

Shakespeare and Japan

Japan has received many things from foreign countries. For example, *kanji* is letters of Chinese origin. In 57 a Chinese king presented a golden seal to Japan. In 538 Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea. In 607 Imoko Onono was sent to Zui, and during the Tang Dynasty several Japanese envoys were dispatched to China. In 751 *Kaifuso*, the oldest anthology of Chinese poetry in Japan, was edited by the poets who were strongly influenced by Chinese literature. In 804 two distinguished Buddhists, Kukai and Saicho, studied in Xi'an and visited Xiangguo Temple in Kaifeng. In this way cultural exchanges between Japan and China became fairly active in ancient times.

However, Japanese people did not know of Europe until the middle of the sixteenth century when missionaries visited Japan for propagation of Christianity. In 1543 Portugal introduced guns to Tanegashima Island, and in 1577 Portuguese ships started trade with Japan at Nagasaki. In 1580 an English merchant ship came to Hirado, and in 1596 a Spanish ship drifted ashore on Tosa. In 1600 William Adams, a pilot of Dutch merchant ship, *de Liefde*, landed on the coast of Bungo. He was a contemporary of Shakespeare's and the first Englishman of note to arrive in Japan. He provided Tokugawa with useful information about shipbuilding, European foreign and trade policies, and Western culture and civilization. In the middle of the seventeenth century, however, Iemitsu Tokugawa closed Japan to other countries except Holland and China in order to ban Christianity.

Japan shook off her long seclusion which had prevailed for more than two hundred years when Matthew Calbraith Perry came to Uraga in 1853

and 1854. He pressed to Japan to open herself to foreign trade and diplomatic relations. Since then Japan has taken her place in the sisterhood of civilized countries, adopting the most vital parts of Western civilization. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 was an epoch-making event which promoted Japan's rapid modernization. During this period, modernization meant Westernization. People wanted to attain the Western level of culture as soon as possible.

It is significant that Shakespeare was introduced into Japan in those days. We find mention of his name as early as in 1841 in the translation of Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*. He was sometimes called "Sao" affectionately. Japanese people learned not only English dramaturgy, poetry and literature but also European thought, culture and manners from his plays and poems. Thus Shakespeare, a national hero of England, became a cultural hero in Japan. But how could he acquire popularity in Japan?

It is noticeable that newspapers were helpful to popularize Shakespeare. The first Japanese newspaper was published in 1862. Since then several kinds of Japanese newspapers were published until 1871. In the same year Shakespeare's short biography and Polonius' speech, "Neither a borrower, nor a lender be;" (*Hamlet* 1.iii.75) were introduced in the translation of *Self-Help* written by Samuel Smiles, the best seller of those days. In 1874 Charles Wirgman, an English correspondent, translated the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy into broken Japanese for the *Japan Punch*. In 1875 Robun Kanagaki who heard of *Hamlet* from Ochi Fukuchi, a journalist, published a story of *Hamlet* whose title was *Seiyo Kabuki Hamlet* for a newspaper.

Two years later, *Kyoniku no Kisho* ("A Strange Litigation about the Chest"), an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, was published in a magazine. In 1883 Tsutomu Inoue wrote the plot of this comedy in Japanese and gave it a Japanese title, *Seiyo Chinsetsu Jinniku Shichiire Saiban* ("A Western Strange Story of the Trial of Pawned Flesh"). In this story, Inoue laid stress on the trial scene, described Portia as an obedient and uneducated Japanese woman, and let Bassanio travel on the railway which was opened for traffic in Japan in 1872. In 1885 Bunkai Udagawa, a journalist, adapted *The Merchant of Venice* for a newspaper, and Hikoza Katsu dramatized it for the Nakamura Sojuro Kabuki Company. The title of this adaptation was *Sakuradoki Zeni no Yononaka* ("The Season of Cherry-Blossoms; The World of Money") and this adaptation set in the Osaka of the Tokugawa period was the first performance of Shakespeare in Japan.

