
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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On Translating Primary and Secondary Sources: The Authentic and the Accessible

John Breen

第一次資料・第二次資料の翻訳：忠実な訳とこなれた訳

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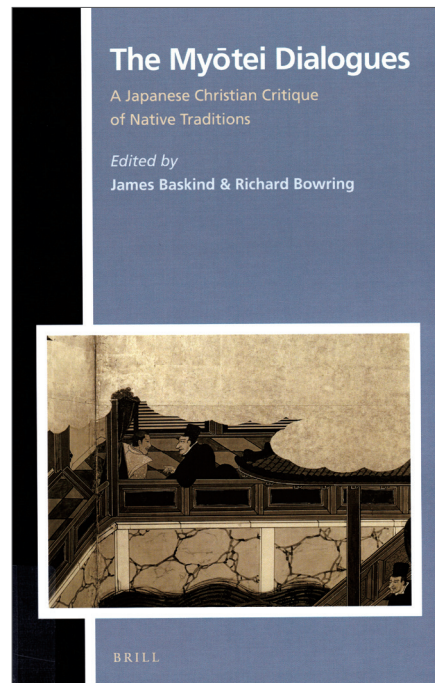
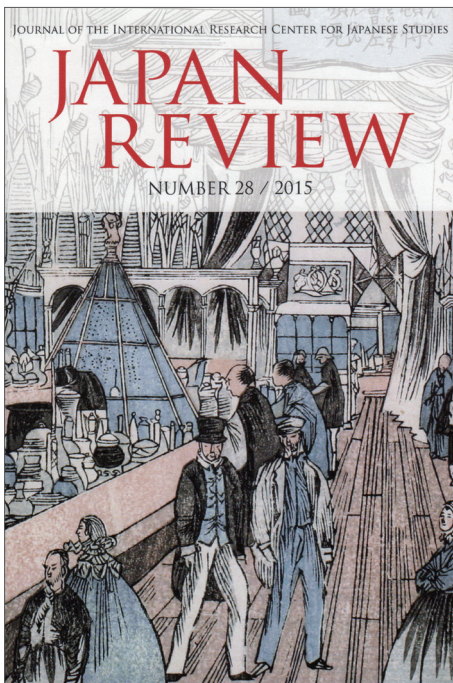
I am going to talk about my involvement in the translation of primary sources, and then conclude with some comments about the translation of secondary sources. Most of what I have to say is episodic and anecdotal; you will struggle to find an argument worthy of the name in what follows. My point, if there is one, is simply that translation—be it of primary or secondary sources—is a vitally important task. I believe it is integral to what we as academics studying other cultures do. It can be exciting, but also tedious. The only way to avoid it is to rely on the work of others.

For the record, I rarely get through a day without translating something or at least checking someone's translation of something. So, for example, I was recently working on an essay in English about the Ise shrines in early modern Japan. My essay carried extracts from the diary of a band of pilgrims from eastern Japan, who spent two unforgettable nights in a brothel in Ise's flourishing pleasure quarters; snippets from the travel diary of a priest who travelled all the way from Ise to Zenkōji temple in Nagano to solicit donations from his "parishioners." He was impoverished, having squandered his considerable wealth on wine and women. I inserted, too, the thoughts of an Ise intellectual on the relative merits of the two great Ise kami.¹ Translation of primary sources has come to define a considerable part of what I do. It is what all of us working in cultures other than our own

1 These fragments appeared as Chapter 7 of Teeuwen and Breen 2017.

must continue to do, if we are to push back the frontiers of knowledge—to put it rather grandly.

Here, I want to address first my recent involvement in primary translation projects. I refer not to the disembodied fragments of texts that I use to construct an argument or tell a story—as in the case of that essay on early modern Ise—but to significant projects that have led to the publication of complete works in translation. I think, by the way, that academics who can should be doing more of this, but we come up against the “economy of translation.” The academy accords far too little value to the translators’ endeavor. This certainly applies to the academy in Britain where I worked. To put it bluntly, British academics get no “brownie points”—no career credit—for publishing translations. Publishers are also to blame perhaps. They have little faith in us as translators, little faith rather in consumers’ willingness to purchase translations of works. On the whole, I think translation is regarded more highly here in Japan. Look at the spine of any book translated into Japanese. There you will see the translator’s name alongside that of the author, in the same font with the same point size. Japanese publishers deem author and translator equally responsible for the publication of the work.



