



Issues of Reception of Japanese Literature in Albanian Language

Edlira Macaj

Assoc. Prof.,
Department of Literature,
University of Tirana,
Tirana, Albania

Received: 5 January 2025 / Accepted: 2 March 2025 / Published: 25 March 2025
© 2025 Edlira Macaj

Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv12n106

Abstract

The relationship between the literatures of different nations plays a crucial role in fostering literary and cultural intercommunication. Literary works, originally written in one language, frequently transcend linguistic boundaries through translation, enabling cross-cultural exchange. However, this process raises important questions regarding translatability, translation theories and practices, and the reception of foreign literature by target audiences. This study examines these dynamics by focusing on the translation of Japanese literature into Albanian and analyzing its reception among Albanian readers. To investigate these connections, the study adopts a historical and analytical approach, incorporating a factual examination of translated authors, readership trends, and the overall success of Japanese literary works in the Albanian literary landscape. The research considers two distinct periods: before the 1990s and after the fall of the dictatorial regime, allowing for a comparative perspective on translation practices and literary reception over time. The study addresses key research questions: To what extent has Japanese literature reached Albanian readers? How well is it represented in translation? What challenges arise in the translation process, particularly regarding translators, publishing houses, intermediary languages, and critical reception? The findings reveal that the translation of Japanese literature into Albanian has been sporadic, largely unsystematic, and predominantly conducted through intermediary languages rather than directly from Japanese. Despite these challenges, Albanian readers have demonstrated a consistent and growing interest in Japanese literature, reflecting an increasing engagement with its themes and stylistic nuances.

Keywords: Japanese literature, translation, Albanian language, publication, reception

1. Introduction

1.1 Literature Review

Japanese literature has a long history and global influence in the literary world. Translating Japanese literature into Albanian is a process that can involve unique features and challenges due to the differences in the structure and style of the two languages, such as the writing systems (Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji), and cultural context, as Japanese culture includes pronounced cultural and philosophical elements that can be challenging to translate into the Albanian context. Concepts such as "wabi-sabi" (perfection in imperfection), "mono no aware" (a sense of humility towards things), and attention to rhythm and structure, especially in traditional poetry forms like *haiku* or *tanka*, are considered challenging. Additionally, cultural and historical contexts that often include historical and mythological references may be unfamiliar to Albanian readers. Japanese literature contains a philosophy and spirituality that imparts a deep and

reflective dimension. Therefore, it is acceptable that along with the translation comes the “misery” and “splendor” of the work, the former due to different mental systems, the latter due to the relocation of the reader within the “linguistic habits” of another. (Gasset Ortega y, José, 1937). Interliterary communication is essentially realized through translation and its transcendence as a linguistic and cultural transfer. This is because the translator must preserve the artistic work’s spirit and quality when delivering it to the recipient of another language, supporting a balance between fidelity to the original and creative adaptation in the new context. (Pound, E., 1954) on the other hand, the translator must capture the original work’s essence or the intellect. (Benjamin, W., 1955).

When the readers of one country come into contact through the literary translation with another culture, this complex process entails the selection of authors, the poetics of works, readings, and readers. Literatures in communication through translation bring their identifying elements to each other. Thus, through the reading of Japanese authors in the Albanian language, the discussion involves first the recognition of the authors, but also of the general Japanese culture, which contains expressions that are unique and not easy to translate, adding to this the adaptation into a unique language such as Albanian. The translation principles vary according to the case in translation methodologies or how a translation emerges. From formal equivalence (Jakobson, R., 1959) to dynamic and functional equivalence (Nida, E., 1969), translation activates thought, naturalness, clarity, and cultural adaptation. All perspectives addressing the theories and practical issues of translation recognize its interlinking function and the development of a process that connects the author and the translator (acting as a secondary author/creator, etc.) with the act of translation itself, and ultimately with the translated product/work. This is especially significant in literary translation, which always has something new to say, particularly when it involves the interconnection of languages resulting outside the most widely used languages globally.

