“The Art of Crafting an Image of Modern Japanese Literature: The Use of Visual Images to Promote Knopf’s Translation Program”

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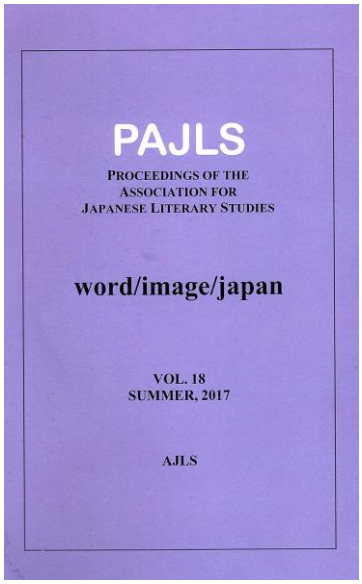

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THE ART OF CRAFTING AN IMAGE OF MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE: THE USE OF VISUAL IMAGES TO PROMOTE KNOPF'S TRANSLATION PROGRAM

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In this paper, I will explore how the publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., crafted an image of Modern Japanese Literature using visual elements in their translation program. Between the 1950s and 1970s, a number of Modern Japanese literary works were translated into English by publishers such as New Directions and Grove Press; one of the biggest driving forces in this movement was the Translation Program of Japanese Literature taking place at Knopf. The program was set up by an Editor in Chief at Knopf, Harold Strauss in 1954. During the Occupation period after World War II, Strauss worked for the CIE (Civil Information and Education Service) at SCAP in Japan, where he was in charge of scanning books and magazines as a part of censorship. He came to know contemporary Japanese novels and publishers, and also some writers such as Osaragi Jirō and Kawabata Yasunari. When he returned to the U.S., he started to work as the chief editor at Knopf again, and based on what he discovered in Japan, he initiated this translation program.

At the time when the translation program was established, Japanese literary works translated into English had a limited audience and published titles were scarce. Among the most renowned works were Japanese classics such as *The Tale of Genji* translated by Arthur Waley. There were some novels translated into English before World War II such as *The Cannery Boat* by Kobayashi Takiji (English edition published in 1933), but the Knopf translation project was the very first attempt for a publisher to translate selected contemporary Japanese literary works into English on a purely commercial basis, with editors also aiming to attract "general readers".

At Knopf, Strauss tried to create a list of novels for each author rather than introducing individual novels. Authors included,

Tanizaki Junichirō, Kawabata Yasunari, and Mishima Yukio, and from the mid stage of the program, Abe Kobō and several other Japanese writers such as Kaikō Takeshi were also added to the list. Its particular focus on living writers was one of the characteristics of the program, apparently with the Nobel Prize of Literature in mind, and it eventually resulted in Kawabata's receiving the award in 1968. This program also served as a platform for academics and translators to build their translation careers. Among those who worked for this program were Ivan Morris, who translated Osaragi's *The Journey* (1960), Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1959), and Edward G. Seidensticker, who translated *Snow Country* (1956) and *The Makioka Sisters* (1957). Donald Keene and Howard Hibbett also contributed to this program both as translators and advisers. Publishers in other languages built their lists following what Knopf published - the translation program played a leading role in the post WWII era in introducing Modern Japanese Literature outside of Japan. In Knopf's attempt to promote this program, visual elements such as book jackets, illustrations and photographs were used effectively. In order to understand the role of these visual elements, I will discuss the use of visual elements mentioned above, with particular reference to Kawabata's literary works.

