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"Loyal to Youth" – the history of the poetry magazine *Kai* based on the essay by Noriko Ibaragi

ABSTRACT
This article aims to examine the origins and principles of the Japanese poetry magazine *Kai* as detailed in Noriko Ibaragi's (1926–2006) essay *Kai Shōshi* ('a brief history of *Kai*', 1969). The magazine, founded by Ibaragi and Hiroshi Kawasaki (1930–2004), emerged during the post-war era as a response to the ideological constraints that previously governed Japanese poetry. *Kai* distinguished itself from other literary magazines like *Arechi* and *Rettō* by emphasizing individuality, creative autonomy, and a break from traditional poetic forms. Ibaragi's reflections in *Kai Shōshi* provide crucial insight into the magazine's impact on postwar Japanese poetry, fostering a space for personal expression. This article contributes to the English-language scholarship by exploring the origins of *Kai*. In addition to discussing the historical and ideological context of the magazine's foundation, this article presents and analyzes selected poems by *Kai* poets. These close readings illuminate the group's poetic vision and their commitment to being accessible and socially engaged.

KEYWORDS: Noriko Ibaragi, Hiroshi Kawasaki, *Kai*, postwar poetry, poetry magazines

Introduction

"One day, a letter arrived. *Would you like to start a magazine together?* – it was an invitation from Hiroshi Kawasaki" (Ibaragi 2022a: 227)[1]. This is how the essay *Kai Shōshi* ('a brief history of *Kai*') begins, which Noriko Ibaragi published in 1969. The emerging Japanese poet Kawasaki approached the

[1] All excerpts from Japanese and Polish sources were translated into English by the author.

equally young and still unknown poet, Ibaragi, proposing they collaborate on a poetry magazine together. Although these two individuals were initially unfamiliar with each other, through their collaborative efforts, they ultimately succeeded in charting a course that diverged from the trajectory followed by the so-called first wave of post-war poets.

There is no doubt that the publication of periodicals played a crucial role in the development of modern Japanese poetry, both before the onset of the Second World War and after the cessation of military hostilities. It was within the pages of these small magazines that writers, whose names would later become widely recognized, first published their works, thus securing a permanent place for them in the canon of Japanese literature. Various periodicals, such as *Kai*, provided a forum for discussions on the nature of poetry, as well as a bridge connecting poets who adhered to similar values.

Modern Japanese poetry experienced a renaissance of lyricism after censorship relaxed and nationalist ideals were abandoned. Freed from ideological and political pressures, numerous magazines began to emerge, and the 1950s are often regarded as the golden age of contemporary poetry (Gotō 2010: 120). The beginning of the *Kai* group coincides with this period. This article analyzes the inception of the magazine *Kai* and the foundational principles established by its founders, which distinguish it from other leading magazines, particularly *Arechi* and *Rettō*. The analysis focuses on the essay by Ibaragi, one of the co-founders of *Kai*, providing insights into the distinctive ideological framework that shaped the magazine's direction and objectives.

Ibaragi was "(…) arguably Japan's preeminent living female poet (…)" until she died in 2006 (Mulvey 2010: 100). She, as well as other members of *Kai* magazine, grew up during a period of intensified military actions. Following Japan's defeat, she began her literary career with a poetry collection titled *Taiwa* ('dialog', 1955). In her debut volume, one can already discern works that reflect the author's experiences from her coming-of-age years. Some poems directly reference contemporary events, occasionally of historical significance, making them a valuable source illustrating both her views and the mood prevailing among the young Japanese intelligentsia of that time. Masako Tomura divides Ibaragi's poetry into three categories: cheerful, humorous poems with an optimistic view on life; poems that reject war and critically describe contemporary society; and nostalgic poetry expressing the author's sense of loneliness (Tomura 2018: 272). Ibaragi's lyrical work is multidimensional, and Tomura's division is just one of many possible interpretations. Although Ibaragi is primarily known as a poet, her body of work also includes essays that provide valuable insights into contemporary

Japanese poetry and often serve as a contextual framework for understanding her poetic output.

The essay *Kai Shōshi* is the first and most important source describing the history of *Kai* magazine, yet it has not been analyzed within the scope of the English-language scholarship. This article aims to fill that gap by examining the magazine's origins and offering English translations and close readings of selected poems by poets associated with *Kai*, with particular attention to their central themes. As Ibaragi herself notes in *Kai Shōshi*, it is difficult to clearly define a unified set of themes for the group, given the diversity of individual voices and poetic approaches. Nevertheless, according to the author of this study, one of the most significant aspects of *Kai* poetry is its strong sense of social engagement, which can be traced back to the poets' heightened sensitivity shaped by their experiences of the Second World War. Through these analyses, the article seeks to illuminate the group's creative vision and literary contributions. Due to the limited scope of this article, only a selection of representative poems is presented and discussed.

