# The well-balanced translation for nursery rhymes:
## Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song* and its Japanese translation

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**Abstract**

Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song* is a unique nursery rhyme book. "*Sing-Song* is unique because Hughes worked from Rossetti's own illustrated manuscript, in which she had include a small pencil sketch above each poem" (Kooistra 2002:12). In her publication, Rossetti made her own image for each of the rhymes and collaborated with her illustrator Arthur Hughes.

*Sing-Song* has been translated differently in Japan. There are four translators who translated *Sing-Song*: Chiyo Nakamura (1926), Tsuneo Oshima (1936), Ohara Miyao (1985) and Yukie Ando(2002).

In this paper, I will introduce Chiyo Nakamura's domesticating translation, which I considered the best-balanced translation for a nursery rhyme. To translate nursery rhymes is difficult for translators. Translators have to work out their translation as a nursery rhyme. They have to keep rhythms, meaning, and sequences at the same time. In addition, the Japanese writing system made translation even more complicated. I will examine how Chiyo Nakamura worked out her translation.

**Introduction**

In his 1987 article "Simple Surfaces: Christina Rossetti's Work for Children," Roderick McGillis noted that "if we gave eyes to see and ears to hear, the deceptively simple surfaces of Rossetti's art reveal secret delights and imaginative truth" (McGills 1987: 230). This observation can be aptly applied to Christina Rossetti's work *Sing-Song* (1872) and to its translations. In this paper, I will consider the poetic text, sound, and images of Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song*'s Japanese translation in order to understand the cultural shifts and assumptions in play in the process of the respective translations of Rossetti's work. To begin this investigation, I will look at Christina Rossetti's family's cultural context, family relations, and interest in translation. Chapter One offers Christina Rossetti's discussion of artistic family influences.

In Chapter Two I will introduce translation theories by Lawrance Venuti. He defined translation in several ways. In this paper, I specially mention his concepts of domesticating translation in order to explain how Chiyo Nakamura fits his theory in *Sing-Song*'s translation. Venuti talks about English-language translation, not Japanese translation. However, the difficulties of translating across different cultures would fit my argument about how difficult *Sing-Song*'s translations are and why

domestication translation would fit for *Sing-Song*'s target readers: mothers and infants.

In Chapter three, will turn to an examination of *Sing-Song* in Japanese translation. The chapter will begin with the history of Rossetti in Japanese translation. *Sing-Song*'s translation begun with the 1926 translation of selected poems, including Goblin Market, by Nakamura Chiyo. Three more translator translated *Sing-Song*: 1936 translation by poet Tsuneo Oshima (Christina Rossetti to Utai Uta), Rossetti scholar Miyao Ohara's translation in 1958 (Eiwa Taiyaku Rossetti Douyousyuu / *Sing-Song* A-Nursery Rhyme Book) and a 2002 translation of *Sing-Song* as children's literature by Yukie Ando. To conclude this thesis, I will discuss the linguistic and cultural implications that the Japanese translations of *Sing-Song*.

**Section One: Christina Rossetti and her family influences**

Christina Rossetti is a poet who was born in 1830 in London, 38 Charlotte Street. The street was not a great place to live: "the atmosphere was now one of genteel poverty, or of poverty that had long given up any pretensions to being anything else but poverty... [and Rossetti's family were foreigners] and the atmosphere was respectable but yet very odd." (Zaturenska 1949: 1) Critics evaluate Rossetti as a great woman poet: "Christina Rossetti is one of the few women poets of the nineteenth century to make it into the children's canon." (Styles 1997: 143)

Her work is diverse and she wrote an enormous amount of poetry over the course of her life. She is famous for *Goblin Market* written in 1862. It "has been marketed and illustrated for the young, as well as for adults" (Styles 1997: 143) Rossetti published *Sing-Song*, a book of children's nursery rhymes and lullabies, in 1872. She published *Speaking Likenesses* in 1875. By the time Rossetti authored *Sing-Song* in 1872 and Speaking Likenesses in 1875.

