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**Electronic version**

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudes-benthamiennes/5678>

DOI: 10.4000/etudes-benthamiennes.5678

ISSN: 1760-7507

**Publisher**

Centre Bentham

**Electronic reference**

Daisuke Arie, "Lost in Translation?", *Revue d'études benthamiennes* [Online], 16 | 2019, Online since 20 December 2019, connection on 20 May 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudes-benthamiennes/5678> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudes-benthamiennes.5678>

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How Japan's Intellectuals Translated Utilitarian Writings in the early Stage of Her Modernization

*Lost in Translation? Comment les intellectuels japonais traduisirent les textes utilitaristes lors du premier stade de la modernisation du Japon*

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“The nation [Japan] had always functioned in accordance with someone else's script--first China's, then the West's--rather than its own.”  
Ann Waswow (1996), p. 91

## Introduction

- 1 After a long two hundred and fifty year-period of Far East isolation, Japan was suddenly thrown into the vortex of world politics by American Commodore Perry's arrival at Uraga, at the entrance of Tokyo (formerly called Yedo) Bay in 1853. Since then, leading Western countries, such as Britain, France, Russia and the United States continuously pressured Japan to open the door to them. Japan's political leaders, both of the Tokugawa Shogunate house and powerful anti-Tokugawa clans, soon came to know that such Western powers were anxious to expand their economic influence and territorial possessions in Asia and that the political integrity of India and China had already been loosened.<sup>1</sup> The leaders recognized the undeniable superiority of Western technology and social institutions when negotiating commercial treaties with the powers. The Meiji Restoration (1868), a political revolution from the Old Tokugawa feudalistic regime to a new development-oriented government, arose in the process of addressing the challenges posed by this situation. What was needed, in short, was some kind of rapid modernization of society, politics and economy to enable Japan to defend itself against the western powers' colonial expansion.<sup>2</sup>

- 2 Due to these circumstances, the new imperial government soon decided to introduce European technology, political institutions and ideas to catch up with those of developed countries. For instance, the government not only sent a number of young students to those countries to acquire superior knowledge, but also invited to Japan a significant number of engineers, specialists or scholars of all fields.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the government created the very specific post of “Adviser on Translation” in the newly founded Ministry of Education and other major ministries. In other words, statesmen, bureaucrats and intellectuals earnestly, voluntarily, and sometimes competitively sought the “secrets” of Western dominance in the nineteenth-century world. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Western knowledge was treated more as an instrument to strengthen and enrich the country pragmatically than for meaning or the value of ideas, particularly at the first stage of modernization. Bentham and Mill's writings first came to Japan within this general context.
- 3 This paper first aims to survey how utilitarian social thought was introduced in the earliest stage of modern Japan, from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 to the 1890s, through some examples of Japanese translations of writings by Bentham and Mill.
- 4 Second, this paper focuses on Mill's *On Liberty* and traces how the first translator Keiu Nakamura (1832-1891) tried to translate some fundamental English terms such as “freedom/liberty,” “society,” and “individual” into Japanese when there were no equivalent words or similar concepts in Japanese thought or culture at that time. This paper, then, briefly surveys the Munemitsu Mutsu's (1844-1897) translation of the first paragraph of Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principle of Morals and Legislation* (IPML) that was strongly influenced by Nakamura's translation of *On Liberty* in terms of Utilitarian keywords.
- 5 Third, a brief description is given about how Japanese intellectuals who had long been under the influence of traditional Confucianism tried to understand or misunderstood key concepts related to Bentham or Mill's utilitarian ideas.
- 6 Lastly, this paper will conclude by showing how Japanese intellectuals accepted Utilitarianism in the late 19th century together with a brief introduction of its influence on later generations. It will also hints at a common question of Western intellectuals about why Japanese do not accept Christianity as a revealed religion.

## Translation of Utilitarian Writings at the First Stage of Modernization

- 7 The kinds of original texts that were translated would reflect social concern or purpose from those days in the Japanese context. From this point of view, it is important to note that the writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill were translated into Japanese and published soon after the Restoration and were among numerous Western books on law, politics and economics. Publications of both were said to be remarkable in number and well spread particularly among newly emerged intellectuals lead by members of the *Meirokusha*.<sup>4</sup>
- 8 According to Nagai's previous research,<sup>5</sup> Bentham's *Principles of Civil Code* was translated in 1876, *Principles of Penal Code* in 1877-79, *Theory of Legislation* in 1878, an English translation of Dumont's *Principes du Code civil* in 1879, *A Fragment on Government* in 1882, *Leading Principles of Constitutional Code, for any State* in 1882, *An Introduction to the Principle*

of *Morals and Legislation* (IPML) in 1883-84, *Anarchical Fallacies* in 1887, and *On the Liberty of the Press and Public Discussion* sometime in the 1880s (not identified).

