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Japanese literary culture has been composed by the synthesis of various works of foreign language literature and their translation into native literary tradition since the beginning of the Meiji Era (1868 to 1912) or even earlier. It has incorporated tremendous volumes of western and oriental literature in translation, most predominantly American literature in recent years. *Walden* has become one of the standard and basic works in forming the ecological identity of modern Japanese language culture, which reminds us of our own long tradition of Japanese nature writing since the time of *Mannyoushuu*.

*Mannyoushuu* is the oldest grand collection of *waka*, a genre of short verse using thirty-one syllables, a Japanese ode published toward the later Nara Age (from 710 to 784); *Mannyou* means "million leaves," expressing the omnipresence of natural sensitivity in all Japanese literature, which is also the precondition of the seventeen-syllable *haiku*. A word in Japanese is a leaf falling from a tree, being a primary expression of life and partly identical with Thoreau's idea of a leaf in "Spring," where "[e]ven ice begins with delicate crystal leaves, as if it had flowed into moulds which the fronds of water plants have impressed on the watery mirror. The whole tree itself is but one leaf, and rivers are still vaster leaves whose pulp is intervening earth, and towns and cities are the ova of insects in their axils" (*Walden,* 307).

Japanese language culture always diligently publishes trendy work almost simultaneously with each native country, or even faster, then absorbs it and makes it popular via nation-wide media. Traditionally, the translation of American literature in Japan has never been exceptional, but we have made exceptions in favor of Thoreau's works. In addition to translations of his major works, we have translated relatively minor texts, including *Faith in a Seed* (Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 1995) and *Wild Fruits* (Tokyo: Shohakusha: 2002). Needless to say a translation has to be supported by its study, and in Japan the study of Thoreau began in the 1870s, about 20 years after Mathew C. Perry came to Uraga to urge Japan to open the country in 1853.

We have now twenty quite different Japanese translations of *Walden* by various translators since the first one published in 1911 by Kouichirou Mizushima, a student of Tokyo University (see the essays by Nagashima and Kamioka in this issue). Each translation of *Walden* reflects its contemporary Japanese intellectual demands and the accumulation of voluminous study of *Walden* on both sides of the Pacific Ocean. We have no other foreign language literary works that have been translated as often as *Walden*.

One example of the Japanese special interest in *Walden* can be seen through a comparative reading with *Hojoki* (1212) by Kamo no Chomei, one of the classical works of Japanese pastoral or hermit Literature. It is also regarded as the first Japanese nature writing prose work because of its biocentric proto-ecological philosophy and search for a lifestyle of simplicity. Therefore Chomei has been called "the Japanese Thoreau" since an English translation of Hojoki titled *A Japanese Thoreau of Twelfth Century* was published in 1905 by a representative Japanese natural historian, Kumagusu Minakata. Leon Edel also points out Chomei as "the Japanese sage" who lived in his "ten-foot square hut" for thirteen years. (Edel 10) Kamo no Chomei was a son of the highest priest of Kamo Shrine in Kyoto, but he experienced adverse circumstances after his father died when he was nineteen years old. He secluded himself from public life when he was fifty and lived in a hermitage called Hojo until his death at age sixty-three.

Despite the sharp contrast in their motives and the period of time spent in the woods, special similarity between Thoreau and Chomei has long attracted our notice. One surprising commonality in their works involves Thoreau's cabin and Chomei's Hojo. Named by the author himself to denote its smallness and simplicity compared with his luxurious and large palace-like mansion of inner Kyoto, Hojo means a small shelter or hut of ten feet by ten. Chomei's Hojo is situated at Mount Hino, Southwest of Kyoto--a liminal place between Kyoto and the wilderness, just as Walden pond was to Concord. According to the translation (into modern Japanese) by Natsume Soseki, the hut is "ten feet by ten; its height was less than seven. It occupied no permanent site, because I had no mind to settle in a definite place. A clay-built floor, a thatched roof, and planks linked together with hooks, so that they might be removed easily if necessary, constituted my abode . . . Two carts were enough to carry the house itself." Thus, as Thoreau does, Chomei insists on the concept of necessity in building a house; but unlike Thoreau, Chomei insists on the mutability of the house like the incessant change of water in life as it flows:

> Incessant is the change of water where the stream glides on calmly: the spray appears over a cataract, yet vanishes without a moment's delay. Such is the fate of men in the world and of the houses in which they live. Walls standing side by side, tilings vying with one another in loftiness, these are from generations past the abodes of high and low in a

> mighty town. But none of them has resisted the destructive work of time. Some stand in ruins ; others are replaced by new structures. Their possessors too share the same fate with them. Let the place be the same, the people as numerous as before, yet we can scarcely meet one out of every ten, with whom we had long ago a chance of coming across. We see our first light in the morning and return to our long home next evening. Our destiny is like bubbles of water. Whence do we come? Whither do we tend? What ails us, what delights us in this unreal world? It is impossible to say. (*Hojo=ki*, 353)

Under the influence of Buddhism, the impermanence or ephemerality of a house (like that of the master himself) is a central idea of this work, while at Walden Pond Thoreau searches for a solid base and construction to build an ideal dwelling and tries to find that "eternity remains" under a "shallow" and "thin current"(*Walden,* 98). But the austerity of each dwelling leads both Chomei and Thoreau to attain spiritual richness of heavenly and higher law through their meditation and their asceticism. Both Thoreau and Chomei play musical instruments (the flute and four-string Japanese lute), and they are transcendental masters of their shelters and their surroundings in searching for spiritual salvation by forming a soundscape full of natural sound in harmony with flute and lute respectively.

From an ecocritical point of view another similarity of the two works is the special cultural status of their houses. Hojoki is situated at the origin of social criticism based on Chomei's ecological principle of life and philosophy, and the special style of Hojo (an unworldly simple life) made the criticism possible. It stood on neutral ground between the secular world and the wilderness, or at the edge of culture and nature quite similar to the location of Walden.

Additionally, Hojo became one archetype for the *chashitsu*, tearoom, a movable room designed for meditation and negotiation while enjoying the Japanese Tea ceremony, an activity which originated in the middle period of the Japanese Civil Strife. *Chashitsu* functioned crucially as a neutral space, where commanders of both sides could meet to discuss truces or settlements. It is a space of high tension disguised in aestheticism, or rather, an aestheticized space of conflict. As Don Sheese comments, in the neutral or liminal character of Thoreau's hut at the edge of Concord town and Walden Woods, the cabin at Walden "reconciles the tensions between wilderness and civilization through a middle landscape of farming" (Sheese 46).

As a type of a political hermit, the name Kamo no Chomei in kanji literally means "loon’s long song" and reminds us of the diving and laughing loon in Walden Pond, one of the most distinguished personae of the narrator in *Walden.* Thoreau’s intentional use of it as a trickster arguably demonstrates his deep acquaintance with the Native American’s pantheistic mythology involving the loon. Thoreau is attracted and lured by the loon's elusive "laughing" voice to imitate its sound to understand the loon's mystery in *The Maine Woods*. Although Chomei is one of the common names to give an eldest son in Japan, the Japanese animistic structure in language and culture has conceivably originated from the same spring as the Native American’s basic cosmic imagination. Chomei's criticism on the "Mammon-worshipping, pleasure-hunting ugly world" (Soseki 349) sometimes echoes Thoreau's Jeremiad on the "lives of quiet desperation" (*Walden,* 8).

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