She was brought up in an artistic family. Basic education is from her mother, Frances Polidori who was an amateur poet. Her father Gaetano Polidori was a famous poet in Italy. Gaetano Polidori supported Rossetti to publish her first anthology too. It is clear that Rossetti was brought up in a double culture: England and Italian. Christina Rossetti's senses of creating poems were inherited from her father Gabriele Rossetti. Rossetti and other children in the family spoke Italian with him, and "he would read or sing to them in his beautiful voice" (Thomas 1992: 28) According to Marsh, Rossetti's father's "linguistic delight in word play was a lasting inheritance: throughout her life Christina loved riddles and puns." (Marsh 1994: 7)

Gabriele Rossetti was interested in and engaged in research on the great Italian poet, Dante Alighieri. "All the Rossetti children read and assimilated Dante as a literary father" (Harrison 1998: 147), and C.C. Barfoot suggests that Christina Rossetti's "pure" style is likely to be linked to her early exposure to Dante (Barfoot 1996: 9), while Valeria Tinkler-Vallani remarks how much Dante as part of the literature and language of Italy meant to the Rossetti's and draws attention to Christina Rossetti's Italian

poems, as well as her translations of *Sing-Song* into Italian: The Italian versions of some of her *Sing-Song* poems testify to Rossetti's interest in translation. This is a real linguistic and poetic interest: the poet is trying out various ways of expressing an idea or creating a total effect in Italian. [...] Through translation, Rossetti is also exploring the opportunities offered by Italian, and these children's verses, very rich in sound and rhyming effects within very compact structures aimed at immediate communication offer a particularly intense exercise. (Tinkler-Vallani 1996: 32-33).

All of the Rossetti's siblings became artists. Especially Dante Gabriele, encouraged his sister to be a poet; he was recognized as "the family artist" and he exerted a profound effect on his sister's life. He provided Rossetti with a chance to publish her work in *The Germ*, the organ paper of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB); she contributed seven anonymous poems in 1850. Seeking involvement in Dante's PRB, Rossetti also served as a model. In the process, Rossetti became fascinated by the interrelationships between the visual and verbal arts (Kooistra 2002: 5).

Dante Gabriele and Christina Rossetti formed a creative partnership to publish the latter's poetry, and together they asserted a great deal of control over the final product, and its format of image and text, which was unusual in Victorian publishing (Kooistra 2002: 9). Alexander Macmillan, who was Rossetti's first publisher who was not a relative, published *Goblin Market and Other poems* (1862), but he had to wait until both Rossettis [Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriele Rossetti] were ready to go to print (Kooistra 2002: 10).

*Sing-Song* was created close relationships between illustrator and poet. "*Sing-Song* is unique because Hughes worked from Rossetti's own illustrated manuscript, in which she had include a small pencil sketch above each poem" (Kooistra 2002:12) In her publication, Rossetti made her own image for each rhymes and collaborated her illustrator with Arthur Hughes. In *Sing-Song*, there are enormous sequences between poems and illustrations. For example, Angels appear when the mother is away from the child. In "Angels at the foot (1)", the baby in the cradle is surrounded by the angels. They seem to protect or celebrate the baby. On the next page, the mother is holding the baby in "Love me-I love you (2)". These illustrations link with each other and show to the reader that there is always "someone" besides the baby.

In "Our little baby fell asleep (4)" the angel took the infant to heaven. This is a very sad moment for the family. However, on the next page of this book, in "Kookoorookoo! kookoorookoo!(5), the sun rises and the cock crows to remind us that the morning has come.

Comparing two illustrations, in "Our little baby fell asleep (4)" the baby is taken from the cradle, so the theme might be the night. The angel's face is looking down and looks sad. In my explication, the night is dark and full of sorrow when someone has passed away. In "Kookoorookoo! kookoorookoo!(5)," the cock's face is looking up and the time is definitely in the morning. In contrast to the previous page, the morning is bright and full of hope. Therefore, I think these illustrations link with each other and show to

the reader that there is always hope after death, and death is not always a bad thing to happen. Angels have a deep meaning in Sing-Song because they are always linked with death. Also, they are linked with the image of the mother who is the angel in the house. In addition, the link to the other illustrations, the angels bring hope even in a sad moment like death.

Here we can see the double levels of meaning in Rossetti's poems: the child will hear only the soothing words about sleeping, while the caregiver will hear the tensions and worries lying under the words. I will call this as a "double audience". Kooistra argues "Nursery rhymes inevitably have a dual audience: the preliterate child and the reading adult [...] Rossetti ensured that her illustrated Songs would work on levels appropriate to both audience." (Kooitsra 2002: 42) She also mentions "[since] nursery rhymes are meant to be read aloud, they inevitably imply a double readership." (Kooistra 2002: 99) Double audience is an essential for nursery rhymes because nursery rhymes have to recall the baby's memory and also another meaning inside the poem. It will work on well with the illustration.

