

The Early Phase of Japanese Literature in Bangla in Periodicals

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Abstract

Many Japanese literary texts have been translated recently into Bangla. However, nobody has yet identified the first translation of Japanese literary text in the periodicals until today. The purpose of this paper is first to map the early phase of Japanese literature in Bangla periodicals; second, it attempts to distinguish the first piece of Japanese literature in Bangla; and third, it strives to ascertain the trends in interpreting Japanese literature in the second half of the 19th century. At least four pieces of literature are unearthed for the first time in this article. Despite not embracing the original Japanese or English name in the title in Bangla, *Gonpachikomurasakihiyokufun* (The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki) and *Hone Kawa* (*Bones and Ribs*) became the earliest Japanese literary specimens in Bangla. Colonial influence and preference for works of religious significance pertinent to Bengal society – are pinned down as the trends in interpreting Japanese literature in periodicals in the 19th century.

Keywords: Bangla, first Japanese literature, periodical, 19th century

In the latter half of the 19th century, Bengal province¹ arose with its flourishing publishing society, enriching the Bangla² language and literature by translating foreign and continental texts. Both creative writing and translation³ experienced a parallel stride in periodicals during this period. While looking for the earliest translation of Japanese literature in the prominent periodicals of this century, *Bharati*⁴ stood out for translating Japanese literature by printing at least two writings in two issues of one volume consisting of two translations – a tale and a farce. During the 1856-1900 period, at least 21 writings on Japan and the Japanese culture, including literature printed in nine different periodicals, were found. However, *Prabasi* overshadowed any magazines by printing the highest number of Japan-related essays in at least 44 issues from the 19th to the 20th century. *Sahitya* has the highest record for publishing translations of Japanese literature compared with several contemporary critical literary periodicals that published Japan and Japan-related articles during the 19th and 20th centuries. From these numbers, this paper intends to first sketch the earlier phase of Japanese literature in Bangla in the second half of the 19th century. Second, it intends to recognize the first Japanese literature interpretation in Bangla, and third, it attempts to determine the trends in interpreting Japanese literature in Bangla.

Literature Review and Methodology

Although “Nikki Kimura, a scholar and monk from Japan who studied Sanskrit in Chattagram, took admission at the Oriental Studies Department of Calcutta University in 1911” (Azuma, 1996, p. 2), this precedent is not the earliest Japan-Bengal relationship from various perspectives. Previous researchers have discussed Manilal Gangopadhyay’s *Japani Phanus* (1908) and *Jhumjumi* (1910) consisted of several Japanese tales (Mitra, 1958, p. 230). However, “*Japan-Probas* and *Japan* by Manmathnath Ghosh and Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyay, respectively, can be considered to be the earliest Bengali travel narratives that portray Japan in the early 20th century through a Bengal gaze” (Keeni, n.d., p. 1). Subrata Kumar Das believed that between the two of them, Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyay was the first Bengali person to write about Japan (Das, 2009). However, Milinda Banerjee has stated Ramakanta Ray as one of the earliest Bengali residents in Japan (Banerjee, 2018, p. 168). The latter wrote a letter from Japan, enunciating his profound respect for the Japanese people (R. Ray, 1901, p. 160). On the other hand, Gita Keeni indicated Rabindranath Tagore as the first translator by including a Bashō’s haiku in his *Japan Jatri* (1919) (Keeni, 2006, p. 298). Furthermore, the four phases of the development of Japanese literature in India identified by Sachidananda did not show a starting point of the year as she clearly stated that “the first phase began in the mid-50s” of the 20th century by pointing out the Hindi translation of *Genji Monogatari* (Sachidananda, 2010, p. 474). In addition, Lopamudra Malek, while analyzing a few instances of Japanese poetry, did not emphasize any historical context of publishing Japanese poems in Bangla. Instead, she focused on discussing the significance of Japanese poets, consequentially Matsuo Bashō, Taniguchi Buson, Kobayashi Issa, and a few songs from Nakano Shigeharu, Yosano Akiko, Sakutarō Hagiwara, and Yone Noguchi (Malek, 2018). She

¹ In this paper, “Bengal Province” expresses the undivided so-called Bengal area in the Indian subcontinent, and “Bengali” is used for the Bengali nation.

² Although, “Bengali” is used by the Indian Bengali people for the Bangla language and other scholars in the world, Bangla is used in this paper to acknowledge the state language in Bangladesh.

³ In this paper, translation means the piece of work.

⁴ Due to the pandemic effect, the primary data for periodicals collected from the digital library of University of Heidelberg. All the volumes of the periodicals are collected in a digitized form from CrossAsia-Repository of Heidelberg University Library <http://crossasia-repository.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/view/schriftenreihen/sr-48.html?lang=en>, retrieved February 25, 2022 and from Internet Archive Books <https://archive.org/details/internetarchivebooks>, retrieved February 25, 2022.

also stated that the first introduction of *haiku* was occurred through *Japani Jhinuk* (1940) by Surendranath Maitra. However, Lopamudra Malek indicated that Rabindranath Tagore included a Japanese poem in his *Kari o Komal* (1886) (Malek, 2018). The original source of this poem, which was included under the subtitle “Bideshi Phuler Guccho” (A Fascicle of Foreign Poems), is yet to discover. These prominent researchers on the Japan-Bengal relationship have explored the phases starting from the beginning of the 20th century. Notably, Subrata Kumar Das, in his book *Sekaler Bangla Samoyikpotre Japan*, is the first researcher to study “Japan” as content in periodicals. He did not pay any particular attention to Japanese literary content. Instead, he noted that five magazines published seven Japan-related writings, excluding literature, during the 19th century (Das, 2012).

