

***International Circulation of Newspaper Novels:
British Empire, Japan, and the Yubin Hochi Shimbun***

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Abstract

Japanese newspaper novels emerged as an important genre in the latter half of the 19th century. The *Yubin Hochi Shimbun* (hereafter YHS), under the editorship of Shiken Morita, played a key role in shaping the development of newspaper novels through translation. The YHS ran many novels whose authorship was—and still is—unknown. More than half of these novels were translated from English newspaper novels that had been widely reprinted in England, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. I argue that the YHS contributed to fashioning newspaper novels as an international genre. This paper examines the two characteristics that distinguish Shiken’s translations for the YHS readers: his *shu-mitsu* style and his deliberate selection of first-person novels. Shiken sometimes turned some third-person novels into first-person works during the process of translation. In the end, through translation, Shiken also invented a new genre in modern Japanese literature, arguably helping to shape the “I-novel” genre.

Keywords: Newspaper Novels, First-person Novels, Verbatim Translation, Shiken Morita, Meiji Era

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Introduction

Japanese newspaper novels emerged as an important genre in the latter half of the 19th century. In 1886, the *Yubin Hochi Shimbun* (hereafter YHS), a hitherto primarily political newspaper, announced that it would print novels in order to internationalize its readers. The editor Shiken Morita had translated popular Western novels, including works by Jules Verne and Wilkie Collins, for the YHS readership.

The YHS ran many novels whose authorship was—and still is—unknown. Through extensive archival research I found that more than half of these novels were translated from English newspaper novels, mostly unsigned miscellaneous pieces and curious stories. Despite their obscure or even anonymous authorship, they had been widely reprinted in newspapers in England, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. I would argue that the YHS took part in the international circulation of newspaper novels beyond the British Empire, thereby contributing to fashioning newspaper novels as an international genre.

This paper examines the two characteristics that distinguish the editor Shiken's translations for the YHS readers: first, *shu-mitsu* style, verbatim translation traditionally used in translating Chinese works, which he applied to English, and second, his deliberate selection of first-person novels. Shiken sometimes turned some third-person novels into first-person works during the process of translation. As he later explained, Japanese literature did not have the genre of first-person novels, so “we needed it.” In the end, through translation, Shiken also invented a new genre in modern Japanese literature, arguably helping to shape the “I-novel” genre.

Shiken Morita and YHS's Newspaper Novels

Shiken Morita, a literary editor for YHS, had visited Europe and America to learn how to run and edit newspapers. He was famously called the “translation king” because of his unique translation style that had a great impact on the modernization of Japanese literature. What is interesting about him, however, is that Shiken often chose obscure or anonymous English novels for translation, many of which were published exclusively in YHS. I have conducted an extensive survey using archival data on English newspapers,¹ and discovered that most of these novels were never published in book form but appeared as newspaper articles and were mostly unsigned (Table 1). Genres ranged from adventures and mysteries to historical novels, but most of them were set in London and Paris and depicted social life and culture while providing Western scientific knowledge.

¹ National Library of Australia and Trove Partners, “Newspapers & Gazettes,” <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/?q=>. National Library of New Zealand, “Papers Past,”: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers>. British Library, “The British Newspaper Archives,”: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-guides/british-newspaper-archive>. Ancestry, “The Newspaper.com,”: <https://www.newspapers.com>.

LIST OF SHIKEN'S TRANSLATIONS IN YHS

From 1888 to 1889	* = First-person novel
「定数」 Jyosuu	under survey
「女旅客」 Onna-ryokaku (=A Female passenger)	Richard P. B. Davey, "A Queen's Adventure"
* 「密封書」 Mippusyo	[unsigned] "Marrying a Convict" or " The Sealed Document"
* 「元日」 Ganjitsu	[unsigned] "My New Year's Case"
* 「猫」 Neko	[unsigned] "Staying Late at the Office"
* 「倫敦辻馬車」 London Tsujibasaya	[unsigned] "A Pound a Minute"
「時計獄」 Tokeigoku	under survey
* 「代言人」 Daigennin	[unsigned] "The Lawyer's Story"
* 「狼声」 Rosei	[unsigned] "Trapped by Telegraph"
* 「一大奇術」 Ichidai Kijyutsu	under survey
* 「まちがひ」 Machigai	C. G. Furley, "An error in Judgement"
* 「是はソモ」 Kore wa somo	[unsigned] "A Queer Situation"
* 「巴里探偵の話」 Paris tantei no hanashi	[unsigned] "A French Detective Story"

