A pioneer of classical studies in Japan, Shigeichi Kure: a focus on his translations

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This article introduces Shigeichi Kure (1897–1977), a pioneer of Classical literature studies in Japan. Kure’s numerous translations of Classical literature, from a translation studies perspective, involved two principal strategies, foreignization and domestication. His translation style is sometimes described as unique and there are arguments both for and against his translations. However, it is certain that he successfully melded the foreign and domestic aspects of his translation work in such a way that he may be considered as the father of future Classical studies in Japan.

Japan’s long history of Classical studies began when European missionaries first arrived and started to teach Latin in missionary schools in Japan during the mid-sixteenth century. After a prolonged period of Japanese national isolationism (1639–1854), a German philosopher, Raphael von Koeber (1848–1923), was asked to Japan in 1893 by the Japanese government. He taught Greek and Latin at Tokyo Imperial University, and he laid the foundation for a thriving discipline. Today, the Classical Society of Japan, which was formed in 1950, now has more than 500 members.

Professional translations have played an important part in the establishment of Classical studies in Japan; so much so, that almost all major Classical works are available in translation. The impact of these translated works can be seen in the classical themes that have been taken up in modern Japanese novels, comics, and films. Any local understanding of these works is wholly dependent on Japanese translations. Almost from the outset, the person most responsible for

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1 E.g. Yukio Mishima’s Shiosai, Koji Yanagi’s Kyoen.
2 E.g. Osamu Tezuka’s Hinotori, Masami Kurumada’s Saint Seiya.
3 E.g. Hayao Miyazaki’s Kaze no Tani no Naushika, Mari Yamazaki’s Thermae Romae.
establishing the foundation for future Japanese translations of Western Classics is Shigeichi Kure (1897–1977), a pioneering scholar of Classics and the first president of the Classical Society of Japan.

In this article, I will introduce Professor Kure, and focus on some of his accomplished translations. Although Kure has sometimes provided commentary on his translation work and some scholars have made comments on these translations, there is neither a comprehensive nor detailed study of his translations and their impact on Classical studies in Japan.

**Kure’s life and translation work**

Shigeichi Kure was born in Tokyo as the firstborn son of Shuzo Kure (1865–1932), a pioneer in the field of psychiatry. Kure’s father wanted his son to follow in his footsteps and to become a doctor. Following his father’s wish, Shigeichi enrolled in the Department of Medicine at Tokyo Imperial University in 1919. However, he soon began to worry about his future as a doctor, so he decided to transfer to the University’s College of Letters. There, he majored in Western Classical literature because of his wish to study the origins of Western civilization that had so influenced the modernization process contemporary Japanese society was undergoing at the time of his studies.

After graduating from university in 1925, Kure went on to do his postgraduate studies in Europe at the University of Oxford and at the University of Vienna. He returned to Japan in 1928 and started to teach Classical languages at Tokyo Imperial University. In 1950, Kure founded the Classical Society of Japan along with other like-minded professors and became the society’s first president. In 1963, Kure became the first director of the Japanese Academy in Rome. Returning to Japan in 1966, Kure accepted the post of professor at Ueno Gakuen University and taught both Classical languages and history until his death on 28 December, 1977.

Among Kure’s various research activities, his translations are especially noteworthy. In all, he translated and published nearly one hundred works. Most of Kure’s publications were translations of Greek or Latin literature; with his translations of Greek literature being almost three times more numerous than those of his Latin translations. Besides ancient Greek and Latin literature, he also published translated anthologies of European poetry and even ancient Egyptian hymnals.

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7. For the whole list of Kure’s publications, see Mizutani (2003: 571–93).
8. Kure translated the *Franciscae Meae Laudes* of Baudelaire, the *Laokoon* of Lessing, and sonnets of Dante.
Comparing Kure’s verse and prose, his translated verse is 3.5 times more numerous than that of his prose.

