Sekai wa bungaku de dekite iru: Teaching Japanese Literature as World Literature

ABSTRACT

In his seminal study, Sekai wa bungaku de dekite iru (‘the world is made of literature’), Numano Mitsuyoshi reconsiders the grounds for comparison of diverse literary traditions as well as the position of Japanese literature within the “world literature” scholarship. This paper is inspired by the conviction that, as Numano claims, “the world is made of literature” but, at the same time, it aims to disclose a number of challenges and obstacles that might occur when Japanese texts are to be read and taught beyond their linguistic or cultural boundaries. The objective of the project is to reassess the applicability of “world literature” discourse in teaching Japanese literature courses at the university level. The focal points under consideration here are the methodology, the potential reading lists and the assessment criteria. The rationale behind this distinctive approach that departs from a predominantly historical development of literary tradition and does not emphasise the singularity of the Japanese literature, is founded on the belief expressed by Zhang Longxi that “world literature provides a welcome opportunity to return to the reading of literature on a much larger scale” and on David Damrosch’s perception of literature as “great conversations among works grouped in an ideal simultaneity”. The paper intends to re-evaluate the pedagogical benefits of world literature as a complementary course to the existing modules within the Japanese Studies and aims to establish its cognitive functions as an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, cross-national and transnational outlook on the canon of the Japanese literature in the globalized world.

KEYWORDS: Japanese literature, world literature, Global Age, cross-cultural communication, distant reading

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“[…] the highest accomplishment of a people is to transform as much as possible of its national history into world history, its private people’s myth into world myth. What ultimately counts are the spiritual values a single nation can offer humanity as a whole.”

Stefan Zweig, *History as Poetess*

**Introduction: The Relevance of sekai bungaku**

As we celebrate thirty years of Japanese Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and reconsider the problems and perspectives for Japan in a changing world, we undertake multiple tasks of reconsidering not only the position and status of Japan in a globalized world but also the challenges that lie ahead for the existing scholarship within the Japanese or broadly understood Oriental Studies.

The challenges we face in the academia could be identified as the consequences of two major factors observed in recent years: the weakening position of the humanities (with the closure of a number of departments, also in Japan)² and the decreasing number of language courses in higher education. However, with regard to these tendencies, Japanese has secured a relatively privileged position as one of the most popular languages taught at universities³. While it is not my intention to make further comments or to elaborate on statistics, a thorough consideration on how these tendencies affect (or may affect) the entire curriculum of the Japanese Studies in the future should become a necessity. Regardless of the numbers, it is still reasonable to ask: Are we offering students enough? Are we providing them with expertise, and do we make sure that they are equipped with the skills that meet the requirements of the present-day job market? Furthermore, what could the courses we teach, the methodology we apply, or the dissertations we supervise reveal or tell us about the status of the Japanese Studies? Thus, my curiosity lies in the subject matter that by far exceeds the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, if I were to keep it short and put it in one sentence, it would take a form of the question: how do we, scholars in the Japanese studies, participate in a globalized world? How does our research address the issues of contemporaneity?

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³ According to the latest figures in the report prepared by Modern Languages Association show the staggering decrees by 7.8% in enrolment for the Japanese language courses in the United States alone and similar changes have been observed by British Council regarding the United Kingdom.
The main objective of this paper is to assess the applicability of the world literature framework to the reading and teaching of Japanese literature modules at the university level. The approach adopted here is based predominantly on observations, class performances, student-led-presentations and the learning outcomes involving both undergraduate and graduate students. To teach literary texts comparatively is to appreciate how people from different cultures act, communicate and perceive the world, but first and foremost, to examine how literature engages in social, political or ethical issues by addressing the problems of language, nation, ethnicity, gender, or the minorities (to mention just a few). Students are encouraged to use their analytical and language skills that shed light on the structures and functioning of a wide range of discursive practices shaping both individuals and cultures. In addition, world literature offers the development of a wealth of transferable skills and teaches how to apply various interdisciplinary research methods: literary criticism, social sciences, anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics (philology), and translation studies. However, as much as diversity of disciplinary and critical approaches within the world literature studies may enrich academic discourse, creating a comprehensible curriculum designed specifically for Japanese studies may remain challenging. Theoretical approaches to teaching courses in Japanese studies have not attracted much attention. An interesting comment on this issue was made by the editors of *Teaching Japanese Popular Culture*, who observed that ‘[…] pedagogical scholarship has not been a priority in Japanese studies because of the way the tenure system ranks and rewards different types of academic publishing. Publications on pedagogy simply do not count for much in most universities’ system, apart from language teaching.’ (Shamoon and McMorran 2016: 3-4).