This adaptation gained in general popularity mainly because of the trial scene. The people of those days were very interested in law; they studied European law as a model for modernizing the legal system. The amazing frequency of the performances of the trial scene in this

comedy indicated the people's growing interest in and awareness of their legal system in Japan. The second reason why this adaptation gained in popularity may be found in the title, *Zeni no Yononaka* ("The World of Money"). People of those days believed that Western civilization had a close relationship with economics and that finance was most important for Japan's modernization. The third reason why this adaptation gained in popularity can be attributed to the description of the woman in the play. Portia, a woman of intellect and strong will, was introduced to Japan as an ideal of European woman. Therefore, Tamaei, a heroine in the adaptation, is described as an independent and highly educated woman. Moreover, it is interesting that the adapter changed the gold, silver and lead caskets of Shakespeare's original to gold, silver and iron. Why? In the Preface, the adapter stated the practical importance of iron for Japan's industrial development and showed the people's concern for technology. Thinking that iron was more important than lead in Japan's policy for enhancing wealth and military strength, he changed the casket from lead to iron (Kawachi 1998: 53–57).

Sakuradoki Zeni no Yononaka was not a translation but an adaptation. The "translations" in early days were mostly free adaptations based on the Shakespearean plot or Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. It is noteworthy that Shakespeare was introduced into China by way of Lamb's *Tales* translated by Lin Shu and Wei Yi in 1903. Perhaps Lamb's *Tales* was more easily read by Oriental people who were unfamiliar with the European dramaturgy.

In 1883 Keizo Kawashima translated *Julius Caesar* into Japanese for a political newspaper, the *Nippon Rikken Seito Shinbun* because one of the editors said, "This plot is timely, for Shakespeare writes about the fall of corrupt governments" (Takemura 1933: 390, 408–9). This was the first word-for-word translation of Shakespeare in Japan. In 1884 Shoyo Tsubouchi also translated *Julius Caesar* into Japanese and gave it a Japanese title: *Shizaru Kidan Jiyu no Tachi Nagori no Kireaji* ("Caesar's Strange Tale: Residual Sharpness of the Sword of Freedom"). Tsubouchi was not a politician, but he used the term "jiyu", the Japanese equivalent of the English liberty or *freedom* in the title of his translation. This proves how tenaciously he stuck to liberty or freedom while putting *Julius Caesar* into Japanese. Why? Probably because European liberalism evoked much admiration among the Japanese bourgeois, and the term "jiyu" was very popular and fashionable during this period of enlightenment.

It is worthy of note that Shakespeare in translation during its early stages was to some degree connected with political movements. From 1882 to 1884 political parties keenly discussed whether or not Japan should have a cabinet and the Diet. In 1882, Taisuke Itagaki, the leader of the Liberal

Party, was stabbed by a man with a knife. Then Itagaki cried, "Even if I died, the people would have liberty." Itagaki was also the leader of "Jiyu Minken Undo", a political movement in which the bourgeois fought for democratic principle just after the Meiji Restoration. He was born in Kochi City where people hailed "Jiyu Minken Undo" with enthusiasm and fought for freedom with swords. As a result, Japan's first cabinet was formed in 1885 and Great Japan's Imperial Constitution was established in 1889. In 1901 Tsubouchi's *Shizaru Kidan* was performed as a political play by Yoho Ii and his dramatic company. This performance had a political intention because Toru Hoshi, the leader of a political party and Speaker of the House of Representatives, was assassinated in June. When this Roman play was performed in July, Caesar was compared to Hoshi (See Kawachi 1999: 126–30).

Tsubouchi was the first to translate the complete works of Shakespeare. He brought out the entire Shakespearean canon in Japanese during a twenty-year period, 1909–28. He was very familiar with Kabuki and Joruri ("ballad drama"). While translating Shakespeare, he appears to have been strongly conscious of the differences in dramaturgy between the East and the West. He felt the necessity of establishing the methodology of comparative drama in Japan, and sometimes he compared Shakespeare with Monzaemon Chikamatsu, a representative playwright of Kabuki and Joruri. In addition, he was the first to give a serious consideration to what Japanese people should learn from Shakespeare and how the Japanese drama should be improved by a study of Shakespeare's dramaturgy. He viewed Shakespeare from the standpoint of a Japanese wishing eagerly to improve the drama of his country. In 1906 he established the Bungei Kyokai (the Association of Literature and Arts) and threw his energy into the training of actors and the improvement of drama.

