

# **So Far In, It's Out (of Context): Problems of Presentation and Context for In-Depth Research**

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The main theme I wish to explore is the position of the foreign scholar as long-term resident in Japan. The following discussion offers a number of generalizations based on my personal experience. These are intended to stimulate consideration, discussion, and response. It should be borne in mind that the relevance of the issues I raise varies, depending on specific fields of research and the kinds of methods that are employed.

Scholarship is generally shaped by the scholarly and institutional context that generates it. Foreign scholars tend to project themes and methodologies that are formed by the interests of the scholarly community in their home nations. Factors that serve to ensure this include the competitive grant applications for research, applications for conference panels, the review process for publication of journal articles and books, the reviews subsequent to publication, and the general reception. All of these factors are necessarily taken into account by scholars as they shape their works or acquire grants to do research in Japan. The depth of research tends to show a close correlation to the amount of time a scholar spends overseas, the degree of access to resources while overseas, and the limitations of libraries in the West. It is directly affected by general time limitations set by grants, leave time from teaching, and time schedules for review for professional promotion, as well.

In the case of scholarship based in the West, there is a continuing tendency to place emphasis on Western sources and methods (theoretical, psychoanalytic, etc.). Sometimes these approaches are shared by some Japanese-trained scholars, but in many instances they have never gained much currency here. On the other hand, foreign-trained scholars who are incorporated into Japanese research projects over long stretches of time are likewise influenced by the approaches and interests of the funding

institutions and their Japanese colleagues.

However, the people that I am thinking about today are outside either of these two broad categories—people who due to their long-term residence in Japan have the potential to occupy a hybrid space, neither fully integrating into the expectations or limitations of Western institutions nor wholly assimilating to Japanese. I wish to discuss some of the pros and cons of this potentiality. Scholars no longer dependent upon foreign institutions for leave time and funding for conducting research in Japan and also not indebted to academic research institutions in Japan have the potential for selecting research topics that may be unthinkable for those whose choices are determined by the aims of these organizations. Not fully integrated into the expectations or limitations of the Western or Japanese academic environment, they enjoy a measure of liberation. This may allow for a greater range of approaches and topics. It may also lead, however, to greater difficulties in publication and presentation of research.

I would now like to turn to my own particular experiences in several different areas in order to give examples of this situation. My original area of research was Japanese art history, more specifically, literati painting. Japanese literati painting (*bunjinga* 文人画) stretches from its origins in the seventeenth-century and actually continues into relatively contemporary times in the twentieth century. The reception of studies of literati painting in the West is fairly spotty. Western research in this area started to expand in the 1970s and 1980s, and yet more recently there has been less activity. This raises the questions of why such research was not done earlier and why is it slowing down now. Ultimately this is a question of the canonization of artists—the formation of a dominant view of who in this very large movement of hundreds of painters is worthy of study, who produced art of lasting value. This, rather than being a given, is very much a politically sensitive issue that has varied a great deal in Japanese history and to some degree in Western history. To give the names of some of the most prominent artists, there is an international consensus that investigating the circumstances of Ike Taiga 池大雅 (1723-1776), Yosa Buson 与謝蕪村 (1716-1783), and Uragami Gyokudō 浦上玉堂 (1745-1820) is of value. Yet of their immediate colleagues or associates who were quite important in their own time, there is now little understanding of who they

were, let alone their significance. That limitation of context is much truer in the West than in Japan. Yet the wartime years marked a watershed in this area in Japan; there had been numerous prewar studies, but they had few postwar successors, and periodical literature (including Japanese journals devoted to this area) practically disappeared. A decline in interest in Chinese-related cultural forms in postwar Japan eroded the context for many of these artists and their works.