- 9 As seen the Chronological publication table at the end of this paper,<sup>6</sup> all of Bentham's translated work seem to be guidebooks of some sort for the art of legislation. At the least, it is clear that Japanese translators and readers of the day thought of them as instruction manuals for a constitutional political regime. This fact would imply that bureaucrats of the government tried to find what they thought useful to build a modern Japanese legal system and political regime, and that they perceived Bentham as a more practical jurist than a thinker or philosopher. In fact, when the government sponsored those publications and major translators like B2: Tadasu Hayashi (1850-1913: diplomat), B3: Saburo Shimada (1852-1923: journalist and statesman), and B7: Munemitsu Mutsu (1844-1897: diplomat and statesman). All of them were high-ranking intellectual government officials, and thus they must have translated with the clear purpose of constructing a new legal system. This process would suggest that the translators might have understood, to some extent, the outline of Bentham's scheme of the art of legislation. The attempt to translate Bentham's work, however, ended around 1887 (Meiji 20th) because Japan's ruling class came to think that German legal and political thought was more suitable for a Japanese regime, rather than *The Constitution of the Japanese Empire* and codification of various laws based on the British or French legal traditions at the end of 1880s.<sup>7</sup>
- 10 On the other hand, Mill's *On Liberty* was translated independently in 1872 by Keiu Nakamura (M1),<sup>8</sup> a teacher of Confucianism of Tokugawa House, who visited London in 1867 as a member of the shogunate governmental mission on an inspection tour. The book is recognized as one of the most influential translations in early modern Japan and it provided the new and stimulating idea of individual liberty. Translation of *Principles of Political Economy* started in 1875 (not completed at that time). *Considerations on Representative Government* was also translated in 1875-78. There came to be two other versions of it by different translators in 1887 and 1890, which should be linked with the spread of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (literal translation of *Jiyu Minken Undo*) in the early Meiji era. There was a well-known story about Hironaka Kono (1847-1923), one of the leading activists of the movement, formerly a bureaucrat, who suddenly became converted to a liberal activist as a direct result of his reading of the translation of *On Liberty* on his way back home from the prefectural office. *Utilitarianism* was differently translated in 1877 and 1880. *Three Essays of Religion: Nature; the Utility of Religion; Theism* in 1877-78, and *The Subjection of Women* in 1878.
- 11 Historically, the tide of translation of Mill's work immediately receded with some minor exceptions, like Bentham's case, in the period of decline of the people's political movement during the 1880s.<sup>9</sup>
- 12 As far as the translation of modern Western political thought in general, it should be firstly noted that all intellectuals or academics, government officials or men of letters, in or out of office, sitting on the left or the right of the political spectrum had a "highly purpose-oriented attitude"<sup>10</sup> to modernization. They were always looking for a "model" or a "secret" in the Western way of thinking and experiences of the Western countries (See epigraph again). Secondly during the first stage, Britain, France and America were thought to be good examples because these powers that came to Japan politically and militarily dominated the world in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Therefore, it was British and French enlightenment thought that was first introduced immediately

after the Meiji Restoration. Leading intellectuals such as Nakamura, translator of *On Liberty* and *Self-Help*, regarded Britain as the strongest and most prosperous in the world, as mid-Victorian England reached the peak of its power in 1868. In addition, the knowledge of Chinese defeat to Britain in the Opium war (1839-42) severely shocked those Japanese who had thought China had been the ultimate model in all aspects for over a thousand years.<sup>11</sup>

- 13 Many researchers have pointed out – and Komaki stated in typical fashion – that those who had broadly influenced the earliest stage of Japanese modernization were “Bentham, Mill, Bacon, Spencer, Smiles, Wayland (USA), Smith, Darwin and Huxley of Britain, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Boissonade, Comte and Tocqueville of France...and the contents of thought were self-help, liberalism, natural right, social contract, separation of three powers, utilitarianism, evolution, pragmatism and so on.”<sup>12</sup>
- 14 Briefly stated, the basic reason why Bentham and Mill were translated early on is the fact of a high British presence attracted the attention of Japanese intellectuals. In contrast, more practical reasons appear for Bentham's works that correspond to the new government's need for legislation. The contents of Mill's work, on the other hand, met the demands of the first stage of a people's movement for civil rights.

## In Search of Something Nowhere: The Case of Translation of *On Liberty* and *IPML*

- 15 Immediately after the publication of *Saikoku risshi hen* (S. Smiles' *Self-Help*) in 1871, Nakamura began translating *On Liberty*, which was to be published in 1872. There is one significant characteristic in his translation in comparison with the eight following different translations that have been produced. His sentences are far longer than other translations and include his own additional inserts among Mill's original sentences. They are basically additional explanatory short inserts that he thought necessary for a general reader who lacked a basic knowledge about Western society. As a matter of fact, Nakamura himself needed enormous effort to recognize and understand new concepts that the Japanese language did not have an equivalent for. He had to create a new Japanese word for each by using Chinese-based words and combining two Chinese-root words in a two-character format that was common in the Meiji era and that continues to this day.
- 16 I introduce an example in the ninth paragraph of Ch. 1 “Introductory” of *On Liberty* below. Nakamura created a new Japanese word-“*ji-yu*” for liberty or freedom for the title of translated work.

<Original Text>

The object of this Essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of **society\*** with the **individual\*\*** in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is, that the sole end of for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively in interfering with the **liberty of action\*\*\*** of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.<sup>13</sup> (asterisks and emphases by the present author).

- 17 \* After **society** Nakamura added “or government” in his translation.

