“Translation in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Writing In(to) Japanese”

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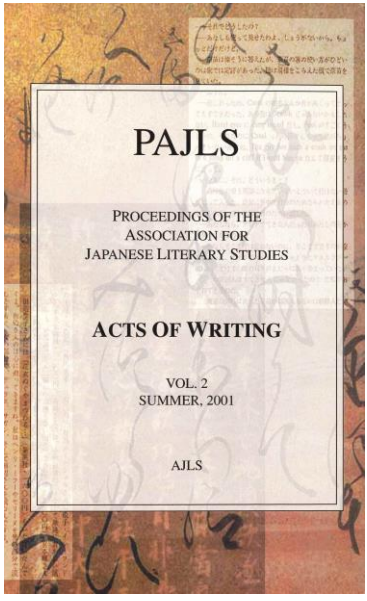

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TRANSLATION IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION: WRITING IN(TO) JAPANESE

SARAH COX

"Acts of Writing," the theme for this year's AJLS conference, has far less felicitous linguistic counterparts in the perhaps too often-heard phrases "acts of war" and "acts of violence." These unintended associations inform my reading of articles on translation published in the journal *Bunshô sekai* (文章世界). Walter Benjamin's 1935 article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," an article that at least in part serves as a protest against the aestheticization of war and against Fascism in Germany on the eve of the second world war, informs my reading of Meiji translation. The acts of violence this paper refers to, however, have primarily aesthetic rather than moral consequences. We see that translation caused violent upheavals in Japanese language and literature during the Meiji and early Taishô periods.

The discourse on the theory and practice of translation carried out in the journal *Bunshô sekai* illustrates Benjamin's assertions about originality and authenticity: that is, reproduction, in this case reproduction through translation, challenges the monolithic authority of the original work of art and declares itself a legitimate work of art in its own right. Moreover, reproduction detaches the work of art from time and place, from the realm of tradition, requiring the development of not only a new art but also new modes of perception. Benjamin writes primarily about revolution in art through photography and film, but his article rests on general notions of reproduction and representation, and of the process of revolution and innovation in artistic production.

Literary translation is one form of reproduction and representation. Like photography, it purports to represent what is already actual and present, the original work of literature, in a different medium—in this case a different language—and to fix a certain performance or reading in time for mass consumption by others. Translation mediates between the original work of art and a new readership just as a photograph or film mediates reality through a

photographer's eye and a camera lens and an editor's careful (re)construction. Benjamin claims that photography and film transformed art and literature, bringing mechanical reproductions to the people, democratizing art, and thus transforming both art and its audience. He writes,

> the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.... Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so *vis-à-vis* technical reproduction.... First, process reproduction is more independent of the original than manual reproduction.... Secondly, technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.... The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room.[1]

Translation is a mechanical, technical reproduction in that it does not aim to *be* the original. There is no question of forgery; it is merely a "copy" in another language of an original work of art to which is owed some degree of fidelity. This reproduction is taken up to allow the work of art to meet the reader half way, to become available outside of its original time and place to a wide, usually unilingual audience. Through Japanese translation, Victor Hugo's characters leave their haunts in French cathedrals to play out their tragedies among *Tôdai* students, while the exotic strains of Russian peasants' chatter resound in Japanese boarding houses.

Reproduction through translation allowed Japan to take possession of the foreign, to appropriate it into their own language and make it a part of their own literary tradition. The original began to lose its authority since Japanese readers could emphasize what interested them in their translations and could make multiple copies (multiple translations) of a single work, each different, and each suited to Japanese rather than foreign audiences.

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[1] Benjamin, 299.

Benjamin speaks of new forms of reproduction in terms of revolution. He asserts that

> the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition.[2]

In the case of translation, a translation meets its audience in the audience's own particular country, its own culture, and its own language. The original work is removed from time and place and is made to speak in a new language, closing the distance—or at least the perceived distance—between the foreign and the native by bringing the foreign into the native realm. Translations gave large numbers of literate readers the illusion that they were somehow experiencing the foreign, thus satisfying the urge Benjamin describes, "to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."[3] The original words, forced from their native clime, gained a new readership, one entirely unimagined by the authors, one that challenges the work's uniqueness in time, place, and language. Thus translation shatters the tradition of the original by making it do its work in a new time and place, against a new background of literary associations and expectations; it shatters the tradition of the culture it enters by augmenting and forcing change on the native canon.

