The First Japanese Translation of *Romeo and Juliet* *

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This paper examines the early Shakespeare translations in Japan in the Meiji era (1868-1912), when Shakespeare was first introduced to the country. Two methods of translation were tried in the early days; the straightforward word for word style and the traditional Joruri text style. Dialogues and narrations were mixed in a Joruri and other Japanese dramatic texts, and a play text solely made of speeches was not yet known. KAWASHIMA Keizo was the first translator of *Julius Caesar* in the verbatim style and *Romeo and Juliet* in the Joruri text style. His translations show a pioneer’s laborious effort of rendering the works made under quite a different idea of theatre.

The Meiji Restoration of 1868 ended the long isolationist policy of the Tokugawa shogunate government. Opening its door to the world, the country encountered the impact of Western culture and technology. The primary policy the Meiji government adopted for ‘civilization and enlightenment’, therefore, was the Westernization of the whole country, and the teaching of English and English literature was among the urgent projects of the government. The early teachers in this field, as well as in other fields of study, were mainly British and American scholars.

The educational system and teachers at a governmental institution which later became the University of Tokyo makes an interesting example of the introduction of Shakespeare and other writers in English into Japanese culture. The first foreign teacher of the school was an American, and he taught for three years from 1871 to 1873. His teaching is said to have been rather concentrated on the language, since it was necessary at this early stage of study although his students were brilliant.
His successor, an Englishman who stayed from 1873 to 1876, read Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, Longfellow, and others as shown in the extant examination questions he made. The third professor, William A. Houghton (1852-1917) taught for six years. He used the annotated editions by G. Craik, and by Clark and Wright for the texts of Shakespeare plays, and helped supply the school library with the sufficient number of books on the subject of English literature.

The three graduates of the University, who were then young professors at the same school, jointly published in 1882 an anthology entitled the *Shintai Shisho* (A Book of New Poetry), as an experiment to innovate Japanese poetry. Fourteen poems among nineteen printed in the book are translations and four are from Shakespeare: Cardinal Wolsey’s lamentation in *Henry VIII* (3.2.351-73), the King’s meditation in *The Second Part of Henry IV* (3.1.4-31), and two versions of Hamlet’s soliloquy in Act 3, Scene 1 (ll.56-90). The Western poems translated in the book reflect the education given by the foreign professors in the early period of the University.

However, the first complete translation of Shakespeare’s work, that is, the translation of *Julius Caesar* in 1883, was carried out by a man who was not a university graduate. This fact and the way KAWASHIMA Keizo, the translator, acquired his knowledge of English prove that the enthusiasm for learning English was not limited to the elite young men of the metropolis but had spread over the country by that time. Kawashima was born in Wakayama, near Osaka in 1859, and he first studied English in his hometown as a child, and then in Kobe and Osaka, and finally at the Rikkyo College in Tokyo. He became a teacher of English and when he was teaching at his old school in Osaka in 1882, he found a volume of complete works of Shakespeare in the school library and started to read it, and translated the plays while reading them.

His first choice was *Julius Caesar*, probably because both the name and the subject were topical. The movement for the democratic government and politics was particularly active around the years 1883-1884. An imperial edict was issued
for the inauguration of a diet, and political parties were being organized. In 1882, ITAGAKI Taisuke, the Liberal leader, was attacked and wounded by an assassin. The names of Caesar and Brutus were, therefore, known to the intellectuals of the day. Encouraged by a friend, Kawashima translated the work and had it published serially in the newspaper of a democratic political party in Osaka.

The translation was published in 1886 in book form, under the new title of *A Mirror of Roman Vicissitudes*. It has a preface written by a friend KUSAMA Jifuku, who says that the translation was made for the purpose of improving the ‘stale and barbarous state’ of the present Japanese dramas and stories, reflecting the naive admiration for Western civilization of the day. Another friend KOMIYAMA Tenko writes an introduction, in which he introduces Samuel Johnson’s admiration of Shakespeare and then suggests that the play should be helpful in understanding the Roman history although it is a fictional work. About the Japanese language for translation, he comments that they have used the Noh and classical old story-telling styles as well as the usual Joruri text style, since the latter is sometimes too eroticized for this kind of work. It seems they were not very sympathetic to Joruri and Kabuki, which were a popular pastime for the common people of the Edo period. He explains next that a brief account of what is going to happen will be prefixed for the convenience of the readers. In this book, Komiyama’s name appears as a co-translator.

