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The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies

VOLUME 11, MARCH 2025

The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies

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Writing Histories of Japanese Literature in Italy: Past, Present, and Future

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The profile of Japanese literature has undergone undeniable modifications recently owing to the different roles of literature on a global scale, a boom in translations, and a new approach to Japanese culture through media. Considering ongoing changes in several European countries, including Italy, initiatives to rewrite the history of Japanese literature are underway. Reflecting on our past, assessing our gains, and identifying areas for further improvement could serve as a solid foundation for new editorial projects. Based on this consideration, this paper aims to provide a concise overview of studying Japanese literature in Italy by exploring its historical background and contemporary trends. It first reviews some recommended reference materials in Italian academia up to the present while presenting valuable information about extensive translation activity. The second section outlines the contents of the upcoming two-volume work on Japanese literature and suggests potential developments for the near future.

1 Histories of Japanese Literature in the Past (The Twentieth Century)

The history of Japanese studies in Italy traces back to the mid-twentieth century. This fascinating subject reflects broader trends in cross-cultural exchanges, academic development, and the evolving relationship between Italy and Japan. One might wonder why interest in Japan emerged so late in Italy, especially considering the significant historical precedent set by Italian Jesuit missionaries in Japan at the end of the sixteenth century and the abundant literature on the subject in the following years, also prompted by the two embassies that arrived in Rome in 1585 and 1615. However, Japan's isolation from the outside world and the subsequent expulsion of missionaries caused interest in the country to wane, only to be rekindled in the mid-nineteenth century (Boscaro 2000, 11).

The publication of histories of Japanese literature in Italy is closely linked to interest in Japan and Japanese studies in Italy. Between the late nineteenth century and the early

twentieth century, Japanese language courses were established at the Royal High School of Commerce,¹ now Ca' Foscari University of Venice, in Florence, in Rome, and at the Chinese College, now the University of Naples "l'Orientale."² Around the same period, the first history of Japanese literature, *Storia della letteratura giapponese* (History of Japanese Literature, 1905) by Ettore Allodoli (1882-1960) was published. A few years later, in 1915, another history of Japanese literature, *Letteratura e Crestomazia Giapponese*³ (Japanese Literature and Anthology) by Pacifico Arcangeli (1888-1918), was released. This book includes a selection of passages from several works of Japanese literature spanning from the eighth to the nineteenth centuries, providing readers a general overview of the Japanese language, history, philosophy, art, and religion. While the first two histories of Japanese literature in Italy were written by humanists with a broad interest in Japanese culture, it was not until 1957 that a history of Japanese literature was published by a dedicated scholar in the field. This work, *La letteratura giapponese* (Japanese Literature), was authored by Marcello Muccioli (1898-1976), one of the most prominent scholars of Japanese studies in Italy, who also wrote the first comprehensive study on the Japanese performing arts, *Il teatro giapponese. Storia e antologia* (Japanese Theatre. History and Anthology), published in 1962. Interestingly, the first scholarly history of Japanese literature appeared in the same year (1957) as the first edition of *Ore giapponesi* (Meeting with Japan) by Fosco Maraini (1912-2004), a scholar who contributed significantly to the understanding of Japanese culture and society as an anthropologist and a skilled photographer. Maraini was awarded a prestigious international award by the Photographic Society of Japan in 2002 for compelling photos of Japan collected over the years.

A complete edition of Marcello Muccioli's work also including a brief history of Korean literature appeared in 1969 under the title *La letteratura giapponese. La letteratura coreana* (Japanese Literature. Korean Literature). This book, recommended as a textbook for Italian university students for many years, has been reprinted several times, with the most recent edition published in 2015. Other English-language works in Japanese literature have also been used as reference materials by many generations of students. These include Donald Keene's (1922-2019) works, such as *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (1953), *Modern Japanese Literature. From 1868 to the Present Day. An Anthology* (1956), *World Within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era, 1600-1867* (1976), and in later years *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era* (1984), and *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest*

