

Translating Poetry Into Japanese

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Introduction

Translating poetry is certainly a bold attempt since poetry is always trying to escape from a general meaning or function of sentences and it often depends upon images which are too unpredictable for foreign readers. Poetry is also very much dependent on the sound or language structure itself which is again not able to reflect in another language. However, these barriers did not always discourage translators who were attracted to the novel and fascinating images or expressions of foreign poetry. Indeed, like any other country, in Japan too, there appeared many outstanding works of translations which stimulated poets themselves and led them to a new kind of creation or even transformed the view of not only poets but also general readers and in the end transformed even the stream of poetry.

Before reaching such an extraordinary stage caused by a certain translation, needless to say, there are a lot of difficulties in the way that translators have to get over. In this small paper, I will first trace the introduction and translation of Rabindranath's poetry into Japanese and then will observe some of the excellent works of translation in the literary history of Japan in order to derive a future perspective of a certain achievement. In the context, I am also going to look into those problems translators have faced so far and their brilliant efforts of getting over the barriers together with their outcome in the literary world of Japan.

1 Some aspects of translation; in the case of Rabindranath

There is no doubt that works of Rabindranath Tagore have been translated the most into Japanese among Bengali poetry. The first translation of Rabindranath appeared in the magazine called *Zamboa* in February, 1913 and it should be noted that it was *before* Rabindranath received the Nobel Prize for literature. The translator was Mashino Saburo who indeed dedicated the rest of his life, which was no more than three years then though, to introduce this Bengali poet who

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was totally unknown to Japanese readers. Soon after the news that Rabindranath had received the Nobel Prize as the first non-European poet reached Japan, several other translations started to appear in various magazines in 1914. However, the real rush of publishing Rabindranath's poetry and other works was observed in 1915, caused by the expectation of Rabindranath's visit to Japan. The poet's visit was actually realized in the next year and these two years, 1915 and 1916, were the high peaks of such publications.

Here we can see an interesting phenomenon of acceptance of foreign literature. Only publishing a certain translation is, regardless of its quality, not enough for wide reception. It needs something more, a kind of special motive rooted in the background of its own culture. The first translation of Mashino and several others following after that did not raise any reaction, on the contrary, the whole literary world "remained silent" then.⁽¹⁾ Only a few months' later, the expectation of the visit of Rabindranath suddenly created a sensation and those works, which had been done before, started to be widely read. There also appeared other new translations at the time of this heated introduction of Rabindranath, however, there was no major gap of quality between the translations of the first stage and the new ones.

We also should not forget the fact that those were all second-hand translations from English. When Rabindranath translated his poetry himself, he dismissed the idea of presenting it in verse form and adopted the style of prose poem so that naturally those translations in Japanese were done in the same style. Most of the intellectuals *did* know that Rabindranath's original poetry was written in Bengali and some of them claimed that those second-hand translations were unable to reflect the poet's talent.

Although we can often find this kind of comment, that there should be a translation from the original text, no such translations came out until 1961⁽²⁾ due to the simple fact that there was no single translator who could read the original Bengali. On the other hand, there appeared several versions of Japanese translations from Rabindranath's English poetry until then and one can safely assume that the one by Yamamuro Shizuka (1906-2000) was the most popular and widely read among them.

²The translation from the original Gitanjali was done by Watanabe Shoko in 1961 and this was the first attempt to translate Bengali poetry. We are going to discuss about this translation later. As for prose writing, Sano Jinnosuke translated Gora from the original and published it much earlier in 1929.

Yamamuro, who was a specialist of North European literature as well as a poet himself, became interested in Rabindranath's works in his youth and translated quite a lot of them and not only his poems, but also his short stories, essays and dramas. His first translation of Rabindranath's poetry came out in 1943, in the midst of the war period and 12 poems were expunged from the book by a strict censorship then. His second book was published in 1957, the third and the final book in 1966, which is still in the market. The second and the third book were based on each previous book though he continued to add new translations. In the end, the last book titled *Tagoru Shishu (The Poetry of Tagore)* contained 150 poems of his selection from *The Gardener, The Crescent Moon, Lover's Gift, Crossing, Stray Birds, Fireflies, Gitanjali, The Fugitive, A Flight of Swans, Fruit-Gathering, The Golden Boat* and *Selected Poems* published by Visva Bharati.