To look at other areas of Japanese painting, much of twentieth century painting has been highly problematic in the West from the beginning. Particularly, *nihonga* 日本画 is just beginning to receive any kind of credibility in the West, although it has long been included in the canon in Japan. So in this kind of scholarly divide, a researcher would find it easy to obtain support inside Japan for a *nihonga*-related project, but more difficult in the West. And if the situation of *nihonga* has been problematic, even more suspect has been the reception in the West of *yōga* 洋画 (Western-style oil painting by Japanese), despite its acceptance as a highly canonized topic within Japan, where many artists are recognized as masters and have museums devoted to their work. Western academic reception of *yōga* has been so frosty that it might more easily be deemed a topic for anthropology or sociology than art history; there is as yet no established basis in the West for appreciating its status as an art form. And if this is true in academia, it is even truer in Western museum acquisitions, with a near blanket refusal to countenance collecting any of this material. There is a limited tradition of collecting *nihonga* that is slowly expanding, yet for *yōga* there have been almost no purchases of works at all. Being in Japan and doing research on these areas, one is nearly inundated by the vast amount of material, writings by the artists, the works themselves, and the critical literature both contemporary and current. Yet in trying to present these topics to an international audience, the long-term resident scholar confronts a reception problem. There is simply little awareness of the material and its significance.

Inside Japan, the difference between prewar and postwar art historical studies has been widening. I am talking about the divide marked by the period of the Fifteen-years War, even in such recognized areas as *nihonga* or *yōga*. If one looks into the prewar years or even wartime, there was a

somewhat different range of who or what was considered important. Artists or topics that were then considered quite relevant are now often hard to deal with, even in Japan, even though the general area is perceived as valuable. For example, many examples can be found in the areas of calligraphy and *haiga* paintings, including the works of Inukai Bokudō 犬飼木堂 (1855-1932) and Kawahigashi Hekigotō 河東碧梧桐 (1873-1937) among others.

To shift to looking at similar issues in a different discipline, let me touch on my experience in 1996, when I chaired a panel entitled “Configurations of Sexuality in Japanese Film of the Seventies” at the Association for Asian Studies annual convention. My own paper, “Mandala of Cultural Identity and Sexuality: Jissōji Akio's Film *Mandara* (1971),” focused on the work of Jissōji Akio 実相寺昭雄 (1937-), a noted director of avant-garde films. Still active today, Jissōji's best-regarded work was produced in the late 1960s and 1970s, when his films were often cited among the top ten films of the year and generated considerable critical attention. These films merit attention for aesthetic, social, and political reasons, as they figured in the development of the avant-garde film movement and were attempting to alter social attitudes towards sexuality and politics in Japan. His most important trilogy, *Mujō* 無常 (1970), *Mandara* 曼陀羅 (1971), and *Uta* 歌 (1972), was scripted by Ishidō Toshio 石堂淑朗 (1932-), who also wrote the scenarios for a number of Ōshima Nagisa's 大島渚 (1932-) important films of the 1960s. Jissōji's films relate to those by Teshigahara Hiroshi 勅使河原宏 (1927-2001), Yoshida Yoshishige 吉田喜重 (1933-), Wakamatsu Kōji 若松孝二 (1936-), Terayama Shūji 寺山修司 (1935-1983), and other directors who were challenging the everyday assumptions of life and cinema at that time. Jissōji's work, however, has been comparatively inaccessible. All his major films had gone out of distribution until the 2001 release of a limited-edition eight-disc DVD set, and they are still unsubtitled. The unavailability of the films, the lack of subtitles for films that contain dense dialog, and the generally low level of collections of the relevant film journals and books in the libraries of the West tightly circumscribe the context for knowledgeable reception even for an academic audience. For me at the AAS, having completed considerable research into some of Jissōji's films, including

working with the scenarios and contemporary criticism, the problem was how to shape the analysis in a way that communicated successfully to an audience that was not “so far in” as I. The problem of casting this in a way that will allow publication without compromising the topic under investigation remains.

This illustrates a kind of professional existential dilemma faced by the long-term resident scholar in Japan: although you can engage in research here that would be impossible elsewhere due to the lack of the requisite materials, institutional structures and the practice of canonization of certain topics and approaches can effectively block the publication or reception of such studies, not by intention but by default.

Thinking about Japanese film criticism in the West, it is still very rare for such studies to deal with the critical context and reception of Japanese film as found in the Japanese-language materials. Recently several excellent books that do attempt this engagement have emerged, one by Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto on Kurosawa and another on documentary film by Abe Mark Nornes.<sup>1</sup> These are among the limited range of Western studies that really deal with the film literature in Japanese.