1. Prelude to the founding of the *Kai* magazine

The history of the magazine *Kai* can be divided into two periods. The first one began with the publication of the first issue in May 1953 and ended with the release of the eleventh issue in April 1955. The second period began after the magazine resumed its activity following a ten-year break, with the twelfth issue being released in 1965. From that moment until 1999, subsequent editions were published intermittently (Kim 2022: 24). In total, thirty-three issues were printed (Gotō 2010: 139).

The founding of the magazine, which aimed to promote poetry, was undoubtedly a result of the passion and enthusiasm of its founders. However, it is important to consider other factors that played a crucial role in its creation and development. One of the most significant influences was the presence and activity of other literary publications, particularly the poetry magazine *Shigaku*.

Shigaku was one of the most influential poetry magazines that contributed to the success of many young and ambitious poets. First published in 1947, this monthly magazine served as a platform for freedom of expression within the world of poetry (Mizutani 2006: 18). It was within the pages of this magazine, in the Shigaku Kenkyūkai ('Poetics Research Association') section, that Ibaragi first published her poem *Isamashii Uta* ('brave song') in 1950 (Gotō 2010: 113). *Shigaku* not only played a pivotal role in the early stages of Ibaragi's creative journey but also contributed to the establishment of *Kai*.

As indicated in the opening of the essay *Kai Shōshi*, it was Kawasaki who first proposed a collaboration with Ibaragi. At the time, he was four years younger than Ibaragi, but he, too, had been publishing his poems in the same section. In the essay, Ibaragi refers to the Shigaku Kenkyūkai as a *dōjō*, a place for the practice of martial arts or meditation (Ibaragi 2022a: 230). She also compares it to Shōka Sonjuku (*ibid*., 238), a private school founded at the end of the Edo period in Hagi, where, among others, the samurai Shōin Yoshida taught (Rubinger 1982: 192). These analogies are significant as they evoke places where practical skills are acquired. Referring to the association created by Ibaragi, the founders and members who eventually joined *Kai* can be considered as „alumni of Shigaku".

Furthermore, Ibaragi herself emphasized the importance of the critical feedback she received from the selectors and more experienced writers employed at *Shigaku*, including Shirō Murano[2] (Ibaragi 2022a: 228). The magazine and Shigaku Kenkyūkai were thus spaces that brought together emerging poets, allowing them to develop their literary techniques and present their works to a broader audience of readers. It is worth noting that Ibaragi, Kawasaki, and other members, such as Shuntarō Tanikawa[3], Tatsu Tomotake[4], and Hiroshi Yoshino[5], were connected to it. Therefore, the history of *Kai* cannot overlook the influence of *Shigaku* and the Shigaku Kenkyūkai, as they served as a prelude to its establishment.

2. In contrast to the magazines *Arechi* and *Rettō*

The decision to establish *Kai* was influenced not only by Ibaragi and Kawasaki's relationship with the magazine *Shigaku* but also by their desire to create contemporary poetry that would break away from the conventions adopted immediately after the end of the Second World War. As Ibaragi notes in her essay:

> (...) I can't shake the feeling that we all had an instinctive need to fill the gaps left by *Arechi* and *Rettō*. (…) [T]he post-war poetry movement was

[2] Shirō Murano (1901–1975) was a Japanese poet and the former president of the Japan Modern Poets Association. Initially, he wrote traditional Japanese poetry, but under the influence of German poetry, he began composing contemporary poems inspired by magical realism. He made his debut in 1926 with the poetry collection *Wana* ('the trap').

[3] Shuntarō Tanikawa (1931–2024) was a poet, essayist, photographer, screenwriter, and translator; he is the author of over sixty poetry collections. His first poetry volume, titled *Nijūoku Kōnen-no Kodoku* ('two billion light years of solitude'), was published in 1952.

[4] Tatsu Tomotake, born Masanori Tomotake (1931–1993), was a poet, baritone singer, musical actor, voice actor, and the host of a cooking program.

[5] Hiroshi Yoshino (1926–2014) was a poet and essayist. He made his debut in 1957 with a poetry collection titled *Shōsoku* ('news').

> bare bones, and its juice, color, downy hair, all seemed extremely scarce. Can an organism still fully perform its biological functions if these elements were removed, leaving only bones? Would the result be poetry created by a being such as a human? (Ibaragi 2022a: 245)

According to Ibaragi, the poetry magazines that had previously been at the center of attention did not adequately reflect the changing reality in Japanese society. They were merely "skeletons".

