
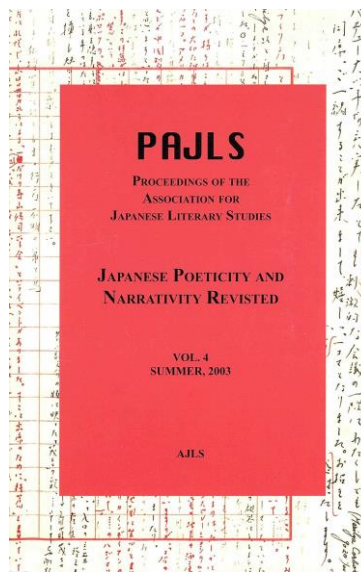


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## OUT OF THE SHADOWS: APPLYING A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK TO TRANSLATION IN MEIJI AND MODERN-DAY JAPAN

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### FEMINIST APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

Feminist theories of translation have recently attracted considerable attention in the West, with the genderising of translation being exposed by feminist theorists (e.g., Godard 1990, Simon 1996, von Flotow 1997) who have highlighted the longstanding analogy in the West between women (regarded as derivative and inferior to men) and translators and translations (regarded as derivative and inferior to authors and original texts respectively). In light of this, it is worth exploring whether the theorising and practice of translation have been framed in similar gendered terms in Japan, where translation has played a particularly vital role and women loom large in the translation profession today, but where their position in society has generally lagged behind that of their Western counterparts.

Translating has often been women's only socially acceptable means of access to authorship, since it puts them at one remove from the site of production and is therefore a less 'immodest' form of speaking out than writing original works. Simon (1996, 39) comments that translation simultaneously *rescued* women from their silence, allowing them to participate in male-controlled literary culture, while also *confining* them to a subordinate role as 'mere' translators. Hence women translators have been doubly marginalised by their position in society and by the typically marginal position of translation itself. To counteract this, feminist translation theorists have attempted to valorise women as translators.

These theorists also argue that our understanding and representation of meaning are profoundly affected by the gender affiliations of the writer, translator and reader. Language is not simply neutral or representational (*mirroring* reality), but also performative in that it *shapes* reality. Hence feminists argue that there is a need for a female language that gives better expression to women's voices and that resists, reshapes and transgresses the current male-dominated reality. Beyond the use of non-sexist language, "Many works of feminist criticism have posited that a female aesthetic exists and may be represented through tools such as a fragmented syntax and a disparate narrative voice." (Henitiuk 1999, 477). If such a female aesthetic does indeed exist, it is quite conceivable that the function and value of a woman writer's words

might be transformed if translated by someone accepting the values of male society and adopting a male aesthetic.

Do male and female translators in fact translate differently? Delisle and Woodsworth (1995, 150) note that in the West “most translations made by women during the Renaissance are more literal [than those by men], not least of all because literalism afforded a certain kind of protection; it allowed the translator to decline all personal responsibility.” In the Japanese context writers such as Makino (1991) have identified gender differences in original writing by men and women, and it can be assumed that these differences apply also to the act of translating. It should be noted, however, that up-and-coming writers are increasingly ignoring these traditional distinctions, and this can be expected to flow through to translations.

When translating dialogue Japanese translators have often had little choice but to mark the language as specifically male or female, thereby feminising or masculinising it beyond the language of the source text. Ota (1990) argues that this gives readers the impression that non-Japanese make similar distinctions, and it deprives readers of the opportunity to consider why the source language does not distinguish in that way. Even interviews with non-Japanese *feminists* sound strange if not translated into women’s language. In other words, the Japanese language does not yet offer viable alternatives to traditional women’s language. Attempts have been made to ‘undo’ traditional patriarchal words such as *shujin* 主人, but the discussion has remained largely at the lexical level.

Feminist theorists are not necessarily arguing that women should translate only women writers or that only women should translate texts by women. They believe that men who identify with the female perspective in a text are also feminist translators, and so the term ‘woman-identified’ is sometimes used to encompass such men as well. Rather than an essentialist focus on the biological sex of author or translator, Chamberlain (1988, 472) argues that “what must be subverted is the process by which translation complies with gender constructs”.

