

# Translation, Culture, and Humanity: Implications of the thought and theory of Akira Yanabu for advancing the study of global relations

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## Review Article

Akira Yanabu, *Japanese Culture as “Translation Culture”* (*Honyaku Bunka Wo Kangaeru*), Hosei University Press, 1978/2002/2013.

Akira Yanabu, *Thought on the Modern Japanese Language: Historical development of the translation oriented writing style* (*Kindai Nihongo No Shiso: Honiyaku Buntai Seiritsu Jijyou*), Hosei University Press, 2004/2017.

Akira Yanabu, *Encounter with the Unknown: Reappraisal on “translation culture” and modern Japan* (*Michi Tono Deai: Honiyaku Bunka Ron Saisetsu*), Hosei University Press, 2013.

**Key words:** Akira Yanabu, translation studies, international cultural relations, Japanese culture

## Introduction

This article focuses on the three recent published and/or reissued books by Akira Yanabu (柳父章, 1928-), who is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding scholars in humanities in Post-war Japan, not only within the discipline of the study of translation (translation studies)<sup>1</sup>, but more generally, in the study international / global cultural relations. He has been offering his unique thought and theory, most notable his “cassette effect” or “jewelry box effect” theory, especially since early 1970s, after publishing his first book. Until now, his insights about the significant impact of the act of translation in the making of modern Japan, that covers not only its cultural aspects in the narrowest sense, has been still fresh and astonishing. Also, his unique and splendidly original way of analyzing intercultural relations starting from the analysis of the act of translation, by applying diverse discipline like history, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy, has ample implications for the interdisciplinary study of international cultural relations / global relations. Further, his hypothesis on the relationship between human beings and language in general is so stimulating and in this aspect he would reach to more fundamental question like what is humanity, by exploring the significance of the people’s experience of the “encounter” to the words as the unknown things.

However, though his writings have been widely read and appreciated since 1970s when his first book has been published, surprisingly and strangely enough, there would be almost no study or full length critical examination about his whole intellectual endeavors. As far as the reviewer’s investigation goes, in Japan,

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in his writings, he himself does not identified himself within the discipline so-called “translation studies”, which is now becoming popular worldwide. One of the reason is that he regards translation studies as originally as intra-civilizational frame work, which only deals with the alphabetical writings and does not go beyond outside. In this review, “the study of translation” would be used to refer to the entire undertakings including Yanabu and translation studies.

there is almost no full-fledged analysis on Yanabu, except several citations and short book reviews. Though translation is one of the most crucial enterprises in forming modern Japan, in developing international cultural relations in Japan, the outstanding uniqueness of Yanabu, most scholars of international relations has not paid enough attention to Yanabu as the subject of study. The reviewer thinks that paradoxically, this absence itself *does* prove the far-reaching importance and decisive significance of his work. Seeing outside of Japan, his work has slowly been introduced and some study and estimation have been done by foreign scholars, but it is also not enough<sup>2</sup>. All of this would be the reason why the reviewer, a scholar of international cultural relations and international thought especially related to the formation of modern Japan, would try to pose this article, as an introduction to his thought and theory.

One of the reasons of this absence of an estimation or study on Yanabu is that his scope is too broad to be handled by scholars of transnational studies, to which he nominally belongs. He would be too interdisciplinary to be covered by only one discipline. Like many predecessors who easily went beyond a given and narrow boundary from where they have initially started and attained truly inter/trans/cross disciplinary studies, his insight generally and wrongly has been likely to be regarded as being valid only in the sphere of his first starting point and overlooked by such tendency to fail to estimate him correctly.

Another reason would be that he has not been trained at the graduate school and he almost studied by himself. Like many self-educational scholars, he made his own way, without caring so much about the rigid rule of each discipline. Thus, even if some scholars outside of the discipline try to appreciate his work, they tend to abstain from analyzing his insights because they tend to refrain from applying his thought to their own discipline because it might be difficult to bridge Yanabu to their discipline, except referring or citing Yanabu casually or perfunctory.