- 18 \*\* Instead of Japanese equivalent word of **individual**, the following long sentence “In the first place, each person has the right to freedom, can practice what he wants to do, and cannot be restrained by others” was written for explanation. The word ‘*ko-jin*’ for **individual** were established later.
- 19 \*\*\* After **liberty of action** Nakamura added the example that in society, there may be a harmless relationship with each other, but there is also a relationship in which one profit is a loss to the other by another long sentence. However, he does not explain well the concept of self-protection related to Mill’s “Harm Principle”.
- 20 Eventually, the length of Nakamura's translation (1872) is almost double as newer various translations appeared particularly after World War II. As seen above, Nakamura needed to add some extra explanatory sentences for unfamiliar translated Japanese words for English terms such as “society,” “individual” and “liberty.”<sup>14</sup>
- 21 As for “society,” Nakamura translated by using two-Chinese-character format (“*kai sha*”) literally means an actual company/group, but does not imply the general/abstract meaning such as an organisation composed/created by people, or people's way of life, or the case of “We live in a capitalist society.”<sup>15</sup> For this reason, he immediately identified “society” with “government.” In other words, the most understandable example of “society” for Nakamura seemed to be a practical institution or “government” (“*sei-fu*”), since he had known only Japan's traditional feudal type of organic society where each member had his/her own actual, but unequal role and position. Therefore, it is quite presumable that Nakamura failed to grasp exactly the tense relationship between society and government that Mill wanted to take up for discussion in *On Liberty*, although Nakamura did realize that Mill thought the relationship important.<sup>16</sup> This insufficient understanding, of course, was closely related to Nakamura's struggle with understanding the conception of “individual.”
- 22 There wasn't until that time an equivalent Japanese word for “individual,” since an “individual” person did not exist in the feudal class society before the Restoration. Each member there was not identical, but different in proportion to his/her different expected role for society. Nakamura used the word of “*ik-ko no jin-min*” (one citizen) as an opposite to “society.” It is clear he recognized individual's singularity as a unit of society in *On Liberty*, but we cannot trace the attribute of uniqueness/distinctiveness/idiosyncrasy in his usage of “*ik-ko no jin-min*”. For Nakamura, a society was an actual real society composed of each member as a unit, however, all members had their different required roles without inviolable unique characteristics.<sup>17</sup>
- 23 Let us now move to “freedom/liberty.” According to a famous Japanese book on translated words written by Akira Yanabu, “*ji-yu*” itself appeared in the early published *English-Japanese Dictionary* (1862) for freedom/liberty, but it had, from the first time, negative connotations of selfishness/willfulness/license as a traditional word.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, early stage translators of *Meiokusha* members including Nakamura, Fukuzawa, Nishi, et.al, all reluctantly adopted it as the translation of liberty/freedom. Historically, “*ji-yu*” was said to have gained popular support as a fashionable new word, then it came to monopolise the position of the translated word for liberty/freedom by the beginning of the 1880s.<sup>19</sup> It is useful to note here that our early translator's concern was right. There is a common expression in modern Japanese language that, “He takes license with liberty,” and this means there is no clear line

between liberty/freedom and license in Japan now, and this case might be a candidate of one of the typical misunderstandings of Western-born conceptions.

- 24 The word “**ji-yu**” also played another historical role in Japan's political movement, *Jiyu minken undo* (Freedom and People's Rights Movement).<sup>20</sup> It was the first political and cultural movement widespread in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The movement aimed to establish people's political rights and freedom, to oppose the newly established government without election that was controlled by a part of the old feudal clans, and to encourage people's involvement in politics.
- 25 The movement started in 1874, at almost the same time when Taisuke Itagaki (1837-1919), a distinguished, well-educated and eloquent movement leader, and others advocated an elected national assembly. At the first stage of the movement, it was mainly supported by the unemployed and protesting former warrior (*samurai*) class and the urban intellectuals as the major activist group, but gradually, rural rich farmers also joined in to make it a national movement. Eventually, the Meiji government was reluctantly forced to make a proclamation in 1881 for the future establishment of the Diet, or national assembly. It is historically and academically established that some democratic messages in the translation of Mill's *On Liberty* helped with the rise of this movement in the first half of the 1870s. But later, major ideological influences on the movement gradually shifted from Mill's moderate ideas to Spencer and the more radical Rousseau. *On Liberty*, however, continued to exist, although in a different way.<sup>21</sup>
- 26 Compared to Mill's *On Liberty*, the appearance of translated book for Bentham's *IPML* by Munemitsu Mutsu<sup>22</sup> was considerably late in 1883. It was the seventh translated works of Bentham. (See Chronological Table) This time-lag of eleven years had made Mutsu translate Utilitarian keywords easier, because newly created Japanese equivalents keywords to Utilitarian ones had become common for intellectuals to a certain extent. We can see it in the case of the famous first paragraph of *IPML*.  

**Nature** has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, **pain and pleasure**. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of **right and wrong**, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They **govern** us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our **subjection**, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.<sup>23</sup>
- 27 According to Mutsu's translation of this part, **nature** is converted to “**ten**” (heaven) but other keywords such as pain and pleasure, right and wrong, govern, subjection are properly translated into one word or phrase in their context unlike Nakamura's case seen above. Then, Mutsu's translated paragraph is far shorter than Nakamura's, because Mutsu already had no need to write additional explanations to each translated Japanese word. Eventually, Mutsu's was able to create a translation that is well understood by the Japanese over a century later, even though it is written in an old style.
- 28 This can be also confirmed by looking at the translation of the third paragraph starting with “By the principle of utility ...”. Mutsu translated utility as “**jitsu-ri**” happiness as “**kou-fuku**”, individual as “**ko-ko-kaku-jin**”, government as “**sei-fu**” and --ism as “**shu-gi**”. “**Ko-ko-kaku-jin**” now shortened to “**ko-jin**” in modern Japanese language, and others are accepted as modern Japanese usage.