Tsubouchi wrote historical plays such as *Kiri Hitoha* ("A Falling Leaf from a Paulownia") in 1894 and *Maki no Kata* ("Lady Maki") in 1896. The former reminds us of *Julius Caesar* and the latter makes us think of *Macbeth*. In *Maki no Kata*, he described the internal trouble of the Kamakura Shogunate after the death of Yoritomo Minamoto, the originator of a samurai government. Lady Maki, the second wife of a regent named Tokimasa Hojo, loved her own child so madly that she instigated her husband to form a plot to murder Sanetomo Minamoto, Yoritomo's son. But her plan failed, and she killed herself. The characterization of Lady Maki reminds us of that of Lady Macbeth, but Lady Maki is not so strong-willed as Lady Macbeth. Rather, she is described as an emotional woman.

Tsubouchi was taught at Tokyo University by an American scholar called William Addison Houghton. On his graduation from university, he

became a teacher at Tokyo Professional School, the predecessor of the present Waseda University, and in 1890 he founded a literary department in which Shakespeare became a major curriculum subject. As a Shakespearean scholar, he wrote *Shakespeare Kenkyu-kan*, a study guide to Shakespeare, and in 1930 he became an honorary president of the Shakespeare Society of Japan. As a novelist, he wrote *Shosetsu Shinzui* ("The Essence of the Novel") in 1885. Since then he has been regarded as the father of Japanese modern literature.

Many literary men in the Meiji Era had experience with translation of European literature. In the process of Westernization, translation of foreign literature contributed to the modernization of Japanese literature because it incited the Japanese men of letters to enrich their own literary world. Shakespearean translation seems to me to have founded a link in the chain of this progress. Some of the modern writers were profoundly influenced by his dramatic vision and poetic diction. Shakespeare appears to have become a cultural point of discussion in literary circles.

According to Gary Taylor, "Shakespeare, simultaneously supreme and central, commanded the apex of the cone of English literature" (2001: 102). It is interesting to me how deeply this genius penetrated through the minds of Japanese men of letters. For example, Ogai Mori and Soseki Natsume were the two distinguished men of letters who were interested in and influenced by Shakespeare. Mori, who studied medical science in Germany at government expense, became not only the surgeon general but also a pioneer of romanticism in Japan. He wrote a romantic novel, *Maihime* ("A Dancer"), based on his experience of studying abroad. He translated Ophelia's song and *Macbeth* into Japanese. On the other hand, Natsume studied English literature in London at government expense, and experienced culture shock. However, he decided to form his own critical estimate of English literature, and published *Comments on Literature* in 1909 after he returned home. He did not translate Shakespeare's plays into Japanese, but he studied the underplots of dramas in order to glean many a hint for his own creative writings. For instance, the heroine of *Gubijinso* ("The Red Poppy") is modeled on Shakespeare's Cleopatra, and that of *Kusamakura* ("The Travel Sketch") is the image of Ophelia.

Hamlet has been translated, adapted and repeatedly staged in Japan since the Meiji Era. When Shoichi Toyama edited *Shintaishi-sho*, an anthology of new-style poetry, with Ryokichi Yatabe and Tetsujiro Inoue in 1882, he competed with Yatabe in translating the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy so that it conformed to the seven-and-five syllable meter of Japanese verse. Their translations profoundly influenced the younger poets of those days and stimulated their appetite for writing. They were attracted by the troubled heart of Hamlet, and sympathized with his philosophical questions. Thus

Shintaishi-sho contributed to the evaluation of *Hamlet* as pure literature as well as to the development of Japanese modern literature.

