

# On Translating Shiba Ryōtarō into English

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Unlike any other people of whom I am aware, the Japanese have developed, especially in the postwar era, a virtually insatiable appetite for historical fiction. They are willing to buy and read, as well as watch television productions of, numerous tales from their history, told and retold, repeatedly. Based largely on personal impression over the years, it seems that the Sengoku (Warring States, late-fifteenth to late-sixteenth century) and *bakumatsu* periods (late Tokugawa years, 1850s and 1860s) are the most fecund time frames for begetting historical novels, perhaps because both were so pregnant with the seeds of the dramatic change to come. Whatever the reasons may be, a number of Japanese novelists have become rich men writing long lists of historical titles.

For comparison's sake, it should be noted that the United States—I am eliding discussion here of other parts of the Anglophone world—has also produced several extremely well-published historical novelists who have prospered greatly. To name just two among many, James Michener (1907-97) and Herman Wouk (b. 1915) have had huge legions of readers. What, then, is the great difference between a Michener or a Wouk and a Shiba Ryōtarō 司馬遼太郎 (1923-96), the topic of this essay? One important difference may be that few *serious* readers ever confuse Michener with the real thing. They read and continue to read his mammoth novels in part because of the “history” in them, of course, but more for the great romances or compelling stories in which they happen to be wrapped. The same might equally be said of James Clavell's (b. 1932) historical novel *Shogun*, a novel set almost entirely not in the era of the Tokugawa shoguns but at the end of the Warring States era, the late Sengoku period; this novel sent the American academy running to attack its historicity or to defend its pedagogical utility.<sup>1</sup> Herman Wouk's two-volume historical novel of World War II, *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*, is somewhat more pretentious as a work of “history.”<sup>2</sup> Fascinating reads that his two hefty volumes are, they may indeed convey a flavor of the times in Europe, the Pacific, and North America, but they contain none of the normal apparatus anyone would expect to find in a work of historical scholarship. In part, this may be true because, like Shiba but unlike Clavell, Wouk inserts numerous historical personages with their real names into his tale (the Roosevelts, Stalin, Hitler, and the like).

By contrast, I think many people do read Shiba Ryōtarō to learn history, or to fill in the blanks where history is mum, and until his death he played the role of authority on history to the hilt. True, he was not a university professor of history, but he attended conferences as an expert on history (and/or literature). Observing him, I was reminded of the late E. G. Marshall (1910-98), the actor who portrayed the senior defense lawyer on a much-hailed television series of the 1960s, *The Defenders*, when he was asked to speak to a convention of the American Bar Association. He responded that, appearances notwithstanding, he was not a lawyer. When about twenty years ago, Alan Alda (b. 1936), the star of the then hit series

*M\*A\*S\*H*, a television program about a field hospital unit in Korea during the American war there, did speak to the graduating class of Columbia University's Medical School, he hastened to remind them that as an actor the only things he had in common with doctors was a compelling need to make people feel better and to be well compensated for it.

In Shiba's voluminous corpus of mostly multi-volume historical novels, one finds as well a number of non-fiction works about Japanese history and literature. Do we classify such works as history, or perhaps as historical popularizations? Is this history à la Stephen Ambrose (1936-2002), Doris Kearns Goodwin (b. 1943), or one of the many other popularizers who, although they may use footnotes sparingly, at least do not plagiarize overly much? It is difficult to say. Shiba and others like him in Japan, even in their fictional works, frequently do cite directly from old historical and literary texts. They may not give chapter and verse but they do provide author and title. And, as long as Michener's and Wouk's historical novels may be, they usually pale in comparison to the length of much of Shiba's and others' output of historical fiction in Japan. Like Charles Dickens (1812-70), Shiba was often paid by the word. His novels were frequently serialized in weekly or monthly popular journals over the course of a year or two and then reissued in book form. This may in part help explain the author's "logorrhea," but it only begs the question on the consumer side of the equation. Can one imagine an English-language equivalent, for example, of Yamaoka Sōhachi's 山岡莊八 (1907-78) twenty-six-volume historical novel entitled *Tokugawa Ieyasu* 徳川家康, which was incidentally translated in full into Chinese?<sup>3</sup>