BUNSHÔ SEKAI

It is difficult to talk about translation without talking about translations. But by Meiji 40 (1907) translation was a topic of discourse.

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[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*, 300.

A significant portion of that discourse is played out in about thirteen articles in *Bunshô sekai* that chronicle literary change through translation.

The journal, a project of influential publishing house *Hakubunkan* (博文官)'s Ôhashi Shintarô (大橋新太郎), published 204 issues from Meiji 39 (1906) to Taishô 9 (1920). Tayama Katai (田山花袋) served as editor for most of the journal's long history, and with Katai at the helm it soon became an organ for the *bundan* (文壇) and particularly for the naturalism (*shizen-shugi* [自然主義]) movement. With a circulation ranging from 10,000 to 18,000 issues per month, it served to bring literature to large numbers of readers, to give general readers a chance to participate in literature,[4] and to give general readers a chance to tune in to what was *au courant* in the literary world. By Meiji 39, literary translation had become an accepted fact, and many *hon'an* (翻案) and *hon'yaku* (翻訳) had become part of the contemporary canon. *Bunshô sekai* did not publish many translations, but it allowed its readers a glimpse of the dialogue on translation by providing a forum for translators and theorists to discuss their own work and that of other author-translators.

The greatest challenge *Bunshô sekai* critics posed to the authority of the *genbun* (原文) was their acceptance of the insertion of the translator's personality and the translator's notions of language usage into the translation. In the earlier days of translation the identity of the original work and its author was often almost completely effaced.[5] This kind of literary appropriation was not so common by the Meiji 40s, but innovation in translation—that is, not adhering strictly to ideas of fidelity

[4] Many notable writers of the Meiji and Taishô eras (including Kubota Mantarô, Katô Takeo, Ema Nakashi, Kojima Seijirô, Uchida Hyakken, and Mizuno Nobuko, among others) had submissions selected for publication in the journal by powerful figures such as Kitahara Hakushû, Iwano Hômei, Shimazaki Tôson, and Tokuta Shûsei. Their publication in the journal helped propel them on to literary careers.

[5] For example, Mori Ôgai's translation of Heinrich von Kleist's short story *Das Erdbeben in Chili* omitted Kleist's name when it was first published, listing only Ôgai as translator. In addition, the early years of translation and adaptation saw a proliferation of *hon'an*, adaptations that often failed to recognize their source materials.

to the original—though criticized by some, was lauded by many influential voices.

Perhaps the loudest voice was that of Mori Ôgai (森鴎外). In the Meiji 39 series *Yo ga hon'yaku no taido* (予が翻訳の態度), Ôgai complained that his contemporaries had studied foreign languages and felt qualified to point out all of a translator's—and, more to the point, all of *his*—mistranslations. Ôgai claims that while faithfulness to the original text is important, flexibility is more important, declaring that there is no need to adhere to the mode of expression in the original, especially if the original is a poor piece of work.[6] This is typical Ôgai. He had full faith that his reproduction could be better than any original and felt little constrained by notions of linguistic fidelity to an authoritative original.

Ôgai's was by no means the only voice privileging the Japanese translation over the native original. In the same series, Uchida Roan (内田魯庵) berates readers for quibbling over words. "Those who point out errors," he says, "misunderstand literary translation."[7] It is more important, he claims, to write skillful, elegant Japanese than to be faithful to every word in the original. Chiba Kikukô (千葉菊香) likewise compares translation to taking a flower from a garden and making it bloom elsewhere. One needs to intimately understand not simply the color and variety of the flower itself, but also the characteristics of the garden into which it is being transplanted.[8]

All of these translator-theorists valorize the native over the foreign: while some degree of fidelity is called for (otherwise a *hon'yaku* would be a *hon'an*), they feel no slavish sense of obligation to the original. They confront the original with their translations, sometimes claiming the translation has outstripped its source, and show the original what it could never do, that is, speak to the Japanese audience in its own voice. Even the voice of the translator is valorized, as it is when an anonymous writer in Meiji 40 praises the cold, lustrous beauty of Ôgai's writing, rhapsodizing about his free translation of form and his

[6] Ôgai, 15.