So what then is this feminist praxis of translation?<sup>1</sup> Two key aspects are the focus on the role of the translator as (co-)producer (not simply reproducer) and the focus on *difference* as a positive element, rather than the traditional emphasis on equivalence. The aim is to liberate sub-texts that the translator believes are relevant to women.

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<sup>1</sup> Slavova observes that “most scholars agree that it is not the translation strategies that are feminist, but rather the use to which these strategies are put.”

In terms of practical strategies, since feminists claim that the female canon has been distorted or *man*-handled, one obvious approach entails rehabilitating neglected female writers. For instance, introducing female Asian writers through translations was the rationale for Sakai Masako's establishment in 1982 of a publishing company called Dandansha 段々社. Another strategy involves recovering neglected women translators and translation theorists. A significant move in this direction was the publication in 2000 of volumes about three Meiji women translators.<sup>2</sup> The examination of theories, myths and tropes of translation from a feminist perspective is another possible strategy, as are revisionary rereadings, critiques and comparative analyses of existing translations.

A further strategy is resistancy, "making the labour of translation visible through linguistic means that have a defamiliarizing effect" (Massardier-Kenney 1997, 60)—e.g., italics, quotation marks, wordplay and "grammatical dislocations and syntactic subversion" (von Flotow 1997, 24). Resistancy is often coupled with commentary. *Author*-centred commentaries "highlight the importance of women as producers of texts", while with *translator*-centred commentaries "the feminist translator must describe her motives and the way they affect the translated text" (Massardier-Kenney 1997, 58). A similar strategy is footnotes that draw attention to the translation process itself. Collaboration with the author or another translator is a further strategy, with 'collaboration' between *author* and translator taking either a cooperative or subversive form.

The most controversial strategy is hijacking, which Simon (1996, 15) defines as "the appropriation of a text whose intentions are not necessarily feminist"—e.g., by mitigating offensive misogynist writing, making an implicit feminist message explicit, or even implanting feminist thought not present in the source text. This includes, for example, replacing non-motivated uses of masculine vocabulary by neutral terms, highlighting the male-centredness of certain words, and putting female elements first (e.g., *women and men*). Simon (*ibid.*, 26) argues that "The interventionism of the translator is by no means gratuitous but solicited and oriented by the text itself."

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<sup>2</sup> *Wakamatsu Shizuko-shū* 若松賤子集, *Senuma Kayō-shū* 瀬沼夏葉集 and *Ōtsuka Kusuoko-shū* 大塚楠緒子集 in the *Meiji bungaku fukkoku sōsho* 明治文学復刻叢書 series published by Gogatsu Shobō 五月書房.

It is important to recognise the diversity of views and practices amongst feminist translators. Whereas some argue *for* the creation of a ‘woman-centred language’, others are opposed to replacing sexist language with more inclusive language, on the grounds that this conceals any patriarchal attitudes in the source text and is just as discriminatory as male-centred language. Some refuse to translate works by men because of the pressure to adopt a male voice, while others argue that women translators should “attempt to highlight the writer’s sexism ..., or ... convert it to a more progressive view” (Robinson 1997, 236).

#### CRITICISMS AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Not surprisingly, feminist approaches to translation have been criticised on various grounds, the chief of which are summarised below.

- Feminist work is Eurocentric, being produced mainly by Anglophones or in response to translations into English.
- It is aimed at elite (bilingual) academic audiences.
- It implants feminist thought not present in the source text, resulting in highly libertine over-translations.
- Ideological feminist concerns might sometimes conflict irreconcilably with “the demands of successful transmission” (Simon 1996, 33).
- It emphasises aspects such as sound at the expense of content.
- The rhetoric often outstrips the changes feminist translators actually *make* in the text.
- It risks obscuring the differences amongst women writers and amongst women translators.
- It is just as biased as masculinist approaches.

There is also the question of the validity of ‘recovering’ unknown women translators. It might be argued that if their translations were of genuine merit they would surely have attracted attention regardless of the translator’s gender. Yet even if we suppose that there have actually been few good translations by matter, matters are not that simple, as social circumstances (e.g., education, views on women working) afforded women few opportunities to extend themselves as translators.

In practical terms it has been difficult to find out about women translators in Japan, as there is little secondary literature available to help differentiate amongst those women listed in catalogues and databases of translators. In many cases women translators have left their mark in *his-*story only because they also produced original works—again reinforcing

the perception of writing as superior to translation. The *her*-story of translation in Japan remains to be written.

