KEYNOTE LECTURES
基調講演

Academic Translation: Potential and Pitfalls

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学術翻訳：その可能性と問題点

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It's an honor to act as the leadoff speaker today, but at the same time I feel very uneasy and diffident about assuming that role. For one thing, what I have to say is rather impressionistic and subjective. It's not based on any systematic consideration of the current situation in the translation of academic materials in Japanese into English (let alone other languages). In particular, I haven't looked at all into the statistical situation—the number and kind of works translated, where they appear, what kinds of distribution they have, and so forth—and to say anything valid about the topic, one really should do that. Also, for the audience here, what I have to say falls largely into the category of common sense; I'm sure that virtually everyone here will have already thought of most, if not all, of what I have to offer. And as one further apology in advance, I'll be focusing almost entirely on materials concerning Japanese history translated into English. There are many other important areas that deserve consideration, such as translations into English of works by Japanese researchers on China, which Linda Grove, who will be speaking later today, has played an active part in. There is also a vibrant tradition of translation of Japanese materials into German and other European languages, and I believe much translation is being done presently as well of Japanese materials into Chinese and Korean. But I will concentrate on what I know directly, which is, as I just mentioned, primarily materials concerning Japanese history and their translation into English.

With that as a caveat, let me first say, too, that although the title of my presentation is "Potential and Pitfalls," for the most part it may seem as if I'm emphasizing the latter, focusing on the difficulties and problems involved in translating academic materials rather than all the positive benefits to be gained. For this audience, those benefits are a given, I think. Everyone here, I'm sure, agrees that academic translation is something that should be promoted in various forms: it's a vital means of enlarging knowledge of Japan in other languages; it makes available a Japanese perspective that may differ in various regards from the interpretations developed by researchers working in English or other languages; it thus contributes to a broadening and diversification of lines of investigation among researchers; it expands the opportunities for catching the attention and orienting the students who will become the next generation of researchers. To expand further upon these points here would be a case of preaching to the choir, so instead I'd like to focus my remarks more on the downside of the situation: why, for all the time and effort and money that has been invested in the translation of Japanese academic writing into English, those efforts have not always been as successful as one would wish, why the works translated often seem not to reach the desired audience, and what are some possible ways of improving the effectiveness of the process of communication and dissemination.

I would like to start from the question of what the target audience is for the translation of Japanese academic writings, that is, the target audience for monographs and academic articles. We can probably best think of it as a series of concentric circles radiating out from a core, or perhaps a planetary system. At the center, the core, are specialists in the same general area who themselves read Japanese. Say, for a work on Tokugawa history, my own field, this would be specialists on Tokugawa history—a very small number—or more broadly, people who work on Japanese history of different periods or in other areas of Japanese studies for whom the particular topic is interesting and relevant, either in terms of their overall understanding or as background for a lecture in an area in which they don't have particular expertise. These people could, if they wanted, read the original, but unless they themselves work on the same topic, they are probably likely to give priority to reading other works instead. For this group, having the piece in question available in English is definitely a plus, and they are undoubtedly much more likely to become familiar with its content than they would if it were not translated. But this is still a very small, limited group of people. In most cases, to justify the effort involved in translating and publishing academic research, particularly if significant sums of money are involved, the presumed target audience has to be substantially larger.

So what are these larger, widening circles of potential audience, or to keep to the metaphor of a planetary system, the spheres farther out in the system? One would be graduate students in various areas of Japanese studies whose Japanese language skills are still developing and who are expected to read widely in different fields as part of their training. Then there are academics in other areas who don't read Japanese and with varying degrees of knowledge about Japan who one could hope would find the topic meaningful and interesting for comparative and other reasons. Just as with monographs and academic articles written in English, academic translation needs to keep these categories of people in mind as a primary target. Beyond them is the wider reading public with a taste for academic writing and undergraduates for whom the piece might be appropriate as a background resource or possibly, in some cases, as an assigned class reading. Thinking about the target audience, or audiences, in these terms obviously should bear on the selection of what is to be translated and how it is presented. So let us turn next to those issues.