Therefore, not surprisingly, this paper discusses a range of pathways and strategies aimed to redesign the paradigms of thinking about Japanese literature and to explore it within the framework, of what I term, *cross-cultural communication through world literature*. My interest lies in presenting a reasonably comprehensive overview of a tentative curriculum that would coincide with the recent development of a transdisciplinary approach in the East Asian Studies, targeting a wider audience and, where applicable, meeting the demands of the current job market in arts and humanities.

*Sekai wa bungaku de dekite iru*『世界は文学できている』– the title of the paper – was borrowed from Numano Mitsuyoshi’s 沼野充義
seminal multivolume work that has become a significant point of departure and a point of reference for my discussion. Numano deliberates on Japan’s position on the world’s literary map; he searches for its transnational and transcultural dimension and recreates the process of Japan’s becoming a part of sekai bungaku since the Meiji period or, more recently, a part of gurōbaru bungaku グローバル文学⁴, re-evaluating “grounds for comparisons” between diverse literary traditions. His research has significantly contributed to the existing comparative as well as translation and culture studies in Japan. The book was published in three separate volumes with slight changes made to the titles: Yappari sekai wa bungaku de dekite iru 『やっぱり世界は文学でできている』 (Still, the World Is Made of Literature), and Soredemo sekai wa bungaku de dekite iru 『それでも世界は文学でできている』 (Nevertheless, the World Is Made of Literature). These were followed by 8 sai kara 80 sai made no sekai bungaku nyūmon 『8歳から80歳までの世界文学入門』 (The Introduction to World Literature from Eight to Eighty Years Old), published in 2016, and 『つまり、読書は冒険だ』 in 2017 (In Other Words, Reading and Writing is Fun). The volumes consist of interviews with prominent Japanese writers and critics, including Ogawa Yōko 小川洋子, Ikezawa Natsuki 池澤夏樹, Ono Masatsugu 小野正嗣, Kawakami Hiromi 川上弘美, Aoyama Minami 青山南, and the translator, Michael Emmerich.

Numano’s approach to Japanese literature consists in reinventing the notions of the national versus the foreign and perceiving “otherness and inclusiveness” as an immanent feature of every single literary text regardless of its cultural or linguistic background. This, in turn, corresponds with Pascale Casanova’s view that treats literature as a coherent entity. As she remarks in The World Republic of Letters,

“The persistent tendency of critics to isolate texts from one another prevents them from seeing in its entirety the configuration […] to

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⁴ With regards to a commonly used term gurōbaru グローバル ‘global’, it replaced the previously used kokusai 国際 ‘international’. As much as gurōbaru bungaku グローバル文学 ‘global literature’ may still not be commonly used, there are other connotations: gurōbaruka グローバル化 ‘globalization’, gurōbaru jidai グローバル時代 ‘the age of globalization, global age’ and even gurōbarujin グローバル人 ‘a global person’.
As an advocate of comparative, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approach to literary studies, I believe that world literature provides an insight into world’s changing and colliding cultures and becomes a medium for intercultural communication. It addresses the notions of diversity, plurality, multiplicity. Although often criticised for not having a clearly delineated theoretical framework, or even for its lack of methodology, and for being too speculative with some of the findings unsubstantiated or not textually evident enough, its flexibility undoubtedly opens the possibility for more comprehensive, wide ranging and multidimensional outlook on literary studies and humanities in general.

Let us first scrutinise some methodological and terminological issues pertinent to world literature in order to accurately measure its applicability and relevance to Japanese or East Asian Studies.

The term Weltliteratur (world literature) was coined by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who in 1827 stated that: ‘National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.’ (Damrosch 2003: 1).

Continuing the legacy of Goethe, Milan Kundera in his essay Die Weltliteratur elaborates on the term and argues that it is necessary to perceive “literatures in the plural.” (Kundera 2008: 36). The Czech writer

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5 An important issue is the interdependence and theoretical relationship between world literature and postcolonial studies. This refers to the method of exploring the ambiguous notion of “world”, the relation to Other, inequality of cultures, as well as canon-formation processes. The studies that offer a deep examination of these two cognitive perspectives are, for example, Homi Bhabha’s Location of Culture and Nation and Narration. Most recent studies that contribute to the debate are Pheng Cheah. 2016. What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature. Durham: Duke UP and Aamir R. Mufti. 2016. Forget English! Orientalism and World Literatures. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Press.

6 Christopher Holmes introduces the concept of “limit” and claims that “understanding world literature as the limit allows literary texts and theory to be read as an event of thinking that is in-progress, in-common an incomplete, an analogue to the necessary impossibility of knowing the world”. Holmes offers a methodology that frees world literature from expectations of coverage and classifications and revitalizes the term as a call to engage the literary text as thinking with rather of the world. Christopher Holmes “The Limits of World Literature.” Literature Compass 13/9 (2016), 572-584.