#### WOMEN TRANSLATORS IN JAPAN

Although women *writers* were important in the Heian period, at least in the private sphere, their voices subsequently went largely unheard until around the end of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> The question then arises of whether translation offered women an alternative creative outlet or career path as it did in the West, particularly in light of “the feminization of the reading public in late nineteenth-century Japan” (Kornicki 1998, 31). In fact, during the Edo period women were totally excluded from the occupation of *tsūji* 通詞 (translator-cum-interpreter), as they were from all such hereditary occupations, but from Meiji times the profession of translator became open to all comers—at least in principle.

One attitudinal obstacle was the fact that translation was by definition associated with the West and, in turn, its modernisation and intellectualism, and the critic Akiyama Shun (cited in Copeland 1997, 399) has suggested that a male elite attempted to monopolise this realm for itself. In practical terms, the fact that many women had not received much of an education was a key factor limiting their potential. For those women who *were* educated, no doubt the prospect of earning some income from translating, however slight, was an incentive for some. Copeland (2000, 5) suggests another motive when she comments that “translation offered a way to circumvent the demands of “feminine” writing. Although women writers were expected to limit their expression to the elegant and the private, female translators were apparently under no such obligation”. Nevertheless, the number of female translators in the early Meiji years remained minute—the index of *Meiji hon'yaku bungaku zenshū* (*zasshi-hen*) 明治翻訳文学全集 (雑誌編) (2001) lists only about 20 women, compared with nearly 400 men.

Space constraints mean that the work of only a few women translators can be mentioned here. The status of what has been regarded by some as the first novel to be translated by a Japanese woman is rather ambiguous in that it was more of an adaptation than a translation.<sup>4</sup> In 1887 Nakajima Shōen 中島湘煙 produced a novel based on Bulwer

<sup>3</sup> Even in the 20th century the lack of a male counterpart to the term *joryū bungaku* 女流文学 (women's literature) points to the fact that the 'malestream' (*danryū* 男流) is the 'mainstream' that is taken for granted.

<sup>4</sup> See Mitsutani (1994) for a fuller discussion.

Lytton's *Eugene Aram*, presenting her *Zen'aku no futamichi* 善悪の岐<sup>5</sup> (The crossroads of good and evil) as an original piece. It is interesting that at a time when women had such a low profile in Japanese society and in the literary world in particular, Nakajima did not choose to use the cloak of translation to hide her authorial presence—perhaps because there was a precedent for women *writers* but not for women *translators*. It is unclear whether the ambiguous status of this work derives from Shōen's inability to separate her voices as translator/adaptor/author or from a deliberate intention to mingle these voices in a hybrid production. Of interest here is the suggestion by Maier and Massardier-Kenney (1996, 237) that women writers are perhaps “predisposed ... to see writing, of whatever kind, as a process of textualization, of endless mediation”, of which one manifestation is the fact that works presented as translations are sometimes actually original works. Perhaps Nakajima's case presents the other extreme of this supposed predisposition. Nevertheless, adaptations and translations with no acknowledgement of the source text were far from uncommon at that time, even among men, so we should not read too much into this instance.

Rebecca Copeland (1998, 2000) has written extensively about Wakamatsu Shizuko 若松賤子, the first Japanese woman to produce what were indisputably translations. The other early woman translator of note was Koganei Kimiko 小金井きみ子, Mori Ōgai's sister. Her translations were inferior to those of her famous brother and lacked influence because they were mostly short stories. This tendency to produce shorter works is often found in women—no doubt largely because of the greater restrictions on the time they can typically devote to creative activities.

If space permitted it would be interesting to explore women translators' relationships with their male mentors or co-translators—such as Senuma Kayō 瀬沼夏葉 and her work with Ozaki Kōyō 尾崎紅葉; the husband-wife translators Nogami Toyichirō 野上豊一郎 and Nogami Yaeko 野上弥生子, and how the anarchist and women's liberation thinker Itō Noe 伊藤野枝 published translations in her own name that had largely been produced by her lover, Tsuji Jun 辻潤 (sometimes acknowledging his role, and sometimes not). Let us move on, however, to the contemporary scene.