1) Primary Source Projects

I have been involved in the editing and publication of two substantial translation projects in my capacity as chief editor of the journal, *Japan Review*. I have also worked as translator in two collaborative projects: *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption*, a compendium of critical views of early modern Japanese society by a samurai of uncertain extraction. You have heard of this already from Kate Nakai. I also translated parts of *The Myōtei Dialogues*, an early modern critique of Japanese religious traditions written by a Japanese convert to Christianity.

In order to give some shape to my few comments on these projects, let me begin by stating my position on the translation endeavor. It is not an original position at all, but I need to state it at the outset. I find myself in agreement with all those people for whom translation is a “referential operation.” That it involves identifying words, phrases, and statements in one language that “refer” to those of another language. There is implicit here the realistic idea of approximation. And similarly, I concur with the sentiments of historian, Douglas Howland, when he writes that “translation is an effort to produce an adequate set of correspondences between two or more languages.”² I like “adequate.” One aims for a precise set of correspondences; one ends up having to settle for an adequate set. This is okay, and it happens because meaning is not fixed in words “once and forever.” As Howland stresses, meaning changes and is contested.³

Allow me here to refer once more to Douglas Howland. He has much of interest to say in his book *Translating the West*, where he reflects on the challenges faced by Japanese translators in Meiji Japan. Their circumstances were of course entirely different to ours—and infinitely more daunting as they had to find Japanese renderings for entirely new concepts, like “sovereignty,” “freedom,” and “rights.” But, at least as Howland articulates them, there is a universal quality to the challenges they faced. Do you strive for “authenticity”—what has been called semantic translating? Or do you plump for “accessibility”—communicative translating as some have styled it?⁴ The former involves the translators privileging the author and the source text in the hope of achieving literal accuracy; the latter approach

2 Howland 2002, p. 63.

3 Howland 2002, p. 63.

4 Howland 2002, pp. 67–68, 74–76.

privileges the readers and the target text, and hopes for familiarity. The point is that, as it was in the Meiji era, so it is today: there is a balance to be struck between the two. For me, the negotiation between the “authentic” on the one hand and the “accessible” on the other is what makes translation both frustrating and fun.

So, now let me speak to the different primary-source translation projects that have recently occupied me.

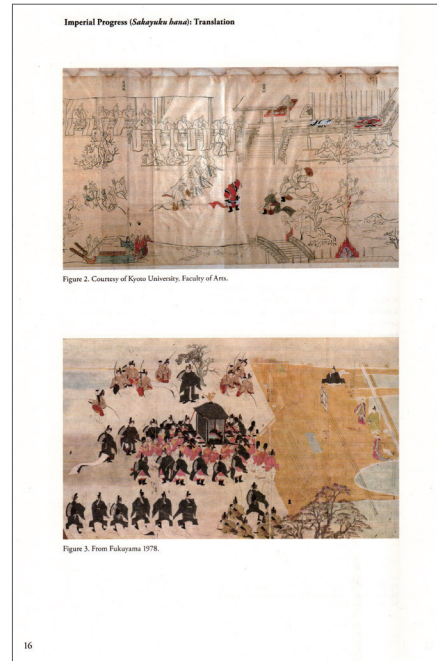
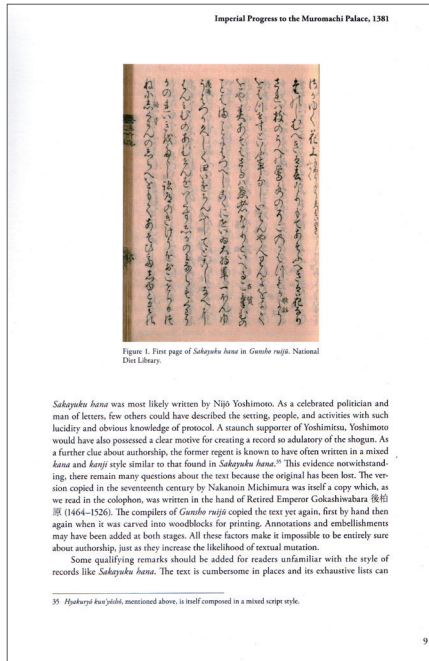
A) *Japan Review*

