

The Role of Russian Literature in the Development of Modern Japanese Literature from the 1880's to the Present: Some Remarks on Its Peculiarities

This is a slightly revised version of the lecture given at the University of Tokyo as a part of the GJS Lecture Series organized by the University of Tokyo's Global Japan Studies Program on October 17, 2014.

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My lecture is not intended to be an in-depth analysis of a concrete case of influence or reception; it is an attempt to outline in general terms some of the most important peculiarities of the reception of Russian literature in the process of the making of modern Japanese literature, and to provide a perspective from which further investigation, I hope, would be more productive.



One of the illustrations by Taiso Yoshitoshi for Takasu's translation of Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (1883)

It is well known that the first work of Russian literature to be translated into Japanese was Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* (Meiji 16, 1883). The translator was Takasu Jisuke (高須治助), a leading expert on the Russian language at the time (Takasu later compiled one of the first Russian-Japanese dictionaries). Although some suspected that Takasu translated the work from an English translation, as Anglicized character names appear throughout his work, it is now commonly accepted that Takasu's work was in fact a direct translation of the Russian original, thanks largely to the research of Yasui Ryohei (安井亮平), who meticulously compared Takasu's translation with the Russian text. The following strange illustration to this early translation, however, clearly shows that Russia was still something completely foreign and unknown to most Japanese at the time.

With this case being a precursor, the reception of Russian literature took place intensively in the first half of the Meiji era. In 1889, when Uchida Roan (内田魯庵) read Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* for the first time in English translation, he was electrified "as if he was struck by a

thunder in the midst of a vast steppe” and immediately decided to translate it into Japanese. It was the kind of literature that Japan had never known before. Uchida Roan didn't know Russian, so he translated the novel from English, but he was well aware of the dangers of translating a translation, so he consulted with his friend Hasegawa Tatsunosuke, also known as Futabatei Shimei (二葉亭四迷), who had a wonderful command of Russian. As it turned out, Futabatei's deep knowledge of Russian literature was crucial in his struggle for the new Japanese literary language, and his translation of *Svidanie*” (「あひゞき」1888) from *The Hunter's Sketches* by Turgenev became a breakthrough in the search for a new realistic style in Japanese literature.¹ In this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that the translation of Russian literature served as one of the most important models for this new literary language, through which Japan sought to replace the traditional style of pre-modern Edo prose.

Thus, from the 1880's on, a vast amount of modern Russian literature (largely nineteenth-century prose) was translated into Japanese and acquired a substantial readership in Japan. In this field, Japanese specialists of Russian literature and comparative literature have already done a considerable amount of research to trace the reception of each important Russian author on Japanese soil as well as their influence on Japanese writers. There are already a number of excellent comprehensive surveys that focus on the reception of key writers, such as: *Tolstoy and Japan* by Yanagi Tomiko and *Dostoevsky and the Japanese* by Matsumoto Ken-ichi. Here I do not intend to add to those important works, but I'd like to point out some peculiarities in the Japanese reception of Russian literature. In my opinion, these peculiarities have not received enough attention in these extant works.

1. The simultaneous reception of multiple European literatures

First of all, it should be noted that Russian literature was only one in a number of European literatures that surged into Japan after the Meiji Restoration (from the 1880's on). In that hectic process, there was no chronology or hierarchy: Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dostoevsky appeared in Japanese translation almost simultaneously. Here is a list of the first translations of some of the most important Western authors, organized by the date of the translation:

Goethe, “Reineke Fuchs,” 1884.

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 1884.

Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (The first part), 1886.

The First mention of Dante's *Divine Comedy* by Mori Ōgai in his diary, 1887.

Scott, *Ivanhoe* (abridged), 1888.

Jules Verne, *80 Days around the World*, 1888.

Turgenev, “Svidanie,” 1888.

Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (first half), 1892-93.²

In that “melting pot” or “battle royal” of literatures, Russian literature was *not* considered “backward.” In fact, it played an essential role in Japan's world literary canon, and Russian literature figured as one of the most important European literatures, on equal footing with (if not superior to) other major European literatures.