## Japanese Understanding of Utilitarianism in the Early Modernisation Stage

- 29 Before discussing this issue, it is necessary to mention Confucianism that has for a long time had a profound historical and cultural impact on East Asia, including Japan.
- 30 The most influential social thought in the East Asia has been Confucianism.<sup>24</sup> It still plays an important role in those countries. Confucianism is founded on the sayings of Confucius (551-479 BC) and the writings of his follower Mencius (372-289 BC). It is a philosophy of daily life rather than a religion, and shares the practical, worldly, and secular mind of utilitarian thought. Confucianism became the official doctrine of government during the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), and later underwent a major renovation in the hands of Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and Wang Yangming (1472-1528), now known as neo-Confucianism. Both the original Confucianism and more political neo-Confucianism had infiltrated Japanese culture and society. Particularly the former is still deeply rooted in the modernized and westernized East Asian society.
- 31 The essence of the original Confucian thought as it relates to human nature is rendered in *Lun- yu* (*The Analects*), the best known holy book of Confucianism. Confucius says, “Is it not a pleasure to learn and repeat or practice from time to time what has been learned? Is it not delightful to have friends coming from afar?” (1: 1) The implication of these remarks is that a feeling of pleasure is good; pleasant sensations are a joy to living persons; the real world is pleasant; human nature is originally good; and intellectual improvement is essential for self-cultivation. As for people’s activities, “Wealth and honor are what every man desires.” (4: 5) As regards government, its purpose is to provide “Sufficient food, sufficient armament, and sufficient confidence of the people.” (12: 7) But at the same time, Confucius warns, “Do not be desirous to have quick results. Do not see just small gains. Desire to have things done quickly prevents their being done thoroughly. Looking at small gains prevents great affairs from being accomplished.” (13: 17) A good ruler is one who governs according to “virtue” (2: 1), and who employs his ministers “according to the principle of propriety”. In turn, ministers “should serve their ruler with loyalty.” (3:19)
- 32 For Confucius, “*jen*” (humanity) is the most superior virtue, and the man of virtue “who really loves humanity will not place anything above it.” (4: 6). In short, virtue “is to love man.” (12: 22) Confucius counsels, “Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. Then, there will be no complaint against you in the state or in the family.” (12: 2) He holds that the actual world is more important than the transcendent world. Spirituality only exists in the form of filial piety that covers both ancestors and descendants (1: 2, 6; 2: 5). “If we are not yet able to serve man, how can we serve spiritual beings? ... If we do not yet know about life, how can you know about death?” (11: 11)
- 33 It is apparent that Confucianism shares some fundamental aspects with utilitarianism such as psychological hedonism, secularism, rationalism, and consequentialism. It is not surprising, therefore, that from their encounters with the Chinese literati Christian missionaries in the seventeenth century believed the Chinese to be materialists and atheists.<sup>25</sup> Also, it seems fair to say these characteristics underlie contemporary Chinese, Korean and Japanese economic development.<sup>26</sup>



- 34 It can be said that this Confucian tradition, particularly based on the original Confucianism, is one of the reasons why Japanese intellectuals in the early days of modernization tried to accept Bentham and Mill's utilitarianism without much resistance.
- 35 Now, let us return to the issue here. According to Nagai's analysis of an early translation, Reishi Ka (1840-1923), grasped the greatest happiness doctrine as a core of Bentham's thought in the preface of the book B1.<sup>27</sup> Saburo Shimada (1852-1923), a translator of B3, wrote that Bentham had rebuilt and popularized the Epicurean school. Shimada also picked up and explained exactly to some extent a certain number of important terms such as *sanction*, *motive* or *moral arithmetic*. Mutsu, later the minister of foreign affairs, translated utilitarianism as "*jitsuri-gaku*" (theory of practical rationality) and understood it as an individual moral principle for human conduct rather than a government principle for political judgement in the preface to B3. More typically, Nishi (translator of M4) showed his own account of utilitarianism in his book entitled *Jinsei sanbou setsu* (*Three Treasures in Life*, 1875):

John Stuart Mill developed Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian ethics into a very good system which may be called the great revolution of recent ethics ... According to Mill's ethics, the greatest purpose of the present life is said to be the greatest happiness to the greatest people. I do not think that it is the perfect ethical system, but it is very difficult for the unlearned lot like me to criticize it ... So, let me suppose that general happiness is the tentative ultimate aim of human life, and furthermore, let me try to construct an ethical system that I think best for the present.<sup>28</sup>

- 36 The quotation above may show that Nishi mostly accepted Mill's Greatest Happiness Principle as the foundation of his own utilitarian ethics, although Nishi had a slight doubt about Mill's concept. Nishi also attributed health, knowledge and wealth to the three treasures in life, which would accomplish the Greatest Happiness Principle.<sup>29</sup> Then Nishi declared a totally secularized moral principle contrary to the traditional Confucian asceticism.

The purpose of society is public interest, which is the aggregate of private interest. Private interest is composed of healthy body, enlightened knowledge and abundance of wealth. Private interest is for each individual, while public interest is for society as a whole. In short, those are anything but the increasing three treasures. Therefore, wishing to conduct yourself morally well begins from making much of one's own three treasures.<sup>30</sup>

- 37 As seen above, Nishi does not think morality and human desire are divided. Instead of putting moral opposite to interest, he declares that it is pursuing interest rationally in a social process that will form a norm as moral system. This portrays clearly a Benthamite view of hedonistic man that calculates pleasure and pain. Yamashita introduced that Nishi's preface at the very beginning of M4 that criticized Confucian asceticism and pointed out utilitarianism was founded on the clear affirmation of human desire.<sup>31</sup> This claim completely coincided with the vision in the *Three Pleasures in Life* mentioned above.<sup>32</sup>
- 38 Yamashita also has provided us with a detailed analysis of Azusa Ono's (1852-1886) reception of utilitarianism.<sup>33</sup> Ono, who was a statesman and a scholar who died at the age of 33 in 1885, wrote two main pieces, *A Treatise on a Constitution* (in Japanese: 1876) and *General Theory of Constitution* (in Japanese: 1879). Those were two other good examples of the Japanese reception of English utilitarian political ideas in the early stages of modernization. Ono adopted Bentham's greatest happiness principle as a first

principle of a constitution. Then, he emphasized that the aim to establish a constitution was to determine rights and duties of the government to realize the true utility of society in general, and that the aim of politics was to remove pain and to protect pleasure.<sup>34</sup> Ono, what is more, supposed that the principle of utility should be the sole standard by which all politics of states and its leaders are to be judged.<sup>35</sup> Although Ono opposed Bentham's republicanism and concept of right,<sup>36</sup> he was basically a Benthamite in terms of the fundamental idea of legislation and utilitarian principle.

