatic husband had left behind. But she cleverly hid her real feelings from the people around.

But it ended in a catastrophe.
One day, the young man had to acknowledge FUJIO's true character and the original reason for her choice. She chose the mild scholar of poor background in order to keep complete power and control of her future husband, only to satisfy her strong ego.

Regretting his mistake, he confessed to FUJIO his decision to marry the shy humble daughter of his old teacher, to whom he had been deeply indepted in his earlier life.
FUJIO's pride was hurt. And it was severely damaged when she met another refusal from her distant cousin, an optimistic, sincere young man, who in fact had been a longtime admirer of hers. She fell into a great rage, until her heart could not bear it; even though she had given the hint of marriage to her cousin out of the impulsive reaction of her wounded ego and in revenge against the young man she felt had betrayed her.

FUJIO died. She was poisoned by her own vanity. She lay still in her bed. Her long black hair without the violet ribbon spread lifelessly on the pillow. A screen had been set close to her head by her grieving mother. The screen was painted colourfully with pictures of poppies of the field at night. The emerald green zigzagged leaves, the fine, fragile petals of flowers in bright scarlet

on each apex of the thread like long stems, floated in the silver air of the moon light. It had been set upside down according to the custom in the case of death, which was meant to shield the eyes from evil.

Thus, finally GUBIJINSO appeared, in an unexpected manner. And I was somehow unsatisfied.

At home, there was a small group of poppies in a corner of the garden, beside the evening blue YAGURUMASO, the corn flower. The huge, overwhelmingly brilliant red flowers gave me a strange sensation every time I stood near them and watched. However, I liked their magnificent red, which was almost voluptuous next to the serene, modest corn flower, and they acted somewhat hypnotically to my eyes.

I began to connect the image of proud FUJIO with those pompous red poppies in the corner of the garden though I knew well that they were not GUBIJINSO but KESHI, poppies. Sometimes I even wondered myself if SOSEKI had confused GUBIJINSO with those fabulous garden poppies.

Years later, it became clear to me why SOSEKI used GUBIJINSO for the title of his fourth book instead of using the more popular name HINAGESHI. The name GUBIJINSO originally came from an old Chinese legend. According to the legend, after the death of GU-beauty, the beloved of the heroic warrior KO-U of SO province, in central China near Yngtze river, the flaming red flowers blossomed one day, on the grave of GUBIJIN, the GU-beauty. Still in deep grief, KO-U believed the late beloved saw his sorrow and wished to console him by changing her appearance into the elegant flower. It had happened a few centuries before Christ, the legend said.

It appeared to me that SOSEKI presented the sweet flowers, which were supposed to have opened on the grave of GUBIJIN, as his elegy to the haughty, but beautiful FUJIO on her death bed.

When I entered the high school for girls, I became friendly with a classmate who came from Korea to study in our school. She was a Japanese but born and raised in Korea, where her parents taught in a provincial school. I heard a faint rumor that many years ago, her parents had eloped hand in hand to Korea to start their life together, when they fell in love and their wish to get married was opposed by their families. In the old days, particularly in the countryside, if young members of old families fell in love without either a proper introduction or their parents' consent, it was considered a terrible disgrace and an awful sin. And it often ended in tragedy.

My new friend had rather reddish, slightly wavy hair, which was cut short at once, according to the school regulation. She was not exceptionally pretty, but possessed a very radiant, agreeable smile. And in the gymnastic class when we were in our white shirts and baggy bloomers, her healthy well-formed body, nicely developed legs and strong but smooth thighs looked outstandingly attractive and beautiful. To use a common expression, she ran like a young deer, and she lept elegantly and forcefully toward the ball in the volley ball match, like a leopard pouncing on its quarry.

Though she was not too ambitious and an average student in the class, she was amazingly well-read. It must have been one reason we made friends so quickly, because I was myself another book-worm.