As Ibaragi mentions, after the cessation of military activities, one of the most important poetry magazines was *Arechi*. The name of the magazine refers to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. Eliot's vision of a wasteland had a profound impact on the imaginations of postwar Japanese poets. Cities that were annihilated during the Second World War – such as Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and Tokyo – became a reflection of the words of the British-American poet (Sugiyama 1961: 225). The magazine was published from 1947 to 1948 and gathered poets who were disillusioned with the reality they had had to confront during the period of the Second World War. In their work, they rejected both the artistry in language and form, as well as the avant-garde and socialist realism (Keene 1984: 366).

The postwar language and norm crisis, noticeable worldwide, can also be observed in Japanese lyric poetry, and the members of the *Arechi* group can be seen as representatives of the so-called poetics of silence.

The generation of poets belonging to the *Arechi* group directly experienced the consequences of Japan's imperial ambitions. They were witnesses not only to numerous air raids and murders but also to the defeat of their country, culminating in the dropping of two atomic bombs. In their poetry, an elegiac tone is thus noticeable. The axiological chaos that arose from traumatic experiences resulted in a loss of faith in the future. The poets of this group believed that in Japan, "there is not even a place to die, let alone live" (Melanowicz 1996: 235). The war-torn Japanese land and the eroding values within society caused the lyricism of the *Arechi* group to become nihilistic, pessimistic, and sometimes veering into defeatism.

The doubt in positive developments and a better future was not only a result of traumatic experiences but also stemmed from the observation of another armed conflict. From 1950 to 1953, the Korean War took place on the Korean Peninsula, which further solidifying the poets' belief that concepts such as security and peace were merely unstable values in the life of every individual. In their poetry, they also depicted the threats and a sense of inner emptiness caused by the Korean War, viewing it as another manifestation of the world's aberration that they had to confront (Keene 1984: 368).

In 1952, when the *Arechi* magazine had already been withdrawn, the magazine *Rettō* began to gain significant attention. Poets belonging to this literary group created works in the spirit of socialist realism, reflecting their leftist views. However, the creators sought to distance themselves from the proletarian poetry that had emerged before the Second World War, as it was seen as overly simplistic. The banality of form used by their predecessors was perceived as a sign of artistic immaturity, so the poets of *Rettō* chose to describe the world in a surrealistic manner (*ibid*., 370). A more advanced poetic technique set the representatives of this group apart not only from the pre-war writers focused on the problems of the lower social classes but also from the poets associated with *Arechi*.

Although the *Rettō* poets broke away from conventions in favour of a more sophisticated form, their poems remained closely tied to their leftist orientation. *Rettō*'s poetry was "full of civil pathos, rich with impressive imagery, and poignant folk humour, sometimes turning into caustic political satire" (Dolin 2015: 86). Their works were not devoid of revolutionary slogans which aimed to influence social attitudes and contribute to the formation of a new, young generation of Japanese people.

However, according to Ibaragi, these two leading magazines in the literary world did not create conditions for sharing poetry that would break away from ideology or pessimistic visions. The *Kai* group consisted mainly of poets born in the 1930s. Melanowicz (1996: 234) emphasizes that they did not have "direct wartime experience", so their worldview differed from that of older writers. At this point, it is worth adding that the paper's author does not fully agree with Melanowicz's statement. A good example is Ibaragi, who was born in 1926, so her formative years coincided with Japan's increased military activity. While Ibaragi did not participate in the war as actively as soldiers, she, like other young girls, was mobilized to work in a factory producing medicines for the Japanese Navy (Yumoto 2016: 101). Her youth had an impact on her later work, and the themes of losing freedom and ruthless submission to the system are evident not only in her poetry but also in her essays (Luo 2017: 23)[6]. Ibaragi's personal history, shaped by wartime mobilization and postwar disillusionment, reflects broader tendencies within the *Kai* group. Her experience was not unique, but rather emblematic of a generation of poets whose adolescence was marked by the final years of the war and the difficult transition into a new era.

[6] It is worth noting that although Luo focuses primarily on the innovative way of expressing emotions and depicting the world in the poetry of two selected poets, she also notes the significant role that the Second World War played in shaping the work of the co-founder of the *Kai* magazine.

3. About *Kai*

3.1 Thematic diversity in the postwar context

The members of *Kai* were distinguished from the representatives of *Arechi* by a ten- to fifteen-year age difference, so they could not identify with the ideas promoted by the *Arechi* poets, who identified as the lost generation that became a victim of history. Moreover, their vision of the world was disillusioned, which irreparably destroyed their value system. On the other hand, the members of *Kai* were much younger than this group, and, with the end of the war, they entered adulthood with new problems and challenges. Therefore, a diversity of themes is noticeable in their works.

