TRANSLATIONS OF AMERICAN CULTURAL POLITICS INTO THE CONTEXT OF POST-WAR JAPAN

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Introduction

The Cold War culture of the United States has been a focus of scholars since the 1980s with the pioneering concept of “Cold war culture” and “containment culture” proposed by Stephen J. Whitfield and Alan Nadel, which showed how the politics of containment was constitutive of the culture of cold war; the deployment of gender and sexuality as explored in works by Elaine Tyler May, Robert J. Cober, and Robert D’Emilio; and the involvement of institutions including the CIA, the State Department and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations that provided and disseminated US cultural policies, as documented in the works of Greg Barnhisel, Frances Stonor Saunders and others. And as Christina Klein’s work on Cold War Orientalism exemplifies, the geopolitics of cultural politics has been encompassed in the process.1

Questions of translation are deeply enmeshed in this geopolitics of the cultural politics of the Cold War. Translation was one of the crucial programs of Cold War US-Japan cultural politics. Plans for Japan were initially organized under the umbrella concept of demilitarization and democratization of the former enemy. During the Occupation, which lasted from 1945 to 1952, the Culture, Information and Education (CI&E) section of General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP) provided a cultural program that had a close connection with the program generated by the State Department, and generally the program shared the Department’s cultural policies to disseminate a “full and fair picture” of American democracy (James, Jr. 1963, 77–78). To disseminate ideas attuned to their program in a non-English speaking country, translation constituted a significant part. Seeing the sporadic selection of American books for translation produced by Japanese publishers during the first three years of the occupation, the CI&E section launched a translation program in 1948 to promote the translation of American books of their own selection, and the program continued into the post-treaty years.

Working across the linguistic and cultural boundaries, translation was involved in the construction of post-war Japanese culture under the shadow of the United States. As the selection of books was part of the US Cold War cultural politics that was closely connected with the US foreign and military policies and their geopolitics, the planning, selection, translators and translation, distribution, and reception constitute a space for cultural and
political negotiation. The concept of translation includes not only linguistic practices but also, as Meaghan Morris suggests, “the resources people commonly draw on to respond to the effects of economic, social, and cultural change in their lives” (Morris 1997, xviii), and because of such characteristics, translation is also connected with the cultural, political, and thus the institutional. In this sense translation is one of the significant fields of Cold War cultural politics, and as such is an object of scholarly analysis.

This chapter explores how translation was involved in the Cold War cultural politics through two cases: institutional promotion of translation of American books into Japanese; and re-representation of Japan through translation of Japanese literary works, especially Yasunari Kawabata’s Snow Country by Edward Seidensticker.

**Promotion of American literature through translation**

The CI&E established their CI&E libraries (later CI&E Information Libraries, and after the occupation, American Centers) in major Japanese cities, filled with books, magazines and journals selected carefully to fit into the US occupation policies of democratization and demilitarization, in tandem with the Office of International Informational and Cultural Activities of the State Department (“CIE Weekly Reports, Library Division”). To disseminate their books more thoroughly, however, the CI&E eventually developed a systematic translation program in 1948 by providing their own bidding list of books consisting mostly of American works, for there was a linguistic barrier for many Japanese, and even American books that had been translated did not satisfy their purpose of fostering “the obligations and needs of the Japanese people under the Potsdam Declaration” (CIE Bulletin, 26 May, 1948, CIE Bulletin 1949, 13; Hench 2010, 237–249; Ochi 2010, 105–106; Dower 1999, 182). During 1948, the purpose of the selection was in transition from the initial one of demilitarization and democratization to the updated treatment of Japan as a Cold War ally of the United States. Their reason for selecting Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, for example, was that the protagonists were considered model democratic heroes that exemplified individual freedom (Ishihara 2005, 65–66). Animal Farm, though the author was not American, was recommended “with enthusiasm” because it was suitable for people who were “befogged by the utopian claims of authoritarian ideology” (CIE Bulletin 22 June 1949, CIE Bulletin 1949, 7).