(notably in French, his language of choice) endorses the “distant reading” for, according to Kundera “[…] the geographic distance sets the observer back from the local context and allows him to embrace the large context of world literature, the only approach that can bring out a novel’s aesthetic value – that is to say: the previously unseen aspects of existence that this particular novel has managed to make clear; the novelty of form it has found.” (Ibid.)

Following this line of thinking, and focusing on the notion of ‘distant reading’, David Damrosch maintains that:

“[…] reading a work from a distant time or place involves back-and forth movement between familiar and unfamiliar […] a view of the world is always a view from wherever the observer is standing and we read through our experience of what we have read in the past […] reading our way, beyond our home tradition involves a more pronounced revision of the part-whole dilemma of hermeneutic circle that we already encounter in a single tradition.” (Damrosch 2009: 3)

In *Teaching World Literature*, Damrosch points out how the course ‘can emphasise the gradual unfolding of a classical tradition, but the presentation of world masterpieces can equally take the form of multipolar “great conversations” among works grouped in an ideal simultaneity.’ He concludes his remarks by defining world literature as ‘a set of windows on the world’ and encourages teachers and course instructors to broaden ‘their focus to include intriguing conjunctions of compelling works of many origins’ (Damrosch 2009: 5).

The pedagogical values of studying ‘literary cultures’ have been endorsed by Anders Pettersson, who, in the Introduction to *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective*, explains the necessity of incorporating literary texts into cross-cultural studies:

“[…] there must obviously also be room for many other kinds of transcultural studies of literature in a broad temporal and geographical perspective. It would arguably be a good thing if literary studies could advance a clearer view of literary cultures of the world and make them, and their mutual relationships, more comprehensible, to students of literature and to a wide audience […]”
Transcultural literary competence is also of value for purely scholarly and critical purposes. Much as our knowledge of the map of the world gives a perspective on our location in space, some knowledge of the world history of literature will undoubtedly help students of literature to orientate themselves regardless of their specialities.” (Pettersson 2006: 2)

At the same time, he points to a number of obstacles, even challenges, that need to be taken into account when implementing “world literature approach” to cross-cultural studies. Pettersson suggests that:

“If one wishes to engage in transcultural literary studies, one has every reason to reflect on world histories of literature and on the problem associated with them. Transcultural literary investigations must of necessity negotiate many of the problems that surface with special, pedagogically rewarding acuteness in the transcultural historical studies that are widest in scope: world histories of literature.” (ibid: 5)

J. Hillis Miller, co-author of Thinking Literature Across Continents, similarly emphasises the challenges in teaching world literature classes, and specifies three reasons for pedagogical concerns. These, according to Miller, are “translation, representation and the notion of literature”. In other words: “in what language to read the texts of world literature”, “how to select the most representative texts (to avoid the biased selection), and finally “different conceptions of literature across time, places, cultures”. Miller argues that:

“Teachers of world literature and editors of textbooks on world literature still need to decide, however, which works to help circulate and get read. Such experts also need to decide what to tell students about a work from a culture that is different from their own […] The challenges to world literature I have identified do mean, however, that one should not exaggerate the degree to which courses in world literature are any more than a valuable first step toward giving students knowledge of literatures and cultures from all corners of the earth.” (Miller 2016: 140-142)

8 Above quotations are from Miller’s chapter ‘Globalization and World Literature’ (134-152). He also explores the pedagogy of world literature in further chapter ‘Should We Read or Teach Literature Now?’ (177-203).
As I intend to demonstrate in the next section, teaching Japanese literature as world literature consists in “simultaneous” or “synchronized reading”, which, from the pedagogical point of view, requires a justified decision when it comes to module reading list. One of the most problematic aspects of such an approach is to what extent reading in translation (considering that, in accordance with the definition proposed by Damrosch, ‘literary texts gain in translation’) remains compatible with course objectives.

Maruya Saiichi 丸山才一, one of the most influential post-war Japanese critics and intellectuals, considered the practice of simultaneous reading of world literary texts in relation to ‘coming into being’ of what he terms *gurēto noweru* グレート・ノヴル ‘great novelistic tradition’.

“It seems to me that there is no other way of looking at modern Japanese literature as the imitation of the eighteenth-century French and British novels, followed by the entire nineteenth century European literature (…) However, the literary tradition of Japan is amazingly longer than in Europe. I mean, for example, *Genji monogatari* … Or the way *Genji monogatari* is written. If we were to apply features of European novel, we will be able to discover Murasaki’s novel anew. I wonder if it would be possible to call it *gurēto japonīzu noweru*, however ridiculous it sounds. But if we look at this issue deeply, we notice that there is a strong connection between translations modern or contemporary Western novel into Japanese and *Genji monogatari*. Today the number of readers who read *Genji monogatari*, those who read Fitzgerald in Murakami Haruki’s translation, or Chandler gradually increase. For me the question is what happens then.”9 (Maruya 2015: 52-53)