- 39 So far, I have presented the major characteristics of early translators' acceptance of the works of Bentham and Mill. The fact that their early and almost simple reception of a utilitarian criteria suggests that they had a relatively exact comprehension of the literal meaning of Bentham or Mill's texts. But they did not have in mind enough logical construction such as the relationship between private interest and public interest. Nor did they ever imagine, actually mentioned nothing about it, the problem of the split of the individualist Bentham versus the collectivist Bentham, or the liberal Bentham versus an authoritarian Bentham. That was, to a certain extent, inevitable because there was no individual as a type in a strict meaning, although the translators accepted secular characteristics of human conduct as a foundation of society.
- 40 In spite of the first translators' enormous efforts as introduced above and the significant intellectual influence of *On Liberty* in general, historically, utilitarianism itself has never been the mainstream in Japan's intellectual world. This paper must add one important fact that is closely related to the question of why utilitarianism has not played a role in Japanese social and political thought. A factor concerns the translation of the very term "utilitarianism." The Japanese equivalent is "**kouri-shugi**", which was established as a technical term in social science, political philosophy and ethics in the period between the 1870s until 1910. It soon came to imply quite a negative sense, particularly in its colloquial use. The expression of "He is a utilitarian" commonly means "He thinks about just money" or "He is selfish." The word "**kouri**" has some homonyms in Japanese such as usury, retail, ice, bamboo box, axiom and local officials in its meaning. The first two meanings certainly have encouraged the original negative connotation for such a long time that the study of utilitarianism in Japan used to be and is still problematic.
- 41 Unfortunately, "**kou-ri**" has such a negative feeling of selfishness or thinking just about money in colloquial usage that the translated word itself would have/has been a barrier to any student who intended to enter into the research on utilitarianism.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly enough, the Japanese word "**kou-ri**" itself was also acknowledged as an academic word in the middle of 1880s and accepted by the Chinese.<sup>38</sup>

## The Influence of the Initial Introduction of Bentham and Mill on Later Generations

- 42 The following presents an outline of the influence of the early translation and acceptance of Utilitarianism and Mill's *On Liberty* upon later intellectual history and political thought in Japan.
- 43 As for Bentham, his constitutional theory spread just within government circles/bureaucrats and among "enlightened" scholars. The purpose of translation was clear. It was codification for a newly established government, which aimed to modernize the

country. Therefore, once governmental policy altered, interest also changed. This was the case for Bentham. There were multiple options as to what would be the “model” for modernization in the early stages of the Meiji era. The new government, at first, not only regarded English studies important, but also encouraged French studies and subsidized the sending of students to Russia, America and Germany until the 1870s, after it stopped promoting Dutch studies in 1868/69 just after the Restoration.<sup>39</sup> Then, French studies lost government favour because of its radical revolutionary atmosphere. Subsidy for Russian study was cut next because of the Populist (*Narodnik*) movement against Tsarism and the successful attempt at assassination of Tsar Alexander II (1881).

<sup>40</sup> Lastly, liberalism-based British study came to be avoided by the mainstream of the government, who were afraid of nationwide rise of the People's Rights Movement. The government favouring the German/Prussian regime was strengthened in particular by the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (1871), which effected on not only polity and the military system, but also medical education and university organization. Consequently, Japanese interest in Bentham in terms of making a new constitution faded away in the 1880s in proportion to the ruling class's strong tendency toward the German/Prussian authoritarian regime.<sup>41</sup>

- <sup>44</sup> A liberalism atmosphere rose again in Japan after the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905). This trend, which extended the idea of democracy to the middle class of Japanese society, reached its peak in the Taisho era (1912-1926). Leading men of letters of the day claimed modest democracy based on British parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy, which was thought to be best example for a Japanese regime with a type of enlightened despotism. The second tide of this introduction of Bentham, as it mainly focused on the Greatest Happiness Doctrine, immediately disappeared as the liberal atmosphere came to be dominated by hardline militarism.
- <sup>45</sup> As written before, Mill at first was accepted as a supporting idea for the People's Rights Movement through the translation of *On Liberty* or *Considerations on Representative Government*. According to historical research, however, the mainstream of the People's Rights Movement changed their guidebook from Mill to Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* (1st ed. 1851). After its translation appeared (1881-1883: tr. by Tsuyosi Matsushima), they gradually came to admit Spencer's critique of the utilitarian theory of expediency which would imply a legislator-based idea of collectivistic central government. They also preferred Spencer's moral sense to a calculation of expediency and named Spencer's thought the “new liberalism”.<sup>42</sup> The leftwing of the Movement shifted differently, at first from British gradualism to idealized French socialist thought, like Rousseau, together with the natural-right theory by the beginning of the 1880s, then to the radical anarchism of Narodism (Russian Populism) by the middle of the 1880s.<sup>43</sup>
- <sup>46</sup> Mizuta pointed out that the characteristics of Japanese acceptance of Mill's thought in the early stages that the majority of the members of the *Meirokeisha* (Meiji Sixth Society) “quite willingly accepted Mill's elitism, together with his fear of mass democracy even when there was no democracy at all in Japan ... they felt contempt for the ignorance of the people.” And they claimed that “it was too early for ignorant, common people” to “establish a popularly elected parliament,” when they were faced with the rising tide of the People's Rights Movement.<sup>44</sup> Of course, there is an ironical exaggeration for stressing the un-enlightened aspect in the enlightened intellectuals in the early stage.

- 47 As for the influence of Mill's thought, fairly speaking, it had not ceased unlike Bentham. As a matter of fact, *On Liberty* continued to be a typical textbook for English readers in high school before World War II, where only 2% of the same generation, the elite class, could enter. In spite of the fact that utilitarianism and liberalism as well did not play a key role in the age of militarism, a part of the intellectual class, being attacked by authoritarian ultra-nationalism and Marxism, had retained an underground stream of Japanese liberalism. It survived in the form of liberal arts in schools, and in the modest study of Bentham, Mill and sometimes Thomas Hill Green until 1945.<sup>45</sup>
- 48 Then, what was the substitute of liberalism, which should have been a counter social thought to extreme nationalistic militarism particularly during the period of 1930-45? It was Marxism.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