Japan Review is the academic journal published by Nichibunken, which I edit. Volume 28 contains the translation of an important primary source. The source in question is *Sakayuku hana*, the record of Emperor Go-Goenyu's 1381 progress from the imperial palace to the Muromachi palace, headquarters of the shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. The source sheds light on a seismic shift in the power relations between the imperial court and the Ashikaga shogunate. Matthew Stavros, of Sydney University, translated the text with Kurioka Norika, and then wrote a critical commentary.⁵ This is the first ever translation of *Sakayuku hana*; the text had, moreover, never before then been subject to any sort of critical examination in any language. The Stavros-Kurioka translation with its commentary makes a vital contribution to our knowledge of fourteenth-century Japanese political and cultural history. We published it in *Japan Review* with abundant illustrations, the better to help the reader visualize the dynamic, epoch-making significance of the emperor's progress to the shogun's palace. At the prompting of Matthew Stavros, we also innovated with format. We placed the translation of the text on verso pages, juxtaposing the textual annotations on recto pages. The editor and translators found this to be an extremely useful way of negotiating the text and its annotations.

The publication of translated primary sources is a new *Japan Review* initiative. You will have heard from Kate Nakai that *Monumenta Nipponica* pioneered translations of important historical texts. *Japan Review* agrees that there is a vital contribution to make. I find myself in complete agreement with Miyachi Masato, to whom Kate Nakai earlier referred, when he said that the monograph lasts for a decade, but published primary source endures for 100 years. My hope is that *Japan Review* will continue to con-

5 Stavros and Kurioka 2015.

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tribute to scholarship in publishing work like this. Indeed, in volumes 29 and 31, we published the complete translation—in two parts—of Imagawa Ryōshun's *Nan Taiheki* by the historian Jeremy Sather.⁶

B) *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: "An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard" by an Edo Samurai*⁷

The second of the translation projects that I was involved with was *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption*, of which Kate Nakai has spoken eloquently already. This was my first experience of collaborative translation; it was not my last. Of all the members of the team of five translators I was the least informed. So it was essential for me to have on hand collaborators who were better informed than I was about warriors in Edo society, and about pariahs and outcasts; these were the sections of *An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard* for which I was responsible.

One of the techniques we deployed was Skype; we Skyped regularly. At one stage, we had one team member in California, two in Europe, and two

⁶ Sather 2016 and Sather 2017.

⁷ Teeuwen and Nakai 2014 and 2017.

in Japan as well. We used Skype to present our translations, to subject our translations to the critical appraisal of other members of the group, and to seek advice. For the most part our comments were constructive, and for the most part we took criticisms pretty well. At least, we all remain friends. The point about the Skypeing really was that it helped maintain momentum. We also met up in Tokyo, and in Oslo for workshops. It was altogether an exhausting yet a very rewarding experience. Anyway, this project resulted in 2014 in the publication by Columbia University Press of the book *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: "An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard" by an Edo Samurai*. I hope you will forgive me the hubris of citing from some of the reviews this book received.