When it comes to deciding what specific academic work is to be translated, a certain random, arbitrary element often enters in, I think. Obviously, there is a great deal of variation in individual cases, and it isn't valid to try to force everything into an absolute typology. Nevertheless, for purposes of discussion, let me sketch two polar scenarios. In one case the initiative comes from the English-speaking academic side. A researcher comes across a piece in Japanese that strikes him or her as suitable for translation: it adds something important to existing debates in English or it fills a hole in what is available in English; it looks as if it will translate fairly readily into readable English; and it can be geared without too much adaptation to the level and background of a reasonably sized target audience, the circumstances of which the English-speaking researcher grasps quite well. It may be, however, that the piece in question is not that representative of the work being currently done on the subject by Japanese researchers; there may be something else by the same author or something by a different author on the same subject that Japanese experts in the field would see as more important or more valid.

In the second scenario, the initiative comes from the Japanese side. It may come from the author himself or herself, who would like to have his or her work made available in English. Or it may come from a group or institution that feels this is an important, representative work. Often, however, proposals for translation from the Japanese side are made without a realistic grasp of the actualities of the target audience in terms of background knowledge or a concrete sense of what will work and what won't work well in English. I imagine that everyone here who has been involved in some way in translation from Japanese into English over the last thirty years or so has encountered lists compiled by one committee or organization or another of "works that should be translated," in many cases with the possibility of funding for the translation or publication support, and has felt a sense of disjuncture between the nature of the works on the list and what will translate well or what likely audience might be expected. Surely one step towards promoting effective and meaningful translation of academic works written in Japanese would be to develop better forums or clearinghouses for bringing together Japanese and English-speaking specialists to identify optimal candidates for translation.

I've referred to what works well in English or doesn't as a crucial consideration apart from the intrinsic merits of the original work in Japanese. What sorts of elements does this involve? Let me mention two or three points that perhaps should be considered in thinking about this issue. One is differences in academic monograph style. Japanese monographs often consist of a series of chapters that appeared originally as separate articles. Some may be connected only loosely to the other, or there may be considerable repetition of points among them. Monographs written in English, on the other hand, tend to be much more in a *kakioroshi* style. Readers expect that the chapters will be linked tightly to each other and to the whole, that they will be steps filling in different parts of an overarching argument. English readers also tend to be far less tolerant than Japanese readers of repetition, whether stylistic or points of information or argument.

A related issue is the level of specialization. Most Japanese academic writing, whether monographs or articles written for academic journals or a collective volume, will be just too specialized or technical to be made accessible to the broader target audience described above. Arguments will be framed in terms of ongoing debates in Japanese scholarship that are not familiar to the English readership or will, quite naturally, assume a level of background knowledge that can't be expected among the target audience. The level of detail may be too heavy to be digestible by that target audience.

Generally speaking, works that are written in a *kakioroshi* style to start with or that are pitched at a more general Japanese readership may work better, I think, than academic works written with a more specialist audience in mind. Professor Watanabe's recent *A History of Japanese Political Thought* is a good case in point. But works written for a more general or popular audience may present a different sort of issue. Sometimes such works slip into a speculative mode or an essayistic tone; they make quite broad generalizations without providing full substantiation for them or answering possible counterarguments; or they include personal asides or examples from a context different than the one immediately at hand so as to be more accessible to the reader. The result may be that the piece becomes rather impressionistic. This can work well in Japanese; the reader, accustomed to the conventions of this sort of writing, takes it on its own terms. But often it doesn't work as well in English. The generalizations seem too sweeping or speculative; the argument seems too loose; or the reader has trouble seeing where the author is heading with it. I would say that, as a general rule, pieces that include a substantial amount of concrete evidence to support their generalizations work better, as do pieces that include ample quotes from primary sources. This again, in my view, is one of the strong points of Professor Watanabe's book. Authors, of course, want to get their own interpretations across. But making concrete evidence and quotes from primary sources available has a value of its own. Particularly in that the English reader has more limited background knowledge to draw from than the Japanese reader, the inclusion of such things makes it more possible for the English reader to engage critically with the author's interpretations and hypotheses.

