

Adaptations, Revisions, and Reworking of Landmark Texts: Japanese Adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

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Abstract

The paper will be highlighting the impact of the age in changing and bowdlerizing the original text of Lewis Carroll's fantasy story *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* through its translation into Japanese. The story of Alice is quite popular in Japan for its two elements, escape from actuality and reimagining of reality, are quite liked by Japanese readers. From the late Meiji period to the present there have been many translations and adaptations into Japanese each with its own spin and bias. Alice possesses a strong personality which in pre-war Japan was not conducive to the idea of the creation of a strong national character. In order to tone down individuality and bring in conformity, the character of a grandmother was introduced. She acted as moral police advising Alice on how to follow social norms. Both the Japanese adaptations and translations changed their character depending on the social needs. With the rise of digital technology, manga adaptations of Alice created a new character called User Alice who becomes strong through readership power and utility challenges the fictional Alice. Both the translation and adaptation of Alice story has been shaped by the changing reality in Japan.

Keywords: translation, change the text, women, individuality, conformity, national consciousness, digital technology, anime

Translation into Japanese language

Over the last century, many Japanese novelists have been challenging themselves to create better translations and adaptations. It is quite interesting that just one particular story, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, has had more than 150 translations and adaptations into the Japanese language.

Translations are described and understood as 'transformation' by Jacques Derrida (Derrida). Translating language reconstructs the story itself. Faithful translation requires not only broad and deep knowledge of the culture and language but also the fine understanding of socio-cultural and political background behind the story. Warren Weaver critically comments on the translation of Alice in Wonderland saying, that the Japanese version both puzzles and intrigues him. He observes, "the three retranslations I have, all being made from the exactly the same Japanese passage, differ so much, one from another, that it seems clear that translation back and forth between English and Japanese must be rather loose and vague business" (Weaver 107).

Changing and Bowdlerizing the Text

Alice has been translated into Japanese many times, but it was not easy to introduce the British literature in Japanese society, because of the vast differences in the political and social situations of the two countries. In addition, the translators confronted a language wall between English and Japanese, but they managed to represent the story of Alice. According to Kusumoto, Japanese translators for the tale of Alice replaced a part of original contents which was difficult for Japanese with several expressions which were familiar to Japanese readers. Therefore, in the process of translating English into Japanese, a part of episodes and poems in the story were changed and bowdlerized because translators tried to create works which were easy for Japanese to understand the British literature (Kusumoto 2001).

Firstly, sections of the original story were altered by the translators because of their unfamiliarity to Japanese readers. In general, there are 2 types of translated works: translations and adaptations. Translation is defined as to replace expressions of one language into other languages. On the other hand, adaptations is defined as to adapt works with the original concept but not faithful to the language expression. For example, *Alice Monogatari* ("*Alice Story*" [translated from Japanese]) written by Nagayo in 1909 consisted of translations from chapter 1 to chapter 3 and adaptations of the contents in other chapters. In this case, in the process of translating English into Japanese, Nagayo generated a new tale with Alice's story that only covers a curious girl's travels in the Wonderland. This shows the change of a part of episode. Another example is Niwa's work, *Kodomo no Yume* ("*A dream of Child*" [translated from Japanese]). Unlike Nagayo's work, Niwa faithfully translated the story into Japanese and managed to retain the fundamental essence of the original story via culturally valid appropriations as we will see. In fact, he altered the long talk of a mouse to a Japanese old tale, Peach Boy, *Momotaro*. He also modified the expression of Alice who become big size in the court, and he used a metaphor of a great image of Buddha. He thought these were more familiar to Japanese

children and easy to understand for them, conveying the spirit of the text. In any case, translators changed some episodes in the story of *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*.

Next, several poems of Alice's story were bowdlerized because they seemed to be unnecessary for Japanese people to understand whole of Alice's tale. There are 11 poems in the tale of Alice. Most of them are parodies of teachings and popular songs which were familiar among people who speak English. However, these parodies had difficulties to translate into Japanese because the original teachings and popular songs did not exist in Japan. Also, most Japanese people did not know the English teachings and popular songs. These facts show that Japanese could not capture humor of parodies. In this situation, some translators choose to delete several poems. Suzuki, a translator of *Chichu no Sekai* ("*Underground World*" [translated from Japanese]), omitted the poem, "*How doth the little crocodile...*" This is a parody of Isaac Watts's teaching. Without understanding the original teaching, readers will not be interested therefore Suzuki decided to delete the poem from his translated work. In addition, in other works, some poems were also deleted, such as "*Fury said to a mouse, that ...*" and "*You are old, Father William...*". Several poems of the story of Alice were bowdlerized because translator assumed these were not essential or interesting for Japanese people.