This fact in turn led to a peculiar canon-formation process in Japan. One of the key literary practices in Japan at the time was the recurrent publication of what is called Sekai bungaku zenshū (世界文学全集) in Japanese, or “the Complete Works of World Literature,” which may sound absurd if taken literally. In reality, the name designates an anthology or multi-volume series of masterpieces from different parts of the globe. The first big hit for such an anthology was initiated by the Shinchō-sha publishing house: published between 1927 and 1930, the full set spanned 57 volumes (the first series consisted of 38 volumes; the second series — 19) and average sales per volume reached as high as 400,000 copies. If we look at the nations and languages represented in the series, we find:

French 17

English and American 12

German 7

Russian 7

Italian and Spanish (Southern European) 5

Northern European 4

Other 5³

What first strikes us when we see this list is the predominance of French literature, which was becoming fashionable at that time, although its reception in Japan started later than its English, German, and Russian counterparts. It is obvious, however, that Russian literature nonetheless ranks among the most popular European literatures. It is also worth noting that, in the consciousness of the Japanese of that period, the notion of world literature included only European and American texts; there were no works at all from other parts of the world.

2. Direct and “indirect” translations

From an early stage (from the 1880's on), there appeared a number of gifted translators (Futabatei Shimei and Nobori Shomu, who were followed by younger talents such as Yonekawa Masao and

Nakamura Hakuyō) who translated directly from Russian, thus making a great contribution to the making of a modern readership in Japan. The role of “indirect translation” (jūyaku) cannot be ignored, either. As mentioned earlier, Uchida Roan first translated *Crime and Punishment* from English, and Mori Ōgai’s influential translations of Russian literature were based on German translations of the Russian works. From 1889 to 1913, Ōgai translated 18 works of Russian literature, all from the German; the Russian authors he translated include: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Lermontov, Gorky, Turgenev, Andreev, Artsybashev, Korolenko, and Chirikov.⁴

3. The role of English (and other European) translations

It should also be noted that many writers and intellectuals used to have an excellent command of English (at least as far as reading proficiency is concerned), from the Meiji period until the middle of the 20th century, and they avidly read Russian literature in English (or other West European) translations: Mori Ōgai read works in German, meanwhile Arishima Takeo, Natsume Soseki and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke read them in English. Their knowledge of Russian literature, acquired by reading Western European translations, naturally influenced them directly. Arishima read *Anna Karenina* in English, and it influenced him in the process of writing his major novel *A Certain Woman* 『或る女』 (1919). Fujii Shōzō discusses the case of Leonid Andreev’s strong influence on both Natsume Soseki and Lu Xun.

As Araya Keizaburō points out in his survey of the history of Russian literature in Japan, there were three major “institutions” through which Russian literature was introduced into Japan: (1) the Tokyo Institute of Foreign Languages (東京外国語大学), (2) the Nikolai Theological Seminary (ニコライ神学校), and (3) “Maruzen” (丸善).⁵ This third institution was of particular importance for general readers who were competent in English but had no knowledge of Russian; it was a Tokyo bookstore (which still exists to this day) known for importing foreign—overwhelmingly English—books, and thanks to meticulous research by literary historians, we now have extensive knowledge about who bought which books through that bookstore. What we can see is that this store really acted as a window onto world literature, through English translation.

On the other hand, in the second half of the 20th century, when there was already a vast accumulation of translated literature, Japanese writers (at least many of them) lost their English proficiency and, paradoxically, the influence of foreign literature (including Russian) on writers declined. As far as I know, this paradox was first stated by the critic Katō Shūichi in his articles on modern Japanese literature more than a half century ago, but still holds true in its application to contemporary Japanese writers. Naturally, many of them are avid readers of foreign literature, but read only in Japanese translation, and few are proficient enough in English or any other foreign language to read foreign works in anything other than Japanese. Two rare exceptions are

Ōe Kenzaburo, who is well versed in both English and French, and Furui Yoshikichi, who was professor of German literature before he became a full-time professional writer.

