

Original Article

In Celebration of a Half-life: Translation and Critical Reflection on Yūko Tsushima

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ABSTRACT: *This paper presents a precise translation and critical analysis of Yūko Tsushima's "In Celebration of a Half-life" (2016), examining the linguistic challenges in rendering the Japanese text into English. The study focuses on broader issues of genre, arguing that while translation studies often foreground poetry as a site of untranslatability, prose fiction presents its own complexities through narrative continuity, structural coherence, and thematic development. The author reflects on difficulties in interpreting abrupt narrative transitions, political allusions, and ethnographic terminology, especially in references to Japanese identity and race. Finally, the analysis situates Tsushima's work within a global environmental and technological discourse, linking its concerns about nuclear disaster to broader historical and transnational contexts such as Chernobyl and large-scale infrastructural transformations. The translation thus becomes not only a linguistic exercise but also a critical act that reveals the text's engagement with ecological anxiety, futurity, and the socio-political implications of modernity.*

KEYWORDS: *Yūko Tsushima, Literary Translation, Japanese Literature, Narrative Voice, Linguistic Register, Untranslatability.*

1. IN CELEBRATION OF A HALF-LIFE (2016)

Tsushima Yūko (1947-2016)

"Please imagine the world after thirty years!" As I am so told, I feel instinctively tempted to wonder otherwise well, what about the world thirty years ago?

Thirty years ago, in the age of PC and fax, it was not yet a home for me. The passing of thirty years is too long. However, as for the actual feeling of life, I do not feel [the occurrence of] any essential change. I have been thinking, say, one day was suddenly projected into the world after thirty years. Can I, without being that puzzled, unexpectedly adapt myself to that right away? I get flustered with new machines and soon get used to them as time passes.

The moment when the fax and the word processor got into my house was the time when the Soviet Union was dissolved. Right after that, the word processor changed into a PC. Regarding the word processor, I only knew the size of a Japanese typewriter until then. Isn't the Japanese mixed with *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana* a troublesome problem to overcome after all? [I] am often moved by how much deep feeling [I] held for this. Regarding the fax, I, at first, tried to be in correspondence with Paris. I was surprised at the convenience of being able to immediately exchange letters. However, even the fax is being taken over by more convenient web communications, such as current email and smartphones. The fax machine has already become a forgotten existence.

I do not know if I am glad that such a change has become convenient. I naturally care that the tool of life will change. From now on, the robot that cleans the house might be further developed; perhaps the day we are to be abandoned might come. Wearing clothes made by oneself becomes the most fashionable; needlework using one's hands will become popular. On the one hand, I am afraid that outsourcing housework will become increasingly common.

Whatever one tries to do, as "car-detached" and "television-detached" [1] trends make progress, some of the TV stations might collapse. The value of newspapers, magazines, and bookstores will be reviewed; communities such as agriculture and forestry can be formed. Co-childcare and co-nursing [2] in the community will spread. No matter how much reproductive medical care advances, women who hope for pregnancy and childbirth for a long time will, on the contrary, increase. However, even regarding this, the birthrate does not go up; without choice, the number of adopted children will increase. I feel unpleasant about the sharp increase in adopted children from various countries. People who oppose this will make a new political party and appeal to the crisis of this country.

In the world after thirty years, a certain country with a large population will acquire more and more power. The country named NIHON in the Far East [3] will lose its competence and may fall into a state close to the closed-door policy. NIHON will become an internationally isolated military dictatorship. Since news of the state-run television, every time, will surely report the movements of the Premier and the national defense military yesterday at great length, news such as traffic accidents will be broadcast just a bit. However, people's lives themselves will not change on the surface. Therefore, in general, people do not express much dissatisfaction.

Life will certainly become hard, the number of suicides will increase, and the number of carrying out the execution will also rise. Despite these, peace is the most important. And now, people passing by television interviews that no one will watch will answer. Speaking of the mass media, television, newspapers, and video sites on the Net would make a fuss about the campaign "Sensō Hyakunen" [4] without permission.