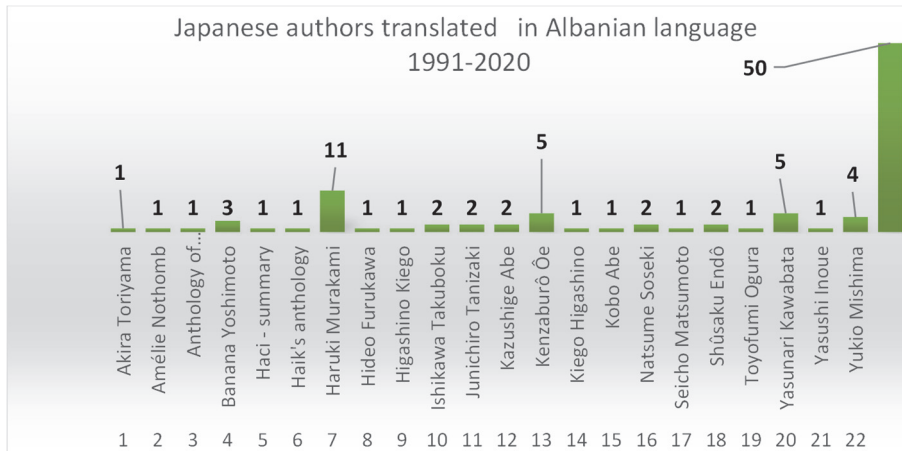
Susan Bassnett (1980) reinforces the idea of a set of textual practices with which translators and readers collaborate, ideas that liberate one from the debates about the original and the translation, or versions and imitations. The translatability of texts of any nature remains in the discussion between the view that the translated text should stay very close to the original or should be as naturally adapted as possible to the target language. How can a balance be built between the two parts? Referring to the aforementioned theoretical assertions about the act, and principles of translation, and keeping in mind the target language reader, we can interpret the concrete data on the translatability situation of this literature into Albanian (from official sources) by addressing several issues related to the most translated authors, genres, translators who have undertaken this mission, publishing entities that value publications and reprints, and the success of authors in creating popularity among mass readers, etc.

1.2 Data research

Japanese literature has conveyed its poetics through the works of its most renowned authors to languages worldwide. The global popularity of Japanese literature is associated with names such as Murasaki Shikibu (the famous author of “The Tale of Genji,” written in the 11th century, considered one of the most important works of Japanese literature and one of the world’s earliest novels), Yukio Mishima (a novelist known for “Confessions of a Mask” and “The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea”), Natsume Soseki (who explores the dilemmas of modern life and various human emotions), Haruki Murakami, and Mitsuyo Kakuta (“One Day in the Life of Shimei Futaba”), among others. Albanian reader receives and enjoys a unique reception with the translation of this literature and some of its authors.

Translation from Japanese literature into Albanian began with sporadic publications in the 1960s during the period of dictatorship, a time when translation was also viewed with orientations that required alignment with the ideological model. During this period, the field of translation records few titles of this literature, and we can note translations from Natsume Soseki in the 1960s, S. Tokunaga in 1970, Seicho Matsumoto and Kaiko Takeshi in 1973, Shūsaku Endō in 1985, and 1990, an anthology of Japanese poetry was published. Additionally, during this period, the “Rilindja” publishing house in Pristina, Kosovo, translated and published Kawabata’s works in Albanian in 1972 and a collection of notable Japanese Haiku poetry in 1984.

After 1990, the situation of translations of world literature changed. However, even in this period of pluralism, the reflection of translations from Japanese literature did not experience a comparable increase with translations from other languages. It is important to emphasize that after 1990, communication with this literature was regained and interest in translating appeared. Even today, there hasn’t been a published bibliography in the Albanian language about translated works from Japanese literature, but we may find data in the National Library catalog. The translated titles, around 58 in Albanian, do not cover Japanese literature as extensively as the literature of other countries covered.



Graph 1:

The translated authors from this literature include Soseki Natsume, Kaiko Takeshi, Kazushige Abe, Kobo Abe, Shūsaku Endō, Yasushi Inoue, Yasunari Kawabata, Seicho Matsumoto, Yukio Mishima, Haruki Murakami, Amélie Nothomb, Kenzaburō Ōe, Toyofumi Ogura, Ishikawa Takuboku, Junichiro Tanizaki, Banana Yoshimoto, and a few others. This listing is reflected in Graph 1.

