

*Donald Keene*



# Donald Keene

Japan and Kita City, Tokyo



City of Kita

# Donald Keene's Past

Chūson-ji Temple



## *The Tale of Genji*

In 1940 Donald Keene came across *The Tale of Genji* in a stack of books at a Times Square bookstore. A bargain at two volumes for 49 cents, he bought the set. “I soon became engrossed in *The Tale of Genji*. The translation (by Arthur Waley) was magical, evoking a distant and beautiful world. I could not stop reading, sometimes going back to savor the details again. I contrasted the world of *The Tale of Genji* with my own ... I turned to it as a refuge from all I hated in the world around me.” (Excerpted from *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan*)

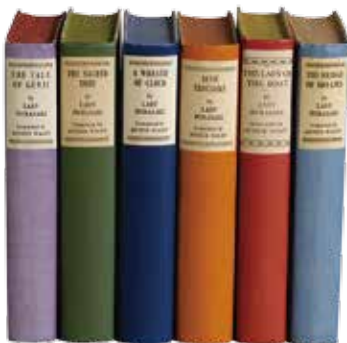
## Chūson-ji Temple

Donald Keene first encountered *The Narrow Road to Oku* by Matsuo Bashō during graduate studies at Columbia University in 1946. Bashō became an important subject of his studies, and Keene has translated *The Narrow Road to Oku* four times. In 1955, during his third year as a student in Japan, he traveled the route of *The Narrow Road to Oku* and visited Chūson-ji Temple in Hiraizumi. “After coming to Japan I was fascinated by all the wonderful statues of the Buddha. I’ve sometimes felt they represented absolute beauty. That’s how it was with the Yakushi Nyorai at Kōryū-ji. But the only time I was so struck by beauty that I was trembling, so entranced that I felt as if I’d entered another world was when I saw the inner sanctuary at Chūson-ji,” he wrote.

### *The Tale of Genji* Translated by Arthur Waley

Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925

Arthur Waley’s translation of *The Tale of Genji* was published in six volumes from 1925 through 1933. The two-volume set that Donald Keene purchased at a Times Square bookstore in 1940 was not a complete translation. He owns a Houghton Mifflin edition of the first volume from 1926.





Ginkaku-ji Temple (Jishō-ji Temple)

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## Tarōkaja

In 1953, shortly after Donald Keene came to Kyoto to study in Japan, he started taking lessons in *kyōgen* in the belief that the study of a traditional art would further his understanding of Japanese culture. Though deeply impressed by Noh, he was attracted to the language of *kyōgen* and began studying with Shigeyama Sennojō of the Ōkura School. As he focused on mimicking his teacher's voice and gestures, Keene had a feeling of being just the latest in a long line of students extending back through *kyōgen's* long history, and he enjoyed his lessons tremendously. In 1956 he performed the role of Tarōkaja in the *kyōgen* play *Chidori* at the Kita Noh Theater. Among the members of the audience were eminent writers including Tanizaki Junichirō, Kawabata Yasunari and Mishima Yukio.

## Ginkaku-ji Temple, Kyoto

In 2001 Donald Keene wrote the critical biography *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912*. In 2003, following the death of his friend Shimanaka Hōji, Hōji's wife, who had become president of Chūōkōronsha, urged Keene to write about *Nihon no kokoro* (the soul of Japan). The result was *Yoshimasa and the Silver Pavilion: The Creation of the Soul of Japan*. "He was a failure as a shogun. His married life with Hino Tomiko was unhappy, and his relations with his son, Yoshihisa, were marred by hostility. But in the last decade of his life, he was the guiding spirit of the Higashiyama era, and the cultural legacy to the Japanese people of that time proved immense. Possibly no man in the history of Japan had a greater influence on the formation of *Nihon no kokoro*." (Excerpted from *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan*)



In the summer of 1953, Donald Keene arrived in Kyoto to study in Japan. He boarded at *Muhinjuan*, the guest house on the property of the Okumura residence in Imakumano. He endeavored to learn about Japanese culture and studied calligraphy at Chisaku-in Temple near his lodgings. Captivated by the splendid performances of the *kyōgen* actors he saw at a Noh theater, he studied *kyōgen* with Shigeyama Sennojō, head of the Ōkura School. Three years later, on September 13, 1956, he performed the role of Tarōkaja in the *kyōgen* play *Chidori* at the Kita Noh Theater in Shinagawa.