Being a poet himself and having had quite a lot of experience of translation, Yamamuro's translation is fluent and his book has been widely read and still is quoted from time to time. Yamamuro's life long effort to introduce Rabindranath, especially those determined works during the war time, should not be undermined in the history of reception of Rabindranath. Still, the only drawback is, he could not read Bengali and all the translations were from English or French. This does not mean he totally ignored the importance of the original since he said: "There might be a question that all my translations are from English (only a few from French) though the originals are written in Bengali. Even if those English poems were translated by the poet himself, the greater portion of the original taste might have been lost in these poems."⁽³⁾

However, at the same time he emphasizes the importance of English poems of Rabindranath and says:

However, I am not saying this just because I cannot read Bengali, but those English poems might have become more clear and impressive than the original since the poet had to simplify the poetry. Through translation, the fluent expression of the original might have been lost, but there is a possibility that it strained the construction and essence of the poem. I dare say Indian poetry generally is too loquacious for us and we usually feel there are too many rhetorical phrases and so these simple English statements of his might be more

³Yamamuro Shizuka, *Tagoru Shishu* (Tokyo: Yayoi Shobo, 1966), 175.

familiar to Japanese readers. Moreover, they should be considered as English poetry by Rabindranath Tagore rather than usual translations from the original. Some people say those second-hand translations have little value, but I don't think it to be right. ⁽⁴⁾

Only the readers who read both English and Bengali poetry of Rabindranath are capable of telling how and to what extent they are different from each other. True, Rabindranath knew well how to handle rhetorical phrases as well; but for instance, the original *Gitanjali* was written in as simple a style as possible with the extreme beauty of the structure and sound at the same time. It can hardly be said that English *Gitanjali* is more strained than the original *Gitanjali*.

The complexity is that, the English *Gitanjali* or other English poems, which are usually the texts of those translations, are also done by the same poet. No one can dismiss the value of these English versions and those are certainly more easily accessible to foreign readers. After all, this English version has its own significance as Buddhadeva Bose says: “*Gitanjali* is a miracle of translation. The miracle is not that so much has survived; but the poems are re-born in the process, the flowers bloom anew on foreign soil.”⁽⁵⁾ Hence Yamamuro's indication that English poetry of Rabindranath is also his own creation is also right. What we must confirm here is, it only represents one side, which is rather minor, of the poet and the rest and major essence of the same poet's creation cannot be neglected in any case.

After the war, the second generation took the direct translation in hand along with the stream of re-appreciation of Rabindranath, and among them, Watanabe Shoko's ⁽⁶⁾ complete translation of *Gitanjali* is noteworthy since it was done from the original Bengali for the first time. This translation was first published in 1961 by Apolon-sha on the occasion of a hundred years of birth anniversary of the poet. The whole part was later issued in a paper-back series of Iwanami in 1977, which is one of the oldest and authorized series of world and Japanese literature. It was an epoch making publication and not only is it still available in the market, it is recognized as the most reliable book of Rabindranath's poetry.

⁴ibid., 176.

⁵Buddhadeva Bose, Kabi Rabindranath (Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1970), 89.

⁶Watanabe Shoko (1907-77) was a famous scholar of Buddhism and knowing Sanskrit and other foreign languages, learned Bengali almost himself as well.

The title of the book is, same as Yamamura's, *Tagoru shishu (The Poetry of Tagore)*. The striking feature of this book is that, Watanabe translated not only all the poems of original *Gitanjali*, but also translated once again all the poems of English *Gitanjali* as well, and presented both the translations in a single volume so that the readers can compare and recognize clearly the fundamental differences between the two. This presentation of his opened the eyes of readers regarding creative abilities of Rabindranath. He also added a detailed list of all the poems, that is, when and where each poem of the original *Gitanjali* was written, and also from which original Bengali text each English *Gitanjali* poem was translated.