On the other hand, though so many scholars of translation studies also has been paying enormous attention to him and regarding him as one of the most crucial scholars, it seems that they cannot treat or estimate his whole broad scope of studies adequately, exactly because most of them cannot go beyond the discipline like Yanabu. This situation of, as it were, the “splendid isolation”, might be good for Yanabu himself to keep on advancing his original thinking without bothering or threatening sometimes meaningless and out-of-point criticism, but this could also not be a sound circumstance for him without having a chance to be understood the crucial meaning of his whole academic endeavor, within and out of translation studies. In consequence, he seems to have been underestimated both from inside and outside of the discipline. His intellectual attainment can be connected to so many research subjects and various disciplines, but this would not have happened so often. He is constantly referred to and cited but nobody goes further to approach the essence of his thought. This is also the reason why the reviewer engaged this article.

The reviewer has been reading Yanabu, especially when started to tackle with the analysis of global dissemination of the word “soft power”<sup>3</sup>. His theory was greatly helpful and it gave full of inspirations to the

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<sup>2</sup> German translation of his work is, Yanabu Akira, tr. Florian Coulmas, *Modernisierung der Sprache, Eine kulturhistorische Studie über westliche Begriffe im japanischen Wortschatz*, Iudicium, 1991. For English translation, Yanabu Akira, “Translation in Japan: The Casette Effect”, *TTR* 22-1 (2009), pp. 19-29 and Some chapters and papers are translated in Indra Levy ed., *Translation in Modern Japan*, Routledge, 2010. Some references are made in Nana Sato-Rossberg and Judy Wakabayashi ed., *Translation and Translation Studies in the Japanese Context*, Continuum Books, 2012. Other reference and analysis are, John Gallagher, *Translation impact in Japanese: A translation of chapter seven of Yanabu Akira's Honyaku no sisou*, Dublin city University, 1999, and Jaques Joly, *Compte-rendu de lecture YANABU AKIRA: HONYAKU NO SHISO*, “Shizen to Nature”. That information mainly depends on the bibliography of BOOK3.

<sup>3</sup> Atsushi Shibasaki, “On Soft Power: International Relations as a research subject of the study of international relations”, Shibasaki, *Thought and Behaviour on the Idea of the ‘international’: Towards the study of global relations (Kokusai Kankei no Shisoshi: Global Kankei Kenkyu No Tameni)*, Iwanami Shoten, 2015 (first appeared in 2007, in *International Social Science*, the University of Tokyo, 56).

reviewer in depicting the essence of the global circulation of the word that Joseph S. Nye coined. More importantly, it leads to the reviewer to contemplate the usage and choice of the translated words in the study of international relations or in the daily language talking and writing about the world as a whole. However, it would be quite difficult to describe his idea and thought, which has a very thick accumulation for over 40 years, thoroughly and completely at one time, because of the factors I have posed above. Therefore, I would limit the scope only to review those three recent published books (hereafter mentioned as BOOK1, BOOK2, BOOK3), not to get lost.

In order to grasp the centerpiece of his versatile and broad academic scope, this review article consists as follows: First, it introduces his personal and academic profile very briefly. Second part would be also a short introduction of each book and its positioning in his research history. Third part is the main one, and it would depict the essence of his study drawing from the examples mainly from the three books and if needed from other important works, by employing three keywords as the pillar of his academic interest; translation, culture, and humanity. Lastly this review concludes by assembling the key findings and showing the future research agenda.

Before proceeding, the reviewer would like to note that the translation of the title of the books, or the keywords like “翻訳文化” (Honyaku Bunka, translation based culture or translation rooted culture) and others are only tentative and without any endorsement from Mr. Yanabu. It would be pretty difficult to translate his unique keywords and the titles, which seems so simple at first glance but it contains much deeper meanings. In order to avoid misunderstandings by putting too much the reviewer’s own interpretation of his intentions, this article basically adopt somewhat word-for-word translation. Though Yanabu supported the premise that there could not be a perfect translation, this choice might be not favorable for him, but the reviewer admits that translation in this article somewhat depending on the reversal cassette effect in some senses.