Let me say just a few words about my own route to Shiba Ryōtarō's work. I met and spoke with him only once, at a conference in the late 1980s, but I first came in contact with his work in 1977 when I was a graduate student in Kyoto. As is well known, Japanese Educational Television (NHK) runs a weekly one-hour historical drama each year (roughly 52 episodes) based on a historical novel, and the novel for 1977 was Shiba's *Kashin* (God of Blooming Flowers).<sup>4</sup> Like many Japanese that year, I sat spellbound each Sunday evening, staring at my television set, watching the story of Murata Zōroku 村田蔵六 (later to become known as Ōmura Masujirō 大村益次郎, 1825-69), the doctor trained in Dutch medicine and later the military modernizer in Chōshū domain who effectively built a modern army in that one domain in western Japan. Shiba added all sorts of flavor to the story, which even someone like myself who was learning about Zōroku for the first time could nonetheless see.

Zōroku's domain of Chōshū was, of course, one of the hottest hotbeds of activity on the eve of the Meiji Restoration, and thus a long list of historical players who would become extremely important in the overthrow of the shogunate or the early Meiji government or both walked across the screen each Sunday evening. I was especially taken with another man from Chōshū, new to me at that time twenty-seven years ago, Takasugi Shinsaku 高杉晋作 (1839-67), primarily because Takasugi, incredible hothead that he was, traveled with the first official Japanese delegation to Shanghai in 1862; and all of this was enacted in the television drama. I bought the novel that week and began voraciously to devour it. It was the first real novel I had read in Japanese, but I was younger then and (more) irrational. After making my way through the novel's 1200-plus pages, though, I found that there was no mention in it whatsoever of this trip to Shanghai. As I later discovered, Shiba had an entire other novel in

four volumes—entitled *Yo ni sumu hibi* 世に棲む日々 (Alive in the world)<sup>5</sup>—about the life of Takasugi Shinsaku from which those TV scenes were drawn and grafted onto the story of *Kashin*.

Several months later, I wrote Shiba a letter in which I suggested translating the novel *Kashin*. He responded through a relative that he basically was not interested, and thankfully the matter ended there. I have been endlessly fascinated by the 1862 Japanese mission to Shanghai ever since, a topic of my present research, and I have Shiba (and NHK) to thank for that.

### Japanese Historical Fiction Concerning China

In addition to Shiba, I have also been particularly interested in the historical fiction of Chin Shunshin 陳舜臣 (b. 1924), his slightly younger classmate from Ōsaka University of Foreign Languages and long-time friend, especially the depictions of Chinese historical figures in their writings. Chin is incidentally a second-generation Japanese from Kōbe whose parents moved there from Taiwan and whose ancestors came from Quanzhou in Fujian Province. Although Shiba's work concentrates on Japanese history, he has set novels on the mainland or placed significant scenes from novels there.<sup>6</sup> Chin, by contrast, has a Chinese connection in virtually all of his work. His novels are either set in China over the centuries or involve the Chinese community in Japan.

I have translated two of Chin's works: a short novel, *Pekin yūyūkan* 北京悠々館 (rendered in English as *Murder in a Peking Studio*), a murder mystery set in Beijing in 1903 on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War; and a much longer one, *Taihei tengoku* 太平天国 (The Taiping Rebellion), about that long and disastrous event in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The former is, first and foremost, a mystery story that happens to concern Japanese efforts to blackmail high-level Chinese officials and force the earliest possible commencement of a Russo-Japanese War, because the Japanese know that the Russians are continuing to move troops along the Trans-Siberian Railway to the east in preparation for such a war. The only genuinely famous historical Chinese character, Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859-1916), who is also the ultimate villain of the piece, makes only brief appearances in the novel. By contrast, *Taihei tengoku* is full of historical characters, from Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 (1813-64) and Yang Xiuqing 楊秀清 (d. 1856) to a wide assortment of Manchu and Chinese officials of the Qing government and military. Only the main characters who, as in Herman Wouk's World War II novels, manage to be at every major or minor historical scene and thus weave the story into a whole, are fictional.<sup>8</sup>