4. The influence of Japanese translations on China and Korea

One more topic related to this field, which has not yet been studied properly in its own right, is the influence of Japanese translations of Russian literature on China and Korea. Since Japan was more “advanced” in terms of the reception and translation of Russian literature, quite a few Chinese and Koreans who had a good command of Japanese read Russian literature in Japanese translation (for example, Lu Xun 魯迅 and Park Tae-won 朴泰遠).

In the case of Lu Xun, he had a good opportunity to get himself acquainted with world literature, including Russian and East European literature, between 1904 and 1909, when he lived and studied in Japan. In 1909, he and Zhuo Zuoren 周作人, while staying in Japan, compiled a Chinese-language anthology of world literature in two volumes, which was titled 『域外小説集』 (containing 16 works). For the anthology, Lu Xun translated two short stories by Andreev and one by Garshin. It thus seems as though, during his years in Japan, Lu Xun had picked up on the general enthusiasm for Russian literature prominent among Japan's contemporary readers.

This is an interesting case of the spread of Russian literature in East Asia through Japanese translation, in which the Japanese language served as a means of transmission (although it was, of course, a language of colonial coercion which people were forced to learn). Nonetheless, the question of to what extent Japanese translations of Russian literature influenced Chinese and Korean writers has yet to be investigated in detail by specialists. As I stated above, the influence of Russian writing on Japanese literature has been well traced by comparatists in both Japan and Russia: there is a large body of articles and monographs devoted to studies of the influence that individual writers such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Chekov had on modern Japanese writers. We may therefore say that the genealogical “tree” (to borrow from Franco Moretti) has been studied fairly well. On the other hand, the horizontal “wave” of influence (Russia→Japan→Korea and China and Taiwan) has attracted little attention from specialists thus far.

5. Influence continues: Russian literature as an undercurrent in postwar and contemporary Japanese literature — in lieu of a postscript

After World War II, the Russian classics suffered a brief decline in popularity. Despite this, the number of writers influenced by and well versed in Russian literature was by no means small, and one group of avid readers came to form one of the major schools of contemporary literature.

Most members of this school were associated with the literary magazine *Modern Literature* (*Kindai bungaku*), which was founded shortly after the war by Haniya Yutaka, Honda Shūgo, Ara Masahito, Hirano Ken, Sasaki Kiichi, Odagiri Hideo and Yamamuro Shizuka. Although unable to read Russian, these writers possessed an astonishing degree of knowledge about Russian literature, and critical works by Sasaki (on Chekhov), Haniya (on Dostoevsky), and Honda (on Tolstoy) have become modern critical classics in their own right.

The literary movement centered around *Modern Literature* came to be known as the “postwar faction,” and it consciously opposed the “I-novel” genre, which had been dominant in Japan since the Taishō period. This “postwar faction” continued to be influenced by Russian literature, a fact that can be seen in the works of Noma Hiroshi and Shiina Rinzō, two of its prominent figures. Their interest in Russian literature was subsequently inherited by the next generation of writers, and this trend continues even today.

In the 1960s, Waseda University’s Department of Russian literature produced many new writers, including Itsuki Hiroyuki, Miki Taku, and Gotō Meisei, who together formed a group that may be called the “Russian faction.” There were also many writers who were well versed in Russian literature despite not having majored in the subject, including Maruya Saiichi, Kaga Otohiko, Ōe Kenzaburō, and Inoue Hisashi. The influence of Russian literature on the later fiction and critical writings of Ōe Kenzaburō, for example, is far more apparent than that of French literature, despite the fact that Ōe majored in French literature and wrote his graduation thesis on Jean-Paul Sartre. Also, in his recent novel, *Farewell, My Book!*, Ōe draws parallels between today’s terrorism and the revolutionary terrorism of Dostoevsky’s age. Moreover, in addition to its traces of Dostoevsky, the novel as a whole also draws considerably from Nabokov’s *The Gift*, after which Ōe named his own novel.

Since the 1980s, however, Japan’s interest in foreign literatures—including that of Russia—has waned. *The Complete Works of World Literature*, a series of foreign literature published continuously since the early 1930s, finally ceased publication, and the last large-scale project of the sort, *The Shūeisha Gallery of World Literature*, published its twentieth and final volume in 1991.⁶ In this historical context, it would appear as though interest in Russian literature has faded into the background. Yet there are still many writers who are devoted to the study of Russian literature, who continue to write under its influence, even if they cannot be grouped together into a particular school of writing.