All in all she was a gentle, amicable person, and I seldom saw her being gloomy or depressed. Her melancholy and her nostalgia were only shown in the verses and poetry she occasionally wrote in a small notebook which she brought to the school from time to time. Some of them were about her home town, in the extreme north of Korea. Her town is located practically next to Manchuria, from which it is separated only by a large river, and it took her two whole days to reach it.

She wrote about the cold winter which froze everything outside and how the houses were heated by Ontol; by the smoke which went through a brick pipe under the hard dirt floor. And of the spring which often seemed to arrive over night after a long winter.

In the verse she composed, she described the yellow RENGYO, forsythia, as the first real display of spring, which was the delight of everyone. The cheerful, bright yellow flowers would smile at people from every hedge, from every field corner, and from every hillside. People would smile and greet each other cheerfully, as if their frozen cheeks were melted by the warm smile of RENGYO flowers.

She once told me that at the approach of summer the fields were gradually covered by brilliant HINAGESHI, red field poppies.

"HINAGESHI?"

I asked her. She explained to me that they are wild flowers and they would bloom in the same fields in late spring year after year, and they would flower until the blazing sunshine would burn them down one day. I listened to her colourful description and sighed in envy. Definitely, she had not exaggerated out of her homesickness, and I could imagine vividly in front of my eyes the vast landscape under the deep blue sky, which was a part of a continent.

During the first summer vacation, she visited her family in Korea. We exchanged letters as if we were in love and made my mother puzzle how we could find so many things to tell each other. I must admit that we enjoyed writing letters as much as receiving answers from each other. In our letters, we could freely wander in a romantic world with boys whom we knew only by seeing them, and we could allow ourselves to be as sentimental as we wished.

When the autumn semester began, I was happy to return to the school and to be with my classmates again. Customarily, the first day of a new semester was only ceremonial. After hearing a dull speech given by the school principal, addressed to all students out in the school-yard we would greet the class teacher in our room. The rules and the new schedule were given, and the first day of the new semester was over.

As soon as the teacher had left the room, the class-room turned to a melting pot of voices and laughter of somewhat excited girls. Wading through the rustles and hustles of girls in white uniform, my friend approached me.

"Here", she took an old notebook out of her school satchel.

"It's for you."

Puzzling, I asked her what it was.

"Open it. I made them for you during the holiday."

"For me? Are they verses?"

She said no and urged me to open it carefully.

Gazing at my hand impatiently as I opened the first page, she said that I should not bother to read the contents. I turned a few pages more as she insisted.

Suddenly, I saw several kidney-shaped thin sheets resting on the page.

They had a strange deep purple colour and were nearly transparent.

"What are they?"

I asked her, examining them.

"There are more." Obviously, she was satisfied to see my surprise, she insisted I should go on. With caution, I turned a few more pages and found more sheets, and as I went on, more and more in every few pages. Some larger and some smaller but otherwise they were identical.

"HINAGESHI!"

Petals of HINAGESHI, she answered me with delight.

"When I was out in the field, gathering wild flowers for our summer homework, OSHIBANA (flowers pressed and dried), I thought of making this for you. There were an exceptional number of HINAGESHI this year in the fields."

So it is. This is HINAGESHI!

I touched the smooth petal with my finger tip and stroked it very gently. My friend cautiously peeled one petal of the page and put it on my palm which she told me to hold open. I felt a faint sensation as it rested on my palm. It was weightless like a tiny piece of a fine feather. I stared at the strange, delicate sheet of deep purple-maroon colour. It had the appearance of shiny, extremely thin tortoise-shell-like hardness.

"This is HINAGESHI!"

I repeated. Smiling, my friend said

"Just petals, you know. And the colour has changed completely. They were bright red when I gathered them."

As I watched the antique glass-like petal with nearly invisible creases, it curled slightly, as if it were alive and wanted to yawn.

My friend returned to her home when she finished school and remained there during the second world war.

