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Banana's *Kitchen*

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‘CENSORSHIP’ IN TRANSLATION POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IN HUGH LOFTING’S *THE STORY OF DOCTOR DOLITTLE* AND YOSHIMOTO BANANA’S *KITCHEN*

Yoshihiro Ohsawa

WHAT IS CENSORSHIP?

Censorship generally carries negative connotations in contemporary Japan because it is supposed to be a synonym of the governmental oppression of freedom of thought and the press. The publishing world of contemporary Japan strongly advocates freedom of speech and severely criticizes governmental intervention. Seen from another angle, however, censorship is an act of preventing the violation of central values in the society concerned. This viewpoint shows us that censorship is not simply an abuse of power by the political regime, but rather a social phenomenon which demonstrates how members of a society clearly follow the same value judgments, that violations of these judgments are not easily permitted, and that such infringement is occasionally atoned with by restricting the freedom of publication. Translation as well has always been placed under this pressure in Japan. For example, Ito Sei (1905–69), a novelist and professor of English at the Tokyo Institute of Technology translated *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) by D. H. Lawrence in 1950 and was prosecuted for his ‘obscene’ translation. Ito was ultimately found guilty and was fined 100,000 yen for the translation. Although Ito was legally defeated at that particular point in time, the years after the trial saw a dramatic change in sexual description in literature both in the West and in Japan and the censorship persecution, consequently, now seems ridiculous and meaningless. Nevertheless, we must not forget that criticism against excessive commercial use of sexuality in literature is even now still strong in Japan.

IBUSE MASUJI'S TRANSLATION OF

THE STORY OF DOCTOR DOLITTLE AND POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS

Now that contemporary Japanese readers have become more permissive about sexual description in literature, and visual media has utilized more direct sexual depictions in order to attract a large audience, preventing the publication of 'pornographic' literature has not recently been vigorously insisted upon. However, censorship, whether it be governmental or societal, is still prevalent in Japan as well as in the West. One of the most divisive issues is political correctness. In 2002 a Japanese civic group criticized the translations of Hugh Lofting's (1886–1947) *Doctor Dolittle* stories by Ibusu Masuji (1898–1993) and urged the Iwanami Publishing Company, a leading publisher in Japan, to withdraw these translations from the market.¹ The company consented to examine inappropriate terms and phrases in the text and promised to at least correct mistranslations by Ibusu himself. The company, however, refused to withdraw the translations from bookshops and inserted instead a sheet of paper in the series, on which the company policy on "racial discrimination" is stated. The company's general policy against discrimination is declared as follows:

- (1) Every literature is historically and culturally bound and is not totally free from discrimination. (2) Inappropriate discriminatory phrases and terms should be, and have been, replaced by more appropriate ones. (3) However, when translators are already dead, the publisher should respect his or her copyright and cannot change the basic plots of translations themselves because this manipulation of texts would infringe on copyrights as well as destroying classics. (4) The publisher asks contemporary readers to read even classics critically and hopes to contribute toward eliminating discrimination from the world.²

Although the textual alteration is not a result of strict orders by the Japanese government and has been made by the publisher's own decision, the original text has been changed. We cannot link this restriction in expression to official censorship, yet freedom of expression has been restricted here by other social conditions; and we must admit that publication should not be allowed to completely defile fundamental values in a society. Freedom of expression *per se* has necessary limitations in every society.

The example I have quoted is also concerned with readership. These works are principally aimed at young readers and the expected readership makes the alteration inevitable. As for general literature, Japanese publishers only add editorial notes to texts with discriminatory terms and phrases in order to point out their historical limitations, but unlike mature readers, juvenile readers cannot be expected to adopt a detached and sophisticated attitude toward classics. Publishers are therefore hesitant to provide young readers with original 'inappropriate' texts as they are.