Let us start with the case of *Thousand Cranes* (1958) published in the early stage of the translation program. In the collection of excerpts from his old diaries ("Furui Nikki"), Kawabata records how Knopf chose the cover design for the U.S. edition without informing him of their selection before it was printed:

> This painting, "Ama no Hashidate" was used for the cover illustration of *Thousand Cranes* in the U.S. edition, without notifying me in advance. The same thing occurred in the case of the Italian edition of *Snow Country*. They used the painting "Kami" by Kobayashi Kokei for its cover. In both cases, it was due to the publishers' judgment, and I found that out when I saw the books for the first time—it surprised me.
>
> (「千羽鶴」のアメリカ版の表紙繪に雪舟のこの「天の橋立」が使はれたことは、私になんの前ぶれ

> もなかつた。イタリイ譯の「雪國」の表紙繪に小林古徑先生の「髪」が使はれたのも同じである。いづれも外國出版社の考へによるものらしく、私は本を見てはじめて知つてびつくりしたものである。).[1]

This episode shows us how the author was not involved in the selection process for the English edition. In addition to this example, Kawabata speaks of the image of geisha on the cover of *Snow Country* in his letter addressed to Mishima sent on October 23, 1956, as quoted below:

> I've received a copy of *Snow Country* sent via airmail by Mr. Strauss of Knopf today. It's $1.25, surprisingly expensive for a paperback edition. I was surprised with the geisha illustration on its cover.
>
> (今日 Knopf 社の Strauss 氏から航空便で Snow Country が一部とどきました。＄1.25 という廉価本（高いのに驚きますが）で、表紙の芸者の絵にはおどろきました。)[2]

As we can see from these two examples, the choice of illustrations on the jacket or cover design was made by the publishers in the case of the U.S. editions. Why did they choose such a design that surprised Kawabata, and why did they not take the author's taste into account?

On analysing the nature of book jackets/ cover designs in the U.S. and in Japan, the reason behind such a choice becomes clear. In the case of the first Japanese edition of *Snow Country* in a book form published by Sōgensha in 1941, Serizawa Keisuke, who also designed bookcovers for other Kawabata's literary works, such as *Aisuru Hito Tachi* and *Onsenyado*, was in charge of designing the cover. According to his description, he used dark gray *kyōseishi* (a

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[1] Yasunari Kawabata, "Furui Nikki." *Kawabata Zenshū* 28 (Tokyo: Shinchō, 1982) 59.

[2] Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima, *Kawabata Yasunari, Mishima Yukio, Oufuku Shokan* (Tokyo: Shinchō, 2000) 98.

type of *washi*, starched with *konnyaku* to strengthen the paper) for the cover, drew lines horizontally with white *gofun* and yellow ocher, and gilded the title with black. [3] From this discreet representation of the mood of the work, it is difficult to imagine the plot of the story.

In contrast, the cover of the first U.S. edition of *Snow Country* was distinctively different from the Japanese version. In the cover designed by Komatsu Fumi (a Japanese artist, who was based in the U.S.), Japanese specific settings, such as the geisha image, the country landscape with Japanese houses, and the paper sliding door, are the main features. Thus you can immediately tell that it is a Japanese literary work that involves a geisha in an exotic, uniquely Japanese setting. But why was the appearance of the book appropriated into such a different form?

One of the reasons behind choosing such imagery can be found in the reading habits and publishing tradition in the U.S., and the role that the bookcovers and jackets play in relation to them. George Salter, a renowned artist, who designed book jackets for Knopf, once summarized the nature of publishing business in the U.S. as follow:

> Some countries with a long history in publishing can rely on well established reading habits and can expect their public to visit book stores as a matter of course. There, the window display can afford to show but a few recent arrivals, and emphasis in selling is placed on personal contact. […] The book reading public is growing but it has yet to reach capacity. Advertising, therefore, is essential in the United States to attract and stabilize a representative reading public.[4]

This statement suggests one possible reason why Knopf produced the cover design with a vivid and exotic portrayal of

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[3] Keisuke Serizawa, *Serizawa Keisuke Zenshū* 27 (Tokyo: Chuōkōron, 1982) 17.

[4] George Salter, "The Book Jacket," *Third Annual Exhibition Book Jacket Designers Guild Catalogue* (New York: A-D Gallery, 1950) [unpaginated].

geisha. Salter further emphasized the commercial merits of the jacket design, noting that the jacket was "the most potent selling factor of the book".[5] Similarly, Alfred A. Knopf, the founder of the publishing house, also described the jacket as "a label, a silent salesman", and he even stated that it was "a protection for the too often unlovely object around which it is wrapped".[6] Such commercial advantages were also repeatedly mentioned in the trade magazine, *Publishers Weekly*. Rather than just being elegant clothes that would not interrupt the interpretation of the content, jackets functioned as advertisements in order to obtain wider readership.