#### **About Akira Yanabu<sup>4</sup>**

Akira Yanabu was born in Tokyo, in 1928. He is the son of an elite businessman who once had been a bureaucrat of Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. He spent his young days mostly in Shibuya, Tokyo. From his childhood he loves to read, as well as other great scholars. He attended Urawa High School and has been influenced by his French teacher Noboru Hiraoka, who is a friend of Hideo Kobayashi, the famous critic of modern Japan. In 1948, three years after the defeat of the Asia Pacific War, when he was twenty, he started his stay at a sanatorium in Sukagawa, Fukushima prefecture, for the treatment of tuberculosis, for eight years long. During the long years in the sanatorium, he concentrated more in reading books, especially Western Literature, Hideo Kobayashi and books in the series of *Classique Larousse* in French. We should be keen about that he experienced the defeat in 1945 when he was seventeen, a sentimental adolescent age, and he has in some sense been stayed away from the ‘ordinary’ world for long years in his twenties. The former experience brought him a fundamental question about Japanese modernity that lead to such a devastating circumstance and fundamental change of entire atmosphere, and the latter experience made him to be able to gain a birds-eye-viewpoint which makes him somewhat being detached from the ‘real’ Japanese society, which was in the process of radical transformation and reconstruction from the desolation by the war, which accompanied drastic structural and cultural changes.

After that, he studied at the University of Tokyo, Division of International Relations. His B.A. thesis was not about translation, but about the independent movement and struggle in Algeria, which was hotly discussed at the time. In 1960s he kept his study while making both ends meet by working as a part-time teacher in a private school, private teacher, and so on. In 1972, he published his first book, *The Logic of Translated*

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<sup>4</sup> This part mainly owes to the interview “Encounter with Translation” in BOOK3, pp. 219-247.

*Words (Honyaku Go No Ronri)* from Hosei University Press, which published most of his books since then. Until now, he has published seventeen books as of 2017(see the bibliography), while he taught in Terakoya School (Private School) and Momoyama Gakuin University. This career shows that he is not a typical university professor or a sought-after author from the first stage. He has been almost ‘outside’ of the authorized academic or intellectual community, and seems to have a sense of anti-mainstream spirit. Of course he was recognized by famous intellectuals like Shunsuke Tsurumi, Yoshie Hotta, and Shuichi Kato, but he is fundamentally an independent and somewhat isolated from the main current.

He received Yamazaki Prize in 1987, for his unique and truly original study on translation and Japanese culture. As noted in the introduction, his works has not positively been translated or introduced worldwide. There are only three translations of his book in two languages (one books in German and Korean and the other book in Korean), and a few short essays translated in English and French.

### **Overview of the three books**

BOOK1: *Japanese Culture as “Translation Culture”* (1978/2002/2013).

BOOK1 was first published in 1978, in between *Thought on the translation in Japan: Shizen and nature (Honyaku No Shiso: Shizen to nature)* (Heibonsya, 1977) and *Comparative Analysis on Japanese Language (Hikaku Nihongo Ron)* (Nippon Honyaku Ka Yosei Center, 1979). This book consists of eighteen essays, divided in three parts, six for each. Most of them are somewhat short, except the last one, which was transcribed from a lecture and Q&A section were included.

The first published date of those essays ranges from 1972 to 1978, which covers the publication of his first four books (*The Logic of Translated Words* (1972), *The Logic of Writing Style* (1976), *What is Translation?* (1976), and *Thought on Translation in Japan* (1977)). This means that the BOOK1 could be regarded as both a supplementary appendix of his early thought and theory in the first phase of his study on translation, and an introductory anthology to his ideas and methods at the beginning of his studies.

As for the three keywords, this book is mainly as translation and culture, more exactly, connecting the study of translation to the study of culture (Part 1 and Part 2). However, in Part 3, Yanabu tried to tackle with the issue of humanity. Especially the last essay which was transcribed from the lecture in Terakoya, which is a private school, with a long question and answer session, called “On the language and the origin of civilization” is full of tremendously interesting argument, though the contents were not sorted out clearly put, and his development of thinking was somewhat under way at this stage.

BOOK2: *Thought of the Modern Japanese Language: Historical Development of the translation oriented writing* (2004/2017).

BOOK2 was first published in 2004 and newly re-printed in 2017. This book has eleven chapters. Most of them are originally written and transcribed from lectures in between 2002 and 2004, except Chapter 4 and 5, which was reorganized from his past essays in 1970s, 80s, and 2000s. Yanabu thoroughly reconstructed the original writings especially from Chapter 1 to Chapter 8.