I mentioned the problem of the English reader not always being able to see readily where the Japanese author is heading. This brings us to another key aspect of what works well in English and what doesn't: differences in styles of academic narrative presentation. Of course, there is no uniform narrative style in either Japanese or English academic writing that authors inevitably adhere to. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some broad tendencies. Much English academic writing adopts an expository style based on the initial statement of a hypothesis—the author's "argument"—followed by the presentation of the empirical evidence to support it, organized in a topical manner. The author tries to provide ample signposts along the way as to where he or she is going in the form of topic paragraphs at the beginning of new sections and topic sentences within paragraphs. The argument marches forward, step by step. This is the expository style students are supposed to learn in composition classes; it's what we try to reinforce when we assign papers and direct theses.

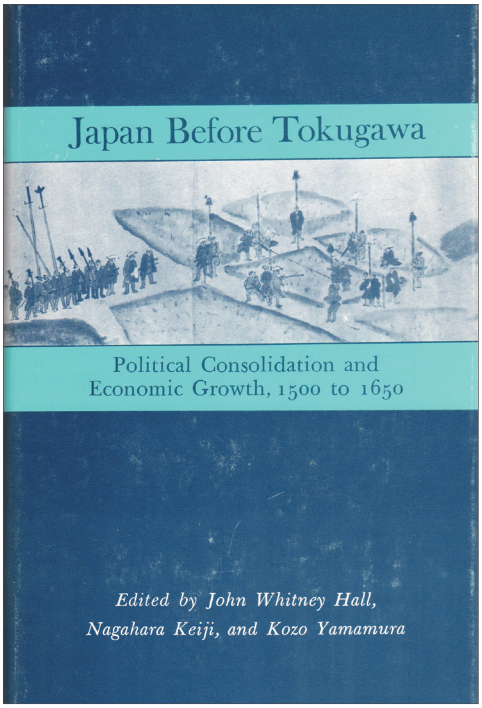
Japanese academic writing, on the other hand, does not necessarily favor that kind of blunt, straightforward narrative style. Authors often adopt instead what I would call a more inductive style, one that is more elliptical. They may prefer to take up the relevant evidence first, piece by piece, and to pull the argument together only at the end and show there how it fits into an overall whole. Instead of leading the reader firmly by the hand, it is more a mode of "let's see where the evidence leads us," here and there, and of discovering together the connecting thread. In pointing to these differences, I don't mean to say that the former style is better than the latter. The latter has its very attractive features, too. Nevertheless, it's also true that English readers accustomed to a more straightforward mode may stumble when reading the translation of a Japanese piece with an elliptical organization. Overall, I would say that Japanese pieces that have a more "English"-style of presentation to start with probably will translate more smoothly into English than those written in a very "Japanese" style. Similarly, when the decision is made to translate something written in a more elliptical mode, the translator, and perhaps the author as well, need to give some thought as to how to bridge the gap in narrative styles so as to make the piece readily accessible to the target audience.

So far in talking about academic translation from Japanese, I've focused on the situation where the piece to be translated was written originally for a Japanese audience and published as such, and I've emphasized the challenges involved in converting such pieces into something that is accessible and meaningful to a quite different English-speaking audience. But that is not the only form for making Japanese scholarship available in English. In many ways, it seems to me, the most successful method over the last several decades for presenting the findings and interpretations of Japanese researchers in English has been not through the translation of pieces that were already published once in Japanese but through the translation of pieces that were written to order for an English publication. Now let me look a little more closely at this form of translation and, in doing so, also offer a more positive outlook than I have up to now.

