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A FAITHFUL TRANSLATION FOR A KABUKI REPLICATION

by

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I did not have any second thoughts about accepting the invitation of the Dulaang Unibersidad ng Pilipinas or Dulaang UP for me to translate *Kanjincho* into Filipino using an English translation because of three reasons. First, one of the directors of the play, Professor Antonio Mabesa, a Professor Emeritus of the University of the Philippines, was my teacher in Asian Theater. In that class, he taught us some Japanese theater forms, including the Kabuki and Noh. Second, if memory serves, this would be the first time in the Philippines that a Kabuki replication would be staged. And third, this endeavor is the fulfillment of my dream to translate Asian plays.

Translating *Kanjincho* proved to be a challenge because of the overall concept and design of the production, namely: the staging of a Kabuki in its purest form and in all its aspects, including set, costume, props, lights, music, sound, dance, gesture and even the actor's style of elocution. In order to preserve the Kabuki in its original form, the production and artistic staff of *Kanjincho*, including the translator, watched *Kanjincho* on video several times. In this way, all persons involved would be precise in replicating details of *Kanjincho* in all its aspects. For me as translator, replication meant that only the

language should be translated from Nihongo into Filipino, while retaining the artistry of a Kabuki as shown in the video.

In the process of translation, therefore, I attempted to visualize how the play would be staged (blocking, pacing, tone, scene design, etc). I did not only give importance to the dialogue of each character in a play, but more so to the over-all production of the play. That is why, I could say that translating a play is different from translating a novel or a poem. A translator does not only translate words when translating a play. He must study the hidden emotion or feelings of a character which can only be discerned through dialogue. Moreover, the translator of a play also has to consider some gestural texts which are important in translating dialogue in a play.

A faithful translation of *Kanjincho* from English into Filipino was really an enormous challenge for the translator. When I was doing *Kanjincho's* translation, I was hoping that I would be possessed by the spirit of the main character Benkei - a soldier loyal to his master Yoshitsune. Since the project required a faithful translation for a Kabuki replication, I had to do a "literal" translation, and not an adaptation into Filipino of a foreign play.

A faithful translation implies a direct translation of one language into another while an adaptation involves research on the equivalence of two cultures. Translation is on the literal level while an adaptation is on the interpretative level. A faithful translation protects the essence of the original language while an adaptation explores possible

meanings of the original words that might conform with the target culture. A faithfully translated play is devoid of interpretation and is open to different readings. On the other hand, an adapted play has already undergone certain reading by an adaptor and therefore can be treated as a product of interpretation. An adaptation tries to find the equivalence of ideas and commonality of cultures between two different peoples, while translation retains the beauty of the original language and the intention of the original concept. In translating *Kanjincho*, I tried to be faithful to the the original text and the original concept.

Because I did not understand Japanese, I had to rely on the English text translated by James Brandon and Tamako Niwa of Namiki Gohei's *Kanjincho*. I was confident with the translation I came up with, because Dr. Jina Umali, a Japanese theater specialist, and Mariko Yamaji, a Japanese student in U.P., helped me with the Nihonggo text. Dr. Umali and Mariko Yamaji re-translated some complicated dialogues from Nihonggo into English while I refined the Filipino translation. Because of this, I could say that the Filipino translation was faithful to its original Nihonggo text, inspite of the mediation of the English language.

We checked the Tagalog translation against the original Nihongo text at every rehearsal of the Filipino version. We did this routine for six months, experimenting and choosing the appropriate words in Filipino that would best capture the meaning of some terms in Nihongo. Dr. Jina Umali even lectured me regarding the context of some dialogue in *Kanjincho*, and most especially the on idiomatic expressions. She also explained to me

some scenes that are peculiar to Japanese culture so that I could adjust my translation accordingly. In some of my other translations works, I adapted foreign situation into the Philippine context so that the audience could relate to the experience of the characters in the play