However, one day after thirty years, an unexpected festival may be spontaneously started even in this TŌKYŌ. [5] Around high-rise residential buildings, in the deserted shopping streets, in front of the station of the Yamanote Line that is running thin due to fewer customers, in the courtyard of the hospital where the elderly people doze off, the announcement could float up with a female voice that sounds like singing somewhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, the familiar Cesium 137 is safe, and it has reached its half-life. To be precise four years ago, Cesium 137 had already reached its half-life, but this year is also the end of "Sensō Hyakunen." All in all, in the primitive war one hundred years ago, this is a memorable year to remember how many people died in unreasonable suffering. In the war, it is a situation where soldiers shall by no means starve to death. Moreover, on top of ordinary citizens' heads, the atomic bombs were first mercilessly dropped by America.

Then, roughly seventy years have passed since the nuclear power plant incident, which exerted an extremely serious impact on the TŌHOKU [6] region, took place. In those days, the radioactive substance Cesium 137 was spread on a large scale; four years ago, Cesium 137 eventually reached its half-life. To celebrate the half-life of Cesium 137, which we have become quite familiar with, many people commented that there was no time more appropriate than this year. Therefore, this year held various celebration events.

The next half-life is after another thirty years. However, without waiting for that, if Cesium 137 falls to half its initial value, there is nothing to be afraid of. Of course, it is necessary to keep measuring radioactivity. Since the accident site remains out of control, optimism is not approved.

In case of that accident, other radioactive substances were also widely spread, but according to experts, it seems that only Cesium 137 is actually what we should worry about. Other radioactive substances have shorter half-lives and smaller amounts. I think that everyone already knows these, but just to be sure, please allow me to add this here.

The other day, a big accident occurred on site, and new radioactive substances were spread out. Still, accidents like this keep happening. However, half-life surely visits. At least, let's celebrate it now. It was worth waiting. Now, please allow me to inform you about each celebration event.

An old woman was listening to the announcement, for evacuees, that floated into the quiet high-rise residential buildings. "That's right, if so, shall I go back home soon?" she murmurs to herself.

In other places, the elderly people listening to the announcement also murmur the same words, "If so, shall I go back home soon?" When I went back to that house near the accident site, as usual, there would be no change. However, celebration is not a bad thing. For a day or so, why not have a good time?

People get away from houses near the accident site, and still stay in the residence for evacuees. [The number of evacuees] has drastically decreased, but it does not disappear. For the past thirty-four years, the old woman has also sometimes gone back to the house near the accident site. For the first three years, she couldn't go back. Because people in the government told me "Don't go back," I did not go back. Now, friends and relatives, whom I do not want to part with, live near here. No one can force the old woman. If it comes to the crunch, she pretends to be hard of hearing.

I think high-rise residential buildings are not the kind of environment where humans live. However, they are unexpectedly comfortable. As it is, I want to spend my life without thinking about complicated issues. [I] continued the cleanup of my former house properly; [I] also kept visiting the grave. Meanwhile, the number of [my] families kept decreasing. My husband disappeared, and his parents passed away one after another. My daughters got married and moved to other places. Since then, I was alone and passed one year after one. Just a half-life of thirty years is in an instant. I have been thinking that way.

The next day after the announcement broadcast, a row of cars was seen heading from TŌKYŌ in the direction of the North. It is said that Cesium 137 safely reached its half-life; Cesium 137 safely reached its half-life; for now, what changed or did not change is the cars of people who shall go visiting the grave. I was surprised at the number of people around me who still kept evacuating to TŌKYŌ. The highway bus picking up the old woman was also mixed in. That was the start of the spring vacation season.

Even though I know that [Cesium 137] is not visible, I can't help expecting that I can see something with my own eyes. Anyway, living safely, I could see Cesium 137 reach its half-life. What to do from now, let's leisurely think. Soon, a pickup from heaven may come this time.

As the half-life of Cesium 137 passes, in the village closest to the accident site, tourists from various countries, including researchers, are coming to visit. As you know, this is a world-famous accident site. However, they came all the way to visit but did not see anything rare, and probably ended up disappointed. Ordinary people are only living an ordinary life.

If we try to listen to people working in the field,

“Ah, it's the half-life of thirty years. Of course, that was a terrible accident. At one time, it seemed that everyone was pessimistic about what to do. However, as you see, we concluded that there was no particularly serious damage. Recently, strangers like me started afresh, and former residents gradually went back. The government has special measures too. Yet the accident site is indeed in a state of ongoing troubles. Five years ago, a big earthquake happened, much worse than any other accident. However, whatever happens, we will find a way. Fortunately, it is said that the air here is much cleaner than in other lands.”

