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| Author(s) | MATSUNAGA, Tomoko |
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The role of English media in modern Japan: Through the history of English-language newspapers issued by Zumoto Motosada

Tomoko MATSUNAGA

Introduction

Sadao Umesao(1920-), who is one of the most famous anthropologists in Japan, compares Japanese civilization to a ‘black hole’ or a ‘receiving set’. Known as a godfather of the ‘information society’, he explains that Japan have eagerly assimilated various cultures from outside but has only nominally presented her own cultures to other countries. His idea about civilization is often applied to the attitudes of Japanese people to foreign languages, especially English. In other words, some people regard the lack of intensive utterance in English as a crucial reason why many Japanese have not been good at speaking and writing in English in spite of tenacious studies and why the presences of Japanese media in the world has been very low. From one’s ability of English to national policy on foreign language education, this attitude as a ‘receiver’ is the target to be criticized.

On the other hand, now a lot of nations including Japan suppose that ‘public diplomacy’ is one of the most important issues, viewed in ‘Soft Power’ (Nye 2004). Therefore they are coming to pay more and more attentions to English media as means of projecting it. That is because that English would be the most effective one being a global language. Politicians are eager to develop strategies and scholars are trying to clarify its theories academically. In any case, in order to prospect for how English media to be in Japan, a historical approach sounds effective. The history of English media in a ‘receiving set’ Japan may show us many implications, how it has functioned in Japanese society for instance. Hence, for the purpose of discussing the role of English media especially in modern Japan, this study tries to describe the history of English-language papers issued by Zumoto Motosada(1863-1943).

Zumoto was a proprietor and director of ‘the Japan Times’, which was the first English-language newspaper in Japan to be edited and managed by Japanese people, founded in 1897. He studied at Sapporo agricultural college with Inazo Itobe and Shigetaka Shiga, and then decided to be an English writer because he supposed that Japan’s effort to become one of the world’s leading Powers was handicapped by the fact that Japanese is a language which is abstruse to the Westerners. In addition, he had also published many English-language papers for students.

The unique point to consider about Zumoto is that his activities imply that English-language newspapers in Modern Japan have functioned not only as a means of propaganda to the West but also of education for non-native English speakers including Japanese. This paper focuses on Zumoto’s motivation to publish them and examines his contribution to Japanese society.

Who Zumoto is; the motivation of publishing English-language newspapers

According to Shirayama(2008), Zumoto worked hard as a propaganda creator with English. What was his motivation? It derives from his student time in Sapporo.

Born in Tottori in western Japan, Zumoto studied English in Nagoya. And then he went to the Hokkaido in 1880 because he wanted to study there where it would be convenient to study Russo-Japanese relations, which were then very strained. He was very conscious of foreign affairs since being a young boy. Once in the Hokkaido, however, his dream was broken and he was quite at a loss for about half a year as to what to do in the future. At that time, an article by Giuseppe Mazzini, the noted Italian patriot which appeared in Harper's Magazine inspired hopes in him. It said that nations had different vocations and that likewise individuals had different vocations.

Mazzini's article led him to think in the following vein. Japan's first vocation is to develop fine art since it has had distinguished examples from ancient times. Its second vocation is to produce good industrial art by application of its traditionally excellent fine arts. The third is to contribute to the world by developing marine transportation. Japan can be characterized as a nation completely bounded by the sea, he concluded. "As for my vocation" he thought, "I considered it to learn more English since Japan's effort to become one of the world's leading Powers was handicapped by the fact that the Japanese is a language which is abstruse to the Westerners." That was his motivation. He needed a Japanese perspective but in English. Zumoto had much confidence in the power of English, particularly propaganda dissemination through English media. In his article in the Japan Times, he said that, "Japanese is so completely different from the languages the West, that a European student has thoroughly to divest himself of all his former habits of thought and feelings. The sphere of its utility is so limited."(Hasegawa 1966)

In addition, to understand Zumoto, it's important to note that he experienced higher education in English. He learned modern knowledge from books written in English and by American professors. It means that English was an essential skill in higher education. Learning in foreign languages, especially in English had been common in Japanese higher educational institutes until around 1890s when the Japanese language had been developed to become the national one. Students at that time had to use English. And it's interesting that their experiences of reading many books about Japan written by Westerners raised their motivation of telling about 'Japan' in English themselves. Inazo Nitobe(1862-1933) who published 'Bushido' in 1900 and Tenshin Okakura(1862-1913) who wrote 'The Book of Tea' in 1906 were the same generation as Zumoto. The gap in the image of Japan between Westerners and themselves encouraged their nationalism. According to below, he managed various English media for purposes of both education and propaganda.