Escape from Reality and Reimagination

In Japan, there are a lot of fantasy stories created for children called *douwa*. However, those stories depicted the real world and imaginary world as different things. Thus, there is no relationship between reality and fantasy world because they were depicted separately in books. *Alice in Wonderland* allows the reader to escape from reality and return to the reality again without a break. This seamless escape and return through fantasy help interact between fantasy and real world and this interaction keeps the interest of readers alive. This concept also appeals to Japanese readers who is not used to this new style of storytelling. What is escape? There are two types of the escaping from reality. The one is finding a safe place. People want to escape from the world they are in because the world is too much for them and could be full of stress, anxiety and harsh reality. On the other hand, another concept is exploring new world. People want to escape from reality because they just want to explore and find another new world. As we can see, *Alice in Wonderland* has both aspects of escaping. Escaping from stressful world and exploring new world. Fantasy novels like *Alice* loved by Japanese have one obvious feature. That is the seamless escape-and-return through fantasy.

In the 1909, Meiji period, when *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was translated into Japanese and in 1912 to 1926, there was a larger trend where narrative storytelling for young generation's books were popularized and the casual mode of fairy tale storytelling transformed to a literary mode. This

era observed a strong tendency of the “fairy tale” story telling in children’s books in Japan. This type of storytelling called *setsuwa* in Japanese is a form in which a story such as fantasy is depicted only within a certain clear framework. For examples, in the book called “The Spider’s Thread”(1989), a short story by Ryunosuke Akutagawa he depicted a whole story as a past event. Other authors used those words “once upon a time”, “Now, it is a long time ago” at the beginning of the stories. As we can evidence, there was a clear distinction between the world created in the story and the reality where the readers are in.

However, British fantasy literature represented by Alice have a characteristic of the seamless escape-and-return through Fantasy. After Alice’s translation, in Japan, those literature in the form of that characters going from their real world to a Fantasy or Parallel world, and then return to a reality, those stories such as “Secret Garden” by Frances Hodgson Burnett or “The Chronicles of Narnia” by C.S. Lewis have been translated and accepted by Japanese. They described those events, such as falling in rabbit hole, going through the inside of cabinet as a real thing and can occur in real world, even if it is not possible.

This writing technique has been very popular. As one of examples, Studio Ghibli animation films are strongly loved by Japanese. They have inherited this technique. For example, in “Spirited Away” in 2001, the main character named Chihiro goes through a long and narrow tunnel and goes to another world, In “ My Neighbor Totoro” (1988), Totoro which can only be seen by Children, comes into the real world but Totoro usually lives inside tree. Thus, there is no clear boundary between reality and fantasy in the movie. In Ghibli movies, tunnels or other things are depicted as a symbol that connects the reality with different world, just as Alice’s rabbit hole plays a role as a symbol.

As I mentioned. Alice was translated into Japanese from around the era called Meiji period (1868-1912) when people trying to break out of the old framework of storytelling created before and trying to form a new world of children’s literatures and the seamless escape-and-return through fantasy have been accepted in Japan because it enriches the ordinary day-to-day existence and allows the readers to escape the real world into a fantasy world and then again return to the real world.

Transformation from the original text to the moral tale in the Late Meiji Period

Since Alice had been introduced into Japanese society in 1909, many readers had accepted and enjoyed the books through adaptations as a moral tale and projection of a good behavior of women because they were strongly affected by socio-political situation in the Meiji period. In the Meiji

period, Japan was particularly concerned with the expansion of education and aiming modernization to catch up the west. According to Chimori who examined translation works in the Meiji period, the translated works were pretty much directly influenced by socio-cultural situation at that time (Chimori 241). She pointed out 4 elements. Firstly, juvenile literature and other publications had been under the national authority which restricted any criticism or comment against emperor and capitalism. Secondly heroines and heroes in juvenile literature rarely had a contact with outer world of family. Around 1902, comic magazines for children were published but they mostly focused on depicting an ideal female figure rather than attracting interest and pleasure of children. Thirdly Japanese literature did not have a genre of non-sense literature therefore many novelists were not able to understand non-sense jokes of Lewis Carroll. Lastly, since all translations and adaptations were created by men until after the world war II, there is lack of sympathy towards Alice. Lewis Carroll depicted Alice as powerful and full of curiosity even though under the Victorian period which was under the stern morality. However, translations in Meiji period seems not have such compassion towards heroines. They rather emphasized moral judgement through the story.