With the end of the occupation in 1952, the cultural program was transferred to the US Embassy under the auspices of the State Department. In spite of an apparent uneven distribution of power between the two countries, the program was marked by the idea of mutual cooperation. The objective of the program for the post-Peace Treaty era was proposed by John D. Rockefeller III, who had been commissioned to draw up a blueprint by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Deciding to avoid “unilateral” rule by the US, he considered “full and voluntary cooperation from the Japanese” integral to his program (Rockefeller 1951, 2, 7; Matsuda 2007, 113–137). This interchange included the interchange of books in both the original language and in translation along with other cultural products as well as the interchange of scholars, students, and other people.

With regard to the translation program, one of the venues that encouraged such “voluntary cooperation” was a monthly magazine, Beisho Dayori (Monthly Review of American Books), first published in March 1953 by the Office of Cultural Exchange at the US Embassy. The magazine was a book guide with the goal of promoting Japanese translation through a list of books considered suitable for translation. The June 1953 issue, for example, featured 19 books, including Lionel Trilling’s The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: Viking Press, 1950). The author of the article offers a tentative Japanese title,
introduces its content, and categorizes the book as an educational and scholastic book. The magazine featured essays on translation and contemporary US literature by leading scholars of American literature and also by prominent translators.

Beisho Dayori functioned as a channel for the import of American literature as it should be introduced through appropriate selection. The preface of the magazine declared, “it is necessary for both Japan and the United States to have a deep understanding of each other’s culture in order for both countries to work together to realize world peace,” and to achieve this understanding, a systematic, instead of sporadic, selection of American books, especially literature and social science books for translation, was important (“Beisho Dayori Hakko ni Yoete” Preface 1953). Indeed, as a site for constructing the proper “understanding,” leading scholars of American literature and famous translators, such as Katsuji Takamura, Kenzaburō Ōhashi, Masashimi Nishikawa, Naotarō Tatsunokuchi, Junzaburō Nishiwaki, Hanako Murakami, Shiho Sakamichi, and Yasuo Nakubo, were commissioned to contribute essays on American literature and ideal ways of selection for translation. In one of such essays, a famous translator, Shiho Sakamichi, complained about the disorganized way of reading American literature by Japanese people, calling it an “unbalanced diet” and recommending Beisho Dayori along with The New York Times and Saturday Review as dependable resources (Sakanishi 1953, 22–24). Nishikawa also deplored the excessive popularity of bestsellers as unsystematic, and underscored the importance of providing an idea of American literature as a whole, and installing a collection of carefully selected literary works (Nishikawa 1955, 29–31). As if presenting that particular collection, those translators whom Katsuji Takamura introduced in his serial article that appeared in numbers 31 to 36 (from October 1955 to March 1956) on translated twentieth-century American literature, heavily overlapped many of the translators of the works he introduced with contributors to the magazine.

overlapped with the years when American studies and American literary studies were disseminated through the American Studies Seminar in Tokyo (1950–1956) and Kyoto (1951–1987) sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Nagano American Literary Seminar (1953–1956) sponsored by the US Embassy.

The Hyōronsha series also coincided with the formative years of the American Literature Society of Japan, which was eventually established as a nationwide organization by uniting regional organizations in 1962. *Interview with Kichinosuke Ōhashi and Kenzabū Ōhashi* reveals how American literary scholars in the Tokyo area formed a predecessor of the American Literature Society of Japan. It was the core members that translated the Hyōronsha series. Although the two Ōhashis did not like the idea of becoming deeply involved in Cold War politics (Tokyo Daigaku Amerika Kenkyū Shiryou Sentā 1983, 8), to their embarrassment Hyōronsha had been granted financial aid by the US Embassy and placed the label “Edited by The American Literature Society of Japan” on their publications (Tokyo Daigaku Amerika Kenkyū Shiryou Sentā 1983, 17). They also reveal that a 20-volume collection of translated American literature published by the Arechi Publishing House was also made possible by ample financial aid (Tokyo Daigaku Amerika Kenkyū Shiryou Sentā 1983, 17).

Whether individual scholars liked it or not, “voluntary cooperation” was, as it were, institutionally constructed, and canonical works and approaches to American literature were translated and circulated during and after the occupation and were conducive to continued cultural occupation. The body of translated scholarly books helped to construct an imagined community of literary scholars.

