

Sōseki's English Translation of Hōjōki - Cultural Negotiations and Hybridity in Meiji Japan -*

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1. Introduction

Translation, in its multitude of meanings, forms an indispensable part of Japan's cultural interactions with the world; first in Sino-Japanese and later in the Japanese-Western contexts. The Sino-Japanese exchanges were largely based on an unequal power equations, for most part preceding Meiji era Japanese importations from the middle kingdom was largely unidirectional in nature. It would be a gross mistake however to think that Japan in pre-modern era was a mere passive receiver. There are numerous instances that show element of assimilations, and resistances while importing new ideas and objects. The best example perhaps is Japanese language, which despite being originated from Chinese writing system, nevertheless transformed into a new language and carved an independent identity.¹ The imported language, in order to satisfy the local tastes, underwent a prolonged process of resistance and negotiation that ensued in a new cultural product in the form of Japanese language. Therefore, such cultural circulations are not simple 'reception' of cultural artefacts, but involved 'replacement' with local elements.² Then, Genshin (942-1017), a famous medieval Buddhist monk of Tendai lineage, is said to have gone all the way to *Dazaiifu* (located in present day Fukuoka prefecture) in 988 AD to send a text authored by him titled *Ōjōyōshū* to China. He wanted that his work is read by the Tendai monks of *Guoqing* Temple on *Mt. Tiantai*, a place famous as the birth place of the Tendai School. This text, written in *kanbun* or Chinese writing style, explicates the Tendai discourse of attaining the Western Paradise. It is believed that Genshin wished that his authority over the Tendai discourses is acknowledged by the very originators of this school. Furthermore, he also wanted that his mastery over *kanbun* writing style is recognized by none other than the Chinese, for they are the very initiators of this writing system.³ The center-periphery consciousness in Genshin is very much protuberant in his act. His non-Chinese identity accompanied by his provincial location beyond the physical geography of China must have driven his action. Simultaneously, his doing is also an instance of resistance against the authority of a superior civilization. Because seeking recognition essentially means challenging the Chinese authority over Tendai discourse as well as over *kanbun* writing system. Such Sino-Japanese interactions, however, are not quite same as the Meiji experiences. The center-periphery spatial gap has been substantially bridged by the physical presence of large number of

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Japanese and Western institutions and individuals in the respective geographies during the Meiji era. The advancement of modern technologies along with free flow of information has made their hierarchical positions ambiguous. Nevertheless, the gap, however less it may be, as we will see in our following explications, remains.

The Meiji transnational exchanges and its ramifications are too conspicuous to go unnoticed in world history. Yet at a micro level, translation of literary works undertaken during this period also echoes the intricacies such interactions involved, which will be our focus of study in this paper. In this paper I will look at a small translation project undertaken by Natsume Sōseki (1869-1916), one of the most prominent literary figures of modern Japan, who lived and worked mostly in the Meiji era. He translated *Hōjōki* (1212), a popular medieval text authored by *Kamo no Chōmei* (1155-1216) into English in the year 1891. Through a close reading of his translation, I intend to show that, this project not only reflects the assimilation that occurred due to the Meiji interactions with the Western world, but such assimilations also bear the imprint of negotiations and resistances against Western importations. Sōseki's translation freed *Hōjōki* from being a mere domestic canon and set it on a cross-national journey, tracing the trajectory of which is definitely worthwhile. However, what is more relevant to our purpose here is to trace the negotiations that Sōseki had to make under the power imperatives and the resultant hybridity, all concealed underneath his translation narratives. With this translation as an illustration, I will adopt a postcolonial approach to show an instance of cultural hybridity resulting out of transcultural exchanges in the context of Meiji period. I will also attempt to show that the shift in interpretation that appears in the translation might have been driven by certain power essentials involved in the project that finally gave shape to the translation narratives.