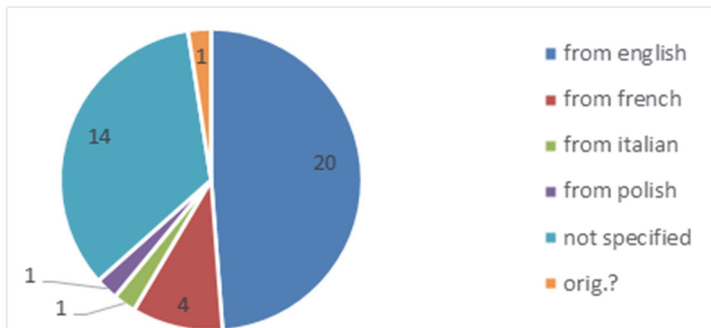
The most frequently translated Japanese author into Albanian is **Haruki Murakami**, with **11 titles** published. **Kenzaburō Ōe** and **Yasunari Kawabata** follow, each with **5 titles**, one of which was first published in **1972 in Pristina, Kosovo**, by the *Rilindja* publishing house. **Yukio Mishima** has **4 translated works**, while **Banana Yoshimoto** has **3**, and several other authors have **one or two titles** available in Albanian.

Another key finding from the statistical data concerns the involvement of publishing houses in translating and disseminating Japanese literature. This data also highlights the most prolific years for such publications. Among **approximately 26 publishing houses** that have contributed to the translation of Japanese literary works into Albanian, *Skanderbeg Books* stands out as the most active, with **12 published titles**. *Dudaj* and *ADA* each have **4 titles**, while *Ombra* and *Toena* have **3 titles** each. *Onufri*, notably, has reissued the same title **three times**. A detailed representation of this data is provided in **Graph 2**.



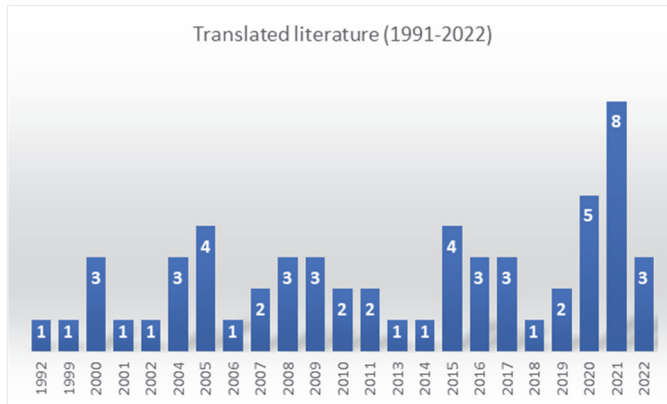
Graph 2:

Another issue related to the arrival of this literature to the Albanian reader pertains to who facilitates its communication: the translators. Japanese literature comes to Albanian through about 41 translators. The most prominent translators include Abdullah Karjagdiu, Agim Doksani, Anton Papeleka, Antonio Çikollari, Artan Kuçi, Bardhyl Myftiu, Betim Muço, Bisej Kapo, Bledar Kurti, Eduart Grishaj, Elda Ymeri, Eshref Ymeri, Elvana Zaimi, Etta Klosi, Fatmir Alimani, Florjan Mjalti, Helena Kadare, Ilir Krasniqi, Ilir Baci, Ines Ekonomi, Ivana Dervishi, Luan Toto, Lili Bare, Lira Muça, Luan Toto, Margalina Sina, Marjeta Thomaj, Merita Meçe, Nasi Lera, Neshat Hodobashi, Orjeta Marku, Petraq Kolevica, Pirro Dollani, Rudi Erebara, Sidita Dano, Stela Dana, Skënder Rusi, Stela Dano, Shyqyri Nimani, Urim Nerguti, and Visar Zhiti. All of these translators carry out translations that come from second languages, not directly from Japanese. Here begins the main problem, the limitation of the direct connection of translators with the source language. According to data gathered from the national catalog, translations mostly come from English, followed by other major languages, as reflected in Graph 3.



Graph 3:

2021 will be the most successful year for publishing Japanese literature, with around 8 published titles as shown in Graph 4.