Answer the people with only these.

The peaceful and beautiful landscape stretches before the eye. As the half-life of Cesium 137 passes, a development rush may start, so that here will be reborn into attractive resorts. Although a new accident happened five years ago, I will not panic since we have experience so far. Stylish high-class hotels will be constructed, as will villas and golf courses. They say that it's a relief not to keep measuring the radioactive level every day. The hotel adds as if they were predicting the usual air pollution. For days of high dose, please stay inside the hotel. Please look forward to various entertainments like dance parties, film festivals, and concerts that no one will find boring.

To tell the truth, though, the radioactive substance Cesium 137 certainly reached its half-life. If the half-life is longer, Plutonium, for example, is the most dangerous radioactive substance for human beings. At the same time, since Plutonium is scattered, no matter how hard dealers like general contractors try, they shall never be able to assure people. Not to mention, new radioactive substances were also scattered around five years ago. People like the old woman already know about the level [of radiation]. However, tourists and people in the industry are optimistic, and even the government tries to pretend to forget about this.

The old woman celebrated the arrival of the half-life of Cesium 137 and one day went to her house close to the accident site. She sat down on a chair in a dining hall that faces the veranda of high-rise residential buildings. “Sure enough, my house is the most relaxing,” she blurted out, carelessly. “Now the high-rise residential buildings for evacuees here feel like my home,” she said to herself with deep emotions.

That is understandable. Various things have happened during these thirty years since I first lived here. Daughters grew into fat middle-aged women, and the husband walked away with another woman. The mother of the husband died of a disease; his father ran after the mother and threw himself from the rooftop of the building. Is the *feng shui* of this residence bad? Especially due to the high death rate, people on the same floor kept committing suicide. Three people on higher floors died in an accident. That made a fuss, but nothing would remain as time passed. People who don't know these will start moving into the rooms of dead people.

The announcement flowing into the high-rise residential buildings tells the residents various news every day. With spring gone, one day before the rainy season, the news may report the sports meet in the junior high school. It seems that the technique of telling news via loudspeakers is old-fashioned. As it turned out, recent research announced the results that loudspeakers, certainly the most inexpensive, can tell people more than the matters they want to convey.

This Sunday, as always, a sports meet that shows everyone the physical training of children will be held in the junior high school. There are also events that adults can participate in. Everyone is cordially invited to take part.

Hearing this announcement, the old woman frowns. Speaking of children's sports meets, it is said that a new law has recently come into effect and is making a fuss. "No matter how much parents of junior high school students can't accept the law, other people go to the Diet Building and sit in for the good old days."

Four or five years ago, the dictatorial government heartily supported organizations like "Patriotic Juvenile (Girls) League," abbreviated to "ASD," that became wildly popular among young people. Children were recklessly eager to join the league, waiting for their turn. Comic books modeled on the "ASD" created stories of this boom. Commodities featuring these characters sell well, always waiting for the arrival of new goods. Its popularity is therefore stirred up increasingly.

Parents frowning at that movement scold their children and try to stop them. "Don't be thrilled with that sort of thing," say the parents. Children crazy about "ASD" went to extremes to support their god, saying things such as "the Sacred Country NIHON, hurray!" or "With glory we, the children of the Sacred." What's more, since children started to earnestly talk with words from comic books, parents' worry was not unreasonable. However, the government is not silent, "self-righteous parents whose children didn't join "ASD" by no means can miss." In other words, the government is trying to establish a new law. The law seems to unexpectedly include that if parents don't like "ASD" and try to ignore the law, they are accused of renouncing their parental duty and sentenced to at least ten years' imprisonment.

Parents were arrested in any way. Parents who are disgraced because their children first join "ASD" are increasing. At all costs, if they try to keep turning down the enrollment of "ASD," they have to seek refuge in other countries.

"ASD" is intended for children from fourteen to eighteen years old. Those over eighteen now, regardless of gender, must join the national defense army. In other words, now, without war with any other countries, they can enjoy the treatment like nobles.