Arisu Monogatari (Alice's Story) in 1909

Amongst many translations and adaptations in the Meiji Period, Arisu Monogatari was most distinctive. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was introduced by Nagayo (1886-1944) for the first time in 1909 with the title of Arisu Monogatari (*Alice's story* [Translated from Japanese]) as a serial novel in the comic magazine for children. Alice was depicted as brave, strong and fearless in the original text, but those characteristics were not welcomed in Japanese society. Those were not translated faithfully to the original story because her strong personality was challenged the creation of national identity for Japanese people in the late Meiji period.

Nagayo created new adaptation of Alice in 1909. He translated first three chapters and added new 11 chapters by his own. He recreated new Alice who was a subject of reflection of morality. Nagayo's work seems most distinctive in that moral judgement. Alice was depicted strong as she finally challenged Queen of Hearts in the trial in the original story but on the other hand, Alice in Nagayo's adaptation was depicted polite and obedient girl as she paid her respect to the Queen of Hearts and the King of Pearl who appeared in the latter half of the story. And she finally became crown princess by getting married the son of the King of Pearl.

In the story which, one day she reached Kingdom of Pearl and she was staying in a palace in peace. She kindly opened the box and release a mouse inside, but that mouse was an enemy of the King. She

was cursed and became a seagull. She went to the island where the grandmother stayed. Grandmother was introduced as a character to guide Alice what she should do to return human being from seagull. Alice asked, *“how can I atone for the sin? How can I return human being?”* (Chimori 2009 147: translated by author) Then grandmother replied that Alice should get something for returning human being. Later in the story Alice realized what she had to get were sincerity, chastity, love and patience.

Personality of Alice

Many translations and revised editions were aimed at suppressing and changing the rebellious nature of Alice to be accepted as a sensitive girl who can adapt to social norms at that time. In Japan, many translations and revised editions of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland were published during the period between the end of World War I and the outbreak of World War II. Many of these early Japanese translations deviated significantly from the original Alice. In the original text, she has love, kindness, politeness and curiosity. She is willing to show off what she has learned like a clever student. Also, she is peculiar who plays double role, scolding or reminding herself. On the other hand, she is self-centered and has strong spirit that does not move with the absurd behavior of strange characters in wonder world. However, Alice in the early translations lacked curiosity, intellect, and personality, omitting the most obvious parts of her opinion and thoughts.

As Japanese social norm at the time, parents did not expect their daughters to have higher education than their sons. Women were expected to well-behaved and should not assert themselves than men. For those reason, in Japan, the nature of Alice was an inappropriate to the creation of Japanese nationality because she appeared as a symbol of rebellion at that time. As a result, in the process of translation, from English to Japanese, the personality of Alice had been changed from rebellious and fiery to sweet and frail girl. As you can see, Alice's personality is a strong reflection of Japanese men's predominance over women and feudal view of woman of the time. However, with the passage of time, as women's rights were established and evolved, Japanese translators were able to translate almost faithfully to the character of the original Alice. As mentioned above, Alice's personality in translating into Japanese society changed over the years, influenced by the social and cultural background of Japan.

Character of Grandmother, Individuality and Conformity

In the story, grandmother appeared as a guide who leads Alice to the right path. Grandmother continued:

“As I said, becoming a human being is not easy, you have to gain something for becoming a human being. You should get something as big as possible, for that, you should do for others but not

for yourself. Get something which especially current women lacks. Of course, men also should do have but women must do have.” Then Alice replied, “Is it scholarship?” Grandmother had a bitter face and said, “scholarship? It doesn’t matter if you have or not....” Alice responded “I was wrong. A treasure of women must be a tender heart.” Grandmother fixed the mood and said, “Almost! But that’s not enough. Women must preserve chastity.” (Trans. 149-150)

The reason behind that Alice was depicted was clear that the thoughts and ideas of the period had reflected. It is obvious that Arisu Monogatari is a moral story that tells an ideal female figure at that time, which is *Ryosai Kenbo*, good wives and wise mothers. In the Meiji period, the aim of girl’s education was to raise *Ryosai Kenbo* for the nation. The status of women was very low especially after getting married, her position was minor under the head of the household. Masae Kato notes that the only important and expected role for women was to give birth to children, especially male children. Otherwise they were not acknowledged as completed women (Masae Kato 37).