One typical scenario that has led to successful written-to-order presentations in English by Japanese researchers has been the organization of a conference volume around a specific theme. In this situation, the organizers, who then usually serve also as the editors, seek out Japanese researchers whose work in Japanese they already know to some extent and ask them to present a paper on a topic related to their work and the conference theme. Then in the next stage the authors rewrite and expand their papers for publication, taking account at the same time of suggestions made by the editors regarding the content and approach of individual chapters and also to improve the volume's overall integration. Whether the translation is made at the first or second stage, the editor remains closely involved in the process and is able to provide feedback about revisions needed to achieve the volume's purpose and to make it accessible to the target audience. This may involve adding further concrete examples to fill in and illustrate what was originally a more general presentation. It may also involve leaving out points that wouldn't be clear without much fuller elaboration, for which there isn't room in the article at hand. Or it may involve suggestions for a different kind of presentation or orientation of the argument so as to fit it more smoothly to the prior knowledge and expectations that the target audience will likely bring to the piece.

This kind of approach has many benefits, I think. The incorporation of translations of pieces by Japanese researchers in the collective volume adds information, interpretations, and perspectives different from those provided by the English-speaking contributors; the translations deepen and expand the volume's scope and thus enrich its usefulness and worth. At the same time, the contributions by Japanese researchers are embedded in a context and connected to related pieces in a way that enhances their meaning for the target audience. The chances of those contributions being read and taken into account are substantially greater, I think, than with a standalone piece (although this is a totally subjective observation on my part).

Let me give a couple of examples of projects of this sort that illustrate the value of this kind of approach. The first is a volume called *Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500–1650*, edited by John Whitney Hall, Nagahara Keiji, and Kozo Yamamura. This was the product of an ambitious, large scale project. According to the introduction, the project was first conceived by Hall and Nagahara at a conference on Muromachi history held in 1974 that also resulted in a volume. The earlier Muromachi volume consisted largely of contributions by Western researchers but also had a few by Japanese specialists. What was different about the "Japan Before Tokugawa," or Sengoku, volume is that virtually all the contributions were to be by Japanese scholars. This was the result of two background circumstances.



First, although this crucial era of transition had been extensively researched in Japanese and was the subject of fierce debates among Japanese scholars, at that point there was virtually no research on it in English. At that time it would not have been possible for English-speaking researchers to come up with a collective overview of the key developments of the period on their own. Second, the seventies were a time when after a deep gulf between Japanese and American historiographical approaches, a kind of rapprochement was beginning to take place. The Sengoku period was the object of debate among Japanese historians in part because it was key to Marxist-inflected interpretations of stages of historical development, of the nature of the following Edo period compared to what preceded it, and of the meaning of "feudalism" as a category of historical analysis. By contrast, American historians had a strong allergy to anything that smacked of Marxist interpretations. As a kind of ironic footnote illustrating this division of views, some years earlier John Hall had written an article on feudalism as an analytical category in which he quoted a passage from Nagahara as an example of the kind of understanding of feudalism that was alien to American historians of Japan.

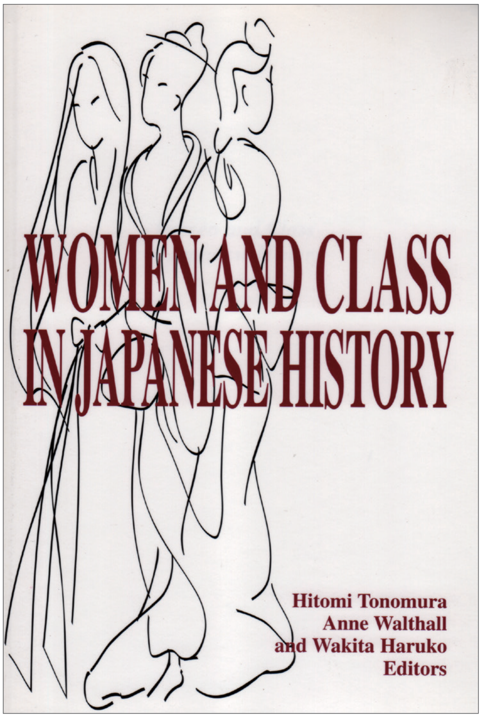
But, as I said, by the mid-seventies, the time was more opportune for building bridges between Japanese and American approaches. And both Hall and Nagahara were historians of great breadth and nuance who also had great networking and organizational skills. So they, together with Kozo Yamamura, organized a conference that was held in Maui in 1977. They received backing and funding for the conference from the Social Science Research Council and American Council of Learned Societies on the U.S. side and the Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai on the Japanese side. Each Japanese contributor was paired with a U.S.-based counterpart. The U.S.-based researchers translated the Japanese papers into English before the conference. These translations were the basis for discussion at it, and then were further reworked by the two researchers, one the author and the other the translator, working in coordination. A Japanese volume based on the original Japanese papers for the conference appeared a year after the conference in 1978, published by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, while the English version appeared a further three years later in 1981 from Princeton University Press.

