SESSION 4

TRANSLATION OF PRIMARY SOURCES:
ISSUES AND EXPERIENCES
第一次資料の翻訳：課題と経験

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Translation for Teaching

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教育の中の翻訳

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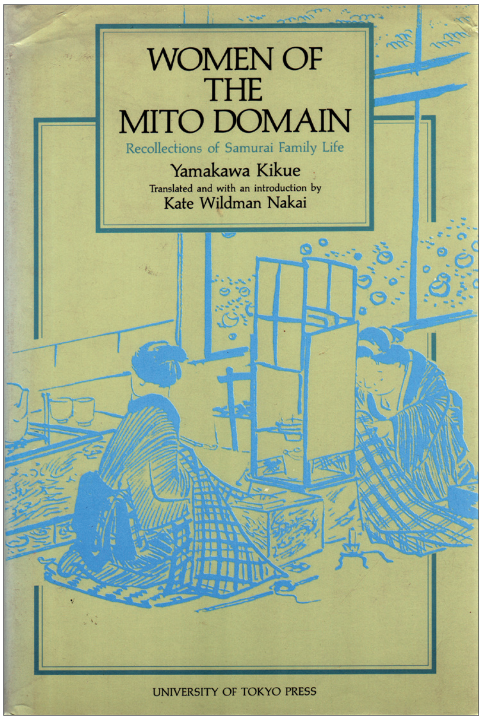
In addition to the presentation I gave yesterday about the translation into English of recent Japanese scholarship, I've been asked to say something about the translation of Japanese primary sources, a subject dear to my heart. So this morning I'd like to talk briefly about some of the challenges and rewards of translating this kind of material and the sorts of issues that distinguish the process of translating primary sources from that of rendering contemporary Japanese research into English. First let me define a little more concretely what I mean by "primary sources." Speaking broadly, one could say that "primary sources" are sources produced in a particular period that offer a direct window into the outlook and actions of the people of that time. Defined broadly like this, "primary sources" would include works of literature, which is probably the category of works in Japanese apart from manga and technical manuals that is translated most widely throughout the world. But what I have in mind here is something more narrow—and something that is translated far less often. It includes things like treatises, diaries, and letters, and also materials like legal documents.

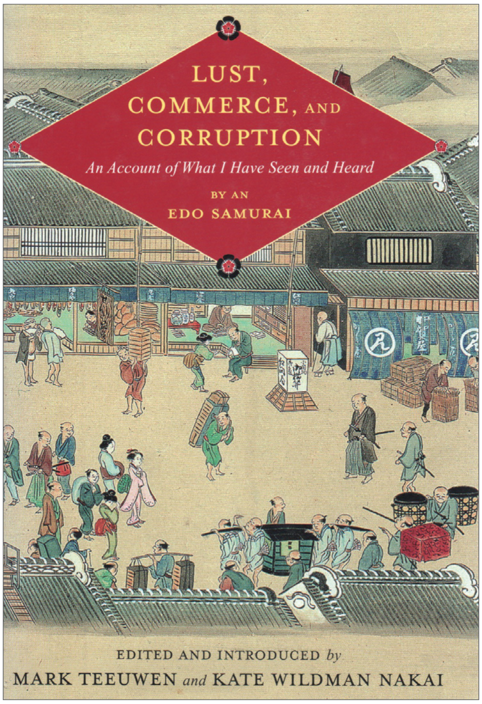
What are the reasons for translating this kind of material? Speaking as someone who was long engaged in teaching Japanese history, particularly the periods before Meiji, one of the major reasons to make primary sources available in translation is that they contribute to teaching about Japan. One of the key problems faced by those teaching Japanese history in languages other than Japanese is the lack of firsthand sources. Because of that lack stu-



dents study mainly what modern researchers say about a particular subject rather than engaging in what I think all historians would agree is really the heart of historical study—wrestling with the sources oneself and trying to put them into context. As a teacher of history, you want your students to get experience with that kind of analysis, and since—in the United States, at least—you cannot expect students taking classes in Japanese history to have the linguistic competence to work with sources in Japanese, they won't get that perspective and experience unless you provide them with equivalent translations into English.