Kawashima devoted himself to the translation of Shakespeare’s plays from 1883 to 1886, and made the following translations, of which the first five plays are complete: *Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Tempest, King John, Othello, Macbeth, Coriolanus and King Lear*. Since Kawashima’s complete edition of Shakespeare did not have commentaries, he read Shakespeare with the help of the Webster’s dictionary and the German versions of Shakespeare by Shlegel and Tieck. Among the translations Kawashima made after *Julius Caesar* only *Romeo and Juliet* was given a chance of publication, and it appeared in Wakayama in 1886, becoming the first complete translation of the work in
Japan. According to the preface by Kawashima, a friend who saw the manuscripts recommended to publish one of them. Though Kawashima wanted to ask some authority about the points he was not yet sure, he after all yielded to his friend’s persuasion.

We do not know why *Romeo and Juliet* was chosen for publication among Kawashima’s translations. Perhaps it happened to be the second piece Kawashima had completed. Anyway, *Romeo and Juliet* has been one of the most popular works in the history of Shakespeare reception in Japan. When two scholars in Tokyo, TOZAWA Koya and ASANO Wasaburo planned to translate the whole works of Shakespeare later in the beginning of the twentieth century, Tozawa started the project with *Hamlet*, and proceeded then to *Romeo and Juliet*, completing both works in 1905.

His friend Asano first took up *The Merchant of Venice* which was finished in 1906. Ten plays had been published before the series was discontinued, and the choice of the plays, they said, depended on their inclinations. In 1929, two series of the literary works were published by different publishers. The one was named *The Literature of the World* and the other *The Drama of the World*, and a volume of the select plays of Shakespeare’s was included in each series. The first one contained six plays, and the second seven, and both volumes covered *Romeo and Juliet*. The play might be associated with the prospect of the commercial success.

Kawashima gave his translation of *Romeo and Juliet* a Joruri or Kabuki like title, *Shunjo Ukiyo no Yume* (A Romantic Dream of the Floating World), while his first translation of *Julius Caesar* was plainly entitled, *A European Drama: A Play of Julius Caesar*. When TSUBOUCHI Shoyo (1859-1935), a great Shakespearean scholar and translator, published his version of *Julius Caesar* in 1884, a year after Kawashima, his title was *Shiizaru Kidan Jiyu no Tachi Nagare no Kireaji* (The Strange Tale of Caesar: The Remains of the Sharpness of the Sword of Liberty). The word ‘the sword of liberty’ suggests that Tsubouchi was too under the influence of the democratic movement of the day. Kawashima, on his part,
seems to have been influenced by Tsubouchi, for when Kawashima’s *Julius Caesar* was published as a book a few months after his *Romeo and Juliet*, the title was, as we have already seen, in Joruri style, *A Mirror of Roman Vicissitudes*.

Kawashima’s style of Japanese language was also influenced by Tsubouchi. Kawashima states in his preface that he has followed Tsubouchi’s method of introducing each scene with a few words of explanation by the translator, which leads up to the first line of speech, as in the Japanese puppet theatre text (Joruri text). He continues that he may add to or deduct from the body of the text itself. The practice of putting a summary before each scene was also preserved.

Tsubouchi himself explains that his method has been a device for the sake of the Japanese readers:

> The original text (of Shakespeare) is just a rough script consisting of only speeches without songs to be chanted, which is very different from the traditional Japanese Joruri text. Therefore, I have transformed the original into the Joruri text form. Differences and changes from Shakespeare’s text will be found if compared word by word or line by line with the original English text. However, please understand that my first aim was the convenience of my Japanese readers, so that they would have no difficulty in enjoying the play. Narrative verse style is used when it is effective and the dialogue style is adopted when it is more appropriate. The hardest efforts have been made to convey the meaning of the original text. (my translation)\(^\text{10}\)

This comment of Tsubouchi’s shows us how Joruri puppet theatre and Kabuki theatre pervaded among the people of the Edo and Meiji periods. In fact, they are the only theatrical arts known to the Japanese people of the day. Tsubouchi himself regards a Western play text as ‘a rough script consisting of only speeches’. For a Japanese of that age, a play text should accompany ‘songs to be chanted’.
Kabuki theatre is a compound of dance, song and dialogue with rather a loose form of performance, full of ad-libbed speeches. It has a longer history than Joruri puppet theatre, and when Joruri prospered with the appearance of CHIKAMATSU Monzaemon (1653-1724), Kabuki adopted its style and scripts, the actors taking parts of the puppets. A Joruri text is meant for recitation, where one or more narrators chant narratives and dialogues to samisen accompaniment. The puppeteers perform on the central stage to the chanting and music, while the chanters and the musicians sit on the side of the stage (the right stage seen from the audience).