This paper intends to fill up the inadequate attention and discovery of the previous researchers in the 19th century, during which we find the earliest translations of Japanese literature in Bangla. The earlier samples of works are located in the periodicals. Therefore, the primary data for this paper is based on the prominent literary periodicals and other magazines the Bangla readers highly appreciated in the 19th century. The newspapers and periodicals that appeared in the 19th century Bengal played a vital role in inaugurating Japan by printing and making news and information about this country and its culture available to the then Bengalis. At least 29 periodicals active in the second half of the 19th century are thoroughly screened for this article, including– *Bharatasanskarak*, *Bamabodhini*, *Bangadarshan*, *Bharati*, *Bibidhartha Sangraha*, *Biva*, *Binapani*, *Birbhu*, *Tattwabodhini*, *Karnadhar*, *Krishitattwa*, *Modhyastha*, *Mohajanbondhu*, *Masik Prakashika*, *Nababidhan*, *Nababarshiki*, *Nabajiban*, *Nabyabharata*, *Rahasyo Sandarbho*, *Sahitya*, and *Sakha*. This paper also intends to identify the observed trends of those translations published in the periodicals.

The two main reasons for not including the periodicals before 1853 are: one, “the tendency of periodicals of the first half of 19th century was producing news” (Ray, 2000, p. 27), and second, due to the Sakoku system of Japan in the Edo period, direct transmission of Japan-related news became difficult in company-ruled India. However, *Bibidhartha Sangraha*, which was founded in 1851, popularized importing foreign educational content and literary components from the West and Indian subcontinent. Therefore, the earliest Japan-related news, “Japan o Japaniyodiger Brittanto,” was published in 1856 in *Bibidhartha Sangraha*, immediately after Matthew Calbraith Perry demanded open access to Nagasaki in 1853, in colonial Bengal. Therefore, 1856 was the first time Japan-related news appeared in the Bangla periodicals.

Japanese Literature in the Periodicals

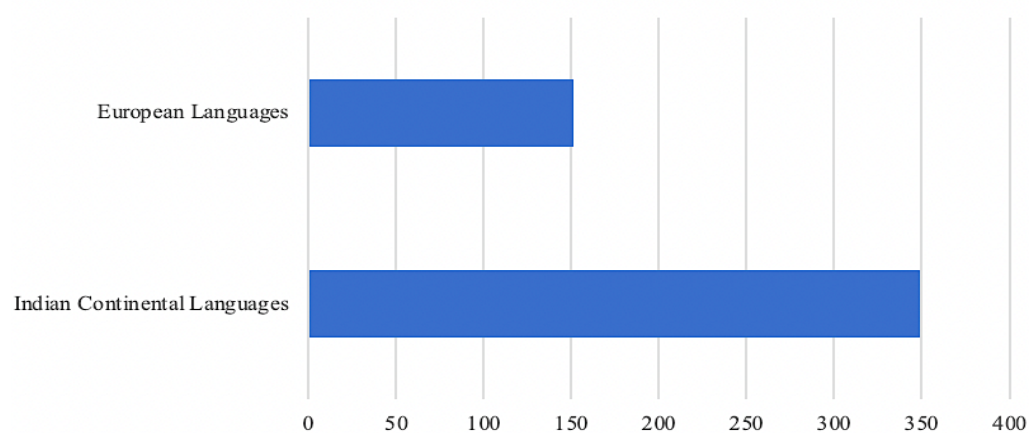
As the timeframe for this paper is outlined from the Sakoku period to the end of the century, the primary data remains within this timeline. According to Priya Joshi, importing books to India saw a sharp rise in the immediate decade after 1857 (Joshi, 2002, p. 40). However, the case of Bengal Province regarding importing books or literature, specifically even before the copyright acts were established in this territory, is yet an undiscovered field of study.

For this study, to identify the oldest piece of translations of Japanese literature in book format, I developed a primary database of translation books in Bangla. Figure 1 is based on a preliminary survey of various libraries and literary history books written in Bangla. It was found that the percentage of translating literature from other Indian languages like Sanskrit was significantly higher than the percentage of translations from European languages (see Figure 1). Surprisingly, the only book available about Japan is *Jepan*, a translation. Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay translated *Narrative of the expedition of an American squadron to the China*

