

TranNet 通信

世界の出版翻訳事情

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In 2003, I left a full-time position teaching multicultural literature to pursue a lifelong dream of writing the Great Asian American Novel centering on the lives of Asian Americans fighting for acceptance in society. It was going to be a novel of rebellion, one that would upend the tired Model Minority narrative that I'd heard growing up. But I had pinned such high hopes on the novel that I suffered a kind of paralysis, and after several false starts, I abandoned the novel and never picked it again.

After quitting my teaching job, I was working part-time at Kinokuniya Bookstore in Seattle and struggling to pay my rent. One day a colleague asked if I'd like to try translating manga and gave me the contact for a translation service company. This was during the manga boom in the US when publishers like Tokyo Pop, Yen Press, and Viz Media were publishing volumes and volumes of manga to satisfy voracious demand. I submitted sample translations for manga that I wanted to be considered for, and eventually went on to translate several series. Although I wasn't paid very well at the translation service, the experience did give me the chance to work on my very first published translations, which later allowed me to contact publishers directly. Several years later, when I was working on a slice-of-life manga revolving around the love of manga titled [*Kingyo Used Books*](#) for Viz Media, Viz launched Haikasoru, its science fiction imprint. They hired me to work on several books including [*The Stories of Ibis*](#) and [*The Cage of Zeus*](#), through which I learned a great deal about Japanese SF.

All of this is to say that I started out the first ten years working as a translator for hire, and I continue to work largely on assignment, though now I can be a bit more selective in the projects that I choose to take on. Finally, when I began to think about the books that I wanted to translate, Kazuki Kaneshiro's [*Go*](#) immediately sprang to mind. I had read the book and seen the excellent movie adaptation not too long after their release—I can't recall which came first at this point, but I remember falling instantly in love with the protagonist Sugihara. Here was a teen growing up "Zainichi" in Japanese society and confronting discrimination head on with his fists and fierce sarcasm. The way Sugihara draws inspiration from diverse voices as Hendrix, Malcolm X, and Springsteen reminded me of myself as a teen seeking wisdom from the words of Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, and later James Baldwin in the hope that they would help me navigate American society more freely and unapologetically as a person of color. I loved that Sugihara's influences are as diverse and inclusive as the society he envisions for Japan—that I envision for America. When he defiantly declares, "I'll erase these national borders someday," you get the feeling that he just might do it, or at least burn himself to ash trying. In other words, *Go* was the novel of rebellion that I had wanted to write!

I reached out to the author via Twitter on November of 2011. After some back and forth, Kaneshiro gave me permission to translate *Go*, perhaps solely on the passion with which I had spoken to him about how personally I felt connected to the novel. UNI Agency helped me to secure the rights of the novel from the publisher; then, a generous grant from the Japanese Literature Publishing and Promotion Center allowed me to translate the first 40

pages of the story. With these first pages, I was able to submit to and was awarded the PEN/Heim Translation Fund in 2015. The publicity from the award really helped to get the translation read by US publishers and allowed me to submit to more publishers that I didn't have previous contact with. I submitted a pitch for the novel and later the sample translation to Amazon Crossing through their open submissions portal and caught the attention of a truly exceptional editor, Elizabeth DeNoma. Since both Amazon and I operate out of Seattle, we were able to meet face-to-face, and Amazon Crossing made an offer. Ultimately it was up to the author, and everyone involved pushed very hard for him to make a commitment. He finally did, and I'm so pleased that *Go* ended up with Amazon Crossing.

Currently, I'm working on a novella titled *Ginny's Puzzle* by Korean Japanese author Chesil, which, with any luck, will be out in 2020. When a couple of years has passed between books, as in this case, it can take some time to warm up the old pitching arm and get your reading senses back to full focus. But the thrill of translating is always there from day one. Sometimes, I write out my first drafts by hand, allowing myself only the time it takes to write out each sentence in my sloppy cursive to work it over in my head. The pressure of having to write the next word as soon as I have finished writing the previous one can occasionally unlock another level of creativity, gifting me with a surprising but wholly appropriate word. Other times, I prefer to labor over the sound and precision of a sentence until I have gotten it exactly right. And when I've found the right word or turn of phrase to make a particularly unwieldy sentence work, it feels very much like the *Ahhh!* moment of pushing a puzzle piece into an empty space of an enormous puzzle. The probability of experiencing two, three or more of those *Ahhh* moments in a day working on a translation is what I find so addictive about the process.

I didn't last very long outside of academia and went back to teaching in 2009. The truth is I love teaching my students about writing and reading almost as much as I love to write and read myself! Thankfully I work at a community college which regards my translation work as valuable scholarship that may inspire students to become writers and translators themselves. I am so proud to be teaching multilingual translation to community college students for the first time this winter, especially now when speaking any language other than English has become fraught with danger for many immigrant students. I am hopeful that this class will help change the narrative that students' multilingual skills are a liability meant to be hidden but are instead a superpower for enormous good.

Takami Nieda was born in New York City and has degrees in English from Stanford University and Georgetown University. She has translated more than ten works from Japanese into English and has received numerous grants and residencies in support of her translations, including the PEN/Heim Translation Fund. Her work has appeared in *Words Without Borders*, *Asymptote*, and *PEN America*. Her translation of the novel *Go* by Kazuki Kaneshiro was awarded the Freeman Book Award in 2019. Formerly an assistant professor of translation at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan, Nieda currently teaches writing and translation at Seattle Central College in Washington State. For more information, please contact the translator at takaminieda@gmail.com.

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