Unlike Yamamuro, working with the original text, he emphasizes the difference between the original *Gitanjali* and the English *Gitanjali*, saying:

If we pay attention to the style of poetry, we can easily notice that all 157 poems of the original *Gitanjali* were written in various fixed verse forms and had been meant for singing, whereas all 103 poems of English *Gitanjali* are prose poems. Out of 103, only 53 poems of the English *Gitanjali* were translated from original *Gitanjali* and the rest were from his other Bengali poetry collections. In any case there are few pieces which can be called exact translations of the original Bengali. We see in this English text, many of the repetitions were omitted, peculiar words or phrases of Indian context were replaced by English idiomatic phrases or style of saying, and sometimes even extra explanations were added.⁽⁷⁾

No one would deny that poetry should be appreciated in the original language and that even if one has to read it in translation, direct translation is much better than the secondhand one. The situation is a little complicated here, as we all know, since the English version of *Gitanjali* is also the work of the same poet. Like Yamamuro, Watanabe also says he considers English *Gitanjali* as an independent work of English literature.⁽⁸⁾ The point is, the English *Gitanjali* and the original *Gitanjali* are completely different types of work by the same poet and that readers

⁷Watanabe Shoko, *Tagoru shishu* (Tokyo : Iwanami shoten, 1977), 3.

⁸*ibid.*, 388.

should know about it. In this context, Watanabe's above mentioned statement and the way of his presentation is quite helpful for understanding of Rabindranath better.

Commenting more on English *Gitanjali*, Watanabe says:

On the whole, English *Gitanjali* was deliberately written for English readers. And this is because, even those 53 poems that are included in both the original and English give very different impressions. 14 more poems from the original *Gitanjali* were included in other English collections such as *The Gardener, Fruit Gathering and Lover's Gift and Crossing*, but still almost 90 poems of the original *Gitanjali* are not available in translation, which means the poet did not wish them to be read in English.

The poems that were left out cannot be the ones the poet himself felt less confident about. We rather can recognize the peculiarity or the greatness of the poet in these poems themselves. Those poems that had not been translated occupy a special position in his poetry and cannot be left out; even if those have been excluded from the English *Gitanjali*. Even those poems which carry almost the same meaning, they have become prose poems and expression itself has also become extremely simple in English.

This is the reason why I have placed the original Bengali *Gitanjali* as the main part of my translation here, and added the prose poems of English afterwards. ⁽⁹⁾

Yamamuro guessed that "English statements of his might be more familiar with Japanese readers", but Watanabe, of course, had a different opinion. In this comment, he pointed out that the English *Gitanjali* was meant for English readers regarding not only the selection but also the expression. This may be a point which is rather overlooked, but should not be, when we do a second hand translation.

Here he implies that Japanese readers can appreciate those poems which were excluded from the English version and this kind of appreciation would lead them to a real understanding of

⁹ibid., 4-5.

Rabindranath's works. This was his belief and this belief forced him to complete this hard task of translating such a specific kind of poetry.

After all, these two translations of Watanabe's and Yamamuro's cannot be compared in the usual manner since these were done from respective texts which belonged to different kinds of creation. Still, we have to remember the fact that the English *Gitanjali* is a kind of work which tends to be cut off from the context of Bengali literature or historical background since these were meant for English readers as Watanabe pointed out. Of course, any poetic work is an individual product of the poet and there might be an idea that analysis of the text itself *is* the key to lead one to true realization and in that sense, there would be little necessity to know its cultural background to read those works deeply. But things are not so simple when one reads foreign poetry in translation. Especially in the case of Rabindranath, the English version of his poetry is often not a translation in a true sense so that this situation causes more misunderstandings and confusions.

It is quite likely that some adverse criticism toward Rabindranath in Japan could have been avoided if translations from the original were then published. For example, Kawahigashi Hekigoto, one of the leading Haiku poets of the time, once claimed that "we are disappointed for its lack of any acute cries of agony."⁽¹⁰⁾ But he might have had a different impression if he had read whole works of original *Gitanjali* or other Bengali poems of Rabindranath. On the whole, readers of English works of Rabindranath have an impression of the poet as romantic, sentimental and somewhat otherworldly and many of the writers and poets in Japan actually dismissed Rabindranath's works being based on that image. On the other hand, some admirers of Rabindranath *do* like the very image so that they tend to search for similar works which strengthen it and unconsciously dismiss other aspects that do not fit. It is quite difficult to sweep off the first image once it is evolved.