Parents whose children are still young, thinking of previous stories, make up their minds to pretend not to recognize their children. Fewer parents whose children are junior high students are planning for their children to study abroad. For the present, there are still loopholes left. The thinking that one can manage anything if only with money was influential thirty years ago, but it has been rampant recently.

The old woman thinks that that sort of attitude very much renounces one's duty, but now it's not nonsensical for her mood to keep looking away from the "ASD." People with the same stands may certainly try to deal with the problem without extra efforts. If they say "My child wants to join 'ASD'" in front of others, speechless, people will look sad. No more than that. However, when parents applied without words, children ended up in examination and committed suicide. Those parents can't help but pretend not to notice this.

It is said that "ASD" has strict race regulations; only the pure *Yamato* race is allowed to join. Although *Ainu* people, *Okinawa* people, and naturally CHŌSEN descent children are not allowed to join "ASD," TŌHOKU people are of the lowest evaluation. "The noble *Yamato* race itself disgraces and corrupts the NIHON society." Though without capacity, with great pride, NIHON's rulers for generations have tried to read previous historical documents that were handed down. About NIHON's regime, they identify and correct rises in rebellion and facts of independence. In other words, TŌHOKU people are the most dangerous race to have lived in this NIHON. Thus, it's not necessary that NIHON itself should put consideration for the above.

Schools also teach children about the TŌHOKU people's wicked personality and that history. Therefore, "if to abandon the TŌHOKU people, NIHON that prospered by centering on *Yamato* will surely decrease." Teachers seem to insist on repeating over and over as if they threatened the children to do so. You can't make friends with the children of the TŌHOKU people. No matter how troubled they are, you must not help. That's wrong justice. Let's all guard the *Yamato* culture. In the heart of the TŌHOKU people is a profound grudge against the *Yamato*.

Ironically, the village close to the accident site, where the old woman once lived, is part of the TŌHOKU. Part of TŌHOKU is manufactured for the nuclear power plant, where the accident happened. Then, inevitably, up till now, various people have visited villages close to the accident site to offer support. Representatives of the former government occasionally visited villages to maintain the regime.

"Though said to be polluted by radiation, rice and peaches produced here are very safe," appeal the government to home and abroad. The representative of the government reacted, "Is it not a terrible humiliation to keep forcing the consideration that whoever sees the truth will lie like this?" A person explains to the old woman with a proud face, "There's a feeling to exclude TŌHOKU people from this society." However, TŌHOKU victims of the accident were eventually treated as an exception. Although the treatment was perfunctory, we shall give them sympathetic words.

When children who want to join apply to "ASD," people investigate in detail whether strange blood is mixed across five generations. Children without their family tree can't become partners from the start. Because of that, people secretly pay

experts to make a family tree, and the price is quickly raised by manipulation. Since children have already been crazy about "ASD," careless about the money, they run away from home and try to join the league. This is not what the government expects. Parents are compelled to be busy clearing up the mess.

After joining "ASD," children are flattered at school, and there are various interesting activities: labor service to show great gratitude for people from farmhouses; the control of planes and boats; physical training of sports cars and motorcycles; artistic groups like riding, fine arts, and music; daily new bombs and research groups; not to mention, the group of guns and military arts. In the Olympics, athletes from "ASD" get many medals in events such as wrestling, field events, gymnastics, and modern pentathlon, causing a hot topic.

In short, the old woman thought of doing things like group activities at school, or it might not be so different. "ASD" children undertake the role of bringing out antisocial people, and that may be the most important role. However, what kind of people are antisocial? People like the old woman often wonder about the standard. A couple who are unlikely to register for marriage is sent to the "Hospital." Needless to say, for homosexual couples. Even if they are proficient in foreign languages more than necessary, it seems that they will be sent to the "Hospital" anyway. Aimed at mentally unstable people, the hospital is watched by directors of special religions. All people called artists, including novelists, poets, dramatists, actors, film directors, stage directors, musicians, painters and sculptors, journalists, editors, teachers, lawyers, who complicate the argument, and tax accountants who manage others' fortune, are basically regarded as a dangerous existence for society.

The way to monitor has been on quite a track like this. The background of making a new law seems to be the increasing number of "ASD" children. The future generation that is instructed since childhood will center their life on "ASD." "The difficulty of the Transition Era nearly announces its end." Fellows already coming of age only reject the current government, to top it all off, and have sought refuge in Europe and South America.