HUGH LOFTING'S *DOCTOR DOLITTLE* STORIES AND POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS

The pressure towards political correctness is more remarkable in the United States, where racial discrimination is a much hotter issue than in Japan. *The Story of Doc-*

tor Dolittle was written in America in 1920 when the supremacy of Caucasian beauty was taken for granted. In the original Chapter 11, "The Black Prince," readers are told that Dr. Dolittle and his animals are captured and imprisoned in the land of the Jolliginki, but they manage to escape from the prison by exploiting a hope cherished by their captor's son, Prince Bumpo. The Prince's hope is to make his face attractively white. He is persuaded into seeing Doctor Dolittle by Polynesia, a parrot, as follows:

"In thy father's prison," said the parrot, "there lies a famous wizard, John Dolittle by name. Many things he knows of medicine and magic, and mighty deeds has he performed. Yet thy kingly father leaves him languishing long and lingering hours. Go to him, brave Bumpo, secretly, when the sun has set; and behold, thou shalt be made the whitest prince that ever won fair lady! I have said enough. I must now go back to Fairyland. Farewell!"³

Lofting 2000, 69–70

When the prince comes to the prison in order to realize his secret hopes, he begs Doctor Dolittle to change the color of his face and eyes as follows:

"White Man, I am an unhappy prince. Years ago I went in search of the Sleeping Beauty, whom I had read of in a book. And having traveled through the world many days, I at last found her and kissed the lady very gently to awaken her—as the book said I should. 'Tis true indeed that she awoke. But when she saw my face she cried out, 'Oh, he's black!' And she ran away and wouldn't marry me—but went to sleep again somewhere else. So I came back, full of sadness, to my father's kingdom. Now I hear that you are a wonderful magician and have many powerful potions. So I come to you for help. If you will turn me white, so that I may go back to the Sleeping Beauty, I will give you half my kingdom and anything besides you ask."

"Prince Bumpo," said the Doctor, looking thoughtfully at the bottles in his medicine-bag, "supposing I made your hair a nice blonde colour—would not that do instead to make you happy?"

"No," said Bumpo. "Nothing else will satisfy me. I must be a white prince."

"You know it is very hard to change the colour of a prince," said the Doctor, "one of the hardest things a magician can do. You only want your face white, do you not?"

"Yes, that is all," said Bumpo. "Because I shall wear shining armour and gauntlets of steel, like the other white princes, and ride on a horse."

"Must your face be white all over?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, all over," said Bumpo, "and I would like my eyes blue too, but I suppose that would be very hard to do."

Lofting 2000, 72–73

The passage presents Caucasian beauty as supreme and sound therefore extremely Eurocentric. Consequently it clearly contradicts the current basic principle of multiculturalism in the United States and textual alteration has become unavoidable. The current version in the United States deletes the 'racist'

descriptions of white beauty and the prince is instead hypnotized by the parrot in order to let Dolittle and his animals free from the prison.⁴ (see Lofting 2001, 105, 107) In the “Afterword to the American edition,” Christopher Lofting reveals his difficult position as follows:

When it was decided to reissue the *Doctor Dolittle* books, we were faced with a challenging opportunity and decision. In some of the books there were certain incidents depicted that, in light of today’s sensitivities, were considered by some to be disrespectful to ethnic minorities and, therefore, perhaps inappropriate for today’s young readers. In these centenary editions this issue is addressed.

Lofting 2001, 173

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE US

IN DOCTOR DOLITTLE’S CASE

The final decision made by Christopher Lofting was to change parts of the text, but the extent of change is much more drastic than in Ibuse’s translations. Ibuse’s translations have been modified at the level of vocabulary, but Christopher Lofting altered the plot itself. The difference has been caused probably because Christopher Lofting is a legitimate owner of Hugh Lofting’s copyright, and is legally qualified to alter Hugh Lofting’s texts. He was able to decide to adjust them to the contemporary value system. The Iwanami Publishing Company, as it is not a legitimate heir to the copyright, did not modify Ibuse’s translation because the publisher must respect his copyright as completely as possible.

There is more to ponder concerning the alteration of the texts. We should take into account the canonicity of authors. Lofting’s *Doctor Dolittle* books are undoubtedly categorized as children’s literature. Although Doctor Dolittle stories were made into movies twice in the United States, the works are not regarded as high literary achievements. Secondly, Hugh Lofting is not a mainstream literary figure whose contribution to AngloAmerican literature is emphasized in literary history. Ibuse Masuji, on the other hand, is a great author in Modern Japanese literature and his contribution to modern Japanese literature is too conspicuous to be ignored. Ibuse’s literary activities garnered attention from the beginning of his career, though his works began to appear in rather popular entertainment media. In 1938 he was awarded the Naoki literary prize, meant to be a prize for excellent popular entertainment in literature. He was active in literary projects for a long time after World War II and reached the status of an established serious author with the award of an Order of Cultural Merit in 1966. His *Black Rain* (1966), which depicts the disaster in Hiroshima, has been translated into many languages and has acquired a large readership all over the world. *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, edited by Theodore W. Goossen, includes Ibuse’s “Carp” (1928) as a short piece in the anthology. The Chikuma Publishing Company published 30 new volumes of his collected works between 1996 and 2000. Ibuse’s literary fame and the popularity of his translation of the *Doctor Dolittle* series undoubtedly prevent the Iwanami Publishing Company from changing the texts and withdrawing the books from the market.