2. Natsume Sōseki and *Hōjōki*

Hōjōki is an early Kamakura period work that remained popular throughout the history of Japanese literature, a fact attested by its long history of readership.⁴ It also became a stable part of school curricula at least since the Edo period, which shows the sustained reactions it evoked both from scholars and the masses. The reason for its popularity partly lies in its short length, barely a thirty pages text that could be finished easily. Its simple and coherent organization is another factor for its wide acceptance. The theme of the work however is the primary reason for its popularity, because it resonates well with the Japanese way of thinking. That is, as Karaki Junzō in his monumental work *Mujō* states, the Japanese since ancient time found beauty in things impermanence.⁵ The fall of cherry blossoms, the setting moon or the melting snow are few of those oft-used epithets in Japanese literature, which are said to have moved the Japanese heart since time immemorial. It has been even claimed that such Japanese way of thinking goes beyond the introduction of Buddhism, a faith famous for advocating the concept of impermanence.⁶ This Buddhist concept forms the central theme of *Hōjōki*.

There are differences of opinion among scholars about the degree of Buddhist religiosity represented in this work, but most do not deny the fact that the Buddhist concept of impermanence forms an integral part of it. In fact this concept forms an important part of the religious and literary discourses in Japan, at least since the early medieval era. Then naturally a work like *Hōjōki* that claimed to have depicted phenomenal ephemerality was assured a mass appeal. Sōseki, like most Japanese liked it and was thorough with its contents even before he actually did the translation.⁷

Sōseki, was born in Tokyo a year before the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and grew up watching the bustling new era from close quarters. He studied Chinese classics until high school, then hoped to become an architect but finally joined the newly opened English literature department at Tokyo Imperial University. It was at the age of twenty six years, when he was in the second year of his undergraduate program, he translated *Hōjōki*. Komiya Toyotaka (1884-1966), a close disciple of Sōseki states “(h)e perhaps translated *Hōjōki* on 8th December 1891, while he was in 2nd year at the university, upon requested by James Main Dixon”.⁸ Komiya’s statement confirms that Dixon indeed requested Sōseki to translate the work. This enterprise became first such attempt to translate this work into a foreign language and in that sense Sōseki played a crucial role in transmitting it beyond the boundaries of Japan. The title of his translation was *A Translation of Hojio=ki with a Short Essay on It*, which was accompanied by a short but critical essay entitled *A Short Essay on It* (hereafter mentioned as “essay”) that will be referred often in the course of this paper.

James Main Dixon, Sōseki’s English literature professor was a Scottish and one among the hundreds of *oyatoi gaikokujin* or the so called foreign advisors invited from a superior civilization to help Japan in her quest for modernization. Dixon arrived in Japan in the year 1880 and spent about twelve years in the country serving as an English language and literature instructor, first at the Imperial College of Engineering, Tokyo and later at the Tokyo Imperial University. He attempted a new translation of *Hōjōki*, although mostly borrowing from Sōseki’s translation, and brought a new English version of *Hōjōki* titled *A Description of my Hut*. He also authored a paper titled *Chōmei and Wordsworth: A Literary Parallel* and presented it at the Asiatic Society of Japan in which he did a comparative study between Chōmei with that of the famous English romantic poet William Wordsworth. With these information at the background, we now move to the details of the Meiji milieu and the associated power imperatives under which Sōseki did the translation.

3. The ‘colonialized’ Meiji Japan

Edwin Gentzler while discussing the role of agencies in shaping translation states that it is “becoming increasingly important to explore the specific situation in which institutions of power have had an impact on translation activity and the resulting impact that translations have had on the development of culture”.⁹ That is without having a comprehensive understanding of the power situations under

which a translation is produced, it is difficult to discern why a particular translator translates a text in a certain way and takes part in the cultural productions. Hence, it is useful to provide here a brief sketch of the power imperatives, both at a macro and micro level, concerning our purpose.