[7] Roan 1909, 17.

[8] Chiba, 35.

overlaying his *nioi* (匂ひ) and *chôshi* (調子) on the work so that his own personality shines through.[9] Nakamura Harusame (中村春雨) goes so far as to claim that he was first induced to read *junbungaku* (純文学) through translations; but not just any translation. He was drawn to the work of Futabatei because Futabatei had gotten rid of what he termed "the reek of the foreign" in his translations, and he was drawn to the work of Ôgai because it sounded so very Ôgai.[10]

Clearly, these critics consider translators artists of the Japanese language. The power of their writing comes from their own skill, not from the merits of the *genbun*. The same anonymous author who praised Ôgai for making his presence abundantly felt in his translations criticizes Senuma Kayô (瀬沼夏葉)'s[11] work by saying that what power and interest her writing has derives entirely from the original.[12] Good translations are not seen as derivative. Osanai Kaoru (小山内薫) complains that Japanese readers tend to pigeonhole translations according to their sources. He writes,

> Here in Japan, if a work contains a skillful description of the natural world, we say "ah, Turgenev!" If it contains a little irony we detect the influence of Chekhov. If a play contains skillful dialogue we say it is derived from Ibsen. These are superficial observations.[13]

He continues to explain that the structure, writing style, and form may all be completely different from the original, transformed in the hands of a

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[9] "Gendai no omonaru hon'yakka," 37.

[10] Nakamura, 34.

[11] It is interesting to note, however, that Kayô is not only the sole translator in this article accused of being derivative but is also the only female translator mentioned in the article. The criticism of her writing as derivative may have more to do with her gender than with her skill—or lack thereof—as a translator.

[12] "Gendai," 40.

[13] Osanai, 28.

skillful translator who understands his or her audience, while still replicating the essence and spirit of the original work.[14] Over and over again, he and other theorists in *Bunshô sekai* speak of savoring the original in order to translate it. They claim that one needs superior linguistic skill to savor a foreign work; but more importantly, one needs superior skills of composition and literary sensitivity in order to bring what he or she has savored to a readership.

Osanai goes so far as to claim that when he translates he avoids looking to the *genbun* as a model as one would for replicating calligraphic strokes. Rather, he tries to savor the work and translate the impressions left in his mind. Instead of merely copying the outer form, he attempts to push his way into the inner reaches of the mind of the *genbun* author and translate as if he were the author.[15] Osanai, and other translators, saw the translators' task as *becoming* the author, displacing him or her in creating a new, Japanese version of the work.

The literary work of art was seen as not only infinitely changeable in the hands of a skillful artist of Japanese, but also as infinitely reproducible through translation. Neither the original nor any of its copies could be considered the definitive work of art. The Japanese literary climate of the time was particularly forgiving of *jûyaku* (重訳) or translations of translations. Ôgai's famous *Sokkyô shijin* (即興詩人) is a notable example, but there were many others, such as translations of Turgenev by Sôma Norikaze (相馬御風). Chiba Kikukô claimed that a bad translation from an original work was far worse than a good translation from a translation.[16] Such attitudes point to a greater concern with the Japanese product than with the foreign-language original. Rather than being seen as illegitimate children, *jûyaku* and multiple translations were adopted into the Japanese literary landscape as examples of the translators' skills with the native language.

Translators' linguistic skills are often spoken of in very sensual terms: critics write that a translator has captured the *shumi* (趣味) or the

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[14] *Ibid.*

[15] "'*Gen' sakusha jishin no atama no naibu ni wakeitte*" ([原]作者自身の頭の内部に分け入って). *Ibid.*, 27.

[16] Chiba, 37.

chôshi (調子) of the original; they speak of taste, smell, color, and sound being somehow taken from the original and transferred into Japanese. Some theorists lamented the too-thorough *digestion* of a work into Japanese, and translators were said to *savor* the rich layers of signification in an original. Translation could appropriate the foreign not just through intellectual activity but through the senses.