Sea and Japan, performed in 1852, 1853, and 1854, which was originally written by Perry. It was published with the title *Jepan* by the Vernacular Society of Literature in 1863. Several significant disciplines, like folklore, theology, and linguistic surveys, which were highly valued by the then European scholars, caught the attention of the Bengali scholars. The growing intellectual society immersed in patriotic harmony and thrilled to leave behind the colonial influence on their culture in the first half of this century merged into the next 50 years, elevating excellence in cognitive knowledge and humanistic intelligence by producing numerous copies of literary periodicals in the second half of the century. At first, importing foreign content to enrich the Bangla language in those periodicals in the first half of the 19th century was not something favored by the editors or leaders as nationhood, patriotic mentality, and holistic perception received more attention in the effort to conquer colonial supremacy. As “the elite society of the nineteenth century became aware of bringing forth the sufferings of villagers in respect of liability and experience to nationalism, patriotic prosperity, and social welfare” in the newspapers and periodicals (Chowdhury, 2000, p. 55). Meanwhile, weekly periodicals saw a massive surge in number (Mamoon, 2000). We observe an inevitable fluctuation in the number of magazine publications throughout the century. Although the publication of literary periodicals in the first half of the nineteenth century was limited, Muntasir Mamoon believed that the publication of magazines was not feasible due to the low income generated from it (Mamoon, 2000, p. 22). However, a considerable number of the absence of Japan-related books directs this paper to investigate periodicals as a following target survey field.

Figure 1

Translations in Book Format from 1852 to 1900



After exploring the translations in book format, articles in periodicals became essential in this context. About 18 pieces of work, which were published in several periodicals from 1856 to 1937, were translations of Japanese literature, including a song, several poems, a few tales, a farce, prose, and a novel (see Table 1). In the 19th century, three issues of *Bharati*, which appeared in 1881 and 1892, included contents about Japanese literature. However, the first translation of a Japanese song in 1881 was not a standalone piece; instead, the song, which did not have an acknowledged source, was included in an article written anonymously, providing a slight hint of Japanese literature only. Therefore, 1881 marks the initial phase of introducing Japanese literature in the form of a song in Bengal after Japan’s opening to the West in 1853. Ironically, the article that introduced the first Japanese literature was an article whose actual aim was to present contemporary developments in Japan. In other words, it was not a single piece of writing intended to introduce Japanese literature. The intention of a translator or a writer has always been a critical aspect in determining the target text. As a result, in this paper,

I recognize the article “Japaner Bortoman Unnoti” (Current Development in Japan) (1881) as the earliest borderline that translates Japanese literary contents into the form of a song.

Table 1
Japanese Literature in Periodicals

Periodical	Title	Writer/ Translator	Year	BS	Vol.	Issue
<i>Bharati</i>	Japaner Bortoman Unnoti (Current Development in Japan)	Not mentioned	1881	1288	5	3
<i>Bharati</i>	Sompadoker Chitrochoyon: Japani Upakhyan (Editor’s Addition: Japanese Tale)	Swarnakumari Devi	1892	1299	16	2
<i>Bharati</i>	Sompadoker Chitrochoyon: Japani Prohoson (Editor’s Addition: Japanese Farce)	Swarnakumari Devi	1892	1299	16	3
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japaner Prothom Uponyas (The First Japanese Novel)	Sharacchandra Das	1897	1304	8	2
<i>Dasi</i>	Ekti Japani Golpo (A Japanese Story)	Not mentioned	1897	1303	6	3~5
<i>Mukul</i>	Japani Rupkotha (Japanese Fairy Tales) *	Priyambada Devi	1904	1311	10	3
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japani Golpo (Japanese Stories)	Ramlal	1906	1313	17	8
<i>Mukul</i>	Japaner Upokotha (Japanese Fairy Tales) *	Abaninath Mitra	1907	1314	13	10
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japani Kabita (Japanese Poetry) *	Satyendranath Dutt	1908	1315	19	2
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japani Golpo (Japanese Stories) *	Manilal Gangopadhyay	1908	1315	19	9
<i>Prabasi</i>	Tonsakur Bipotti (Trouble of Tonsaku)	Sureshchandra Bandopadhyay	1910	1317	10.1	4
<i>Prabasi</i>	Matsuyama Darpan (The Mirror of Matsuyama)	Sureshchandra Bandopadhyay	1910	1317	10.2	6
<i>Prativa</i>	Namiko (Namiko) *	Hemanalini Ray	1912	1318	2	12
<i>Sourav</i>	Japane Sahityo Chorcha (Literary Practice in Japan) *	Jadunath Sarkar	1913	1320	2	1

<i>Sourav</i>	Japaner Sekkhopiyar (Shakespeare of Japan) *	Abinashchandra Ray	1914	1321	3	7
<i>Manasi</i>	Cha-grontho (Tea Book) *	Priyambada Devi	1915	1321	7	11
<i>Prabasi</i>	Tibbat Rajye Bhromoner Tin Bochor (Three years in Tibet) *	Hemalata Devi	1916	1323	16.2	1~4
<i>Ramdhonu</i>	Japani Golpo (Japanese Stories)	Kalidas Ray	1937	1344	10	8

Note. The asterisks (*) in Table 1 and Table 2 mean that these are referred in Subrata Kumar Das's *Sekaler Bangla Samoyikpotre Japan*.