The above standpoint raises an important methodological but also pedagogical question, notably whether we are required to take into consideration the linguistic background of the text. Gayatri Spivak (the author of *Death of a Discipline*), stresses the importance of area studies

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and language as she proposes that the comparatist pays attention to area studies and the linguistic conditions (language) of the literary texts. While the above dilemma might be solved, it does not diminish the significance of the question: to whom does world literature belong? The adjective global – the word that conditions the validity of world literature – was challenged by Adam Kirsch in his study *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century*. He claims that ‘global literature requires translation, “[b]ut is translation a valid form of interpretation, or does it obscure more than it reveals? Does the hegemony of English threaten the diversity of literatures and cultures?” Kirsch provides a thorough assessment of the keywords *world/global literature* and states that,

“[...] the question of whether world literature can exist – in particular, whether the novel, the preeminent modern genre of exploration and explanation, can be »global« – is another way of asking whether a meaningfully global consciousness can exist. Perhaps the answer is already suggested by the question: It is only because we have grown to think of humanity on a planetary scale that we start to demand a literature equally comprehensive. The novel is already implicitly global as soon as it starts to speculate on or record of human beings in the twenty-first century. Global novels are those that make this dimension explicit.” (Kirsch 2016: 12)

With regard to the above definition, I believe that it is still justified to ask: how to tackle the notion of global\(^\text{10}\) and how relevant, for literary studies, are definitions formulated by other disciplines: social sciences, politics, economics? Is it the question of periodization and locating the global on the timeline of history? Again, whose history would that be? Does the concept of universality include the global? Are these notions interchangeable? For understandable reasons, it would not be possible to adequately address the above questions within the limited scope of this paper.

Literature’s response to global and globalization was addressed in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader* (2011), the study that offers a multidisciplinary approach, starting with an attempt to define “globalization” from the academic and historical perspective. The objective of the study was to indicate that conceptualising the phenomenon of

\(^{10}\) グローバル化 gurōbaruka in Japanese is the equivalent of the English globalization, there is also 世界化 sekaika, which corresponds to the French mondialisation.
globalization involves the attention to the spectrum of discourses such as historical, cultural, social, political. Examining the relation between literature and globalization, Paul Jay approaches the topic historically, but at the same time suggests that globalization cannot be limited to the contemporaneity, and seeks for testimonies of diverse manifestations of globalizations throughout human history. Literature’s relations to the processes of globalization as they manifest themselves in a variety of historical periods – indeed, literature’s facilitation of economic and cultural globalization – is becoming a potentially important field of study that might get short-circuited if we think of globalization only as a postmodern eruption. (Jay 2011:106)\(^{11}\)

As already stated, it would be erroneous to perceive world literature as an inclusive or all-embracing phenomenon: its scale and framework have not been properly established yet. Damrosch distinguishes key conceptual questions that accompany us when we teach literature not from national perspectives but as part of world literature discourse:

1. What is literature?
2. Whose world?
3. How has literature been understood in its myriad manifestations over time and across space?

There exists, however, the ethical dimension highlighted by Zhang Longxi, who states that “world literature […] offers us not just the occasion to appreciate works from different traditions for their aesthetic appeal and broadly human interests but also a glimpse into the specific conditions in which those works are created and circulated, the opportunity to understand different cultural and historical circumstances that necessarily deepen our appreciation” (Zhang 2015: 2).

While Zhang perceives world literature in its ethical dimension, Rebecca L. Walkowitz points out yet another significant aspect that needs to be taken into consideration: the changing patterns of reading among global readers. In one of the most recent essays written for ACLA (American Comparative Literature Association), Walkowitz poses the questions: “How will we read literary works in the future? And how does thinking about the future of literary works change the way we read?”, to which she provides four separate answers. The first is: “Future reading will require foreign reading”, by which she means that we readers must see the novel as a work existing

\(^{11}\) Jay’s essay in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader.*
simultaneously in different languages, in different media and artistic forms, thus being addressed to the plurality of audience.

Secondly, future reading is a “[F]oreign reading, recognizing the foreignness of literary texts, animates collectivities that are both smaller and larger than the nation, and that operate both within and across languages”. Third, “In the future, we will need to read comparatively, by which I mean reading across editions and formats and also recognizing that any one edition and format contributes to the work rather than exhausts it. This changes reading, philosophically as well as technically, because it defines the work by its appearance in the world rather than by its inherent or original characteristics.” Finally, as Walkowitz notices, “Instead of asking where or in what language a work of literature belongs, we need to ask how it belongs”. (Walkowitz 2017: 108-110).