Moreover, we must draw attention to Kure’s Greek Myths (Japanese title: ギリシア神話), which has already gone into several editions. One of his significant achievements was making contemporary Japanese society become more familiar with Greek mythology. Sales of his edition of Greek Myths, first published in 1956, have reached 150,000. In the light of these considerable sales figures, Kure and Saeki, who is a scholar of American literature, explained that Greek myths were often co-opted in the twentieth century’s contemporary literature and drama, and that young Japanese people encountering new foreign literature thus became interested in Greek myths. In his book, Kure introduced stories of the older Gods (Gaia, Uranus, Prometheus, etc.) and the Olympians (Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Artemis, etc.), legends of royal families (Aeolus’ family and Tantalus’ family) and tales of important regions (Thebes, Crete, Thessaly, and Attica), heroic sagas (Perseus and Heracles), and epic stories (the story of Argo and that of the Trojan war including outlines of the Iliad and the Odyssey).

Strategies in Kure’s Translations (1): foreignization

Shigeichi Kure’s translations, when considered in detail, involve two basic strategies, foreignization and domestication. The strategy of foreignization creates a target text that deliberately breaks target conventions by retaining something of the foreignness sourced from the original. The strategy of domestication designates a type of translation in which a transparent, fluent style is adopted in order to minimize the strangeness of the foreign text for the target language readers.

Kure’s use of foreignization provides considerable evidence of the great effort he undertook to create a Western archaic atmosphere within the scope of his Japanese translations. His translation style preserved the original archaism by using their own particularly archaic style. Goro Maeda remarked, ‘The beauty of Kure’s Japanese deserves its fine reputation. When he translates, he understands the meaning of ancient Western languages and his Japanese translations are filled with an ancient atmosphere. His translation brings readers to ancient Greece.’ The following serves as a good example: in his Homeric Iliad, in a scene (3. 441) in which Paris seduces Helen, Kure translated the passage ‘ἀλλ’ ἂγε δὴ φιλότητι τραπείομεν εἰνηθήχνε’ into Japanese with a classical — some would even say archaic — flavour. In English, the Japanese might be rendered something like: ‘But lo! Let us ascend to the bed and allow our feelings of affection to be satisfied.’

9 Kure and Saeki (1970: 12).
11 Maeda (1958: 2).
12 In Japanese: ‘だがそれよりも、さあ、臥床に入って、いとしこころに胸を舞らそう’ (Kure 1964: 125).
deliberate archaism contrast Kure’s translation with the 1992 translation of Chiaki Matsudaira, where the same line in Japanese resembles the English: ‘But now, let’s enjoy making love in our bed.’

Secondly, a careful observation of each word Kure chose demonstrates that he sought to preserve a Western Classical style within each text. Let us focus on Kure’s use of furigana which is written alongside some Chinese characters (kanji). Usually, the furigana consists of phonetic characters that indicate how the kanji should be pronounced. For example, Kure translated II. 1. 305 ‘λίθων δ’ ἀγορήν παρὰ νημαίν Ἀχαιῶν’ (they broke up the assembly beside the ships of the Achaeans) as ‘アカイア軍の船陣 (ふなで) の傍 (わき) の集 (つど) いを解いて’c. There are six kanji in this phrase (军, 船, 陣, 傍, 集 and 解) and Kure added the furigana to four kanji: ‘ふなで’ to ship, ‘べき’ to 船, ‘わき’ to 傍 and ‘つど’ to 集. He chose not to write furigana for two of the kanji, because it would have been obvious for Japanese readers to read 軍 as ‘ぐん’ and 解 as ‘ど’. As I said above, the use of furigana usually shows the pronunciation of its kanji. However with some of the kanji, Kure added furigana to show the original Greek pronunciation of the word and not that of its kanji. For example, he translates ‘Μόδσα’ at II. 2. 484 as ‘詩神’ adding the furigana ‘ムーサイ’ (/mūsai/), when the normal practice would be to add ‘しん’ (/shishin/) to show the pronunciation of ‘詩神’.

Thirdly, the mixture of different forms of Japanese language is another noticeable feature commonly found in Kure’s translations. Kure argued that this sort of deliberate blending was due to his chosen adherence to the Greek style, saying: ‘There are some people who criticize my translation because it includes modern words, archaic words and poetical words altogether.’ However, contemporary words,
archaic words, dead words whose meanings have become obscure, and the words of later periods are mixed in the lexicon of Homer, and he used them as he liked. I did not imitate him, but Homer definitely influenced my expression.'