BOOK2 was published in between *The Idea of Secrecy (Hi no Shiso)* (Hosei University Press, 2002) and the BOOK3. Since BOOK3 is the introductory book of his whole thought, this BOOK2 is at this moment the latest academic work that concentrate on the specific theme.

Though it touches all aspects of the three points like BOOK1, this book is mainly about translation and its effect, to the style of the modern Japanese language. Chapter 9 and 10 deal with the issue of culture *per se*, and obviously inspiring is the Chapter 11, entitled “Limit of Language” focuses on the issue of humanity

itself, just as the last essay in BOOK1.

BOOK3: *Encounter with the unknown: reflection on translation culture in modern Japan* (2013).

This is his latest book, as of the summer of 2017. This book includes seven chapters, with a short but important introduction, and long and important interview in 2012 as appendix. This book deals with all three aspects as mentioned, but since this was written very recently, it reconstructed from his present standing point. This means that this book about the reflection of those three keywords, translation, culture and humanity, by trying to arranging the order of discussion.

To put it roughly, From Chapter 2 to Chapter 5 is about translation, Chapter 6 and 7 is culture, and introduction to Chapter 1 is about humanity. The interview was so useful to understand his backgrounds, as well as the one done in 2007<sup>5</sup>. This book has also an almost complete bibliography of his works in all languages.

### **Translation, Culture, and Humanity: three core research subjects**

As I have referred in the introduction, there seems basically three fundamental pillars in the whole academic endeavor by Yanabu: translation, culture, and humanity. The core questions about translation are: What is the translation in modern Japan, or in whole history of Japan? And especially what does happen when people translate and when do people use those translated words? The core questions on culture are: What is the relation between the phenomenon of translation and modern Japan, or in whole history of Japan? More generally and particularly, what is the significant impact of using those translated words to the making the structure of the thinking of Japanese people or its entire culture? Thirdly, the core questions about humanity is: What is the language itself and its impact to the entire human beings and its civilization?

Those three are already found in his early writings in 1960s and 1970s, and consistently penetrating through his academic undertakings until now. I do not have firm confidence that he himself would classify his thought consciously into those three categories, but in order to understand and introduce his thoughts, these divisions would be of some use. To put it very roughly, his academic interests has been moving from translation to culture, of course always going back and forth between them, at the same time, period to period, he tries to tackle with the last issue of humanity by applying intellectual fruits he harvested at each time. I am going to deal with them one by one, taking from the examples from the three books.

### **1. Translation**

His first and direct academic interest is undoubtedly about the issue of translation in Japan, especially in modern Japan. From thorough investigation of this issue, he devised the very original “cassette effect” theory (sometimes translated as “jewelry box effect” theory) in 1970s. At first he concentrated on the process of translation itself, more specifically on what happened when people translate Western foreign words (English, German, French and others) into Japanese. Then, he turned to how those translated words work to Japanese people, and deeply affect and radically form the style of modern Japanese language. Then, since language plays enormously important role in making and maintaining culture and civilization, he turned to the issue of culture in general or in several respects, and in the third point of investigation, he even reaches to the more fundamental question like what words and things means to humanity, especially the triangle relationship

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<sup>5</sup> “Translation Starts with the encounter with the unknown and the mysterious: Interview with Akira Yanabu” (Michi Fukakai No Deai Kara Honyaku Ga Hajimaru), *Honyaku Kenkyu Heno Shotai* (Invitation to Translation Studies in Japan),2, 2008 (interview was done in 2007).

between words, things, and humanity.

Cassette effect theory would be explained as follows. When Japanese intellectuals in early Meiji period tried to translate a foreign word (mostly from Western countries) to Japanese, there were three alternatives. First was to translate it to a word which previously existed and often used in the daily life among ordinary people. Second was to translate it to an existed but rarely used and/or previously unpopular word. The third was to translate it to an entirely new word that they devised originally in order to make translation possible into the Japanese language system.

For example, a “tree” would be translated to “木”(Ki), following the type 1. “Nature” is to “自然”(Shizen), type 2, and “society” is to “社会”(Shakai), type 3. As for type 1, Japanese people would feel nothing special and never feel any dissonance from those words, because the word is translated to daily used ordinary words. However, when people are faced with type 2 and type 3 translated words, people are consciously or unconsciously at a loss, because they cannot guess the true meaning from seeing those Chinese characters. Also, they feel a certain kind of attractiveness from those new words. They feel something good or even cool, exactly because its meaning is unknown. This kind of feeling leads to the cassette effect.