To my Western sensibilities, Wouk's two war novels are much more successful as fiction than Chin's Taiping novel, though, Chin's may be better "history." Perhaps this tells us something about their audiences. Perhaps Japanese audiences are more drawn, for whatever reasons, to the kind of tale Chin tells than they would be to Wouk's. At the same time, we should note that at least the first of these Wouk novels, *The Winds of War*, was translated into Japanese within three years of its initial appearance; a Chinese translation raised quite a fuss when it appeared on the Mainland several years later.<sup>9</sup> Wouk's novels work better probably because the love story works better than the one in Chin's work.

I recently completed the translation of another work of Shiba's entitled *Dattan shippūroku* 韃靼疾風録 (Chronicle of the Tartar Tempest, which I may subtitle A Novel of Seventeenth-Century East Asia),<sup>10</sup> a novel set first in Hirado in southern Japan and then in mainland Northeast Asia in the early seventeenth century on the eve of the Manchu conquest of China. The hero of this virtually impossible story, Katsura Shōsuke 桂庄助, comes from a Hirado family. His grandfather who raised him was fluent in the Zhejiang dialect of Chinese because of his contacts with numerous Chinese traders coming to Hirado, and Shōsuke thus grows up bilingual. After an incident involving his grandfather, for which he is not to blame and in which his grandfather dies, Shōsuke is forced to give up certain *samurai* appurtenances. One day his lord calls him to an audience and informs him that he is to be charged with a long-term mission. To make a long story short, he will have to escort a young and apparently noble young woman—whom no one is initially able to determine the ethnicity of—back to her homeland, the land of Tartary. She is a Jurchen, a Manchu. Through connections in the Chinese underworld with ties in Hirado, they make their way to the mainland via Korea.

And, of course, they fall in love, but they manage not to consummate it for hundreds of pages. Promised to regain his full warrior status if he does a good job, Shōsuke remains a no-nonsense *samurai*, following his lord's orders to the hilt, and he thus cannot very well fall in love with a woman he has been charged to bring home. He must return to Japan after his mission is completed—a mission he later learns involves collecting information to corroborate or refute the rumor of a storm brewing in Tartary that will sweep the Ming dynasty out of power and conquer East Asia—and he certainly cannot very well marry her and bring her back home to Hirado with him. Eventually, however, he gives in to his emotions.

Of course, things start to go wrong, and he ends up staying in Shenyang, the Manchu capital, for many years, with periodic trips to Mongolia, Suzhou, and elsewhere. He meets Nurhaci, Abahai, Dorgon (Prince Rui 睿), and numerous fictional Manchus, as well as many Chinese, Koreans, Mongols, and even a half-Cantonese, half-Portuguese man from Macao. As one frequently finds in this genre, there are recurrent digressions into the history of China, Manchuria, Mongolia, Korea, and elsewhere as background for a given scene. As interesting as these often are, one cannot help but feel that these deviations from the storyline are there, at least in part, to fill that week's or month's magazine installment.

Ultimately, Shōsuke decides he must return to Japan, but unfortunately the new Tokugawa government has in his absence decided to impose the *sakoku* ("locking of the country") law, which forbids Japanese, on pain of death, from leaving their country. If he returns now, he stands a chance either of being humiliated for doing precisely the opposite of what his lord has ordered him to do—escort the Tartar princess back to her home—or, worse still, being executed. What's he to do? The impossibility of the story makes the fascinating (though entirely improbable) manner in which Shiba lets it unfold "seem" possible.