Of course, among their poems, one can find texts that refer to wartime experiences or Japan's defeat. One such work is *Kōen Mata-wa Shukumei-no Maboroshi* ('a park or a vision of destiny', henceforth: *A Park or a Vision of Destiny*) by Tanikawa, originally published in the fourteenth issue of *Kai*, which serves as an example of prose poetry:

> ***A Park or a Vision of Destiny***
>
> There was an old shrine, its roof covered by a second, larger roof for protection. There was an old monument to the fallen, and farther back, a new monument to peace. (In this small town, over four hundred people died in the war.) There had likely once been a ring for ceremonies – its trampled outline now barely visible[7]. There was a great tree, and its young leaves shimmered in the sunlight at its crown. There was a red iron bridge, and the sound of footsteps echoed loudly when one crossed it. A river flowed beneath. There stood a Jizō statue[8] with its head broken off, a stone had been placed gently where the head had been – an old woman, passing by, bowed before it. A gentle wind was blowing.
>
> There was a white stone bench, worn stone steps, and a black car in which my wife was dozing. Our two small children were at the riverbank, tossing pebbles into the water.
>
> Empty bottles and rotting vegetables had been discarded along the shore. A madwoman approached, barefoot, muttering something; she

[7] In the original, the expression *matsuri-no hi-no tame-no dohyō* appears. The poet likely referred to the ceremony to purify the ring before the start of a sumo tournament, commonly known as *dohyō matsuri*.

[8] Jizō is a Buddhist deity who is a protector of children, travelers, and the souls of the deceased. In Japan, they are often found along roads, at temples, or in cemeteries. People dress them in red hats and bibs, asking for protection, especially for children, including those who died before birth. For details cf. Glassman (2012).

> lifted a large stone and crushed the heads of both children. Blood streamed, the children died instantly – that is what I saw.
>
> In what I can see there is something I can't see. Within what is there is something that is not. Within what is not there is what is. The possible and the impossible overlap does this terrifying hope for bruised harvests not shape the structure of the world?
>
> There was a ruined roadside shrine. A low wire fence. Scattered sweets lay on the ground. My wife awoke in the car and screamed. The children came running, laughing, their hands wet with river water (Tanikawa 2023: 96–97).

The poem can be divided into three distinct parts. In the first part, the speaker offers a detailed depiction of the town in which he finds himself. Particular attention is drawn to a shrine that houses two monuments – an old one and a newer one erected in memory of those who perished in the war. The latter structure stands as a material trace of wartime trauma – “In this small town, over four hundred people died in the war” – still inscribed upon the landscape. The description is rendered in strikingly realistic detail: the family spends time together, and the children play by the riverbank. However, the sudden appearance of a mysterious “madwoman” violently disrupts this seemingly idyllic scene. The ensuing act of brutal murder unfolds in a manner that borders on the surreal.

What follows is a fragment of disordered, philosophical reflection, in which the speaker meditates on the threshold between presence and absence, being and non-being. The line “does this terrifying hope for bruised harvests not shape the structure of the world?” suggests that the world is not merely formed by realized events but also by fears and hopes that remain unrealized.

In the final section, the poet returns to the setting described at the outset. Once again, the speaker is with his family by the river, and it may be inferred that he has been awakened from a nightmarish vision by his wife’s scream. Yet the reader remains uncertain whether the scene of violence was merely a dream, a premonition, or perhaps a resurfacing of wartime trauma that continues to shape the speaker’s perception of reality.

This poem offers a poignant meditation on the instability of the real in which the visible and the invisible, the possible and the impossible, life and death, continually intersect. Tanikawa, through the seemingly ordinary language of everyday life, reveals a profound existential tension – the drama of human

consciousness suspended between the real and the imagined. The poem may thus be read as a poetic articulation of the psychological condition of postwar society – a society that outwardly appears to have returned to normalcy, yet continues to bear the weight of unhealed wounds.