I had lost my mother right after my graduation and had been at home, looking after my father and younger brothers. Already Japan was deep in the terrible war and heading towards the desperate end. Most of my classmates took jobs in offices, and some of them volunteered or were drafted to work in munition industries.

One day, I had a visit from another good friend of my school days. For a brief period, she had volunteered to help in a military hospital which was located in the big city, and had just returned from her assignment. In reply to my eager and curious questions, she told me of her experiences at the hospital among the wounded veterans and sick soldiers. Because it was not an army hospital on the battle field, the scene was not bloody or chaotic, but the stories of patients in pain and agony, and their fears for their health and their unknown future, which they tried hard to overcome or conceal, was very

impressive. My heart ached for the veterans who would be handicapped throughout their lives and forced to accept it as destiny.

I also admired the courage of my friend, even though she had very simple work at the hospital. And at the same time, I deeply regretted that I was not in a position to do anything for the cause, because I was needed at home.

After a few days of thinking and heart searching, I wrote to my friend in Korea, with whom I still kept close contact despite the difficulty in communicating owing to the state of war. I asked her if she would agree to do something with me, for our nation in this extremely difficult time. It would be very indirect and slight. In those days she was teaching at a primary school as an assistant teacher, and her positive response came quickly.

Our little tribute to the cause was making tiny booklets of verses and pictures, which I bound by hand in the traditional Japanese style and sent to the suffering patients in a hospital. Indeed she wrote the poetry and I myself made sort of illustrations of her works. They must have been terribly childish, primitive works, however, we were extremely serious and content in our efforts. Every ten days or so, I received her poetry and short stories by post, which were mainly memories of our school days; the funny incidents and behaviour of young girls, and the humorous words and conversations we held during breaks. With water colour, I painted girls in sailor uniforms, and without exception they were all nice-looking with huge black eyes and cute pink lips. And once in a while, I added a sort of portrait of a woman who had long eye lashes in a Japanese KIMONO and posing sentimentally!

Owing to the poor communication system, our work was occasionally interrupted, but we were determined to continue it as long as it was possible.

One day, a newspaper reporter appeared at our former school to ask the principal a question. He was sent at the request of the patients in a small branch of military hospital, located at the edge of our prefecture to try to solve their long-lasting puzzle. At first, the reporter had stopped at the town hall, because of the address indicated in the post mark on the envelope, but was advised to search at the girls high school instead, which indeed was more sensible.

The principal was new and had come after our time, so he was also puzzled as to who could have been sending those small booklets of verses and pictures , which, according to the word of the reporter, became popular among the hospital patients.

They always had the same signatures, but it appeared either they were fictitious or pen-names, and the address was a lotus pond, and it created still more pleasant suspense in the hospital. It is true we used our pen-names which we had already decided upon during our school days, and there was a lotus pond behind my home. We used our pen-names simply because we thought it sounded more romantic. In any case my friend called herself MIDORI, a beautiful bird, and mine was more proud YUMI, which means something like the meaning or the reason of beauty!

Although the principal could not help the reporter, the vice director, who once taught us, suspected us somehow of being the anonymous artists. But he was cautious. Without giving any hint to the reporter, he visited my father first after the school and told him what had happened. Since my father had known the outline of our works, he admitted it without hesitation, but begged the teacher to keep it to himself.

Within a week, a large article appeared in the paper with a photo of one of my paintings. The story was written in a sensational vein as a beautiful, heart warming story of the patriotic act of unknown young people.

Immediately after this article, the poor reporter who had been sent back empty-handed dashed to my home. Having read the article in the paper, someone from our town had written to the paper and mentioned our names as most probably the two artists concerned. My father was rather annoyed by his visit at first and reluctant to admit it because of his dislike of publicity. But all the same, another story, this time about us two followed in the same paper.

