
Symposium: Translation and Japanese Studies: Introduction

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Symposium: Translation and Japanese Studies

ROY ANDREW MILLER

Introduction

Each translator is to consider, that he exerts himself as a mediator in this general spiritual commerce, and that he makes the promotion of this exchange his concern. Therefore, no matter what one may say concerning the inadequacy of translation, translation nevertheless is and remains still one of the most weighty and worthy activities in the general run of the world's affairs. The *Koran* says, "God has given every nation a prophet in its own tongue;" thus, each translator is a prophet of his people.

J. W. v. Goethe to Thomas Carlyle.¹

No one in our field would for a moment seriously argue that the entire discipline of Japanese studies is not intimately bound up with

1. In a letter dated Weimar, July 20, 1827; the text is printed as Letter 534 in E. and Ch. Beutler, eds., *Briefe der Jahre 1814–1832*, vol. 21 of their *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1965), p. 747. The Goethe of this letter (he was then already 78 years old) is to be understood as the Philosopher-Sage of Weimar, making his final impressive statements on subjects he considered of enduring importance; the allusion to the role of "a mediator in this general spiritual commerce" (*als Vermittler dieses allgemein geistigen Handels*) is a reference to Carlyle's work in bringing Goethe and the German romantics to the attention of the English-reading world. Following the reference to the *Koran*, Goethe goes on in this same letter to bring Luther's bible-translation also into comparison; illustrating his views on translation by means of this wide-reaching, archetypal *Westöstliche* linkage between the *Koran* on the one hand and the German Reformation on the other, was a favorite device of the Poet, appearing, e.g., in the *Briefe* as early as a letter under date of May 28, 1819, to the otherwise quite unimportant A. O. Blumenthal (*Briefe*, loc. cit., Letter 213, p. 333).

questions relating to the translation of Japanese into Western languages, and particularly with the translation of Japanese into English. But with this admission of involvement, most unanimity of opinion on this issue just as suddenly dissolves. There is never any question about how closely translation is involved with Japanese studies; but there is also hardly ever any substantial area of agreement when we begin to ask just what are the nature, dimensions, and extent of that involvement. No sooner do we ask these questions than we are struck by how extremely involved the answers must inevitably be.

The editors of the *Journal of Japanese Studies* undertook the publication of the papers constituting the present symposium hoping that they would be able to make at least a preliminary effort toward tracing down the importance of translation in Japanese studies. The key word here is "preliminary." Neither authors nor editors have aimed at anything more than a general exploratory operation into the first stages, if not simply the more obvious symptoms, of the overall problem presented by translation in Japanese studies. Telling the readers of the journal how to translate this or that kind of Japanese text, or how not to translate another, is not the goal of the symposium, nor are these the kinds of questions that the participants were asked to address. What we looked for instead were preliminary, overall, but also we hope long-range guide lines. We have looked for indications of where we have been in this field, and of where we may be going.

Of the several themes relating to problems of translation that may be extrapolated from the papers contributed to the present symposium, three seem to stand out in particularly impressive relief. The first is also the most obvious. Until very recently, the entire field of Japanese studies has been distinguished by a striking lack of academic and scholarly concern for problems of translation. When such questions have been raised at all, they have almost always been limited to the most trivial level possible: hunt-and-peck scannings of this translation or that, generally in a critical review, and most frequently aimed only at demonstrating a reviewer's claim that this translator or that has incorrectly rendered a passage in some text.

Conspicuously lacking are attempts to lift scholarly discourse on this entire issue above the level of random inventories of translation errors. This kind of fault-finding is generally easy enough to do, and it can at times make a contribution to the field, as for example when it warns an otherwise unsuspecting instructor against the classroom use of a particularly inept, or sometimes simply an incorrect and

misleading, translation. But it is clearly not enough. It can never make up for our greatest single lack in this segment of Japanese studies—the beginnings of an overall, theoretically sound, and discipline-oriented approach to the basic, underlying sources of the problems that translation in this field encounters. If the present symposium does nothing more than draw the attention of the readers of the journal to the existence of this larger problem, and to the possibilities for its eventual clarification, particularly at the level of the theory and methodology of Japanese translation, then it will have served its purpose.

