

# A BLAZING STAR: TAIWAN AND THE MAKING OF KANO TADAO

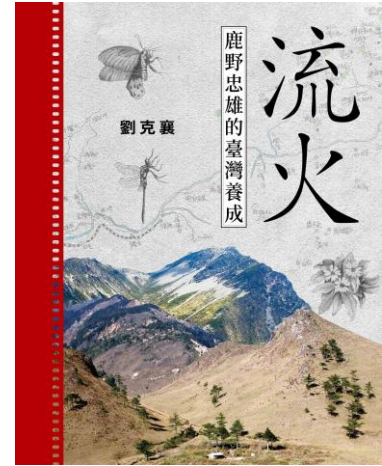
## 流火：鹿野忠雄的臺灣養成

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*No one in the 1930s had trekked more of Taiwan's alpine wilderness or conquered more of its peaks than Kano Tadao. This remarkable young Japanese naturalist made the most of his regrettably short career studying firsthand this island's topography, natural environment, and indigenous inhabitants.*

Well-respected naturalist author and travel show host Liu Ka-Shiang, looking fully the part of an erudite academic able and eager to set off with a well-packed rucksack on a multi-day wilderness hike at the drop of a hat, credits Kano Tadao as being the source of his passion for the outdoors and professional aspirations. Importantly, Liu's literary pursuits have helped bring him closer in both mind and spirit to his professed mentor. Liu has thoroughly studied Kano's life and works, researched the Japan and Taiwan of Kano's time, and used Kano's detailed notes and maps to retrace his footsteps and compare and contrast Taiwan's interior of today with that of a century ago. Learning from Kano Tadao has greatly deepened Liu's own understanding of Taiwan.

Kano Tadao, born in Tokyo in 1906, is an outdoorsy kid from a very young age. While at high school in Taihoku (Taipei), he spends most of his time in the island's rugged interior collecting insects, developing serious interests in both biogeography and anthropology. Despite his poor classroom attendance, his prolific field observations and writings earn him the headmaster's recommendation to attend Tokyo Imperial University. Between his first experiences in Taiwan in the mid-to-late 1920s and his disappearance on Borneo in 1945, Kano publishes



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dozens of books on his mountain treks, wildlife research, and indigenous tribe studies as well as over 150 academic papers.

Focused primarily on Kano as a young adult, this book fleshes out Kano's experiences as a student and takes occasional asides to introduce notable influencers on his life. Although the narrative wraps up in 1933 on one of his field surveys on the island, the volume of anthropological and natural science information included in this work far exceeds that provided in most biographies. *A Blazing Star* is the most-detailed examination of the life and importance of Kano Tadao published to date.

## Liu Ka-Shiang 劉克襄

From an early age, Liu Ka-Shiang has channeled the spirit of the nineteenth century natural historian in his explorations of the world around him, bringing a poet's eye and a historian's attention to detail to bear on Taiwan's diverse flora, fauna, and people. His over forty books published to date, including poetry, essay compilations, novels, and travelogues, have earned him an impressive list of domestic literary awards.

# A BLAZING STAR

By Liu Ka-Shiang

Translated by Grace Najmulski

## Origins: The Classics at A Glance

At first glance, that book, as big as my palm and wrapped in a stiff slipcase, looked to be a precious, handmade poetry collection long out of print.

How condensed must the text be to fit in this pocket-sized edition and still cram Taiwan's vast and important history in its pages? At our first encounter, it was difficult to suppress my curiosity.

I took it from the shelf for closer examination and noticed that, even though this diminutive work lacked the bulk of most history books, a spectacular richness still flowed from its still closed pages. Looking at it beneath the glow of a gosling-yellow lamp, the cover had clearly been designed and bound with care. The title deserved further praise: *Alongside Mountains, Clouds, and Aborigines: A Taiwan Mountain Travelogue*. Being a year-round mountaineer myself, I was hooked instantly. Perhaps I might better compare the experience to being an iron nail with a magnet stuck fast to its side.