"The talented translators bring a very foreign world to life and re-create the engaging and accessible style of the original" (Luke Roberts, University of California, Santa Barbara)

"This translation of *Seji kenbunroku* is a wonderful and invaluable addition to our view of nineteenth-century Japan" (Haruo Shirane, Columbia University)

"The translation is an amazing piece of co-operative work, and how five scholars managed to produce such a seamless book is nothing short of a miracle" (John Butler, University College of the North)

The book was subsequently published in 2017 in an abridged paperback version, which was also welcomed:

"What better way to explore the riches of Japanese society ... than through this masterful translation of one of the most colorful social commentaries of the time? Student and scholar alike will treasure this volume" (Daniel Botsman, Yale University)

The reason I cite these reviews—apart from encouraging you to buy the book—is that they make it clear that there is a place for translations. And there are presses out there that will publish them if we can only make the case for their value. The downside for the academics involved, though, is that there are no brownie points to be had for the translation. Our universities and research institutes do not acknowledge the academic value of translation. The success of this project owed much to the efforts of the editors. We

all worked together on the translations, but the editors were responsible for giving the book the seamless quality that several reviewers commented on; they wrote the introduction too, which made the case for the academic interest of the work. You can get a sense from this image (see p. 141), that this is an attractive-looking book. It costs \$55.00 for a hardback book of nearly 500 pages, which is extremely reasonable. The book has sold well and Columbia University Press last year brought out an abridged paperback edition, at 296 pages, which is on sale for \$35.00.

C) *The Myōtei Dialogues*

This brings me neatly onto my third project: *The Myōtei Dialogues: A Japanese Christian Critique of Native Traditions*, which, as you can see on p. 148 is somewhat less attractive-looking.⁸ It is also much shorter, at 200 pages, and Brill published it at the stupendous price of \$135.00. Regardless of the cover, the cost, and the almost complete lack of editorial input from Brill, the *Myōtei Dialogues* is a fascinating text. This was one of the most exciting projects that I have been involved with in recent years. I shall not burden you with multiple citations from reviews of this book. One must suffice. Franz Winter wrote this in the *Norton Anthology of World Religions*:

One of the basic competences of Japanologists is (or should be) the ability to provide useful editions and translations of texts, an aspect that is unfortunately too often neglected (as it is said to bring no “real” academic credits). As this publication shows this is not true at all. The translation and presentation of important material is a most essential and crucial task that brings fruitful results.⁹

The reviewer’s sentiments are greatly to be applauded. *Myōtei Dialogues* was written in 1605 by a Japanese convert to Christianity, who is known to history as Fukansai Habian. The purpose of his immensely erudite work was to argue the existence of the Christian God, to persuade his readers that the Christian way alone is the ethical way, and that only Christianity offers a certain path to salvation. Essential to Habian’s method is the reduction, humiliation and dismissal of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto. He launches devastating attacks on each of these religions. He has a knowledge

8 Baskind and Bowring 2015.

9 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rsr.12877/full>

of Japan's religious culture at the start of the seventeenth century matched by no foreign missionary. His method is dialogical. He deploys Yūtei, a fictional Catholic nun as the protagonist, and Myōshū, a fictional Pure Land Buddhist nun, as her foil. In often very colloquial language, Habian has them argue to and fro about the merits and demerits of the multiple religious traditions in early seventeenth century Japan. Time and again we witness Myōshū yield to Yūtei's logic, until at the climax of the Shinto section, Myōshū admits defeat, declaring her wish to convert to Christianity. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto are left in tatters.

The Myōtei Dialogues English translation was an offshoot of a Nichibunken-based research project led by the historian, Sueki Fumihiko. Professor Sueki published the entire Buddhist section in the original, along with a modern rendition and a critical commentary. This was published by Hōzōkan in 2014.¹⁰ The English translation of the *Myōtei Dialogues* got off to the worst possible start. Somebody had the bright idea of entrusting to a Japanese Buddhist scholar, who had very good spoken English, the translation of some extremely complex Buddhist passages. This proved a mistake. The scholar's superlative knowledge of Buddhism far exceeded his ability to articulate it in English. The editors had to abandon him, and reconstitute the translating team. The team of four collaborators, two of whom doubled as editors, each translated the sections in which they had some expertise. Professors Baskind and Bowring took joint charge of the Buddhist sections; Professor Bowring also translated Habian's rebuttal of Confucianism. I translated the Shinto section and Professor Krämer translated Habian's advocacy presentation of Catholic Christianity.