Table 1: List of Shiken's Translations in YHS

Providing stories along with news from overseas was YHS's editorial strategy to capture the interest of readers during a period in which Japan underwent Westernization. At the same time, precisely because of this strategy, YHS selected novels from English newspapers for translation and disseminated them, thereby participating in the international circulation of the genre of newspaper novels beyond the British Empire.

Shiken's "A Female Passenger" and Davy's "A Queen's Adventure"

To illustrate this, let us consider the example of the newspaper novel, translated and published in YHS, entitled "A Female Passenger." Set within the context of the royal flight to Varennes—the unsuccessful attempt by King Louis XVI of France, Marie Antoinette, and their family to escape Paris during the French Revolution—the newspaper novel "A Female Passenger" is a comedy centered on an actress who resembles the queen and is hence suspected of being the undercover Marie Antoinette. At a time when Japan had been forced at gunpoint to conclude unequal treaties with the Western powers, the French Revolution and the American Revolutionary War were events inspiring to the Japanese readership due to the themes and ideals of independence and democracy that they embodied.

I discovered that the Japanese newspaper novel "A Female Passenger" was a translation of Richard Patrick Boyle Davey's "A Queen's Adventure," published in 1874. While Davey, an English writer who studied in France and Italy and who also stayed in New York City, is now consigned to relative oblivion, the ways in which his work "A Queen's Adventure" was circulated beyond the British Empire and the United States to reach the readership of YHS warrants scholarly attention particularly since the novel was transformed into an unsigned and obscure work of fiction as it was reprinted and translated.

"A Queen's Adventure" first appeared in the February 1874 issue of *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature & Science*, published in Philadelphia. Subsequently it was reprinted in various newspapers across the United States (Table 2). As far as I have been able to ascertain,

at least 10 different newspapers including *The Belvidere Standard* in Illinois reprinted “A Queen’s Adventure.” According to Charles A. Johanningsmeier (1997), prior to 1860, American newspapers reprinted novels from domestic and British sources without permission, until newspaper syndicates appeared. The newspaper syndicates then began to sell short stories and serialized novels from British and American magazines and newspapers, and the editors of each newspaper purchased the works that they wanted to publish.

NEWSPAPERS THAT REPRINTED “A QUEEN’S ADVENTURE” AFTER *RIPPINCOTT’S MAGAZINE*, 1874

- The Belvidere Standard* (1874.2.3) Illinois / Belvidere
- Wood Country Reporter* (1874.2.5) Wisconsin / Wood
- The Chicago Dairy Tribune* (1874.2.21, Appendix 1874.02.22) Illinois / Chicago
- The Rutland Dairy Globe* (1874.3.14) Vermont / Rutland
- The Donaldsonville Chief* (1874.3.21) Louisiana / Donaldsonville
- The Herald and Mail* (1874.4.3) Tennessee / Columbia
- The Vermont Farmer: An Agricultural and Family Newspaper* (1874.4.24) Vermont / Newport
- The Elk County Advocate* (1874.6.4) Pennsylvania / Ridgeway
- The Brooklyn Dairy Eagle* (1874.6.6) New York / Brooklyn
- The Indiana Progress* (1874.8.27) Pennsylvania / Indiana

Table 2: Newspapers that Reprinted “A Queen’s Adventure” after *Rippincott’s Magazine*, 1874

Nine years after its publication in *Lippincott’s Magazine*, “A Queen’s Adventure” was reprinted in the September 1883 issue of *The Theater*, a British magazine, followed by reprints in newspapers. However, there was a new development at this time: namely, “A Queen’s Adventure” began to be reprinted in the settler colonies of the British Empire, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Table 3). Shiken’s translation, retitled “A Female passenger,” for YHS also appeared around this time.