Finding these pieces of work in the periodicals prove that the early Bangla literary domain was being encouraged by importing foreign literature, which also leads us to realize that globalization played significant role in creating Bangla literature via translations. Furthermore, Finding Japanese literature in this period proved that due to the colonial networks, Bengal was accommodating not only European countries but also brought the Asian countries like Japan closer to Bengalis. The gradual interests towards an unfamiliar neighboring nation Japan continued to the next century via these literary imports.

After about ten years of the first Bangla translation of Japanese literary content, Swarnakumari Devi translated two pieces of Japanese literature under the same titles, “Sompadoker Chitrochoyon: Japani Upakhyan” (Editor’s Addition: Japanese Tale) and “Sompadoker Chitrochoyon: Japani Prohoson (Editor’s Addition: Japanese Farce)” in 1892. She produced these Japanese translations not as a picture of Japan but to propound a diversified literary angle. The first one is a translation of the famous tale of “Tomb of the Shiyoku,” well known as “The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki.” Interestingly, A. B. Mitford, a secretary to the British delegation in Japan, had already published *Tales of Old Japan*, which included this tale (Mitford, 1871). Mitford’s work might be the source literature for the translation as, unfortunately, Swarnakumari Devi was unable to have the opportunity to learn Japanese in person, as pointed out by the researchers who have done studies on her. The second contribution made by Swarnakumari Devi is the translation of the famous Japanese farce (*kyōgen*) *Hone Kawa*. In May 1878, B. H. Chamberlain read “On the Medieval Colloquial Dialect of the Comedies” before the Asiatic Society of Japan, which consisted of *Hone Kawa-Ribs and Skin*, a bilingual work, published in part 3 of volume 6 of *Transactions—The Asiatic Society of Japan*. Thereby, it is possible that Swarnakumari Devi came across Chamberlain’s English translation and used it as her source.

In 1897, *Dasi* anonymously published “Ekti Japani Golpo” (A Japanese Story) with the subheading “Inari in Japan,” and the storyline for identifying the source literature is so vague that it is like finding a needle in a haystack. However, the closest match resembles Lafcadio Hearn’s “Kitsune,” in which Hearn portrays the mythological Inari God prominently in fox forms by drawing Japanese people’s folk beliefs and in-person experiences. The translator probably prepared an adaptation by sketching only the acceptable folktale version from this book.

On the contrary, in his essay published in *Sahitya* (1897), Sharacchandra Das acknowledged *Taketori Monogatari* as the source for his translation *Japani Kathuriya* (Japanese Woodcutter),

which indicates a particular purpose for introducing Japanese literature. Although the translation is not printed as standalone literature, the essay aimed to introduce Japanese literature to the Bengalis. As Hubscher-Davidson emphasized on incorporating the study of attitudes, personalities, and dispositions in addition to the study of merely cognitive processes of psychology of translation (Hubscher-Davidson, 2017, p. 3), in this article, the intense curiosity of introducing Japanese literature in Bangla in detail establishes Das's article as the remarkable one. Incontrovertibly, Das' purpose was to put *Taketori Monogatari* forward as the first unique literary piece of work from Japan.

The most probable reason for the 18-year lapse, from *Jepan* to *Bharati*, in translating Japanese literature is that the Bengalis were mostly interconnected with Japan through the influences of colonial interests during the emergence of literature as a domain in the late 19th century. The text that appeared in the British territory reached the Bengali readers as a colonial influence in Bangla form. To add more, there are unexplored examples of European literature in Bangla in the periodicals which indicates that the colonial networks throughout the world was influencing the Bangla literary developments.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, we find at least 13 pieces of literature translated and published in periodicals. *Mukul* published translations of several Japanese children's tales in two different issues (in 1904 and 1907) in the first decade of the 20th century in 1904 and 1907 (Das, 2012, p. 52). In 1913 and 1914, *Sourav* published two proses specially written on literary practices in Japan. A particular appreciation can be accredited to *Prativa*, from the East Bengal, for publishing a novel, *Namiko, Hototogisu (The Cuckoo)*, written by Tokutomi Kenjirō, in 1913-1914. Subrata Kumar Das was unable to explore the first volume of *Partiva*, which contained the first few chapters of the novel. "Namiko's 3rd chapter was printed from 2nd volume of *Pativa* translated by Hemanalini Ray" (Das, 2012, p. 40). Nonetheless, the last chapters of *Namiko* remained unexplored in Subrata Das' study. However, during my survey, I explored all of the 23 chapters of *Namiko* published in 19 issues of *Prativa* from March 1912 to March 1914. In 1915, Priyambada Devi translated the first chapter of the famous *Book of Tea* (1906) by Tenshin Okakura, which was published in *Manasi*. "Although 'to be continued' was mentioned at the end of the translation, the book's remaining chapters in translation were not found. It could have been a milestone for the Japan-Bangla relationship if she had continued her translation of that book" (Das, 2012, p. 51).