The focus on the figure of the reader (specifically, a foreign reader) modifies the framework of a (national) literary canon. “Texts become world literature by being received into space of a foreign culture a space defined in many ways by the host’s culture national tradition and the present needs of its own writers (…)” maintains Damrosch (Damrosch 2009: 283). Numano also observes the recent changes in reception of classical (canonical) Japanese literature (following new English language translations). In a conversation with Michael Emmerich, the author of *The Tale of Genji: Translations, Canonization and World Literature*, Numano points out that,

“If we consider *Genji monogatari* as world literature, we wonder if the Japanese language used a thousand years ago is continued in present-day Japanese or is it completely distant. Or maybe, we should perceive the language of the text as an entirely foreign language, I wonder. When it comes to world literature, the differences between Japanese and English are not only on linguistic level. We tend to think of diverse literatures: Japanese, European, Asian, American, African that coexist geographically. But the example of *Genji monogatari* shows that a one-thousand-year-old text is still a literary work. In other words, world literatures exist not only in spatial terms but also within time.” (Numano 2016: 264-265)

Numano, similarly to Damrosch, appreciates the contribution made by translation and links *bungaku* 文学 ‘literature’ and *hon’yaku* 翻訳 with the
process he terms *sekaisei* 世界性 ‘worlding’. The same approach is also demonstrated by Michael Emmerich, who provides a new reading of *Genji monogatari* by assessing Murasaki Shikibu’s masterpiece as a text that ‘demands to be read again’. He offers a fresh appraisal of the canonical work, precisely by interpreting it ‘translingually, transnationally, transhistorically’. Emmerich’s scholarship embraces *Genji* ‘as a work of world literature, *Genji* as a work that exists first and foremost in translation, and *Genji* as a work that is discursively figured as participating in world literature through translation.’ (Emmerich 2015: 1 and 315).

**Sekai bungaku: Locating Japan on World Literary Map(s)**

The notion of literary canon in Japan constitutes one of the most problematic issues. Despite a long literary tradition, with some texts dating back to as early as the seventh century, the literary canon has been considerably revised and reorganized since the second half of the nineteenth century with the introduction of Western literary patterns, genres or styles. It could be claimed that the process has not been completed yet, and it can be identified as the *canon in the making*.

Though the Japanese literature is no longer considered to be the periphery on the world literary map, the question is to what extent does it possess a secured position as part of world literature. Does it contribute to the global literary canon? If, not what could be the factors that make Japanese literature *unreachable or remote* for the global readership?

One of the biggest challenges, highlighted by Numano, is the scope of *sekai bungaku*, which does not necessarily include Japanese literature [12]. As the term itself remains imprecise, it includes: *hikaku bungaku* 比較文学 ‘comparative literature’, *gaikoku bungaku* 外国文学 ‘foreign literature’, and *hon’yaku bungaku* 翻訳文学 ‘translated literature’ [13]. Despite the growing interest in *sekai bungaku* ‘world literature’ [14] in Japan and within Japanese Studies in recent years, the key methodological questions still

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12 It is worth mentioning Sekai bungaku kai 世界文学会 [Society of World Literature Japan] that has significantly contributed to expansion of the scope of world literature and demonstrating the interdependences between Japanese literature and foreign literature. See http://sekaibungaku.org/.

13 For more details see Tsujihara Noboru’s study (2010) Tōkyō daigaku de sekai bungaku o manabu 『東京大学で世界文学を学ぶ』 [studying world literature at Tokyo University].

14 Interestingly, despite the proclaimed crisis of humanities in Japan, a number of higher educational institutions offer courses in world literature/global literature (Tokyo University; Hōsei University). It is also worth mentioning that 2018 Summer Session in World Literature (organized by the Institute for World Literature, Harvard University) was held at Tokyo University.
appear to be: How to locate Japanese literature on the literary map of the world? What are the criteria or cognitive tools that lead towards establishing Japan’s interconnections with literatures of the world? What should be the point of reference? As Kōno Shion observes in Sekai no dokusha ni tsutaeru to iu koto, to adequately understand Japan’s interconnection with world literatures, it is necessary to acknowledge the interdependencies between two perspectives that dominate in academia but not necessarily complement each other: hikaku bungaku 比較文学 ‘comparative literature’ and chiiki kenkyū 地域研究 ‘area studies’ (Kōno 2014:22-23).

Ikezawa Natsuki, the author of Ikezawa Natsuki sekai bungaku rimikkusu, indicates that the point of departure remains the Japanese language. The distinction between hon’yaku no nihongo 翻訳の日本語 ‘translated Japanese’ and sōsaku no nihongo 創作の日本語 ‘creative Japanese’ proposed by Ikezawa expands the scope of the existing scholarship and treats West and Asia as a common and equal area of impact on Japanese literature. Nonetheless, the specificity of Japanese language (in particular, the writing system) results in the ‘sense of isolation in/of Japanese literature’ 孤絶感の残る日本文学 kozetsukan no nokoru Nihon bungaku, which, in Ikezawa’s view, needs to be appreciated by the readers and translators. (Ikezawa 2017: 58)15.