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- 1 On Japanese courses taught for the first time in Italy by native speakers at the Royal High School of Commerce, and more in general on the presence of Japanese in Venice between the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century, see: (Boscaro 2018).
 - 2 For more detailed information about the origins and the development of Japanese studies in Italy see: (Beviglia 1966); (Beviglia 1967); (Tamburello 1976); (Boscaro 1985); (Calvetti 2009).
 - 3 It is possible to find the anastatic copy of this book at the link: <https://archive.org/details/arcangeli-letteratura-crestomazia-giapponese/page/248/mode/2up>

Times to the Late Sixteenth Century (1993). Among the histories of Japanese literature originally written in Japanese and later translated into English, two works stand out: Konishi Jin'ichi's *A History of Japanese Literature* (Nihon bungakushi), originally published in Japanese in 1953 and translated into English in a three-volume edition published from 1984 to 1991, and Katō Shūichi's *A History of Japanese Literature* (Nihon bungakushi josetsu) in two volumes published in Japanese, respectively, in 1975 and 1980 and translated into English for the first time in a three-volume edition published from 1979 (first volume) to 1983 (second and third volume). Although not initially intended for Italian readers, both works are considered remarkable for their original and, in some ways, captivating approaches to Japanese literature. However, they proved difficult to use as textbooks in Japanese classes or reference books for the general audience. In the case of Katō Shūichi's *A History of Japanese Literature*, the extensive discussions on history, philosophy, and religion often diverged from the main topic of Japanese literature, causing puzzled reactions in Italian readers more interested in literature than in intellectual history. Therefore, Katō Shūichi's work, completely translated into Italian by Adriana Boscaro and published in a three-volume edition from 1987 to 1996, with the collaboration of Katō Shūichi⁴ was later condensed into an abridged version, released in 2000 and commonly known by its subtitle "Historical Drawing", more focused on Japanese literature. This single volume has been a staple in many Italian universities, especially since 2000, when Italy's four-year undergraduate degrees were reorganized into three years,⁵ necessitating a complete revision of syllabi with more concise programs.

The publication of histories of Japanese literature was accompanied by a growing number of translations of Japanese works into Italian. The translation of literary works began in the late nineteenth century with Antelmo Severini⁶ (1828-1909), but significant progress was not achieved until the 1960s. Scholars such as Atsuko Ricca Suga (1929-1998) and Mario Teti (??-??) played a crucial role in promoting translations from the original Japanese, advising Italian publishers on the works to prioritize. Thanks to their efforts, Japanese authors such as Ibuse Masuji, Nakajima Atsushi, Izumi Kyōka, Shiga Naoya, Fukuzawa Shin'ichirō, Inoue Yasushi, and many others were translated into Italian for the first time. Masterpieces by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Kawabata Yasunari, and Mishima Yukio also appeared in Italian, although not always translated from the original Japanese. A significant event from those years is the publication of *Narratori giapponesi moderni* (Modern Japanese Narrators), an anthology of selected works by modern

4 Katō Shūichi spent long periods as visiting professor at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. To celebrate his achievement the university chose to confer upon him an honorary degree in foreign language and literature in 2000.

5 This reform was a part of the broader "Bologna Process", aiming to standardize education across Europe. The official introduction of the three-year undergraduate degree dates to 1999 with the Ministerial Decree 509/1999.

6 Antelmo Severini translated into Italian *Ukiyogata rokumai byōbu* by Ryūtei Tanehiko under the title *Uomini e Paraventi. Racconto giapponese di Riu Tei Tane Hico* in 1872 and *Taketori monogatari* under the title *La Fiaba del Nonno Tagliabambù* in 1880. For a historic timeline of the translation of Japanese literature in Italy until 2000 see: (Ciapparoni 1997) and (Boscaro 2000).

Japanese authors (including Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki and Dazai Osamu, among others) edited in 1965 by Atsuko Ricca Suga.