The Mission of the *Japan Times*

‘The Japan Times’, which was first issued in 22 March 1897, was his first propaganda project with English-language papers. Zumoto’s desire to publish English-language newspapers by himself, came true as a national mission of ‘the Japan Times’. His aspirations to start his projects, were greatly spurred and aided by the late Prince Ito Hirobumi(1841-1909) who took Zumoto under his wing and encouraged him in his efforts. Since Prince Ito was already conscious of Western public opinion or the importance of evaluation, he helped Zumoto both in an official and private capacity. He financed Zumoto’s trip to inspect newspaper businesses in Europe and the U.S.A. His exploration convinced him in the belief that an English-language paper was badly needed to remedy the general ignorance abroad about Japan.

As he was also private Secretary to Ito, the Japan Times was not apart from the public relations’ institute of Japanese government. As opposed to contemporary English-language papers owed by Westerners, *Kobe Chronicle* since 1891 managed by English or *The Japan Advertiser* since 1890 by American for instance, it emphasized Japanese perspectives and opinions to Western World. According to the advertisers of the Japan Times at that time, the readership was composed of foreign residents and Japanese students and business persons who needed to learn and use English practically in their lives. The fact that its price was about two times that of Japanese-language papers implies that the papers had higher class readers. Therefore, the Japan Times in Tokyo had functioned both as propaganda for foreigners and as educational text for Japanese. It was really welcomed in Japan where nationalism was much evoked but subscriptions didn’t increase to the extent that they expected. The number of foreign residents was not enough to support many English-language papers in Japan. However, the Japan Times was a very important institution not only politically but also economically for the Japanese nation so, receiving aid from the ministry of Foreign Affairs, they continued to publish until wartime. Zumoto had been chief editor until 1902 and had been president of the Japan Times from 1911 to 1914.



【Figure 1. The picture of Zumoto Motosada from his book in 1931】

The Activities as a propagandist

After the project of ‘the Japan Times’, Zumoto published English-language papers ‘Seoul Press’ in Seoul and ‘Oriental Review’ in N.Y. It means that the readership of his papers have extended to outside of Japan.

According to a study by Yi and Park(2008), ‘Seoul Press’(1905-1937) played the role of a tool for public relations spreading the Japanese colonial policy, using the secret funds of the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After leaving this project, Zumoto was succeeded by his staff and continued until 1937. This was the only English-language newspaper until emancipation from Imperial Japan, so Yi and Park pointed out that for a small number of Korean subscribers, it informed them about Western culture. This paper, an English-language paper in Seoul published by Japan, is really interesting because it reflects the relationship between Imperial Japan, colonial Korea, and the West.

And then after Manchurian Incident, he promoted the justification of Imperial Japan through the English magazines ‘Herald of Asia’(1931-32), which Eichi Shibusawa supported with funds.

**【Table 1 the contents in ‘The Herald of Asia Library of Contemporary History’
No.1 ~ No.9 (1931 ~ 32)】**

Refer to Peter O’Connor (2005) *The Struggle with Internationalism, 1931-33
Japanese Propaganda: Selected Readings (Series2: Pamphlets 1891-1939) Vol.4*

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 1931.11.3. | Japan in Manchuria and Mongolia |
| 1931.11.3. | Outstanding Issues in Manchuria and Mongolia |
| 1931.11.10. | Anti-Foreign Education in China |
| 1931.11.10. | Manchurian Emergency |
| 1932.3.10. | Further Military Operations |
| 1932.3.10. | The Shanghai Affair |
| 1932.4.11. | The Origin and History of the Anti-Japanese Movement in China |
| 1932.5. | Fighting Around Shanghai |
| 1932.10. | Lytton Commission on China and Manchuria |

Zumoto had developed negative campaign against China in Western eyes and also resisted the criticism from other countries on Japanese colonial policy. There are examples of his utterances such as follows.

