

## **The past as a place of cultural transfer and literary invention – Notes on the presentation of the French medieval culture by Ban Takeo –<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

Modern Japan opened to Occidental countries in the last half of the nineteenth century. Included suddenly in the global economy and politics (even though Japan had not been completely isolated from the world even during the Edo period), Japan rapidly tried to import every aspect of knowledge of Occidental civilization, including its art and literature. In this context, medieval French culture became an object of appropriation by the Japanese people. In this paper, we present an example of this appropriation through the works of Ban Takeo, a rather unknown intellectual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The works of Ban Takeo are important because he had a hybrid cultural background and his works, published mainly before and during World War II, present how a Japanese intellectual thought about the way through which he could share with his compatriots the past belonging to other cultural traditions. In fact, he translated old French texts in his mother tongue by using the lexical resources of old Japanese, and his achievements had a tangible impact on the Medieval studies, even those of the post-WWII era.

To present his thought and practice regarding the interference of two different pasts and languages, we will first present a short biography of Ban Takeo in order to describe his hybrid cultural background. Secondly, we will analyze his thinking with regard to the cultural transfer between Europe and Japan, which seems to have played a certain role in the elaboration of his “analogical approach,” consisting of research on cultural equivalents in the past. Finally, we will present his most important work for his study of the French Middle Age in Japan – the first Japanese translation of the *Song of Roland* – and analyze a few results that relieve his method.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a modified version of our presentation in *Values of the Other*, a symposium held in the Grenoble Alpes University on March 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This revised version received the benefit of JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 20K00515. In this paper, we modernize the Chinese characters used in the quotation in Japanese.

## I Ban Takeo and his hybrid cultural background<sup>2</sup>

Ban Takeo was born in Tokyo in 1904.<sup>3</sup> As a child, he studied at Gakushūin school, which was reserved for the aristocratic society during this period. After finishing this school, he studied French, Greek, and Latin in the Athénée Français, a private and highly esteemed school of French language founded in 1913 by *agrégé des lettres*, Joseph Cotte, who had also been a lector of Greek Literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo. This school, to which even French Marshall Joseph Joffre had visited in 1922, was also officially recognized by the French government so that those who had finished the curriculum of this school were granted the baccalauréat ès Lettres, the French official grade required to enter universities.<sup>4</sup>

Not only did Ban study there, but he was also very engaged in the cultural and pedagogical activities of the school, as we can see from the *Bulletin of Athénée*, a bulletin of the association of alumni. Ban was one of the alumni who were most engaged in school life. He also participated in the representation of the French Theater organized for festivities of the school, as we can see from a photo taken in 1924. Later, a famous French medieval farce, *the Farce of Master Pierre Pathelin*, was represented in the school in May 1933, perhaps for the first time in Japan; we do not know if Ban participated in this representation of this French farce, but it is certain that, at an earlier time, he was very interested in French theater. He also taught Greek and Latin as a teacher, when the founder of the school, Joseph Cotte, had to be absent because of his sickness.

In September 1933, he departed to France on a scholarship from the French government. He studied French philology with several prestigious linguists and medievalists of the time and even attended the lectures of Joseph Bédier, the editor of the *Song of Roland*.<sup>5</sup> We also know that he stayed in Grenoble in 1934, from which he sent a short report to the *Bulletin of Athénée*. We would like to quote this short text, in which we can see how he enjoyed his stay in France and this region:

[...] I came to the city of Grenoble in mid-August. Until now, there should be

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<sup>2</sup> The description developed in this chapter is based on our documentation in Athénée français, namely several numbers of the *Bulletin of Athénée* (『会報アテネ』). As for the consultation of these documents, We express our profound gratitude to Ms. Kawaguchi Ayako, secretary of Athénée français.

<sup>3</sup> See Ban, Masaomi. *Complete Works*. Ed. by Ban Masami, vol. 5. Tokyo, 1932, p. 2377 (阪正臣『縦屋全集』第5巻, 東京, 阪匡身, 1932, p. 2377).