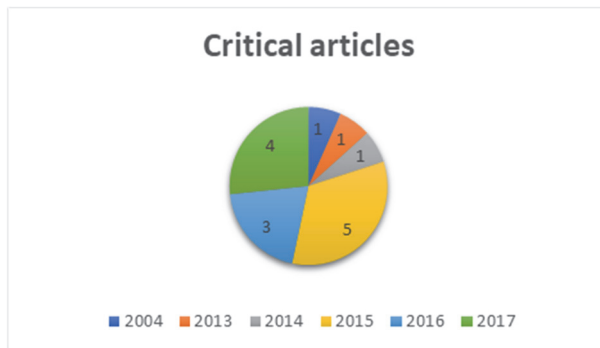


Graph 4:

The trends of the last three years have been marked by an increase in the publication of new titles, specifically in 2020-2021. The period 2021-2022 enriches the translation field with **five** new titles by Haruki Murakami, a collection of short stories and four novels published by the publishing house “Skanderbeg Books”; **one** novel by Sōseki Natsume and **two** novels by Osamu Dazai (2021, 2022), **one** collection of short stories and novellas by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa in 2021, as well as **the novel** written by Keigo Higashino in 2021, and **a novel** written by Mieko Kawakami – all translated from English, not from Japanese. Additionally, new publishing houses appeared such as “Arka e Noes” and “Shtëpia e Librit”. Only in one of the published titles, later republished has emphasized with a note that translation derives from the source

language. (translator Eduart Grishaj, yet confirmed for objective reasons.)

The reception of translated literature also entails another way of assessment, such as the critics might assess it. Regarding this issue studies are lacking, and so are translations of studies. Critical articles are structured as occasional reviews or introductions for certain parts of translated short stories, or excerpts from works published in various journals. Sometimes the translator also takes on the role of the critic. Based on the data, 33 articles have been recorded and published in various gazettes. During the period 1990-2022, around 15 articles and reviews appeared. The year 2015 records 5 critical articles. See graph 5.



Graph 5:

Another issue related to the reception of this literature is new editions of the same title. Reeditions mark also the success of the book because of its readability. We're talking about Haruki Murakami's book "Sputnik Sweetheart" which had a reedition and Yasushi Inoue's "Three Women" (published in 2000, and republished in 2005 and 2015). Murakami results as the most popular and enjoyable Japanese-translated author, whether Inoue became popular due to some reasons. First, the novel was professionally translated by Helena Kadare from French, and it came in Albanian with a poetic title "Three Woman", far from *ad litteram* translation, (獵銃, *Ryōjū*) known in English as "The hunting gun". Secondly, this novel conveys an unconventional narrative of three women through an epistolary format, unraveling disrupted relationships and human dynamics. Since letters appeared in narrative structures that flourished the epistolary genre, they remained pleasant to the reader. Abrams and Harpham sustain that in this literary genre, the narrative schemes are conveyed entirely by the exchange of letters, and the technique is still occasionally revived (Abrams, Harpham, 2012: 254). Another reason for success is that the novel has been adapted for theater, receiving acclaim and success in performances by professional actors from the Albanian National Theater "Kujtim Spahivogli" in 2018 and 2019, as well as being staged in Kosovo under the title "Three Women and Misugi."

This narrative tells the story of three women who write respectively letters to the same man. A letter's poetics unfolds mind and soul (thought and feelings) through an uncensored confession, becoming so a structure of motivation and known as a personal expression a long time ago (Nissinen, 2003). Each of the letters (woman) identifies breakdowns between binary oppositions like love/hate, faith/traitor, life/death, lie/truth, etc. It's not sufficient to explain what love means in general, as it's a vast topic, but it's worth understanding how love has influenced the characters in the novel. Love shapes human lives, while the letters reveal how love, hate, or disappointment can be experienced. The letters suggest that love cannot be clearly explained but may be expressed through open-ended questions. Altman interprets the letter as being "tailored for the love plot, with its emphasis on separation and reunion, and considers it as a halfway between the possibility of total communication and the risk of no communication at all" (Altman, 1982: 14, 43). The first letter of this novel is filled with doubts and disapproval (Shoko). The second letter exudes love and regret (Saiko), while the last intersects love and rejection (Midori). Midori is the betrayed and silenced woman; Saiko is the loved one, ... *Since we cannot avoid the fact that we are sinners, then let us at least be great sinners. And as long as we live, we will deceive not only Midori but the whole world, and Shoko has been lied whole time ... For 13 years, my mother lied to me about it.* Kauffman's observation about letters in the modern and postmodern periods considering their use in fiction for exposing problems of feminist theory (Kauffman, 1992) For more we think that the letter diffusion in literary texts (novels) overpasses feminist view and it is underlined by it's up and down poetics in different periods of its appearance. It has always marked letter's reactivation constantly and is a literary feature used without gender boundaries. One of the letter's