As Kure said, by following the established Homeric style, he was able to use both old and new Japanese words as part of his translation work. It is widely known that Homeric poetry contains some words especially coined for metrical purposes, and it is also apparent that archaisms make up an important feature of Homeric language.

Like Homer before him, Kure coined some of his own unique phrases through his Japanese translations. For example, in a popular scene taken from the Odyssey, Odysseus tells Polyphemus, a gigantic Cyclops, that Odysseus’ name was ‘Od tíς’ (nobody), before he blinds the monster: Od. 9. 366 Od tíς ἐμοὶ γ’ ἄνωμα ‘Nobody is my name’. Kure’s translation is ‘駄礼毛志内と私はいうので’. He translated ‘Od tíς’ using the kanji ‘駄礼毛志内’ and then added the furigana ‘だれもしない’ to indicate that the kanji should be read as meaning ‘nobody does’. To the Japanese reader, there is something humorous about these five kanji and their accompanying furigana. As Japanese names are usually composed of Chinese characters, Japanese readers instantly understand that ‘駄礼毛志内’ is a person’s name, although quite a strange one. When Odysseus introduces himself with this strange alias, we fully understand that he is trying to cheat the Cyclops and to make fun of the monster at the same time. Although we understand why Polyphemus believed Odysseus’ self-introduction because ‘駄礼毛志内’ looks like a real name, we laugh at how the deceived Cyclops is so gullible, and we learn the wiles of Odysseus. Then when we read that the cyclopean monster was blinded and tells his friends, ‘It is Nobody that is slaying me’ at Od. 9. 408, we understand the full implication of the name ‘駄礼毛志内’. Finally Odysseus says at Od. 9. 413–4 ‘My heart laughed within me that my name and flawless scheme had so beguiled’. Kure’s coined name ‘駄礼毛志内’ makes Japanese readers laugh along with Odysseus, just like Homer made Greek listeners laugh long before. Kure’s translation is able to preserve the implied wiles and wisdom of Odysseus, and the intention of Homer, without giving away the tale’s familiar punchline.


19 I have used Murray’s English translation of the Odyssey (Loeb).

20 Among other examples of words coined by Kure, the following ones are worth mentioning: at II. 5. 777 Kure translated ἄμβροσίαν (ambrosia, the food of the gods) by using his coined word ‘仏香食’ which is composed from the characters meaning ‘wizard’ + ‘pervision’ + ‘food’. Also II. 3. 107 ὑπερβαίη (wrongdoing) is translated as ‘不法無徳’ (illegality + ‘shamelessness’) and Od. 2. 19 Κύκλωψ (a Cyclops) as ‘単つ眼鬼’ (‘one’ + ‘eye’ + ‘demon’).
At the same time, it may be noted that Kure’s translations contain an abundance of ancient Japanese words, like archaisms in Homer. For example, at II. 1. 438, Kure translated ἐκατῷβην as ‘大賢’, a very ancient formulation. The oldest example of the use of this word is found in Kojiki, Japan’s oldest history text which was compiled around 712 A.D.21

Fourthly, in another linguistic practice which followed normative Greek literature, Kure sometimes used variant synonyms in his translations. For example, in Homeric epics, the names of Odysseus and Achilles are stated in two different ways: Ὀδυσσεὺς and Ὀδυσσεύς; and Αχλαῖος and Αχλαλεύς. In like fashion, Kure chose to use variant synonyms as part of his Japanese translations:22 he translated Οδυσσεύς as ‘オデュッセウス’ at II. 1. 145, but ‘オデュセウス’ at II. 1. 430.23

Moreover, the use of the following devices in Kure’s translations has a similar impact to that of the variant synonyms. For example, Kure used several different kanji for expressing a single word. He wrote ‘いかり’, which expresses the notion of ‘anger’ in several different ways: 怒り (II. 1. 1 Μήνων), 嘆息 (II. 1. 387 χόλος), 忍り (II. 1. 422 μήνι’), 嘆息 (II. 1. 420 χωδύμενον).24