In the 1970s, the political climate influenced cultural exchange. Aside from a growing interest in the works of Endō Shūsaku and the first translation of *Suna no onna* (The Woman in the Dunes) by Abe Kōbō in 1972, little was introduced to the Italian public. However, the 1980s and the 1990s witnessed a resurgence of interest in Japan, marked by a flourishing of translations almost all directly from the original Japanese. This was made possible by a new generation of young and well-prepared translators who introduced Italian readers to works by Dazai Osamu, Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki, Edogawa Ranpō, Enchi Fumiko, Hayashi Fumiko, Ōe Kenzaburō, Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, and many others. New translations or, in some cases, revised editions of pre-modern Japanese literature by authors such as Kamo no Chōmei, Kenkō Hōshi, Sei Shōnagon, Murasaki Shikibu, and Ihara Saikaku were also completed during this period. An important achievement in the history of Italian translations of Japanese literature dates to the late 1980s when the Venetian publisher Marsilio Editori, following a suggestion by Adriana Boscaro (1935-2022), launched the book series “Mille gru” (One Thousand Cranes) entirely dedicated to Japanese literature. This series features many works in modern and pre-modern Japanese literature. Thanks to these translations, which were always published along with critical introductions by Italian scholars, the readership of Japanese literature in Italy expanded, laying the foundation for the current boom in translation.

2.1 History of Japanese literature in the present (The Twenty-first Century)

Regarding the history of Japanese literature published in Italy in the past 20 years, three works are worth mentioning. One is a two-volume book co-edited by Adriana Boscaro and Luisa Bienati titled *Letteratura giapponese* (Japanese Literature), published in 2005, considered the second most relevant work on Japanese literature published by scholars of Japanese literature after the book of Marcello Muccioli, which dates to 1957. The first volume of *Letteratura giapponese* offers an in-depth overview of Japanese classical literature from the eighth to the middle of the nineteenth century, while the second volume focuses on the major authors and works from the late nineteenth century to the early 3rd millennium. The contents of these two books are organized as mini-encyclopedias with several entries in alphabetical order for each author or work. They are considered very helpful as reference material, especially when one needs to grasp basic information from several authors.

The second and the third work, published in 2009 and in 2010, were authored respectively by Adriana Boscaro and Luisa Bienati, and by Luisa Bienati in collaboration with Paola Scrolavezza. These books, titled *La narrativa giapponese classica* (Classical

Japanese Narrative) and *La narrativa giapponese moderna e contemporanea* (Modern and Contemporary Japanese Narrative), are specifically designed to support teachers and students of Japanese literature in Italian universities. They offer a comprehensive overview of fiction spanning from ancient to contemporary periods, focusing on a selection of works traditionally studied in Japanese literature courses in Italy.

Some years later, precisely in 2012, in the same series “Elementi” (Elements) published by Marsilio Editori in Venice, a two-volume book on Japanese poetry by Pierantonio Zanotti appeared as *Introduzione alla poesia giapponese* (Introduction to Japanese Poetry). Soon after, in 2015 and 2016, the two volumes of *Storia del teatro giapponese* (History of Japanese Theatre) by Bonaventura Ruperti (1959-2023) were also released. Along with these epoch-making works written in Italian for an Italian audience, reference books in English appeared in the Japanese literature’s syllabi of several Italian universities. These are the abovementioned works by Donald Keene and new books edited by Haruo Shirane, such as *Early Modern Japanese Literature. An Anthology, 1600-1900* (2002) and *Traditional Japanese Literature. An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600* (2007). In more recent years, *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, edited by Haruo Shirane, Tomi Suzuki, and David Lurie and published in 2015, has been considered an indispensable reference book for Italian scholars and students. For the first time, this work provides a history of Japanese literature with comprehensive coverage of the pre-modern and modern eras in a single volume, including contributions from several well-known scholars of a particular literary genre. This is arranged topically in short chapters for easy access and reference, providing insights into canonical texts and many lesser-known, popular genres.