On the other hand, *Prabasi* was founded in 1901 in an effort to write about the immigrant life of Bengalis living in various countries, and therefore, it preferred publishing foreign content. However, it did not pay any particular attention in introducing Japanese literature to Bengali readers, notwithstanding the three pieces of literature that appeared in it. Noticeably, it emphasized presenting Japan-related news and the Japanese culture, which received the world's attention during the first half of the 20th century. At least 60 writings on Japan and Japanese culture were printed in it. Given this number, it is hardly surprising that *Prabasi* only published a travelogue, in its four consecutive issues in 1916, which was initially written by a Japanese Buddhist monk Ekai Kawaguchi, who was the first Japanese monk to travel to Nepal; besides Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyay's two tales, which were later included in *Hanashi* (1912). Therefore, in exploring the earlier phase of translating Japanese literature in Bangla in the second half of the nineteenth century, *Bharati* historically comes in first.

The First Japanese Literature in Bangla

The idea of translation is more understandable as a process than by any particular definition. According to Roger T. Bell, this process conveys meaning from the original to the target text (Bell & Candlin, 1995). David Damrosch established that both the attainment and misplacement of literary language are possible in the literary translation process (Damrosch, 2003), which, I believe, was unavoidable in the case of translating Japanese literature in Bangla from English sources. On the other hand, according to the Japanese word *chōyaku*, it is possible to prepare a more comprehensible document for the readers by not committing to a word-to-word translation but instead involving interpretative activity. Based on the collective summarization of the discussions on the early modern cultures of translation in Europe, Newman and Tylus believed that the renaissance would have been impossible without translation (Newman & Tylus, 2015). Likewise, in the case of the Bengal Province, it can be said that the early manifestation of the Bangla language and literature would not have been possible without translation, as many scholars interpreted numerous amounts of works of literature to expand the cognitive periphery of the growing educated elite class as well as the mass. The purpose of importing foreign literature was to make the Bengalis conversant with the outer literary world so they could upraise their treasure with their creativity. Hence, it is widely accepted that “creativity” helps prepare “distinctive writing practices” (Rossi, 2019, p. 49). It has been observed among the Bangla translators that the translator who attempted translations at earlier stages became a literary figure later – for instance, Swarnakumari Devi. Translators or translations did not receive proper appreciation in the 19th and 20th century Bengal since creative literature was then the most applaudable work. From this perspective, imposing the most definitive definitions derived from the 21st century to understand the translation process to identify the most acceptable earliest work in the 19th century Bengal would be an injustice to those pieces of works. As a result, in this paper, I only follow the fundamental characteristic identified by Rodger T. Bell mentioned earlier.

Swarnakumari Devi’s interpretation of *The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki* and *Hone Kawa* has been recognized as the first piece of translated work. Unfortunately, neither of the translations had a translated version of the original title; instead, they came with subtitles, namely, “Japanese Tale” and “Japanese Farce.” However, the storylines of both pieces are entirely well-adapted in that they could represent the original images depicted in the Japanese version.

For instance, in *The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki*, Swarnakumari Devi followed the presentation style adopted by Mitford. “Tomb of the Shiyoku” is one of the tragic legendary love stories that consist of strident actuality, desire, and misery endings of unforgettable characters like Miura Komurasaki and Shirai Gompachi in the 18th century in Japan. Published in May 1892; Swarnakumari Devi’s translation also concisely followed the central plot depicted in Mitford’s *Tales of Old Japan*. Notwithstanding that there are two identical elements lost from Mitford’s version, it is difficult to reach a decisive conclusion whether Swarnakumari Devi’s version is more of a *chōyaku* than a word-to-word translation as she was conscientiously faithful to the original. For instance, in his rewriting, Mitford began the tale by describing the writing on the second stone:

Amid the changes of a fitful world, this tomb is decaying under the dew and rain; gradually crumbling beneath its own dust, its outline alone remains (Mitford, 1871, p. 47).

Swarnakumari Devi interpreted it as follows, which carries the most proportionate meaning from the Mitford's version:

এই অনিত্য জগতের মাঝে এই সমাধি স্তম্ভ শিশির ও বর্ষায় ক্ষয় হইয়া যাইতেছে। নিজেদি ধূলির মাঝে লয় প্রাপ্ত হইয়া সে রেখা মাত্রাবশেষ হইতেছে। (Devi, 1892, p. 104).

Personal translation: In the midst of this eternal world, this tomb is decaying by dew and rain. Gradually coming apart at the seams by its own dust, only its outline remains. The essence of Buddhism – that is, in the eternal world of suffering, the true nature of living is in sorrow, and nothing more – is reflected in these lines of the tale. Immediately after interpreting the engraved words on the tombstone, the Bangla translator followed a more comparatively comprehensive rewriting compared with Mitford's. However, the broader storyline did not change at any stage from Mitford's version. Besides the two identifying names and the newly attained name of Komurasaki at Yoshiwara, the translator conveyed all other identical names of places. The name of the site in Yoshiwara, where lady Komurasaki lived, "The three Sea-casts," was not used by Swarnakumari Devi. The identical elements like Yedo, Suzugamori, the name of the wardsman Chobei, and Boronji Temple at Meguro are perspicuously portrayed in the Bangla version. Even without a proper title in the heading, the Bangla version is so adroitly crafted that a reader can immediately comprehend that this tale adheres to the Japanese culture. Regardless of the elements, the tale's essence remains original and as distinctive as Mitford's version. However, the original Japanese version is written in old Japanese and compiled in the Kabuki collection *Ukiyogarahiyokuinazuma* 『浮世柄比翼稻妻』 under the title *Gompachikomurasakihiyokufun* 「権八小紫比翼墳」.⁵ The kabuki adaptation appeared in 1816 with two acts detailing Gompachi's encounter with Komurasaki to death. (Fukumori, n.d.). Overall, both the English and Bangla versions are more comprehensible version than the original Japanese Kabuki version. Whether the English or the Bangla translation resembles the Japanese version is still an unexplored topic.