In no time, our mail box began to be flooded with letters. They were not only from those patients in the hospital, but people practically from all over Japan. Later, letters from soldiers in the battle field, sailors aboard ship joined in the stream of mail. We were amazed. We were forced to realize the power and influence of a newspaper which circulated the whole country, although it became thinner and thinner as the war situation worsened, and at the end it was reduced to a mere two page tabloid. The papers were strictly censored, and they were mostly exaggerated or false reports of victory on the battle field. Or of the brave and stoic behaviour of people suffering hardship, and our story belonged to the category of a moving episode of patriots.

Yet such an enthusiastic response to our modest tribute surprised us. Without even one exception, they were all sincerely praising and thanking us as the same Japanese who believed in the cause those days.

Among them, I found letters from people who were themselves ailing at home. One young man sent me a book of beautiful poetry of flowers in Japan in every season; more than one hundred flowers from pompous garden flowers to modest, shy flowers which open only in shadowy backyards. Each of them was accompanied by a concise pen drawing. On the title page, he wrote a dedication which read: he was happy to dedicate this book of flowers of Japan to another flower of Japan. I felt shy to receive such a compliment, but I appreciated the book so much and it is still in my possession. He wrote me each time well-composed letters in brush and ink, on the traditional roll of rice paper. Within a year he died. Another young man from near Kyoto who also suffered from tuberculosis and only had his mother to look after him wrote me a few letters in beautiful hand writing of pen and ink, and died soon afterwards too. One day after the war, I received a box full of dried KAKI, which his mother had made herself from the fruits of her garden. Her brief, trembling hand writing thanked me for my letters to her late son. I have never met them, but I remember them with their beautiful letters.

But unfortunately, about the same time as the article came out in the paper, we had to stop our small tribute of booklets owing to the lack of communcation between Korea and Japan, and I did not hear from my friend for a long time.

I usually walk to my studio from home which only takes a quarter of an hour, except on rainy days. (According to the Chinese calendar, I am supposed to be a mouse, but I am more like a cat that hates rain. I am reluctant to go out when it is raining and feel miserable when I am in the rain. I feel great sympathy with a cat walking on the wet street on tiptoe, as if she is trying to keep her paws from getting too wet.)

There is a wooden bridge over the highway. It has become really old, and when we have fine weather for more than a week, the boards quickly dry out, and a space is created between the knotty, rough planks. Some of the gaps are more than one centimetre wide, and as I cross over the bridge, I can see cars passing rapidly underneath on the highway. The worn out planks rattle wildly, like a child with a club, banging at a primitive xylophone. From this artistic bridge, one can view a forest of a tall building beyond the field on the right hand, with snowy Alps as their background. From the last building towards the left, there are over a dozen huge, beautiful old oak trees proudly lining up. A farm house with stables, and a manor house surrounded by its trees are visible between the heavy oak trunks. A long range of hills covered with a forest of dense trees lies beyond.

A straight road from the bridge dividing the fields and the vegetable gardens leads me to my studio, in one of the tall buildings. The dirt and pebble road which was a grass hidden path until recently, is the stage of my habitual dreaming. I seldom worry about my unfinished paintings in the studio. I indulge in the placid feeling of the joy of living, and in pleasantly positive anticipation of the new born day. The sentiment I feel there is somewhat similar to the faint thrill and excitement I usually taste before landing in the airport near Tokyo.

There are often people walking their dogs in the crisp morning air. I pass them quickly.

When it is foggy, the world changes to the infinite space of silvery white, and there are usually only silhouettes of great oaks inserted in midair. Soaked in tranquility, I inhale the white air in deep satisfaction.

The fresh snowy landscape under the azure sky is another scene I adore, and I am immersed in a near ecstasy. People in general believe that a snowy landscape is cold, and it makes them shiver. To my eyes, it is tenderly warm, because of the soft outlines and round forms the white snow flakes create. There are no sharp edges, no rigid lines left in the scene after a snow fall.