Incomplete knowledge about the cultural background also often results in unfortunate misunderstandings or confusions. Having known that many of Rabindranath's poems were meant for singing, Iwano Homei, a critic, once said; "Lyrics meant for singing cannot be poetry worth

¹⁰Kawahigashi Hekigoto, "Tagoru no insho (The Impression of Tagore)", *Nihon oyobi nihonjin* 683 (July, 1916): 135.

talking about.”⁽¹¹⁾ Iwano was one of those critics who were extremely harsh to Rabindranath for some reason and we do not have to take this saying to the letter, however, it also cannot be denied that many readers were puzzled when they came to know that the original *Gitanjali* poems were actually songs. It is sometimes difficult to imagine that modern serious poetry *could* be a song especially in the culture where there is no similar style of literature.

Even Yamamuro, as we have seen already, did his work under a kind of incomplete knowledge though it did not affect him so much in a negative way. Not only did he say English *Gitanjali* “might have become more clear and impressive” than the original, he also dared to say that “Indian poetry generally is too loquacious for us.”

It is not clear that on what basis he had this kind of impression, but we can at least say that Rabindranath’s works are not always loquacious. Indeed, general readers in Japan are not fond of long and grand poems and rather prefer compact and dense expressions so that poets in Japan usually cut down their expressions to the very limit. Rabindranath himself found out this fact as we can see in his travelogue *Japan Yatri*.⁽¹²⁾ Yet, this cannot be the reason that readers in Japan do not have to read Rabindranath’s original poetry in Bengali.

If we turn our eyes to the difference in the taste, of course it creates another interesting phenomenon regarding the response of the readers. It is a well-known fact that Rabindranath often wrote short poems while in Japan and those works were published under the title of *Stray Birds* or *Lekhan*. They were hardly recognized as serious poetry back in Bengal, while they became quite popular in Japan or other countries. Rabindranath himself made some comments regarding *Lekhan* saying “Bengalis are used to read long and grand poems so that if the size of the poem is rather small, they cannot take it as a proper poem”.⁽¹³⁾ In the same writing, Rabindranath claims that some readers in Bengal used to count lines of *Gitanjali* or other poems and declared his miserliness in writing poems. The size of a certain poem seems a rather minor factor of the style of poetry, but at the same time it should not be totally ignored since it sometimes affects the reception of the work.

¹¹Iwano Homei, “Tagoru-shi ni chokugen su (An Appeal to Tagore)”, Yomiuri newspaper, 16-7, June, 1916.

¹²In his travelogue *Japan Yatri*, Rabindranath talks about its nature to “condense one’s expressions (nijer prakashke atyanta sankhipt karte thaka)” quoting Matsuo Basho’s Haiku. Rabindranath Tagore, *Japan Yatri* (Kolkata: Vishvabharati, 1974), 82-3.

¹³Rabindranath Tagore, *Lekhan*, Rabindra Racanabali vol 14 (Kolkata: Vishvabharati, 1942), 528.

After all, we can hardly predict whether a certain translation will be well accepted or not since there are so many unstable factors. Not only in the case of Rabindranath, but also in other cases of renowned poets, there always remains a mystery when and why they are well accepted or not. A sincere work of translation is not always rewarded but on the other hand, there exists the so called apt translation which makes the work undying in a foreign language.

Unfortunately, Rabindranath has not had any translation of this level yet and it cannot be helped in a sense as there are only a small number of people who are involved in Bengali literature compared to others such as English, French or Russian literature. Still, even in those foreign literatures which have a longer history of translation, translators have found no simple answer for what is a good translation and how to work to create an apt translation.

The first translation of Bengali poetry, *Gitanjali* by Watanabe, appeared in 1961, while the first translation of English poetry came out in 1882 so that it won't be an irrelevant attempt if we look into a brief history of translation of poetry in Japan in order to have a view of future prospect of translating Rabindranath or any other Bengali poet. But before doing so, we should take a closer look into Watanabe's translation so as to make clear the barriers when one translates poetry into Japanese.

2 Translating poetry; Turning its rhythm into another

Gitanjali is a special poetry in many ways in Bengali literature. But its style, particularly that of "the perfect beauty" critics say ⁽¹⁴⁾, becomes the biggest barrier when someone tries to translate it. Watanabe was conscious about the verse form of original *Gitanjali* so that he had to devise some means to apply such a form into Japanese.