# Donald Keene's Achievements



Visiting the dressing room of Akutagawa Hiroshi



With composer Takemitsu Tōru and Abe Kōbō

## Making Japanese Literature Known throughout the World

Based on his extensive knowledge of Japan, Donald Keene translated numerous works of Japanese literature into English, from classics by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Yoshida Kenkō and Matsuo Bashō to modern fiction by Nagai Kafu, Mishima Yukio, Dazai Osamu and Abe Kōbō, introducing them to the world. By making Japanese literature better known and helping it gain recognition, Keene contributed significantly to the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Kawabata Yasunari and Ōe Kenzaburō.



**The Battles of Coxinga: Chikamatsu's Puppet Play, Its Background and Importance**  
By Donald Keene  
Taylor's Foreign Press, 1951

## Inspiring a Renewed Awareness of Japan's Appeal

Observing that the Japanese were taking less interest in various aspects of their culture, including classical literature and traditional theater, Donald Keene inspired a renewed awareness of their splendors from his unique perspective and in his lucid language.

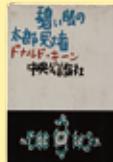


Performance of *Echigo no Kuni Kashiwazaki Kōchi Hōin Godenki* at Asahi Hall in Tokyo in October 2010



**Kojōrurishū: Daiei Hakubutsukan-bon**  
Edited by Torigoe Bunzō and Charles Dunn  
Koten Bunko, 1966

This volume contains the texts of three jōruri plays in the collection of the British Museum including *Tariki Honganki* and *Taishokan* as well as *Echigo no Kuni Kashiwazaki Kōchi Hōin Godenki*, an early play discovered by Torigoe Bunzō.



**Aoi Me no Tarōkaja**  
By Donald Keene  
Chūōkōronsha, 1957



Hakutai no Kwakaku in the July 4, 1983 edition of the Asahi Shimbun



Zoku Hakutai no Kwakaku in the Oct. 13, 1986 edition of the Asahi Shimbun

## Discovery and Appreciation of Japanese Diary Literature

In *Hakutai no Kwakaku: Nikki ni Miru Nihonjin* (trans. *Travelers of a Hundred Ages: The Japanese as Revealed through 1,000 Years of Diaries*) Donald Keene offered an appreciation of diaries from a new perspective, establishing “diary literature” as a genre of Japanese literature. “An unbroken series of diaries extends from Ennin to Toshiakira and, of course, even to our own day. As far as I am aware, there is no other literature in the world of which this is true,” he wrote.



**Hakutai no Kwakaku: Nikki ni Miru Nihonjin** in two volumes  
By Donald Keene  
Translated by Kanaseki Hisao  
Asahi Shimbun, 1984

## Educator of the Next Generation of Scholars of Japanese Literature

Until his retirement in 2011 at the age of 89, Donald Keene continued to teach at Columbia University and educated many scholars of Japanese literature. His students were not only Americans but came from other countries as well. Many went on to contribute to greater knowledge and recognition of Japanese literature around the world. Among Keene’s students was Royall Tyler, the third person to translate *The Tale of Genji* into English.



**John T. Carpenter**

Taught the history of Japanese art at the University of London. Now curator of Japanese art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Conducts research on Edo-period paintings and woodblock prints.



**Royall Tyler**

Born in 1936. Resident of Australia. Third person to translate *The Tale of Genji* in its entirety following Arthur Waley and Edward Seidensticker.



**David B. Lurie**

Associate professor at Columbia University and director of its Donald Keene Center of Japanese Literature. Studied in Japan for three years from 1998.