Some people might say that book jackets easily get thrown away. However, the cover and jacket illustrations have another role other than attracting consumers in the bookstores; these images were also used in the book reviews published in newspapers, magazines and journals. An examination of some of these book reviews reveals that often there is no title nor author's name printed on the illustrations, unlike the actual book jacket, so you can tell that it was the publisher that provided this illustration/image for the articles. In the case of book reviews for *Snow* Country, the visual impact and exotic imagery of this illustration were further enhanced with headline phrases such as "For Love of a Geisha".[7] In addition to being a wrapper to protect the book and an advertisement to trigger the interests of consumers, book cover images were also used for publicity purposes.

Another visual element worth exploring is the function of illustrations used in these translated literary works. In the U. S. edition of *Thousand Cranes*, some line drawings that were not present in the Japanese original were inserted at the beginning page of each chapter. These illustrations not only raise the expectations of potential readers, but also help to visually convey cultural specific items and settings, especially for those who are

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Alfred A. Knopf, "A Publisher Looks at Book Design," *Portrait of a Publisher I: Reminiscences and Reflections* (New York: Typophiles, 1965) 87-88.

[7] Donald Barr, rev. of *Snow Country*, by Yasunari Kawabata, *The New York Times Book Review* January 6, 1957: 2.

not familiar with Japanese culture. For example, the first chapter opens with the sentence, "Even when he reached Kamakura and the Engakuji Temple, Kikuji did not know whether or not he would go to the tea ceremony".[8] The illustration placed at the chapter head helps readers to visualize the stage properties or settings used in this novel. Similar examples can be seen in the case of the English edition of *Some Prefer Nettles* (*Tadekuu Mushi*) published in 1955. In this novel, small illustrations of *bunraku* were inserted at each chapter head.

However, a more significant difference in terms of the use of visual imagery in *Thousand Cranes* was the use of a portrait of the author on its jacket. The photograph of Kawabata used for the back of the book jacket was taken by Cecil Beaton, known as a photographer for *VOGUE* and also for his iconic portraits of Audrey Hepburn and Twiggy. This photograph of Kawabata taken by Beaton first appeared in *Harper's BAZAAR* in 1957, and later it was used in the jacket for *Thousand Cranes*. Utilizing this photo as a part of the jacket design was a sign that the publisher was starting to incorporate typical features of Knopf's graphic style, that is, using photos of authors taken by popular photographers. In most cases, a photo fully occupied the back cover as in the case of *Thousand Cranes*, or half of the back cover, and these photos were also used in the book reviews published in journals and newspapers for publicity purposes, just like the bookcover images of *Snow Country*. At this second stage of publishing Kawabata's literary works, Knopf seems to have been trying to establish an image of the author by using the author's portrait.

The presence of such author images is more visible in the works published in the later stage of the program. For example, in *The Master of Go* (1972), another portrait of Kawabata taken by Harold Strauss, is further highlighted by the addition of the author's autograph, and it fully occupies the back of the jacket. The autograph was copied from the June 1972 issue of *Bungei Shunjū*,[9] which also had featured articles on Kawabata's death on

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[8] Yasunari Kawabata, *Thousand Cranes* (New York: Knopf, 1958) 1.

[9] Kawabata Yasunari by Bungei Shunjū, photogravure, *Bungei Shunjū*, June. 1972: [unpaginated].

April 16, 1972; this English translation of *The Master of Go* was published within a few months of his death. For the frontcover design, black and white Go stones are arranged to form a profile, and a Go board is used as background. From this design, you can tell that more than being just a story of a mysterious board game in Asia, it is a story of a human drama set in the game of Go. Such a symbolic portrayal of the content is distinctively different from the exotic representations of Japan utilized in the earlier stage of the translation program.