**Section Two: Theories of translation**

Schleiermacher said about translation, "there are only two possibilities. Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and the writer towards him" (Schleiermacher 2004: 49) What this study of *Sing-Song* can teach us is that Sing-Song is for all generations especially for infants and their caregiver, mother.

Venuti argues that categorizing translations is not simple. "The terms 'domestication' and 'foreignization' do not establish a neat binary opposition that can simply be superimposed on 'fluent' or 'resistant' discursive strategies" (Venuti 2008: 19) In this he is opposed to Friedrich Schleiermacher, who wrote originally in 1813 of what he considered a dichotomy of translating.

Venuti argues strongly against "domestication," describing it as "Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work 'invisible,' producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated texts seems 'natural,' that is, not translated" (Venuti 2008: 5).

In this way of translation, the translator's appearance becomes "invisible" and "the author freely express his thoughts and feelings in writing which is thus viewed as an original and transparent self-representation... [However, it] carries two disadvantageous implications for translator...[1.] translation is defined as a second-order representations...[2.] producing the illusion of authorial presence whereby the translated text can be the original" (Venuti 2008: 6).

Venuti thinks domestication and "[t]he translator's invisibility is a wired self-annihilation." As an example, he points to American translator Norman Shapiro, who says "Certainly my ego and personality are involved in translation, and yet I have to try to stay faithful to the basic text in such a way that my

own personality doesn't show" (Kratz 1989: 27, qtd by Venuti 2008: 7) Associated with domestication, he uses the term "violence".

I partly agree Venuti's discussion of violence because translation always face language power between each language. Translations for news, novels for adult, too much domesticating translation would be violence. The reader would never know the translated text's origin. To considered nursely rhyme's nature, I wouldn't use the term violence in *Sing-Song*'s translation. Because if the translator captures the fundamental image and meaning of the image of the original text, the translation maintains the double standard quality and can leave both the author and reader in peace.

**Section Three: Chiyo Nakamura's domesticating translation**

Nursery rhymes have the distinctive feature that there are no barriers of generation. To raise a general example, when Japanese people see a sunset, one specific nursery rhyme called "Yu-yake Ko-yake" (Ukou Nakamura, Shin Kusakawa: 1923) would come to most Japanese minds. "Yu-yake Ko-yake" is a very old song, but this song is still used for an evening time signal. Another example is "Edo Komori Uta". (Anonymous) Somehow when Japanese people soothe a baby to sleep, the phrase "ねんねんころり" comes naturally from their mouths. This generationless cultural heritage is unique to nursery rhymes.

Translators have to work out their translation as a nursery rhyme. They have to keep rhythms, meaning, and sequences at the same time. In addition, Japanese have four writing system: Hiragana, Katakana, Chinese characters and roman letters. Translator has to choose which one would suit their translation. If Hiragana is too much in their work, it would too childish to read back. If there are too many Chinese characters, the main targeted reader infant cannot read. Particularly translation of nursery rhyme is difficult for translators.

In the end of the Taisyo era, Chiyo Nakamura published a translated book called Christina *Rossetti Sisyu* in 1926. She was a Haiku poet. As a translator, she translated only Christina Rossetti's poem. She covered a wide range of Rossetti's poems to include a part of *Sing-Song*. Nakamura was the first translator who did not focus on Rossetti's brother Dante Gabriel. She detailed Rossetti's family context and her life in the introduction. She describes Rossetti's life as "Even though she had sad love affair, she controlled herself, her poems are well described as pure, quiet, a devotional life was led by her up until she was passed away in 1894, at the age of sixty three." (Nakamura 1926: 4) Based on my reading of the introduction, Nakamura tried to understand Rossetti.

To talk about *Sing-Song*, Nakamura translated twenty-six poems selected in the book. She translated *Sing-Song* as Komori-uta written in Chinese characters, which means "nursery rhymes" in Japanese. She put texts in vertical direction, the standard style in Japanese publication. Nakamura didn't put any illustrations in her translation. However, she put titles before the translated poems. The titles

attract the reader's attention. She seems to have had her own sequences for putting poems in order. I will examine several poems in which she talks about mother and child.

In "Angels at the foot" (1) she maintains quatrain forms of the poems. External rhythm clearly shows Nakamura was keen on traditional Japanese rhythm like "Haiku: Japanese seventeen-syllable poem". The words like"あんよ/ おつむ" are used for infant in Japan. These words are called child care vocabulary. When Japanese use"あんよ/おつむ", the caregiver of the baby touches him or her. In the original text, there is an illustration above the poem. Angels and cupids are around the cradle with baby in it. Angels and cupids never touch the baby.