- 49 As far as the modern Japan's intellectual history is concerned, it must be noted before concluding this paper that ideas or thoughts that were Western in origin have come to be the core of Japanese humanities and social sciences since the Meiji Restoration and until today. Social thought, or common people's thought, then, has been formed by translated and popularized versions, and existed together with harsh historical experiences like oppressively violent militarism. As a result, the Japanese people of today have a common idea that there is no better political system that goes beyond Western democracy, in spite of its all defects. The introduction of utilitarianism should be thought of in this context.
- 50 First, the British presence in the world of the mid-nineteenth century made educated Japanese and political leaders pay attention to English writings on society. The new government initially promoted translation of Western knowledge, particularly those written in English.<sup>47</sup>
- 51 Second, the early translation of Bentham's works was highly motivated by the educated in those days to make a new constitution and codify laws. However, attempts at further translation gradually ceased after the much of the Meiji government decided in the middle of 1880s to create Japan's future political system by emulating the German political system.<sup>48</sup>
- 52 Third, utilitarian secularized characteristics and the literal meanings of basic principles or terms such as the Greatest Happiness Principle, pain and pleasure, etc., were almost exactly understood by well-learned translators. They did not notice, however, the logical problems underlying utilitarian thought, like a comparison of differences in pleasure/happiness, and the relationship between private and public interest, etc.
- 53 Fourth, as an argument derived from the third point, the influence of long-term Confucian secular values lying at the bottom of Japanese mentality/mindset not only explains the Japanese affinity for utilitarianism, as we have seen, but also might suggest the reason of their strong refusal to monotheistic revealed religion. In fact, Japan currently has a population of 120 million, of which only 0.8% are Christians, including Catholic and Protestant.<sup>49</sup>

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## APPENDIXES

### Chronological Translation Table



Works of Bentham and J.S. Mill Translated during 1868-1890	
(Hori 1975, pp.368-370; Nagai 1982, p.352)	
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1868 (Meiji 1)	Meiji Restoration
1871 (4)	[S. Smiles, <i>Self-Help</i> ] (Keiu Nakamura)
	<Bentham>                      <Mill>
1872 (5)	<i>On Liberty</i> (M1 : Keiu Nakamura)
1873 (6)	(Mill died: 8/May/1873)
1875 (8)	<i>Pr. of Pol. Eco.</i> (M2 : Tadasu Hayashi)
	<i>Con. On Rep. Of Gov.</i> (M3 : Hideki Nagamine)
1876 (9)	<i>Pr. of Civil Code</i> (B1 : Reishi Ka)
1877 (10)	<i>Utilitarianism</i> (M4 : Amano Nishi)
	<i>Pr. of Penal Code</i> (B2 : Tadasu Hayashi)
1878 (11)	<i>Three Essays on Religion</i> (M5 : Atsuiro Obata)
	<i>The Sub. of Women</i> (M6 : Motoi Fukamauchi)
	<i>Theory of Legislation</i> (B3 : Saburo Shimada)
1879 (12)	<i>Intr. Pr. civil</i> (Dumont) (B4 : Saburo Shimada)
1880 (13)	<i>Utilitarianism</i> (M7 : Keizo Shibuya)
1881 (14)	[Spencer, <i>Social Statics</i> (Go Matsushima)]
1882 (15)	<i>A Frag. of Gov.</i> (B5 : Shiro Fujita)
	<i>Leading Pr. of Con. Code</i> (B6 : Kakushiro Sato)
	[Rousseau, <i>Du Cont. Social</i> (Choumin Nakae)]
1883 (16)	<i>IPML</i> (B7 : Munemitsu Mutsu)
1887 (20)	<i>Anarchical Fallacies</i> (B8 : Yoshitaka Kusano)
?	<i>On Lib. of Press and Pub. Disc.</i> (B9 : Taneshichiro Noda)

This table shows how Bentham and Mill's work was translated in chronological order since the Meiji Restoration (1868). It also shows the translation years of Smiles' *Self-Help*, Spencer's *Social Statics*, and Rousseau's *Du Contra Social*, which had great influence on Japanese intellectuals at the time. The titles of works are abbreviated.

## NOTES

1. From 1185, Japan was effectively ruled by “shoguns,” or military dictators, through a continuous succession of powerful warrior families. The emperors had little real power. The ascendancy of the Tokugawa house from 1603 to 1868, the age of Neo-Confucianism as the official ideology of the state, maintained Japan's self-imposed isolation. In 1850s the Tokugawa house weakly and incompetently negotiated with the United States and other strong Western countries. In 1868 anti-Tokugawa clans overthrew the shogunate in the name of the emperor. The young emperor Mitsuhiro took the name of *Meiji* (Enlightened Rule) and reigned until his death in 1912 in what was called the *Meiji* era. The political coup of 1868 is called the “Meiji Restoration.”
2. Ann Waswow's following comment is right, “As the problem was national, national solutions were required.” (Waswow 1996, p.21) In other words, there was almost no social conflict on this point in the nation. For modern Japanese history in general, see Reichauer (1977) and Lehman (1978), Jansen (2002), in addition Waswow (1996) above.
3. Foreign employees of the Meiji period, hired by the government as teachers, technicians, and advisers, reached a peak of some 520 persons (Kodansha International 1999, p. 70). Another western scholar more widely characterises this “reform movements” era as “To be sure there have been important reform movements in the East in recent times: in the nineteenth century Western ideas deliberately assimilated by Hindu reform movement, by Japan during the Meiji period (1863-1913), and by the Chinese Westernisation movement of 1860s (Clarke, 1997, p. 29).” For China's case, see Fung (1948, pp. 326-331).