I opened it slowly. The table of contents caught my eye first. Familiar names of mountain peaks were lined up in uneven rows like lines from the modern poetry I loved. Upon closer inspection, all of the printed mountains, many of which were around "Mount Niitaka" (present day Yushan) showed the surrounding pathways up Taiwan's mountain range. Since I'd studied some simple Japanese and scaled several of Taiwan's mountains by that point, the blueprint, structure, and geography of the book suddenly took shape in my mind. The author's travels were further in.

I was a drone, quietly gliding high in the sky, tracing Taiwan's tallest mountain range – Niitaka – from south to north, visiting mountains as enormous as a whale's back one after another. It was hard to believe that someone had traversed this range multiple times, half a century before I had launched my own comprehensive dialogue with this imposing landscape.

This book was published in 1941, and I could see most of its chapters were composed in the early 1930s. The author seemed like the kind of person who could travel overseas and wander deep into Taiwan mountain forests that were still unfamiliar to the Japanese, all while Japan imposed its oppressive regime over the original inhabitants. He seemed the kind of person who combed through natural histories and tribal customs during long sojourns overseas, familiarizing himself with each mountain peak. The kind who proceeded to spend tens of days traversing mountain ridges.

Hidden within this single, tiny book were vast and boundless depths that instantly made me feel more isolated and insignificant. Every essay recounting his mountain travels was substantive, a journey of countless trials and tribulations, stacking higher and higher until they became a perilous mountain of words. Moments and places of the past were angled in my direction, and piled tangibly before my very eyes until we were equal in height.

And I still had yet to read it. It never occurred to me this little book would be so dense or that, when I did finally flip through it, it would feel like twenty kilos pressing down on me, making it hard to breathe. It felt as if I were weighed down by a large backpack, about to step into Taiwan's mountains.

I double-checked the author's name: Kano Tadao.

Publisher: Tokyo Chuokoronsha. Printed on August 5<sup>th</sup>, Showa 16 (1941) and released five days later on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

From that moment on, it was as if the author's name was tattooed on my cheek, following along on all of my travels through nature up until the day I died. But I was also caught off guard by the publication date: summer 1941, four years into the Sino-Japanese War. How unfortunate that the author published during this less-than-ideal moment in history, and yet how fortunate.

It was a treacherous and tense time for publishing, a time when an enormous, whirling black hole sloshed in the background.

I proceeded with my in-depth inspection. The pocket-sized mountaineering booklet was wrapped in a burlap sack. At the time, there weren't many miniature volumes among the shelves lined with books from the occupation. Not only was the book eye-catching, it appeared that special attention had been paid to its binding. The cover was bright and simple – a Bunun weave pattern subtly printed in red and green across the top and bottom. Splayed across the endpapers was an illustration of Taiwan's cloud-covered mountain peaks; a wood engraving of the Bunun calendar at the bottom, seemingly put there out of concern that someone might forget the when the harvest, hunting, and sacrificial ceremonies were to take place.

The cover and endpapers were a reflection of the book's contents. It was clear that after Kano had finished writing the book, he'd stipulated that the book's layout and binding be inextricably linked to the mountains he'd visited. He even included his personal drawings of each area's hiking paths, clearly and vividly complementing the black-and-white pictures he'd taken.

I later read *Taiwan's Mountains and Aborigines* (June, 1937), written by Japanese mountaineer Tanaka Kaoru, bound and illustrated by the mountaineer painter Adachi Genichiro. The title stood out on the slipcover, and below the heading stretched the sketch of a mountain, the red and white background adorned with images of indigenous peoples. The book contained information on subjects – like forest succession, climate, rain and snowfall conditions, and landscape – about the various mountains, which included Nanhu, Qilai, Songling, Xue, and Dabajian. The final section introduced Taiwan's indigenous peoples.

Kano's work was published four years after Tanaka's. Although unsure whether he was influenced by his predecessor, *Alongside Mountains, Clouds, and Aborigines* was notably more

diligent and comprehensive. The work cleared the distracting weeds of knowledge and further developed the character of Taiwan's mountains.

As for Kano's publication with Chuokoronsha, his middle school classmate, Fujita Tamao, might have had something to do with that. Fujita worked at Chuokoron in the early 1940s and was mainly responsible for publishing children's literature, as he himself was also a writer of children's literature. Fujita didn't just help Kano find a publisher, he was also responsible for the book's cover, slipcover, and title page. As for the book's title, that was reportedly chosen by the wife of the newly-wed Kano, Tanna Shizuko.