### Translation Problems

As good a researcher as Shiba was—in this regard, Clavell, Wouk, and Michener really pale by comparison with him—he was often prone to precisely the kind of generalizations that historians and literary scholars tend to avoid at all cost. Shiba, though, was attracted to such big, popularizing themes like a moth to a flame. Among his many books are such titles



as *Ningen ni tsuite* 人間について (About Human Beings) and *Nihonjin to Nihon bunka* 日本人と日本文化 (Japanese and Japanese Culture), both the transcripts of extended “face-to-face conversations” (*taidan* 対談) with interlocutors.<sup>11</sup> He also collaborated with Chin Shunshin on a similar work entitled *Chūgoku o kangaeru, taidan* 中国を考える、対談 (Thinking about China, a Conversation),<sup>12</sup> and several others on Korea and Japan. This is a style few academics in the West find either useful or meaningful—Tu Weiming 杜維明 (b. 1940) in our field might be an exception, the late Joseph Campbell (1904-87) in another.

This penchant for the general or more popular explanation forces the conscientious translator of his fiction into something of a corner. Do we just render his words as they are without explanation? Do we add a translator’s note to the effect that there are many exceptions to the generality just enunciated, or such-and-such a view is not or no longer generally held by specialist scholars? The first option of just conveying the words as accurately as possible may work for professional translators, but for scholars who pour their lifeblood into the very questions he and others like him toss off over a few beers, this is unacceptable. Translator’s notes in a work of fiction, though, only work if they are few and far between. Otherwise the translated text will no longer be a readable novel but will read more like an essay by Paul Pelliot (1878-1945).

How do we deal with views no longer widely held in academia? This is one issue I have had to face in the Shiba translation. The image he conveys of the Tokugawa shogunate “locking itself up” in the early seventeenth century no longer jibes with much recent scholarship, even in Japan. While Shiba was more understanding of the complexity of the whole *sakoku* issue, his portrayal of this institution was still out of date from a scholarly perspective, even in the mid-1980s when the book first appeared. I have no answer to this question, but simply raise it here for consideration.

What about specific errors of fact, as opposed to differences of interpretation from the scholarly consensus? For instance, there is a passage in *Dattan shippūroku* which Shiba describes the execution by *haritsuke* はりつけ, a form of crucifixion and exposure, of the notorious eunuch Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568-1627). The problem is that we know that Wei committed suicide by hanging after which his corpse was crucified. Should the translator add a note about the specific cause of Wei’s death or even simply add it to the text? This may seem like a small point, but it is a slippery slope from this sort of tinkering to more insidious forms of playing with an original text, such as Arthur Waley’s (1899-1966) adding of florid language—and apparently a character in one chapter—to his translation of the *Tale of Genji*.<sup>13</sup>

There is also a relatively small issue related to this, which causes less despair as a translator but some worry nonetheless. That is the issue of Shiba’s getting dates and other numbers wrong. In the roughly 1100 pages of text, this problem has come up about fifteen times. Usually, it involves a well-known person’s age off by a year or maybe two. Occasionally, the dates of events or other numbers are similarly at odds with every available reference work. I have finessed any problem of infidelity to the text by simply correcting Shiba’s errors and converting all ages to Western reckoning of them, which scholars working on premodern texts do all the time. The errors themselves are less disturbing than what they *may* portend—namely, sloppiness on the part of the author who wrote so rapidly and voluminously. I stress

*may* because Shiba has many times more dates and figures that do accord with the historical record.

Yet another issue derives from a rather pretentious inclination on Shiba's part to flaunt his supposed knowledge of the Manchu and Mongol languages, his college major. In countless instances, he has his Manchu characters speak using Manchu words or phrases, or he himself employs Manchu terms while describing Manchu history or culture, of course in *katakana* renderings. The problem is that many of these are simply incorrect. Some are slightly off and easily corrected. Others are way off, but ultimately recognizable to those knowledgeable of Manchu. Probably a third of them are completely unrecognizable. Were Shiba still alive, I could contact him and ask what he meant, but that avenue was shut off some eight years ago.

Interestingly, this is something Herman Wouk does frequently in his two massive World War II novels with Russian, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, and other languages. It adds authenticity to a historical novel, having the characters occasionally "speak" in their native tongue, and makes it seem as though the author knows that about which he speaks. It is frankly not a lot different from the footnote to a foreign-language source in a scholarly work. The difference between Herman Wouk and Shiba Ryōtarō in this context, though, is that I have never found Wouk to have made a single language mistake, and I have made a point of looking up every foreign word I did not already know that appears in his many historical novels.