However, using "あんよ/おつむ", the translated poem rapidly shifts into Japanese culture.

Interestingly, childcare vocabularies are not in the third line. At first glance, it seems the turns in "起 承 転 結: introduction, development, turn, conclusion" are in the Chinese style poetic form because the rhythm seems different, so more attentions is attracted to the third line. Then in the fourth line, rhythm returns in the conclusion. However, the first and second line don't have an introduction, development role. She broke the third line rhythms for a different purpose. In the first line and second line, Nakamura translates angels into "天使様". She used it twice and made them into a refrain. This translated angel is like cupid in Japanese. Around "あんよ/おつむ", cupids are flying near the baby. The caregiver of the baby is touching baby's foot and head.

Then in the third line, there is no punctuation and it continues to the fourth line. Nakamura translates "curly little lamb" into "小さなちぢれ毛の羊の やうに". She did not translate lamb. She chose sheep, an adult sheep. She could have translated infant sheep, "子羊"because she has already broken the rhythms in the third line. She chose sheep in order to have a fluffier image. She begins with "小さな", little. Then she translates curly into"ちぢれ毛". In "ちぢれ毛", there are two dull sounds. "羊"has one dull sound. She makes into rhythms and emphasis towards the fourth line.

In the fourth line, she uses "床", not bed but floor. She adds and ends with on. Therefore, the baby is not in the bed as in the original poem. The baby is 'on' the floor. This image fits with the Japanese style of living. Recess "床の間"is common in Japanese house. The baby is on the floor and touched by the caregiver and the cupids are around baby's foot and head in Nakamura's translation. Nakamura chose Japanese words and rhythms effectively and created her original poem.

Chinese characters were effectively used in Nakamura's translation. In "My baby has a father and a mother" (3), Nakamura translates father and mother in the first stanza as とう様, かあ様. She didn't use Chinese characters. However, she translates the same words in second stanza, 父様, 母様. She was trying to separate relative and stranger by her choice of Chinese characters. The original poem seems as if someone is speaking to a baby. "My baby has a father and a mother, / Rich little baby!/Fatherless, motherless, I know another /Forlorn as may be:/Poor little baby!" When Japanese use hiragana in the sentence, there should be specific reasons.

Usually, if the words can be written in Chinese characters, written words should use Chinese characters as much as possible. The reason is, because the Japanese writing system doesn't have a space between each word, the sentence using only hiragana is difficult to read. Also, hiragana was historically invented for women who could not read Chinese characters, so if the word was given proper Chinese characters, the writer should use them.

Thus, using hiragana gives a childish image to the reader. In contrast, sentences written in Chinese characters are for official papers. Nakamura uses both characters in same poem because the first stanza is talking about his or her own child and second stanza talks about stranger's baby. She translates baby with different words too. In the first stanza, she translate baby as"坊や". In the second stanza she translates baby as "赤ちゃん". She even translates "another" (baby) as "者" which sound "物" object in differently spelled words that sound the same. Even though とう様, かあ様 and 父様, 母様 are same sound, the impression for readers are completely different. Using hiragana isn't official use in Japanese writing, so Nakamura uses them on purpose. She describes a fatherless and motherless baby as a stranger in order to contrast with the baby who has parents.

Nakamura translated *Sing-Song* as a part of Rossetti's work. She used Chinese characters and hiragana effectively in order to show poem's meaning. She used Japanese haiku-like rhythms rather than using European rhythms. Therefore the reader can read Nakamura's translation as a Japanese edition of *Sing-Song*.

Nakamura's translation is domestic translation. She uses Japanese child care vocabulary like "あんよ/おつむ" in "Angels at the foot". Also, she changed bed in the fourth line, she uses "床", not bed but floor. The baby is 'on' the floor. Nakamura's translations are based on Japanese style of living. This kinds of domesticating translations would be appreciated both author and readers. The reason is Chiyo Nakamura's translation's target readers are the same as Christina Rossetti: the double audience.

**Conclusion**

Chiyo Nakamura's translation is a well-balanced example of translation of a nursery rhyme. Even though she did not use Arthur Hughes' illustrations, she transformed English nursery rhymes into Japanese nursery rhyme. Nakamura changed Rossetti's original rhymes and sequences and put away the illustrations. In return, her translation perfectly suits a Japanese reader and they can imagine Rossetti's poems through Nakamura's translation. Her translation has a double audience like the original text. Even in translation, *Sing-Song* has to be a nursery rhyme book, suitable for not only the infant but also the adult, especially the mother who cares for the baby.

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