Further, Kure chose to add different furigana to one or more kanji. For example, he wrote ‘聖い’ (holy, II. 4. 46 ἱρή) adding the furigana ‘たかい’, while adding another furigana ‘とうとい’ to the ‘聖い’ at II. 4. 121 ἱερὴς.25 This strategy has several effects. First, it keeps the repetition of a same word out of his translation: e.g. 愛しい (dear): ‘いとしい’ (II. 5. 359 φίλε), ‘かなしい’ (II. 5. 364 φίλον). Secondly, it adjusts...


22 Kure (1964: 3–4).


24 This feature may also be observed in the following examples: よろい (armor): 鍔 (II. 1. 371 χαλκοχιτώνων), 鐵衣 (II. 2. 47 χαλκοχιτώνων), 銃衣 (II. 2. 163 χαλκοχιτώνων), 武具 (II. 3. 29 οὐκέχειν), 胸甲 (II. 3. 332 θῷρηκα). ゆたか (rich): 食か (II. 2. 570 ἄφετοι), 裕か (II. 2. 825 ἀφετοῖ), よつ (a follower): 伴侶 (II. 2. 540 ἄσω), 伴 (II. 2. 842 ἄσω). くま (a car): 車駕 (II. 3. 260 ἐννυγμέναι), 馬車 (II. 3. 263 ἰπποῦς).

25 In the following examples, Kure also added different furigana to one or more kanji. 武士 (a soldier): もののく (II. 1. 242 ἀνδρόφωνοι), ‘きむらい’ (II. 6. 350 ἀνδρῶς). 武具 (armor): よろい (II. 3. 29 οὐκέχειν), もののく (II. 3. 327 οὐκέχειν). 列 (a line): ‘ならび’ (II. 3. 113 στίχας), ‘つら’ (II. 4. 90 στίχες). 胸甲 (a breastplate): よろい (II. 3. 332 θῷρηκα), ‘むなよろい’ (II. 4. 133 θῷρηκα).
the rhythm of the text. For example, Kure added different furigana to ‘青铜’ (bronze), and he seems to have made a choice according to the rhythm in the following three textual cases:

‘からかね’ (/karakane/, II. 1. 371 χαλκοχιτῶνων):

青銅の鍬をつけたka-ra-ka-ne-no yo-ro-i-wo-tsu-ke-ta (five-seven syllables)

‘まがね’ (/magane/, II. 1. 426 εἶμι ... χαλκοβατὸς δῶ)

青銅つく宮居にものが ma-ga-ne-shi-ku mi-ya-i-ni-mo-u-de (seven-seven)

‘かね’ (/kane/, II. 5. 75 ψυχρῶν δ' ἐκε χαλκόν ὀδούσιν)

冷たい青銅をもろ歯に咬んだ tsu-me-ta-i-ka-ne-wo mo-ro-ha-ni-ka-n-da (seven-seven)

Kure understood that the translations must sound euphonic, because five-seven, seven-five, or seven-seven syllable patterns usually sound more comfortable for Japanese people. Kure deliberately chose each furigana for making a good rhythm. Thirdly, the strategy makes the expression of his translation more effective. For example, we usually call ‘掌’ (the palm of the hand) as ‘てのひら’ in ordinary conversation. Therefore, when ‘掌’ is used in a speech of a character (i.e. Achilles) at II. 1. 238 παλάμης, Kure’s furigana ‘てのひら’ is appropriate. But when it is used in a narrative part like at II. 6. 318 (χειποι), Kure’s choice of another furigana ‘たなごこざ’ is also appropriate. ‘たなごこざ’ is a Classical Japanese word and it makes the translation sound more dignified. Moreover, when Agamemnon was angry with Achilles and called himself as ‘私’ (‘I’, at II. 1. 132), Kure added the furigana ‘たし’ which is usually used by men informally. Therefore, it suggests that Agamemnon does not respect Achilles and makes him aware of who is higher ranked. On the other hand, when Helen talked with Priam and called herself as ‘私’ (II. 3. 180), Kure used another furigana ‘わたくし’. This is a polite pronoun meaning ‘I’ and it suggests Helen respected Priam.