How is a translator to finesse this problem? When I have been able, through consultation with colleagues who specialize in Manchu and Mongol to ascertain the correct form of a Manchu or Mongol term, I have rendered them according to the modern romanization schemes. When I cannot figure them out, I simply skip the romanized term. Shiba always gives the alleged meaning of these Manchu or Mongol terms, because of course he does not expect his Japanese readers to know them. I have simply jumped directly into English when the *katakana* expression makes no sense and elided any linguistic complexity in those difficult cases.

However, one potentially serious problem still remains. That is the names of his Manchu characters which he occasionally feels he must translate to be meaningful, and these of course cannot be elided. Some of the names do not mean what he says they do, and others are completely inauthentic as Manchu names. I shall spare readers here the details, but suffice it to say: what do you do when a specific character is called X in Manchu, because he or she is meant or hoped to embody that quality, but X does not, in fact, translate as that quality? Again, I have no solution to this problem but simply want to raise it.

There is one point in the text at which three Mongol generals submit their allegiance with all attendant pomp to the Great Khan of the Jurchen people (the Manchus). Their Mongolian names are given a number of times in *katakana*. Suspecting that they were based on historical personages but having not a clue as to how their names might be romanized, I contacted several Mongolists in the United States and Japan—Christopher Atwood of Indiana University, Harayama Akira 原山煌 of Momoyama Gakuin University, and Nakami Tatsuo 中見立夫 of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. None of these specialists could figure out the names, which simply did not ring any bells for them, although Mongolian names are not strange to them in the least.

This issue led Professor Nakami in an e-mail message to go on at length about a more telling issue which concerns the fault lines within the entire genre of historical fiction. He was explaining why he so disliked Shiba Ryōtarō's work, first and foremost because he wrote fiction for a mass audience. Unlike Inoue Yasushi 井上靖 (1907-91) who relied on top-flight scholars to advise him on several of his many historical novels—for example, for *Tonkō* 敦煌 (Dunhuang), a novel about the period in the Tang when that cave site was sealed with countless manuscripts inside, he consulted with Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃 (1911-98); for *Fūtō* 風涛 (Wind and waves), a novel about Korea under the Mongol yoke, he consulted with Okada Hidehiro 岡田英弘 (b. 1931); and for *Tenpyō no iraka* 天平の葦 (The Roof Tile of Tenpyō), a novel about several young Japanese who travel to China in the early eighth century with one of the periodic embassies from Japan to pursue Buddhist studies and from which several members work to convince the great monk Ganjin 鑑真 (C. Jianzhen, 688-763) to come to Japan, he consulted with Andō Kōsei 安藤更生 (1900-70)<sup>14</sup>—Shiba either did all the work himself or relied on lesser lights. The distinction, in Nakami's view and undoubtedly in many educated Japanese readers' views as well, is between Inoue Yasushi as *bungō* 文豪 (literary giant) and Shiba Ryōtarō as *taishū sakka* 大衆作家 (mass market writer).<sup>15</sup>

On one final concern on which I think Shiba does relatively well: his novel takes place in the early seventeenth century, a time when the modern entities of "Japan," "China," and "Korea" were not at all well formulated in political, nation-state terms among ordinary people. That has not stopped other historical dramatists from assuming that a twentieth-century perspective on the nation-state has always and forever existed throughout East Asia. Shiba's main character in *Dattan shippūroku* is decidedly a man of Hirado rather than a generic "Japanese." This fact is extremely important to the unfolding of the story, for it is because of his origins in Hirado that he has had contacts with Chinese merchants (and, as it develops, figures from the Chinese underworld) his entire life, and knows the spoken Chinese language of the Zhejiang region; and it is because he has traveled nowhere else in the home islands of Japan that he is familiar with little else in Japan from first-hand experience. Shiba makes this very point several times, and it is a salient and salutary one. Similarly, there is a Korean character midway through the first volume who behaves in a manner more Confucian than the contemporaneous Ming Chinese government to which he nonetheless feels an almost subliminal bond of fidelity, even while he despises individual members of it. I admire also Shiba's telling of how the Manchu leadership slowly comes to see itself as a distinct "ethnic group"—not his term and perhaps inappropriate—and ultimately to create its own dynastic structure and finally to contemplate attacking and conquering the Ming. The very fact that throughout the novel he refers to the "Ming" or "Great Ming" rather than to "China" is an indication of his sensitivity to this important issue.