<sup>4</sup> See the home page of Athénée Français (<https://athenee.jp/about/history/>: viewed March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See Ban, Takeo. “The Sorbonnards in 1930s.” *Tō*, 1-6, 1949, pp. 68-70 (坂丈緒「三十年代のソルボナアル—世界の大学 (ソルボンヌ大学)」, 『塔』, 1-6, 1949, pp. 68-70).

about seven Japanese people, including myself. As a summer seminar is opened here for international students, we can pretend to be studying, even if we are much enjoying ourselves. The motorways of France are built very correctly: the bus travels radially from this city in every direction and every day so that I came here from Paris by taking a bus, which seems like a revival form of the stagecoach of old days, via Lyon. If I hurry, I can come up on a day trip from Chamonix or Genève. On the last Saturday of the last month, I saw the *glacée* of Mont-Blanc almost without walking, and also visited the remains of the monastery of Chartreuse in a half-day. The city of Grenoble is sweltering, but if we travel to the mountains there, it is so freezing for passengers in a car with opened windows that they have to be afraid to catch a cold. By September 1st, the fresh snow of the mountain range of Belledonne melted almost entirely, but the air of the fall season began to fill the valley of Grésivaudan [?], and then came the moment when our international friends had to leave the city with some sentiment. I also depart from here at the beginning of October and will stay around Auvergne as long as I can pay the travel, before returning to Paris. Please take care of yourself.<sup>6</sup>

Ban returned to Japan in March 1937, after obtaining a “Diplôme d’études supérieures de philologie française” degree from Sorbonne, and started to teach in Athénée Français. Although he would be one of the first Japanese who obtained a French degree in the field of French philology, after WWII, during which he worked in the Oversea Diplomatic Establishment of Romania, he became a librarian at the National Diet Library in 1945<sup>7</sup> and almost ceased to publish his philological works.

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6 “ [...] 八月の中旬にこのグルノオブルの町に来ました。今のところ日本人が僕とも七人くらい居るはずです。夏期講習が外国学生の為に開かれるので、こゝに来れば遊び乍ら勉強してるやうな顔をして居られるといふわけです。フランスの自動車道路は実に完備して居ますから、この町を中心に八方へバスが毎日通つて居て、現に僕も巴里から汽車によらず昔の diligences が再生した様なバスで、リヨン経由で、この町に来たくらみです。シヤモニイだの、ジュネエブだのへも、少し忙しい目をすれば日帰りで行つて来られます。先月の最後の土曜には殆ど歩かずにモンブランの「氷の海」を見物して来ましたし、このシヤルトルズの僧院跡は半日で見て来ました。グルノオブルの町は熱いんですが、ここまで上るとオオープンの中車内では風邪を引きさうに涼しい。朔日にベルドンヌ連峯においた新雪はあらかた溶けたけれど、秋の気はグラジデダンの谷に立ちこめて、国際的な友達同志が、多少の感傷を残して、別れ去る時が来ました。僕も今月の十月すぎには、此処を立つて予算のゆるす限り、オオエルユヌのあたりを廻つて、巴里に戻るつもりです。どうぞ皆さん御達者で。” (*Bulletin of Athénée*, 6, 1934, p. 19 (『会報アテネ』, 6, 1934, p. 19))

<sup>7</sup> *Who's who in Japanese Bureaucracy*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed., Tokyo: Nihon-kankai-jōhōsha, 1954, pp. 510-511 (『日本官界名鑑』第十版, 東京, 日本官界情報社, 1954, pp. 510-511). We express our profound gratitude to a librarian of the National Diet Library for his instruction about Ban's status in this institution.

However, he continued to teach Greek in the Athénée Français and French in some universities in Tokyo. His career as a librarian finished in March 1971 (an approximate date), and he died in 1983.