At a macro level, we know that Japan's status in the world, especially with respect to the Western world, played a significant role in directly shaping the ideological frameworks of Meiji intellectuals and students. Japan was forced few decades earlier in 1854 to open up to the outside world after two centuries of self-imposed isolation, under the threat of West's superior military strength. The unequal Kanagawa Treaty concluded same year with the United States was followed by many similar treaties. These treaties made Japan realizes not only her vulnerable position in a world where Western colonial adventurism were growing throughout Asia, but also more so of the superiority of Western prowess. This feeling of gross inferiority and weakness, in the growing face of Western influence during early Meiji era, left the new era leaders of Japan without much options, but to follow a strategy of rapid assimilation, with an aim to resist the Western influences, in order to escape the fate of other Asian countries experienced lately in the hands of Western nations. This resulted in a state sponsored wholesale reform initiative starting with the education system, and spreading to all spheres of the Japanese society and state. Western systems were adopted in all walks of life and anything slightly associated with old and traditions were highly despised. The conscious Japanese efforts to adopt everything Western, simultaneously the urge to give up anything old, resulted in a state that is often termed by scholars as 'pseudo-colonialization' or 'self-colonialization' of the country.¹⁰ This state of 'pseudo-colonialization' without really being colonized became even more prominent when the Meiji government set the platform for wide exchanges with the Western world helping the Japanese to directly witness the material advancements of the West that further reinforced their view about Japan's inferiority. When Sōseki was in the university, Japan was in the midst of marching ahead absorbing all things Western in her aim to surpass the West. By 1890's Japanese intellectuals were already advocating for a strategy of selection instead of blind importations. Nonetheless, the vulnerable position as a lesser civilizational site remains from which Japan partially emancipates with her victory in the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95. While Sōseki was a witness to the steady progression of Japan's status at the international arena, at the same time, he was very much aware about Japan's vulnerable position with respect to West's perceived superiority. This point is clear in many of his works that is discussed in more details in the following section.

Apart from this unequal power relations at a macro level, there were few other immediate fronts - not necessarily in the traditional sense of hierarchical order - where power relations also concerns us. First of all, at the very personal level between Sōseki and Dixon, that of a student and teacher relationship. The student-teacher unequal relationship may be understood by the Foucauldian disciplinary power

framework that states power in a teacher is vested through his authority over knowledge. The teacher endeavours in the game of truth to bring positive outcomes in the pupil by transmitting knowledge.¹¹ Then this hierarchical position is further strengthened, as some researchers have suggested, by the voluntary submission to the teacher's authority by none other than the pupil himself.¹² Lave and Wenger, for instance, discuss how members in particular *community of practice*, in their concern to learn something they are interested in, and in their endeavours to carve out an independent identity within a particular community, perform legitimate peripheral participation, in order to fulfil their goals.¹³ There is no reason to not believe that Sōseki in his effort for upward class mobility and to carve an independent identity as an intellectual in a modern Japan, acknowledged the authority of his teachers including that of Dixon's. However, as we will see in the following section, Sōseki's acknowledgement was definitely not a passive one - as argued by Foucault- for not only his translation, but many of his other works show his resentment towards accepting the myth of Western civilizational superiority.

The second power essential, which is more significant for our purpose, is the position of Dixon as a Western advisor. He was invited to Japan, not only because he belongs to a superior civilization, but also for his competence over his area of specialization that is English Language and literature. The Japanese government selectors who recruited Dixon must have anticipated the constructive role that he is going to play in modernizing higher education system of the country. All these elements show Dixon's relatively higher status in contemporary Japan. The high salaries the foreign advisors drew, in most cases much more than even the top level Japanese bureaucrats, is yet another example that testifies their higher social position in Japan.¹⁴ We don't have much records to have a clear picture about Sōseki's relationship with Dixon at a personal level. However, at least in one of his later works Sōseki critiques the latter for his poor teaching ability. In the very opening of *Watashi no kojīn shugi* (My Individualism and The Philosophical Foundations of Literature, 1914), which is a collection of lectures delivered at Gakushuin University, he writes "A person called Dixon was the instructor at that time. I was asked to read poems in front of him. I was scolded for missing articles in essays or for wrong pronunciations. During the examinations, we were asked such questions like when did Wordsworth was born and when did he die [...] although you are still young, I am sure even you can imagine; whether this is what we call English literature?".¹⁵ This statement shows that Sōseki was never a great admirer of Dixon. Sōseki, unlike many other students of Dixon, both in Japan and America, maintained a rather negative view about him, which could be a sign of his expression of resistance against Dixon's so called civilizational superiority. The theme of Western superiority remained a prime issue for Sōseki. He denounced it in many of his works as a myth and even critiques against the whole scale blind importation of so called superior Western ideas. Many of his later works like *Kusamakura* (1906), *Bungakuron* (1907), and *Gendai Nihon no Kaika* (1911) take a critical stand