Lastly, we need to admit that there is a difference in attitude toward children's literature in Japan, compared with that in the West. Although Ibuse's translations of the *Doctor Dolittle* series are not among his major literary achievements, and though Ishii Momoko (1907–) made the preliminary translation for Ibuse's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*⁵, the translation of *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* is included for reference of his literary activities in the 28th volume of his collected works. This suggests that his translation of juvenile fiction is regarded as part of his literary activities. Many other Japanese novelists translated Western juvenile fiction into Japanese as a means of livelihood. For example, Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) published a translation of Frances Eliza Burnett's (1849–1924) *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) in 1956. Indeed, this translation is not considered to be important in Kawabata's literature. Ibuse's case is truly exceptional even in Japan, but Japanese novelists did not regard the distinction between literature and children's literature as decisive and they frequently and ardently wrote for younger readers even if the works were sometimes written to make a living.

To sum up, translations are transgression into another cultural context, and are inevitably supported on different cultural conditions. Political correctness is both universal and culturally bound. In the United States it sounds immediately politically incorrect that the black prince wants to make his face white, while in Japan it does not seem to be a highly embarrassing and humiliating desire. Doctor Dolittle stories are still on the reading list for Japanese juvenile readers and placed on the bookshelf of local Japanese libraries. In North America, on the other hand, only a few works by Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* and *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* for example, are available in the market and the inappropriate passages are changed so as not to provoke a critique against them. The fact clearly shows us the existence of different cultural contexts between the two countries. Nevertheless in this case the problem was clearly specified. The issue of the political incorrectness in Ibuse's case was raised by a civic group while the publisher examined their claim and took the necessary steps against criticism. Therefore the issue was *clarified* and presented as such to readers, who were thus well informed by the argumentation.

YOSHIMOTO BANANA'S *KITCHEN* AND POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS

In some cases, however, political incorrectness is not openly dealt with, but is instead simply hidden from readers and the existence of the issue itself effaced from texts. Take an example from Yoshimoto Banana's (1964–) *Kitchen*. Yoshimoto wrote *Kitchen* in 1987. She received a literary prize for the novel and the work was translated into many languages. In this novel occurs the following passage, which I will first quote in German translation.

Die Frau, die im Grunde ein Mann war, lächelte mild. Es war ein scheues Lächeln, wie man es manchmal im Fernsehen bei den New Yorker Schwulen sieht. Doch in Wirklichkeit war sie viel stärker, als dieses Lächeln vermuten ließ. Ihre starke Ausstrahlung hatte sie wohl auch dahin gebracht, wo sie jetzt war.

Yoshimoto, trans. Schlecht 28

[The woman, who was after all a man, smiled mildly. It was a timid smile as you often see gay New Yorkers do on TV. But she was actually much stronger than this smile suggested. Her strong radiation certainly brought her to where she was now.]

In English, the passage was translated as follows:

Her power was the brilliance of her charm and it had brought her to where she was now.

Yoshimoto, trans. Backus 19

In the English translation the translator has deleted two Japanese sentences where the character's sex transformation and the timidity of gay New Yorkers are referred to. The German translation, on the other hand, maintains the two sentences. Next is the French translation.

Elle—ou plutôt il?—souriait. D'un sourire vulnérable qui rappelait celui des 'gays' de New York, qu'on voit souvent à la télévision. Pourtant, Eriko était trop forte pour qu'on l'assimile à eux.

Yoshimoto, trans. Palmé & Sato 30

The French translation retains the two sentences as well. Only the English translation crosses out the 'politically incorrect' part. The decision of the translator seems justifiable because Yoshimoto's reference to gay New Yorkers is incidental and the associative connection between timidity and gay New Yorkers may be upsetting for modern American readers. The German and French translators probably recognized the problem of the sentences, but thought that faithfulness to the source text was more important than considerations of political correctness, as gay New Yorkers were people in New York and were thus neither German nor French. Considerations of political correctness truly influences translators but it works differently in each target text from the source text. The difference in translation is also created by dissimilar cultural contexts, which include even principles on translation *per se*. AngloAmerican translations tend to be strongly target-oriented and give the final product a more Anglo-American flavor. The dominant linguistic position of English in the present world and the smoothness and naturalness of Anglo-American translations have acquired a huge readership around the world. A large number of readers rely on Anglo-American translations to enlighten themselves on literatures other than their own. However, in some cases, the pressure to be target-oriented in Anglo-American translations leads to the deletion of unnecessary passages from the viewpoint of target reader-friendliness.