This type 3 translation inevitably happens simply because, there had been no equivalent concept like “society” or “nature” in pre-modern Japanese language. Pioneers of modern translation like Amane Nishi (西周) and Yukichi Fukuzawa (福澤諭吉) deplores the absence of adequate words. They honestly confessed that those new words they chose made up of Kanjis (Chinese characters) would never have completely equivalent meanings as the original Western words have. They admitted that they only tentatively put those newly made Japanese words, and even cautiously mentioned that readers have to guess the meaning not from the translated word itself, but from the context of the whole text.

It would be also striking to mention that most of the important words which is needed to accept the key concepts of modern Western civilization to westernize Japan, especially very abstract concepts which connects to the core notions of modern western society like liberty (自由), rights (権利), philosophy (哲学) and so on, were translated by type 2 or type 3. Of course, Japanese intellectuals who understand foreign languages can tell the original western words from these Chinese characters, but many others would not know the original words. This shows that there are different ways of accepting those words, based on the extent of the language ability.

Cassette effect refers to the strong fascinating appeal that those translated words have for Japanese people. Those words are mainly about the abstract concepts, and mostly translated in the form of the two Kanjis (liberty=自由, society = 社会, right = 権利 and so on). If they translate them into Katakana, instead of Kanji, its effect is basically still the same (ex. “global” to “グローバル”). According to Yanabu, Katakana word is also translated words. When Japanese people see those words, at first they cannot tell the meaning of it, but they feel so enchanted by the presence of the word itself, because those words looks something important and new, and strong power to persuade and/or move others. For them those word is like a *cassette* (jewelry box), it looks and feels gorgeous and lovely from seeing outside, though we don’t know what’s inside. Of course some people dislike such new words because it is not familiar and unknown, but most people enticed to use it. To put differently, exactly because what is inside is unknown, it seems something great and wonderful, right and true, and something better than all things which previously exists. If they use those words, they feel some kind of superiority, because those words have some kind of ‘soft power’. To use those words often makes others persuaded, moved or ruled more easily. This is the basic structure of cassette effect.

As the translation of type 2 and 3 prevailed in modern Japan, those words with powerful cassette effects played a crucially important role in forming the structure of modern Japanese language. Pre-modern Japanese do not use any of such translated words, and also there would not an explicit structure like an independent sentence by using comma or period. In order to translate foreign language with translated words which has cassette effects, they were going to change the structure of Japanese.

Further, translation makes new way of Japanese writing. For instance, in order to translate the sentence like “This is a pen.”, people have to make new modern Japanese sentence, “これはペンである (Kore HA Pen DE ARU)”. “は” (HA) is regarded as equivalent for “is”, but pre modern Japanese people did not use “Ha” in this way, for “HA” refers to previously mentioned objects, but in modern Japanese “HA” started to use to refer to new or unknown objects. Also “DE ARU” is regarded as the element of “is”. In order to translate A is B, they had to devise a previously preexisted structure of “A Ha B De Aru”.

In this context, Yanabu regards the title of the famous novel “吾輩は猫である” (Waga Hai Ha Neko De Aru (I am a Cat)) by Soseki Natsume (夏目漱石), one of the most important founding fathers of modern Japanese literature, as a satire for the newly devised “HA/DE ARU” Japanese style. In this way, translation formed the new structure of modern Japanese language.

The last thing to note about the function of the translated words and newly devised modern Japanese writing style using translated words, is that this is conditioned and restricted the very way of thinking of modern Japanese people. One of the most important influences which this way of translation depending on the cassette effect lies in the field of academism and in the thought of the intellectuals. Most remarkable consequence brought by a dependence on translated words is that academic professionals and intellectuals tend to be controlled and ruled by the deductive logic, which stems from using those translated words.