against the so called superiority of Western civilization.¹⁶ His famous concept of *jiko honi* advocates primacy for the self as against borrowed ideas from others. He has advocated instead, like many of his contemporaries, notably the likes of Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), for selective importations with the sole aim of strengthening the self.¹⁷ Thus, so far as the notion of Western superiority is concerned, whether with respect to Dixon or that of other Western ideas, Sōseki has shown reluctance for passively accepting them.

In the third place, the canonical status of Hōjōki is another critical factor that Sōseki could never ignore. Recent findings have shown that the history of most of the ‘canons’ in Japanese literature does not go beyond the late Edo period.¹⁸ In case of Hōjōki, though we have evidences indicating that our text was read soon after its composition, nevertheless, it was discontinuous in nature. Not until the beginning of Edo era, we see appearance of Hōjōki manuscripts. Its canonical status is gradually cemented with the arrival of several annotated texts throughout the Edo era. However, despite this recent canonization, Hōjōki still comes with a history of almost seven hundred years. By the time the translation was attempted, it has already established itself as a ‘classic’ in the cultural repertoire of Japan with all the associated intrinsic characteristics, including the ‘textual authority’ inherently fused to such canonical text. This fact is vindicated by its recurrent publication since the early Meiji period and its continuous inclusion in the school curricula. Further, since a ‘classic’ constitutes a part of the national cultural repertoire, hence translating a part of the culture is especially problematic since it necessarily involves circulation of national imageries for the consumption of others. The disseminated imageries become the basis on which others construct the national image. Thus, translation of canonical texts has serious political as well as nationalistic undertones. It’s not uncommon among the Western educated young leaders and students of early Meiji era to make conscious and designed articulations while disseminating information about ‘national essence’. For instance, in 1882 Suematsu Kenchō (1855-1920) while producing a partial English translation of *Genji Monogatari* presented a forceful narration detailing out how this ‘national treasure’ is a proof of civilizational superiority of ancient Japanese society.¹⁹ Needless to say that Suematsu’s claim was highly driven by his ethnocentric nationalism to appeal contemporary educated European readers. Even the way he projected the authoress *Murashaki Shikibu* in the introduction section, it gives the reader an impression of him claiming a higher social position for ancient Japanese women in light of the contemporary liberal feministic trends in Europe. Likewise Sōseki, as we will see in the forthcoming sections, had in fact designed his translation strategy in a certain way, so that the canonical status of the work is untouched, all the while addressing an alien readership in a comprehensible manner. All the above seemingly invisible power relations had their role not only in shaping Sōseki’s translation, but they can also be felt in many of his latter works and life as well.²⁰

Under such circumstances Sōseki was requested by his European professor to translate *Hōjōki*. Considering these power imperatives, the project outcome was in fact determined even before the production starts due to the very reason of ‘subjectivity’, to borrow a Foucauldian terminology.²¹ The point of departure for Foucault, we may recall, is separation of power from its Marxist framework; that is power is a possession and a mere tool of oppression. Instead he claims power is a strategy rather than a possession, the exercise of which brings corresponding reactions. Power is not something that is applied on passive bodies, but on subject that reacts to such power plays and brings productive transformation or hybridity, that is the newly produced knowledge.²² Foucault’s focus is on the productive reactions in form of resistances that exercise of power brings.²³ That is, in our context, the wide acknowledgement of Western superiority during Meiji era in Japan and the hierarchical positions of Sōseki and Dixon, along with the canonical status of *Hōjōki*, are some of the associated power factors, the exercise of which upon Sōseki ensued resistances. It forced him to choose a particular kind of translation strategy – an act of resistance - that resulted in acculturation and creation of a new body of knowledge, that is according to Foucault, is a strategy to empower the producer, the translator Sōseki in our case.