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<sup>5</sup> The version that appeared in *Jogaku zasshi* 女学雑誌 was called *Zen'aku no futamichi*, but the later book version was called *Zenko no chimata* (written using the same character).

It is only since World War II that women translators have had any major impact in Japan, and today they represent a strong presence on the translation scene, at least numerically. Translation has shifted from being the province of an elite few men to a profession potentially open to many now that English is compulsory at high school and women are well educated. It is in fact quite an appealing career for Japanese women, many of whom are attracted to the West. Translation is regarded as quite “suitable” for women, partly because it allows them to work from home while continuing to manage the household and family. It is also more mentally stimulating than working in menial office jobs. The lack of a stable income for translators means that men tend to avoid translation as a career, but married women often have less need to rely on their income as translators. In fact, some do not *want* to make “too much” money because they would lose the insurance benefits and tax-free income threshold that accompany their status as dependents.

The strong numerical presence of women translators in Japan is in fact rather misleading, as often they are cast in an inferior role, churning out translations of second-class works such as Harlequin romances, which constitute about 40 percent of all English works published in Japanese translation. So the apparent ‘feminisation’ of translation in Japan is in fact a further entrenchment of women’s inferior position, relegating many of them to relying on translation as a ‘side job’ (often of ‘entertainment’-type works). By association, it also reinforces the inferiorisation of translation itself.

Women are, however, becoming increasingly important as *consumers* of translations. As more women became literate in the Meiji period, these new consumers began to have an impact on text selection, with more translations catering to ‘women’s interests’ beginning to appear. In more recent times, readers of translated mysteries, for example, had been predominantly male up until the 1970s, but from about the time several works such as Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express* were turned into movies the number of female readers began to increase rapidly. For instance, today women account for 70% of the readers of the mysteries published by one small niche-market publishing company (Matsui 1993, 76). A recent trend in mystery novels is the 4F phenomenon—i.e., mysteries by female *writers*, with female *protagonists*, *translated* by females and *read* by females. Although the core readership of translations in general still consists of young male company employees, the *rise* in sales can be attributed to the increased number of women readers. Capturing the female market is today indispensable to sales of translations.



The *authorities* on translation—those who write about it—continue to be predominantly male. One interesting exception is a 1991 article by Mizuta Noriko 水田宗子 that contrasts the traditional schemata of “man=writer=God the creator” with that of “woman=translator=midwife”. She cites the views of French feminists who regard creation as a feminine act and the writer as a mother giving birth. Using the analogy of the bisexual, Mizuta argues that if the writer is dethroned from the position of a god creating an untranslatable original and the work is instead regarded as an infinitely translatable copy of a copy, then the writer takes on a new garb as translator, surviving as a transmitter, transvestite, trans/gender/lator who blurs the boundaries between the writer’s self and the Other and transcends cultural and gender differences. Mizuta (1991, 218) also raises the questions of whether the gender of the author and the gender of a text actually match, and just how a text’s gender is formed. A 1998 article by Yamaguchi Michiyo 山口美知代 is also of interest, not only because it is a rare mention in Japanese of Western works on the connection between gender and translation but also because it raises the question of the applicability of this Western theoretical construct to translation in Japan—although Yamaguchi is generally supportive of feminist approaches.

Despite the fact that feminist views had a particular impact in Japan in the 1920s and again in the 1970s, it seems that the ideological views of activist feminist *translators* in the West today have had little influence. There have been few attempts to adopt a specifically female or feminist perspective when translating texts written by women, much less to appropriate, distort or expand on male-authored texts. There does not seem to have been any coherent strategy on the part of ‘women-identified’ translators in Japan to use their translations as a means of challenging hegemonic gender conceptions. Further textual analysis would be necessary to determine whether the female voice has nevertheless made its way, perhaps unconsciously, into translations by Japanese women.