The second of these themes, early identified by all of us who participated in the preparation and editing of these symposium papers, concerns the surprisingly great differences in the way in which each of the disciplines within the field approaches the question of Japanese translation. We expected that there would be differences; but we could hardly have guessed that they would be as great as our work with this symposium has shown to be the case. No one expected that the literary scholar would approach Japanese translation in the same way as the institutional historian, or the political scientist, or the scholar of the law; but at the same time no one really expected to be confronted with the really major cleavages in the approach toward translation and its problems that these symposium papers so clearly document.

Indeed, the distances that appear to separate each of the fields of discipline-specialization within Japanese studies with respect to translation have shown themselves to be of such major dimensions that there is now little question but that here we have identified one of the major areas of pressing and immediate concern for much of the future progress of Japanese studies as a whole. It is unlikely that these differences that separate one field of discipline-specialization from another will soon be significantly narrowed, much less finally removed. Instead, the important contributions in the future will be made by recognizing that these differences exist, and by working with Japanese translations—and with Japanese translation itself—in fuller cognizance of their existence than has often been the case in Japanese studies up to now.

The last of these themes is the most nebulous of the three, but also perhaps the most important. It may be described as our growing sense that in identifying the problems and questions of Japanese translation, we have not simply been studying a set of external issues all somehow related to the conduct of Japanese studies (though that certainly also has been true); but rather that in identifying these

problems and questions, we have also been approaching closer to answering another, and more important question—one having to do with the identity of Japanese studies themselves.

The epigraph above documents the tremendous intellectual importance that Goethe assigned to translation—all translation, every translation, and all translators—as well as the exalted terms in which he expressed his evaluation. Perhaps we in Japanese studies are now in the process of evolving a *raison d'être* for translation in which it will eventually be assigned a role somewhat parallel to the lofty position it occupied in the views of the German romantics. Perhaps also we are drawing nearer and nearer to the conclusion that translation itself is *the* discipline of Japanese studies *par excellence*.

Fortunately, there are signs that the need for a theoretical approach to the problems and questions of Japanese translation is being recognized in other quarters as well. Work had already begun on the papers printed here when word reached us of plans underway at The Center for the Book and The Asian Division of the Library of Congress to sponsor a symposium on “Japanese Literature in Translation” in Washington, D.C., on May 17–18, 1979. The Library of Congress symposium was planned from its inception to be somewhat narrower in scope than our own, limiting its topics to problems and issues directly relating to the translation of Japanese literary texts; nevertheless, at the same time it cast its net somewhat further afield in certain areas than do the papers printed here, since it also undertook to consider, for example, such extremely practical issues as the problems encountered in arranging for the commercial publication of translations.

Again coincidental in its timing, but none the less welcome for that, was an announcement in a recent issue of the *Journal of Asian Studies*² that it too would soon undertake a substantial consideration of questions of translation and their application to Asian studies in general, a project in which Japanese studies must surely come in for significant treatment. Growing interest in serious questions of translation as they relate to Asian studies in general, and to Japanese studies in particular, is suddenly evident from many quarters, and this is all to the good for all of us. Help is apparently on the way!

In allotting the five papers of the present symposium among the various disciplines with representation in Japanese studies, it was obvious that only a few important areas could be included. Assigning attention in this initial attempt at assessing the problems of trans-

2. “Editor’s Note,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): 229.

lation in Japanese studies to the specific fields here represented—literature, pre-modern institutional history, political science, and the law—is to be understood only as an initial sampling of the issues, not as a report-card, and much less as an attempt to evaluate the relative importance of particular fields with respect to the problems of translation in Japanese studies.

So great are the differences in approach taken by each of the papers included here that the reader may well be aided in the useful employment of their content by a brief introduction to each, offered solely in an attempt to highlight their respective contents, but surely not with a view to summarizing their highly contrastive and extremely varied contributions.

Seidensticker's remarks on the problems of translating Japanese literature, particularly on those encountered in the course of his monumental rendering of the *Genji monogatari*, can only rejoice everyone interested to any degree at all in Japanese literature of every period, which is to say, just about everyone in Japanese studies. In this remarkable paper we are fortunate enough now to have first-hand documentation for many of the revealing and informative incidents and decisions involved in translating such a formidable original, treated here in the technical detail that some of us had looked for in Seidensticker's published diary of his *Genji* labors.³

Seidensticker stresses in no uncertain terms his view that the fundamental problems of Japanese translator and Japanese translation alike are the same, whether the work being rendered is an ancient poem or a modern novel—as well as being much the same for every language and all texts of every period. He admits to there being differences, to be sure, but the similarities far outweigh them. An opinion of this order of generality carries considerable weight when, as this one does, it has behind it the tremendous authority of a translator of Seidensticker's demonstrated genius.