Many authors have avoided getting involved with the scenarios, despite the fact that nearly all of them were published in Japan.<sup>2</sup> This has resulted in the errors and omissions of subtitles found in the standard overseas versions of films being incorporated into the standard Western analyses. As is well known, original subtitles are often produced under adverse conditions (unreasonable time pressures) for quick release into

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<sup>1</sup> Yoshimoto 2000 and Nornes 2003 are only two examples of a wider group of Western critics who have effectively used Japanese critical literature. Yet a survey of the notes and bibliographies of most Western literature on Japanese films reveals how few Japanese language source materials have been employed.

<sup>2</sup> Film scenarios have been published in the postwar period in the monthly magazine *Shinario* シナリオ and two annuals of top film scenarios, *Nenkan daihyō shinario shū* 年間代表シナリオ集 and *Nihon eiga shinario senshū* 日本映画シナリオ選集. In addition to special collections of scenarios of particular directors and screenwriters, the bimonthly film magazines *Kinema jumpō* キネマ旬報 and *Eiga geijutsu* 映画芸術 regularly published scenarios during the 1970s and earlier decades.

theatres. What is particularly disappointing is that newly subtitled DVD versions either maintain earlier mistranslations or even introduce new errors. The following examples are small yet representative of a larger problem.

The 2003 Criterion edition of Ozu's *Tōkyō monogatari* 東京物語 (1953) still includes a fundamental mistranslation in a critical passage near the end of the film. One of the most famous passages in the film is the conversation between Kyōko and Noriko about the nature of life. The standard old translation, maintained in the 2003 edition, is:

Kyōko: Isn't life disappointing?

Noriko: Yes, it is.

These lines are frequently quoted in Western commentaries, yet the original Japanese text is much more emphatic, especially in Noriko's assessment of life.

Kyōko: いやね, 世の中って. Awful, aren't they, these events of life.

Noriko: そう... いやな事ばかり. Yes, nothing but awful things.

In effect, the standard translation of Noriko's reply only conveys her initial assent (そう) which, taken by itself, could be interpreted as nothing more than Noriko's sympathetic support for the youthful angst of Kyōko. Yet Noriko's full response requires a new interpretation of her behavior throughout the film. Noriko, the image of virtue and correct behavior, has volunteered her assessment of the events of life as, "nothing but awful things." This revelation deepens and complicates the perception of her personality and prefigures the denial of her own virtue and honesty in the following equally famous dialogue with her father-in-law Shūkichi.

The new subtitles for the 2003 DVD Criterion edition of Kurosawa's 1952 *Ikiru* 生きる, although generally improved, now has the protagonist Section Chief Watanabe calling out for a bicycle (*jitensha* 自転車; "Say, get me a bicycle") for himself and his staff rather than the car that is mentioned in the script (*kimi... jidōsha o... hitotsu* 君...自動車を...ひとつ). The absurdity of appearing to call out for a bicycle adds a startling note of unintended humor to a key scene meant to reveal Watanabe's change of character. That such mistranslations are still occurring is

especially ironic as scripts of his films have been readily available in a variety of sources, including the illustrated bilingual scripts for the older Kurosawa films that were published in a series of six volumes more than three decades ago.<sup>3</sup>

Most Western discussions of Japanese film still fail to engage more than a smattering of the key critical literature in Japanese. Another major problem caused by this lack of engagement, and one that clearly illustrates the issue under discussion, is the near total avoidance of the Japanese reception of Western cinema in the Western studies of Japanese film. They frequently make quick references to the impact of specific films or Western directors on Japanese films, but most people in international film studies assume that if you want to investigate European or American films, then you should study the relevant Western scholars on those topics. The Japanese reception of Western films is too often treated as a curiosity, rather than as socially and intellectually significant.

These attitudes have had a pervasive and I think pernicious effect on scholarship. This is not the right occasion for the presentation of complex examples, but I would like to cite an instance that involves both literature in translation and cinema; it illustrates some of the points that I have sought to make here. The question of translation and literature involves transformation; of course, any translation involves a transformation of the text. My intent is not so much to address that broad topic as it is to examine cases where translators intentionally omit or transform part of the text to fit what they assume to be (Western) readers' expectations. Such changes are often done out of a certain sympathy to the author or the text, when the translator thinks something may be resisted or misunderstood by a Western audience if translated in a direct fashion. This tailoring of the text is frequently viewed as a necessary move towards popularizing the text in the West. Let us consider a minute, yet representative, example of a widespread practice.