### Conclusion: The Bohr Atom

I think we can all accept the fact that there are not neatly separable realms of history, fiction, and myth, each with comfortable barriers and distinct constituencies. Each of these realms influences the others and washes over into the others' terrain. By the same token, this does not mean that history and literature are really the same, the only significant difference being the truth claims of the writer, a view that has commanded some support of late in the

academy. If we can dispense with the idea of history as a science, even a soft science, what are we left with once we accept the fact that literature—even myth—influences our understanding of the past? Do we then throw up our hands and give in, somewhat nihilistically, to the impossibility of ever saying anything of meaning? Clearly not. Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), the father of the Anglophone novel, noted several centuries ago that he wanted to make his epistolary novel *Clarissa* seem real, not because he wanted people to think that the letters in it were the genuine article but “to avoid hurting that kind of Historical Faith, which Fiction itself is genuinely read with, tho’ we know it to be Fiction.”<sup>16</sup> As writers we create “history” as we create “fiction.” History does not simply exist waiting for us to discover it, nor does it fall from the sky—that, I would argue, is the terrain occupied by myth.

For most of us, the history that we write will be read by precious few and is unlikely to influence even a majority of those in the academy. We live in a strange world—looking down our noses at people who pander to the masses and sighing at how ignorant of history every new college class appears to be. When government bureaucrats bemoan the widespread basic historical ignorance of the young, they usually mean ignorance of a whitewashed, decidedly didactic version of our own history. For most people, though, history only lives in television dramas and, if we are really lucky, historical novels. I must confess that when I think of nineteenth century America, I still conjure up images of the westerns of my youth: Hugh O’Brian (b. 1925) in my mind will always be Wyatt Earp (1848-1929), Kevin Costner’s (b. 1955) attempts to the contrary notwithstanding.

Do we, as academics, do much of a service by devoting our time to debunking historical novels and movies? Just in recent years, Oliver Stone’s *JFK* became a feeding frenzy for American historians, and Steven Spielberg’s *Amistad* and *Schindler’s List* were not too far behind. The fear, justifiable as it is, is that most young Americans, and many not so young, get their history from popularizations, movies, and fiction. So, just to play devil’s advocate, what is the difference if young people all think there was an elaborate conspiracy behind the assassination of John F. Kennedy? The answer has to be: It’s just not true. But, so what? Hugh O’Brian was not Wyatt Earp either, a fact I know and think largely irrelevant. Is it a slippery slope from there to fiction or pseudofactual stories about events much more important in our times, such as those concocted by Holocaust deniers anywhere or Nanjing Massacre deniers in Japan? The French classicist Pierre Vidal-Naquet (b. 1930) has described how he feels he must take precious years away from his own research time to disproving what strikes most of us as the patent nonsense of the Holocaust deniers, principally in Europe, because the frauds they perpetrate demand exposure.<sup>17</sup>

I would like to call this the Bohr atom phenomenon for the following reasons. We all tend to think of the structure of the atom as a nucleus of protons and neutrons with a bunch of electrons whizzing around at extremely rapid speeds. This model of the atom was devised by the great Danish physicist, Niels Bohr (1885-1962), who even at the time he received the Nobel Prize in 1922 realized that his model was at best insufficient and demonstrably incorrect. And, yet, to this day we and, I dare say, many scientists still tend to think of the atom in the manner that Bohr pictured it. Most of us cannot possibly understand how an atom should properly be pictured—with the mixture of equations, energy, and matter—and it does little damage in our daily lives to think—to the extent that we do at all—of an atom with protons, neutrons, and electrons in their proper places.