The process of popularization of *Hamlet* seems to me to parallel to the modernization of the Japanese drama, novel and poetry. Particularly, the “To be, or not to be” soliloquy provided the men of letters with a literary stimulus and exerted a deep influence on the Japanese modern view of life. But there is a complex question about translating the first line of Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” soliloquy into Japanese. Edward Sapir says that language is a symbolic guide to culture (1985: 192). Therefore, translation is not only a verbal product but also a cultural product. In addition, translation consists of the transferable and the untransferable. Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” soliloquy contains too profound meanings to be rendered into a single Japanese phrase. We have such renderings as “To live, or not to live,” “To do, or not to do,” “To act, or not to act,” “To revenge, or not to revenge,” “To exist, or not to exist,” “To maintain the status quo, or to change the status quo,” and so on. But none of these really conveys in a single word the essential meaning of Hamlet’s dilemma. In Korea, however, the line is put into “To die or to live” or “Death or Life” because the Koreans lay more weight on death than life (Kim 1995: 21).

Novelists have enriched Japanese literature through their novelization of *Hamlet*. Naoya Shiga, who disliked Hamlet’s flippancy and was interested in Claudius’ psychology, wrote *Claudius’ Diary* in 1912. When Shiga read Tsubouchi’s translation of *Hamlet*, he could not find evidence of Claudius having killed his brother except in the ghost’s speech. This provided the starting-point for his novel, in which he described the inner life of Claudius caught in a dilemma between his love for Gertrude and his distrust of Hamlet. In 1931 Hideo Kobayashi wrote *Ofelia Ibun* “Ophelia’s Literary Remains” in which he described poetically the inner life of Ophelia, and in 1941 Osamu Dazai wrote *New Hamlet* in the form of *Lesedrama*.

In this novel, *Hamlet* is a nihilistic playboy, unreliable son and jester. Gertrude is very old, and Hamlet thinks that her remarriage is ridiculous. Hamlet regards Claudius as a good and weak man, and Claudius wants to be friendly with Hamlet. Ophelia is pregnant, but she makes up her mind to have a baby and bring it up alone. When Gertrude knows that Claudius murdered his brother, she kills herself. But neither Claudius nor Hamlet dies. This novel makes us feel a kind of terror because Claudius is described as a modern villain.

After World War II, Tsuneari Fukuda wrote *The Horatio Diary* in 1949, imagining that Ophelia loved both Hamlet and Horatio. In 1955 Shohei Ooka, who regarded Hamlet as a political drama, published *The Hamlet Diary*. In this novel Hamlet is a Machiavellian prince who desires the

throne for himself, and Horatio also seems to be a Machiavellian. In addition, Gertrude is politically motivated when she agrees to marry Claudius on condition that Hamlet be made the princely heir of Denmark in future. Fearing Fortinbras' betrayal, Claudius collects guns. Fortinbras, a keen politician, becomes the ruler of Denmark after Hamlet's death, and contrives to invade Poland and Russia with the guns which Claudius collected. In this way Ooka expressed modern society full of madness, wars and political machination in his novel (Kowachi 1986: 68–76).

As I have already mentioned, Japan accepted Shakespeare as a symbol of European culture. In the Meiji Era, Shakespeare's plays were used as textbooks for class at university. The students majoring in not only English literature but also politics, economics and law learned Shakespeare, and contributed to Japan's modernization as leaders of various fields after their graduation from university. In addition, scholars translated his plays and poems into Japanese, carrying on their studies of Shakespeare. Their detailed explanation and learned annotations are exceedingly helpful to readers, directors and audiences even now.

During World War II Shakespeare's plays became chiefly the object of study by scholars. But he was revived on the Japanese stage after the war. There are many translators such as Tsuneari Fukuda, Junji Kinoshita, Yushi Odashima, and Kazuko Matsuoka. Fukuda tries to heighten the poetic effect, and Kinoshita lays stress on elocution. Odashima translated all of Shakespeare's plays in colloquial style, and Norio Deguchi performed them at a small underground playhouse. Yukio Ninagawa directed Shakespearean plays, too.