Many Western readers are familiar with Tanizaki Junichirō's novel *Kagi* 鍵, translated as *The Key*. It is structured as a parallel presentation of

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<sup>3</sup> Illustrated bilingual scenarios for most of Kurosawa's films through *Dodesukaden* どうですかでん (1970) were published as Kurosawa et al. 1970-71.

entries from two diaries. Howard Hibbett produced the standard English translation of this novel in 1960, and in it he changed or omitted a number of small references to film. One instance deals with the character Kimura, who is depicted as an attractive yet highly manipulative young man who involves himself in the affairs of the family. At one point Kimura takes several of the primary characters out to the movies. Tanizaki names the movie, Billy Wilder's 1954 film *Sabrina*.<sup>4</sup> Hibbett omits the exact reference in his translation. This and the other examples are interesting, as the film references all relate to foreign films shown in Japan within months of their release in the West in 1954. The first chapter of the serialized novel first emerged in the January 1956 issue of *Chūō kōron* 中央公論 magazine. In other words, the mentioned movies would all have been readily recognized as recent films by the Japanese audience of the time. The entries in the two diaries that compose the novel's text just begin with the day and month with no indication of year. As the films were released in the fall of 1954 and the novel appears in January of 1956, it would have been clear to the reader that the diary entries which begin on the first of January and conclude on June eleventh had to have been set in 1955. Tanizaki, by putting in these references to films famous not only overseas but in Japan, establishes the story for the Japanese reader of the time as being quite contemporary. The translator, by suppressing these references, is trying to place the text in a more timeless zone, which is significant. We can argue that the changes create an essentializing view of the text.

The translated passage in reference to Kimura, from the January seventh diary entry by the professor, says, "he rather resembles a certain Hollywood movie actor—who seems to be her favorite. (I've noticed that she makes a point of seeing all his films)." The Western reader wonders about this actor that resembles this attractive young man who is potentially

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<sup>4</sup> Billy Wilder's (1906-2002) *Sabrina* (known in Japan as *Uruwashi no Saburina* 麗しのサブリーナ), a 1954 romantic comedy on a modern Pygmalion theme, starred Humphrey Bogart (1899-1957), Audrey Hepburn (1929-93), and William Holden (1918-91). Its Japan release information appears in *Kinema junpō* 100 (September 1954). Although it is likely that it is only a coincidence, the husband in *Kagi* is attempting a Pygmalion-like transformation of his wife's sexual attitudes.



malicious and manipulative. Which Western actor might it be? It was actually my curiosity about this that first led me to consult the Japanese text to see if it contained a hint. Of course, in the original text the actor is named, and the name is Jimmy Stewart (1908-1997). The appearance of this name raises a number of questions, and one can sympathize with Professor Hibbett, who may have judged that naming this particular actor as a model for such a dubious character might be too distracting for the Western reader. The suppression of the name might equally have been done on the presumption that the image of Jimmy Stewart might disturb the “Japanese” quality of the text. It might also raise the question of Tanizaki’s interpretation of Stewart: did he misunderstand the general popularity of Stewart in America as the quintessential “good man,” a character who can be driven to temptations but will always overcome them as he did in the 1939 *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, or the 1947 *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Tanizaki was an enormous fan of movies, wrote some film scripts early in his career, and was continually watching Japanese and Western films. Among the films released in the 1954 is Alfred Hitchcock’s (1899-1980) *Rear Window* (known as *Uramado* 裏窓 in Japan). Jimmy Stewart plays the protagonist, a dubious figure who spends his time in voyeuristic activities that target the other members of his apartment building while developing a relationship with his socialite girlfriend (played by Grace Kelly, 1929-82). The screen dialogue reveals that he has also been photographing his neighbors, often with sexual intent. These aspects of the Stewart role in this film parallel the Kimura character in *The Key*, who knows so much about the inner relationships of the primary family and not only provides the professor with the camera equipment that will allow him to photograph his wife in the nude but develops and prints the resulting images. Perhaps the translator just did not think this situation through carefully, or did not investigate what the Japanese reception of Jimmy Stewart was at the time of the novel’s release.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A third Western film, director Claude Autant-Lara’s (1901-2000) *Le Rouge et le Noir*, was mentioned in Ikuko’s diary entries for 16 and 27 February. The film was first released in late October 1954. A notice about its upcoming Japanese release appeared in *Kinema jumpō* 100 (September 1954).