**Presentation of Kawabata as a Cold War modernist: Translation of Japanese literature**

If the translation of American literature and literary studies served as a vehicle to incorporate Japanese scholars and readers into the Cold War cultural deployment, translation of Japanese literary works by Kawabata, Tanizaki, Mishima and other contemporary Japanese writers into English and other languages functioned to disseminate Japanese culture that was represented as no longer a bestial enemy but a friendly new ally of the West. The selection of translatable works was contextualized in the deployment of the military, political, economic, and cultural.

There was a momentum towards translation of Japanese literary works into English and other languages. In 1951, as a powerful agent of Cold War cultural politics, the Humanities Division of the Rockefeller Foundation commissioned Wallace Stegner, a novelist, who had established a creative writing course at Stanford University in 1946, to make a tour as a missionary of “modernist literature” (Bennett 2015, 69). He visited Germany, France, Italy, Egypt, India, Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan, and after the trip his letter was published in one of the Japanese newspapers to promote cultural exchange, encouraging the introduction of Japanese writers to be included in the journal *Pacific Spectator* published by Stanford University. Mikio Hiramatsu, a famous translator and Japan P.E.N. Club member, who was instrumental in instituting the Japan Society of Translators, contributed an essay to *Beisho Dayori* to show how Stegner and Yasunari Kawabata, then the 4th president of the Japan P.E.N. Club (serving 1948–1965), functioned as facilitators, or “seeders,” of translation. Responding to Stegner’s appeal, the Japan P.E.N. Club under the leadership of Kawabata established a committee to select representative post-war Japanese short stories suitable for journals like *Pacific Spectator* and *The Western Humanities Review*. Stegner also helped *Poetry* magazine, then edited by Karl Shapiro, to publish a special issue featuring contemporary Japanese poetry (Hiramatsu 1954, 30–32).
The Alfred A. Knopf Japanese literature series beginning in 1955 and the UNESCO Contemporary Works series from 1948 onwards gave momentum to this move. Indeed, both were closely tied together. According to Larry Walker, translation work in the Knopf series was often supported by the UNESCO series, and considering the fact that the United Nations and its headquarters in Manhattan owed much to the Rockefeller Foundation, that translation work was indirectly part of the institution’s cultural program (Walker 2015, 55). Against the backdrop of the development of Japanese studies in the United States that had increased its significance for strategic purposes during World War II, Japanese literary studies flourished after the war, especially at Harvard, Columbia, and Michigan, to which were affiliated Donald Keene, Howard Hibbett, Ivan Morris, and Edward Seidensticker, all of whom were prominent translators of Japanese literature and were involved in these programs.


Kawabata’s Snow Country showcases the refiguration of Japan and the close connection of cultural politics hooked up with the military, economy, and political complex. The award of the Nobel Prize to Kawabata Yasunari in 1968 can be considered a product of the post-Peace Treaty culture of “mutual cooperation.” In the context of the cultural Cold War, his prize-winning marked an important moment when Japanese culture under the Japan-US Security Treaty (Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan) re-entered a hegemonic negotiation as one of the Western allies. Translation by a Cold Warrior Edward Seidensticker and his New Critical interpretation and presentation of his translation of Snow Country to the world through the Knopf and UNESCO series of literature illustrates how governance and literary form and its reading were implicitly working together in the cultural arena.

Seidensticker’s career is the epitome of a cultural Cold Warrior. Having studied Japanese literature and culture at Harvard and entered the State Department, he was sent to SCAP in Tokyo (Seidensticker’s 2002, 35–57). After leaving SCAP, he launched his career as a translator in Tokyo. He was closely affiliated with an international anti-Communist organization, Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), that was secretly sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency and accommodated numerous intellectuals including Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Daniel Bell, Sidney Hooks, Stephen Spender and Allen Tate, and actively promoted Western culture as “free” (Seidensticker’s 2002, 58–108). Seidensticker’s first translation of Japanese literature (short pieces by Osamu Dazai) appeared in 1953 in the first issue of the Encounter series. His prize-winning career included the translation of Mishima’s Sadamu (Tokyo, Chikuma Shobō, 1952) as The Temple of the Golden Pavilion by Morris (New York: Knopf, 1959); Osaragi’s Tabiji (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1953) as The Journey by Morris (New York: Knopf, 1960).
magazine published by the CCF. His first translation of Kawabata appeared in a special issue of Perspectives USA. According to Greg Barnhisel, this magazine, established by James Laughlin (a poet and writer, known for his publishing of modernists including Pound and Williams), was totally in step with the US Cold War cultural policy including the CCF (Barnhisel 2007, 729–754). Laughlin planned a Japanese issue, Perspective JAPAN, and came to Japan, where he talked directly with Seidensticker about translating Japanese literary works in that issue. The result was an abridged version of “The Izu Dancer” along with a piece by Tanizaki Junichiro (Seidensticker’s 2002, 112–113).