Nagayo emphasized that action should be for others not for herself. *Alice summoned up her courage hearing that her action would be for the sake of human and women (152)*. She was depicted obedient, shy, loyal, less distinctive and self-sacrifice girl. It reflects Japanese female figure in the Meiji period. In addition, in the story, she did not fight with anyone unlikely the original one. She is kind of trying to avoid fighting and crashing. When she replied, “*Is it scholarship?*” she noticed that grandmother was making a bitter face and immediately her face turned red and said she was wrong. She does not protest, discuss or against. In prewar time, Japan there was a regulation of speech in order to monitor anyone would be against emperor or capitalism, juvenile literature was also not an exception of the subject of restriction. Society and political ideology casted a shadow over the literature. Therefore, Nagayo intentionally changed the original text and story into a moral story which brings conformity and lessens individuality. She was leading Alice to achieve sincerity, chastity, love and patience.

User Alice

With the rise of digital technology and popularity of manga culture, adaptation of Alice has become a trend amongst non-professional authors. Comic Market is widely known as called “Comiket” amongst Japanese who love manga, animation and literature. Comiket is the largest fan convention in the world and it makes Japan one of the most unique culture in my opinion. In this market, fans share merchandises such as books and comics that they made and published by themselves based on the original literary text or manga. They also make many kinds of goods and fan arts such as stickers,

postcards and video games. In this way, Japan is a country where fantasy and “second creation” or adaptation prosper.

As one of such examples of “fan culture”, British Alice in Wonderland has been very often recreated in Japan. A Japanese fan of Alice in Wonderland tried to write their own story and named Key Princess Story: Eternal Alice Rondo. This animation tells the story of Aruto and his adventures with Alice Users. These kinds of adaptation and translation of a work have developed with the digital technology.

Aruto, who is the main character of the Japanese animation, Key Princess Story: Eternal Alice Rondo'. Aruto is a student and has interested in original Alice in Wonderland. This Alice story inspired Aruto when he was in childhood, so he starts creating his own story based on original one. One day, Aruto finds a rabbit-eared girl and thinks she is a real Alice, but her name is Arisugawa Arisu, which is written in Hiragana. All of names are written in Katakana, but it's not Katakana. It means that she is a Japanese-style character and a member of Alice Users. Aruto loves Alice story and always thinks about Alice, so it makes him access to the library. In fact, library implies the imaginary world where only Alice Users can be accessible. Alice User who is created by a Japanese fan keeps fighting each other to finish final Alice story and read it. This is not completed and when all Alice Users stories are collected by taking away another person's secret, the final story will be completed. To do this, they try to collect another person's secret story by winning in the battle because those who win can read all the secrets of another Alice Users. The secret story means personal trauma that each Alice User has. The final Alice story can be finished by taking away another person's secret. Aruto is not an ordinary boy. He has the strong power of imagination, and it turns out Lewis Carrol called Alice master tries to use the creative powers that Aruto has. In the end, Alice Users are created by Aruto and these girls are not real people but exists in Aruto's imagination.

Finally, the development of technology has a large impact on Japanese manga. In the digital technology society, original works are easily transformed from comics to anime and games. From the printed words to animations, the Japanese artist have adapted the original Alice story and transformed it into the new versions like unique Alice character.

In conclusion, Japanese readers of the iconic Alice fantasy has created an interactive genre where readers not only vicariously participate in the adventures of Alice but also get into her life bringing

social and individual conflict in it. Retelling the story through shifting genres—comic, anime—and introducing new characters in the story gives a new dimension to an elitist canon.

Conclusion

Translation is a dynamic attempt to transform the text and story itself, even changing its intention and value. Japanese authors have been trying to publish better and creative translations through making expressions familiar to Japanese readers. Especially in the Meiji Period, with the rapid modernization and the rise of national consciousness, literature was used for the purpose of creating ideal women. Literature is a micrograph of socio-political situation. Just like the social norms create literary canon, literature has a power to change people's attitude and behavior. Alice as an iconic character had been loved by people and taken advantage of as a part of creation to strong nationalism. Secondary creations and adaptations through manga and anime are reflecting current phenomena representing certain desire for escapism.

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