Translated words like “文明” (civilization), “市民” (citizen), “民主主義” (democracy) has led to the deductive way of thinking, because they are totally dispatched from the original historical context. Those words are brought from ‘outside’ of Japan, and had almost nothing to do with Japanese history. In addition, those were treated like completed and do not intermingle with the reality in Japan. Then, if those intellectual use those words, they play the role of judging the reality of Japan. For example, how ‘society’ is matured or not in Japan, how ‘democracy’ is soundly developed or not in Japan, to what extent Japanese citizen is a ‘true’ citizen, and so on. According to Yanabu, most academics and intellectuals used those words for giving a judgement towards Japanese society and its people in order to estimate how Japan and Japanese is ‘rightly’ modernized and westernized, but most of them never tried to alter the definition or meaning of the concepts itself by induction, by observing the Japanese reality.

This is why he even wrote that modern academic discipline in Japan (at least humanity and social sciences) are translation based discipline (Honyaku Gakumon), which always follows authorized old and new concepts and theory imported from Western societies, and all they can do is only to apply it to Japan deductively, not vice versa. Interestingly, this type of translation has its own roots in the Meiji Constitution, whose way of writing is deeply influenced by the translation from Prussian constitution (of course by its contents also), according to Yanabu.

Another interesting study done by Yanabu in this aspect is the analysis of the dissertation by Masao Maruyama (丸山眞男), who was undoubtedly the most influential and authorized post-war academic. In his *Thought in Translation: Shizen and Nature*, Yanabu examined Maruyama’s early important work, and pointed out that Maruyama’s interpretation of “自然”(Shizen, Jinen) in the text of Edo period is totally misleading, because he treated “自然” in Edo period as the same meaning as “自然”(nature), which is the newly translated word devised to be equivalent as ‘nature’. In his view, Maruyama confused Shizen and Nature and his whole argument is based on the misunderstanding that the concept of nature was already existed in Edo period. This had to be a lethal intellectual damage to Maruyama, but according to Yanabu’s reminiscence, Maruyama kept silence on this matter until his last days.

If most Japanese intellectuals and academics deeply infected by translated words that accompanies cassette effect and has a tendency for them to fall into deductive thinking discussed above, such confusion might be found in anywhere. Thus, his analysis reveals the possibility of re-examination of the usage of translated words by all Japanese scholars of social science and humanity. It would be possible to depict that they seem to use those translated abstract words very elegantly but in most cases they are moved and controlled by

those words.

The first three chapters of the BOOK3 and Part I of the BOOK1 is very informative starting point in understanding this aspect. And chapter 1 to 7 of BOOK2 is the compact summary of his whole argument on the birth of modern Japanese language writing style.

## 2 Culture

The second keyword is, culture. If applying his hypothesis to the history of Japan, Japanese culture itself has been fundamentally consisted through the act of translation, in the sense that Japanese culture has been formed by the act of translation from foreign countries and by the dissemination of such translated words, since its historical origin. This can be explained by the structure of Japanese language, which consists of Hiragana (ひらがな), Katakana (カタカナ), and Kanji ((漢字), Chinese characters), and sometimes foreign language, which is directly used into Japanese sentence.

It is needless to point out, most scholars agree that Japan has long been influenced from the continent of China and Korean peninsula, by importing and receiving its culture and elements of civilization. Politically, importing Kanji was crucially important, because Japanese people need to use Kanji in order to be endorsed by Chinese dynasty in each period. At first, they use only Kanji to express its own language (Yamato Kotoba, (やまとことば、大和言葉)), which initially has no letters, and they used Chinese characters for expressing every syllable.

When they use Kanji to express Yamato Kotoba, there happened exactly the same thing in the modern era: Cassette effect. They began to interpret Yamato Kotoba not by its original *tone*, but by its Kanji *form* and that act forced them to add a new meaning to the original Yamato Kotoba. For example, once “KOTO” is expressed in Kanji as “言” and /or “事”, people who write, read and use those Kanji started to think about “KOTO” through seeing these Kanjis, which would not be complete equivalent as “KOTO”, that has not been transcribed in any letter previously. The word itself creates new meaning which would be different from original one, and people was trapped into such effect when they use those words. In this respect Kanji in Japan started to contain its original meaning, which only make sense in Japan. Things became more complicated when Japanese people even made new original Japanese Kanjis (ex. 畑、働、峠), which could not be understood in China.