**Amy V. Heinrich**

Former director of the C. V. Starr East Asian Library at Columbia University. Conducts research on the *tanka* form of Japanese poetry and is a poet herself. Translated poems written by people affected by the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.



**The Tale of the Heike**  
Translated by Royall Tyler  
Viking, 2012

# Donald Keene's Travels

## ① Hakodate

In July 2012 Donald Keene went to Hakodate to do research for his book on Ishikawa Takuboku. Takuboku, who faithfully kept a diary, wrote in romanized Japanese from April through June 1909. A copy of this handwritten *Romaji Diary* is stored at the Hakodate Central Library. Although the diary is not ordinarily available for viewing, Keene was granted special permission to see it. In the afternoon Keene visited Takuboku's grave on a small hill overlooking the sea. After climbing a narrow path and stone steps, he bowed and laid flowers at the grave. The gravesite commands a fine view, and on a clear day the Tsugaru Peninsula can be seen.



In front of the statue of Takuboku in Takuboku Park (Hakodate)



In front of the structure housing the Konjikidō at Chūson-ji Temple (Hiraizumi)

## ② Lecture at Chūson-ji Temple

Donald Keene, who returned to Japan to settle permanently after the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, delivered a lecture at Chūson-ji Temple in Hiraizumi, Iwate Prefecture, on September 11, 2011. He talked about his first visit to the temple's Konjikidō in 1955 while a student in Japan and about how pleased he was when the temple was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At a press conference following his lecture, Keene described how the behavior of the Japanese at the time of the disaster had been praised, saying, "The Japanese are gaining new respect overseas because people have been so impressed by how considerate and well-behaved they were after the disaster." He noted that upon seeing the ruins of Tokyo just after the war he felt it would never be able to recover and stated his conviction that the Tōhoku region would recover beautifully just as Tokyo did.

3 Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture  
Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum

4 Ise, Mie Prefecture  
Ise Grand Shrine

Kita City, Tokyo

### 3 A Visit to the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum

Donald Keene was on friendly terms with Isamu Noguchi, one of the leading sculptors of the 20th Century. Born to a Japanese father and an American mother, Noguchi spent his childhood in Japan and later lived in the U.S. As an artist, he worked in a wide range of fields and created monuments, environmental designs, furniture and lighting. In 1969 he established a studio and residence in the town of Mure in Kagawa Prefecture, where he worked for more than 20 years. In accordance with his wishes, after his death the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum was opened on the site to serve as a source of inspiration for future artists, researchers and art lovers. Although Noguchi had urged Keene to visit his Takamatsu studio, this trip marked his first time to do so. While listening to the explanation of Izumi Masatoshi, who collaborated with Noguchi on many of his works and is director of the museum, Keene admired Noguchi's remarkable works and the entire garden, which is like a work of art itself.



In the living room of the Isamuya at the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum (Takamatsu)

1 Hakodate, Hokkaidō  
Takuboku Park



Taking part in the *Oshiraishi-mochi* tug-of-war (Ise)

Hiraizumi, Iwate Prefecture  
Chūson-ji Temple

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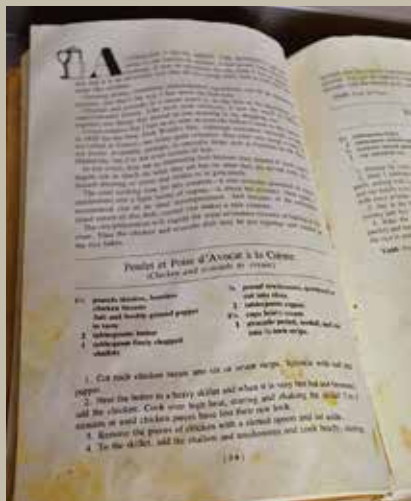
### 4 Taking part in the *Oshiraishi-mochi* event at the Ise Grand Shrine