On the other hand, building on Franco Moretti’s work Distant Reading, Suzuki Akiyoshi reminds us that ‘(…) Japanese literature and concepts of literature have been developed as a compromise between the local styles of peripheral countries and the metropolitan culture of core countries in Europe’. Suzuki remains vigilant in his approach to world literature and maintains that scholars must note that ‘literary theory was mainly born in Western countries. Whether Japanese use literary theory or not, the study of literature in Japan has been based on western concepts of literature’ (Suzuki 2014: 6-7).

This, in turn, addresses the question of translatable. How to read diverse literary genres and to appropriately use culture-specific literary terms: for example, are the classical genres of Japanese literature like monogatari or

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15 This remark (which appears to be untranslatable and not fully addressing the Japanese meaning when translated into English) was made during the conversation with Numano Mitsuyoshi and Kōnosu Yūkiko 鴻巣友季, a translator of British and American literature, and was published in Ikezawa Natsuki, Bungaku Zenshū wo Amu 『池澤夏樹、文学全集を編む』 (2017).
nikki compatible with tale/story or diary in the Western context? Does the Japanese shōsetsu represent the same parameters as the novel (in English) or le roman in French? I am strongly convinced that we cannot simply apply the principles of world literature without taking into consideration how these issues are tackled or discussed in Japan. The objective of such an approach is to find compatibility between various methods in grouping literary texts in accordance with topics, motifs, styles, historical periods, literary schools etc.

As Atsuko Hayakawa points out, ‘along with world literature, translation studies have received much more attention due to the powerful investigation of the nation’s history in which language inevitably affects people’s minds’, and she goes on to note that world literature calls for a re-evaluation of national canon but also notion of mother tongue. (Hayakawa 2015: 647).

At the same time, to read Japanese literature translationally (by which I mean taking into consideration methodology, as well as treating translation as the ‘initiating’ factor behind the literary work16) is to appreciate what remains ‘untranslatable’. Emily Apter emphasises the fact that the notion of ‘untranslatability’ has been overlooked in existing scholarship whereas it should be recognized as a cognitive tool that could potentially enrich the way we read literary texts. Exploring “untranslatability” means, as Apter points out, to appraise ‘the importance of non-translation, mistranslation, incomparability and untranslatability’. (Apter 2013: 4).

Reading across Languages, Cultures and Genres: Teaching Japanese Literature as World Literature

As mentioned earlier, designing world literature course for Japanese Studies raises a number of theoretical questions and demonstrates, to certain degree, terminological and conceptual incompatibilities that occur when comparative perspective (Japan versus the West) is applied. However, an equally thought-provoking subject matter is Japan’s interaction with East Asia, and whether there exists a common literary canon of Oriental texts that could contain a shared reading list for world literature students. Most Japanese literature curricula do not include Chinese or Korean literature, and cross-referencing serves as background for illustrating

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16 This comment refers to works in Meiji/Taishō period that were (re)created as translation of Western texts, e.g. Edogawa Rampo’s detective stories where the boundaries between ‘translation’ (hon’yaku), adaptation (hon’an) and the original were often blurred. I also apply Rebecca Walkowitz’s notion of ‘born-translated’, where she considers translation as ‘not secondary or incidental but a condition of literary works’ production’. See Walkowitz, Born Translated: Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature.
The approach that could potentially expand the existing learning patterns and help students to encompass multidimensional facets of world literature, is the evaluation of Western literary tradition as translated, received and circulated in East Asian countries. As Simon Estok’s comments in *Western Canons in a Changing East Asia*, the evaluation of the impact Western reveals how “the essentializing notions of both of the West and Asia [and] the changes within the region, combined with an economic slowing down and belt-tightening in the West, have resulted both in a radical decline of the importance of Western literary canons within East Asia and in a more sincere appreciation of domestic work” (Estok 2014: 1). Similarly, Sowon Park states that “[s]o whether one sees world literature as transnational or hypernational, the underlying issue keeps returning to the question of what or whose measure of evaluation authorizes the process of stratification. To this question there are no satisfactory “literary” answers, only more political questions: who or what produces the function of world literature? What power or authority ensures the currency of its criteria across changing historical and cultural contexts? On what grounds? And for what purpose?” (Park 2013: 2).

What does it mean to read Japanese literature as world literature? It is simply going beyond conventional, predictable and unadventurous – from the students’ perspective – methods of teaching. World literature not only enhances the visibility of Japanese literature on the literary world map, it also invites a much wider audience to participate in literary and non-literary discourse as the outcome of transnational, translingual and crossdisciplinary approach. In other words, it allows to depart from the traditional, historic-descriptive exploration of literary phenomena for the benefit of revealing their inner dynamicity. Karen Thornber sees pedagogical benefits of world literature since it combines ‘global, the local, and everything in-between.’ (Thornber 2016: 115).