4. Production of Cultural Hybridity

Sōseki had to formulate his narratives in such a manner so that the norm of the day - Western civilizational superiority – is maintained without overlooking the canonical status of *Hōjōki*. In order to achieve this, he adopted a middle path that ensued a hybridity that is construing *Hōjōki* as a work dealing with Wordsworthian Nature instead of a Buddhist text representing the concept of impermanence. While the very idea of comparing Chōmei and Wordsworth is in itself a problematic, nonetheless, the Wordsworthian view of nature was accorded primacy with adequate justifications. Sōseki complains of Chōmei’s material view of nature, which he claims, never find a ‘spirit’ in it, as the romantic poet did. It is precisely for this reason that he had to ignore all the disaster narratives of *Hōjōki*. Because their existence would have prevented him to elucidate it as a text dealing with nature as its main theme.

4.1 Reading *Hōjōki* as a Romantic Text

Before going into further details, let us have an overview of how *Hōjōki* was read over the centuries, in order to help us better appreciate Sōseki’s style of reading. The reception history of this work shows few broad thematic patterns that were traditionally followed while reading and appreciating it. One such pattern is reading it as a Buddhist text. The narratives detailing how the author abandoned the world to spend the last quarter of his life in Mt. Hino as a recluse helps in creating a Buddhist image of the text. The logical narrative sequence, first the numerous disasters as expression of phenomenal ephemerality, followed by virtues associated with reclusion, goes well in strengthening this image.

Hōjōki, for this reason was mostly read from the usual Buddhist religious perspectives and often considered a work that represents the notion of impermanence. *Kankyo no tomo* (1216-22), *Jikkinsho* (1252), *Bunkidan* (1272) and the *Tale of Heike* (14th cen.) are few of those major works that acknowledge this reading pattern and considered it a Buddhist text. Then, Hōjōki is also famous for its disaster narratives. The author makes it clear at the very beginning of the text that he experienced several disasters in his early life that forms the basis of his narration in his work. Although the historical veracity of the facts provided about these disasters have been questioned, but several other works, like the *Tale of Heike* for instance, have suitably adapted these disaster narratives. *Hitorigoto* (1468), another medieval work authored by priest *Shinkei* (1406-75) also mentions about the inferno (1177) mentioned in Hōjōki. The image of Hōjōki as a disaster narrative still resonates to the present day, a fact proven by the wide attention the work draws in the wake of major natural calamities in the country. Yet another theme of Hōjōki that has been highlighted by scholars is the subject of reclusion, in which Sōseki has shown interest. Although reclusion is closely linked to religion, but works like *Kankyo no tomo* take especial interest in Chōmei's solitariness without its religious connotation. Almost all the Edo era annotated texts of Hōjōki follows these usual strands. Modern day scholars while occasionally indicating the Daoist and Confucian influences the work might have received, mostly follow either or all of these established patterns.²⁴ However, Sōseki's case was an exception. He was neither impressed with the religious elements nor had any inclination towards the disaster narratives. Instead he attempted a new reading hitherto unknown in the reception history of Hōjōki. Sōseki read Hōjōki through the lens of nature loving Romantics such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850). In his small essay that accompanied his translation Sōseki left valuable clues from which we may reconstruct his ideas about Hōjōki. In the essay he has given a three-fold classifications of literary products; works of a genius, works of talented men and works of enthusiasm, the last category to which Hōjōki belongs is placed in between the first two categories. Our text for Sōseki, then belongs to a middle category that although lacks the characteristic of a 'mirror in which every one finds his image', simultaneously it is not a 'mirage that strike us for a moment with astonishment, but soon slip out of mental vision for their unsubstantiality (sic)'.²⁵ These rhetorical narratives function as a mindful design to place the work in a middle category all the while maintaining its historical standing, details about which will follow in subsequent sections. Sōseki writes;