Four months after this little book was published, Japan mounted a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, igniting the fire of the Pacific War.

I first came across this book in the fall of 1987 at National Central Library: Taiwan Branch on Bade Road (now National Taiwan Library, located in Zhonghe) while frenetically combing through western travelogues on Taiwan, published in *Ibis* and the Royal Geographical Society's *The Geographical Journal*. All this while compiling reports on the natural scenery of each area.

Back then, all Taiwan-related reference books from Japan and the West were stacked inside the storage room of the library's basketball-court-sized basement, a single walkway separating the Japanese books from the western ones. Interested parties could go in and borrow books by simply presenting their ID. I often spent entire days in there flipping through Western publications and occasionally browsing through Japanese ones when I needed a break.

I was doing exactly that – browsing the bookcases lined with literature published during the Japanese occupation – when I found it. Taking in the volumes one by one, it was fate that amongst a row of books on Japanese local customs and literary histories, this book caught my eye.

I'd just read about Kano in Hachisuka Masauji and Udagawa Tatsuo's "Contributions to the Ornithology of Formosa" (1950 & 1951). Both authors held him in high esteem, particularly in regard to his prolonged ornithological survey of Mount Xue.

The high praise they awarded the young academic left a deep impression on me. However, I was also curious how someone so young and still climbing the ladder of academia could have the opportunity and skills necessary to travel all the way to Taiwan, live in the mountains and become one with the wild, obsessively conduct broad surveys of the wildlife, cirques, and biogeography, and then branch out into anthropology and archeology.

My amazement only grew when I found this book. Clearly, Kano was much wilder than I'd imagined. In that time, not only did he conduct large-scale studies on the tribes and forests by diving deep into Taiwan's remote areas, exploring the mountains to his heart's content despite the risk of being decapitated by the natives.

I'd previously found records of Kano's ornithological and entomological observations while flipping through reference materials, yet was unaware of this book's existence. Why had he come that year, and how? There was something about these mountains that demanded he climb them, something related to their many birds and insects as well as the distinctiveness of each indigenous tribe. These are the curiosities that lurked in the depths of my heart.

In his second year at Tokyo Imperial University, Kano was only twenty-four when he completed the main expeditions described in the book. Most of the Mount Niitaka expedition took place in August 1931. His mountain exploration lasted fifty days, during which he relied on his unmatched passion and lofty goals. Only one of the seven travelogues contained a detailed account of Mount Chao-she, which he had hiked as early as 1928 when he was still in high school. Even before that, Kano had visited many of Taiwan's mountain ranges and natural landscapes, including Mount Niitaka, countless times.

Just before being published, Kano supplied a single comprehensive article about what he'd learned on Mount Niitaka as an addition to his travelogues. Titled the "Niitaka Files", this record detailed the mountain's native Bunun people and their lives. Kano's thirst to live like the Bunun hunters manifested in his passion for hiking mountain forests.

This young explorer traveled all over Taiwan's mountain ranges, a feat very few knew of. Out of all the famous travelogues on the nineteenth-century Age of Exploration I'd encountered, the observations presented in this were uniquely its author's. Suddenly, all I could think about was how to best treat this work.

It was like thinking yourself to be the first to summit a mountain only to reach the top and find someone had beaten you to it a century before, leaving behind a glimmering array of proof. The book I held before me sang the Niitaka mountain range's praise in beautiful and elegant words. Nearly a century ago, a young man had realized his dreams in Taiwan's wilderness. Alas, along came the war, forcing him south to fight in an impossible war.

He was twenty-seven when he became of the legend of this island. At thirty-eight, he joined eternity.

Kano Tadao, 1906–1945?

When I first learned of Kano in the late 1980s, I didn't have the skillset to fully enter this world. Despite finding it utterly irresistible, I respectfully closed the book and put it back on the shelf with the other historical volumes. At that moment I shelved my heart – his work and legacy.

I originally planned to revisit this book when I was ready, after giving it some time. It never occurred to me that the next time I picked up this early classic and written record of Taiwan's mountains, thirty years would have gone by.