Another strategy was to add the same furigana to different kanji. Thus, Kure added the same furigana, ‘としよう’ to ‘老人’ (an old man, II. 1. 358 γέρωντι) and ‘老神’

In the preface of his Iliad, Kure (1964: 3) argued ‘In translation I have taken great care in pitch and rhythm’.

Let us remember traditional Japanese poems: Haiku has 5-7-5 and Tanka 5-7-5-7-7 syllables.

Similarly, Kure translated ‘頭髪’ (hair) in two ways and made a good rhythm: ‘かみのけ’ (/kaminoke/, II. 2. 65 κομόωντας ‘having abundant hair’), 頭髪を垂れなびかせるka-mi-no-ke-wo ta-re-na-bi-ka-se-ru (five-seven syllables), ‘かみ’ (/kami/, II. 2. 542 διπαθὲν κομόωντας ‘having abundant hair at the back’), 後ろ側だけ頭髪を延ばしたu-shi-ro-ga-wa-da-ke ka-mi-wo-no-ba-shi-ta (seven-seven).
(an old god, *Il. 1. 538 γέρωντος*). The effect of the strategy is to mainly appeal to the visual sense. For example, it is possible to translate *Il. 1. 538 (Θετίς,*) θυγάτηρ ἄλοιπον γέρωντος as either ‘海の老神の娘’ (daughter of the old god of the sea) or ‘海の老人の娘’ (daughter of the old man of the sea). But ‘老神’, which Kure chose to adopt, makes us notice that Thetis is a daughter of a god and that she is sacred, at the moment of seeing the word.

According to Shogo Kawasoko, a student of Kure and a like-minded scholar of Western Classics, there are two salient features which demonstrate that Kure consciously strove to preserve a consistently Western Classical style within the translations of his Japanese texts. First, it was Kure who advised Kawasoko not to write ‘ギリシア’ (Greece), because the original Latin word (Graecia) contained the sound ‘a’ (/a/). Secondly, Kure went on to criticize Kawasoko for deleting all of the Japanese macrons that had been used to indicate a long vowel sound in the proper nouns found in his original translation. For Kure, they must be kept to maintain the translation’s affinity with Classical texts.

Strategies in Kure’s translations (2): domestication

It is important to note that Kure also used domestication strategies in his translation work in addition to foreignization. First, he sometimes made a translation feel more naturally Japanese by adjusting the meaning of Classical texts to meet standards of contemporary Japanese sensibility. For example, epithets occur with greater frequency in epic than in regular modern literature. If it were quite literally translated, the Japanese translation of such an epithetical word or phrase would sometimes seem unnatural, perhaps even discordant, to the ear. Therefore, Kure occasionally chose to translate an epithet by adjusting its meaning in accordance with the given situation at hand. For example, although ἀμύμων is usually meant to denote the notion of ‘blameless, excellent’, Kure translated ἀμύμωνος Αἰγίσθοιο at *Od. 1. 20* as ‘人柄のよいアイギストス’ (‘pleasant’ Aegisthus), choosing this epithet because Aegisthus is in fact an adulterer so that the adjective ‘blameless’ would be inappropriate used to describe him. Moreover, ἕχέφρων is usually meant to denote ‘sensible’, but Kure translated ἕχέφρωνα (Πηνελόπειαν) at *Od. 13. 406* as ‘志操堅固な’ (constant), because the Japanese word implies that Penelope constantly awaited her husband Odysseus’