As we can see immediately, Ban was an intellectual elite of pre-WWII Japan, imbued with Western culture. However, we must point out another face of this person. Ban Takeo was the second son of Ban Masaomi, a famous poet of Waka, a form of traditional Japanese poetry, and the Imperial family's teacher for this form of art (apparently, it was Ban Takeo who donated his father's classic collection to the National Diet Library).<sup>8</sup> He was also the brother of Ban Masami, a military member of the Imperial Navy, who died in the Battle of Surigao Strait on October 25, 1944 as the captain of the Battleship Fusō.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Ban Takeo was very close not only to the French community in Tokyo during the pre-war period but also to those who were involved in Japanese cultural tradition and even modern Japanese militarism.<sup>10</sup>

## II The past as a source of cultural transfer and the elaboration of the “analogical approach”

As a person nourished by European and Japanese cultural traditions, Ban Takeo seemed to be very interested in the idea of cultural transfer between old European and Japanese cultures, especially in the past. In a short text entitled simply as “Note” and published in the *Bulletin of Athénée* in 1930, the young Ban points out the similarities between the episode of Arion, a legendary poet of the ancient Greeks, presented by Herodotus, and an episode of a young merchant in *Kasshi-Yawa*, an anthology of essays written by a feudal lord, Matsuura Seizan, in the first half of the nineteenth century. We quote a passage in which Ban presents this idea of cultural transfer:

*Kasshi-Yawa* is a collection of essays written by the feudal lord of Hirado (I

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<sup>8</sup> As for the life of Ban Masaomi, see Namikawa, Mikio. “A court poet and Kamakura: Ban Masaomi and his surroundings.” *The Journal of Kokugakuin University*, June 1995, pp. 64-77 (浪川幹夫「ひとりの宮廷歌人と鎌倉——阪正臣とその周辺——」, 『国学院雑誌』, 1995年6月, pp. 64-77); Katō, Junichi. “First half of the life of Ban Masaomi: the road to the Imperial Poetry Bureau.” *Tōkai Research Reports*, 1, 2007, pp. 90-111 (加藤順一「阪正臣の前半生—歌所への道—」, 『研究報告とうかい』, 1, 2007, pp. 90-111).

<sup>9</sup> “Tasteful and Brave General: vice-admiral Ban Masami, captain of the Battleship Fusō.” *Maru*, December 1959, p. 39 (「風流肌の猛将：「扶桑」艦長 阪匡身中将」, 『丸』, 1959年12月号, p. 39).

<sup>10</sup> Our documentation of the early writings of Ban is in process. We would like to give a more exhaustive insight on them on another occasion.

add this note because I dare to guess that there are not many people who have read this, as any collections of one-yen books do not contain this work). It is not older than about a century, so there is no wonder if this episode could have been transformed a lot and now looks like a purely Japanese subject, as we can see here. The legend of Yuriwaka, recorded in a book of *Kōwaka-mai* [a primitive form of *Nō*], is considered by some critics as a transformation of the history of Odysseus. Still, in this case, the version that I present here seems to preserve more of its original figure. However, we cannot find the weaving of Ariadne, which is an essential element, in Yuriwaka's wife, nor does any charming dolphin appear to appreciate the arts in this episode of Arion of Sanuki [the region corresponding to the preference of Kagawa]. If the Greek version insists on the particular abundance of divine grace on poets and musicians, the Japanese version merely preaches the salvation of those who are devout. Thus, the latter is somehow more mercenary, or at least more modern in its conception of a supernatural being, and perhaps because of these changes, there is no precision about the actor of this salvation of shipwreck. In any case, we can consider this spiritual record of God Kompira derived directly from Europe. [...] It must be fascinating if we can know how this legend of Arion had drifted from the Ionian Sea to the Seto Island Sea. [...]<sup>11</sup>

Ban was profoundly attached to this idea. That is to say, ten years later, after his study in Paris, he published even a French translation of the legend of Yuriwaka, which he mentioned in the last quotation. We can see the persistence of his thinking on cultural transfer in the introduction of this translation, which I quote below:

### The Legend of Yuriwaka

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<sup>11</sup> “大体甲子夜話といふのは、(多分読んだ方はあまり沢山はなからうといふ失礼なあて推量からこんな註をつけるのです、どこの円本全集にもはいつていない様ですから) 平戸の殿様の随筆録で、やつと百年ばかり前の著作ですから、この位、さも土着のものらしく変形してゐるとしても不思議はないでせう。幸若舞の本に伝はつてゐる百合若大臣の説話はユリツセスの作りかへだといふ説がありますが、それよりも、これの方がプロトタイプには近い様です。たゞ百合若の奥方に、大事なペネロオペの織機<sup>はた</sup>が無いやうに、この讃岐のアリオンには、芸術を解する愛すべき海豚が出て来ない。希臘の話では詩人や音楽家の上に特に神の恩寵が多いことを説いてゐるのに、こつちでは直接それに信仰のあついで者の危難を救ふという風に、せちがらくなつてゐるとでも言ひますか、とにかく超自然的存在に対する考へ方が新しくなつてゐるために、この水難救済の行動者を具体化さなかつたと見るべきでせうか。なんにしてもこの金毘羅様の靈驗記は欧羅巴直伝のものとして見て差つかへなささうです。[...] 何んな経路で、このアリオン伝説が、イオニア海から瀬戸内海へ漂ひ寄せたかを調べる事が出来たら相当面白いに違ひありません。[...] ” (*Bulletin of Athénée*, 2, 1930, p. 4 (『会報アテネ』, 2, 1930, p. 4))

This legend of Yuriwaka has certain specificities that curiously evoke some episodes of the *Odyssey*. It seems that this legend cannot go back to before the end of the 13th century because of the mention of the Mongol invasion. The *Kōwaka-no-maï* version that I chose among others is dated only to the 16th century because these stories, accompanied by dances (which are more or less mimics), can be considered quite rightly as one of the primitive forms of *Nō*.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, he presented the *Kōwaka-no-maï* (or *Kōwaka-maï*) version of the legend of Yuriwaka as artistic artifacts based on a Greek-originated subject but executed in the context of Japanese performing arts. This image of the cultural mixture, underlined in this introduction, is also reinforced by a textual elaboration of his translation. Ban translated a verse inserted in the original narration, a verse written in a Japanese poetic fixed form, by using a French verse:

Chère amie qui m'attendez,  
L'espérance point ne perdez,  
Et vous fiez au vent volage  
Qui vous a porté ce message.<sup>13</sup>

My sweet dear, who are waiting for me,  
Never lose hope,  
Also, trust the fickle wind  
Which carried this message to you.

He translates this enigmatic waka, written in the fixed form of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, by using a French form of four lines of eight syllables, rhyming two by two. The result is a “francization” of the Japanese poem, even in a formal aspect. The Greek-originated subject, stylized in the Japanese literary and theatrical tradition, became once again “Occidentalized” in the hands of Ban.

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<sup>12</sup> “La Légende de Yuriwaka

Cette légende japonaise a des traits qui rappellent curieusement certains épisodes de l’*Odysée*. Elle ne peut pas remonter, semble-t-il, au delà de la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle à cause de son souvenir des invasions mongoles ; et la version du *Kōwaka-no-maï* que j’ai choisie entre autres ne date que du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle étant donné que ces récits accompagnés de danses plus ou moins mimiques peuvent être considérés à juste titre comme une des formes primitives du *Nō*.” (*Bulletin of Athénée*, 12, 1940, partie française, p. 7 (『会報アテネ』, 12, 1940, partie française, p. 7))

<sup>13</sup> *Bulletin of Athénée*, 12, 1940, p. 9 (『会報アテネ』, 12, 1940, p. 9). The corresponding Japanese text would be as follows : 「とふとりのあとばかりをはたのめきみ／うはのそらなるかせのたよりを」 (*Shin Gunsho Ruijū*, vol. 8. Tokyo: Kokusho-kankōkai, 1906, p. 44 (『新群書類従』, 第8巻, 東京, 国書刊行会, 1906, p. 44))