roles in fiction is related to 'the dramatic explosion for 'helping self-revelation' of fictional characters. Epistolary activation is a paradigm of desire (love) (Kauffman, 84-90). Self-disclosure is what the reader seeks, what everyone tries to hide, and what the letters strive to illuminate in specific circumstances. Therefore, these letters invite different interpretations as various readings suggest them. The themes of love, betrayal, and complex emotions depicted in three epistolary scenarios appeal to readers, making this edition familiar and attractive to them. All three letters have their respective rhetoric, three different styles that reflect three different relationships, but the three of them inform, persuade, and lead to audience motivation. (Corbett, Connors, 1999). The popularity of this work can be attributed to its unique structure of three letters, each written in the language of one of the women, resonating with a broader audience due to its poetic portrayal of love and pain.

2. Conclusions

Japanese literature, with its rich tradition and global influence, has historically had a delayed reception and a limited readership in Albanian-speaking regions. However, in recent years, there has been a notable increase in the availability and selection of translated works. Despite this progress, a key challenge remains: the predominance of translations from intermediary languages rather than directly from Japanese. This underscores the pressing need for well-trained translators proficient in the Japanese language, culture, and literary traditions, who can facilitate a more authentic and nuanced cultural exchange.

Since 1991, the number of translated Japanese literary works has steadily increased, reflecting a growing interest in this literary tradition. However, critical reception remains limited, with a lack of comprehensive studies or translations of scholarly works related to Japanese literature. Existing discussions are mostly confined to occasional reviews rather than in-depth literary analyses.

In terms of readership and popularity, **Haruki Murakami** stands out as the most widely translated and recognized Japanese author in Albanian. Additionally, **Yasushi Inoue's *The Hunting Gun*** has demonstrated lasting appeal, having been published in **three editions (2000, 2005, 2015)** and adapted into theatrical performances. Its success can be attributed to its distinctive narrative structure—three letters written by three women to the same man—offering multiple perspectives on love, loss, and human relationships.

Moving forward, fostering direct translations, expanding critical engagement, and promoting a broader spectrum of Japanese authors will be crucial in deepening the presence and appreciation of Japanese literature within the Albanian literary landscape.

References

- Abrams M.H., and G.G. Harpham. (2012). *A Glossary of literary terms*. 10th ed. Cengage Learning.
- Altman, Janet Gurkin. (1982). *Epistolary: Approaches to a form*. Ohio State University Press: Columbus.
- Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. (1980). *Translation Studies*. London: Methuen.
- Benjamin, Walter. (1955). *Baudelaire: Tableaux parisiens*. Heidelberg. Reprinted in *Schriften*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 40-54.
- Corbett, E. P. J., and R. J. Connors. (1999). *A survey of rhetoric. Classical rhetoric for the modern student* (4th ed.). University Press.
- Jakobson, Roman. (1959). *On Translation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Kauffman, Linda S. (1986). *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Kauffman, Linda S. (1992). *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kuiper, Kathleen. (2012). *Prose literary terms and concepts*. Britannica Educational Publishing & Rosen Educational Services.
- Nida, Eugene A., and Taber, Charles R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Nissinen, Martti. (2003). *Prophets and prophecy in the ancient Near East*. Society of Biblical Literature.
- Ortega y Gasset, Jose. (1937). "Miseria y Esplendor de la Traducción." *Obras Completas*. Madrid.
- Perelman, Les. (1991). "The medieval art of letter writing. Rhetoric as the institutional expression", *Textual dynamics of the professions: Historical and contemporary studies of writings in professional communities*, edited by Charles Bazerman and James Paradis. The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Poster, Carol, and Linda C. Mitchell. ed. (2007). *Letter-writing manuals and instruction from antiquity to the present: historical and bibliographical studies*. University of South Carolina Press, 2007
- Pound, Ezra. (1934). "Guido's Relations." From "Cavalcanti," in *Make It New*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Pound, Ezra. (1954). *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. Norfolk, CN: New Directions