‘When Japan’s attitude toward injustice and wrong is compared with that of western nations exposed to similar disabilities, it will be easily seen which are the more warlike nations.’

‘Japan has definitely accepted her position as a responsible and important member of the family of civilized.’ (Zumoto 1931)

Moreover, Zumoto had attended some international meetings, the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1925 for instance, so he was recognized as a nationalist from Japan by foreign people. In domestic society, however, sometimes he was criticized as a ‘traitor’ by ultra-nationalist just because of managing English-language papers.

The contribution to English Education

In fact, Zumoto was known as a manager of English texts for students in the early

Showa. He had already issued English-language newspapers for students, the *Japan Times Student Edition* from 1911 to 1923 and *The Youth* from 1912 to 1923 and his uniqueness was focusing on Current English Education. His policy toward learning English was to be practical.



【Figure 2 The first issue of The Japan Times Student Edition(1911.9.1)】

He declared that a students’ aim in learning English must be to be able to write and speak to foreign people with a dignified attitude. In short, he emphasized utterance when learning English. Generally, the typical English education in school was to translate English texts to Japanese and Zumoto criticized such instructions. On his newspapers, he introduced how to write a letter and conversation in English. The articles of Current English Conversation written by Zumoto became popular and then it was published as a book in 1912. It went into a second printing within a half of the year.

Zumoto had also written many English textbooks as shown in Table2. While it is true that he stressed writing and speaking English, his texts were normal types which had enough information on grammars. It supposedly reflects how he had learned English.

【Table 2 English textbooks written by Zumoto】

Made by the author referred to the database of historical documents (Haruo Erikawa)
<http://www.wakayama-u.ac.jp/~erikawa/database2/>

| Title | Volume | First publish | Authorized | Publisher |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| The Primary School Readers | 2 | 1925.11.20. | 1926.3.1. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |
| New Age Side Readers | 3 | 1925 | 1926.2.1. | Zumoto Motosada |
| New Age Easy Course No.1, No.2 | 2 | 1925.12.9. | 1926.3.30. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |
| New Age Higher Course No.1, No.2 | 3 | 1927.12.10. | 1928.3.15. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |
| New Age Elementary School Readers | 2 | 1928 | 1929.3.26. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |
| Easy English Grammar | 1 | ? | 1932.1.21. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |
| A Complete English Grammar | 1 | 1932 | 1933.2.15. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |
| New Age Industrial School Readers | 4 | ? | 1933.9.21. | Chuto Kyoiku Shuppan Kyokai |

He was proud of his way of learning it so he didn’t doubt that students could attain ability to express themselves in English through using print media. That would explain why he didn’t use new media, Gramophone and Radio for teaching English. It was his limitation.

Conclusion

Zumoto’s final project was to publish a newspaper for students, World Digest from 1939

to 1940. He intended that this paper would make up for the lack of English books during wartime. It is certain that he worked hard as a propagandist but he was not blind to various ideas from abroad. His policy of propaganda and English education are similar in concentrating on how to influence someone's. That why his preferred means was print media.

Being a unique position between national and international, Zumoto had a great contribution on Japanese society in two respects as follows. First, he created a public sphere between Japanese and Westerners in Japan by publishing English-language newspapers. These papers enabled not only foreign residents to get articles about Japan but also Japanese people to touch 'internationalized Japan' through reading these articles. More research to clarify what kind of effects reading such a style of content gave to Japanese nationalism or internationalism are needed. The second point is his contribution to current English education at wartime. Although there are a lot of studies in the field of history of English education in modern Japan, knowledge on how Japanese people studied English outside of School is not enough. Zumoto's project provides suitable data and sufficient materials.



【Figure 3 World Digest VOL. I. No. 3 March 1, 1939】

Discussion

This paper tried to sketch the history of English-language newspapers issued by Zumoto Motosada. However, it is just a tiny drop in the huge ocean. It is necessary to cover other English-language newspapers, cinemas, and radio in order to understand the role of English media in modern Japan. Comparing such histories would be an effective approach in the future.

Now in the information society, we cannot avoid of thinking about how to cope with the popularization of English as a global language. We live in a world whose media environment is different from that of Zumoto, but the history proposes these questions :Who's voice in Japan does English media represent? How should we learn and use English as a media-language? From such perspectives, we need more research on English-language media.

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