Tsubouchi’s explanation also reveals that he rendered his first Julius Caesar for the readers, not for the stage. But about twenty years later, he was to devote himself to the new-drama movement. He organized a society in 1905 for the drama and theatrical art, and it developed into the Bungei Kyokai (Literary Society) the following year under Tsubouchi’s leadership. Tsubouchi rendered some Shakespeare plays for the Society’s public performances, which aimed at the Westernization of theatrical art. Tsubouchi’s Shakespeare translation was maintained after the dissolution of the Art Society in 1913, and his versions continued to be meant for the stage. The significant translators after him have tended to be concerned with productions, and the translation for the stage has been one of the features of Japanese translation of Shakespeare.

On the other hand, Kawashima is not known to have had an interest in theatre. His published works other than two plays of Shakespeare were annotations to Charles Lamb’s Hamlet, King Lear, A Midsummer Night’s Dream as well as Ali Baba and Forty Thieves. It seems he loved teaching English to young people. Whether meant for the stage or for the readers, however, the matter of style and language was a problem for translators. The two methods were tried by the early translators; the straightforward word to word style and the Joruri text style. Tsubouchi looks back at the history of his Shakespeare translation over forty years in his Introduction to Shakespeare Studies, which was published in 1928 as the
fortieth and the last volume of his Shakespeare series. He says there have been five stages in his approaches to Shakespeare translation. His *Julius Caesar* in the Joruri text style belongs to the first period. The second is the word for word one with plenty of notes prepared for the lectures at school. The third is for the performance by the Literary Society, and he borrows the speech styles of Kabuki and Kyogen. The fourth stage is the mixture of literary and colloquial styles. The fifth and the last is the modern spoken style, and this has by now become the standard style of Shakespeare translation.

In the days of Kawashima, however, there was not a custom of writing anything as it was spoken. The literary style and the colloquial style were traditionally different. Therefore, a movement for unifying the two styles of the language, the written and the spoken styles, was just being proposed by some novelists around 1885, which eventually contributed to establish the present writing style in Japanese. For Kawashima and other early translators of Shakespeare plays, the models of dialogue description were those in Joruri and Kabuki or in the older Noh and Kyogen, which were all the traditional Japanese language for the stage. Kawashima has mixed the Noh and the classical storytelling styles with the Joruri dialogue in his *Julius Caesar*.

For his next trial of *Romeo and Juliet* translation, Kawashima adopted the complete Joruri style influenced by an example shown by Tsubouchi in his translation of *Julius Caesar*. In a Joruri drama, the situations, actions, and private thoughts of the characters are written in verse basically of seven-five syllable metre. In order to change a Shakespeare play into a Joruri text form, a translator has to supply the parts of metrical narrative, which may be called creative writing rather than translation. Kawashima tries to explain Shakespeare’s text in his narratives, but sometimes his own views of things are added. The observation of Kawashima’s narratives will reveal the characteristics of his Shakespeare understanding.

The following is how Kawashima’s Joruri style *Romeo and Juliet* is
constructed. Each scene is prefaced with a summary of the scene prepared for readers’ convenience. Then an introductory narration starts which leads to the first line of the first speaker. It is a custom of the Joruri play that every scene of a piece begins with a narrator’s chant explaining its situation. The Joruri narrators play both the parts of narration and characters’ voice. Therefore Kawashima provided each scene of his *Romeo and Juliet* with an introduction. Stage directions are incorporated with narratives. Kawashima sometimes adds his own comments to the stage directions, but on the whole his version is a faithful translation and few lines of the original speeches are left out. Some of Kawashima’s introductory additions will be examined here.

The part of the Prologue is omitted, and his lines are borrowed as the material of the first narration, which tells of the old grudge between the two distinguished families in Verona, the two unfortunate lovers, and the reconciliation of the parents afterward. The entrance of the two retainers is reported and their dialogue begins. At Act 1, scene 2, the magnificence of the Capulet house and the rich decoration of a room with gold, silver and lapis lazuli are related, and the old Capulet and Count Paris meet in the room. Lady Capulet’s room where the next scene is supposed to be set faces a lovely garden. She is now contemplating her daughter’s marriage, as a thoughtful mother does. She asks the nurse to call Juliet. Juliet who appears is prettier than cherry or peach blossoms.

In Act 2, scene 4, Kawashima introduces a street of Verona as a high street with tall and large buildings standing on both sides, and two young men, Mercutio and Benvolio in fine clothes are talking in fine language. In the next scene, Juliet who waits for the nurse to come back is looking at flowers and butterflies in the garden. A cuckoo clock strikes twelve before her speech starts. Act 2, scene 6 is a cell of Friar Lawrence. It is situated in a forest of evergreen trees, which symbolize everlasting constancy. The wedding ceremony is planned to include a foreign custom of exchanging rings before the altar. The priest’s main anxiety about the secret marriage is that it lacks the parental approval.
The introductory narrative for Act 3, scene 1, the scene of fighting, relates that the flowery spring has now changed into the green summer and the citizens of Verona are strolling the public place to enjoy a hot but comfortable day. Benvolio and Mercutio and their attendants are among them. After Act 3, scene 2, Kawashima does not give summaries. Apparently he does not care much about consistency of the work. The starting narrative tells how happy Juliet is, waiting for the night to come. Her first speech of the scene is translated precisely line by line into the poetical Japanese in seven-five syllabic metre. Her blame of Romeo’s cruelty (of killing Tybalt) is also rendered into a beautiful poetry.