Overall, the exclusion of references to Western films in this text does not cause a significant shift in meaning of the entire work, yet their suppression not only shifts the text towards an essentialized timelessness but encourages the Western reader to perceive these characters, and Japanese society, as being removed or unaware of contemporary Western culture.

Similar issues of editing and altering Japanese texts in the process of translation are often encountered. Recently Jay Rubin has discussed various aspects concerning the translation of Murakami Haruki's novels.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Alfred Birnbaum's translation of *Hitsuji o meguru bōken* 羊をめぐる冒険 (*A Wild Sheep Chase*), Birnbaum and his editor "removed dates and other signs linking the action to the 1970s, giving it a more contemporary feel—even going so far as to include a Reagan-era chapter title, 'One for the Kipper', that chimed with the translation's hip new style, if not with the book's chronology."<sup>7</sup> This resembles Hibbett's omissions that dropped date-specific references, yet unlike *The Key*, Birnbaum's translation added, rather than omitted, references to popular Western culture. In reference to the multiple changes he made in his own translation of *Nejimaki-dori kuronikuru* ねじまき鳥クロニクル (*The Windup Bird Chronicle*), so far the main work of Murakami Haruki's career, Rubin remarked, "I still think that the translation is tighter and cleaner than the original, but I suppose that very tightness can be viewed as a distortion of the original, an Americanization of a Japanese work of art" (p. 275). Furthermore, "he [Murakami] read and approved my final edit, though he was admittedly uneasy that so much had been eliminated" (p. 276). Many of the changes and the omission of chapters of text were initiated by the publisher and the publisher's editor. Again to quote Rubin's account: "Murakami's U.S. editor. . . said simply, 'My reaction was that it couldn't be published successfully at such length, which indeed would do harm to Haruki's cause in this country'" (p. 275). We may ask, of course, is this the publisher's cause to make profits or the writer's cause to convey meaning? While

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<sup>6</sup> Rubin 2002. Throughout this book, Rubin comments on different translations, and his "Appendix A: Translating Murakami" centers on the complexity of the process.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

noting that some people in the publishing industry do care about the meaning of the works translated, Rubin makes the obvious point that, “publishers are thinking about sales, about deadlines, about ‘shaping’ an author’s career, about the timing and rhythm of releasing an author’s work, about keeping the author in the public eye without flooding the market—about selling books.”<sup>8</sup>

Problems are native to the very idea of translation, and increase to the degree that the cultures and languages involved differ from one another, yet the concern I raise focuses on the deliberate alteration of texts to promote their popularity to meet economic, cultural, or academic goals. While these concerns have repeatedly been raised in regard to translation of texts, it is less frequently noted that the often-lamented problems of crosscultural studies are basically the same as those of translation. In both cases the propensity of the reception of translations and studies of culture to be shaped by the presumptions of the sponsoring agencies, whether those agencies be academic societies or commercial publishers, is often critical to the crafting of the presentation. These presumptions usually follow the lines of topics and approaches that have been accepted as canonical in various fields of study. Despite calls in many disciplines for new approaches and new topics that would reform or transcend the canonized topics, there remains a reluctance to actually do so due to difficulties in reception of such new areas.

Foreign scholars with long-term residence in Japan have the potential to work in a hybrid space. The limits of exploratory practice in that space are fewer, or at least differently drawn, than the boundaries for those who are exclusively in Japan or exclusively in some other country or academic culture. For the potential to be effectively realized, the “chicken and egg” challenge of creating a context for the reception in academic circles of work that is “so far in, it is out” is an ongoing issue. There is no distinct benefit to such a “hybrid space” if analysis developed within it is shaped to fit the presumptions extant only inside or only outside of Japan. The value of increased access generated by long periods of research within Japan by foreign scholars is reduced if the results are massaged for ease of reception

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

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along the lines of translations of literature such as I cited above. There are no easy answers to this problem, but I am persuaded that there is value in persisting to develop this hybrid research space, rather than attempting to fit oneself into the research interests and approaches that already exist. If foreign scholars with long-term residence in Japan avail themselves of the potential freedom from the standard academic pressures, and if latitude is allowed for the publication and appreciation of new viewpoints, all researchers—both foreign and domestic—can expect to benefit from original insights that will help erode the dualism of academic worlds inside and outside of Japan.

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