But the reader of the present symposium will probably also wish to contrast Seidensticker's unequivocal views with the other evidence that may be marshalled for yet a different point of view, namely that there are important levels of the problem where translation *out of* Japanese, any kind of Japanese, *into* English, or indeed into any other Indo-European language, *is* substantially different from, and probably also more difficult than, most other kinds of

3. Edward G. Seidensticker, *Genji Days* (Tokyo & New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1977).

translation.⁴ Perhaps the perpetually tiresome problem of the correct interpretation and translation of the plethora of names and titles that infest most Japanese literary texts, but particularly early texts—a problem considered also in the Mass contribution—might be pointed to as being one level at which problems of translation from Japanese are really and substantially different from any other variety of translation problems.

At any rate, Seidensticker's *Genji* translation is without question the single major accomplishment of Japanese studies in our generation; and particularly when viewed in that light, it is surely of significance to recall that it is, after all, an accomplishment of translation.

Already this translation is collecting a literature of its own, ranging from Miyoshi's seductive suggestion that the *Genji* is itself not really a novel, and cannot properly be rendered as if it were one,⁵ to Rucinski's pensive reservation that "Seidensticker's ladies sound like airline stewardesses—studiously polite but without character."⁶ Our symposium is fortunate to be able to begin with the master-translator's own masterful contribution to this burgeoning body of literature relating to his own work.

Obvious as the differences that separate traditional from modern Japanese literature are, Ryan's contribution convincingly demonstrates several ways in which the problems of translation presented by both are more the same than they are different; thus her contribution further enhances the credibility of Seidensticker's hypothesis. Much of what Ryan has to say about translation may be characterized as a welcome verbalization of views and evaluations that many in her field have long entertained, but that in the literature of translation have mostly been kept at a carefully covert, subliminal level of consciousness. Ryan's paper focuses particular attention upon the needs of students (and all other readers of translations), and provides here yet another concrete expression of the concern common to all the papers in this symposium for the dangers inherent

4. This point is developed, with examples and evidence, in my paper "Linguistic Aspects of Translation," to appear in the published papers of the May, 1979 Library of Congress symposium on problems of Japanese translation.

5. Masao Miyoshi, "Translation as Interpretation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): p. 300: "I believe that *Genji* is not at all a novel. . . ."

6. J. D. Rucinski, "Sire le Radieux: *The Tale of Genji* in French," *The Japan Foundation Newsletter* 6:6 (February-March, 1979): 13-14, reviewing the newly published French version of the first thirty-three chapters of the *Genji* by René Sieffert, as *Le Dit du Genji* (Publications orientalistes de France, 1977), a translation also noted in Seidensticker's contribution to this symposium.

in a monolingual reader's reading of any translation, even of the best translation possible. (In this context, Henderson's comments on the pitfalls awaiting the monolingual reader in the utilization of law-code translations, as well as Mass's exhortations in favor of more English translations of pre-modern texts, are both to the point.)

The discipline of translation as Ryan sketches it is both substantial and demanding; the translator must not only know everything possible about both the languages, the translator must also know everything possible about Japanese life and civilization. As we shall note below, Ryan's assumption that a translator from Japanese into English will necessarily first make every possible effort to master Japanese is a common enough working-assumption in Western Japanese studies, but apparently is not one of the assumptions that we share with our Japanese colleagues.

How greatly different the demands upon Japanese translation are, depending upon the discipline involved, is most vividly highlighted by the Mass contribution. His opening admission that the "translation needs" of different disciplines are likely "not transferable" is hardly intended as the understatement it may at first reading appear to be. Only careful study of his entire contribution will show how deeply this "non-transferability" actually goes.

Mass's contribution also demonstrates how greatly the emphasis and values of many historians of Japan have shifted in these post-Sansom years. The result of this shift will appear to some readers to be a somewhat too absolute denial of the validity of any historiography that would still dare to deal with matters any less concrete than land-rents or lease-hold rights. Such readers may well wonder where, in the course of this shift, the poetic sensibilities, aesthetic concerns, and spiritual and intellectual lives of thousands of Japanese are now to be filed away. Such issues, we are told by Mass, have today only a "diminished place in the priorities of most modern historians."