However, later in 9th century, Japanese people devised Katakana and Hiragana (Katakana first but almost at the same period), in order to express the syllable of the Japanese language. Since then Japanese language consists of Kana (hiragana and katakana) and Kanji (Chinese language). After Meiji period, Kanji was mainly used for the translated words imported from Western powers and then there made three layered structure of language, (1) hiragana (2) kanji (+katakana, which is becoming more often used mainly for expressing the syllable of western language) (3) original western language. Most intellectual who learns western language knows and understands all layers, always being dragged by the deductive thinking by using them. Some intellectuals, mostly in local society, who only have an ample knowledge of Kanji, tried to understand the meaning of those translated words not by tracing original western language, but by its own Kanji form. For example, the translated word “権利” (right, Kenri) is interpreted by breaking down into “権 (Ken)” and “利 (Ri)”, and by referring to the Kanji dictionary and Chinese classics). Lastly, most Japanese who has not enough knowledge both on Western language and Kanji based education, they are directly fascinated by the sound of the unfamiliar new translated words KENRI, JIYU, without thinking about the origin, both the KANJI and original words.

Japanese culture, according to Yanabu, was formed by those people who has deeply constrained in such structure of language. Japanese culture is “translation culture”. This impact was both negative and positive. Negative aspects would be that Japanese people would not have a chance to understand foreign language or

culture directly, because those are always contained in the cassette and they can easily use the word without knowing or contemplating the exact meanings. Japanese people use such kinds of words like society, liberty, democracy and so on, but it is always somewhat detached from the daily life.

For example, they use the word “社会”, as the translation of ‘society’, only in the writing and reading in schools, newspapers or some public circumstance but they rarely use it at the conversation in the normal daily life. Instead, they use “世間” (Seken) or “よのなか” (Yononaka) in more casual and daily usage of the words. “社会”(Shakai) is well accepted and proliferated, but it would never exterminate “世間” (Seken) or “よのなか” (Yononaka). Seken or Yononaka is often criticized from Shakai, because Shakai is more modern, progressive, superior, and Seken and Yononaka is old, feudalistic, premodern. Also, the rule of deductive thinking previously mentioned would be another negative effect. There has been so many intellectuals who insists that Japanese ‘true’ Shakai is premature because they could not abandon Seken and Yononaka, and that we have to develop Japanese Shakai by denouncing such old-fashioned concepts, for instance.

On the other hand, importing culture by not bringing it directly to replace the native one has good effects. Direct importing might be dangerous to Japanese culture, because it might destroy original way of life. Instead, containing the cassette and disseminating such western ideas in Japan indirectly and slowly would be so convenient, because it enables for Japanese people to absorb modern or western culture more quickly, without making significant cultural conflicts that might lead to disrupt the core entity of original or native culture. This argument is very close to the mechanism of acculturation theory, which originally comes from anthropology and now becomes the core premise of International Cultural Relations, established by Kenichiro Hirano (平野健一郎)<sup>6</sup>. Also, this point of view also connects to the analysis on humanity, the third pillar.

At first Yanabu is in favor of negative effects, but later he also sees this positive aspect. We can see those arguments in Part II and III in BOOK1, Chapter 9 and 10 in BOOK2, and Chapter 5 and 6 in BOOK3.

### 3 Humanity

Behind this intriguing intellectual investigation lies in his radical thinking about the understanding of the relationship between words, things, and humanity.

First, Yanabu regards a word as primarily a thing, not only a transparent container which only conveys a meaning. A word at first appears in front of a man as an object, which is originally not familiar. Yanabu describes this as an “encounter with the unknown”. Translated words in Japanese is definitely typical examples, but if we remember how a baby or a child acquires language and how adults do when they learn foreign language, it could happen to all of us. We all have experienced such encounter with and acceptance of words, not first by its meanings but by the presence of the word itself, which is at first unknown and strange. However, by the effect of the education in home and in school, we have been trained to treat a language as the tool just for conveying meanings, most of us begin to forget such kind of sensual experience with the encounter with the words as things.

In Japan, in the process of learning difficult abstract Kanji words which are the translation of foreign words, young people like university students have experienced this again. Some students might drop out or lose grades because they could not handle those abstract words, but when they know how to deal with it, soon after they forget the process. However, Yanabu thinks that it is indispensable for us to think about the true importance of the translated words. In order to understand what are words and language for us we have to start with analyzing the very moment of encountering the unknown, or the mysterious. Yanabu explores this aspect especially the BOOK3, from Chapter 2 to Chapter 7, by dealing with the encounter with Nature, God, Love.