These tentative efforts can be nothing but a vain dream of an intellectual who desired to “Occidentalize” his own culture. However, Ban’s respect for his cultural heritage can be perceived in his translation of *Mask and the Thurible* of Gaston Baty, published in 1942. In his translation of this book, where the author, Gaston Baty, sought in the medieval liturgy the most profound and innovative power to invigorate the modern theater arts, Ban tried to translate the medieval French text quoted in the original work by using old Japanese, and did this in a very systematic way – dare we say an “analogical approach”:

In the first half of the original book, there is some quotation in Latin or Old French. As I dislike mixing Western languages in Japanese text, I retained only my Japanese translation, without keeping any original texts. However, as I had to mark these quotations, in the first half of this book, I used the Japanese archaic literary style to translate quotations in Latin (or those that were already translated in French in the original book but were initially and indeed written in Latin). In addition, for the quotations in Old French (that of the 12th century as well as that of the 15th century), I introduced the oral Japanese (or something like this) of the Muromachi period [= 1336-1573]. I believe that this procedure can be estimated more than my mere pastime.<sup>14</sup>

We can now see his conviction, hereafter consolidated almost as a method: the Japanese language and its culture could offer equivalents to sufficiently represent the European languages and its culture. If he declares that he “dislikes mixing Occidental languages in Japanese text,” this statement apparently results from his profound respect for the two cultural traditions, for both of which he could consider himself a successor and introducer. In addition, his translations of some passages of Medieval French theater, including the *Mystère de la Passion* of Arnoul Gréban, show us how he could admirably stylize the Medieval French theater in Japanese.

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<sup>14</sup> “原書の前半には、羅典語及び古代仏蘭西語の引用文が多少入つてゐるが、邦訳文中に欧文を混ぜることは嫌ひなので、それ等の原文は再録せず、訳文のみとした。但し、これ等を区別する必要がある爲、前半に於ては、羅典文（或は原書に仏訳して引用されてゐても、元來羅典文である事が確かなもの）には擬古文章体を用ひ、古代仏蘭西語は、十二世紀のものも、十五世紀のものも、均し並に吾が室町時代の口語（と覺しきもの）を用ひて訳した。これは必ずしも訳者の道楽気ばかりではない積りである。” (Baty, Gaston. *The essential of the theater* [original title: *Mask and Thurible (Le Masque et l'encensoir)*]. Translated by Ban Takeo. Tokyo: Hakusuisya, 1942, pp. 13-14 (ガストン・バティ『演劇の本質』坂丈緒訳, 白水社, 1942, pp. 13-14)

### III “Analogical approach” in the time of crisis

This contrastive presentation and understanding, that we called “analogical approach,” had already been applied massively in his Japanese translation of the *Song of Roland* – a masterpiece of French medieval epic, published in 1941 (one year before his translation of *Mask and Thurible*).<sup>15</sup> This translation is the most important of his works in several ways. This translation was published as a volume of the *Collection of World War Literature*, which was planned to promote Japan’s then expansionist policy. Thus, this translation could have played a political role at the time.

As for the “analogical approach,” he seems to have met some difficulties in its practice, unlike one year later in *Mask and Thurible*, as shown below:

Perhaps I have made the style of the translation too archaistic. On the one hand, it is because I had been influenced by the tone of this old story written in old French; on the other hand, it is because I did not want to use words that sound too modern, although it was about a translation. That is why I finished by creating this strange style that had never been seen in any period. For words designating the arms, harness, and clothing, I tried to use, as much as possible, Japanese words that designate similar things. When I could not find any, I was obliged to invent new Japanese words that seemed adequate. In any way, all these words are no more than signs, and I tried to show, as much as possible, what these words had signified in the time by explanations and images that I grouped separately.<sup>16</sup>

This quotation is precious because we can see here what was happening in his work of translating. In fact, in order to represent the French Middle Ages in Japanese, he tried at first to seek equivalent words from old Japanese, and it was only after this research that he dared to invent new words, probably against his will. In other words, he tried to find a series of equivalent words that would permit readers to smoothly link the French and the Japanese Middle Ages. At the same time, he was also aware of the

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<sup>15</sup> *The Song of Roland : Islamic War*. Translated by Ban Takeo. Tokyo: Ars, 1941 (『ロオランの歌 回教戦争』坂丈緒訳, 東京, アルス, 1941).