NEWSPAPERS THAT REPRINTED “A QUEEN’S ADVENTURE” AFTER *THE THEATER*, 1883

Leeds Times (1883.9.8) UK / West Yorkshire
Steuben Republican (1883.12.5) USA / Illinois
The Queenslander (1883.12.8) Australia / Queensland
The Auckland Evening Star (1884.2.9 Appendix) New Zealand / Auckland
Te Aroha News (1884.2.16) New Zealand / Waikato
The Daily Telegraph (Appendix 1888.11.10) New Zealand / Hawke's Bay
The Yubin Hochi Shimbun (1888.11.25,27,28) Japan / Tokyo
Western Star and Roma Advertiser (1889.8.28) Australia / Queensland
The Evening Telegram (1897.3.5) Canada / Newfoundland

Table 3: Newspapers that Reprinted “A Queen’s Adventure” after *The Theater*, 1883

Graham Law and Norimasa Morita’s study (2003) shows that during the latter half of the 19th century local newspapers were launched in Britain, and short stories and serialized novels began to appear in weekly newspapers. Moreover, a newspaper novel syndicate called Tillotson & Son was established in England, and from the early 1880s, the market expanded overseas to encompass the United States, British colonies, and continental Europe. In this milieu, “A Queen’s Adventure” gained an international route to sale and subsequent reprinting. However, Japan was outside of this supply network. Law and Morita (2003) point out that the influence of the international novel supply industry was almost none in Japan. And yet YHS made inroads into the international circulation of the newspaper novel “A Queen’s Adventure” through translation. We should not downplay the sort of translation-mediated relationships that YHS created.

The era of newspaper syndicates and newspaper novels ended in the United States and Britain during World War I. By contrast, newspaper novels have been published in Japan for the past 150 years without interruption. Many popular Japanese writers have written them, and amongst them can be found important works in the history of Japanese literature. The close relationship between newspapers and literature in Japan does not seem to have changed even during the modern day when newspapers have transitioned into a digital format.

Verbatim Translation and First-Person Novels

This, I would argue, is partly because of the translation style that Shiken successfully established for the YHS readers—a style that is marked by two practices. First was the creation of a unique style called *shu-mitsu*, verbatim translation, which was originally a technique of translating Chinese sentences into Japanese but which Shiken applied to English translation. Such a direct translation of English was rare in Japan, but Shiken’s translation style gained support because of his sophisticated use of Japanese. There was a minor caveat, though: he translated the subject I (= “Yo”) every time as it appeared in the original English, though in Japanese, it is more natural to omit the subject I.

The second practice developed by Shiken was the dissemination of Western first-person novels in Japan (Table 1). For this purpose, he resorted to an extreme measure. A case in point is “The Story of Prince of India Djalma” (1886) by the French writer Eugène Sue (1844), which Shiken translated into Japanese from an English translation and published as a newspaper novel. Though a third-person novel, “The Story of Prince of India Djalma” was changed to a first-person novel as Shiken rewrote it from the perspective of one of the main characters, Djalma. In his essay “Self-Written Description of Novels” (1887), Shiken explained why he was interested in first-person novels. As he described it, first-person novels were widespread in the West but were rarely found in Japan and China. First-person novels are superior to third-person novels as they express feelings such as happiness and sadness directly to the readers allowing the readers to feel these emotions. As such, he felt that Japan was in need of first-person novels.

One could reasonably speculate from Shiken’s remarks that YHS published Western first-person novels to enable readers to sympathize with the main characters of stories from abroad and experience different cultures in a simulated manner. In addition, the emergence of first-person newspaper novels had a significant bearing on the creative methods of Japanese writers, arguably paving the way to the establishment of a unique genre called “I-novel.” Shiken’s declaration that Japan needs first-person novels was significant.

Conclusions

As I have discussed, YHS and its editor Shiken played a significant role in internationalizing newspaper novels and introducing the same genre into Japan through translation. The close relationship between newspapers and literature in Japan would not have been possible without YHS’s ingenuity. YHS and Shiken were also instrumental in shaping first-person novels in Japan, a literary genealogy that can be traced down through the works of Soseki Natsume, Osamu Dazai, and Haruki Murakami. In the end, Shiken’s influence was unpredictably immeasurable.

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