In August 2013, Donald Keene traveled to Ise to participate in the *Oshiraishi-mochi*, part of the *Shikinen Sengū* ceremonies held in conjunction with the rebuilding of the Ise Grand Shrine every 20 years. It was his fourth time to participate in the *Shikinen Sengū*. He had first taken part 60 years before. While a student in Kyoto, he saw a poster for the *Shikinen Sengū*, which he had learned about from *The Narrow Road to Oku* by Matsuo Bashō. With no connections, he sought permission to participate from the chief priest of Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Kyoto. During the *Oshiraishi-mochi*, one of the events of the *Shikinen Sengū*, white stones are placed on the sacred ground around the new sanctuary. The stones are gathered at the Miya River and placed in huge carts, which proceed along the road to the shrine. Keene participated clad in a *happi* coat. After entering the precincts of the shrine, Keene proceeded near to the shrine's new sanctuary, which cannot be entered after the *Sengū*, and laid the white stones he had brought. In October he also participated in the *Sengyo no Gi* ceremony for the fourth straight time since 1953.

# *Donald Keene's Home Cooking*







The only book that Donald Keene reads in the kitchen is this well-used cookbook.



Donald Keene's kitchen is small. The sink and induction stove are adjacent, so he can cook efficiently simply by turning one way or the other. In this kitchen, Keene cooks without hesitation or wasted motion. Without seeming hurried, he cooked up a delicious-looking meal in a short time.

Donald Keene sometimes takes a break from studying, writing and lecturing to step into his kitchen and cook. Today's main dish, chicken and avocado in cream, is part of the extensive culinary repertoire he developed in New York. Of course, Keene does his own shopping too. List in hand, he heads to the Shimofuri Ginza Shopping Street to purchase the ingredients. After returning home, he starts cooking. Although his expression differs from the one he wears when writing at his computer, he looks intent on the task at hand while evidently enjoying himself. His impressive, well-used cookbook, one he purchased in New York in the 1960s, is opened to the proper page and placed where he can see it easily. Without the slightest hesitation, he handily prepares the meal. After sautéing the chicken, he cooks the mushrooms and shallots in butter and prepares a cream sauce. His deft motions demonstrate that he is an experienced cook. In short order, dinner for four is ready and Keene sits down to dine with his guests, who praise his cooking. To the accompaniment of delicious wine and pleasant conversation, the food is soon eaten up.



# Locals Talk about Donald Keene



## Honda Yōichirō, Honda Butcher Shop

When I heard that he had said he was going to live permanently in Japan after the 2011 disaster, I was relieved that he wasn't going to desert Japan. The press conference he held after that really impressed me. I felt like we hadn't been abandoned and he would stick by us. It inspired me to hang in there.

●Nishigahara, Kita City, Tokyo



## Nishimura Yukiko, pianist

I always think of Donald Keene as the most humble Japanese person I know.

At performances, he gets into the rhythm and really seems to enjoy listening to the music. When I pick up that kind of feeling, because it's an intimate venue, I can tell that he's really enjoying the music, and as a performer that makes me very happy.

- Nishigahara, Kita City, Tokyo
- Gives salon concerts at the Ōtani Museum in the Kyū-Furukawa Gardens twice a year.



## Enomoto Takeshi, manager of the DäBlü beauty salon



Prof. Keene always seems like a bundle of energy in some ways, and he doesn't show his age. He goes overseas and then talks about it as if he just went down the street. For someone in his 90s to take a trip like that as if he's just going to the neighboring town and then talk about it like that is just amazing.

- Nishigahara, Kita City, Tokyo

Full of  
kindness



## Why is Donald Keene so popular?

Donald Keene often goes downtown to shop or to do errands. When people call out a friendly greeting, Keene responds with a big smile.

# Donald Keene and Kita City's Nishigahara



(Courtesy of Shinchōsha)

## Charmed by the Greenery of the Kyū-Furukawa Gardens

At the invitation of his friend, the late Shimanaka Hōji, president of Chūōkōronsha, Donald Keene went for a walk one day in the Kyū-Furukawa Gardens. Charmed by the beauty of the lush greenery, he made up his mind to live nearby. For Keene, who works at home, nothing is more important than the view from his apartment, where he spends the greater part of the day. Keene has lived in the same residence for more than 40 years since deciding to move to the area after one look at the Kyū-Furukawa Gardens. For a long time he divided his time between New York and Japan, but since acquiring Japanese citizenship and deciding to settle in Japan permanently, he enjoys living in Kita City's Nishigahara year round.