An apparition, possibly, the following piece (i.e., Hōjōki) may seem to most of us, inasmuch as only a few can nowadays resist its angry isolation and sullen estrangement from mankind, still fewer can recognise their own features reflected in it. Philosophical arguments too may be urged against the author's narrow minded pessimism, his one-sided view of life, his complete renunciation of social and family bonds. (A short essay, p.371)²⁶

The author of *Hōjōki* has been critiqued for being a ‘misanthrope’, an important notion for Sōseki’s understanding of this work. The fact that the term ‘misanthrope’ also appears in many of his notes and letters of those days indicates that his individual circumstances might also have influenced his decision to brand Chōmei as a misanthrope.²⁷ In any case, *Hōjōki* that was mostly canonized for its Buddhist landscape of impermanence and reclusion became the very reason for Sōseki to critique it as mere ‘narrow minded pessimism’ on the part of the author. The seven hundred years of literary history was first white washed in order to give a new meaning to the text. Then Sōseki put forwarded his own argument - why such a work that is the target of stern critique even needs a consideration at the first place? Despite all its drawbacks, he argues, the work calls the attention of some like himself for ‘the naive admiration of *nature* as something capable of giving him (i.e., Chōmei) temporary pleasure’, apart from the author’s proper way of living and refusal to pursue shadows of happiness. With this single statement he makes his intention clear that *Hōjōki*, a work traditionally read and appreciated for its Buddhist elements, essentially requires a rereading to value the author’s view of nature, hitherto undiscovered by any reader. Then he goes on to elucidate how the twelfth century recluse lacks all the characteristics of a romantic Wordsworthian’s comprehensive and humane view of nature.

Sōseki complains that Chōmei’s view of nature was utterly material because he didn’t recognise the presence of a spirit in the nature. Let us borrow a passage at length from Sōseki’s essay;

It is an inconsistency that a man who is so decidedly pessimistic in tendency should turn to inanimate nature as the only object of his sympathy. For physical environments, however sublime and beautiful, can never meet our sympathy with sympathy. [...] After all, nature is dead. Unless we recognise in her the presence of a spirit, as Wordsworth does, we cannot prefer her to man, nay we cannot bring her on the same level as the latter, as our object of sympathy. Man with all his foibles and shortcomings, has still more or less sympathy for his fellow creatures. Granting that love deepens where sympathy is reciprocal, we find no reason why we should renounce all human ties and sullenly fly to cold, unsympathetic nature as the only friend in the world, who is really harmless. Harmless she may be, but can never be affectionate! (A short essay, p.371)²⁸

Though branding Chōmei as ‘decidedly pessimistic’ is in itself dubious, but what’s more noteworthy here is Sōseki’s elucidation of Chōmei’s view of nature. After deconstructing *Hōjōki* as a Buddhist text, he states that its twelfth century author lacks the qualities to recognise a spirit, as Wordsworth did in the nature. Chōmei’s material view of the nature and shunting of human ties were now brought to question. But in reality, Chōmei seeking solace in inanimate nature is nothing more than a conscious construction by Sōseki to fit *Hōjōki* into his own interpretative agenda that grew out of the aforesaid power equations. Nowhere in *Hōjōki* there are descriptions that address nature the way Sōseki has cited. His emphasis on ‘human society’ and Chōmei’s ‘misanthropic’ nature, needless to say, was

influenced by the nineteenth century Western literary trends. The English Romantic figures pursuing their literary undertakings all the while living in the very human world, unlike Chōmei who escaped to the mountains, was perhaps something idealized by Sōseki. We are also aware about the Humanist Wordsworth, who remains Sōseki's primary focus, whose poems revolves around the themes of reinvigorated humanism that might have also shaped Sōseki's thought.²⁹

4.2 Overlooking Disaster Narratives

Another remarkable aspect of Sōseki's translation is that he purposefully overlooked all the narratives that concerns with disasters in Hōjōki. He mentions;