The trick he resorted to was the use of literary language in order to make a certain verse form in Japanese. He says:

Gitanjali is meant for reciting and singing. I wanted to preserve the poetry form as much as possible, which meant keeping the number and the length of

¹⁴For example, Buddhadeva Bose says "When we observe perfect work like *Gitanjali*, we don't feel like adding anything there." Buddhadeva Bose, *Kabi Rabindranath*, 74.

lines almost the same. I also wanted to make them fit for singing as they were in Bengali. Under this condition, I did not have any choice other than translating in literary form. I wonder what kind of Japanese language is appropriate for the poetry which is classical as well as familiar for ordinary people. My choice is only an attempt. Wishing someone in the future will translate these poems into colloquial verse with the cultivated style of the original, I will present this defective translation of mine. ⁽¹⁵⁾

He was so conscious about the difference between English and original *Gitanjali* that he could never translate the original in prose style. This trial to present the closest style of the original led him to choose the literary form of the language. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The problem is, the literary form of writing was completely abandoned in Japanese long before the publication of this book. In Japan, almost all the poems are written in the style of prose poem or colloquial free verse nowadays, except those traditional poems such as Haiku. The fact that there is no specific metre in modern Japanese poetry makes it all the more difficult to translate any verses into Japanese. Of course, the translator knows the fact, so that he says this is an attempt. But it cannot also be denied that this style might keep some readers at a distance.

His vocabulary is generally plain but he could not help using some archaic words in the style of literary language. On the whole, his translation looks rather old fashioned even than the original though it has a certain fragrance of *Gitanjali*. Of course any translator will sympathize with him if he reads Watanabe's confession above, "did not have any choice other than translating in literary form" under the condition of trying to preserve the verse form of the original. What we should think now is if it is the only way to make a verse form and how to solve the problem of creating a certain rhythm in Japanese poetry in a colloquial form.

Not only in modern literature, Japanese poetry has long been rather pictorial than musical as Rabindranath keenly observed "all the poems I have heard so far are poems of seeing pictures,

¹⁵Watanabe Shoko, Tagoru shishu, 387.

¹⁶Actually, Watanabe did not follow any kind of fixed verse form in his translation. For example, the form in the first stanza of 67th poem of *Gitanjali* is: 5,5 / 5,7 / 3,6 / 2,6 / 2,7 / 3,7. He sometimes uses 5 and 7 feet which are regular in the Japanese tradition, but avoided it consisting only 5 and 7 which would be monotonous for modern readers.

not of singing songs”⁽¹⁷⁾ when he was in Japan in 1916. Even the traditional verse form like Haiku or Waka usually appears too short to preserve any specific metre and it may be hardly recognized as proper verse form for non-Japanese readers since there seems to be no repetition of a certain rhythm. This characteristic of Japanese poetry becomes the biggest barrier when one tries to translate foreign poetry and it can be said that Watanabe’s attempt was a kind of desperate resort to create some kind of a rhythm in his translation. This barrier has always stood in the way of translating foreign poetry, hence, it won’t be futile to trace some translations from European languages here which have a longer history.

There is a famous translation theory by Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909) who was an eminent writer and also a translator of Russian literature. He was a pioneer of translating western literature and his translation greatly influenced the idea of literature or style of writing in modern Japan. His short essay titled “My standard of translation” has also influenced translators in Japan a lot and is still quoted from time to time. The most famous part of this writing is:

I have never dismissed even one comma or period so that if there are three commas and one period in the original text, I made it a rule to use three commas and one period in my translation too. ⁽¹⁸⁾

¹⁷Rabindranath Tagore, *Japan Yatri*, 82. Rabindranath, of course, indicates its pictorial feature of poetic expression, but here we should point out another pictorial factor in writing poetry in Japanese language. This factor lies in the writing system of using different kind of characters which is rather complicated. In Japanese, three kinds of characters, respectively named Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji, are used altogether. Kanji is Chinese character which is ideographical and both Hiragana and Katakana are Japanese character which is phonetic. The trick is, a certain word can be written in each of these three characters so that there is a choice how we write a certain word. In prose writing, there is somewhat a standard of choosing characters, but in poetry, it is almost free to write in any character. For example, “mizu”, a word for water, can be written in any of these three characters and if it is written in Hiragana it looks soft whereas in Kanji it looks rather stiff. This word is not usually written in Katakana since Katakana is a character for foreign words, however, if the poet dares to use Katakana for “mizu”, and actually sometimes does, it can give queer or distinct impression to readers. On the whole, the choice of characters can create very much different impression and poets are usually concerned about it. Moreover, this word “mizu” is written in two letters in Katakana or Hiragana while in Kanji in one letter. It means that the shorter the sentence will appear the more Kanji one uses though phonetically these two sentences are exactly the same. This is only a part of the technique in writing poetry and anyway, poets in Japanese have to be very keen about how it looks as well as how it sounds. This technique of writing a certain sentence is naturally applied by translators also.