The production of *NINAGAWA Macbeth* which received favourable reviews in Edinburgh and Amsterdam in 1985 revealed his consciousness of the dramatic technique of Kabuki plays. He set the scene in sixteenth-century Japan, and changed Macbeth into a samurai. In the beginning of the play, the bell of a Buddhist temple tolled, and the two old women opened the double doors of a large household shrine. They watched the drama from the outside of the altar. All the tragic events happened within the shrine until the two women shut the doors. Therefore, the dramatic world of *Macbeth* was presented as a play-within-a-play. The witches were performed by three male actors because Ninagawa wished to use the acting style of female impersonators in Kabuki. In addition, the production of *The Tempest* represented his attempt to fuse Shakespeare's play with Noh drama. Thus Ninagawa believes that a sort of Japanization is a way of combining Shakespearean spirit and Japanese mind. J. R. Mulryne who saw *The Tempest* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1988 was struck with the exotic glamour of the Eastern references (1998: 1).

Akira Kurosawa, however, had already used the technique of Noh drama in *Throne of Blood* (“Kumonosu-jo”), his film adaptation of *Macbeth* in 1957. He set the scene in the period of Japanese civil war, and used the way that Noh actors had of moving their bodies and walking. This film was the fruit of Kurosawa’s imagination and the most stylized of his all works. In *Ran*, his film adaptation of *King Lear* in 1984, he restored Lear to life in the character of a lord who lived in the turbulent sixteenth century. He changed the father/daughter relationship of the original play to a father/son relationship and succeeded in weaving the plot within the framework of Japanese feudal society. Moreover, he depicted the impermanence and frailty of human life by unfolding the Shakespearean plot within the framework of Noh drama.

In this way, the fusion of Shakespeare with Noh and Kabuki plays represents a current trend in Japanese Shakespearean theatre. I think adaptation means that many people of different languages and cultures can enjoy the limitless “performability” of Shakespeare’s play-texts while searching for their own images of Shakespeare on the stage or in the film. These stage or film adaptations have allowed audiences all over the world to attempt a new interpretation of Shakespeare.

However, this poses a difficult question: After adaptation, how much of the original Shakespeare remains? If he were alive in this century, he would be very surprised to find that his dramas are performed in various styles and different languages. Would he cry out, “Bless me! I am translated,” like Bottom with an ass’ head? Or, would he criticize, “This, Shakespeare? No, this is the director’s Shakespeare”?

Shakespeare wrote for the stage. His original text itself is static, and it is nothing but pages. His real text of a play rests in the performance itself, and it should be appropriated with freedom of interpretation in order to satisfy the various needs of the theatre. Each country has her own Shakespeare. For instance, India has her own Shakespeare and China has her own Shakespeare. When I visited India to give a speech at the International Shakespeare Seminar held in Delhi in 1989, I was surprised to know that Shakespeare had played a role in ensuring the ideological hegemony of the British Empire in colonial and even post-colonial India. But J. Philip Brockbank who attended the Chinese Shakespeare Festival in 1986 wrote as follows:

Conventional Chinese theatre was apparently in need of the intimate attentiveness to life to be found in Shakespeare’s plays, while the plays themselves are clarified by the energies and styles of an exotic, simultaneously courtly and popular tradition [...]. If China can continue to find a way of honoring human values while allowing the community a creative range of acquisitive motives, the Shakespearean renaissance may be more than transient and help to stimulate fresh invention in the Chinese theatre of our own time. (1988: 195–203)

It is true that no language and culture are imported without risk of transformation. Luigi Pirandello says, "Illustrators of books, actors, and translators share a common difficulty inherent in their work. All three falsify the original text, they reinterpret and in so doing rewrite it, and recreate it" (Bassnett-McGuire 1985: 93). Very happily, however, Shakespeare's play-texts are flexible enough for staging in most social and cultural context.

Recently cross-cultural performances are increasing, and Shakespeare is now beyond the boundaries of "English" world. James R. Brandon remarks, "Intercultural Shakespeare is the expression of contemporary Asian cultural artists and audiences who live daily with one foot rooted in Asian culture and the other foot planted in Euro-American culture" (1997: 19). Yukio Ninagawa and Tadashi Suzuki are the important directors who began to make intercultural explorations in Japan. Suzuki directed his intercultural adaptations such as *The Tale of Lear* which was performed with all-American cast in 1988 and *The Chronicle of Macbeth* which was produced with Australian actors in 1992.