3.2 Social engagement and the search for meaning

The poets of the *Kai* group, carrying the memory of the Second World War, expressed strong opposition to all forms of armed conflict. While they reflect on the traumas inflicted by the past war, as in the poem discussed above, they are equally attuned to emerging conflicts that threaten global peace. For instance, in her poem *Chi* ('blood', henceforth: *Blood*) initially published in the twenty-seventh issue of *Kai*, Ibaragi invokes the figure of Saddam Hussein, thereby linking historical trauma to contemporary geopolitical anxieties:

> ***Blood***
>
> The Iraqi singer recited
> earnestly, shaking his hips
> let us offer our blood to Saddam
> let us offer our lives to Saddam
> a well-known song
>
> Forty-five years ago, we sang the same way
> German children also sang that way
> for the glory of the Führer
> when you sing about offering blood
>
> There is nothing noble in it
> blood should be used for your good
> if you deliberately wish to offer it
> it should only be to your dearest, your closest
> (Ibaragi 2022b: 44–45)

The poet draws a striking analogy between the events that occurred under Hussein's dictatorship and those of the Second World War. In the opening stanza of the poem, singers chant in praise of their leader: "let us offer our blood to Saddam / let us offer our lives to Saddam". The Iraqi ruler, the object of these declarations of devotion, has gone down in history as one of the most notorious war criminals. In line with the ideals of the Ba'ath Party

(the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party), which he led, Hussein advocated the unification of all Arab peoples – a population he claimed had been fragmented by Western imperialists (Pycińska 2010: 100).

In their pursuit of a unified Arab homeland, the Iraqis became yet another example of the illusion and fragility of peace. Just as the Japanese and Germans once bore responsibility for the outbreak of war and widespread bloodshed, so did they. Iraqi society thus serves as yet another example of successful political manipulation and the effectiveness of authoritarian rule. The songs of praise are, in fact, elements of a cult of personality. The blinded populace places its faith in the ideals and values embodied by the leader himself. This phenomenon is hardly exceptional – as the poet herself remarks: "Forty-five years ago, we sang the same way / German children also sang that way". Naivety, combined with belief in national exceptionalism, leads to the complete subjugation of the individual to state power. As a result, people become willing to sacrifice everything – even their own lives – to fulfill the objectives imposed by their rulers. The poet explicitly condemns this mindset, asserting that there is nothing noble in singing "about offering blood". Though the people profess their loyalty, their actions may ultimately prove disastrous.

This poem also reflects a critical perspective on society itself. Like many other members of the *Kai* group, Ibaragi composed socially engaged poetry. An intriguing parallel may be found in the work of Yoshino, who likewise published in *Kai* and presented, among other pieces, the poem *burst – hana hiraku* ('burst – bloom'), which was originally published in the sixth issue of *Kai*:

burst – bloom
The office work proceeded quietly without the slightest errors
or delays not even dust gathered.

Thirty years.

A ceremony in honor of long service.
Amid the endless praises from the employer, one of the employees
with a pale face suddenly shouted:

— Ladies and gentlemen!
Let's talk about the soul
About the soul!

How is it possible that for so many years
We haven't talked about the soul?

Suddenly he collapsed to the ground at the feet of his bewildered coworkers. Wiping cold sweat from his face.

Madness
Blooms

— Again the same dream.
(Yoshino 1994: 25–26)

The poet constructs an image of existential emptiness concealed beneath the façade of orderly professional life – an aspect seemingly central to the identity of many Japanese individuals. Office work becomes a symbol of repetitive routine in which people gradually lose contact with their inner selves. The pivotal moment in the poem is the long-service award ceremony, which, while intended as a celebration of dedication, simultaneously reveals the alienation of an individual within the institutional structure. At this seemingly dignified moment, one pale and visibly shaken employee breaks the formal atmosphere with a dramatic outcry: "Let's talk about the soul!" His desperate plea is not merely a call for spiritual reflection, but also a rebellion against the dehumanizing mechanisms of the corporate system. It underscores a painful truth – that for three decades, no one has spoken about what truly matters, about what constitutes our humanity.

Toward the end of the poem, "madness" is described as something that "blooms", implying that insanity is not a sudden eruption, but rather a process – something that slowly matures in secrecy. Yoshino's poem may be read as a powerful diagnosis of modernity: a critique of a society subordinated to productivity, where spiritual concerns are relegated to the margins and human beings are reduced to roles and functions. The poet emphasizes the urgent need to address the human condition. This imperative resonates deeply in the aftermath of war, when the search for new meaning and values becomes essential. In this context, it is telling that the *Kai* poets, including Yoshino, were described as those who "represented a return to normalcy and a reaffirmation of the values of ordinary life" (Burleigh 2004: 31). Their work, while rooted in the everyday, exposed the underlying tensions of modern existence, which is sometimes paradoxical.

One of the paradoxes of human life is illustrated in another poem by Yoshino, *Mottomo Nibui Mono-ga* ('the one who is the most dull',

henceforth: *The One Who Is the Most Dull*), which appeared in the sixteenth issue of *Kai*:

The One Who Is the Most Dull

The one who is most dull to the breath of words
walks the path of poetry, cheerful and unafraid
on a day I think of it

The one who is most dull to the difficulty of teaching
isn’t he the one possessed by the passion to teach?