## **Bug Boy**

*Don't weep, insects—*

*Lovers, stars themselves,*

*Must part.<sup>1</sup>*

—Kobayashi Issa

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: The English translation of the poetry is a work of Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, quoted from *Haiku: The Poetry of Zen* (edited by Manuela Dunn Mascetti; published by Hyperion in 1998).

The important Edo-era haiku poet Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827) wrote countless poems about insects throughout his life. An unfathomable number of early Japanese poets mimicked Kobayashi, using insects in their poetry as metaphors for life's joys and sorrows.

Born from a nationwide fervor, this was how a country's poets sang their love of insects, and nurtured a deep-set tradition in their daily lives.

A long time ago, while reading Ms. Lin Wen-yue's six-volume translation of *The Tale of Genji*, I distinctly felt the Japanese aesthetic of impermanence, the singular "mono no aware", long described in this thousand-year-old masterpiece. This natural aesthetic had only grown more acute with the West's rising influence. Westerners traveling to Japan imparted their first-hand experience of conducting entomological surveys. Like noodles fermented with yeast, their knowledge was gradually incorporated until it became an essential aspect of Japanese life.

When entomology was first introduced to Japan, it was a hobby mainly amongst the elite. It wasn't until around 1870, near the beginning of the Meiji period, that the government incorporated entomology into the nation's natural science education. Thanks to the influence of modern science, collectors with a scientific inclination began to gradually appear.

Around the dawn of the twentieth century, this widespread love of insects had already become a fixture of life in Japan's cities as well as an important part of education. Broadly speaking, Japanese children during that period spent their playtime outdoors, many of them obsessed with collecting insects. This was the environment in which Kano, born in 1906, grew up.

Elementary schools featured insect observation classes, which furthered the wave of enthusiasm around collecting and inadvertently created business opportunities. The famous Nawa Museum of Insects opened in 1919, and Jean-Henri Fabre's *Souvenirs Entomologiques* was published in Japanese in 1922. Both were products of their age.

"Bug boys" whose overflowing passion for field observation continued past childhood were likely to follow one of two paths. One being Fabre's extended field observation method, and the other being itinerant specimen collection.

In 1923, when attempting to study insect behavior by surveying spider wasps, Kano lived with family on the Chuo Line, somewhere between Kokubunji and Asagaya stations. Regrettably, Fabre's fixed-observation method proved unsustainable. During this time Kano's interests were expanding, particularly when it came to wide-range sampling. He clearly preferred discovering new species in the different places he surveyed as opposed to conducting long-term research on the behavior of any single species. Kano was not the kind of researcher to spend long hours quietly waiting around, as is evidenced by his later surveys. Rather, his reports contained a passion for long-distance, wandering trips.

In October of 1920 at the age of fourteen, Kano published his first report, "A Catalogue of Butterflies from Fukushima Prefecture", in *The Insect World* – a monthly journal issued by Nawa Insect Research Center – based on specimens collected in his father's hometown of Fukushima. This earned the attention of Yokoyama Kirio (1894–1932), who was part of a new wave of entomologists. Yokoyama worked in the silkworm room at Nakano Sericulture Experiment Station

in Koenji, south of Tokyo Prefecture. He and Yokoyama became fast friends and eventually grew to be as close as brothers after a family friend introduced the two.

Despite being only twenty-six at the time, Yokoyama possessed extensive entomological knowledge. Later on, Kano often spent time outside of classes furthering his entomological studies and relevant foreign language skills in Yokoyama's lab, where he was also provided with a table to read on. Fortunately, Kano was able to learn about insect categorization and scientific methods of research alongside natural science experts. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say Yokoyama was Kano's mentor in entomology.

Although the area was reduced to ruins after the Second Sino-Japanese War, the surrounding fields remained filled with boys with their bug nets, enjoying their beautiful childhoods. Amongst them, Tezuka Osamu and Miyazaki Hayao may stand out as familiar names. This peaceful outdoor activity, a rustic portrait of growing up surrounded by nature, is still used in anime to showcase the wide and beautiful landscapes that define the Japanese countryside.