Kawabata’s Snow Country fits into the framework of what Christina Klein calls Cold War Orientalism: a burgeoning of middle-brow, popular cultural products concerning Asia, ranging from popular movies such as The King and I (1956) and Sayonara (1957) to the media in such magazines as Saturday Review and Reader’s Digest, as well as the Voice of America radio station. It flourished against the backdrop of US Cold War policies including those of the National Security Council (NSC) and the State Department that aimed at extending the front line of European containment to Asia. NSC policy papers series 48 in particular laid out “the position of the United States with respect to Asia” (“NSC48/1,” in Etzold and Gaddis 1978, 252; Klein 2003, 126–27) and strategies to help build a non-communist Asia, and carefully ruled out any possible behaviour by the US which would “be subject to the charge of using the Asiatic nations to further United States ambitions” (“NSC48/2,” in Etzold and Gaddis 1978, 270). Those cultural items constructed a cultural arena where ideologies generating such policies could be not only accepted but also contested and negotiated (Klein 2003, 6–7).

NSC48/1 describes Japan as a country that the United States would “support against external aggression” without “the appearance that its policies in Japan” were “dictated solely by considerations of strategic self-interest” (“NSC48/1,” in Etzold and Gaddis 252), and accordingly, as Nahoko Shibusawa points out, representation of Japan was changed from that of a brutal samurai to a feminized, subservient woman who needed protection: in other words, a geisha. Feminine or familial representation of Japan helped to replace the former image of a belligerent nation with the renewed image of an obedient political ally deserving of US protection and instruction (Shibusawa 2006, 4–7). Indeed, Japan’s alliance with the US and other Western countries led to being regarded as a partner or member of “an international family,” whether it was a military, political, or economic one (Hilgenberg, Jr. 1993, 113).

It was during this prevalence of “geisha” and the subservient image of Japan that Kawabata’s works were introduced to the Western allies. Unlike Madama Butterfly and Sayonara, Snow Country was not a romance between an American man and a subservient Japanese girl but a love affair between a Japanese man from Tokyo and a Japanese geisha in the countryside. Whether the author Kawabata and the translator Seidensticker were conscious of it or not, however, Snow Country had peculiar narrative devices to induce readers to see it as a Cold War Orientalist romance. The story opens with the scene of a train going through a long tunnel, a channel to another country. The train carries the urban dilettante male protagonist Shimamura, who is much influenced by Western culture and has even translated French books. Sometimes when he senses that he has lost his honesty he goes into the mountains, and his attachment to the local geisha Komako is considered by the narrator as an extension of “his response to the mountains” (Kawabata 1956, 19). Komako is a person who could give Shimamura a sense of lifelike nature. He does not want to bridge or overcome the gap in social class between him and the geisha, or rather he longs for something remote precisely because he cannot acquire it. That is why he feels he must leave her when he is
really close to her. Like the formula of a Madama Butterfly-like story, Shimamura later leaves the girl and returns to Tokyo through the tunnel, where the girl’s voice is “already a distant one that could do no more than sharpen the poignancy of travel” (Kawabata 1956, 86). By going through the ritual of entering and leaving another country, and also owing to the unbridgeable gap in social status between the urban man and the outcaste girl, the world of Snow Country serves as if it were a foreign country, safe from the danger of the mingling of two different social classes. The reader identifies with the narrator of Snow Country who shares Shimamura’s view, and this viewpoint makes the remote country beyond the tunnel a strange and foreign location where the traveller can find a subservient geisha and leave her safely, thus objectifying, eroticizing, and romanticizing the region and the girl together.

When Western readers identify themselves with the narrator, the remote country has an intensified strangeness and foreignness that entices the Orientalist’s gaze. The representative middle-brow magazine Saturday Review acknowledged the story as “an experience.” The reader “will find he has lived in that cold, snowy air, seen the landscape...spent the night with the geishas” (Bowers 1957, 15). The San Francisco Chronicle book review saw it as a “vignette of Oriental decadence, beautifully presented” (“Book Review” 1957, 19).