Kyū-Furukawa Gardens Japanese Garden



Kyū-Furukawa Gardens: The gardens, which feature a Western-style residence and Japanese garden, have been designated a national site of scenic beauty by the government.

● Kyū-Furukawa Gardens 1-27-39 Nishigahara, Kita-ku, Tokyo Phone: (03) 3910-0394

# Principal Holdings of the Donald Keene Collection Corner Kita City Central Library



## Reference Works on Books by Donald Keene



### **Meiji Tennō (2001)**

Imperial Household Agency (ed.), *Meiji Tennōki* (13 vols.),  
Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1968 - 1977.



Kume Kunitake (ed.), *Bei-o Kairan Jikki* (5 vols.), Iwanami Shoten, 1977.

Tanaka Akira, *Iwakura Shisetsudan*, Kōdansha, 1977.

### **Ashikaga Yoshimasa (2003)**

*Gunsho Ruiju, Zoku Gunsho Ruiju* (4 vols.)

Kawai Masaharu, *Ashikaga Yoshimasa*, Shimizu Shoin, 1972.



### **Watanabe Kazan (2007)**

Tsukiyama Terumoto, *Watanabe Kazan no Gyaku Gansaku Ko*,  
Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1996.

Sugiura Minpei, *Kazan Tansaku*, Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1972.

Ozawa Kōichi, *Watanabe Kazan Kenkyū*, Nihon Tosho Center, 1998.



### **Masaoka Shiki (2012)**

*Shiki Zenshu* (25 vols.), Kōdansha, 1975-1978.

## Materials on Japanese Literature, Classical Literature

Chikamatsu Monzaemon (3 vols.), Wakatsuki Yasuharu (ed.) *Zenyaku Chikamatsu Kessakushu* (3 vols.),  
Taiyōdō Shoten, 1928.

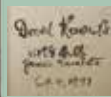
English translations: *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, *The Eternal Storehouse of Japan* by Ihara Saikaku;  
*Ugetsu Monogatari* by Ueda Akinari; *The Love Suicides at Amijima* by Chikamatsu Monzaemon; *The  
Monkey's Raincoat* by Matsuo Bashō; *The Spring of My Life* by Kobayashi Issa: *Sand and Pebbles*, *The  
Tale of Genji*; *Tsurezuregusa* etc.

## Books Signed by the Author or Others

### **House of the Sleeping Beauties and Other Stories**

By Kawabata Yasunari, et al. (1969)

Signed by Kawabata on the inside front cover



**Materials donated** (as of Jan. 26, 2013) : 788 books (490 in Japanese, 298 in other languages), 6 paintings, 1 hanging scroll

●**Kita City Central Library 1-2-5 Jūjōdai, Kita-ku, Tokyo Phone: (03) 5993-1125**

## Foreign Language Editions of Books by Donald Keene

In addition to English translations, there is a Polish edition of *Travelers of a  
Hundred Ages* and a Russian edition of *The Japanese Discovery of Europe*.

## English Translation of Works by Writers Keene Associated With

Abe Kōbō: *Kangaroo Notebook*, *The Box Man*, *The Face of Another*,  
*The Ruined Map*, *The Woman in the Dunes*, *Secret Rendezvous*, *The Ark Sakura*  
Ōe Kenzaburō: *A Personal Matter*; *Nip the Buds*, *Shoot the Kids*; *The Pinch Runner Memorandum*; *The Silent Cry*  
Mishima Yukio: *The Sea of Fertility tetralogy*, *The Black Lizard*, *Forbidden Colors*, *Thirst for Love*, *Death in Midsummer*, etc.