30 See Kure (1971: 419).

31 Kawasoko (1978: 10).
When a very commonplace epithet δίος, whose original is meant to denote ‘divine, noble, goodly’, is used for Eumaeus, a lowly swineherd, Kure translated the word as ‘人のよい’ (soft-hearted: *Od.* 14. 48, 401, 413 δίος ὑψοββός). If Kure had translated the phrase as ‘divine swineherd’, Japanese readers would have felt that his translation was strangely disjointed. He translated δίος Χάρβδος at *Od.* 12. 235 as ‘恐ろしいカリウブディイス’ (‘terrible’ Charybdis) to emphasize the nature of Charybdis’ monstrosity. Finally, in the scene of Odysseus’ journey to the Greek underworld, Agamemnon hopes that his son Orestes is still alive, so he calls him ‘δίος Ὀρέστης’ at *Od.* 11. 461. Kure translated this as ‘大切なオレステス’ (‘precious’ Orestes) to underscore Agamemnon’s emotional state as a father. The three Japanese meanings (‘soft-hearted’, ‘terrible’, and ‘precious’) are far from the original meaning of δίος, but they are entirely appropriate towards meeting the context of the translation.

Secondly, Kure’s use of archaic Japanese words can be offered as an example not only of foreignization, but also of domestication at the same time. It is worth noting that the oldest anthology of Japanese poetry *Manyoshu* (万葉集) was especially influential on Kure’s later translations. For example, he once translated a hymnal verse to the ancient Egyptian Sun God Aten which meant ‘I would like you to be here’ with the Japanese phrase ‘きみimasokari tamae re ba (君いましょうかたまへねば)’. Although Kure translated the verb form ‘to be’ as ‘imasokari’, contemporary translators might choose instead to translate it as ‘iru’ or ‘aru’ in the modern Japanese language. However, the word ‘imasokari’ is both intelligible and appropriate in giving the text an archaic air. In defending this singular word, borrowed directly from the text of *Manyoshu*, Kure commented that ‘iru’ or ‘aru’ were too light in their relative meaning to adequately express the existence of the Sun God. He believed the textual gravitas achieved by employing ‘imasokari’ was far more suitable in such a context. Moreover, as Kure further pointed out, one of the reasons he chose to use archaic Japanese words throughout his translations was that the words contained in the *Manyoshu* included many particles and were thus more useful at conveying feelings and for creating subtlety in sentence structures. Interestingly, Western Classical literature includes a lot of particlization. Homer is said to have overused particles in many of his texts — τε, γε, μέν, etc. This common linguistic point occurring between the Greek and the Japanese languages must have inspired Kure to choose certain archaic Japanese words for inclusion in his translation. Furthermore, such a notion may be demonstrated with the following list of words taken from Kure’s translations and that are also found in the *Manyoshu*: II. 1. 216

32 See Kure (1972: 394).
33 See Kure (1971: 419).

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Thirdly, Kure sometimes used special expressions found in kanji, which are peculiar to both Japanese and other Asian cultures. *Kango* (漢語) is one of the major categories\(^{38}\) of Japanese vocabulary, and it is a Japanese word of Chinese-loan origin. Since Japan started westernization in the mid-nineteenth century, many *Kango* were coined to express Western ideas and cultural expression which flowed into Japan.\(^{39}\) Moreover, it is known that intellectuals of the Meiji period (1868–1912) had a sound knowledge of Chinese Classics. Therefore, it was common that sentences written in Japanese had many *Kango* or were representative of the Chinese Classical style. Such sentences would have been immediately understandable for readers of Meiji period.\(^{40}\) Kure’s father, Shuzo, studied Chinese Classics extensively,\(^{41}\) and Kure shared a great appreciation of Chinese Classics possibly because of his father’s influence. Kure sometimes used Classical Chinese literary terms in his Japanese translations: e.g. 驚舌 (a foreign tongue, *Il.* 2. 867 βαρβαρωφων), 面帕 (veil, *E. IT.* 372 καλυμμάτων), 薄帕 (a web, *E. IT.* 1150 φάρεα), 銀針 (a sting *E. IT.* 1456 οίστροις). Moreover, he often used distinctive four-character idiomatic compounds (四字熟語, *Yojijukugo*) of Chinese origin: e.g. ‘傲慢不遜’ (ʊβρων, *Od.* 16. 86), ‘不承不承’ (απεκαζόμενος, *Od.* 18. 135), ‘不墮金剛’ (ἀδαμαντίνων *A. Pr.* 6).\(^{42}\) The effect of using *Yojijukugo* is that Kure’s translation becomes more convincing because *Yojijukugo* is sometimes used to express a proverb and thus makes his translation more dignified.