The one who is most dull to the darkness of others
does he not fervently long to help them?

The one who is most dull to the core of his field
does he not devote his life to it?

On a cold day,
the one who has lost his way on the path of words
accuses even those unconnected to him.
(Yoshino 1994: 715–716)

The poet constructs a portrait of an individual who appears to be “dull” – that is, seemingly insensitive or unaware – but who, paradoxically, proves to be the most deeply devoted and engaged in the very areas to which they seem indifferent. The lyrical speaker observes that those who appear least attuned to language, teaching, or the suffering of others may be those most passionately committed to these realms. The poet seems to propose an alternative perspective on empathy and engagement – one not grounded in thorough understanding but rather in a pure impulse toward action.

The final section of the poem marks a clear structural and tonal shift. The narrative becomes more personal. The figure who has “lost his way on the path of words” emerges as a symbol of a divided, self-aware, and powerless individual. This passage may be interpreted as a self-portrait of an artist or an intellectual who, unlike “the most dull one”, is paralyzed by existential awareness and unable to act. Thus, the poem can be read as a metaphorical exploration of the psychological condition of modern man, who, entangled in reflection and incessant analysis, frequently loses the capacity for authentic action.

3.3 Individuality, linguistic sensitivity, and the spirit of youth

The above-discussed reflection on the internal conflict between thought and action resonates with broader concerns expressed by the *Kai* poets, whose works often grapple with questions of identity, responsibility, and existential paralysis. A thematic classification of the works of all the poets associated with *Kai* may present certain challenges. This is how Kawasaki presents the thematic openness of the magazine in the afterword to its inaugural issue, which Ibaragi quotes in *Kai Shōshi*:

> Here, we have established the modest poetry magazine *Kai*. We do not wish to present the viewpoint of a single school, but rather to create a space for the presentation of works created based on individual ways of thinking – works that can only exist in an individual form (Ibaragi 2022a: 236–237).

As proclaimed by the founders at the early stages of the magazine's creation, one of its main objectives was to preserve individuality. This seems particularly significant in the context of the biographies of specific members. Growing up during the war, they had to relinquish their individuality and adopt a stance approved by the broader society. After being liberated from the repressive system, they were finally able to express their views more openly and assertively. Ibaragi also points this out in her essay. She was not surprised, for example, by the lack of hesitation in the decision of one of her peers to join *Kai*; as she claims, this was a characteristic of their generation:

> To this day, I remember Yoshino's response clearly; it was brief and resolute: "I join". It was not something like "Thank you for letting me join" or "Let's do this together", but rather it carried individuality in the style of "I'm in!". I felt that we came from the same period. Yoshino and I were born in the same year, and our early youth was marked by humility, modesty, and the submission of the young to the old. However, with the defeat in the war, we vehemently opposed such discipline. That one word, "I join", immediately allowed me to understand his state of mind (*ibid*., 239).

In this description, there is not only resoluteness but also a rebellious attitude that opposes conformity, which is characteristic of this generation. A critical approach to politics, history, philosophy, religion, and various societal changes is one of the central themes in their works, including those of Ibaragi.

Based on the content of the previously mentioned afterword by Kawasaki, it can be concluded that the founders sought to distance themselves from a categorical identification of the distinctive features of *Kai* poetry. The reader was not provided with a prescriptive image of what the magazine would look like, and even the authors themselves seemed uncertain of this. As a result, an enclave of writers with diverse temperaments was formed. *Kai* provided a sense of security for the individual expression of each poet, without the pressure to conform to the vision of other members. However, this perspective creates difficulties in classifying and holistically defining the characteristics of *Kai* poetry. Maki Mizutani (2006: 15) identifies two dominant features: lyricism and sensitivity[9].

The moodiness and emotionality expressed in the poems of the *Kai* poets can be regarded as shared traits. However, it is important to note that each poet perceived reality subjectively, and their works cannot be fully homogenized. Furthermore, the key characteristics identified by Mizutani may also stem from the experiences of the generation born in the 1930s. As Ibaragi observes:

> *Kai* was often perceived as an extravagant, humorous poetry magazine, but if one were to look at the environment in which each of us lived, the soil on which we blossomed was rather barren (Ibaragi 2022a: 245).

Traumatic experiences are not the central theme of their works, but they undoubtedly influenced the development of their life stances and personalities.