# The Life of Donald Keene

June 18, 1922  
Born in Brooklyn, New York,  
son of a trading merchant



1947  
Returns to Columbia University,  
earns master's degree



1942  
Enters U.S. Navy Language School  
where he learns Japanese,  
translates and serves as an  
interpreter in battle zones

1938  
After skipping  
two grades, enters  
Columbia University



1948  
Following graduate studies at  
Harvard, spends five years  
studying at Cambridge  
University, teaches Japanese  
there



1953  
Begins three years of graduate  
work at Kyoto University,  
studies *kyōgen* under  
Shigeyama Sennojō

1954  
Becomes acquainted with  
Tanizaki Junichirō, Kawabata  
Yasunari, Mishima Yukio

1960  
Takes up  
professorship at  
Columbia  
University

1962  
Receives Kik  
Prize for his  
introduce  
literature to

1920 1930 1940 1950 1960

1931  
Travels to Europe with  
his father, feels frustrated  
at being unable  
to speak a foreign language  
while in France



1940  
Buys a copy of Arthur Waley's  
translation of *The Tale of Genji* at a Times  
Square bookstore, decides to pursue  
study of Japanese literature

1945  
Makes first trips to Tokyo and Nikkō on  
his way home following his discharge  
from the Navy after the end of the war

1951  
Earns doctorate from Columbia University

1952  
Gives series of five lectures on Japanese literature at Cambridge University

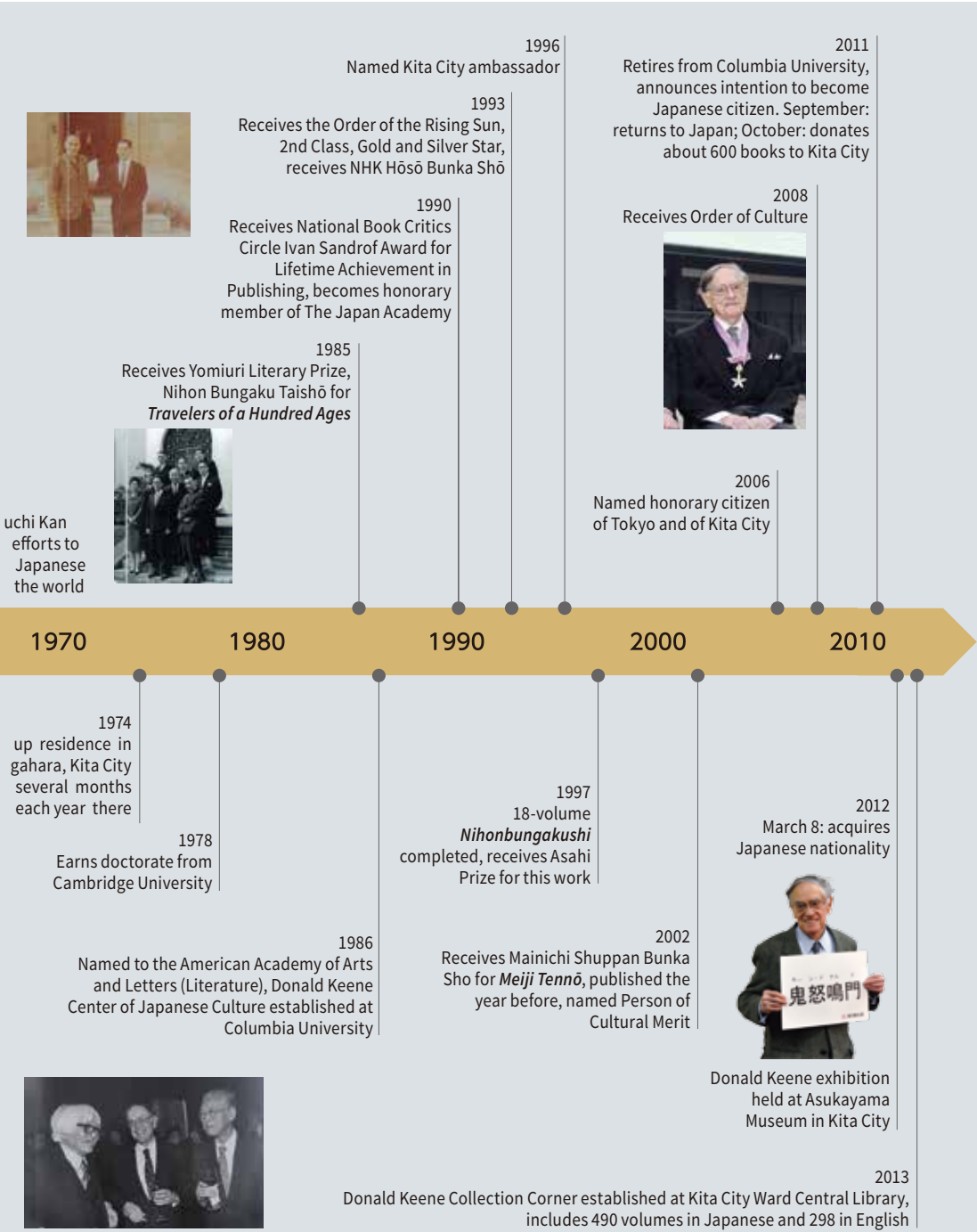


Takes  
Nishi  
spends  
out of

Sept. 13, 1956  
Performs role of Tarōkaja  
in *kyōgen* play *Chidori*

1955  
Travels route of *The Narrow  
Road to Oku*





1996  
Named Kita City ambassador

1993  
Receives the Order of the Rising Sun, 2nd Class, Gold and Silver Star, receives NHK Hōsō Bunka Shō

1990  
Receives National Book Critics Circle Ivan Sandrof Award for Lifetime Achievement in Publishing, becomes honorary member of The Japan Academy

1985  
Receives Yomiuri Literary Prize, Nihon Bungaku Taishō for *Travelers of a Hundred Ages*



Keene's efforts to bring Japanese culture to the world

2011  
Retires from Columbia University, announces intention to become Japanese citizen. September: returns to Japan; October: donates about 600 books to Kita City

2008  
Receives Order of Culture