To the extent that this is true, it can hardly be questioned that historians who work along these lines will also have special, and perhaps not yet well-understood, requirements and methodology for approaching questions of translation. But even those with a different approach to history will still find much in Mass's contribution to this symposium that will be of value and interest, particularly in his concrete examples of how the historian is or is not served, on the one hand, by a "historian's translation" of a specimen text, and on the other hand, by a translation of the same text by a "literary specialist."

Surely of great value to all will also be Mass's treatment, not only of translations that tell the historian too little, usually because they are simply incorrect or careless, but also of translations that tell the historian (and everyone else as well) too much, or at least more than is genuinely known about a subject. Important examples here include his comments on certain of the once-fashionable etymological renderings of semantically eroded, and virtually meaningless, titles of sinecures and functionless offices. Here again, we encounter the problem of "names," an issue that persistently surfaces in any and all discussions of Japanese translation.

As is true of each of the other papers in the symposium as well, one of the great virtues of Mass's contribution is that it raises more questions to be answered in future studies than it solves now. One might in this connection point in particular to his assumption of the "obvious value to scholarship and pedagogy of having Japanese pre-modern texts [available] in English," and inquire, if only as a way for beginning some future continuation of this present discussion, just *how* obvious *is* such value, and to *whom* is it obvious?

Johnson's contribution is the only paper in the symposium that makes significant use of generalized, methodology-oriented studies dealing with overall questions of translation in terms of inter-lingual communication—another concrete indication of the general dearth of such materials in our field. From the work of the currently active Japanese sociolinguist Suzuki Takao he extracts the rule-of-thumb that "when we read a foreign language, we are really thinking in our native language most of the time,"⁷ and suggests that this formulation presents the translator of political science materials with the particularly specific challenge of "breaking the habit." The existence of a number of unsolved theoretical and technical questions in Suzuki's approach—particularly on that still extremely murky middle-ground that obscures the link between "language" and "thinking"—detracts hardly at all from the impact of Johnson's conclusion that a "habit" is indeed involved, or from his challenge that it is probably time to "break the habit" here at issue.

Meanwhile, it is important to stress the large area of commonality shared by the contributions of Seidensticker and Johnson, even

7. Takao Suzuki, *Japan and the Japanese*, translated by Akira Miura (Tokyo & New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1978), p. 60. But this translation somewhat obscures the sense of the original (Suzuki Takao, *Kotoba to Bunka* [Iwanami shinsho, Aoban 858, 1973], pp. 45–6), where the specific reference is to the difficulties that the Japanese have in learning English, making the text appear more generalized in tone and approach than it actually is, and also mistranslating "topic" as "subject."

though the former is concerned with translating the very special kind of language displayed by some of the earliest monuments of Japanese literary culture, while the latter is dealing with the special language of modern political science, politics, and politicians. "In general," Johnson concludes, "all political language means more than it says, and a good deal of it is euphemistic." Anyone who has ever tackled even a page of the *Genji*, or essayed the translation of a single Japanese poem from any period, would surely find it difficult to put the matter any more neatly: it would appear that "all Japanese political language" is very much like all other Japanese language, which is to say, very much like all language everywhere. On the face of the matter, probably few would have predicted the existence of any significant area of commonality between the translation of early Japanese literature and modern political science documents; that such a surprising commonality does exist is hardly the least of the discoveries of the present symposium.

For most readers of the symposium, Henderson's contribution will offer maximum exposure to the translation problems of a discipline where interests and materials differ significantly from those of the more familiar areas of Japanese studies. He makes it clear that the study of translation questions as they impinge upon the law is potentially of theoretical significance to our field as a whole, as well as being of obvious applied value for the communication and interpretation of legal matters *per se*.

All translation, no matter what the field or discipline, is after all interpretation. Henderson's contribution exhibits the special juridical senses of this "interpretation" that exist within the area of the law, with its high development of extremely specialized techniques for the categorization of meaning. These techniques show themselves to be significant not only because of their obvious relevance in the actual translation of legal texts, but also for the striking way in which many of them differ from current semantic theory as now understood within general linguistic science. Also of considerable theoretical importance for future work is Henderson's finding that it is probably the actual system of Japanese law—in linguistic terms, its "structure"—more than its overt linguistic expression that does the most to impede attempts to conduct legal communication solely by means of translations. The parallels existing between this paradox and many of the problems encountered in translating literary texts, particularly longer poetic texts, open whole new fields for future cross-disciplinary treatment of similarities and differences in questions of translation.