Among the Italian publications on Japanese literature, the latest book is *Cultura letteraria giapponese. Le mille forme della scrittura dal VII al XXI secolo* (Japanese Literary Culture. A Thousand Forms of Writing. From the Seventh to the Twenty-first Century) edited by Gala Maria Follaco and published in 2023. This book offers readers good reference materials with chapters written by Italian and foreign scholars on selecting major works of Japanese literature from the seventh to the twenty-first centuries. Each group of chapters, organized according to the different periods, includes a historical and cultural overview of recurrent issues that span many decades, if not centuries, providing the general audience with a solid framework to understand the development of Japanese literature across time.

Even if today, there are plenty of reference books on Japanese literature, those who have teaching experience and need to consider how to teach Japanese literature to undergraduate and graduate students in Italian universities with better results cannot help but notice some weaknesses in the books published in Italy until today:

1. Many are not written by scholars with different specializations who have mastered various genres developed in Japan from ancient to contemporary times.

2. Many studies do not include an overview of each period and do not exhaustively discuss works of literature in terms of the social and historical contexts in which they were produced across centuries.
3. Some are not conceived as a comprehensive history of Japanese literature. Various genres (poetry, drama, and narrative forms) have been presented in different volumes published over the years by diverse scholars. In some cases, it offers readers only a general overview of Japanese masterpieces, excluding significant issues related to various genres in different periods.
4. Sometimes, they are published only to meet the publisher's demand. Often, authors must respect the characteristics of a book series already included in the publisher's catalog. Consequently, they must comply with certain pre-established requirements to meet the expectations of a particular group of readers without considering what is needed to teach Japanese literature in Italian universities and what common readers interested in Japanese culture would like to read.
5. They are influenced by "*kokubungaku*" (national literature), which emerged in Japan in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This concept defines "national literature" as works written exclusively in Japanese (classical or modern) and excludes a huge corpus of Sino-Japanese texts.
6. They examined narrative fiction as the core of pre-modern – especially Heian – literature without considering the central role of poetry in several genres, such as diaries (*nikki*) and tales (*monogatari*).

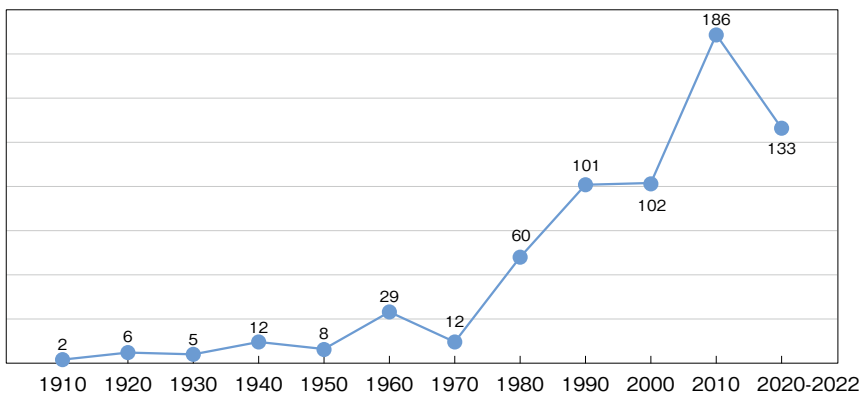
The dissatisfaction with the books on Japanese literature published in Italy has produced several problematic "side effects" that cannot be overlooked. A glance at Japanese literature syllabi on the websites of some Italian universities shows that, instead of a history of Japanese literature in Italian, they often mention a well-known history of Japanese literature written in English. In the same syllabus, we sometimes find critical essays written by different scholars in English or Italian on several topics included in several books or journals as supplementary material. Today, studying Japanese Literature in Italy still depends on books published in English, at least for the history of Japanese literature. Therefore, Japanese literature could appear even more distant from our culture, making it challenging for many students, scholars, and common people interested in Japanese culture to fully understand it. In Italy, university professors must spend some of their class time describing the different categories of Japanese literature using Italian terms, and they sometimes feel the need to provide a brief historical introduction to a particular period or genre. If this basic information (categories of Japanese literature and socio-historical introductions) were readily available to everyone by simply reading the history of Japanese literature in Italian, university lessons could be different and probably much more interesting for students. For example, lessons could focus more on the specific reading of selected works to sharpen students' abilities to apply philological and critical

arguments. Students would probably understand Japanese literature much better if they could read and appreciate passages of a particular work with their teachers' help instead of reading alone because teachers do not have enough time during their classes. Finally, Japanese literature scholars should also seriously contemplate the need to update information on the history of Japanese literature published in the past, considering the many translations of Japanese works of literature that have appeared in Italy only in the last twenty years.