Some of the differences between the two versions incidentally illustrate the differences in styles of exposition that I mentioned earlier. The Japanese version appears to be a faithful representation of the conference—it includes the kind of "in process" aspects that Japanese readers are receptive to, such as comments on the papers made by other participants at the time and a section reproducing the *tōron* at the conference. The English version, by contrast, omits the "in process" elements. Instead it presents the chapters as fully developed English articles, what the author would have said if he or she were writing in English. To achieve this the articles are in fact openly declared to be joint efforts; they are described not as "by 'x,' translated by 'y,'" but as "by 'x,' with 'y.'"

This was a very successful undertaking, I think. The worth of the end product can be seen from the fact that Princeton has chosen to bring it back into print through its Princeton Legacy Library "print-on-demand" series. Princeton certainly deserves praise for keeping the book in print, but it also should get a scolding for garbling the name of the great John Hall on the cover. Whether the project as a whole would be reproducible today under quite different circumstances may be open to question, but still it stands as one possible model as to how to present Japanese research effectively in English.

Although not on the same scale, incorporating Japanese contributions into English collective volumes continues to be a standard practice and one that is very positive. Even if not as explicitly as with the *Japan Before Tokugawa* volume, it frequently involves extensive editing and adaptation by the editors to make those contributions readily accessible to the target audience, which may be assumed to be the middle to farther spheres of the academic planetary system. That is, the editors hope that the volume will reach readers including researchers in other areas or members of the reading public who don't read Japanese, but might be interested in the subject, and perhaps some undergraduates. Generally, at least in my view, incorporating translations of contributions by Japanese researchers into collective volumes works best when the volume has a clear theme and systematic overall organization, which then provides the individual chapters with a firm context. Let me briefly introduce two other examples, both of which also were the outgrowth of preliminary conferences. One is *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature*, edited by Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki and published by Stanford University Press in 2000. In this case, too, there were parallel Japanese and English editions, but the two editions differ substantially, with three of the original Japanese authors not being included in the English edition. In their place are two chapters by American authors who were not part of the Japanese version. The acknowledgments to the English edition speak of people "laboring extensively on translations that ultimately could not be included," and we can surmise that some hard decisions were made about what would work in English and what would not. Likewise some of the Japanese contributions have been abridged. Nevertheless, the English version makes available for the English-speaking target audience an introduction of some of the most stimulating and influential recent work done by Japanese scholars on the formation of a national tradition of the "classics."

A third example, dating from the same general period as *Inventing the Classics,* is *Women and Class in Japanese History*, edited by Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko and published in 1999 by the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Michigan. In this case, as with *Japan Before Tokugawa*, the majority of the chapters are translations of contributions by Japanese researchers. Again, these translations filled a major gap in what was available in English. Of the three examples, this volume also probably spoke most directly to a perceived need, an active desire for information, on the part of the target audience. This assumption is based, of course, on the general growth of interest in women's and gender studies in recent decades, and my guess (although this is totally subjective) is that this volume probably succeeded the most among the three in reaching a wider audience outside the immediate core of Japanese studies specialists. But again, to make the volume meaningful and accessible to a broader audience required a lot of reworking and adaptation on the part of the editors, who translated some of the contributions and edited the whole as well as preparing their own chapters. Probably this was also the reason why the volume had a quite long gestation, with the initial conference on which it was based having been held in 1991, nine years before the volume finally appeared.