The country NIHON, now harshly condemned in the world, has to wage a war that is different from the past. The nuclear power plant causing the accident is in NIHON. Now, I come to understand that after the nuclear accident, if one missile is dropped, in a flash, [the missile] can cause the fall of NIHON.

Knowing this, the government will face up to any danger and distort the hypocritical policy of worshiping god. "What sort of country is this?" NIHON has provoked rival countries. As this rivalry goes on, regardless of TŌHOKU people's plot, the country NIHON may have died out in an instant. The old woman can't help feeling that what's pitiful for her is the children. Though adults have their own responsibilities, children don't have any responsibilities.

On the day of the sports meet, the old woman gave in to her curiosity and took a quick peep at the junior high school group dance and group gymnastics.

She doesn't know how much practice they have done, but the pyramid of the group gymnastics reaches a height of seven steps. And yet, they don't turn a hair. "Pii," when the whistle (this whistle slightly changes from the past) blows, children move like mechanical puppets.

The children of the old woman, now junior high school students, couldn't match the group dance with their fingertips. Parents are flush with excitement when gazing at their children's performance.

The old woman thinks. Now, these parents probably ask the school for everything. The subcontracted organization of "ASD" doesn't pass, and the sports meet is why school exists. Guardians see children's painting and calligraphy. The culture festival that shows drama and music had disappeared a long time ago. All year round, the school arranges practice for the sports meet, and the course of study is only scheduled in the morning. Children selected for "ASD" are carefully sorted out into which field they excel and sent to each group.

Though the terrible state of the school came to an end, children attending the school are not "excluded" like the TŌHOKU people. Therefore, people say, "Isn't it getting much better?" Indeed, I don't know when TŌHOKU people were arrested under the pretext of "exclusion," but the announcement tells it every day. Even though not part of the "ASD," I can imagine that no one cares much about those things from the standpoint of TŌHOKU people's children. Children of *Ainu* people and *Okinawa* people cannot join the "ASD"; parents are expelled from work, but not directly arrested like the TŌHOKU people. Losing their job is like gradually killing them, though.

Since the number of TŌHOKU people is much larger than that of *Yamato* people, the room to get into the "Hospital" will soon run out. "When arrested, TŌHOKU people are sent directly to the 'Shower Room.'" I can't easily believe such a terrible story. However, perhaps, think I.

TŌHOKU people's families live close to the high-rise residential buildings where the old woman lives. They run a pharmacy. Without other pharmacies in this district, theirs was quite prosperous. However, because the TŌHOKU people are rusty at words, they don't know what to say. A special person comes out though not that lackluster and ingrains the unique TŌHOKU nasty smell to the whole family. It was said that he was an unheard-of miser, and one day had suddenly disappeared with his family. The following day, a strange family of the *Yamato* race quickly moved in.

On inquiry, I heard that they officially made a contract with the realtor and moved into [the room]. Of course, until yesterday, they did not know that the TŌHOKU people lived here, and neighbors like the old woman kept silent about that.

People like the old woman fretted about whether the TŌHOKU people's family would now return. After all, the family remained unheard of. I wonder if the whole family was sent to the "Shower Room."

The uniform of the "ASD" is nevertheless very classy. Boys wear shorts except in winter and put on white socks up to the knees. They wrap a brown scarf around the neck and wear a square hat on the head. Girls wear basically the same clothes, only instead of shorts, they put on knee-length culottes/skirts.

The uniform is suitable respectively for the four seasons. With the stylish uniform, children are admitted free to "ASD." Although there's a dissatisfied voice that suggests not using heavy taxes for children's uniforms, needless to say, the government ignores this discontent. As it were, that was NIHON's honor. "ASD"'s ceremonial occasions to be active in diplomatic occasions carefully selected strikingly beautiful boys and girls with black hair and straight hair. Curly red hair is out of question. The flesh color is white, and the cut-long eyes shine well. They must have slim limbs and smooth skin.

"ASD"'s beautiful girls were very heartless and cruel. Girls of fifteen or sixteen years old may naturally be like this. How was the old woman herself? [I] can no longer recall it, though, because the time was too far away.