2.2 Lost in Translations

From the beginning of the third millennium, a new era of literary translations from Japanese began. Along with classic authors such as Mishima Yukio, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and Kawabata Yasunari⁷ and modern classic authors like Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana, many others were introduced in succession for the first time in Italian translation. According to a survey conducted by Gianluca Coci,⁸ one of the most active Italian translators, approximately 186 works were translated into Italian over ten years, specifically from 2010 to 2020. The survey highlights the increasing and intense translation activity over the years, with about 133 works showcased in just two years, from 2020–2022 (**Figure 1**). We expect more translations by the end of this decade (2020–

Figure 1 The number of works by Japanese authors published in Italy by year.



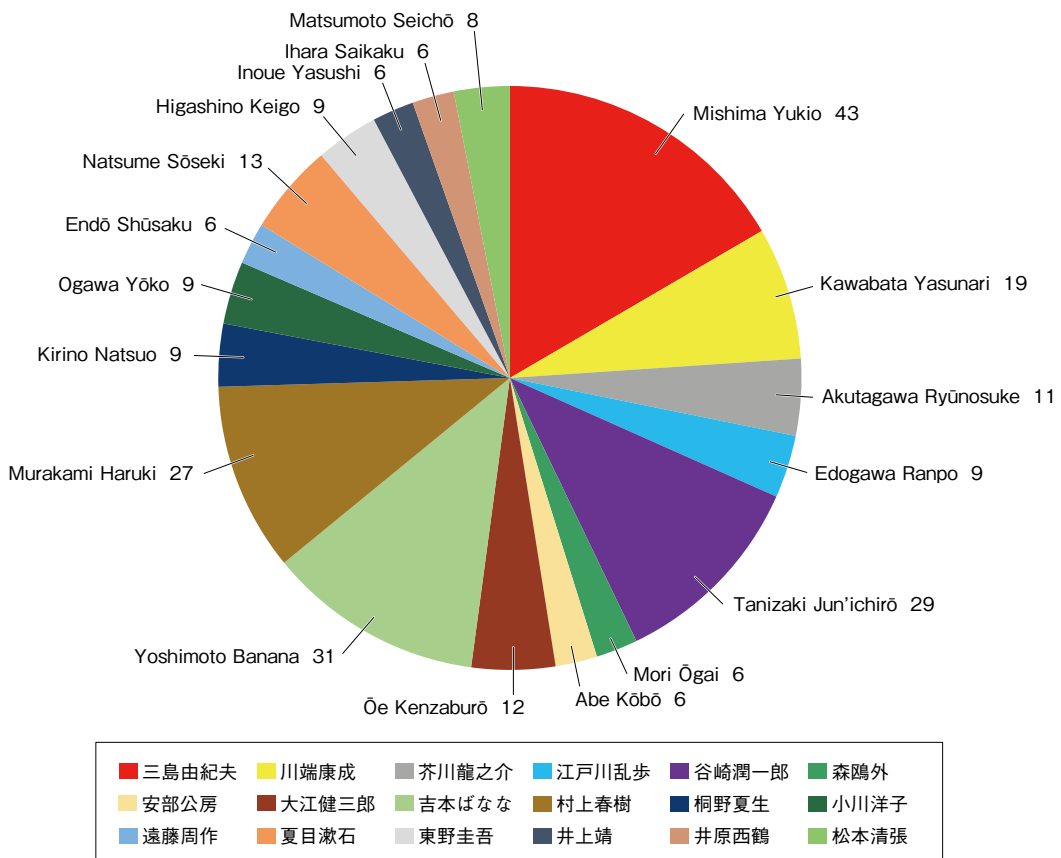
7 Collections of selected works by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Kawabata Yasunari and Mishima Yukio appeared at the beginning of the third millennium in one or two-volume book editions: *Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. Opere* (Jun'ichirō Tanizaki. Works) edited by Adriana Boscaro and published in 2002; *Kawabata. Romanzi e racconti* (Kawabata. Novels and Tales) edited by Giorgio Amitrano and published in 2003, and *Mishima. Romanzi e racconti* (Mishima. Novels and Tales) in two volumes edited by Maria Teresa Orsi and published respectively in 2004 and 2006.