Several paragraphs which follow are devoted to an account of the removal of the capital to Settsu in 1180, of the famine during Yōkwa (1181), of the pestilence in the same year, the earthquake in the second year of Genreki. *All these however are not essential to the true purport of the piece, so that we can dispense with them with little hesitation.*³⁰

Hōjōki, as we saw earlier is a work organised in two broad sections seamlessly linked so that the perceived message is communicated effortlessly. The key message then, at least what the author states in his own words, is to represent the Buddhist concept of impermanence by illustrating live examples of phenomenal ephemerality. He states that the realization of this truth triggered his resolution to abandon the world and seek refuge in solitariness. Therefore, more than half of the text is devoted to various natural and manmade disasters that the author said to have experienced in his early life. These experiences, the author mentions, made him to realize the fundamental truth taught by Buddhism that all aspects of phenomenal world are all but ephemeral in nature. The second part, then covers how upon realizing this truth, the author resolved not to be fooled by the worldly illusions and retreated to Mt. Hino to engage in spiritual practices. Thus, the two themes are interlinked to a broader main subject in such a way that any part cannot exist as an intelligible independent part of the text. The entire narrative must be read in the given disposition in order to grasp this message. However, in a 'Barthesian' style, Sōseki first overthrew the author and then gave Hōjōki a reading, in a seemingly liberated manner that was in reality not so an independent act. He effortlessly discounted the necessity of these narratives for the 'true purport of the piece'. The 'true purport', needless to say was to valorise the Wordsworthian view of nature and humanism, in which imageries of chaos, horror and death naturally do not fit. This valorisation was nothing but the result of the power relations under which the translation project was undertaken.

By the time Sōseki did the translation, he was already well acquainted with Western literature, which cannot be denied as a direct factor contributing to this hybrid reading. But, it seems the aforesaid power imperatives at both macro and micro levels played a rather crucial role in shaping his essay. The transnational power relationship of Japan during the Meiji era has gotten place in many of Sōseki's

latter works.³¹ The teacher student unequal power relationship is even evident from the descriptions of his essay. He mentions,

Only firm and robust minds can resist the momentary shock and find there something attractive; or persons with a particular bent of mind who find their likeness reflected there, can truly sympathize with these seeming apparitions. (A short essay, p.371)

The ‘apparition’ by which Sōseki implies works like Hōjōki, which can be appreciated only by a section of the readers who can ‘resist the momentary shock’ created by rhetorical works lacking a solid ‘philosophy’. He reminds that while people in general are struck by the outward semblance of works, only a few ‘with a particular bent of mind’ can only find their likeness reflected in these works. In other words, Sōseki found in Dixon a connoisseur of works like Hōjōki, for it’s the latter who recognized a ‘philosophy’ in it and consequently requested its translation. He appreciated his European professor not only for giving him an opportunity to show his critical literary skills through his essay, but also for finding his own self reflecting in the narratives of Hōjōki. But, it seems this praise of Dixon as a patron of Japanese classics was a mere a laudatory from a student who didn’t just want to antagonize his instructor. Then, there is great possibility that Dixon had already discussed with Sōseki about his intention to write a paper comparing Chōmei with western recluse literary figures³² It is definitely not a simple coincidence that Dixon starts his paper with ‘nature’ and in the very first paragraph discusses ‘recluse’ practice in Europe.³³ These are precisely the main themes, as we saw, that Sōseki discusses in his essay making it very much plausible that he was mindful of the expectations from his professor. Consequently when he did the translation, he was left with not much options but to give a new reading to Hōjōki keeping in mind the anticipations from his professor.