On the other hand, *Hone Kawa* might be interpreted from the English version in the same farce format. Chamberlain's translation, printed as bilingual side by side, presented Japanese and English versions, following a direct translation approach. Swarnakumari Devi also maintained the farce style by offering a conversational approach rather than a descriptive one. From narration to the portrayals of the characters, every minor detail is masterfully presented so that the question of gaining or losing literary essence during the interpretation process does not arise. The rendered message developed in this farce for the readers about the then Buddhist monks' socio-cultural context is considered unrefined for modern Japanese society but relevant to the contemporary Bengal society. Each time the Curator revealed what he was advised to say in front of the parishioners, the readers could enjoy a recreational comic relief. In the end, when the parishioners chased the monk, his responses offer the audience or readers the ultimate perception of how Buddhist monks were welcomed by the commoners in the Edo period in Japan. It is not yet determined if this farce was staged in Bangla.

Concerning the argument of identifying the first specimen of Japanese literature in Bangla, Swarnakumari Devi can be conferred the accomplishment for either of her interpretations: *The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki* and *Hone Kawa*. In the 19th century, distinguished scholars in Bengal did not develop any particular school of translating from any specific language. Despite not having an appropriate methodology to follow, Swarnakumari Devi

⁵ This information is collected from the National Diet Library Digital Collections. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/881027/15>

successfully translated both pieces of literature skillfully. She remained the editor of *Bharati* for about 11 years. She was the foremost among the Bengali women writers in the early colonial Bengal. Her splendid mastery of creative writing in Bangla strengthened her superiority in rendering Japanese literature in Bangla. Therefore, according to the publication month, “Editor’s Addition: Japanese Tale,” illustrating *The Loves of Gompachi and Komurasaki* is considered the earliest translation of Japanese literature in Bangla.

Trends of Introducing Japanese Literature in the 19th Century

The history of modern Bangla literature has had glorious episodes like improvement in the quality of Bangla prose, advancement of theater forms, attaining the only Bangla literary epic, and so forth; since the 19th century, it was impossible to evade the British colonial influence during the emergence of modern Bangla literature. The process of translation did not evolve quickly as literature was not a public sphere in the early 1800s. However, in the first 50 years of the 19th century Bengal, at least 90 pieces of work introducing Christianity, Hinduism, and the *Puranas* were published from various sources. One of the influencing factors was the Sanskrit College, which was established in 1824 and which eventually became Presidency College in 1855. It showed profound interest in teaching educational content from the Eastern languages of the then subcontinent. Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, and Farsi were among these languages. However, a particular society came into the limelight for translating works into the Bangla language by conducting a meeting titled *Banga Bhashay Pustok Onubadartho Sabha* (A Meeting for Translating Books in the Bangla language) held in 1850. This society later became the Vernacular Literature Society (Mondal, 2005, p. 58). These institutions played key roles in bringing foreign literature to Bengal.

Furthermore, the 19th-century children’s literature was precisely translation-based. Not only from English was being translated, but there were also many translations from Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindi, French, and Farsi (Mitra, 1958). Japanese literature appeared in the latter half of the century. Besides Perry’s book *Japan*, the people of Bengal Province began learning about Japan from the newspapers and periodicals. At least 21 articles were printed in 9 different periodicals from 1856 to 1900 (see Table 2).

Table 2
Japan and Japan-Related Contents in the Second Half of the 19th Century

Periodical	Title	Year	BS	Volume	Issue
<i>Bibidhartho Sangroho</i>	Japan o Japaniyodiger Brittanto	1856	1262	6	3
<i>Rahasyo Sandarbho</i>	Japan Dwiper Parbon	1872	1279	7	
<i>Bamabodhini</i>	Japani Kukur*	1874	1281	10	10-11
<i>Bharat Sanskarak</i>	Bharatborsho o Japan*	1874	1281	2	2
<i>Bharat Sanskarak</i>	Chin o Japaner Bolporikkha*	1874	1281	2	
<i>Bharati</i>	Japaner Bortoman Unnotir Mul Potton	1881	1288	5	2
<i>Bharati</i>	Japaner Bortoman Unnoti	1881	1288	5	3
<i>Bharati</i>	Sompadoker Chitrochoyon: Japani Upakhyan	1892	1299	16	2
<i>Bharati</i>	Sompadoker Chitrochoyon: Japani Prohoson	1892	1299	16	3
<i>Bharati</i>	Japaner Fulbinyas	1892	1299	16	2
<i>Shikkha Parichor</i>	Japanir Mukhe Japaner Kotha*	1895	1302	5	2
<i>Bharati</i>	Japan o Japani	1896	1303	20	4
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japaner Potro*	1897	1304	8	2
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japaner Prothom Uponyas	1897	1304	8	2
<i>Bamabodhini</i>	Japan Kahini: Japaner Koyekti Deshachar*	1898	1305	36	5
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japan o Japani	1898	1305	9	2
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japaner Portro	1898	1305	9	9
<i>Sahitya</i>	Japani Mohila	1898	1305	9	9
<i>Bamabodhini</i>	Japane Bharat Chatrer Subidha*	1899	1306	37	5-6
<i>Mohajonbondho</i>	Japani Bhasha Shikkha	1900	1307	1	12
<i>Sakhi</i>	Japani Khela*	1900	1308		5-6