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<sup>6</sup> Kenichiro Hirano, *International Cultural Relations (Kokusai Bunka Ron)*, The University of Tokyo Press, 2000.

Second, Yanabu further steps to the analysis of intercultural relations. He reached to the idea that encounter with the unknown and the mysterious makes the border and discrimination, by applying words to the unknown. BOOK2 in Chapter 11 and BOOK3 in Chapter 6 and 7 deals with the oppression of Japanese Christians in Edo period and so-called Buraku discrimination. The reviewer considers that the seminal work for this aspect was *God and Joutei: Translators in history* (1986), which was later reprinted as *Is God Kami or Joutei?* (1995), which deals with the translation of Bible, especially how the word “God” should be translated in modern China. Combining the usefulness of cassette effect, his theory can be applied towards the investigation of the complex cultural interaction between state borders, from the perspective of translation and culture.

Thirdly, he touched the most interesting and the least referred aspects of his thought, about the limits of language. He repeatedly stresses in his writings that the language is ‘closed’ and the word as a thing is independently important from its meanings. His view is that the function of the language is to contain people’s thinking and imagination within given words. However, the world is always open for any interpretation and senses. Yanabu tries to depict this border between word-described world and beyond one, and relations between them. This viewpoint has much in common with Yusuke Maki (真木悠介)<sup>7</sup>, who depicts the structure of the whole world as the relation between open and unlimited word (naguar), and closed and limited by the power of language (tonar).

Also using the language has good effects, for example it makes possible to establish civilizations. As many others pointed out, the ability to use language is crucially important for humanity to prosper and survive. However, Yanabu seems to want to see what is lost and made unseen behind this success story is far more important, in contemplating what is humanity, culture, and language. The last essay in BOOK1 and BOOK3 is mainly dealing with this issue.

## Conclusion

This review article has depicted his academic originality consists of three layered viewpoints, each of them tightly connected, partly intertwined and mixed. However, most scholars of translational studies only take the first layer and not try to understand this interconnectedness between the three. And, the second layer, often overseen, is also important in order to elucidate the issue of making and transforming international global culture. Lastly, the third point is quite significant but also very difficult to apply to another fields of study. As he pointed out in his interviews, this third layer on the essence of humanity is exactly the core interest of himself, not only as a professional scholar, but as one human-being, which severely impressed and influenced by his own personal experience, especially the defeat of Asia Pacific War and the collapse of ‘Great’ Empire of Japan, and the complex towards his father, who is so oppressive and authoritarian. According to his recollection, cassette effect stems from his interest to reveal the emptiness or weakness of such authority, both pre-war Japan regime and his father, which at first looked solid and firm but in reality it was so vulnerable in logical structure.

Yanabu is basically an original and independent scholar, but he is also influenced by structuralism like Levi-Strauss, translation studies like Eugene Naida, Japanese language scholar like Akira Mikami, and others. Another thing to remind is that he regards himself as not a scholar of translation studies in Western countries, because most of those studies treat the issue of translation only within western civilization, which has much in common. Conversely, the act of translation in Japan is done between the inter-cultural contacts, consisting of Yamato Kotoba, Kana, Kanji, and Western language. In a sense this is truly a trans-civilizational translation and this phenomeon cannot be simply analyzed within the context of the transnational studies. In

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<sup>7</sup> Yusuke Maki, *The Hissing of Winds (Kiryu No Naru Oto)*, Chikuma Shobo, 1977/2003.

this aspect, he himself admitted that he would be located at the same line as post-colonialism and/or postmodernism. And also because of this, his academic work could be regarded as the study of international cultural relations in its broadest sense.

As first noted, this review presents only one simplified review of the vast amount and scope of his entire works. So many other important findings and hypothesis are left unintroduced or unexamined, and so many possible speculations that inspires the student of international / global cultural relations, even only in these three books has been omitted or missed, notwithstanding his whole thought. The reviewer is planning to tackle with more comprehensive analysis of Yanabu and hopes that this short reviewing essay would be at least a guide for readers to encourage for reading the writings of Yanabu, and also, this would be some sort of stepping stone for more accurate and definitive appreciation of him in future.

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(This bibliography made mainly by referring to the one in BOOK3, which contains all writings. English translation is by the reviewer)