In Japan’s contemporary literary scene, there are numerous writers whose works show clear connections to Russian literature, including Ikezawa Natsuki, Shimada Masahiko, Kurokawa Sō, Hirano Keiichirō, Kashimada Maki, and Nakamura Fuminori. Special reference should also be made to the one of contemporary Japan’s most popular writers, Haruki Murakami, who has been deeply influenced by such Russian writers as Dostoevsky and Chekhov. While it is true that he is a

great admirer of American literature, Murakami also admits that long before he had ever heard of American literature he was reading 19th-century Russian classics, and that he read *The Brothers Karamazov* several times. It is easy to detect the influence of Russian literature in many of Murakami's works, including *Hear the Wind Sing*, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and the brilliant short story "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo."

Given the historical trajectory we have traced thus far, it would be no exaggeration to say that, although he is most commonly considered to be above all indebted to American pop culture, Haruki Murakami also belongs firmly within the time-honored tradition of Japanese writers whose works have been indelibly shaped by Russian literature.

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Notes

1. Many comparative approaches have been made to the influence of Russian literature on Futabatei, which I will not enumerate here. Special mention should be made, however, of Kato Yuri's recent book 『明治期露西亜文学翻訳論攷』, which contains a chapter devoted to Uchida and discusses comprehensively discusses his 'collaboration' with Futabatei in the process of translation of *Crime and Punishment*.

2. There already exist useful bibliographies which trace the history of translated literature in modern Japan, and the National Diet Library of Japan offers good bibliographical service. Here I'd like to single out one of the most useful reference books published recently: 川戸道昭・榎原貴編著『図説 翻訳文学総合事典』全5巻, ナダ出版センター, 2009 年。

3. See: 矢口進也『世界文学全集』44-50 ページ。

4. For the complete list, see Kato Yuri (加藤百合), 131-134.

5. Araya Keizaburo (新谷敬三郎), 9-14.

6. Mention should be, however, made of the recent *Sekai Bungaku Zenshu* edited by Ikezawa Natsuki in 30 volumes (Kawadeshobo Sinsha, 2008-2010), which attempts a completely new approach the canon of modern world literature. Although it is entitled "Sekai Bungaku Zenshu", it demonstrates that the traditional "Sekai Bungaku Zenshu" is not possible anymore.

近代日本文学の形成におけるロシア文学の役割 (1880年代から現代まで) ——その特徴についての覚書

沼野 充義

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本講演の目的は、ロシア文学の影響や受容について特定のテーマについて掘り下げるのではなく、日本近代文学形成にあたってロシア文学が果たした役割の際立った特徴でありながら、これまで十分に注意が払われてこなかった側面を概観し、今後のさらなる研究のための方向性を示すことである。

(1) ヨーロッパの様々な国の文学が、言語も文学史も無視する形で同時に受け入れられ、明治期の日本における外国文学は一種の「世界文学の坩堝」となったこと（これは現代の「世界文学論」に対して極めて示唆的な実験の場であった）。

(2) 言語からの直接訳だけでなく、英語を初めとする他のヨーロッパ言語からの「重訳」もかなり長い期間、重要であったこと。

(3) ロシア文学の日本語訳だけでなく、英語などその他のメジャーなヨーロッパ言語への訳もまた重要であったこと（昭和前半までは、英訳などを通じてロシア文学に親しんだ作家たちも少なくなかった）。

(4) ロシア文学の日本語訳は、中国や朝鮮半島でも読まれ、それぞれの国の作家たちに影響を与えたこと。

上記の特徴は主に 1930 年代までを念頭に置いたものである。第二次世界大戦後は、ロシア文学の影響は——他の外国文学と同様——衰えていくが、それでも、『近代文学』の同人たちから、早稲田大学露文科出身作家たち、加賀乙彦、大江健三郎、村上春樹、そしてさらに若い世代の作家たちまで、ロシア文学に深く影響された作家たちの系譜は続いている。