Ong Ken Sen, a Singaporean, is also interested in intercultural Shakespeare. Supported financially by the Japan Foundation Asia Centre, he directed *Lear* in 1997. Using Rio Kishida's script, Ong Ken Sen let the players of different nationalities speak their own languages on the stage. In this production, a Japanese Noh actor played the role of Lear while a Chinese actor of the Beijing Opera played the part of Goneril and a Thai actress played the role of Cordelia. The players from Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore participated in this production. Not only the modern music played on folk instruments such as the Indonesian gamelan and the Japanese *biwa* but also the dramatic energy of this multilingual and multicultural performance charmed the audiences. In this way Ong Ken Sen's *Lear* furnished a wonderful example of adapting Shakespeare to the Asian stage.

Today Japanese people wish to contribute to the world stage by refreshing and re-creating Shakespeare's dramas by adding something new to his stage. Some directors are willing to re-create Shakespeare in Japan by performing his plays in Japanese style. They believe that to fuse Japanese culture with European culture will stimulate the audience's imagination. But Thomas Healy says as follows:

However, there is equally a danger that by embracing the placeless Shakespeare ... seemingly adapted and adaptable within all cultures ... participants in the Shakespeare enterprise are merely revealing themselves as consumers of a cultural resource which offers the fantasy of cross-cultural participations or understandings. (1997: 213)

This is a serious warning to Shakespeare biz. But Shakespearean stage of today is not the same as that of the English Renaissance. Shakespeare has

already been a world text. Ong Ken Sensays in a press interview, "We should not stunt our originality while mixing different cultures. The question is what to do as an Asian artist on an international scale" (2001: 25). We should recognize that the clash of foreign and native cultures breeds a new Shakespeare. Moreover, we should notice that Shakespeare is generous enough to let the people of today enjoy seeing his plays in their own cultural tradition and that he is gentle enough to allow the directors in various countries to perform an ingenious experiment.

According to Edward W. Said, "culture is a source of identity" (1999: xiii). If so, Shakespeare in Japan, Korea, China, India and other non-English-speaking countries can establish a unique identity in each place. In *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the Audience and Asia*, John Russell Brown wrote about Shakespearean performances in Japan, Korea, China, Bali and India, and confessed that he sought out forms of performances which were new to him and that he gained a fresh and exciting view of the theatre for which Shakespeare wrote (1999: 1-3). This is, so to speak, a record of an English scholar's travels in discovering Shakespeare in Asia, but it tells us that Shakespeare in the East can give a new stimulus to the audiences in the West and that he has a possibility of revival in different languages and cultures.

Shakespeare is a global artist who told the truths about the universe. But the problem which confronts us is how to convey his message to the people in the twenty-first century. Hans Robert Jauss said, "Literary communication opens up a dialogue, in which the only criterion for truth or falsity depends on whether significance is capable of further developing the inexhaustible meaning of the work of art" (2001: 27). The same may be said of Shakespeare's works. Today literature is on the verge of crisis. Pierre Purdue, a sociologist, warned us of a literature crisis. Visiting Japan in 2000, he said in a press interview, "In the twenty-first century, an artist who wants to preserve personal independence will not exist so comfortably, and culture will not be shaped safely. It will be more difficult to have the complete independence in learning and art" (2000: 40). However, we need literature so that we may act more like a human being. Shakespeare wrote about human life and human nature. I think that it is supremely important for us to extract new meanings from his works and convey them to the people all over the world.

Then, what should we do now? For example, multicultural and multilingual performances of his plays will afford a key to promote international cultural exchanges and to deepen mutual understanding between the people of different nationalities. In addition, international cooperation among Shakespearean scholars, translators, directors and actors will be much more required than before in order to make him truly worldwide. Such projects will give them an opportunity to understand not only other cultures but also their own culture, and simultaneously offer them hints on how to produce new Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is cross-cultural and universal. Moreover, he is “not of an age, but for all time,” in the words of Ben Jonson. We must exert every effort to make Shakespeare remain alive as a cultural hero in the twenty-first century. It is our duty to consider how to hold the new mirror up to nature in this age of globalization.

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