8 Gianluca Coci is Professor of Japanese Language and Literature at the University of Turin, where he has taught literary translation from Japanese for many years. He presented this survey on translation in Italy during the conference *La traduzione letteraria dal giapponese e l'editoria. Una storia in costante evoluzione* (Literary Translation from Japanese and Publishing Industry. A History in Continuous Evolution) held at the University of Foreigners of Siena on April 19th 2022. Figure 1 and Figure 2 by courtesy of Gianluca Coci.

2030), considering that over 60 translations have been released only in 2023.

Figure 2 shows major Japanese authors translated from the beginning of the twentieth century until 2022. Mishima Yukio is the most translated, with 43 titles, followed by Yoshimoto Banana, with 31 titles. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō ranks third with 29 titles, and Murakami Haruki is in fourth place with 27 titles. According to the same figure, Japanese writers awarded the Nobel Prize, such as Kawabata Yasunari and Ōe Kanzaburō, have reached 19 and 12 titles, respectively. Among others, in recent years, several works by Japanese women writers such as Kirino Natsuo, Ogawa Ito, Ogawa Yōko, Murata Sayaka, Kawakami Hiromi, and Morishita Noriko have gained a significant audience in Italy together with authors of detective novels such as Matsumoto Seichō, Higashino Keigo and Yokomizo Seishi. From the late eighties and the early nineties, a new generation of Italian scholars who studied in Japan and gained excellent proficiency in Japanese contributed to the gradual disappearance of translations of Japanese literature from English. In recent years, alongside modern and contemporary Japanese literature, many

Figure 2 The number of works published in Italy by each author.



masterpieces from pre-modern Japanese literature have appeared in Italy, with some translated from Classical Japanese for the first time. The monumental translation of *Genji monogatari* titled *La storia di Genji* by Maria Teresa Orsi, published in 2012, has definitively replaced the previous Italian translation, which unfortunately contained several misunderstandings based on Arthur Waley's (1889-1966) English translation.⁹ Other notable works of pre-modern Japanese literature include the Italian translations of *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) (Villani 2006), *Hitachi no kuni no fudoki* (Reports on Hitachi Province and its Customs) (Manieri 2013), *Nihon Ryōiki* (Record of Miraculous Events in Japan) (Migliore 2010), a collection of *otogizōshi* (Strippoli 2001), and *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* (Travel on the East Seaboard) (Talamo 2019), together with new translations of *Ise monogatari* (Tales of Ise) (Maurizi 2018) and *Tzurezuregusa* (Essays in Idleness) (Boscaro 2014). Additionally, several diaries written by ladies-in-waiting during the Heian period (794-1185) such as *Sarashina nikki* (Sarashina Diary) (Negri 2005), *Izumi Shikibu nikki* (Izumi Shikibu Diary) (Negri 2008), and *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* (Murasaki Shikibu Diary) (Negri 2015) have been translated into Italian for the first time.

Regarding classical Japanese poetry, numerous collections of poems have not yet been translated into Italian. Until now, the most significant publications are the translation of some books of *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves),¹⁰ the first complete translation of *Kokinwakashū* (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) (Sagiyama 2000) along with *Wakanrōeishū* (Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems for Singing) (Maurizi and Sagiyama 2016), and a collection of the major poetry anthologies produced in Japan from the eighth to the twelfth century (Gerlini 2021).