The process of mounting *Kanjincho* in two languages – Filipino and Nihongo of Dulaang UP helped the actors to grapple with this theater form. The director asked the actors to memorize the Nihongo text first. Aside from the video tape that served as reference and guide for the actors, and production and artistic staff, the actors were also given audio tapes for them to listen to familiarize themselves with the dialogue, most especially with the intonation and manner of elocution. After the actors had already memorized their dialogue in Nihongo, the Director then told them to memorize their dialogue in Filipino. And in the memorization of the Filipino dialogue, the actors were advised to imitate the tone, rhythm and the manner of speaking as they do it in Nihongo. However, some of the dialogue in Filipino did not go with the melody and rhythm of the Nihongo. Thus, I had to revise the problematic dialogue once more.

Initially, I did not yet consider the rules regarding the measure when I started translating *Kanjincho*. All I did was to translate all the dialogue into Filipino first so that I could move on and finish my first draft. This meant that I did not bother to consider the number of syllables per line, or the number of words in a sentence in the original. I just translated the Nihongo dialogue into Filipino based on my initial comprehension and reading. After that, I went through my translation and further refined some words. It was

then that I saw to it that the number of words in a Nihongo sentence would equal the number of words in a Filipino sentence. I had to keep in mind that the duration of the translated text should be as that of the original text.

To be faithful to the original text, I considered some Kabuki conventions in my translation. As much as possible, I tried to be consistent with the numbers of syllables in every sentence or line (e.g. *waka*: 31 syllables – 5-7-5-7-7; *shichigocho*: 9-5-7-6) in order to conform with the meter of the Nihongo dialogue.

After some refinement, I gave my translation to the directors for comment. Dr. Jina Umali checked my translation with reference to the Nihongo text, while Prof. Mabesa, also a Tagalog speaker, checked my Filipino translation. They advised me to revise some lines in the translation so as to be precise and exact. They advised me to think of alternative words for some terms to make the translation more understandable. They also advised me to refine some ideas so that some scenes would be more fluid.

And when I was done with these revisions, I thought I was done with my translation. But no. When the actors started to rehearse in Filipino, more adjustments had to be done, particularly in the poetry part that really required measure and rhythm in the delivery. And in this instance, I had to revise again the dialogue in order to conform with the number of syllables in a sentence of the Nihongo text, choosing words with the stress that would match the original Nihongo intonation.

I knew that this problem with regard to measure would crop up because some of the Nihongo dialogue as well as the English translation were written in verse. That is why in my initial translation of some verse, I really tried to use the number of words in a sentence that would conform to the Nihongo text. For example, if the first line of poetry in the Nihongo text was composed of seven syllables, I had to make the first line of my poetry translation in Filipino seven syllables as well. If eight in Nihongo, it should be also eight in Filipino.

I sought the assistance of Dr. Jina Umali in the translation of some lines. Dr. Umali had to explain to me the context of some sentences because it was really important for me as translator to translate a word or a sentence with knowledge of its context. Many lines were drastically revised when some of the dialogue in Filipino was sung the way the original was sung. Thus, the translation of the Filipino text had to be really precise in terms of numbers of syllables with reference to the Nihongo text..

I had to cut off syllables and even edit out some words in a sentence, or a line in a poem to conform with the Nihongo's intonation.. There were also instances when we had to go back to the original Nihongo text and add some lines to Filipino translation so that a particular dialogue would coincide with the count of the Nihongo melody, particularly in the poetry part of the play.

This translation of a Kabuki served as a challenge to me because aside from translating ideas and concepts, I also had to follow the conventions of the source culture, such as the manner in which the Kabuki dialogue is delivered.

Maybe, this laborious requirement in translating a Kabuki is the major reason why Kabuki plays have not yet been translated into Filipino. A translator has to consider conventions of poetry and other verse forms, most especially if the plan for a project is a replication, and not an adaptation. A translator also has to be familiar with Kabuki conventions of music, songs, dances, spectacle, and performance.

Another possible reason why Kabuki has not been translated into Filipino is because there are only a few Philippine scholars who specialize on Japanese theater. Likewise, We only have a handful of scholars who are adept in Japanese theater, Nihongo, and Japanese culture, and Filipino language and who, at the same time have passion for theater.