<sup>16</sup> “訳文が多少擬古的になり過ぎた嫌ひがあるが, それは一つには古代仏蘭西語で書かれたこの古い物語の調子に引摺られたせみであり, 一つには又, 語感の新し過ぎる言葉は, 如何に翻訳と雖も避けたかったので, 何れの時代にも存在しなかつたやうな, かゝる奇妙な文体が出来上がった次第である。武具, 馬具を初め服装や風俗を示す単語は, 出来るだけそれに近い物を示す和名を用ひ, 又さう云ふ物の名所 {などころ} の全く日本に存在しない物には, 訳者が適当と考へた和名を發明するより外なかつた。これは何れにしても一種の符牒に過ぎないから, それ等が實際何んなものであつたかは, 別項の説明と図版によつて出来るだけ明かにして置いた積りである。” (*ibid.*, p. 3)

impossibility of establishing a perfect series of equivalents. In fact, for Ban, the analogy was realizable only in a general tone (which remains “strange” according to him), by creating an archaic style of which the model would be chronologically close to the period of the original work, but not in detail.

Despite this limitation, his tentative was full of promises. His way of translating the *Song of Roland* in archaic Japanese has been adapted by other translators of the epic after WWII up until the end of the 20th century,<sup>17</sup> even if his implication for this propagandistic project seems to have largely influenced his post-war career.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, we would like to quote an example in which his “analogical approach” may have modified the whole impression of this French epic – a specific use of the word *iteki* (夷狄). This word means “barbarian” and Ban used it to translate the French word *paien*, which means “pagan.” The word *iteki* is a very old one, and he preferred this word to a more accurate new word – *ikyōto* (異教徒) – perhaps because of the former’s oldness.<sup>19</sup> However, this choice was susceptible to modifying the impression of the *Song of Roland*, which was initially written as an epic of the Christian warriors against Muslims. In fact, the word *iteki* has been used since the end of the Edo period to designate the Occidentals, considered barbarians who could not recognize the dignity of the Emperor and the Japanese regime. As a result, through the use of the word *iteki*, the *Song of Roland* could bear another dimension of the lecture: an epic narrating the battle of the civilized people against the Barbarians, in other words, the battle of the civilized Japanese people against the barbaric Occidentals.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to describe the career of philologist Ban Takeo, which has been largely ignored until now. As an intellectual elite with a double cultural background, he thought a lot about possible cultural transfer in the past. This interest in cultural transfer and his “analogical approach” enabled him to represent medieval French culture in a very stylized Japanese manner, even if he was aware of the limitations of his method. His contribution is undeniable; the first translation of the *Song of Roland* was followed by post-war translators in many senses. The pasts of two different cultural traditions and languages became connected under his pen, while each one continuing to conserve its esthetic coherency.

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<sup>17</sup> See the translations by Satō Teruo (Chikuma-shobō, 1962), Arinaga Hiroto (Iwanami-bunko, 1965), and Kamizawa Eizō (Hakusuisha, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Ban published very few writings after WWII.

<sup>19</sup> See *Complete Japanese Language Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1. Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2000, p. 876 and *ibid.*, p. 1218 (『日本国語大辞典』(第二版), 1, 東京, 小学館, 2000, p. 876 and *ibid.*, p. 1218).

The essay of Ban tells us how our cultural heritage could permit us to incorporate those of the others, even in an approximate and sometimes dubious way. At the same time, as Ban told himself, the absence of equivalents in Old French and Old Japanese invited him to create new Japanese vocabulary. In this sense, the meeting of two “Middle Ages’ became a genuine occasion for language creation.