¹⁸Futabatei Shimei, “*Yo ga honyaku no hyojun (My standard of translation)*”, *Futabatei Shimei zenshu 5* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), 174.

This part is usually quoted to show how much he was attentive to preciseness, but that is rather too simplified an interpretation and actually misses the point of his idea. In the beginning of the same essay, Futabatei indicates as follows:

On the whole, western writings do not appeal so much when one only goes through them. However, if you once relish those writings you will find a kind of tone or melody and it will become clearer when you actually recite them that they are somewhat musical. That is why we can enjoy listening someone read aloud from western writings. Actually, we can realize better what it means when we read silently, but even if we do not clearly understand the meaning of the sentence because of our lack of knowledge, we rather find it enjoyable to read aloud. This is certainly one feature of western writings. On the other hand, we do not have this kind of musical sense in our sentences.

Anyhow, once I decide to translate foreign writings, I think I must reflect the tone or rhythm of the original – this idea settled my standard style whenever I attempt to translate foreign writings.

When we try to translate any foreign works, if we only attend to its meaning and give too much weight to it, we could damage the rhythm of the original sentences. Therefore, I believed that I should first apprehend the rhythm of the original and then try to reflect it in my translation⁽¹⁹⁾

The famous part which we have quoted before actually comes *after* this quotation, and it is clear what he emphasizes the most is how to reflect the original rhythm in his Japanese translation. Indeed he was not at all a believer of literal translation. At the end of the same essay, praising Zhukovsky's translation of Byron he recommends free translation rather irrespective of its original style if one can find out one's own rhythm.

Futabatei is not a specialist of translating poetry, he rather translated prose writings of great Russian writers but most of the renowned translators more or less have similar notions. .

¹⁹ibid., 173-4.

Japanese translation from foreign poetry, especially from western poetry is regarded to have started by “*Shintai shisho (New Style Poetry)*” in 1882. This book consists of 14 translations of English poems by poets such as Shakespeare, Tennyson or Longfellow as well as 5 poems of the translator. This work was done with the rather enlightening purpose of encouraging new poetry in modern literature. Indeed, three translators ⁽²⁰⁾ of this book were all professors of Tokyo Imperial University and none of them were scholars of literature. Therefore, translation itself was rather immature and they could use nothing but the traditional so called 7, 5 form ⁽²¹⁾ here.

Still, it has become a kind of stimulation of a new stream of poetry and many other serious translations of western poetry followed. Among them, three books are generally considered to be the most powerful and influential in the stream of modern Japanese poetry. These are, *Kaicho-on (Sound of Sea Tide)*, *Sango-shu (Collection of Corals)* and *Gekka no ichigun (A Throng Under Moon Light)*.

Kaicho-on, published in 1905, is definitely one of the first serious and genuine translation of western poetry. The translator was Ueda Bin (1874-1916), who was an English teacher of Tokyo Imperial University. Ueda was extremely good at foreign languages and fluent in English, French, German, Italian, Greek and Latin. *Kaicho-on* includes 57 poems from several European languages, and the poets he took up were 14 French, 7 German, 4 English, 3 Italian and one Provençal. Ueda apparently laid stress on French poetry and actually this was almost the first introduction of French poetry, especially to symbolist poetry. This translation greatly influenced modern Japanese poets, but interestingly, this book did not create an immediate sensation. Actually, the book was reprinted only once in 1908 and then after some years later gradually spread to general readers. In the end, this translation attained the fame of an apt translation after his death and has been read by generation after generation until the present time.