Reading comparatively enables setting in motion an additional level of understanding of highly politicised, controversial topics: one of these is gender, equality, feminism, which could be discussed with the reference to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*, Han Kang *The Vegetarian*, Elif Shafak’s *The Black Milk*,

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17 Academic institutions that offer teaching Japanese literature as world literature are (to name just a few): Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University; Institute of Comparative Culture (Sophia Universities, Tokyo); Department of Comparative Literatures at Penn State University, Comparative Literary Studies at Northwestern University, Centre for World Literature (University of Leeds, UK).
Tsushima Yūko’s *The Child of Fortune* and Takahashi Takako’s *Lonely Woman*.

While discussing narrative techniques and the notion of authorship (as expressed in Japanese by *sakka* and *sakusha*), I introduce students to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s story *In the Groove*, which we read alongside Ian McEwan’s *Nutshell* and Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. When we assess the validity of Roland Barthes’s ‘death of the author’, we may refer to Dazai Osamu’s *The Setting Sun*, Witold Gombrowicz’s *Trans-Atlantic* or Michel Houellebecq’s *Map and Territory*. Endō Shūsaku’s last major work of fiction, *Deep River*, and Victor Piellevin’s *Buddha’s Little Finger* could be analysed from the angle of intertextuality and according to how the borders of ‘literateness’ shift in the post-modern fiction.

Another simultaneous reading that groups texts from diverse cultural backgrounds, could, for instance, consist in the exploration of ‘time’, as in Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, Orhan Pamuk’s *The Museum of Innocence* and Mishima Yukio’s *The Sea of Fertility*.

It must be noted that detective fiction (*kaiki* or *tantei shōsetsu*), a genre slightly neglected by most curricula, is popular with students. Just to avoid cliché, I need to add that I do not encourage students to read Edogawa Rampo with Edgar Allan Poe. Instead, it is Higashino Keigo, Hideo Yokoyama, alongside with novels classified as *Scandinavian noir*, or a French bestselling writer, Pierre Lemaitre.

Apart from a conventional approach to literary texts, it is paramount to teach students how to interpret culture and society with the use of cross-media studies: arts, *manga*, *anime*, fashion, songs. One of the most suggestive topics that can be explored in a classroom is narratives of disasters, where the distortions of language make it impossible to express the totality of human experience. Ineffablility of the unimaginable can be explored by the comparison of literary testimonies as depicted in the book on Tōhoku disaster in 2011 (usually referred to as *Higashi nihon daishinsai*), *March Was Made by Yarn* with Sono Shion’s film *Kibō no kuni* (Land of hope) and the recent rise of post-Fukushima protest songs 18.

Finally, teaching Japanese literature as world literature is to examine literary bilingualism and translingualism, literature written in foreign languages (English/French/German) or by non-Japanese writers (in Japanese), to redefine the notion of ‘literary canon’ in a predominantly homogenous and monolingual society. By making Japanese literature the case study, we may be able to evaluate how the frameworks of literary

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Sekai wa bungaku de…

The reading consists of internationally recognized writers: Murakami Haruki, Tawada Yōko, Mizumura Minae, Hideo Levy, Furukawa Hideo, Ruth Ozeki, but also other works that address the issue of bilingualism, including Japanese manga and anime. The changing boundaries of the Japanese language were highlighted by Faye Yuan Kleeman, who observes that the designation of Nihongo bungaku ‘still highlights its ambiguous status. Only when all writers using the Japanese language are understood to be contributing to Nihon bungaku and granted their rightful place within its canon we may say that Japanese literature has really entered the postcolonial era.’ (Kleeman 2000: 387)

As previously stated, one of the key pedagogical challenges we face when designing a curriculum is the course reading list. I have already identified a number of issues concerning this matter, among which the following remains decisive: what is and what is not world literature? How about the canon of Western literature in Japan? Is the canon limited to one territory? Or can it be transterritorial? In other words, what about the foreign authors like Amélie Nothomb, Éric Faye, David Mitchell, Philippe Forest, Dany Laferrière, whose literary texts clearly touch upon the themes related to Japanese culture, history, not infrequently with references to the language? It is as Teresa Ciapparoni La Rocca identified as “The European Border of Japanese Literature”:

“Are these writers then Japanese? […] they are, but, borrowing Amélie Nothomb’s expression, on the condition that they be equally considered European writers. This of course does not mean that they are half-European and half-Japanese, but something else again: border-crossing writers […] expatriate writers who have a greater right than others to be identified as writers of »world literature«” (La Rocca 2008: 99)19.