The introduction for Act 3, scene 3 is sentimental. The bright moon will often be concealed by gathering clouds, and cherry blossoms tend to be exposed to a storm. One’s good fortune does not last and joy turns into sorrow in a day. Yesterday’s happy Romeo cannot find a place to hide himself now. It seems insects chirping in the bush or the flapping of birds’ wings above frighten and depress him. The priest tries to encourage him.

Act 3, scene 5 is the scene of parting. Romeo has come, stepping over dew drops to see Juliet for the last time before leaving home. Their last conversation takes place in the garden where Juliet is to see him off. They hear a chirp of a bird and discuss whether it is a night bird or a lark. They see something foreboding on each other’s face. Unlike the original, the lovers are standing on the same level, close to each other.

The dress Juliet selects for the wedding in Act 4, scene 3 is a white one with the whiteness of an egret, and she looks like a goddess in it. In Japan there is a piece of dance about a tragedy of a spirit of egret that has turned into a girl. In the introduction to the discovery scene of Juliet’s death (Act 4, scene 5), Kawashima tells that a crow is heard to croak guiding the dead to the underworld, and he laments the rashness of a child who has ignored the parents’ affectionate care. Act 5, scene 1 narrates how Romeo is spending the days of distress and anguish thinking of home and his wife, and Romeo’s story about his dream begins.
There are several interesting additions to the stage directions which Kawashima has turned into narrations. In Act 1, scene 5, when the Capulet family and the guests gather in the ball room, the place looks like an earthly paradise. At the scene of lovers’ final parting in Act 3, scene 5, the way Romeo leaves looking back and Juliet follows him with her eyes is told like a parting scene of a Joruri or a Kabuki play. They think they are like a standing tree cleaved by fate. In the same scene when the parents leave in anger at Juliet’s refusal to marry Paris, Juliet feels deserted like a small boat drifting at sea. She is all in tears and looks as if she is drenched through under a tree where she has taken a shelter. When Juliet takes the liquid medicine, she is said to fall on the floor, suggesting that she is in a tatami matted Japanese style room. When Juliet stabs herself, Kawashima says she stabs her throat as a Japanese woman does.

Some of Kawashima’s comments so far examined in this paper can be said poetic, sentimental, or didactic. He often refers to natural beauties such as cherry or peach flowers, evergreen trees like pines, butterflies, insects, birds, the moon or the clouds. These are materials traditionally favoured in classical poetry and indicate that he was well educated in Japanese and Chinese literature. Sentimental expressions are displayed when he mentions that Juliet feels deserted like a small boat drifting, or that lovers are forced to part like a tree split by fate. The descriptions seem to reflect the teaching of Jodo Shu or Jodo Shinshu sects of Buddhism that you should not challenge fate but ask for the help of Amitabha. Friar Lawrence in Kawashima is anxious about the secret marriage mainly because it lacks the parents’ approval. The most lamentable aspect of Juliet’s death, Kawashima says, is the rashness of a child who ignores the parents’ affectionate care. Respect for one’s parents used to be one of the most important duties of Japanese people, according to the moral teaching based on Confucianism. Kawashima’s remarks examined here show that he was a gentleman of his day, who was nurtured in the moral world of Buddhism and Confucianism and well educated in Japanese and Chinese literature.
An encounter with Shakespeare was a crucial experience for this young man of Meiji from a samurai family, and Shakespeare became his main subject in his study of Western culture. Like most young intellectuals of the day, as well as the government, Kawashima believed that the Westernization was the right way to proceed, and did not worry much about the decline of traditional Japanese culture. He lived in a naive age in this sense, and intensively pioneered the reception of Shakespeare in the form of translation, which has been continuing ever since over one hundred years. Between the two styles Kawashima tried, the straightforward translation and the Joruri style translation, the first one was soon to become the mainstream after the Western style drama productions were known to the Japanese.

NOTES

* The original version of this paper was presented at the Seminar: The Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare, at the British Shakespeare Association Conference held at the University of Warwick on 31 August - 2 September 2007.

3. Toyada, pp.32-37.
5. Toyada, p.34.
   Moriya, p.21.


10. Tsubouchi, Shoyo, Preface to *Shiizaru Kidan Jiyuno Tachi Nagorino Kireaji*.