Ueda criticized the literary world of those days saying most of the literary men only pay attention to English Victorian poetry among European works. He also criticized the monotonous style of translation observed in *Shintai shisho*. His translation was masterful, not only smooth but

²⁰One of these three translators was Inoue Tetsujiro (1856-1944), a scholar of philosophy, who later criticized a lot about Rabindranath especially his view on civilization.

²¹Traditional Japanese verse form almost always consists of 7 and 5 feet as in the case of Haiku. Haiku consists of only 5, 7, 5 and a longer form called Tanka is written in 5, 7, 5, 7, 7. There was even longer form in the past, but 7 and 5 have always been the unit of the verse form in Japan.

colorful at the same time using rather archaic words and very colloquial words. More than that, he created various meters which were not quite used in Japanese poetry.

As we can see from Ueda's saying "French poetry, by such as Verlaine, conveys a certain voice of music."⁽²²⁾ he was sensitive about its musical elements. His translation always had a kind of meter which was not quite found in Japanese poetry before and with this rhythm, his translation stayed in people's mind for a long time. One of such translations was "Chanson d'Automne" by Verlaine and this one is still quoted often even at the present time. Not only he translated this poem in 3 stanzas with 6 lines each as it is in the original, but he applied simple 5, 5, 5, 5, 5 meter as in the case of the first stanza "Akinohino Violonno Tameikino Minishimite Hitaburuni Uraganashi". This style was fresh as well as easily recognized and it was granted that the translator conveyed its original rhythm successfully though it was not exactly the same.

The next masterwork of translation is *Sangoshu* by Nagai Kafu (1879-1959). Nagai, who became a renowned writer in later years, spent some years in America and France in his youth. After returning home, he published a kind of essays respectively named *Amerika Monogatari* (*A Story of America*, 1908) and *Furansu Monogatari* (*A Story of France*, 1909). Since then he started his writings seriously and a famous book of translation *Sangoshu* was published in 1913.

Though he was basically a prose writer, he was very much absorbed in French poetry when he was in France⁽²³⁾ and this passion for French poetry resulted in his translation. Nagai himself says; "I did those translations not because I wanted to import the fragrance of western poetry but because I thought it could be a help to polish my feelings and expressions."⁽²⁴⁾ The book contained 37 French poems of his favorite poets, and among them were works of Baudelaire, which was almost the first introduction to the literary world of Japan and which had a great response.⁽²⁵⁾

²²Ueda Bin, *Kaicho-on* (Tokyo: Tokyo-do, 1905), 76.

²³During the period of his stay in France (1907-8), he came to know Ueda Bin.

²⁴Nagai Kafu, *Yakushini tsuite* (about my translation) in Kamei & Kutsukake ed. *Meishi Meiyaku Monogatari* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2005), 87.

²⁵At the time of Rabindranath's visit to Japan for the first time in 1916, Iwano, a critic, mentioned before, criticized Rabindranat's works saying those cannot have any impact in Japan whose literary men were already familiar with symbolism of French poetry (Iwano Homei, "Tagoru-shi ni chokugen su (*An Appeal to Tagore*)". He did not mention any name of the poet here, but naturally, he should have made this remark bearing the translation such as *Sangosho* or *Kaicho-on* in his mind.

Nagai's translation is elegant and highly appreciated though he does not so much attempt to apply various verse forms as Ueda did. At this stage, literary language was still in use for Japanese writings and Nagai also followed the custom. However, his language was nearer to colloquial language and sometimes he tried to write in the style of prose poems.

The opening poem of *Sangoshu* is the translation of "Le Mort joyeux" by Baudelaire, which is also the opening poem of his famous *Les Fleurs du mal*. The original poem is written in sonnet style but Nagai translated this poem rather freely. Translation also consists of 14 lines, however, there is no rhyme⁽²⁶⁾ and no rigid verse form. He uses rather longer units of phrase such as 10, 12, 13, 14 whereas 5 and 7 are the unit most used in Japanese as mentioned. This style actually fits in well with the specific poetic world of Baudelaire and anyhow, the spirit of this translation is believed to be succeeded to prominent poets such as Miki Rohu (1889-1964) or Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942).