Similarly, Kure used terms borrowed from Buddhist scripture,\(^{43}\) which make his translation have gravitas and therefore become more sacred. As such, these translations are entirely appropriate for use with Greek and Roman Classics: ‘起誓’ (a prayer, *Il.* 1. 65 εἰςχολης), ‘懈怠(なく)’ ([without] negligence, *Il.* 1. 77 πρόφερων), ‘定業’ (destiny, *Il.* 2. 155 ὀπέμμορα), ‘増上慢’ (recklessness, *Il.* 4. 409 ἀτασθαλής), ‘経

\(^{38}\) Other categories are *Wago* (和語) which are native Japanese words and *Gairaigo* (外来語) which are words borrowed from foreign countries.

\(^{39}\) See Yanabu (2010: 11–12).

\(^{40}\) See Saito (2012: 170).


\(^{42}\) See also ‘傲慢無礼’ (insolent, *Od.* 1. 227 υβρίζωντες) and ‘無間地獄’ (Tartarus, *A. Pr.* 154 Τάρατραν.

\(^{43}\) Kure said he often read Buddhist texts since he was a junior high school student (Kure 1970: 189).
Kure and the two translation strategies

As mentioned above, two translation strategies (i.e. foreignization and domestication) coexist in equal measure within Kure’s overall translation work. He used both strategies with great dexterity in order to bridge Western Classicism and modern Japanese culture. Kure exerted considerable efforts to push Japanese readers’ acceptance of Western Classics by making the literature accessible to Japanese aesthetic sensibilities.

One of the principal reasons why Kure used a foreignization strategy must be that he was fascinated by the beauty found in Western Classics, and he wanted to let Japanese readers appreciate it for themselves. For example, Masaaki Kubo, who is the seventh president of the Classical Society of Japan, said, ‘Kure spared no effort to bring his translations as close as possible to the perfect beauty which Greek and

44 Noma (1979: 23).
46 For this translation, see Kure (1976: 219).
47 Examples of the translators who have also chosen to use both strategies in their own works include Roan Uchida, Ogai Mori, and Shiken Morita (Saito 2012: 56, 141).
Roman literary men had attained in their works. This was a sentiment that Kure sometimes expressed explicitly; claiming, for example, that the reason why the Classics have such a long life is because they depend on the beauty that expresses eternal humanity and truth. Furthermore, Kure himself had commented that he was struck by the ethereal aesthetic of the Iliad: ‘First of all, its force, beauty and sad precariousness caught my heart... Heroes are destined to war and death, young men are pierced by spears in their breasts and women cry. They show the sadness and beauty of human beings who must die and disappear.

However, the foreignization strategy would not prove sufficiently robust on its own to open the door to foreign Classics for a modern Japanese readership. Although westernization had proceeded incrementally in Japan, there are many possible reasons for a consistent societal rejection of Western cultural media: The long-term duration of Japanese national isolationism, Japanese imperialism, Japan’s defeat in World War II, the huge cultural differences in language systems, etc. So, it was here that Kure’s domestication strategy came to the fore.

By means of his profound knowledge of Japanese literature, Kure was able to make these Western Classics feel very Japanese while still preserving (as he saw it) their inherent dignity. Kure embraced Western culture through distinctly Japanese eyes. In many ways, this was understandable given his personal familiarity with so many literary men from his childhood onwards. For example, the famous poet and psychiatrist Mokichi Saito was a student of Kure’s father. As part of their relationship, Kure showed Saito his own Japanese poems and his translations of Classical Western poetry. Similarly influential was Kure’s friendship with the famous novelist Takeo Arishima who had a direct influence on the course of Kure’s academic studies. Kure was surrounded by famous literary men and so a literary career is not surprising. What is remarkable is that while he composed some of his own Japanese poetry, it was in the field of translation that Kure was best able to deploy his deep knowledge of Japanese literature and language.