These kinds of phrases recognize the possibility that the foreign original *could be* captured and digested and made thoroughly Japanese. And indeed, translations were digested into the literary landscape. The Meiji 40 review, "Meiji meisaku kaidai" (明治名作解題), lists influential literary works of the past thirty years: of the eighty or so works given prominent mention, translations make up almost one-fourth.[17] Western literature had made its presence felt in the Japanese literary landscape, but not through the *genbun:* in his Meiji 43 article, Osanai Kaoru claims that "in terms of influence, it's not so much the Western literature that has influenced my work as the skillful translations of Western literature into Japanese."[18]

Translation replaced original works with thoroughly Japanese works that could hold their place alongside creative literature. By doing so, it also challenged traditional literature and language. A eulogy to the legendary translator Morita Shiken (森田思軒) reminisced about his translation *modus operandi*: he would wander about his room flailing his arms and legs searching for the proper word or phrase, and would shout out when he finally found it. Such behavior was apparently necessary since it produced his refined composition style.[19] The nature of language, and in particular the nature of the Japanese language, required violent, painful effort to effectively and appropriately transfer words and content and the ineffable essence of a work of art from one language to another.

These birth pangs were felt in both literature and language. Shuntei Sanshi (春汀散史) wrote in a Meiji 40 article "Nihon no hon'yakka" (日本の翻訳家) that Japanese writing was immeasurably

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[17] This article is not ascribed to an author in the journal but is presumably the work of the editor, Tayama Katai.

[18] Osanai, 25.

[19] Chizuka, 113.

changed through the importation of Western works, quickly adding that it need hardly be said that this change was due to Meiji-era translations. He names notable translators Tsubouchi, Ôgai, Shiken, and Roan as the literary movers and shakers who directed the tone and style of writing—all writing, not just translation—of the time.[20]

Translators introduced numerous changes to modern literature, including revolutions in subject matter and plot. Translation contributed to rise of the *shôsetsu* (小説) and the development of new forms in verse and drama. *Bunshô sekai* critics emphasize a growing recognition through translation and through moving Japanese literature into a global context that literature could and should be a serious endeavor. Roan holds literature up to a new standard in Meiji 43 when he writes of Furukawa Tsuneichirô's (古川常一郎) experience at a Russian university. Upon reading *Crime and Punishment*, Furukawa told his Russian professor that the work was entirely uninteresting. The professor informed Furukawa that his reading was all wrong. He must consider it an important philosophical work, sit up straight, and study it. When Furukawa did, so Roan reports, he finally understood and came to love the novel. Roan explains, "the representative classics of modern literature are all serious studies of 'truth.' Their *raison d'être* differs from the popular, superficial novels produced by Japan's dilettante sons."[21] Katai, in writing of Ôgai's short work *Maihime* (舞姫), expresses similar sentiment: he explains that early translations and early attempts to mimic them were superficial, but that by Meiji mid-20s works such as *Maihime* were possible thanks to deep understanding and importation of Western works. He writes that

> readers discovered upon reading just this one work that their expectations must be greatly expanded beyond Kôyô and Rohan, and that they must write things much deeper, not just interesting, or beautiful, or amusing. . . . Ôgai claims this [work] is just the insignificant life of an insignificant man. Perhaps, but

[20] Shuntei, 121.

[21] Roan 1910, 18-19.

> within this short work, things so significant as had never before appeared in a novel are accomplished.[22]

Roan continued to explain that one of the most significant accomplishments in *Maihime* was the clear depiction of character, and of what he termed the essence of character.