Another interesting aspect of visual elements in this English edition was the use of diagrams to visually illustrate the progress of the game of Go as narrated in the novel. In Knopf's edition of *The Mater of Go* there are twelve diagrams, which are not present in the Japanese version. In the example of *Thousand Cranes*, we have seen how the illustration served to visually convey cultural specific settings unique to Japan described in the novel that might not be familiar to general readers. However, in the case of *The Master of Go*, diagrams seem to play another role beyond just showing stage properties of the novel, for they do not provide much information for those who are unfamiliar with the game of Go. Then why were these diagrams deemed necessary in the U.S. edition?

By the 1960s, there were a growing number of amateur Go players in the U.S. and this trend seems to have influenced Knopf's decision to incorporate the diagrams in their edition. According to the list of publications by Tuttle, another publisher that has produced a number of English publications about Japanese culture and also has reprinted English translations of Japanese novels, Tuttle published three books on Go in the late 50s and 60s. At this time there were also some magazines targeting amateur Go players; one of them was *Go Review*, published by the Japanese Go Association. Considering the fact that Go was in vogue around the time when *The Master of Go* was published, the publisher may have been attempted to increase the pleasure for amateur Go players in the U.S when they read this novel. Although these diagrams were severely criticized for being "very poor quality" in a book review published in the *Go*

Review,[10] it demonstrates how such illustrations helped to attract the attention of amateur Go players.

The last Kawabata novel that Knopf published in this translation project was *Beauty and Sadness* (1975) translated by Howard Hibbett. For this novel, a painting by Kobayashi Kokei, "Ideyu" (1918) was selected for the jacket. If we compare this cover design to the examples discussed above, the difference from the jacket illustration for *Snow Country* published in the early stage of program is striking. The strong presence of the geisha girl that immediately catches one's eyes and which encouraged readers associate the book with Japan is no longer present. Instead, here one finds a gentle color scheme, with light salmon pink and silvery green used to portray the misty bathing scene, combined with the round lettering used for the title and name of the author. All of these images echo the female sensuality that runs through the novel. Kobayashi was also the artist, who illustrated the jacket for the first edition of *Thousand Cranes* published by Chikuma Shobō.

Editors involved in the Knopf translation program, sometimes borrowed images from paintings for their jackets and bookcovers. For example, for *Some Prefer Nettles* by Tanizaki, a detail from an ink painting by Kei Shoki was used on the jacket, but there is no clear association between this painting and content of the novel. However, you can tell that it is a Japanese novel at a glance, as we have seen in the case of the cover design for *Snow Country*. On the contrary, the jacket for *Beauty and Sadness* is strongly tied to the content of the book, and it even incorporates the work of the painter mentioned in the novel, Kobayashi Kokei.[11] In this Knopf edition, the illustration on the jacket reflects not only the overall mood of the novel, but it also can be assumed that this painting was chosen because of the specific reference to the artist in the text.

In this paper, I have mostly focused on the evolvement of jacket designs and illustrations, and how these images were also used for magazines and newspaper articles to promote the

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[10] Peter Gilder, rev. of *The Master of Go*, by Yasunari Kawabata, *Go Review* 13.2 (1973): 73.

[11] Yasunari Kawabata, *Beauty and Sadness* (New York: Knopf, 1975) 66.

translation program. In the early stage of the program, the central components of the design and illustrations were things immediately recognizable as related to Japan. During the next stage of the translation program, Knopf attempted to bring these literary works out of the realm of exotic curiosities by trying to establish the author image by incorporating portraits of authors, and ultimately created jackets that evoke the overall mood or content of the novels. Of course the evolvement in Knopf's use of visual images varied according to the authors, and the nature of each literary work, and was also influenced by the socio-historical and economical situation surrounding the publisher and the texts. It is my hope that an examination of the experimental process in translating Japanese literature at the visual level, might provide insight into how publishers considered what might pique the interest of their target audience and encourage them to read literature originally written in a remote language, and how accumulations of these images eventually helped to form the image of Modern Japanese Literature in the West.

*Note: All translations of passages from Japanese materials are my own.