Mizutani (2006: 15) mentions another distinctive feature of the *Kai* literati, namely their particular focus on *nihongo-no gokan* ('the five senses [expressed] in the Japanese language'). This aspect is also essential to the author of *Kai Shōshi* herself, who agreed to collaborate with Kawasaki because, as she claims, he demonstrated a very good command of the mother tongue:

> Kawasaki and I have very different views on poetry, but I felt that with someone who is so proficient in Japanese and approaches words so meticulously, I would be able to communicate on this matter. It may sound strange to say that his Japanese is good, but this comes from my deep suspicion and dissatisfaction with many of the poems written at

[9] In her article, Mizutani references works such as *Nihon kin-gendai shi* ('Japanese contemporary poetry', 1967) and *Sengoshi taikei* ('an outline of postwar poetry', 1971).

> that time, which were created without paying attention to the sense of words in the Japanese language [emphasis E.W.] (Ibaragi 2022a: 232).

Mizutani used the same term as Ibaragi, namely the previously cited *nihongo-no gokan* (the translation underscored in the quote). According to Ibaragi, the foundation of poetry lies in the poet's sensitivity to language, with particular emphasis on an intuitive grasp of the nuances and emotional resonance of words. After the war, the search for a language capable of new expressive possibilities, while simultaneously breaking away from the classical tradition, became a widespread practice not only among Japanese poets but also poets from other countries. Sensitive to nuance, the members of *Kai* were also part of this phenomenon. They also drew attention to the diversity of dialects present in Japan. In the first issue of *Kai*, Ibaragi published a work titled *Hōgen Jiten* ('dialect dictionary', henceforth: *Dialect Dictionary*), which begins as follows.

> ***Dialect Dictionary***
>
> *Yobaiboshi* a falling star
> *Itachi michi* a narrow path
> *Debeso* a woman out walking
> *Komokaburi* moonshine
> *Chiranbaran* scattered
> (Ibaragi 2022a: 24)

The first stanza of the poem resembles the titular dialect dictionary, in which individual words are explained so that the reader can fully understand the message, even if they are unfamiliar with the dialect. In the final stanza, the lyrical subject, who can be identified with Ibaragi, confesses: "There is one dialect dictionary / I love with no hope" (*ibid*., 26). These words may reflect the poet's attachment to a form of language that seems to be fading away. The poem also points to a reflection on the transience of language and culture – things that once defined a community or region but may no longer hold their place in the face of modernization and globalization. Perhaps for this reason, Ibaragi, like other poets, occasionally used dialects in her texts A notable example of this practice is the work of Kawasaki, who traveled across Japan and recorded poems in various dialects. As a result of his efforts, an anthology titled *Nihon Hōgen Shishū* ('collection of Japanese dialect poems', 1998) was published. Additionally, Kawasaki created his

poems using dialects. One notable example is *Tōkyō Hōgen Akutai Hikae* ('refraining from using abusive words in Tokyo dialect').
Lyricism, sensitivity, and linguistic proficiency are the three most frequently mentioned qualities that unite the creators associated with *Kai*. However, the author of this study would like to highlight an additional characteristic, one pointed out by Ibaragi herself. She references the words of Tanikawa, spoken at one of the magazine's meetings:

> (...) "I am proud of my loyalty to my youth". At that moment, I experienced a sort of shock, as if I had been struck by an arrow coming from an unexpected direction. The post-war standardized ideas of complete regret, total repentance, and absolute denial seemed to come from another dimension. If one were to summarize what each of us was trying to do in our own way, while having different temperaments, it would most likely come down to the words of Tanikawa (Ibaragi 2022a: 244–245).

Youth is a common trait shared by all members of *Kai*. Emphasized by Tanikawa and endorsed by Ibaragi, the words about remaining loyal to one's youth and utilizing the rights bestowed upon it seem to be key when reading the poems of the *Kai* poets. The break with convention, the search for new means of expression, and the creation of poetry that distances itself from the past, alongside the rebellious stance, all reflect an ecstatic celebration of youth. The ideas they promoted are derived from their experiences in their early years. The wartime catastrophe led to doubts about humanity and the system, thereby sparking pacifist sentiments and original ideas within Ibaragi's generation.
This celebration of youth, marked by renewal, transformation, and defiance, finds powerful poetic expression in Kawasaki's poem *Ima Hajimaru Atarashii Ima* ('now begins the new now', henceforth: *Now Begins the New Now*). The text serves as a lyrical embodiment of the ethos shared by the *Kai* poets – namely, the belief in perpetual becoming and the generative potential of the present:

> ***Now Begins the New Now***
>
> Pumped from the heart, fresh blood
> circulates throughout the body after ten seconds
> I am not the person I was before
> Nor are you
> We are always new

A butterfly barely emerged from its chrysalis
sways in the barely formed heat haze
This flower
yesterday, it was still a bud
Look at the new wind from across the sea
how it dances, rushing forward
Nature is always new