There is one more influential translation of poetry whose title is *Gekka no Ichigun*. The translator was Horiguchi Daigaku (1909-1981) and he again was a great lover of French poetry. Born as a son of a diplomat, Horiguchi spent many years in foreign countries including France. Moreover, his step-mother was a Belgian lady and French was the language spoken in his family. Thus he had no difficulty in reading French literature whereas he had to struggle to find out the proper literary style of Japanese. Fortunately his father was a highly cultivated person and had quite a wide range of collection of books. Living abroad most of his youth, he acquired high cultivation of Japanese literature.

He started translating poetry in his very youth while he was abroad for his own pleasure and later published quite a lot of translations. He also wrote his own poetry⁽²⁷⁾ and essays, but is now rather well known as a translator not because he was a minor poet but because he was such a distinguished translator.

His most famous translation, *Gekka no Ichigun* was published in 1925 and Horiguchi presented 340 poems of 66 French poets in the book. It looks almost like the anthology of modern French poetry though the selection depends completely upon his taste. The book

²⁶Structure of Japanese language is not fit for rhyme and there has never been any attempt to rhyme in verse in Japanese anyway.

²⁷Along with the translation he always wrote his own poems and his first book of poetry, *Gekko to Piero* (Moonlight and a clown, 1919) was also highly appreciated.

contains not only the works of those poets who were already introduced such as Baudelaire, Verlaine, Valery, but also many other poets who were unknown to Japanese readers then such as Apollinaire, Cocteau and Radiguet. Horiguchi shows true genuine of translation in these poems of modernism, especially in Apollinaire and Cocteau's poetry. Indeed, this modernist poetry in translation has become a wellspring of the stream of modernism in Japanese poetry.

There are many popular poems in this book which are still quoted at the present time and Le Pont Mirabeau by Apollinaire is certainly one of those poems which have been loved by many readers. Horiguchi once called Apollinaire's poetry as "musical lyric" and naturally his translation also has supreme rhythm of his own though he did not apply any specific verse form. Language itself has become almost natural colloquial Japanese here. His literary style, simple as well as elegant getting into a natural rhythm, has become a kind of milestone of translation and even the translators today consider it as a model.

Observing these processes of translations, it must be admitted that Watanabe's translation in literary language is untimely and old-fashioned. It is rather queer that he did not apply natural colloquial language long after the great success of *Gekka no Ichigun* even if it is the first attempt to translate any poem from the Bengali language. He was a scholar of Buddhism and Indian Philosophy, yet, he should have read those translations from French poetry as an intellectual of the time. Of course Rabindranath's poetry itself has a different ambience from that of the works of modernism and that can be one of the reasons that Watanabe adopted a completely different style. Still, it is also true that there is an expectation for further trial of translation as Watanabe himself admitted.

As mentioned before, Horiguchi's translation of Le Pont Mirabeau by Apollinaire is widely admitted as one of the apt translations. Still, this poem was translated again and again even after that and we can read more than 10 versions of the same poem. Rabindranath's *Gitanjali* is also such a masterpiece worth translating over and over again and we should at least have scope for further attempts.

Conclusion

We have so far roughly surveyed both the Japanese translations of Rabindranath's poetry and of some western poetry. Needless to say, there are many aspects and factors in translating poetry such as symbols, metaphors etc. whereas I could only refer to the rhythm of Japanese translation. We have to yield to other aspects of translation to another piece of writing, however, the rhythm is definitely a major fact in translating in the case of poetry.

It has always been said that translating poetry is almost impossible while many of them have been actually translated. Trial and error of those translations are the bridge between the impossible and the possible and all the translations including those that look unsuccessful are indeed valuable attempts to discover a new horizon of literature. As Japanese readers discovered Baudelaire by Nagai's translation or discovered Apollinaire by Horiguchi's translation, they have discovered Rabindranath by Yamamuro's or Watanabe's translation. And there always will be a new discovery when it is translated afresh, therefore, there will be no limit of new trials.

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Chronological record:

1882 *Shintai Shishu* published
1905 *Kaicho-on* published
1913 *Sango-shu* published
1913 first translation of Rabindranath's poem printed
1914 first translation of English *Gitanjali* published
1916 Rabindranath's first visit to Japan
1924 Rabindranath's second visit to Japan
1925 *Gekka no Ichigun* published
1929 Rabindranath's third visit to Japan
1943 Yamamuro's translation of English poetry of Rabindranath published
1961 first translation of original *Gitanjali* by Watanabe published