All flowers by the road are my friends. There are always flowers in the little vegetable gardens. Tulips, peonies, irises, lupins, large sunflowers,

dahlias, chrisanthemums, and indeed roses. The shy white flowers of strawberries, potatoes and tomatoes. And all sorts of wild flowers in the field which are dominated by dandelions, clovers and buttercups. For several years I saw a scarlet ribbon of HINAGESHI flowers behind vegetable gardens.

Started sometime last winter, there was a large canalization work carried out in the field beside the oak trees, and this was finally completed in the spring. The construction sight was flattened and ploughed, and grasses swiftly covered the bare ground, only waiting for the finishing touch of nature. For some reason, there was a small part at the corner, where I turn to the right to my studio, has remained unfinished, and a tiny mound has been left next to a manhole, which has a heavy iron lid. One morning, on this mound, a few HINAGESHI cheerfully flowered.

I have lived in Europe for many years. My longing for the HINAGESHI of my childhood days has long since been satisfied. It happened in those days when I lived in Paris, and was on my way to visit Venice by car, when I first saw the brilliant red spots scattered in the golden wheat fields. My delight and excitement when I was told that they were HINAGESHI, has quietly settled in my heart through the passage of time.

But as the numbers of scarlet HINAGESHI flowers on the mound increased every morning, I became restless, as though my longing of child days for them had been revitalised. Even while I was at work in the studio, I thought of them frequently, and the radiant scarlet hue of HINAGESHI appeared and danced in my imagination.

One day, I decided to pick some of them and bring them with me to my studio.

Between the mound and the building where I have my studio, is a distance of no more than one hundred metres. I carefully shielded them from the wind, and practically ran to the studio to put them quickly in the water. I tried the cold water, sometimes lukewarm, and again changed to cold water, hoping to save them from drooping and withering.

I tried to pick them short, or with long stems along with the hairy, misty green leaves, and sometimes, from just above the ground. Once I carried them with their roots, which held the earth determinedly fast and resisted being removed, and I tried to plant them in the soil in a pot. But my instinctively orientated efforts were seldom rewarded, and they withered within a few hours, after they had secretly and nervously changed positions themselves, as if they felt ill at ease.

I sometime thought that they acted like a baby who is comfortably held in

her mother's arms and smiling at everyone whoever comes near. She would charm people by her innocent smile, until some woman could not resist her desire to hold the baby to her breast. But as soon as the baby is transferred into the arms of a stranger, the jolly baby would cease her bright smile, and she would hang her lips and start to weep. She might even burst into loud crying, calling everyone's attention as though somebody was kidnapping her. We should not be angry or blame the capricious baby, because she is a baby and not responsible, but we somehow feel we were cheated by her sweet smile. And we might feel awkward embarrassment, suspecting ourselves of having looked so ugly or monstrous in the baby's eyes.

One Monday morning, I walked into the studio holding in my hand another bunch of HINAGESHI flowers which I had just gathered on the way. I put them in the water and brought them to their customary spot on the old HI-FI, in front of one of my white oil paintings hung on the wall.

In great astonishment, I stopped, and exclaimed

"Are you still there?"

Yes, they were still there. HINAGESHI from Saturday. All lively. They looked proud and even more attractive, and seemed relaxed.

"How! How come you are still here?"

Amazed still, I questioned them. And I said from the bottom of my heart that I was so delighted to see them well and content in my studio.

As the summer suddenly arrived, they began to pop out in many unexpected parts of the fields, just like mushrooms after a rain. In the morning as I approached the field, I heard the loud chorus of HINAGESHI calling me from everywhere.

"Hello! I am here"

"Look! Here I am!"

Hello! Look at me! Look!"

I greeted them in return contentedly, like a kindergarten teacher. Also I was relieved from the worry I had had in the past, toward the whimsical eyes and hands of small school children, who once swept all my HINAGESHI on the mound away in no time, which reminded me of a scene in the Pearl Buck's book "Good earth", of a swarm of grass hoppers attacking wheat fields. However, fortunately, the flowers returned on the very next day, as if the ordeal I saw was only in my worried imagination.

