

メセナ活動による児童文学の育成

中島 友子 中嶋 裕子

Mecanat Activity and Children's Literature

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In today's society, children are surrounded by an increasing number of social problems. Discord, divorce, isolation, abuse, and the like, are many problems that children face more often than ever before. Given such problems, it is essential that society develops and supports children's sentiments by integrating their life at home, at school, and within the community. Currently the activities of public bodies are not enough to adequately support children, and those of private enterprises are highly desired.

Himeji Shinkin Bank has been practicing mecenat activities utilizing literature to promote children's sentiments. Mecenat activities in Japan are often defined as privately sponsored activities or programs that support the community. In 1987, they opened the "Mineari Bunko Library" on the second floor of their new bank building. In addition, in 1989, they started a poetry contest for elementary school children in the Harima Area, the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize." In Japan there are only three mecenat activities which have a prize contest for children's poetry.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Himeji Shinkin Bank's mecenat activities and their effect on children's sentiments and whether or not such activities promote children's literature in the community.

Through our research, it became clear that the activities contributed to the promotion and development of both children and children's literature. The "Mineai Bunko Library" is recognized as "Mother Library" in the area. As for the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize," the number of applicants and the rate of application from schools are increasing because the contest is becoming more and more important for children. This activity can be concluded as a successful Mecenat activity thanks to enthusiastic teachers, careful continuous management of Himeji Shinkin Bank, and support from the community.

Key words : Mecenat activity, poetry, children, children's literature
メセナ活動 詩 子ども 児童文学

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Introduction

In today's society, children are surrounded by an increasing number of social problems. Discord, divorce, isolation, abuse, and the like, are many problems that children face more often than ever before. Given such problems, it is essential that society develops and supports children's sentiments by integrating their life at home, at school, and within the community. Currently the activities of public bodies are not enough to adequately support children and those of private enterprises, mecenat activities, are highly desired. Mecenat activities in Japan are often defined as privately sponsored activities or programs that support the community.

Himeji Shinkin Bank has been practicing mecenat activities utilizing literature to promote children's sentiments. In 1987, they opened the Mineari Bunko Library on the second floor of their new bank building. In addition, in 1989, they started a poetry contest for elementary school children in the Harima area, the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize."

Poetry is a great way to develop children's sentiments. It allows them to express emotion and sentiments in a

condensed way. In Japan, there are only three mecenat activities that have a prize contest for children's poetry. (cf. table 1) One of them is "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize" managed by Himeji Shinkin Bank. It is deeply rooted in the community and will have its 24th contest this year.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Himeji Shinkin Bank's mecenat activities and their effects on children's sentiments and whether or not such activities promote children's literature in the community.

1 . Introduction of Himeji Shinkin Bank

The headquarters of Himeji Shinkin Bank is located in Himeji city, Hyogo Prefecture. Himeji is famous for its Castle, a world heritage site. The bank was founded in 1910 and is in its 102nd year of existence. There are 51 branch offices in Hyogo Prefecture, most centered around Himeji. The head office has been practicing mecenat activities in many fields such as sports and art. Within the field of art, Himeji Shinkin Bank established both the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize" and the "Mineai Bunko Library" in Himeji, two prominent art programs whose focus is on children's literature.

Table 1 The Enterprises that Have Poetry Contest for Children

Enterprise	Name	Place	Foundation Date
Seibu Gas Ltd.	Words of the Earth Children's Murmurs	Fukuoka Nagasaki Kumamoto	1997
Himeji Shinkin Bank	Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize	Hyogo	1989
Rokkatei	Sairo	Hokkaido	1960

2. Mineai Bunko Library

1) Foundation and purpose

“The Mineai Bunko Library,” which is a local library, started in 1987. In the Rokkaku area in Himeji where Himeji Shinkin Bank was going to build a new office and start their business, there was no library around. At the time 30% of the population was made up of children under the age of 14. There were a lot of double income families and people were worried about child delinquency. Himeji Shinkin Bank thought about the situation and found a key word to the solution, “children.” They opened a library on the second floor of their new building with the hope that the children of the Rokkaku area in Himeji would be able to grow up in a healthy way, knowing that they were a key to the future of the country. In addition, they responded to the request from the community to keep books that went out of print because they did not sell well. The bank thought that if the library could keep such books, it would be a social and cultural contribution.

2) Activities and challenges

This library is managed by a volunteer group of mothers. There are about 3,000 books and 60 registered members. The volunteer mothers lend and read books to children, and enjoy playing games and singing songs together. They hold a star festival and Christmas party, and create a warm atmosphere by exchanging small gifts and notes. They think it is very important to interact with each other. Photograph 1

and 2 show the activities there.