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19 Michael Emmerich identifies these tendencies as 日本語では読めない「世界文学」としての「日本文学」Nihongo de wa yomenai sekai bungaku toshite no Nihon bungaku [literal translation: ‘The Japanese literature as world literature that cannot be read in Japanese’]. He discusses the topic in the chapter グローバル化する現代日本文学 – 日本語では読めない日本文学 Gurōbaru suru gendai Nihon Bungaku – Nihongo de wa youmenai Nihon bungaku [Contemporary Japanese Literature Towards Globalization – Japanese Literature Unreadable in Japanese] in 『世界文学への招待』Sekai bungaku e no shōtai [Invitations to World Literature], and points to the changing patterns of national literature (kokugo) as a result of diverse forms of translation involved in creative process, for instance Murakami Haruki’s use of English or Tawada Yōko’s bilingualism. (Emmerich 2016: 239-255). Emmerich examines the “broken” relations between language and literature; whereby national language no longer conditions national
Concluding Remarks: Reimagining a Universal Culture
This paper has discussed the cognitive functions of world literature, and in accordance with its definition, its premise could be summarized as “reading across time, cultures, languages and genres”; that is cross-cultural communication through world literature. Moving beyond literary studies, we might, or rather should, acknowledge its contribution to Oriental Studies.

To teach Japanese literature as world literature is to constantly re-establish literary canon, thus shifting the borders that define, to use the Japanese terms, uchi and soto.

World literature unveils the phenomenological dimension of literature: our being in the world. Covering a hermeneutic way of the circulation of texts, their translation, adaptation, transformations, and finally interpretations, world literature is about creating values. Zhang Longxi terms world literature a “global view of human creativity in various forms of literary manifestation” and argues for the absolute necessity of comparison, as he claims, “integration of different literary and cultural perspectives, a truly global and cosmopolitan vision that helps making cross-cultural understanding possible among the world’s different people and their communities” (Zhang 2015: 1 and 7). From a more practical point of view, it provides students with not just factual information but also skills that are applicable to other disciplines: close reading, critical analysis, translation skills. World literature, with all its faults and inner inconsistencies, reminds us that we are the citizens of the world. It is the world that changes but at the same time it is the world – as Borges envisioned it in The Total Library – that requires to be (re)interpreted, (re)read and (re)discovered.

Concluding my discussion on teaching Japanese literature as world literature, I would like to give a final say to Mizumura Minae, a Japanese writer brought up in America, who discovered treasures of national literature while living abroad. Her fictional and non-fictional works, including an experimental bilingual novel Shishōsetsu from left to right (1995) 『私小説 from left to right』, followed by Honkaku shōsetsu (‘A True Novel’) 『本格小説』 and most recently, Haha no isan (‘Inheritance of My Mother’) 『母の遺産—新聞小説』, constitute personal (though often fictionalized) accounts of how one’s experience of reading constantly oscillates between the native and the foreign. Since the publication of her seminal study Nihongo ga horobiru toki. Eigo no seiki 『日本語が亡びる literature (日本語原文の存在しない日本文学) (ibid: 246).
ときー英語の世紀の中で』（‘The fall of the language in the age of English’) in 2008, she has demonstrated that whilst endorsing the concept of world literature, in a globalized world it is vital to maintain culture-specific features that define each of us. In the 2009 interview she clarified her viewpoint by saying: “It’s also important to offer a non-English, local perspective as an alternative to the reality presented by English-language writing (…) my point is that it’s important to use the Japanese language to portray the reality that is specific to Japan (…) In any case, the important thing is not to be blinded by globalization but to use the Japanese language to capture the reality of Japanese life through the Japanese language” (Mizumura 2009). To a certain degree, she shares experiences of previous generations of Japanese writers, split between the East and the West, like Nagai Kafū, Natsume Sōseki, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Endō Shūsaku, Suga Atsuko, but these experiences, as we know, are not unfamiliar to present day writers, for example Tawada Yōko, Shiraishi Kazufumi, Murakami Haruki, Furukawa Hideo, and probably most notably articulated by Ishiguro Kazuo.

“Distant reading” – one of the key premises of world literature – consists in a search for the common ground of human experience as expressed in diverse literary traditions. In one of her most personal essays “Bungaku no rekishisei o yomu” [The historicity of literature], Mizumura – a “distant reader” of Japanese literature – uses the metaphor of solitary island (kotō) to reveal her endeavours to bridge what seemed for her, as reader and writer, unbridgeable.

“It became clear for me that the world of Japanese language and the world of English symbolise two different worlds – almost like day and night – and they remain incompatible with each other. At the same time, I looked at novels written in Japanese and those in English language, as if they were like solitary and remote islands that appear here and there on the surface of the earth, the islands that do not know the existence of each other, without any connections. But literature is never a solitary island. […]” (Mizumura 2009: 75-76; quotation slightly modified).

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