Splinters of glass dazzlingly glittered on the street at night; since that scene was beautiful, these beautiful girls later became known as "A night of jade," [7] who were most active at the time of the Rain on TŌHOKU people. Stationery stores, beauty salons, and cafes run by TŌHOKU people were attacked one after another; security glasses were broken by guns and bombs; TŌHOKU people trembling at home were taken out to the outside and sent to the "Hospital." Only one night, it is said that three thousand TŌHOKU people living in TŌKYO were sent to the "Hospital." Of course, the "Hospital" could not accommodate them right away.

I feel that any beautiful girl will fall in love. A well-known affair enters the old woman's ear. A sixteen-year-old beautiful girl couldn't forget a seventeen-year-old TŌHOKU boy. This is a love affair that never happens. However, since it's around the age of longing for love, if given a chance, one will fall in love in an instant. The "ASD" girl saw the boy who was about to be sent to the "Hospital" by truck, saying hello. The boy doesn't reply. The girl didn't mind, dropped the boy from the truck, and brought him to her own room. Then first she gave him a meal. The boy who lost a lot of weight from starvation didn't speak, but finished the meal. The girl made beds for the boy. I did not know what I should do with myself, being of the *Yamato* race. Nevertheless, as for TŌHOKU people, I couldn't see how the boy's body differed from the *Yamato* race. The boy had slept for several days in the quilt. His parents and little brother seem to have already been sent to the hospital. As the girl gazed into the boy's sleeping face for a long time, she snuck into the quilt and clung to the boy's body. The boy also held the girl's body in his arms.

Then for three months, the boy and the girl were in their fugitive life. The *Yamato* girl had the money that was necessary for the escape. They wandered around cities in the KANTŌ area and sought refuge in the mountains of the NAGANO prefecture. Without ID cards, it was impossible to check into *ryokan* and pensions. In cold seasons from fall to winter, they slept in the open; they got a cold but could not go to the hospital. Each of them started slightly ruining their health. The two talked this over and decided that they had no alternative but to seek refuge in Hong Kong. As a politically independent city, Hong Kong tries to accept political refugees as much as it can. However, when they went to the Hakata Port, the TŌHOKU boy was arrested by the authorities. It was rumored that he was sent to the "Shower Room." There's no way that the girl shall have some of "ASD"'s privileges.

Noticing this, the girl was pregnant. More than mixed blood with TŌHOKU people, she couldn't save the baby. As soon as the boy was arrested in Hakata, the girl was given an abortion. The girl couldn't return to either "ASD" nor her own house in TŌKYO. Losing the chance to escape, she cut her wrists with a razor in the bathroom of the hospital and gave up her own life. At that moment, the sad tale of the boy and girl was talked about among ordinary people. When the story was being talked about, it spread so fast. Right away, a film was made and became a big hit. For the government, it is a film with a favorable plot.

Even if Cesium 137 reached its half-life of thirty years, the old woman doesn't feel like anything has changed in her. Particularly when it seems no change, everything has changed. However, she tries to think that nothing has changed.

It has been unnoticed that the turnover of people is intense in society. The TŌHOKU people who somehow managed to escape from cities start settling in villages close to the accident site.

The new policy of the government, exceptionally, seems to permit the settlement of the *Ainu* people, the *Okinawa* people, and the TŌHOKU people in villages close to the accident site. If living there, they will be allowed to work on the accident site. However, there is no medical support at all; only various medical examinations are carried out. It is said that the settlement is attached with the condition that they don't mind these. Fearing that the radiation dose is too high, the descendant *Yamato* race does not want to work on site.

In villages close to the accident site, people will not be arrested unless they act too conspicuously. The village keeps its landscape from the old days, which has been maintained according to the government policy. People coming from the outside feel relieved. I am able to realize that here is the paradise for TŌHOKU people.

Returning to the village close to the accident site, the old woman cannot stay without pursuing the figure of these TŌHOKU people. If they can escape from the nightmare of the "Shower Room" and come to this village, they restore the hope that they didn't know anything from the start. And one day, though as expected, the hope collapses. Brought to the hospital, they have various examinations in a quarantine ward. They can never receive treatment. Imagine that situation, the old woman has tears in her eyes.