Translation brought Japanese literature to a higher accountability and held it to a standard not just of any Western work, but of the best Western literature had to offer as Japan perceived it: serious explorations of "truth" and "the essence of character." Japanese literature was forced into a global context, so much so that Higuchi Ichiyô (樋口一葉)'s *Jûsan'ya* (十三夜) and *Takekurabe* (たけくらべ), while proclaimed masterpieces of the Meiji *bundan*, were compared in mood and plot not to Murasaki but to Turgenev.[23]

Perhaps the most violence was done, however, to literary language. Translation brought a shattering of tradition in the recognition of a need for a modern language in which to express modern ideas and sentiments. In one of the earliest *Bunshô sekai* articles dealing with translation, Suematsu Kenchô (末松謙澄) complained that it was much easier to translate from Japanese to a European language than the other way around because the Japanese colloquial style (what he terms *gengo bunshô* [言語文章]) was not as well developed as the European. He claims that *Genji monogatari* is written in a style appropriate for its time, in language not at all unnatural to the ideas expressed; but today those ideas have progressed. Old-fashioned language is inappropriate to new ideas.[24] Obviously, Suematsu is an advocate of *genbun itchi* (言文一致) and of orality in literature; his article, in fact, is a *danwa hikki* (談話筆記). He traces "lag time" in Japanese literature to a lack of Western means of mechanical production and reproduction: typewriters and easily-produced shorthand and the ability to use an amanuensis. When the language is reformed to meet the standards of the West, he claims, Japanese writers can stop concentrating on language and start

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[22] "Meiji meisaku kaidai," 26-27.

[23] *Ibid.*, 66.

[24] Suematsu, 3-4.

concentrating on content, both in translation and in original composition.[25]

Not all theorists thought Japan should stop concentrating on language. Translation brought about a careful examination of the Japanese language and its use and appropriateness in the modern world. Clearly there was a need to modernize the written language, but translation forced the creation of a third language, something not quite western, but not quite the stiff literary Japanese, highly Sinified, of the past. Roan recognizes that "in any time period, that which brings change and progression to writing is the influence of foreign literature."[26] He gives as an example the translations of Wakamatsu Shizuko, writing that

> she had absolutely no ability to write anything in Japanese. Even her simplest correspondence was carried out in English. But her translation *Shôkôshi* was truly a splendid accomplishment of Japanese language. I believe that if she had been well versed in Japanese, she could not have made such a translation.[27]

He continues,

> when Futabatei's *Aibiki* appeared in *Kokumin no tomo*, hardly anyone understood it. The Japanese of the time didn't include such abstruse, idiomatic, violent expression. But contemporary Japanese writing owes its development in part to that translation-language of Futabatei.[28]

While they advocated a new kind of Japanese, however, these theorists were careful to insist that the language, even in translation, retain the "essence" of Japanese, even when translation necessitated the

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[25] *Ibid.*, 5.

[26] Roan 1910, 24.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*

invention of new words to express new ideas. Nobori Shomu (昇曙夢), among others, asserted that translators must make *Japanese* the standard, asking how best to express something in Japanese, not how best to replicate Western grammar and syntax.[29] Chiba Kikukô went so far as to suggest all translation should be done in pure Tokyo dialect.[30] Shuntei Sanshi tells of Fukuzawa Yukichi spending three days on the task of translating two characters for the English "lecture" (演説).[31] Critics chose these examples and made these claims, not to talk about fidelity to an original, but to show how Japanese must be modernized and stretched to its limits, but not robbed of its "essence," to admit and then appropriate the foreign.

Changes in literature and language forced changes on the readership as well: readers had to raise their expectations of literature, but also had expectations of their *reading* raised. Reading the new literature was expected to require effort and thought. They had to take literature seriously (as Furukawa discovered in Russia), and to take language seriously. They had to have an increased awareness of the world around them and give up notions of the authority of foreign originals, returning authority and trust to Japanese translators, allowing them to bend and stretch the Japanese language as they bent the foreign source text to their own purposes.

Reproduction and replication through translation forced Japanese translators and critics to examine not only foreign literature, but to reexamine their native language, literature, and literary community. Benjamin claims that the desire to reproduce stems from the desire to bring art objects close, to possess them, and to make them one's own by removing them from their privileged place. *Bunshô sekai* critics show that Japanese translators and critics made foreign works their own by making them speak in Japanese, but they had to remove their own language and literature from its tradition in order to do so. Their encounter with the foreign through reproduction forced Japan to

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[29]Nobori, 24.

[30] Chiba, 36.

[31] Shuntei, 121.

reconcile itself not only with the literary world at large but with their own literary history, and to paint their acts of writing as acts of revolution.

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