Does it matter then, as one of my students at Harvard put it some years ago, whether Mao wore red sneakers or black ones? Or, to bring this discussion back to the topic at hand, do the kinds of literary license taken by historical novelists like Shiba Ryōtarō really do irreparable harm? Are we not then just like that tiny coterie of quantum mechanics specialists who actually understand how an atom should be construed? I have no hard answers, but these are some of thoughts and doubts. And, to bring the story even closer to home, if we have qualms about certain historical fiction for possibly twisting history for dramatic effect, should we translate it, thereby expanding the potential readership for good or ill? By doing so, are we, to be a bit melodramatic, sleeping with the enemy? I should add that the project of which the volume I am translating is part was initiated between Donald Keene and the Japan Foundation, because both felt that the Japanese novels that have been translated to date do not, on the whole, reflect Japanese readers' literary tastes. I should add that Keene and Shiba were close friends, but I doubt that had anything to do with it.

In the midst of my work on this translation and on Shiba himself, I found in a long online interview with Donald Keene some interesting comments made in the context of the appearance of another Shiba novel that had then just come out as part of this same series. The author of the essay is explaining the reasons for Shiba's popularity and why he wrote so much about certain periods in history.

Individual opportunity is maximized not during periods of superficial stability, but rather in turbulent eras like the Sengoku period or the transitional phase between the Tokugawa shogunate and the Meiji Restoration. In many of Shiba's works, people who lived in such tumultuous times are depicted in vivid and dynamic detail.

In fact, it is this vividness that explains the popularity of Shiba's historical fiction. Once touched by Shiba's pen, people who actually existed centuries ago are brought to brilliant life in the reader's mind.

"I knew what Yamanouchi Yōdō did, what he was against, and the opinions he voiced," says Keene, "but no documents tell us what kind of person he was. When I read Shiba's story, however, I gained insight into the motivation behind Yōdō's actions. That's something you don't get from history books."<sup>18</sup>

What then should we aim for when translating historical fiction? Do we attempt to recreate the world of the novel in language redolent of past times and different places? Shiba, for example, uses contemporary grammatical forms for all conversations involving one or more non-Japanese, but he frequently adds local dialect when there are only Japanese conversing. What he does not use is contemporary slang, for obvious reasons, I would assume. However, that opposite approach can work, if extremely skillfully applied. Pat Hanan's translations of late Ming and late Qing novels brilliantly convey a time and place different from our own in an English that sounds very down-under to my ears.<sup>19</sup> I have opted for a style that eschews contemporary colloquialisms and, of course, anachronisms—namely, anything that sounds as if it was informed by events after the early seventeenth century, especially specific knowledge or expressions or metaphors based on such knowledge formed after the Qing dynasty came into being—but I have also gone for a style that may sound somewhat stilted to many ears.

This essay ultimately raises far more questions than it can possibly answer. The issues involved in translating fiction, historical or otherwise, are many, and they are likely never

to be resolved to anyone's particular delight. By the same token, however, they deserve our continued attention and investigation.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Smith 1980, on Clavell 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Wouk 1971 and Wouk 1978. His two novels about the founding of the state of Israel and its many crises are historical novels, but with few real personages, and hence they struck me, at least, less as disguised history. Wouk 1993 and Wouk 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in thirteen volumes (Kōdansha, 1981-84). Translated into Chinese in fifty-two volumes



by He Lili 何黎莉 and Ding Xiaoi 丁小艾 (Taibei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1991). Yamaoka has also written numerous other fictionalized historical biographies.

<sup>4</sup> Shiba 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Shiba 1973.