4. *Meirokeisha* (Meiji Sixth Society) was the first cultural association for the enlightenment of people formed in 1873 by Amane Nishi (1829-1897), Mamichi Tsuda (1829-1903), Hiroyuki Kato (1836-1916), Arimori Mori (1847-1889), Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901), Keiu Nakamura (1832-1891) and other leading intellectuals. As the year 1873 was the sixth year of the reign of Meiji emperor, the society was thus named. The best-known person is Fukuzawa, the founder of Keio University. On Fukuzawa, see Blacker (1969).
5. See Nagai 1982, p.352.
6. See the “Chronological Translation Table” at the end of this paper.
7. See Nagai 1982, pp. 353, 359. Komaki (1978, pp. 296-298) provides a clear example of Japanese governmental favour of Germany. Inoue, one of the strong men in the Meiji government, suggested the promotion of German studies in 1881 to erase British-based extreme liberalism and to restrain the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. *Doitsugaku kyokai* (The Society for German Studies) and its school were also founded in 1881 and 1883, to which the Emperor's house, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Law gave annual subsidies.
8. Nakamura also translated Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* in 1871, which was said to have sold over 1,000,000 copies. Regarding this book and “accomplishment-ism” in Meiji popular culture, see Kinmonth (1980) and Arie (1991). As for Nakamura in general, see Hagiwara (1984), and Takahashi (1976). In English, Nakamura is well introduced in Jansen (2002, pp. 461-462) and Howland (2005) thorough investigation of the introduction of J.S.Mill both in Japan and China. Howland (2001) focuses on Japanese acceptance of the Western political thought through translation issue. Howland's two books are indispensable for research in this field as a typical analysis from the Western viewpoint. In addition, the following fact is commonly known, “All the bestsellers” between 1866 and 1878 were translations of Western works or books about the West (Wilkinson, 1980, p. 108).
9. At the most energetic time of the movement, the activist more favourably accepted Rousseau or Spencer's natural right thought than Mill's moderate ideas. Then they began to be interested in Russian Narodnik movement, see Crump (1983).
10. Maruyama 1961, p. 27.
11. On this point, we can see an interesting observation on Japanese rapid adaptability or turnover by an English journalist, Charles W. Dilke, in the *Fortnightly Review* (New Series Vol. 20, No. 118, 1 Oct. 1876, p. 434). “The political influence of England and America combined to lead the Japanese to the use of English as the official language...The rise of European influence in Japan has been accompanied by a patriotic revulsion against that which was formerly the chief foreign influence---namely, the Chinese...The Chinese civilisation was adopted by the Japanese because it was altogether superior to their own, and it was abandoned when found to be inferior to that of the western nations.”
12. Komaki 1978, p. 293.
13. Mill, 1991, pp. 13-14.
14. I deeply owe this comment, evident quotations and 9 translation list to Yamaoka (2006, pp. 1-6).
15. These paraphrased examples for “society” are from *Collins COBUILD Lexicon*, 1997.
16. It is said Nakamura once confessed, “[Unlike the case of Smiles] I had difficulty in some places to translate in the text” (Matsuzawa, 1975, p. 35). In the late 1880s, “*sha-kai*” came to be a commonly accepted word for “society.” But “*sha-kai*” came to imply only an abstractly nominal meaning of people's relationship or the world in general with less emphasis on individuals in society, and this tendency is quite common in contemporary Japanese usage.
17. Later, “*ko-jin*” came to occupy the translated word for “individual” in the middle of the 1880s (Saito, 1977, p. 229), and it was exported to China and Korea with huge number of other translated Japan-origin Chinese words.
18. See Yanabu 1982, pp. 175-191.

19. *Collection of Philosophical Words*, revised & enlarged ed. by Three Faculties in the University of Tokyo, in Japanese, 1884) clearly indicates “*ji-yu*” is for Freedom/Liberty, “*sha-kai*” is for Society (pp. 48, 70, 118).
20. Dore gives an ironic comment on people's understanding “*ken-ri*” the translated word for “right,” “The reader of Mill in translation might conceivably read and take the sense of the word “*ken-ri*” without even realizing that this was a ‘new’ word to translate the foreign concept of ‘right’ (Dore, 1965, p. 111).”
21. Howland (2005) investigates Nakamura's “painstaking effort” (p. 64; particularly Ch.3) of translation in detail. I have not had an opportunity to survey his works so far.
22. Research on Munemitsu Mutsu has been extremely weak compared to his fame. I introduce Hoashi (1967) as an old one and Sasaki (2018) as a recent at the moment.
23. Bentham 1789, p. 11.
24. The contents of this part of Confucianism is mostly based on my own writing of ‘Confucianism’ as an entry for J.E.Crimmins ed. *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Utilitarianism*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, pp. 88-89. On Confucianism in broad Asian context, see Prasad (2005).
25. See Cook and Rosemont, in Liebniz 1994, p.14.
26. In the Western scholarship, recent communitarian interpretations of Confucianism are based on the Confucian emphasis on familial and communal relationships (MacIntyre, 2004). However, for traditional Chinese Confucianists community is based on the ties of filial piety within the clan, and rarely extends beyond this to embrace the common good. This has led even Sinophile intellectuals to refer to “the absence of public spirit” in the Chinese mind (Smith 1986, pp.107ff).
27. See Nagai 1982, pp. 355-356.
28. orig. Japanese, Ohkubo 1967, p. 68; trans. by Koizumi 1994, p. 146.
29. See Ohkubo 1967, p. 68.
30. Ohkubo 1967, p.74; trans. by Arie.
31. See Yamashita 1973, p. 63.
32. Koizumi does not enjoy Nishi's simple acceptance of hedonism-based utilitarianism by criticising that Nishi neglected the possibility of conflict between self-interest and public interest. Koizumi characterises Nishi as “Backwards to Bentham” (Koizumi 1989, pp. 308-309).
33. See Yamashita 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1973, 1994.
34. See Yamashita 1994, pp. 471-472.
35. See *ibid.*, p. 472.
36. See *ibid.*, p. 474.
37. See Hayasaka, 1975, p. 11; Nagai, 1982, p. 5.
38. A good example is *English and Chinese Standard Dictionary*, fourth ed. published in Shanghai (Commercial Press Limited, 1921) where many of Japanese origin translated Chinese words.
39. It was not only the new Meiji government, but the old Tokugawa house also sent students to western countries, particularly to Britain. As for Britain, Mizuta research found the following, “Many of them entered the University College London to learn natural and social sciences instead of practical engineering...The professor of Political Economy in the University College London from 1876 to 1880 was W.S. Jevons. According to the records of the college, a total of seven Japanese students registered to attend the courses during this period. In the academic year of 1878-79, there were four Japanese among the thirty-one students registered for his course. Since Jevons was not a good lecturer nor a kind teacher, it is difficult to trace what those Japanese students learned directly from him.” (Mizuta 1992, p. 19)
40. See Asukai 1968, pp. 132-135.
41. See note 7.
42. See Yamashita 1983, pp. 60-62.