The historical importance of the Shinto section lay not least in the fact that it was the first-ever critique of the *Nihon shoki* and the *Kojiki*, the Japanese foundation myths published in the eighth century. Until this time, nobody in Japan had ever thought to interrogate and attack them. What were the challenges of translating it? The Shinto section was, by common consent, the least problematic of all the sections. Fabian's main target was the Yoshida school of Shinto, and he cited extensively from the eighth-century *Nihon shoki*, which the Yoshida Shinto adapted and used as their "bible." Fortunately, the *Nihon shoki* was translated by the British diplomat-scholar, William Aston, back in 1896, and it endures today as an absolutely first-class translation. There was no point in my re-doing it. I made some adaptations

¹⁰ Sueki 2014.

to it here and there, but basically, I used it as it was. In the Shinto section, Habian deploys Yūtei to mock the myths, and expose as fraudulent the practices of Yoshida priests and then, in one of the most exciting parts, he has Yūtei dismiss the Ise Shrines and the Ise kami as utterly without value. This was all pretty straightforward. Unlike Buddhism, Shinto is not strong on metaphysics; there were no sections that involved difficult concepts. The great challenge was rather the perennial one of striking that balance between authenticity and accessibility.

I asked other members of the team to reflect on their experiences of producing the *Myōtei Dialogues* translation. One responded to my request with the word “bilgewater.” He meant my questions to him were pointless and that his answers would benefit no one; he seemed to feel that translation is not something that can be profitably be discussed. This, of course, is debatable. I obviously failed to communicate adequately the point of the “Reevaluating Translation” conference to him. Others found challenging Habian’s tendency to mix a generally colloquial, chatty style between his two protagonists with very dense passages on Buddhist metaphysics, Confucian philosophy and Christian doctrine. Habian deploys some fiendishly difficult word plays in those sections as well. The rendition into English of key terms (尊体, 性, 性命, 性体, 实体, 色体 or 体 soul, spirit, mind, nature, or essence) was challenging too; though, again, these difficulties did not apply to the Shinto section. Habian frequently cites raw *kanbun* and follows it with a Japanese paraphrase. What to do? Translate twice the same thing or reduce one of the translations to footnotes?

We were all struck by Habian’s erudition and incredible knowledge. He was not only a Jesuit brother, but he had trained in Zen, and was perhaps ordained as a Rinzai monk at the Daitokuji temple. Like all learned men, he was deeply familiar with various forms of Confucian thought, and he had acquainted himself intimately with the Yoshida brand of Shinto. We needed to convey to readers that immense knowledge without overwhelming them. One option was to provide abundant footnotes but, in the end, we decided to keep footnotes to a minimum, and explore significant problems in the essays that each translator wrote to introduce his translation.

2) Secondary Source Translation

I would like, finally, to reflect briefly on my mixed experiences with non-primary source translation. On the whole, time constraints mean I have to—rather, I can—entrust this to the experts, the professional translators. On occasion, I translate secondary sources, and find it rewarding when it relates to subjects that interest me. Not so long ago, I translated into English two fine essays on modern Japanese history. They were written in Japanese, submitted to *Japan Review* and refereed in Japanese. Once they were accepted for publication, I translated them.¹¹ When I translate secondary texts, I look for the ever-elusive balance between authenticity and accessibility, between the literal and the familiar. When the piece is difficult, and the going gets tough, I apply the technique that I had drilled into me as a schoolboy when studying Latin: subject, verb, and object. A sentence is not a sentence without a subject, verb, and object; and those “adequate correspondences” that I referred to at the beginning will elude us unless we first identify that holy trinity. I should add that this is the technique I fall back on when I hit difficulties with primary sources as well.