Yesterday, that which I didn't know
Today, I joyfully know
Yesterday, that which I didn't notice
Today, I begin to see
The world where each day is new
Once again, a piece of ancient history has been changed
Even the past becomes new

Today, once again, a new accidental meeting,
A completely new love
is born after another
Now the song is sung for the first time
Always always,
Let live a new life
Now begins the new now
(Kawasaki 2007: 61–63)

The poem serves as a poetic affirmation of constant transformation and youthfulness. In the opening lines, the poet refers to the biological rhythm of the human body: fresh blood, pumped from the heart, circulates throughout the entire system in just ten seconds. The central motif of the poem is newness – not as a fleeting sensation, but as an intrinsic and enduring quality of reality. Kawasaki discerns this perpetual novelty both in nature (a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, a blooming flower, a sea breeze) and in human experience (a new love, a chance encounter, newly acquired knowledge). Each day carries the potential for change, discovery, and the reconfiguration of one's history. Even the past, as the poet suggests, is not fixed – it can be "altered," reread, and reinterpreted in the light of the present.

Kawasaki's poem may also be viewed as an act of poetic and existential resistance against stagnation. It functions, in effect, as a poetic manifesto

that, in the view of the present author, reflects the defining features of the *Kai* poets' works. By emphasizing change, discovery, and the reinterpretation of both self and history, the poem aligns with the *Kai* poets' desire to create literature that was not confined to elite literary circles but open to all. In this sense, *Ima Hajimaru Atarashii Ima* serves not only as a personal reflection but also as a continuation of the *Kai* group's mission to revitalize poetic expression and bring it closer to the lived reality of ordinary people.

The founders of the magazine were committed to liberating creative individuality, as well as poetry itself, which, although regarded as high culture and traditionally confined to an elite audience, they sought to make more accessible to a broader segment of society. They aimed to write poems that would be understandable to the average Japanese person, often incorporating everyday vocabulary. They were known for their unconventional method of popularizing poetry by reading poems in public spaces and also writing poetic dramas for mass media outlets such as radio and television (Keene 1984: 372). The unconventional approach to a literary genre with such a long history may be seen as a manifestation of rebellion, the creativity of the younger generation, or a desire to make a mark in the history of Japanese literature. Although it is unclear whether the magazine's founders focused on the latter, they were quickly recognized and included in studies on contemporary poetry. In her essay, Ibaragi cites the example of a book published by the Nihon Kindai Bungakukan (Japanese Museum of Modern Literature), namely *Nihon-no Kindaishi* ('contemporary Japanese poetry'), where *Kai* is included alongside other well-known poetry magazines like *Arechi* (Ibaragi 2022a: 256).

Conclusion

The poets belonging to *Kai*, with Ibaragi at the forefront, believed in humanistic ideals, which they expressed through their works. Due to their sensitivity and youthful enthusiasm, they gained increasing popularity among Japanese society. In the introduction to the anthology Adachi, Kotański, and Śliwak (1992), Makoto Ōoka[10] wrote about their literary achievements as follows:

[10] Makoto Ōoka (1931–2017) was a poet, distinguished literary critic, and lecturer. He was the former president of the Japanese Pen Club. In 1996, he became the first Japanese to receive the Golden Wreath at Struga. A recipient of the Order of Culture. The author of numerous publications on Japanese poetry, both contemporary and classical. He was a member of the *Kai* group.

> They fervently believed that one could create a microcosm in a poem through the crystallization of a poetic vision in words. As a result, their poems embodied the characteristic freshness and vibrancy of their generation, which can symbolize the celebration of the creators' sensitivity. In their poems, the love of human life was expressed in a much stronger way than any discouragement about life or bitterness. But they were not only concerned with humanity; the essence of their poetry lies in the keen observation and benevolence toward the entire environment on a global scale (Adachi, Kotański, and Śliwak 1992: 24).

These words from the renowned literary critic aptly capture the essence of their poetry, summarizing its most important features. Although the *Kai* magazine played a significant role in the development of Ibaragi's career, it was through the publication of poetry collections that she became a recognized figure, and along with her, her sensitivity and approach to poetry. The dynamic changes occurring globally, coupled with a refined ability to observe, have made her work incredibly diverse while also thought-provoking, which is why she enjoys great esteem among the Japanese.

In conclusion, the poets of *Kai* created a legacy that reflected their profound belief in individual expression and the importance of sensitivity toward both humanity and the natural world. The significance of *Kai* lies not only in its contributions to Japanese poetry but also in the broader cultural and social impact it had by fostering a new generation of poets whose work was deeply rooted in personal expression and an understanding of the world around them.

Author Contributions

The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results, and manuscript preparation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

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