43. The first translation of Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social* was published in 1882 by a left wing leader, Choumin Nakae (1847-1901). According to Mizuta, the second part of Hobbes's *Leviathan* was published in 1883 by the Ministry of Education without the chapters about a natural-right of self-preservation. The government apparently wanted to advocate the absolute power of sovereignty (Mizuta 1992, p. 302).

44. Mizuta 1992, p. 13.

45. The best example was the case of Eijiro Kawai (1891-1944). He was a pre-war opinion leader of Japanese liberalism based on Mill's liberalism and Green's idealism in the 1920s, but later the authoritarian government forced him to be silent. He also established the image of Bentham as a liberalist mainly depending on A.V. Dicey's *Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion During the Nineteenth Century* (1905).

46. This is symbolised in the case of Marxist economist Hajime Kawakami (1879-1946). He started his academic career as a non-Marxist scholar of history of economic thought and ended up an active Marxist. According to his interpretation, he summarised the history of economics of egotism from Mandeville, continued Smith and reached its height with Bentham's utilitarianism. Then, he focused on John Ruskin and J.S. Mill as forerunners of socialism. Lastly, came Marx. In short, he understood the development of economic thought as "from selfishness to selfishless." On Kawakami, see Bernstein (1976).

47. Mill himself referred to Japan as "active minded Asiatic" just once in his letter to Frederick Furnivall dated March 30, 1871, in which he suggested, beside his own works, that the Japanese read Smith, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, Bentham, and James Mill. See Mill 1972, pp. 1812-1813.

48. It would be important to show the following points to the Western scholars who are interested in the history of modern Japanese political thought. For a long time at least 1970s, Bentham and Mill scholarship had been less prosperous than others in Japan. This is mainly because of Marx's insulting remarks about them in *Capital*, Mill is "the best representative of 'a shallow syncretism'" (Marx 2001, p. 15), or Mill's intellectual project is scorned as an "attempt to reconcile irreconcilables" (Ibid., 16). For Bentham, Marx writes, "There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham...And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each." (Ibid., 186).

49. See Arie 2017, p.3.

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## ABSTRACTS

This paper examines how Japanese intellectuals tried to introduce Utilitarianism into the first stage of a modernization procedure in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It focuses on their efforts to translate Bentham and Mill's works or writings by creating numerous new Japanese words. This was necessary because there had been almost no equivalent concepts such as individual, freedom, right, democracy, for example, until the end of Tokugawa Shogunate which ruled over a quasi-feudalistic agrarian society. At first glance, the very name of the Meiji Restoration of 1868 would seem to suggest a restoration of the old regime; but in fact it was the opposite, and it was actually a turning point for Japan in that it aimed at establishing a new modern industrial society.

The research here firstly gives a chronological list of translations of Bentham and Mill's works during first two decades after the Restoration. Secondly, it considers the accuracy and validity of

the translations which resulted, taking the first paragraph of *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* as an example. Thirdly, it investigates to what extent Japanese intellectuals at that time understood utilitarianism in the process of creating new Japanese translations. It was built on the tradition of creating various Japanese unique concepts as words based on the hieroglyphic Chinese characters together with the deep Confucian cultural influence for a long period from the 6th century. Lastly, this paper surveys how Bentham and Mill's early introductions influenced the subsequent generation of Japanese intellectuals. This result may explain to some extent why Japanese society is basically secular and encourages economic development.

La présente étude examine comment les intellectuels japonais tentèrent d'introduire l'utilitarisme lors du premier stade d'un processus de modernisation dans la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Elle décrit les efforts significatifs qu'ils consacrèrent à la traduction des œuvres ou des textes de Bentham et de Mill en créant de nombreux mots japonais nouveaux. Car, jusqu'à la fin de la société agraire quasi féodale du shogunat Tokugawa, il n'y avait quasiment pas eu de concepts équivalents pour des notions telles que l'individu, la liberté, le droit, la démocratie, par exemple. La Restauration de Meiji de 1868, au premier abord, suggère par son nom une restauration de l'ancien régime ; mais en réalité c'était l'inverse, car il s'agissait d'un tournant décisif pour le Japon, dont le but était d'établir une nouvelle société industrielle moderne.

La présente recherche fournit tout d'abord une liste chronologique des traductions des œuvres de Bentham et Mill réalisées au cours des deux premières décennies après la Restauration. Ensuite, elle évalue la précision et la validité du résultat de la traduction, en prenant comme exemple le premier paragraphe de *Introduction aux Principes de la Morale et de la Législation*. En troisième lieu, elle examine dans quelle mesure les intellectuels japonais de cette époque comprirent l'utilitarisme dans le processus de création des nouvelles traductions en japonais. Ce processus était issu de la tradition consistant à créer différents concepts japonais uniques, sous forme de mots composés de caractères hiéroglyphiques chinois, ancrés profondément dans l'influence culturelle du confucianisme qui domina longtemps à partir du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Enfin, la présente étude évalue comment les premières présentations de Bentham et Mill influencèrent la génération suivante d'intellectuels japonais. Ce résultat peut expliquer dans une certaine mesure pourquoi le Japon ne compte démographiquement que 0,8 % de chrétiens, et pourquoi la société japonaise est fondamentalement laïque et tournée vers le succès économique.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Bentham, Mill, translation, modernization, Chinese hieroglyphic character, IPML, utilitarianism, Confucianism

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