Nor are additional planes of intersection between Henderson's contribution and the other papers in the symposium difficult to identify, despite the highly specialized nature of the subject-matter with which Henderson is dealing. Examples include his scoring of the inadequacy—or possibly even the “negative value”—for monolingual lawyers of Japanese code translations into English when read without substantial annotations (we may compare Mass's call for more translations of pre-modern texts). Similarly, Henderson's treatment of the implications of the richness of Japanese legal terminology is echoed and reinforced by Mass's attention to differentiations in the translations of the historical terminology of Japanese offices and titles.

Among the several problem areas involved in Japanese translation that could not be dealt with here, one in particular may eventually prove to be the most important of all. If “Japanese studies” are ever to be more than simply something that foreigners do to and about Japan, and always from the outside looking in, then increasingly significant participation on the part of our Japanese colleagues must somehow be implemented. What can be done in the future to ensure their greater participation in this vital sector of Japanese studies, and to arrange for their monitoring, in some fashion, what the rest of us do? Most of our translation is done in isolation from Japanese scholars, who neither notice our results nor comment upon their accuracy or effectiveness. A minor exception may sometimes exist in *belles lettres*, but surprisingly enough, here too there is as a general rule hardly any evidence of scholarly attention by our Japanese colleagues to what we do. When such attention is paid, it is rare, and generally also on the most trivial level. Seidensticker refers to one such effort (out of which, however, he is still able to extrapolate useful reflections); and it would not be difficult to cite others.⁸ What remains conspicuously lacking is serious, evaluative, binational monitoring of translation that recognizes it to be the vital part of Japanese studies that it surely is.

At the same time, there also remains the very open question of how to monitor, from this side, the increasingly large numbers of translations now being published by Japanese scholars (and others) in Japan—translations that sometimes appear to have no originals,⁹

8. E.g., Itasaka Gen, “Kindai sakka no sakugo, §§ 6, 7, Yukiguni zeichū,” in his *Nihongo yokochō* (Kōdansha geijutsu bunko, 257) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1978).

9. E.g., such volumes as Sen'ichi Hisamatsu, *Biographical Dictionary of Japanese Literature* (Tokyo & New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1976), which appears to have no Japanese original text, where the translators are not men-

as well as translations that often raise serious problems of utility as well as of veracity.¹⁰ If we too often work in isolation from Japanese scholars in doing our translations, too many of the recent flood of new translations published in Japan more than return the compliment by isolating themselves from Western scholarship, and by ignoring both the needs and standards of Japanese studies. So many of these publications from Japan have appeared in the past few years that today they virtually constitute a new academic *genre*. They deserve the most careful scrutiny, and we regret that the symposium was unable to treat them in the detail they deserve.

One thing is clear. When the implementation of truly binational monitoring of translations in both directions finally begins to occur, we can almost certainly look for somewhat surprising results, and also for a certain rocking-of-the-boat in many fields. Even judging from what little is now known of this issue, it would appear quite unlikely that our Japanese colleagues would approach the questions of translation in Japanese studies from anything even remotely resembling the same assumptions and ground-rules that most of us in the West have traditionally brought to the consideration of these problems.

For example, each of the papers in the present symposium embodies the assumption, so basic that most of the authors allude to it only in covert terms, that any translator from Japanese must be, or should try to become, as capable in the language as possible. Japanese studies in the West has long taken as a given the axiom that the better a translator knows Japan and the Japanese, the better the translation will be. Ryan's contribution, as already noted, effectively expresses this generally held assumption.

But now evidence is becoming available that this conventional wisdom of the West is anything but conventional for some of our Japanese colleagues, and perhaps is also far from being wisdom. Kano Tsutomu, for example, in an attempt to describe what he "think[s] the perfect translator should be," begins by specifying, "He reads Japanese fairly easily."¹¹ One may safely assume that to

tioned, and where the "compilers" are simply described as "a team of Japanese experts under the direction of" the late Hisamatsu.

10. E.g., the translation of Suzuki's *Kotoba to Bunka* (cf. note 8, *supra*), some of the problems of which are treated in the review now in the press for *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, Vol. XII, No. 2.

11. Kano Tsutomu, "The Alchemist, Philosophy and Problems in Japanese-English Translation," *Translation Service Center Newsletter* No. 1 (January, 1979): 7.

the participants in this symposium, as for most of us, “fairly easily” does not seem to be nearly good enough for a translator who is going to tackle a Japanese text, no matter what its content, type, or period. It is clear that a significant divergence of opinion exists here between our Japanese colleagues and ourselves; it will be interesting and rewarding work to try to bridge it in the years ahead.