Recently, I have been involved with three book projects involving the translation of secondary sources. My involvement is that of editor; I am the one who commissions the translation, and then checks the translation. One of those books is so far published: *Henyō suru seichi: Ise*, a collection of essays that arose from a conference on Ise I organized here at Nichibunken in 2013.¹² The book finally appeared in 2016, and the time-lag had much to do with problems of translation. The conference engaged scholars Japanese and non-Japanese. Non-Japanese participants rewrote their conference papers into substantial essays, which I then got translated. Space allows me to give you one example of the problems I encountered. One scholar presented a fine paper at the conference which he worked up into a fine essay which, in its English version, was “Buddhism in and out of Ise, 766–788.” The translator neatly rendered it as “Ise ni mie-kakure suru Bukkyō: 766–788.” That works fine; so far so good. The essay was about ritual and its performance; the author referred both to state ritual and, as he put it, the ritual state.

11 The two essays I refer to are those by Takagi and Kokaze as cited in the references below.

12 Breen 2016.

The best way to translate ritual into Japanese is *girei* 儀礼; state ritual would be *kokka girei*; and *girei kokka* works well enough for the coinage “ritual state.” This much our translator could know by checking any Japanese text that references rituals in an historical, political, sociological or ideological context. Our translator could also acquire this basic knowledge were he or she to contact the author. What our translator actually did, however, was to translate the single English term “ritual” with a miscellany of different Japanese terms: *gishiki* 儀式, *giten* 儀典, *gyōji* 行事, *saishi* 祭祀, *matsuri* 祭, *sairei* 祭礼, *tenrei* 典礼, *rei* 礼, and *gireiteki saishi* 儀礼的祭祀. This last might be rendered back into English as “ritual(istic) ritual,” which is just about meaningless. Why did our translator adopt this strategy? I have no idea, and I am pretty sure that he or she has no idea either. Our translator did not re-read the translation, and despite my instructions, made no attempt to contact the author for clarification. In brief, our translator took no responsibility for checking or editing his or her work.

I encountered the problem of the professional translator’s failure to take responsibility for checking, editing, communicating in a project to be published shortly as *Kyoto’s Renaissance: The Modern History of an Ancient Capital*. This book springs not from a conference, but from the shared interest of a group of scholars in exploring what happened to Kyoto after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In this case, all the essays except for the one I wrote, are in Japanese; all needed to be translated into English. I recruited a team of translators, some professional, some not—and gave them instructions on the need to seek that balance the authentic and accessible, literal and familiar; to make contact with the authors if they encountered difficulties and, above all, to take responsibility for the translation which, after all, will appear in a commercially published book and be bought and read by lots of people. In this project, it was those who did not make a living out of translation who did the better job.

The collection contains a very interesting essay on modern Kyōyaki pottery, and its development in the Meiji period. The original Japanese was clear, but in parts, the English translation almost defies comprehension.

If we look at the sample designs originated by this company in 1889, those patterns are no different from the “products that are currently being exported to America even now (1962, author’s notes),” and it is mentioned by parties concerned later on that they “if anything, had daring designs.”

Even in context, this requires four or five re-reads to make sense of it. But the problem here is that the translator did not re-read it, or check it, or attempt to polish it. He or she did not stop to identify accessibility—not to mention authenticity—as a problem, and so saw no need to consult with the author or indeed the editor. This next example is even more obscure:

However, on the other hand, controversy that this way of doing things was excessive also has been introduced. Guessing from this criticism of Nakazawa, it should be seen that, though the creation of designs from natural objects was the norm in Europe at the time, designs also did progress rapidly from conventional natural forms and signs of abstraction did emerge in Japan.

It is not a case of this translator's inability to understand the Japanese. It is simply that he or she has no sense of responsibility towards author, editor or indeed the reader; no awareness of the need to negotiate the authentic and the accessible, the literal and the familiar.

I am not suggesting for a moment that this is typical of what happens when a professional translator is commissioned to translate an academic text. But this case does make the point that translation involves communication on multiple levels. The translator is communicating, on behalf of the author, with the reader. He or she owes it to the author to make an effort to understand what the author is trying to say; to communicate with the author if the author's meaning is not obvious. The translator has a responsibility to the readers, the third of three key players in the translation business, too, who buy and read the book. It is surely the case that there are no translation problems that cannot be solved by communication. But it is translator who is the lead-communicator; the translator alone is responsible for the translation.

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