Also, when I tried to get the pulse of the Kabuki text, I discovered that Kabuki dialogue has a certain texture and energy, because of the traditions of *engo* (related words with suggestively similar meanings), *watarizerifu* (passed-along dialogue), *tsurane* (forecful style of elocution), and *kuriage* (raising-up). These conventions helped me in finding the appropriate words to be used in Filipino, at the same time served as an excercise in using Filipino vocabulary.

Like the tradition of *engo*, Filipino vocabulary is also rich in meanings. There are many Filipino words that have suggestively similar meanings, which makes translation exciting and challenging. There are times when a translator can play by choosing a word for a particular scene because of its sound and stress. If we were to study these Kabuki conventions, we would actually see them also in the Tagalog drama of the Philippines during the American period. For example, the *drama simboliko*, an allegorical play (against the American occupation of the Islands) also had this convention of *engo* in some of its parts.

Also, I was reminded of the Dramang Tagalog when I was translating some of the *tsurane* in *Kanjincho*. The Tagalog drama is full of forceful elocution like the *tsurane* which can be found in the emotional soliloquies of Inang Bayan (Mother Country) where she longs for the freedom of her children, or the sorrowful lamentation of a girl after her fiancée had left for the countryside to fight for freedom, or the emotional scene of a man because of jealousy with her sweetheart. It is also obvious that a Kabuki is as wordy as the dramang Tagalog. Moreover, we can also find the tradition of the *watarizerifu* in the lines of the koro of the *dula-tula* (play-poem) in the contemporary Philippine theater, as well as in some scenes of *taongbayan* in dramang Tagalog in the 1900.

In my translation, I saw to it that the language spoken (vulgar, elegant) by a character reflected his social status since this is one of the conventions in a Kabuki script. The loyal soldier Benkei used humble words when talking to his Master Yoshitsune.

A certain level of respect was observed when Togashi, the leader of the guard, talked to Benkei regarding their passage through the prohibited barrier.

This convention of dialogue can also be found in the Tagalog Drama which became popular in Manila from 1900 to 1940s. As in the Kabuki, the social status of a character may be determined through his way of talking. The noble and dignified persons use refined and pure language while people who have bad manners use corrupted and foul language.

However, whatever the status of a person delivering a dialogue in *Kanjincho*, I saw to it that I was using words and concepts were are easy to comprehend. Although I confess that initially I entertained the thoughts of translating *Kanjincho* into Filipino using the old Tagalog words because Kabuki is a traditional theater form.

As much as possible, I tried to find the most appropriate words for my translation, in order to be faithful to the original text. However, I retained the Nihongo terms for those words that were alien to Philippine culture and had no exact equivalent in the Filipino language. For example, I retained words like *token* (hat), *oi* (box), *suzukake* (vestment) and *kanjincho* (subscription list). I could easily have used the word *sumbrero* for *token* or hat. However, a *token* has a cultural specificity for Japanese people, and is not an ordinary hat or headcover of a priest. Likewise, I retained the word *oi* because a word such as *bag* or *lalagyan* (container) would not have been appropriate for *oi* which is somewhat sacred in the context of the scene. Also I retained the word *suzukake* which is

similar but not equivalent to priest's vestments in the Philippines. To be exact, it is the clothes that the Yamabushi priests wear. I also retained the word *Kanjincho* for the subscription list because I could not find a single word in Filipino that would be near enough.

Translation is really the discovery of new cultures. It has been proven that language is the key to discover the richness of one's culture. In translating *Kanjincho*, the door opened and allowed me to discover the similarities of the theater conventions of the Philippines and Japan, and possibly the conventions of theater in Asia. Also, I discovered in the process of translating *Kanjincho* how Japanese culture valued loyalty which is also a trait of Filipinos. Being loyal to one's master is one of the Filipino traits that is reflected in the language Filipinos use.

Reference:

Brandon, James R. *Kabuki, Five Classic Plays*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.