Considering that translation is likely one of the main interests of Italian students—especially regarding future employment—several Italian universities, such as the University of Turin, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Sapienza University of Rome, and the University of Naples “l'Orientale” have regularly offered classes on literary translation from Japanese over the years. Professors are well-known translators who have received several awards,¹¹ and students are enthusiastic about learning from their personal experiences.

3 Histories of Japanese Literature in the Future

As we have seen, in the past decades, the profile of Japanese literature has undergone radical modifications due to shifts in the role of literature on a global scale, a boom in literary translation, and a new approach to Japanese culture through media. To respond to

9 (Waley 1925-1933).

10 For the Italian translations of *Man'yōshū* see: (Sagiyama 1985) and (Migliore 2019).

11 This is the case of Giorgio Amitrano, the University of Naples “l'Orientale”, and Gianluca Coci, the University of Turin.

the new market demand, initiatives for rewriting the history of Japanese literature, both modern and pre-modern, are underway in several European countries, including Italy. Considering these relevant changes and what could happen in the not-too-distant future, in 2023 Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner organized a two-day workshop at the Free University of Berlin titled *Writing Histories of Japanese Literature for Western Readers* to bring together main actors involved in new projects on Japanese literature. The workshop invited European scholars to compare and discuss culture-specific readerships, translation policies, publisher demands, and new trends in Japanese literary historiography. Scholars participating in the workshop highlighted that many translations of Japanese literature emerged consecutively in several European countries, such as Italy, France, Germany, and Norway. However, even if these countries currently discuss the possibility of writing new reference materials to update the published materials, also considering the many literary translations that emerged in the last decades, only in Italy are scholars actively conducting a project to publish a new history of Japanese literature. The project that involved the author of this article as one of the editors-in-chief was originally suggested by a person working for Einaudi, a well-established Italian editor, who proposed to include in the publication catalog a history of Japanese literature similar to the history of English literature and other literatures they had included in the catalog. We stress that the same editor has published in the last 20 years more than 60 translations of pre-modern, modern, and contemporary works of Japanese literature, including the first Italian translation from classical Japanese of *Genji monogatari*. The editor is aware that many Italian people, students, scholars of Japanese literature, and those interested in Japanese culture will probably buy and read a new history of Japanese literature. Therefore, they convinced me to accept their job offer. This ambitious project would require several colleagues with different specializations and some years of demanding work. After some hesitation, I discussed this project with friends and colleagues and organized a team with the cooperation of young and senior scholars working in several Italian universities where courses on Japanese Studies are regularly offered: the University of Milano-Bicocca, the University of Bergamo, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the University of Bologna, Sapienza University of Rome, and the University of Naples "l'Orientale." We had preliminary meetings to discuss a two-volume work defining each colleague's role according to their specialization in different authors and periods.

As literary history, the first volume that spans from the beginning (eighth century) until the early modern period (nineteenth century) will be organized according to the major periods of Japanese history: ancient (up to 794), Heian (794-1185), medieval (1185-1600), and Edo (1600-1867). It introduces Japanese masterpieces and overviews key genres, themes, and authors across the centuries. The book is designed for students interested in broadening their knowledge of Japanese culture and those wishing to compare other literature with that of Japan. Moreover, it could be a reference book for all common readers of Japanese literature translated into Italian who are curious about finding more

about certain authors or understand which genre the translated text belongs to and how and why this genre developed in Japan during a particular period. The book will be arranged into chapters, starting with a general overview of the historical period, followed by short descriptions of canonical works and lesser-known genres, from mythology and historical writings to drama, including many different forms of poetry and narrative fiction. Texts are chosen according to their popularity and interest, and sometimes their availability in translation. An extensive bibliography of works in Italian, Japanese, and English is included to enable readers to continue exploring Japanese literature through translations and secondary readings. For the literature produced in the Heian period, the golden age of Japanese literature, after some discussion, we decided to create lists of different genres, including narratives and poetry, which are usually not included in the history of Japanese literature written in Italy. We considered the complicated written history of Japanese pre-modern literature that used both the vernacular (*kana*) and the Sinitic syllabary for a long period; therefore, we decided it would be better to include at least a selection of works written in *kanbun*. Adding the most important historical tales (*rekishi monogatari*) and martial tales (*gunki monogatari*) to give readers a comprehensive understanding of different types of tales (*monogatari*) that developed between the tenth and the twelfth centuries in Japan was a compelling choice. Regarding poetry, the main element of continuity in Japanese pre-modern literature, which characterizes a significant number of diaries (*nikki*) and tales (*monogatari*), including *Genji monogatari*, which contains about 800 poems, we decided to include several poetry anthologies without neglecting to mention several important poetic treatises.