DELETION IN MURAKAMI HARUKI'S *A WILD SHEEP CHASE*

Take another example from Murakami Haruki's (1949-) *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982). After the narrator-protagonist's ex-girlfriend is killed in a traffic accident, 'I' attend her funeral. Following is the description of how 'I' manage to reach her house.

Her family lived in an old quarter of Tokyo. I got out my map and marked the block in red. There were subway and train and bus lines everywhere, overlapping like some misshapen spiderweb, the whole area a maze of nar-

row streets and drainage canals.

Murakami, trans. Birnbaum 3

The counterpart in the German Translation is as follows:

Ihre Eltern wohnten in der Altstadt. Ich schlug meinen Plan von Tokyo auf und markierte den Häuserblock mit einem roten Kuli. Das Haus lag wirklich in einem typischen Altstadtviertel. Ein wirres Gespinnst aus U-Bahn-, S-Bahn- und Buslinien, unter- und überzogen von Abwasserkanälen, Straßen und Gäßchen wie das feine weiße Netz einer Melonenschale.

Murakami, trans. Ortmanns-Suzuki & Stalph 9

[Her parents lived in the old part of the city. I opened my Tokyo city map and marked the block with a red ball pen. The house actually stood in a typical old city quarter. A confused web of trams, subway, and bus lines shown under and above drainage canals, streets, and alleys like the fine white net on a melon's surface.]

The comparison between the English and the German translations shows us that the English translator, Alfred Birnbaum, deletes the simile of white meshes in the surface of a melon and the repetition of the phrases of the old city quarter. The pressure toward naturalness in English can again be discerned here. The French translator writes as follows:

Sa maison était située dans les quartiers populaires de la ville. Je dépliai la carte par arrondissements de Tokyo et inscrivis une marque au stylo à bille rouge autour du numéro de sa maison. C'était un quartier de faubourg comme il en est peu. Les lignes du métro, du chemin de fer national et des autobus s'y chevauchaient, s'y enchevêtraient comme le fils d'une toile d'araignée dégingandée; plusieurs ruisseaux boueux coulaient au milieu d'un réseau compliqué de rues se cramponnant à la surface du sol comme de rides sur un melon.

Murakami, trans. De Vos 7–8

The French translation is the longest of the three and tries to retain every piece of information of the source text. The English translation is the shortest and the most style-oriented in its rendition.

SUMMING UP

Since repetition, digression, and prolixity have negative connotations in English, Anglo-American translators manage to streamline their translation. The result is both readability and remarkable distance from the source text. The critical problem is that the distance is invisible to target readers. Political correctness is one of the best examples to show the invisibility found in Anglo-American translations. Since it can be wiped off silently due to the target-oriented attitude, the deletion of text can only be found when readers can read English target texts and Japanese source texts, a practice not expected from common readers of translations. Translation is a bridge text between the source culture and the target culture. If it does not reach the other end of the target culture, the aim of translation is not accomplished. At

the same time, if it is not rooted in the source culture, serious dialogue between the two cultures is not realized. A perfect balance between the two cultures in translation is only to be desired; it is at best culturally and temporally determined, and we do not have a final solution to the dilemma. Differences between the two cultures make translation a difficult task, but at the same time give translators a significant challenge to unroll a diversified picture of world cultures to readers, which is at the least helpful to us in expanding our perspective.

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ENDNOTES

¹ “Debate on the withdrawal of Doctor Dolittle stories,” Asahi Shinbun, February 4, 2002, Morning ed.

² “To Readers” inserted in Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, Trans. Ibuse Masuji, Tokyo: Iwanami Publishing Company, 2001.

³ The original text of 1920 can be also obtained from the Project Gutenberg E-text of Doctor Dolittle located at:

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=501>

⁴ The textual alteration is pointed out by Suzuki Yasuyuki at:

<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~hh5y-skz/ransome.htm>

⁵ Ishii Momoko, “On *Doctor Dolittle* Stories.” In Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, Trans. Ibuse Masuji, 2001.

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