Photo 1 Mineai Bunko Library



Photo 2 Activity in Mineai Bunko Library

However, due to the recent decrease in birthrate, a wide range of other forms of entertainment, and an increase in public crimes which make it difficult for children to come by themselves, the number of library users has been decreasing. The library used to open every Wednesday afternoon, but in order to attract more users, it is now open all day on additional two days a month for babies and infants. The number of users is a continuous challenge.

The Mineai Bunko Library volunteers work closely with children using literature to promote their sentiments. Because of the volunteers' valued knowledge and experience, there is a dedicated spot for one library volunteer to serve on the recommendation committee for the

“Children’s Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize.” In this way, the sponsored Mineai Bunko Library is also connected to the “Children’s Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize.”

3. Children’s Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize

1) Foundation and management of “Children’s Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize”

In 1990 Himeji Shinkin Bank had its 80th anniversary and in the same year Himeji city’s administration had its 100th anniversary. Himeji city made a plan to build a Himeji Museum of Literature and display the achievements of poets and writers Himeji had produced. Arimoto Housui was one of them.

Arimoto Housui was born in Tamachi, Shikama ward, Himeji. He was born in 1886 and passed away in 1976. He was very famous for his children’s poetry. He was so popular that his poetry book “Hosui Poetry” was published 350 times. Photograph 3 is a picture of Arimoto Housui.



Photo 3 Arimoto Housui

Himeji Shinkin Bank founded the “Children’s Poetry, Arimoto Hosui Prize” in order to honor him and to promote children’s sentiments in the Harima area, which is the south east part of Hyogo Prefecture. Each

year the bank asks every elementary school in the area to send children’s poems for the contest. Thousand of poems are submitted, but only 37 are selected as winners. Awards are also given to each teacher, who helps instruct the selected winners. The 37 poems are combined into a poetry book. Photograph 4 shows the list of application requirements and photograph 5 shows poetry books.



Photo 4 List of Application Requirements



Photo 5 Poetry Books

Himeji Shinkin Bank says that they hope through writing poems, children will have an opportunity to look at themselves and will learn the importance of expressing themselves and sharing their way of thinking and feelings with others. This prize is supported by the Museum of Literature and the Himeji Board of

Education. The former helped Himeji Shinkin Bank establish the contest from the very beginning.

2) Transition of application

The prize began to be taken up by the radio and newspapers, and on Himeji Cable TV. Since it became well known, the number of total applicants has been increasing. In 2011, 9,446 poems were submitted. Figure 1 shows the number of applicants for 23 years. One hundred seven elementary schools out of 169 schools in the area applied for the contest and the rate of application was 63.3 percent. Children from every grade applied. In many schools, it has become an annual event. Figure 2 shows grades and the number of application.

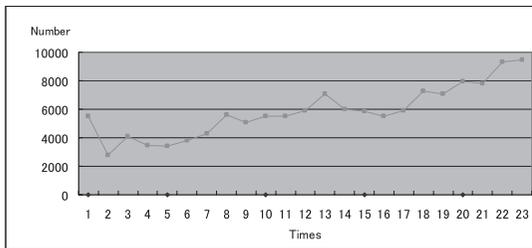


Figure 1 The Number of Application

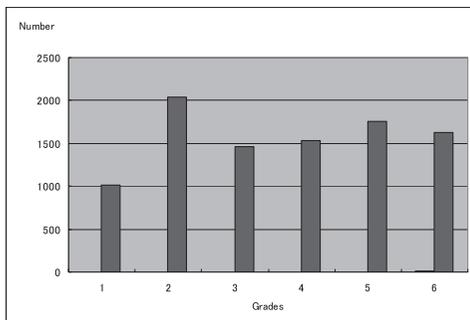


Figure 2 Grades and the Number of Application in 2011

3) Evaluation of the activity by teachers

We examined the activity by interviewing teachers from different schools. Most of

them were thankful for the contest.

① Discovery of Children by Teachers

According to the interviews, the teachers said, “I could understand the burden children bare and their backgrounds,” “I became aware of the frankness of them, which adults can never imagine,” “I was surprised to learn what they are moved, and impressed by. I discovered a childlike excitement,” and “I enjoyed the process of working together with children.” It became clear that the contest had provided teachers with opportunities to discover the children’s world.

The words confidence, encouragement, discovery, language art education, and development of self-expression were common among the teachers who worked together with children to take part in the contest. In addition, they suggested that more schools should participate in the contest.