<sup>6</sup> One vast work by him in this vein is *Kō U to Ryū Hō* 項羽と劉邦 (Xiang Yu and Liu Bang) (Shiba 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Originals: Chin 1971c and Chin 1982. Translations: *Murder in a Peking Studio* (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1986); *The Taiping Rebellion* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Notably, the Lian family, a wealthy merchant house from Fujian, members from which appear in other Chin novels, particularly his immense *Ahen sensō* 阿片戦争 (The Opium War) (Chin 1971a), three volumes with many subsequent editions. It has been translated in Chinese by Bian Liqiang 卞立強 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1985). Chin even wrote a single-volume popular account of the Opium War (Chin 1971b), which won the 1971 Mainichi Publishers' Cultural Award.

<sup>9</sup> Wouk 1974; Wouk 1979. I have been unable to locate Japanese translations of the sequel, *War and Remembrance*, though I cannot imagine that it was not translated.

<sup>10</sup> Shiba 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Respectively with Yamamura Yūichi 山村雄一 (Shiba and Yamamura 1983) and with Donald Keene (Shiba and Keene 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Shiba and Chin 1978.

<sup>13</sup> Waley 1935.

<sup>14</sup> *Tonkō* (Inoue 1981), with translations into English by Jean Oda Moy, *Tun-huang: A Novel* (Tokyo, New York: Kodansha International, 1978), into German by Siegfried Schaarschmidt, *Die Höhlen von Dun-Huang: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), into French by Jean Guiloineau, *Les chemins du désert* (Paris: Stock, 1982), and at least three times into Chinese by the Pomegranate Red Writing Group 石榴紅文字工作坊, *Dunhuang* 敦煌 (Taibei: Huatian wenhua gongsi, 1995), by Dong Xuechang 董学昌, *Dunhuang* 敦煌 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), and by Liu Musha 劉慕沙, *Dunhuang* 敦煌 (Taibei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1991); *Fūtō* (Inoue 1963), with translations into English by James T. Araki, *Wind and Waves: A Novel* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), into French by Corinne Atlan, *Vent et vagues: le roman de Kubilai-Khan* (Arles: Philippe Picquier, 1993), and into Chinese as *Wenhai fengtao* 文海风涛, ed. Guangdongsheng zuojia xiehui 广东省作家协会 (Guangdong Provincial Writers' Association) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1993); and *Tenpyō no iraka* (Inoue 1957) with translations into English by James T. Araki, *The roof tile of Tenpyō* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1975), into French by René Sieffert, *La tuile de Tenpyō: roman* (Paris: Publications orientalistes de France, 1985), into German by Oscar Benl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), and in Chinese three times by Lou Shiyi 楼适夷, *Tianping zhi meng* 天平之薨 (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1963; reprinted Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), Chen Dewen 陈德文, *Tianping zhi meng, lishiju* 天平之薨: 历史剧 (Roof tile of Tenpyō, a historical drama) (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1978), and by the Pomegranate Red Writing Group, *Tianping zhi meng* (Taibei: Jiuda wenhua, Wanxiang tushu, 1992). These translations were readily available from NACSIS-Webcat; there are undoubtedly many others as well. Inoue was a prolific author in his day; among his other historical fiction set in China are *Kōzui* 洪水 (The Flood) (Shinchōsha, 1962), translated into English by John Bester as *Flood*, in *Modern Japanese Authors*, vol. 4 (Hara Publishing Co., 1964), and *Kōshi* 孔子 (Confucius) (Shinchōsha, 1989), translated into English by Roger K. Thomas, *Confucius, a Novel* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992), into French by Daniel Struve, *Confucius, roman* (Arles: Stock, 1992), and into Chinese twice by Liu Musha, *Kongzi* 孔子 (Taibei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1990) and Zheng Mingqin 郑民钦, *Kongzi* (Beijing: Renmin ribao chubanshe, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Personal e-mail communication from Nakami Tatsuo, 24 August 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Bowersock 1994, pp. 50-51.

<sup>17</sup> See Vidal-Naquet 1992.

<sup>18</sup> See: [www.lookjapan.com/LBsc/02FebCF.htm](http://www.lookjapan.com/LBsc/02FebCF.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Li Yu, *A Tower for the Summer Heat*, trans. Patrick Hanan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); *The Sea of Regret: Two Turn-of-the-Century Chinese Romantic Novels*, trans. Patrick Hanan (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995).