If you teach Japanese literature in the United States, you naturally assume that students will be able to read works of Japanese literature that have been translated into English, and you build your syllabus around those works. You wouldn't talk about *The Tale of Genji* without having students read at least sections of it, or you wouldn't talk about Natsume Sōseki without having students read translations of *Kokoro* and other works by him. If you teach a course on Tokugawa history, say, you want to be able to do the same. You want students to be able to see and come to terms with what people living at that time said about their own society, or to get a sense of how people of different status groups interacted as reflected in actual legal documents from the time. Students can then compare the evidence from such sources to what they read in secondary works, and from that experience they will gain a much richer and more nuanced understanding of Tokugawa history. The same is true for the other potential target audiences that I tried to identify yesterday, such as people working in other historical fields who don't know Japanese but who might be expected to find the window on Tokugawa society provided by such sources pertinent from a comparative perspective.

Since I've brought up again the topic of target audiences, let me talk a little about how this issue figures in the translation of primary sources as opposed to contemporary scholarship. In many regards the same criteria apply. For instance, in choosing works to translate, you certainly need to think about how they will work in English and how they can be made accessible to a range of potential audiences. Yet, some important differences also come into play, I think. For example, as various people said yesterday, in translating contemporary academic works, the aim is to make it seem as if the author had written the piece in English, and to accomplish this aim the original work may need to be adapted in various ways. When it comes to primary sources, you certainly want them to be comprehensible and to read as well as possible in English. But at the same time, you want to present them as is, with all their quirks, including places that may be murky in various ways. You don't change around the order of sentences or paragraphs; you go lightly with excising repetition. In this regard the translation of a primary source is comparable to literary translation. You want to convey the character of the original as faithfully as you can, even if this means keeping passages where you know readers may have difficulty grasping exactly what is going on.



This means also, though, that the translator has to adopt strategies for helping readers to make sense of such passages. Sometimes this can be done by adding interpolations in brackets to fill in what you think is the source's unstated assumption. Brackets are a classic "academic" device that can certainly be overdone in translation, making the result almost unreadable, and in my own view they are best avoided in translating contemporary scholarship. But in translating primary sources, to be fair to both the source and the reader, they can be a good solution, so long as you don't go overboard with them. Other strategies are using footnotes to provide background information or to explicate more fully what an elliptical passage likely means. An introduction that sets the stage and provides further context can also do much to prepare the reader to deal with the idiosyncrasies of a text from a different period and milieu.

Another aspect of representing the original source as faithfully as possible, however, is to be careful not to overfamiliarize it by using terms or concepts that sound natural to a present-day audience but would have been alien to the source. To give an example from my own experience, John Breen, who is also here today, and I were recently part of a group of people who translated *Seji kenbunroku*, a well-known critique of late Tokugawa society written in the early nineteenth century. As I've just indicated in the words I used to describe the book, from our perspective today, it focuses on the "society" of the author's time, and one of the things that we hoped readers would find interesting and meaningful about it is the wealth of vivid detail it provides about the nature of that "society." But as is well known, the term "society," with its range of connotations, was not part of the Tokugawa lexicon; the term *shakai* was coined in the Meiji period to express that range. The author of *Seji kenbunroku* doesn't refer to *shakai*; he speaks of *seken* or *yo*. So although our first instinctive inclination was to use the lexicon natural to us and render those terms as "society," we changed tack and consciously avoided using the word "society" in the translation. Instead we tried to convey the text's perspective by translating *seken* and *yo* more literally as "world" or "age."

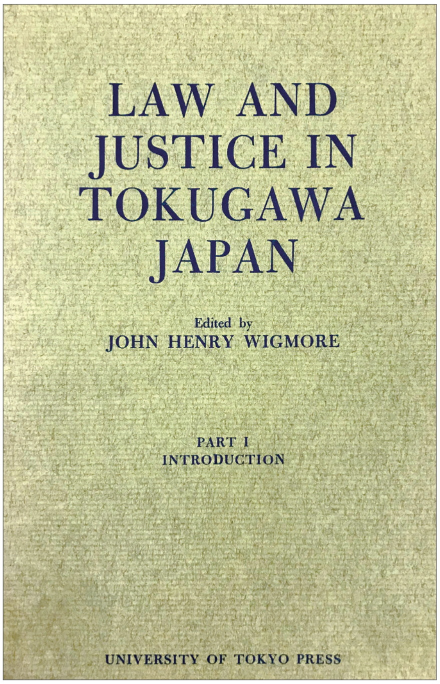
I hope that the *Seji kenbunroku* translation will reach a fairly extensive target audience, and so far it seems reasonably successful in doing so. But there's also a place, I think, for the translation of documents and texts that will probably reach only a limited audience at a given time but that have an ongoing value as a fundamental research resource. I'd like to adapt here a favorite saying of Miyachi Masato, an outstanding and prolific historian who was long a professor at the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo. He has written many monographs and articles, but he's also devoted much time and effort to *honkoku*, the transcription of handwritten documents into printed form. In encouraging younger researchers to do the same, he often tells them, "An article or monograph will last for ten years, but a *honkoku* lasts for a hundred years." Articles and monographs date, is his point. In some cases, of course, they continue to be used and to be a basic point of reference for later researchers, but many have a fairly short shelf life. But a *honkoku* of a source that offers firsthand evidence about a subject provides something that researchers on that subject will continue to come back to and bring new questions to. And having the *honkoku* available means that over time many more researchers will have access to that source and be likely to make use of it than would be the case if it only existed in handwritten form.