② Children’s self-discovery

Some teachers said, “Children can’t realize their ability by themselves. They discover themselves through application and being awarded.” “Some children began to write poems even after the contest.” “They became interested in writing poems and made a notebook for poetry.” “Having won a prize gave one girl a lot of encouragement. Though she was often in and out of the hospital, she continued to write poems and published a poetry book.”

In elementary school, when children get a prize, they have an opportunity

to be awarded and to read their poem aloud in front of the all children in the morning assembly. It is a great honor for them. Even if a poem is not chosen, good poems are read aloud in class and often appear in the class newspaper. When children read a poetry book which consists of poems by their friends, many of them think that they can and would like to write like them as well. They get a lot of stimulation and encouragement.

③ Utilization of the poetry book

Selected poems are combined into poetry books and placed in every elementary school that submitted poems, every library in the Harima area and every Himeji Shinkin Bank branch office. In elementary school, they are used as a kind of textbook for poetry. In the community they are used by volunteers on various occasions. In facilities for the elderly, they are used by volunteers, who read them to the elderly. Needless to say, some elderly people can enjoy reading them by themselves. In this way, children's poems ease the minds of many people and are gradually becoming the poems of the community.

4) Challenges of "Children's poetry Arimoto Housui Prize"

① Contents and form

Though the total number of applications has been increasing remarkably, some poems are something like a copy from a text book, and other poems are from 500 to 700 words, just like a composition.

A poet and member of the selection committee, Yasumizu Toshikazu, said that it was sad that there were not many poems which hit the mark.

④ Difficulties for teachers

From the interview of the teachers, it became clear that most poems are the result of the collaboration of teachers and children. Teachers "dig out" the topics of the poems from children's compositions and journals and then "dig deeper" by asking questions and talking with the children in order to lead them towards the final shape of the poem. The teachers who have never sent poems to the contest said, "Though I have heard of the contest, I cannot participate in it because it is too much work."

⑤ The rate of application from schools

The annual goals of each elementary school have influence on the rate of application. The rate of application in the past five years was 51.7%, 50.3%, 54.1%, 59.2%, and 63.3%. Though it has been increasing, it is hoped that the rate will increase even more.

In order to help teachers enjoy collaboration with children and increase the rate of application from schools, it may be a good idea to require poems with fewer words.

5) Evaluation of the Activity

The level of quality of the poems in the "Children's poetry Arimoto Housui Prize" is going up year by year. The subjects range from family, life, and the elderly to introspection, nature, and natural disasters. Children look at themselves, realize a

relation with others, and then try to express what they have found through their own words. It is possible to say that this contest has accomplished the purpose of foundation of Himeji Shinkin Bank.

Kazuo Kashima, a former elementary school teacher and writer of children's literature, said in the 10th poetry book of the contest, "This contest has become a great opportunity for children to observe human beings, and to consider and experience the life of others." In addition, he said in the 18th poetry books of it, "This contest has become socially significant by leaving a mark in the history of children's poetry."

It is possible to say that mecenat activity by Himeji Shinkin Bank is successful. The main cause of the success of this activity is the cooperation of children, schools, the local community, and Himeji Shinkin Bank.

Conclusion

Mecenat activities by Himeji Shinkin Bank have had an influence on the development of local culture. "The Mineai Bunko Library" is recognized as "Mother Library" in the area and the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize" as something essential by many elementary schools.

As for "The Mineai Bunko Library," it may not be as great a success as the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize" because the recent number of library users has been decreasing. However, the library still provides mothers and children with a place to gather to enjoy reading books, and interacting with each other. The value of

its existence will increase all the more in a society where people are isolated. It is hoped that "The Mineai Bunko Library" will continue to be recognized as Mother Library" and deliver enjoyment of reading.

As for the "Children's Poetry Arimoto Housui Prize," the contest has reminded people that Arimoto Housui was born and raised in Himeji, a fact often forgotten when at the age of fourteen, he moved to Okayama and later become one of the greatest poets of children's poetry. Thanks to the contest, the children have a renewed sense of honor and pride in their community, which produced Housui. While the contest has brought awareness about who Housui was, many contest participants, when asked, had no idea that it was carried out by Himeji Shinkin Bank. This fact shows that the contest is beyond the purpose of self-promotion for Himeji Shinkin Bank and has deep roots in the community. Enthusiastic teachers, careful continuous work by Himeji Shinkin Bank, and support from the community help promote children's sentiments.

These activities by Himeji Shinkin Bank can be concluded as successful mecenat activities that continue to contribute to the promotion and development of both children and children's literature.

(This essay is based on the presentation at the International Association of Japan Study 2012.)

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