Women themselves have in fact sometimes been complicit in censoring works that present an ‘unacceptable’ view of women and their sexuality. For instance, led by a woman, the translators of the American classic *Our Bodies, Ourselves* omitted a great deal from their 1974 translation, including ‘unnecessary’ information about the Pill and lesbianism. This voluntary censorship was later reversed when in 1988 the book was retranslated by a group of women who not only restored previously omitted information but also coined new terms for female body parts so as to avoid the denigrating associations of the traditional

vocabulary (Buckley, 1997). These coinages had the effect of foregrounding these terms and drawing attention to the translation process, although the neologisms do not seem to have gained a permanent foothold. Another case of self-censorship that eliminated references promoting an active sexual role for women involved the 1982 translation by Kimura Harumi 木村治美 of *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence*. A complete, more faithful version of this work was produced in 1985 by the renowned male translator, Yanase Naoki 柳瀬尚紀. This is an instance in which the gender of the translator is less important than the translator's attention to fidelity to the source text—even if not to a feminist 'writing project'.

Not surprisingly, examples of 'women-identified' male translators are scarce in Japan. One attempt something along those lines occurred in 1987 when the male writer Hashimoto Osamu 橋本治 published a complete modern Japanese 'translation' of Sei Shōnagon's 10th century *Makura no sōshi* (The Pillow Book), called *Momojiri-go-yaku "Makura no sōshi"* 桃尻語訳 枕草子 (The Pillow Book in momojiri translation). The language used in this diachronic translation is the contemporary vernacular of young Japanese women today, and the book carries two prefaces—a 'male version' and a 'female version', with the latter written in what purports to be Sei Shōnagon's voice. It is debatable, however, whether these superficial changes are sufficient to qualify Hashimoto as a woman-identified translator.

Nor have Japanese female translators made many attempts to retranslate existing translations by men, highlighting or rewriting their sexism. The area where their 'femaleness' has been most apparent is in *what* Japanese women choose to translate, rather than in the more ideological aspects of *how* they translate. Women translators in Meiji Japan manifested their femaleness by choosing works aimed at the hitherto-neglected audiences of women and children. Although this constituted 'resistance' to the existing patriarchal canon, it simultaneously reinforced women's inferior position, in that they were less likely to translate canonical works. Women were often praised precisely because their translations fitted the image of what was deemed 'seemly' for the 'fair sex', and at least in part it is because of this stamp of approval from male critics that the work of these women translators has gone down in history. When translating male authors, these women seem to have had little hesitation in adopting a male voice—in fact, translation sometimes allowed them to take on the male voice they 'lacked'.

The afterwords of a random sample of recent translations of Western feminist works give no indication that any of the translators (all women) were aware of the activist attitudes espoused by feminist translation theorists or practitioners in the West, even though all seemed in sympathy with the feminist content of the books. Commentary by Japanese translators has tended to be *author*-centred, with little attempt so far to foreground a female perspective on life or translation or to draw attention to their identity as women translators.

Given the use of Chinese characters in writing Japanese, it would be an easy matter to ‘play’ with or disrupt the language by inventing neologisms or ‘mutant’ characters, or to use *rubi* to add subversive meanings. The Japanese language has great experimental scope in this respect, but it seems that translators are yet to exploit this flexibility.

Feminist translators might see the picture painted here as not very rosy, with the only cited example of ‘activist’ translation by Japanese women seeming to have had no lasting effect, and even that resistance being limited to the lexical level. Nevertheless, since meanings are *constructed* by the users of a language and hence open to change, it is possible that such incipient moves might in time spread to other texts and beyond the lexical level.

Finally, I would like to revisit the question of the validity of applying Anglo-American feminist constructs to the Japanese cultural context—i.e., the very ‘translatability’ of feminist translational practices. There are no linguistic reasons why feminist techniques of translation could not be adopted in Japan, which suggests that the scarcity of feminist translations is due to sociocultural reasons. It would be anachronistic and inappropriate to project the views of contemporary feminist translators in the West (where these views are by no means widely accepted) onto the handful of women translators who began to emerge in the Meiji era, a time when vastly different gender and translational conditions obtained. Yet a gender-conscious analysis can open up additional insights into the work of these pioneers and their successors. Conversely, the situation in Japan might act as a counterpoint to the views propounded by Anglophone feminist translators. If feminist theorists do indeed value women’s plurality, they must accept that Japanese translators might not be interested in aggressively feminist strategies of translation, at least at this point in time. It seems, however, that Japanese women translators have not so much rejected feminist strategies as that they are on the whole simply unaware of such approaches that might potentially enrich and inform their work. If at least acquainted with these more politically engaged strategies, Japanese

translators would then have the choice of adopting, refining or rejecting them.

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