2006  
Named honorary citizen of Tokyo and of Kita City

1970

1980

1990

2000

2010

1974  
Moves residence in Kahara, Kita City several months each year there

1978  
Earns doctorate from Cambridge University

1986  
Named to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (Literature), Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture established at Columbia University



1997  
18-volume *Nihonbungakushi* completed, receives Asahi Prize for this work

2002  
Receives Mainichi Shuppan Bunka Sho for *Meiji Tennō*, published the year before, named Person of Cultural Merit

2012  
March 8: acquires Japanese nationality



Donald Keene exhibition held at Asukayama Museum in Kita City

2013  
Donald Keene Collection Corner established at Kita City Ward Central Library, includes 490 volumes in Japanese and 298 in English

## Donald Keene

Born in New York in 1922. Scholar of Japanese literature, literary critic. Professor emeritus at Columbia University. Encountered Arthur Waley's translation of *The Tale of Genji* in 1940 and was deeply impressed. After graduate studies in Japanese literature and culture at Columbia University and Cambridge University, conducted further studies at Kyoto University from 1953. Upon returning to the U.S., translated Japanese literature, from the classics to modern literature, while teaching Japanese literature and language at Columbia University. Through his writing endeavors, contributed to a greater international recognition of Japanese literature. Received the Order of Culture in 2008. Acquired Japanese citizenship in March 2012.



Donald Keene, scholar of Japanese literature, Kita City ambassador and honorary resident, acquired Japanese citizenship and settled in Kita City permanently in 2012. Taking that opportunity to officially recognize his many years of residence as an asset, Kita City launched an endeavor to leave a record of his connection with the ward.

As part of that effort, in fiscal 2013, a video and booklet about Donald Keene were produced to outline his connection with Kita City and his achievements and to profile him as a person.

**Donald Keene:** Japan and Kita City, Tokyo

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