These thirty years, was it long, was it short? I feel like nothing has changed. However, everything has changed, thinks the old woman as well. Thirty years ago, at least, the old woman was not yet the old woman, nor did she realize that she herself was a TŌHOKU person. She did not know the names of radioactive substances like Cesium 137, nor did she know about half-life. It's good not to know. When she knows everything, doesn't everything start to be distorted?

The old woman, from the veranda of the high-rise residential buildings for evacuees, looks down on the sea of TŌKYO bay. As if golden sands were brilliantly sprinkled, the sea of TŌKYO bay shines. However, here as well, the sea is polluted, heard I long time ago.

Since the mountains are polluted, as it rains, radioactive substances flow into the river with mud; no matter how many years pass, the mud in the river pours into the sea. Even so, more than twenty years ago, the Olympics that included competitions at the estuary were forced to be held. If the competition goes on, people would collapse one after another, ominously predicted some people. However, nothing happened. No, serious changes had already occurred. Wasn't the current regime that established "ASD" born from the aftermath of the enthusiasm for the Olympics? The change started from unexpected places. And that change also cannot be stopped by anyone.

Up till now, I pretended not to notice anything. I do not want to notice. Even if I notice something, I cannot do anything.

Long-awaited, Cesium 137 reached its half-life. It may be time to go back to TŌHOKU. If going back to the TŌHOKU village close to the accident site, for now, I do not have to look at those abhorrent "ASD" children. If aware, already, the old woman has nothing to fear.

The old woman, thirty years ago, was still only forty-five years old, and thought the world was full of scary things. Although high-school girls are still very young and full of strength, they like playing with their husbands; they are sometimes enchanted by men at someone else's. During those days, one day, the accident at the nuclear power plant happened.

While the old woman is weeping, she continues gazing at the beautifully shining TŌKYO bay.

2. A REFLECTION ON TRANSLATION

"In Celebration of a Half-life" (2016) is the last work of Tsushima Yūko and a work that hasn't been translated. Before translating this story, I looked at translations of her previous works. Most works focus on her representation of animals or interpret her writings as a mode of "I-novel-in-becoming." Yet in "In Celebration of a Half-life," I see a different perception of time and a futuristic concern of Japan that ties closely to the present. The story reflects on nuclear radiation, ethnographic conflicts, and youth movements. It seems that the writer tried a different mode of writing in her last moment. To translate this story into English not only initiates an inter-lingual dialogue, but also situates her futuristic concern in a more international platform, for instance, the environmental concern globally.

In the process of translation, one of the challenges is how to keep the voice of the text and the style of the author. The Japanese original often omits the subject, object, and the cause of events. I decide to insert my own interpretations at times to make the translation smoother. I decided to put the contents I added in brackets. These brackets help distinguish between the original and the translation, and keep the semantic structure of the original. Furthermore, the story shows an excessive use of adverbs, concessional phrases, and caesuras. Although a literal translation of these features reads redundant in English, these details embody a special subtlety of the Japanese and the unique rhythm of Tsushima's writing. Especially with adverbs, the story tends to repeat some short adverbs and, at times, insert long adverbs as long as a sentence. To capture Tsushima's style, I tried keeping the repetition of certain words and changing the cadence of sentences by inserting commas. I deliberately changed the grammatical order of some sentences. Though not perfectly correct in English, the transition attempts to read more like the original. Moreover, the story does not have a consistent tense. Since the story pays attention to temporality and often uses the emphasis marker “には” after a certain time, I didn't use the past tense throughout the translation, but kept the tense the same as the original.

In terms of proper names, the story deliberately avoids using the current names in kanji but uses katakana for country names, city names, and ethnic groups. The story renders a de-familiarization with the current social context and attempts to write about a different world in the future. To respect this distance the story tries to preserve, I did not use the existing translation of these proper names. Rather, I put their transliterations in capital letter, including “NIHON,” “TŌHOKU” and “TŌHOKU.” Yet to translate proper names in this way, I also worry that these words lose their original connotations.