Conclusion: evaluation of Kure’s translation
Kure’s translations are a direct combination of both ancient Western culture and Japanese traditional culture. As such, they may rightfully be described as ‘unique’, and critics are almost united in praise of their idiosyncracy. Kawasoko said that he has been concerned for a long time with how to understand the charm found in the

48 Kubo (1978: 21).
49 Kure (1953: 12).
51 Kure (1976: 190–1).
54 Kawasoko (1978: 8).
unique style of Kure’s translation. Tatsuhiko Shibusawa said that he had paid attention to Kure since he is one of the translators who chose to employ a unique translation style.

It cannot be denied that there are arguments both for and against Kure’s translations. Many would echo Kawasoko’s observation made to Kure himself: ‘Contemporary students do not understand your translation because your Japanese is too difficult.’ Others criticize not the translations’ level of intelligibility, but of their style. As Sibusawa observed, the style of Kure’s translations has its own special detractors. For example Masao Asai, a professor of German literature, who argues that Kure’s translations exhibits a rather ‘feminine’ style that should not be adopted for Western literature, and that we must instead translate using ‘formal and logical’ Japanese language to transmit any essentials of European culture.

Yet, even those scholars who are critical of his translations cannot deny the extent of their collective influence. Kure’s translations have won numerous awards; for example, in 1959 Kure received the Yomiuri Prize for Literature because of his prodigious Japanese language translation of the *Iliad*. In 1973, Kure received a prize for *Flower Crown*, an anthology of his selected translations. A review in the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper celebrated it as one of the best five translations available in modern Japan. Thus, while opinions are clearly divided among scholars and reviewers alike on Kure’s translation, one thing, however, is certain. Kure’s translations represent one of the most significant channels by which Western Classical literature has been spread in modern Japan. In 1948, Kure said that Classical literature, for example that of Dante Alighieri or Homer, was hardly ever read in Japan. Kure’s translations changed all of this. In the space of his own lifetime, Kure’s translations of Homer were published no less than four times. Even now, Kure’s translations are still in reprint and readily found sold in bookstores throughout Japan. In the twenty-first century, new editions of Kure’s translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to be published yet again. His translations have exhibited an ‘umbrella effect’ so that other Classical literary works have enjoyed popularity in

55 Shibusawa (1978: 28). Shibusawa is a prolific translator from French literature, especially the works taken from the Marquis de Sade, and he is well-known for his flowing, yet colloquial, translation style.
56 Kawasoko (1978: 8–9).
57 Sibusawa (1978: 29).
58 Similarly Ogawa (1959: 170) criticizes Kure’s translation of the *Iliad*, saying that it is a weak and an unprofessional translation.
60 Noma (1979: 21).
61 Kure (1948: 9).
62 The *Iliad* was republished in 2003 by Heibonsha, and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in 2005 by Issuisha.
Japan. In 1978, Yaeko Nogami wrote a postscript to the Japanese edition of Bullfinch’s *The Age of Fable* in translation. In the postscript, she said that the first edition had been published in 1927, and ‘Compared with 1927, Western Classical studies in Japan have developed very much. We have read many major works, for example Homer and so on, in their original languages and have translated them into Japanese without depending on English translations. I believe Shigeichi Kure is the man who contributed the most to this work, and I have missed him greatly since he died last winter’. This simple heartfelt appreciation of Kure’s pioneering role provides a fair valuation of his significant influence on Classical studies in Japan. Kure’s works should be remembered. Shigeichi Kure was able to successfully meld both the foreign and the domestic aspects of his translation method and, as a result, became the father of future Classical studies in Japan. The weight of his contribution can be seen by the general acceptance of Western Classical literature in Japan, and for that we owe him our deepest gratitude.

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**References**


63 Watanabe (2011: 227) said, ‘classical themes make their appearance even in the ubiquitous *manga* or cartoon’. He also said (239), ‘the Greco-Roman novel has been read, translated, and studied by a number of Japanese intellectuals in diverse fields starting from the early Meiji period’.

64 Nogami (1978: 460).

65 Regarding the melding Kure (1947: 125–6) argued, ‘It is important for Japanese scholars to understand not only Western civilization but also Eastern culture… Our future culture will be very fruitful by marrying East and West’.

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