I'd like now to turn to a rather different issue from those raised so far, and that is the question of methods of dissemination for academic translation. The examples I've touched on so far have all been cases of traditional publication in paper. But today, of course, another major medium for the dissemination of information, academic as well as otherwise, is the Internet. I'm totally unqualified to speak about Internet publishing. But having been involved tangentially with one effort to make academic translation in Japanese studies available via the Internet, I'd like to share a few thoughts about that project.

The project in question is two loosely linked types of translation sponsored by Kokugakuin University. The larger scale one is a translation of the *Shintō jiten*, a one-volume topically organized encyclopedia of Shinto edited by people at the Nihon Bunka Kenkyūjo at Kokugakuin and first published by Hōbundō in 1994. The Kenkyūjo had already sponsored and put out paper versions of translations of a couple of the sections of the encyclopedia, but in 2002, when the Ministry of Education established the "21st Century Center of Excellence Program," the Nihon Bunka Kenkyūjo received funding under it that was used in part to put out an online translation of the entire encyclopedia. Kokugakuin continued the project with university funding after the COE money ran out, and it is currently housed within the Kokugakuin Daigaku Digital Museum. The project involved large numbers of people, both in Japan and overseas, translating the entries, and then people based at Kokugakuin editing and reediting the translations and adjusting the online version to the rapidly evolving digital environment.

The project was an extremely worthwhile one, I think, one of the most meaningful and productive uses of COE money that I've encountered. Of course, as with any such work, the *Shintō jiten* is uneven, and one can quibble with the coverage of one entry or another. Likewise the translations, too, are sometimes uneven. But one advantage of the online format is that it makes it possible to continue to revise and edit the translated entries. As a whole the translation of the encyclopedia has made available in English an enormous amount of solid information about various topics related to Shinto, information that reflects the views of a wide range of established researchers in this field.

The second Kokugakuin translation project is also housed within the Digital Museum. This is the "Articles in Translation" project, or 双方向論文翻訳. The idea is that the site will provide both translations of Japanese articles on Shinto-related topics into English (and in a few cases into Korean) and translations into Japanese of articles written in English. The aim thus is to serve as a kind of clearinghouse for the cross-fertilization of international research on Shinto. As far as translation into English is concerned, the idea is also to bypass the various complications involved in publishing translations of Japanese research in conventional paper forms, such as books and journals. It is a kind of working-paper format, one might say, but in this case the original has already been vetted and appeared in published form. Of course, again, the system is far from perfect. One can raise questions about both the quality of some of the translations and, from the perspective of "does this work in English," the choice of some of the pieces to be translated. The logistics of keeping the project going and steadily adding new translations also seem challenging. Nevertheless, the idea of having a dedicated, go-to site where one can find academically reliable information in English about a wide range of aspects of Shinto is attractive.

The major problem, however, it seems to me, is in catching the attention of the target audience, of making the audience aware of the site's existence and the kind of information that can be found there. The problem undoubtedly lies partly with the Kokugakuin site itself. It's not necessarily easy to find and navigate the Digital Museum site if one searches for it in English, at least if one is digitally challenged, as I am. But beyond that, search engines like Google in many cases do not lead you to the *Encyclopedia of Shinto* when you put in a term that is covered there. I understand that people at the Kenkyūjo have made a concerted effort to insert links in relevant Wikipedia entries and such. And as I tried out various terms in preparation for this presentation, I found that the incidence increased of the *Encyclopedia of Shinto* appearing high on the choice of possible options. Perhaps Google learned that that's what I was looking for and led me to the Encyclopedia entry more quickly than it had originally. However, in the cases that I tried, it also directed me to the older online version of the Encyclopedia, not the newer version with improved cross-reference search capabilities. Thus the question of how best to reach the target audience would seem to remain a key issue for digital as well as more traditional forms of academic translation.