When I walked in the hazy field, my shoes were often soaked by the silvery dew on the grasses. In the part where it had just been exposed to the glorious

sunshine, all the grasses reflected and sparkled like cristal objects. In the sunnier spots, HINAGESHI opened earlier, and they all faced the glitter of the morning sun. Some of them timidly peaked out through the split of the hairy, olive green shell. Crumpled and wrinkled, the tiny cups of the youngest ones often still had a piece of the shell hanging on their sides. The flowers from previous days were wholly open, and some had a form of saucer as their four petals nearly separated from each other.

Until the impressive Monday, I picked mainly those profoundly elegant, characteristic mature flowers of HINAGESHI, because I found the young one less attractive and lacking in individual appeal, like young girls in their school uniforms in the old days. I should have known that they are also like humans, and the young ones are far more flexible and tolerant toward any change of condition.

But there was one more problem left. Those excessively red charming HINAGESHI among the young group had always had the company of one or two bees in their cups. It is incredible that the bees made exactly the same choice I would make. Often I hesitated to pick them, fearing the bees might be cross with me and seek revenge for their flowers being stolen by a latecomer. I mumbled some apologies when I was pricked too much by my own guilty conciousness towards the hard working bees.

People in Japan are familiar with the name of HINAGESHI, although some never saw them. To our ears the name would sound charming and graceful. Depending on which KANJI, Chinese symbols we use, there are a few different definitions for the word HINA.
One meaning is a chick. A baby chicken which has just come out of the shell. And another definition of HINA is countrylike, rustic or pastoral. And the third is an abbreviation of the HINA-NINGYO, dolls of HINA-MATSRI; a traditional festival for girls. It is celebrated every year on the third of March, among the families with either little or young girls.

Those dolls are presumably models of the people in the Emperor's court. A couple in ancient costumes sitting on the highest tier in front of a golden screen, are supposedly the Emperor and his Empress. Their ladies and gentlemen-in-waiting, musicians and servants, all in the same ancient costumes, kneel on the lower tiers, illuminated in the soft light of BONBORI. Branches of peaches with pink flowers and round buds, together with the three sheets of diamond shaped rice cakes in three individual colours, and milky, sweet SAKE are

traditionally displayed on the tiers. For women in Japan, particularly in earlier days, the sound of HINA-NINGYO or HINA-MATSURI played a similar role to that of Christmas for Westerners; the sound recalling their happy memories of tender childhood.

In my recent letter to my friend in Japan, who became a grandmother not so long ago, I said that I painted HINAGESHI during this summer.

After the war, she returned from Korea, carrying a satchelful of belongings as her only possession. Her family settled in an old house by a thick bamboo forest, which was abandoned for many years and had been a near ruin. But the power of endurance, and optimistic spirit of the family supported them during the difficult postwar years, and my friend's radiant smile has never left her face. By family arrangement, she married a gentle government employee and bore two sons, but she continued teaching at a primary school, while her mother-in-law skilfully handled the domestic work. As in her school days, she was athletic and more than once, she won in the tennis tournaments of school teachers of the prefecture. She retired from her long teaching several years ago, but after a year of rest, she took a part time job as a visiting teacher and instructor for handicapped and retarded children in the countryside.

In response to my letter, she wrote that during the summer, she had visited the Japanese Alps for a few days, and saw numerous Alpine flowers. And this summer in her backyard, she said, unusually many HINAGESHI had blossomed, and she will make OSHIBANA, pressed and dried flowers next summer for me. She must have thought that I painted all the poppies from my imagination, as the result of my long yearning.
I must tell her without fail that I live in a paradise of red HINAGESHI, before next spring arrives.

Teruko Yokoi

Berne, November 1981

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