Although the story centers on one character, the old woman, the story often strays away from the old woman and comments on politics, the past, and the present. The story also talks about radio announcements, the “ASD” youth movements, ethnic conflicts, and an anecdote of a love affair. The loose plot makes it hard to interpret the whole story from the perspective of the old woman or to draw a chronological order of the narrative. Rather, it reads like a mix of novel and essay, paratactically. In this regard, I decided to translate some of the indirect discourse and free indirect discourse into first-person narrative. This can evoke the voice of both the narrator and the old woman, but make the narration of the old woman subordinate to the narrator. This adoption of first-person narrative also puts this story in dialogue with Tsushima's other works, and infuses new possibilities into the old I-novel.

Nevertheless, some features I didn't capture are the use of classical language and different registers in the story. Although “In Celebration of a Half-life” was written in 2016, this recent text shows a mixture of newly coined words and classical diction. The story coins words such as “自動車離れ” (“car-detached”) and “テレビ離れ” (“television-detached”) to comment on the current lifestyle. Yet the story also uses old conjunctions like “ばや” or old verbs like “反撥する,” which are seldom used in contemporary writings. The story thus shows the language of both contemporary teenagers and old people. The story also uses colloquial diction—“それじゃ” or “さほど” for instance, but at times shifts to an honorific language. I was not able to capture all shifts of register, but tried to show different voices.

Another challenge in translation is concerned with genre. When it comes to the translation of poetry, the problem of untranslatability often occurs. *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* shows nineteen translations of one Wang Wei poem, and yet points out the insufficiency of each. Like Peter Boodberg's translation of Wang Wei's poem, this collection renders formal experiments with words and various interpretations of the poetic realm. Brief yet clear, three lines or four lines already embody the brilliance of the work. Nevertheless, a novel has its own complexity that can be untranslatable as well. Translation of a novel concerns itself more with the length, plot, rich content, and consistency of the narrative. Translation of one passage or one vignette can hardly stand for the whole work.

When translating “In Celebration of a Half-life,” I find it hard to predict the flow of the later plot from the opening and to situate the role of the old woman in the story. When the story starts to narrate the patriotic youth league “ASD” and dictatorship, I found myself at a loss, translating the story because the plot suddenly comes without any hints. It's difficult to make a connection between “ASD” and the old woman, or to make a transition in the story. I was also afraid that I was ignorant of political or historical allusions embedded in the story. When the story talks about conflicts among the *Ainu* people, the *Yamato* people, and the *Tōhoku* people, I was unsure about how to translate this ethnographical language. To be more specific, when the story mentions “*Yamato* people,” it always uses the term *jinshū* 人種. As for other ethnic types, the story just uses *jin* 人. I was not sure about the difference between *jinshū* and *jin* implied there: Is there an indicated superiority of the *Yamato* people? Although I translated *jinshū* into race to differentiate it from merely “people,” I still worry about the loss of the connotation in my translation. Moreover, unlike the brevity achieved in the translation of poetry, the translation of a novel starts to make more sense after finishing the whole story. In retrospect, the translation of a novel becomes an organic body resonating with its inner parts.

In the process of the translation, I was further wondering what the translation can do. Although “In Celebration of a Half-life” can be seen as a direct response to the 2011 nuclear accident in Japan, the story also attempts to go beyond the Japanese

context and the current moment. The concern about nuclear radiation and disasters is also reminiscent of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake, and the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. This international dialogue situates the futuristic concern suggested by the story into a broader concern about the environment and geo-psychology. Furthermore, the story seems to go beyond nuclear power to point to the negative side of technological development. As the old woman recalls the change of urban landscape because of the nuclear accident, I was also thinking of the similar change represented in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* (2006). Like the nuclear power plant, the Three Gorges Dam along the Yangtze River produces large amounts of electricity. However, this building project flooded an important cultural site, displaced numerous people, and greatly changed the local landscape. Even in the context of China, Tsushima's futuristic concern can shed light on the great change of its ecology and landscape.

REFERENCES

- [1] Jidōsha-banare “Terebi-banare” / Moving away from cars, “moving away from television”.
- [2] Kyōdō ikuji, kyōdō kaigo / Shared childcare, shared eldercare.
- [3] Kyōkutō no Nihon to iu kuni / A country in the Far East called “Nihon”.
- [4] Sensō hyakunen / One Hundred Years of War.
- [5] Kono Tōkyō / This “Tokyo”.
- [6] Tōhoku / Tohoku.
- [7] Hisui no yoru / Night of Jade.