If one of the principal findings of this symposium, then, is that translation lies close to the core of all Japanese studies in the West, we ought to keep in mind that this is hardly a Western idiosyncrasy. Each of the three traumatic turning points in Japanese history has been accompanied by a massive confrontation between Japanese civilization and what George Steiner has termed “the destructive prodigality” of “Babel,”¹² in other words, the mystery, might, and impact of the very existence of foreign languages, and the consequent need for translation back and forth between those languages and one’s own. In the Taika Reforms, the confrontation was with Old Korean and Chinese; in the Meiji modernization, with several different European languages, beginning with the Dutch contacts; and in the defeat of 1945 and thereafter, with English.

By the same token, the growing conviction that translation is never a trivial aspect of Japanese studies is another, and perhaps one of the most striking, implications inherent in each of these five papers. If a tendency has prevailed in much of our academic community to hold that all questions of translation are somehow trivial, and fit only to serve as subjects for squabbling by language teachers, then it would seem that the time has come to reevaluate that tendency.

The problems that Seidensticker, Ryan, Mass, Johnson, and Henderson address in these five papers clearly are not trivial. No discussion of translation can avoid matters of detail, and plenty of details are discussed in these papers. Rather, we come closer here to what Hesse called that “strange hankering to find differences” (*merkwürdige Versessensein auf das Finden von Unterschieden*)—and Hesse went on to explain that “Science is nothing else than that strange hankering; her essence could not be better defined, *Man könnte ihr Wesen gar nicht besser bezeichnen.*”¹³ We are dealing here with more than quibbles about this word or that; we are moving

12. George Steiner, *After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 56.

13. Hermann Hesse, *Narziss und Goldmund*, p. 45, in *Gesammelte Werke, Achter Band* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970); translated by Geoffrey Dunlop, *Narziss and Goldmund* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), p. 42.

along one of the roads that takes us into the heart of science. Translation, like most things having to do with language, turns out to be too important to be left to language teachers. Goethe was, as usual, right: translation is “one of the most weighty and worthy activities” we can undertake.

But even over and above such pressing questions as the possibility of future binational cooperation in the evaluation and monitoring of translation, the papers in this symposium, taken as a whole, point toward a substantial number of new directions for the continuing study of this entire question.

For example, the Mass contribution deals, *inter alia*, with two different varieties of translation troubles—translations that tell us too little, and those that tell us too much. The former variety, translations that do insufficient justice to the content of their originals, are a common concern for most serious translators among Western languages. George Steiner, for example, is much concerned about them: “each translation falls short,” he writes, and “[f]rom [this] perception of unending inadequacy stems a particular sadness [that] haunts the history and theory of translation.”¹⁴

But we also know that there is an important second category of unsatisfactory translation, the translation that tells the reader more than the original deserves, or intends, to communicate. Indeed, one begins to wonder if this second category might not be something of a Japanese speciality, if not a monopoly. Mass’s specific examples have to do with rendering semantically attenuated titles of sinecures, but the problem is encountered with virtually all “names” in Japanese texts of all types and periods. George Steiner knows this problem not, or almost not.¹⁵ Refining the methodology of translations that “tell too much,” and analysing their strong points along with their shortcomings may well yet prove to be the single most significant contribution that the study of Japanese translation has to make to overall problems of translation as a discipline in its own right. And surely we would also all like to learn more in the future of

14. George Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

15. It is hardly an accident to find that when George Steiner does exceptionally admit this negative possibility (“Bad translations communicate too much,” *Babel*, p. 63), he is paraphrasing Walter Benjamin. But Benjamin’s approach to the theory of translation was essentially gnostic, irrational, and above everything else, Kabbalist, hence “Oriental” in the classical sense, and also thoroughly non-Western. It is only in terms of Benjamin’s Kabbalist insights that a methodological explanation of the many translations from the Japanese that are so “bad” simply because they “communicate too much” can be sought.

fascinating areas hinted at in some of these papers, but insufficiently explored, such as the “failed translations” alluded to in the Seidensticker paper: why do some of them fail, and what can be done to help ensure that more do not fail in the future? Nor can this in turn be isolated from the still largely unasked, and surely unanswered, question of what is to be translated, and why. One thing is plain: much remains to be studied in the future, as Japanese studies continue to grapple with translation.