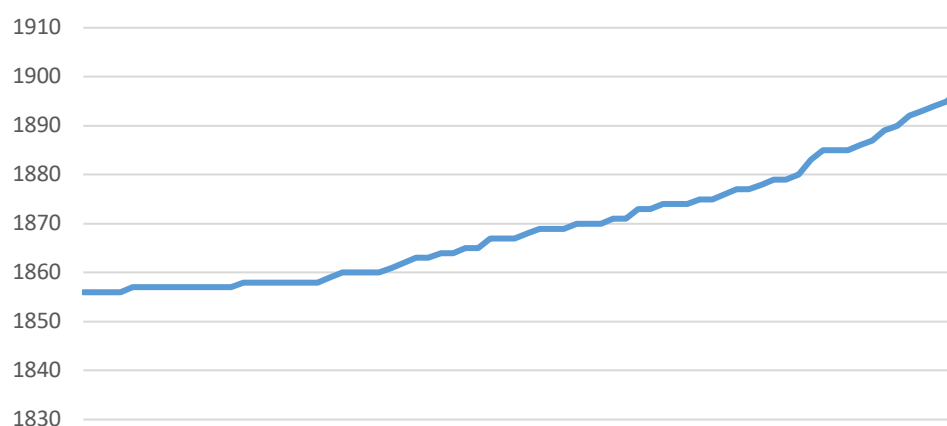
During the British period, starting from the company rule and ending in the 1947 partition, the undivided Bengal underwent the direct influence of British colonization. Therefore, the

translation of Japanese literature was not an instantaneous initiative. At first, the Bengal experienced a very delicate introduction to Japan and Japanese society. As different scholars began writing about Japanese history and culture, the Bengali people became more intrigued about Japan. This eagerness displayed by the readers became an inspiration to bring information successively about Japan and the Japanese culture and translate it for the growing readers. “A mature literary public sphere vibrant in creativity and debates steadily emerged as an alternative, as a section of the Bengali intelligentsia, howsoever numerically insignificant, began to redefine conflict-ridden notions of society based on caste and religious communities, and turned to the possibilities of a literary public sphere as the basis of a new social order.” (Mitra, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, I identify colonial influence as one of the trends in introducing Japanese literature in the 19th century.

From the first Japan-related content in 1856 to the first writing about Japanese literature in 1897, about 40 years of empty space is observed in interpreting Japanese literature. Moreover, a gradual increase in overall translation works is experienced during this period (see Figure 2). This pattern of Bangla-translated books matches Priya Joshi’s indication of a gradual rise at a later stage of the Sepoy Mutiny of Indian rebellion against British rule in 1857, which led the British administration to exercise control over the rebellious Bengalis (Joshi, 2002, p. 40). Therefore, focusing on enhancing the literary field as a sphere might have had a positive impact on the 19th century Bengal.

Figure 2

Translation in the Second Half of the 19th Century



Note. This figure is retrieved from the primary database developed for the main ongoing PhD dissertation. To date, it includes 500 books from various catalogs and literary history books.

A second trend in introducing Japanese literature in the 19th century is about choosing literature from a specific religious occupancy: Buddhism. Religion as a topic in newspapers and among people remained a fundamental issue that required raising voices against the dominant in the first 50 years of this century. This led the editors of the latter half of the century to work toward evolving their society through a sophisticated literary practice.

The dialog between the exasperated dogmatists in the 19th century Bengal exchanged through periodicals was an unavoidable ambiance due to its religious sentiment. At least 31 books were printed for Christian propagation by 1850. In response to its evangelistic intention, religion-based periodicals began to publish items discouraging Christianity and encouraging Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islamism. *Tattwabodhini* was such a leading spokesman for the *Brahmasamaj*.

Surprisingly, Buddhism-based periodicals are merely discovered by the previous researchers. For instance, while writing about religion-based bulletins, Swapan Basu only explored the Hinduism- and Islamism-based periodicals (Basu, 2000). Here a question arises about how Buddhism was reflected in Bangla in magazines or books. The construction of Hinduism having in 19th-century India was “less indeterminate, unbound, pluralistic to the point of all embracing—as, in other words, distinct and different from other religions” (Smith, 1998, p. 330). Therefore, discussion referring to Buddhism was not an avoidable aspect in this period; hence Hinduism is the root of Buddhism. Although *Tattwabodhini* dealt with the argument for Hinduism on behalf of the *Brahmasamaj*, it also dissected the relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism by denying the forthcoming invasion of Christianity as there were many writings reflecting messages from Hinduism and Buddhism in its different consecutive issues. While *Sambad-Prabhakar*, which was founded in 1831, contributed to sharpening the excellence of Bangla prose, *Alochana*, which was founded in 1884, prioritized disseminating the viewpoints of uniting the separated *Brahmasamaj*. Meanwhile, *Bangadarshan* had already published the first Bangla fiction *Kanchanmala*, adapting Buddhist contents by Haraprasad Shastri in 1883. Thereafter, at least five books on Buddhism were interpreted by several intellectuals in the last decade of the century.