It is now clear that the overall socio-intellectual environment of the Meiji era along with certain immediate power relationships shaped Sōseki’s hybrid reading. However, he was careful enough not to forget the canonical status Hōjōki and its author enjoyed over the centuries. He made sure through his narratives that the work maintains its status. He mentions that the social milieu and strong influence of Buddhism might have forced the author to abandon human world seeking escape in the solitariness of nature. But, despite all his drawbacks, he mentions, ‘the author is always possessed with grave sincerity and has nothing in him, which we may call sportive carelessness. [...] he is at least entitled to no small degree of eulogy for his spotless conduct and ascetic life which he led among the hills of Toyama, unstained from the obnoxious influence of this Mammon-worshipping, pleasure hunting ugly world’.³⁴ Then he quotes an excerpt from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* summarizing Chōmei’s teachings that amounts to evanescence nature of the material world. He concludes his essay by stating;

Let a Bellamy laugh at this poor recluse from his Utopian region of material triumph; let a Wordsworth pity him who looked a nature merely as objective and could not find in it a

motion and spirit, rolling through all things; let all those whose virtue consists of sallying out and seeking adversary, turn upon him as an object of ridicule; for all that he would never have wavered from his conviction. (A short essay, p.369)

We are not sure if Sōseki's statement of 'obnoxious influence of mammon worshiping, pleasure seeking ugly world' is a veil attack on the Western influenced worship of industrial mammon in Japan. But he makes it clear that, despite all his drawbacks, Chōmei still stands tall in the Orient for his exemplary ascetic lifestyle that can never be appreciated by the Occident. The Occident may despise Chōmei for his attitude towards nature and humans, but such critiques would not be enough to influence his chosen path. With this Sōseki made sure that Chōmei is given his due respect. By assimilating western ideas for interpreting a Japanese classic, he indeed strengthened the Japanese literature. Such assimilation by Sōseki is also an instance of Foucauldian power plays during the Meiji era. The very attempt to project Chōmei against the greatness of William Wordsworth, is perhaps a sign of Foucauldian 'resistance', for it can also be seen as a challenge to the greatness of Wordsworth and the West.

5. Conclusion

In "What is an Author?" included in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, Foucault quotes Jorge Luis Borges as saying, "The fact is that every writer creates his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, which will modify our conception of future".³⁵ Indeed, in our case too, the hybridity or newly created cultural knowledge - reading Hōjōki as a text dealing with nature - by Sōseki through his translation was carried forward by Dixon, who suitably appropriated its contents in his own version of translation. Consequently, when Dixon presented his paper at the Asiatic Society of Japan comparing Chōmei with Wordsworth, there were at least two other Westerners present at the venue, who despite criticizing Chōmei's inanimate view of nature, acknowledged cheerfully that Hōjōki is in fact a twelfth century Japanese text that deals with nature.³⁶ Then Dixon's paper appeared in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* that was circulated all over the world and must have been further read by many more who might also have found Hōjōki in the same way as it was presented by Sōseki. This process of knowledge circulation acquires further significance when the audience do not read Japanese language making it impossible for them to refer to the original contents. Almost thirteen years after Sōseki's translation, when Minakata Kumagusu and F. V. Dickins came out with a new English translation of Hōjōki, they simply could not ignore the precedent set by Sōseki and Dixon. They titled their translation piece as *A Japanese Thoreau of the Twelfth Century* reaffirming that Hōjōki really deals with nature and Chōmei is the twelfth century Japanese Thoreau, the nineteenth century American who treasured nature more than anything else.

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- ²⁵ Natsume Soseki. (1995). *Soseki zenshu*, Vol.16. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten. p. 373.
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- ²⁹ Ulmer, William Andrew. (2001). *The Christian Wordsworth 1798-1805*. New York: SUNY Press. pp. 178-179.
- ³⁰ Natsume Sōseki. (1995). *Sōseki zenshu*, Vol.16. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten. p. 359.
- ³¹ Refer Note 10.
- ³² Nature and solitariness form the primary conceptual themes in Dixon's paper. While indicating the divide between Eastern and Western views of nature and solitariness, he compares Chōmei with Western literary figures like Shakespeare and Wordsworth. The same theme also appears in Sōseki's essay, nevertheless in an abridged manner. Due to this commonality, it looks like that Dixon had already discussed with Sōseki about his plan to write a paper comparing these themes, possibly during his interactions at the university, due to which Sōseki also touched upon these themes in his essay.
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