But with no more than its reception as a middle-brow cultural product and without the high-brow interpretation of the artistry of Kawabata, it would have been impossible for Kawabata to be awarded the Nobel Prize. In addition to his affiliation with these Cold War cultural organs, Seidensticker shared the “apolitical” lexicon of the Cold War liberal critics, such as “irony,” “paradox,” or “detachment.” In an article featured in Perspective JAPAN along with “The Izu Dancer,” Seidensticker denounces proletarian literature as political and praises Kawabata’s indifference to politics (Seidensticker 1955, 169). Especially in his analysis of Snow Country, which appeared in the journal Freedom, published by the Japanese branch of the CCF, Seidensticker’s contention that juxtapositions of totally different images such as the depiction of the heroine Komako’s beautiful lips as “leeches” (Kawabata 1956, 32) generate new imagery by an original combination of beauty and ugliness reminds us of the New Critics’ evaluation of the metaphysical poets’ conceits. “As American New Critics tend to argue,” he says, “if paradox is the essential part of art, Kawabata’s work has, at the bottom of it, a very serious and a peculiarly Japanese paradox, which constitutes the essence of his art” (Seidensticker 1962, 104–105). Above all, when he says that Kawabata’s “detached attitude toward his characters” distinguishes him from traditional Japanese novels under the influence of “Western literary techniques” (Seidensticker 1962, 107), which specifically refers to the techniques of 1920s’ and 1930s’ naturalism and proletarian literature, Seidensticker labels Kawabata as a genuine Japanese modern novelist distinguished from naturalist and proletarian literature paradoxically by applying New Criticism. In this way, the literary space of Snow Country, the other Japan, or as Seiji Lippit suggests, an “ahistorical realm separated from modernity” (Lippit 2002, 156), was made into a truly modernist space by his New Critical rhetoric. In this sense, Kawabata and his “Japan” is a Cold War cultural product of depoliticized Cold War liberal literary criticism, including Metaphysical Criticism of contemporary Japan and New Criticism and its canon that travelled across the Pacific.

Kawabata’s creation of the other Japan is made more foreign by Seidensticker’s translation, as he selected aptly what would accommodate both high-brow criticism and middle-brow criticism of the Cold War era. The politico-cultural space of the NSC 48 mindset constituted a systematic understanding of Kawabata’s literary space. The understanding by middle-brow cultural institutions of a mythical and authentic Japan wherein resided subservient geisha girls, and the understanding of the works as an authentic Japanese modernist literary space by high-brow cultural institutions including Seidensticker—both of these created Kawabata’s
reputation, like Faulkner’s, in the Cold War cultural arena and thus appropriated this mystic, other Japan as a cultural ally of the United States.

It is worth noting that Seidensticker’s introduction to *Snow Country* was written in consultation with Kawabata and Strauss, and he rewrote part of it to make it clear that the vague relation between Yoko and Komako is just that, something implicit that is just implicated (Seidensticker 1956, ix; Walker 2015, 89). As Walker shows, the final product *Snow Country* was produced “through their elaborations” that circumscribed the range of interpretation, and to help its success Donald Keene favourably reviewed the book in the *New York Herald Tribune* (Keene 1957, 8; Walker 2015, 89). It was the year after Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato endorsed the policy of the three non-nuclear principles and thus totally brought Japan under the protection of the US nuclear umbrella that Kawabata was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The implicit idea that underpins these cases is what Naoki Sakai calls “homolingual address” that “assumes the normalcy of reciprocal and transparent communication in a homogeneous medium” (Sakai 1997, 8), or the institutional translation is, as it were, a project to performatively assume a politico-cultural space of homolingual address. Translated literary works constituted a space of negotiation with an uneven power balance, a formative cultural space for generating a model minority in the post-war complex of the political, economic, and military.

**Note**


2 For more detailed description of Seidensticker and Kawabata as Cold Warriors in their political positions and aesthetics, see Ochi (2014). As Michael K. Bourdagh, Cécile Sakai, and Toeda Hirokazu point out the significance of an approach to Kawabata and Seidensticker in the context of the Cold War (Bourdagh et al. 2018, 2–11).

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