In other words, the turmoil of argumentative and offensive theological dialogs in periodicals in the first half of the 19th century led the Bengali scholars and intellectuals to a sapient circumstance to focus on developing the literary excellence in Bangla. As a result, many periodicals, especially literary magazines, and children’s papers recorded exponential growth in the latter half of the century. Although the number of children’s bulletins assumed to be not less than 50 during the hundred years from 1818 to 1918, Subimal Mishra stated the number to be 38 in total (Mishra, 2000, p. 283).

The first single appearance of Japanese literature under the titles, “Editor’s Addition: Japanese Tale” and “Editor’s Addition: Japanese Farce” in two consecutive months of *Bharati* in 1892 is reflective of the intention of presenting a religious context to promote a holistic mindset. The story’s significance lies in the remarkable appreciation of creating a tomb over Gompachi and Kumurasaki’s dying place built by the temple monk. Bandit Gompachi’s aspiring relentless endeavors to free Komurasaki from slavery deliver a message to the Bangla readers that religion could bestow the ultimate appreciation. The sense of humanity and harmony circulated by Buddhism depicted in this story draws the readers’ attention. In addition, *Hone Kawa*, one of the famous *kyōgen* in the Edo period with a portrayal of a Buddhist temple creating a comic atmosphere, became a successful rendering in Bangla that amused Bangla readers. “Chamberlain’s 1879 rendition of *Hone Kawa*, titled *Ribs and Skin*, marked the beginning of the first wave of attempts to render the short comedies into English” (Iezzi, 2007, p. 211). Accordingly, the motive of presenting farce to the Bangla audience was justified as Bengal had already seen such forms and was familiar with the best Bangla farce *Nil Darpan* (1859) by then. On the question of how Japanese literature entered Bengal province after the Sakoku period, this paper establishes that importing Japanese literature was a colonial influence in the first place, and secondly, works of religious significance, especially Buddhism, received closer contemplation.

Both trends are observed in other later writings in the 19th-century periodicals. As the writer of the Japanese tale subtitled “Inari’s visit to Japan,” published in *Dasi* (1897), did not mention either the sources or the characters’ names, discovering the Japanese version becomes a challenge. The only identifying name is Inari; other characters of the story are mentioned only by their professional identities, like the beggar, the lord, the judge, and others. The closest

assumption is that the translator collected different stories of the Inari God from English sources and compiled them into one narrative. Notwithstanding the undiscovered fact of the original Japanese or English origin, the story conveyed the moral values of the Inari God and how she balanced justice by showing mercy and offering wealth. The famous writer-translator Lafcadio Hearn had already published his book *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, which included “Kitsune” (1894). One can find exceptionally presented legends of the Inari God in this book three years before *Dasi’s* story (Hearn, 1894). Surprisingly, there are no Buddhist materialistic elements in the story other than the messages of good (Inari God) against the wrong (people) in an unsettled plot of her visits to different places in various disguises. A reader can only feel the essence of congruity and benevolence, relevant to Buddhism, throughout the story.

In “The First Japanese Novel”, Sharacchandra followed the original storyline of *Taketori Monogatari* depicted in both the Japanese and English versions. Moreover, he continued the exact name of the place *Tenjiki*, in Northern named Sindhu, where Prince Ishizukuri would find Buddha’s beggar bowl. In the original version, “depending on which part of the *Taketori Monogatari* are focused on, the figure of Kaguyahime can be seen as a composite of folkloric and literary personages. The tale also contains thematic and narrative elements derived from Chinese Taoist literature” (Joy, 1996, p. 10). The contents or elements of this tale appear as “the product of mind putting legendary material well known to the people of his time to the use of moral and political discourse” (Marra, 1991, p. 16). However, Sharacchandra’s Bangla work is more of a concise and summarized version in Bangla rather than a word-to-word translation even of the English version.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, countries from all over the world united in many ways – through cultural exchanges, trades, education, and so forth. In today’s tumultuous world, the formation of an administered world literature import system can regulate the enervated stagnant multifariousness of human creativity to achieve a particular brilliance. However, in the colonial Bengal, first, the translators could not evade colonial influence while interpreting Japanese literature. Second, works of religious significance enticed the editors much more than works of other subjects as they helped Bengal grow more culturally and holistically. Third, socially apposite Japanese results became interlocutors in Bangla periodicals. *Gonpachikomurasakihiyokufun* and *Hone Kawa* in Bangla, interpreted from the English versions, are marked as the first works of interpretation. Among the five renderings in the earlier phase of Japanese literature translation in Bangla, *Hone Kawa* excels in respect of all aspects. Unquestionably, this farce incorporates all the trends determined in this article.

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