Bug boys don't just catch bugs, they call out to the spirit of their childhood. Their eyes hold nothing but a desire for insects, a romantic innocence that hides a quest for eternity, or perhaps the promise of a beautiful, natural environment.

Dressed the part and equipped with binoculars, Kano was out in the fields as early as the 1910s. The average young bug-catcher held few aspirations beyond capturing a variety of bug species. Through both luck and hard work, Kano was lucky enough to connect with other, more seasoned entomologists. Having already gained incredible insight through exchanges of information and the influence of his surroundings, Kano clearly understood that a breakthrough was only possible through grueling fieldwork. The only thing was that he had no idea how long this would take, which direction to go, or where he would ultimately end up.

During this period, he made regular visits to the nearby Mount Takao, venturing to even more distant mountains and rural destinations in the summer. He even went as far as Oshima on a sampling expedition that ended up becoming an annual event. Eventually, when he was short on money to pay for lodging, Kano was able to use his tuition money to make ends meet thanks to his family's favorable financial situation. Apart from his annual trips to the Upper Highlands in Fukushima's mountains northeast of Tokyo, Kano visited northern Hokkaido and Karafuto Prefecture (Sakhalin), all of which would become important sites for his entomological work.

When many of Japan's young people were headed for the capital (Tokyo), Kano's passion for insects sent him off into the countryside. He was even more determined to head south when Taihoku High School established the Advanced Program in 1925, eventually abandoning his many surveys in Japan's northernmost territories. Kano shifted his romantic dreams of field collection toward Taiwan's brilliant and varied landscape, and proceeded to blaze across southern Japan as gloriously as the red star Antares  $\alpha$ .

At first glance, this young man of natural sciences' encounter with Taiwan's mountain wilderness seemed like love at first sight, but it would also prove to be his last. This positively explosive chance encounter, a poetic beginning, was truly but the prologue to his Taiwan expedition.

## The Chuo Line

As a young boy, Kano traveled by train to the open fields near Tokyo's west side for his entomological surveys. These fields would become the setting for many of his studies.

To get to school, Kano mostly rode the Kobu Railway – Japan's first general railroad, which opened in 1889. This line initially only ran between Shinjuku and Tachikawa until a series of expansions beginning in 1906 turned it into Japan's national railroad, the precursor of today's Chuo Line.

By the time Kano was in middle school, the railway already stretched from Ochanomizu in the east to Hachioji in the west. The entire line traversed most of Tokyo's Tama-gun district. In the 1990s, to get to Jinbocho's Book Town, I often transferred at Shinjuku Station and getting off at Ochanomizu. Unbeknownst to me, I was following the same path young Kano took on his way to school.

Kano lived in Building 348 in Yodobashi Town's Kashiwagi, just outside of Tokyo City. It was while living there that he published his first report at the age of fourteen in *The Insect World*. As was common amongst fellow entomology enthusiasts at the time, he took responsibility for his work by including his full address, perhaps hoping it would help connect with others in the field.

This area is now known as Shinjuku Ward's Kitashinjuku District and is near modern-day Okubo Station. Long ago in (then) Kashiwagi's vast countryside, Kano spent all his time connecting with nature, even conducting surveys in his family's yard. As the eldest son of the family (he had two younger brothers and two younger sisters), Kano's influence extended to one of his brothers who would go as far as helping Kano gather specimens from around the yard.

In July of 1899 (32<sup>nd</sup> year of Meiji), Yodobashi Jinjo Koto Elementary relocated to Buildings 131 and 132 (where Nishishinjuku Middle School is located now) in Kashiwagi District to allow for the construction of a water treatment plant in Yodobashi. This was the school Kano would likely attend once he was old enough.

The little school had over three thousand students enrolled in 1911 (1<sup>st</sup> year of Taisho), reflecting the period's baby boom. It was around this time that the Kitashinjuku area was rapidly growing in popularity as a residential area.

Kano's father was selected as a Tokyo district representative and served as a part-time civil court mediator in his later years. He enjoyed fishing when he wasn't working, and rarely attended to his children. Kano's mother noticed her son's love of nature early on and helped him construct the things he needed for bug-catching so he could pursue his dreams. Eventually, she helped him buy the professional tools necessary for conducting proper field surveys.