During the selection of pre-modern and modern literature, while reading histories of Japanese literature published until now, we considered why a particular text should be included and why others should not, asking ourselves which texts can be labeled as “classics” and in what ways they became canonical in Japan and abroad. Canon formation is concerned with immediate producers of the work and with those agents and institutions that produce or reproduce the value of a text and create consumers and audiences capable of recognizing and desiring that value. As Haruo Shirane (Shirane and Suzuki, 2000, 2-3) highlighted, key issues to be considered in canon formation are: 1) the preservation and transmission of a text; 2) the extensive commentary, exegesis, and criticism; 3) the use of a text in a school curriculum; 4) the employment of a text as a model for diction, style, or grammar, or as a source of allusion or reference; 5) the use of a text as a source for knowledge of historical and institutional precedents; 6) the adoption of text as the embodiment of a set of religious beliefs; 7) the inclusion of a text in anthologies; 8) the construction of genealogies and lines of descent, especially for schools and scholarly families; 9) the writing of literary histories, which occurred from Meiji period; and 10) the incorporation of a text into institutional discourse particularly state ideology, as with *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters). However, as European readers, we also consider the availability of translated texts in Italian, which naturally makes Japanese literature more

comprehensible and enjoyable.

Several chapter drafts to be included in the first volume of pre-modern Japanese literature have been uploaded in a shared folder on Google Drive, which all participating scholars can easily access. We are currently exchanging opinions about the contents of each chapter, using them as reference materials for our classes in Japanese literature while waiting for the publication of the volume, expected by the end of 2025.

The second volume, focused on Japanese literature produced from the nineteenth century until contemporary times, has as editor-in-chief Luisa Bienati from Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Like the first volume, the second involves many scholars specializing in different periods and genres, particularly modern and contemporary Japanese literature. The volume introduces students and the general audience interested in Japanese literature to the major authors and works produced in about 150 years, starting from “The Great Transformation” in the late nineteenth century, when Japan was opened to the world and to Western culture after a long period of isolation, to arrive at the so-called “Global literature” of the contemporary times. The book, organized into chapters introducing authors active for two or more decades, will also highlight several less-known Japanese authors, particularly those who published during and after the Second World War. The book will include a chapter on digital literature focusing on the “cell phone novels” (*keitai shōsetsu*), while also providing a general overview of the significant “light novels” published in recent years. Considering the close relationship between trauma and literary production, a specific chapter is dedicated to the rich literature produced in Japan after the 2011 Fukushima accident.

One main objective of the second volume is to offer readers, including general audiences, a practical guide to properly contextualize the numerous translations published in Italy today within their respective periods and genres. Many of these translations, in fact, are presented to readers without any critical introduction to the author or the translated work.

We hope that the output of this project will contribute to forging a new teaching and learning environment in many Italian academic institutions, which could be beneficial for students and general readers to transcend their time and place and appreciate the rich legacy of Japanese literature.

Books have long been considered the best tool for teaching and learning and will probably continue to be viewed as necessary reference materials, including e-books. However, we should recognize that literature, especially from distant countries, can be easily accessed by young students with the help of modern multimedia tools they use daily. These tools, including texts, pictures, videos, and animations, can stimulate students to read, think, and write successfully about literature. The appeal that teachers create when they spend their class time showing colourful slides, pictures, and videos while passionately discussing Japanese literature is undeniable and suggests much about future possibilities.

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