In many ways the same thing can be said, I think, about the translation of primary sources. In quite a few cases, the target audience should be thought of not just in terms of those who will make use of the translation in the first few years after it is published. That number might be quite small—not enough, from the publisher's perspective and bottom line, to justify putting the work out at a reasonable price. But over time, one hopes, the translation will be used by successive generations of researchers and will be an ongoing source of insight into the subjects it provides evidence about.

Let me give a concrete example here of a translation of this sort: *Law and Justice in Tokugawa Japan*, the translation of which was undertaken at the instigation of John Henry Wigmore, an American jurist and legal scholar

who spent some years in Japan in the mid-Meiji period and played a part in the establishment of the Keio University Law School. He later long served as dean at the Northwestern University Law School in the U.S. The original text is a large compendium of judicial records compiled by the Tokugawa shogunal offices dealing with judicial matters to use as precedents. These records, which largely deal with what we would call civil law, give a firsthand picture of the operation of the Tokugawa system of justice, but they also provide tremendously rich and vivid insight into all sorts of facets of Tokugawa society and government.

The translation of the documents in *Law and Justice in Tokugawa Japan* was not just a project with a value that would last for one hundred years—it was a project that took almost one hundred years to complete. Some of the documents were published in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* in the 1890s. The Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai published a larger number in the 1930s and then resumed sponsoring the project again sometime after the war and Wigmore's death. Eventually the University of Tokyo Press assumed responsibility for publishing the entire series, and it was completed in 1986, in a total of nine parts, divided over 19 volumes. To my mind it is one of the great monuments of translation from Japanese into English. It provides exactly the kind of materials that can be used to give students who don't read Japanese or are in the early stages of learning it something approximating firsthand experience in analyzing Japanese historical sources. Indeed for many years I taught a course on Tokugawa society that was centered on documents selected from *Law and Justice*. It also enables researchers to familiarize themselves with the contents of the original collection much more fully and easily than would be the case if the only option were to wrestle with the original documents.



That being said, *Law and Justice* cannot be described as a user-friendly source, and because of that, it's not used nearly as often and extensively as it could and should be. It's organized around the categories of jurisprudence that were meaningful to those who originally compiled it, which in most cases are not the same as the subject categories that are of direct interest to modern researchers on Tokugawa history. An institution such as Nichibunken would do the field of Japanese studies an immense service by creating an index of the issues taken up in the nineteen volumes, or by providing a searchable digital version. But even as is, thanks to the efforts of the many people who worked on it over the one hundred years of its gestation, its riches are available in English, a resource of enormous lasting value, ready to be utilized by those willing to spend some time familiarizing themselves with its organization and contents.

Law and Justice was a very large project. But I would emphasize that short translations of primary sources are also extremely useful. They might be sections of a larger piece or pieces that are short to start with. Just as with contemporary secondary scholarship, translating a short primary source can have advantages over translating a book-length one. A short piece may be more readily digestible by an English-language readership and thus succeed in reaching a larger target audience. There are also wider possibilities for publication, even if the piece is of a fairly specialized nature, because it can be submitted for consideration by an academic journal such as *Monumenta Nipponica*, which has a long history of publishing translations of a variety of sources. Published in that form the translation will typically be accompanied by annotation and an introduction, which again enhance the piece's accessibility by providing explication and context.

Monumenta Nipponica is of course not the only journal that publishes translations of primary sources, but you can get an idea of the role that journals have played in this area by looking at the Monumenta website, http://dept.sophia.ac.jp/monumenta/. Under "Search the Journal" on the top page, check the box "Article/translation"; then click "search." A list of 332 translations that have appeared in the journal since the first issue in 1938 will pop up. Some are translations of contemporary scholarship; many are translations of literature, broadly defined; but there are also numerous translations of different kinds of nonliterary primary sources. From it one can get an idea of the sorts of translations of primary sources that have enriched English- and other Western-language studies of Japan up to now. We may all hope that the list will continue to grow, in both *Monumenta* and other venues.