

# Forgotten Women Translators of Tagore in Japan: Recovering a Lost Intellectual Network (1913–1945)

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**Abstract:** For more than a century, scholars have studied the reception of Rabindranath Tagore in Japan. However, the contribution of women translators, editors, and educators who mediated his writings from 1913 to 1945 has been largely overlooked. James and Turner's scholarship highlights the strong role of a network of women writers working through magazines, schools, translation societies, and the literary world. These women have had a strong influence in getting Tagore's world view introduced to Japanese readers. This was in contrast to the influence of male intellectuals like Okakura Yoshisaburō, Kuga Katsunan, or Ueda Bin. The work that they did is unnoted, is unarchived, and is mostly forgotten in educational memory. Using a comparative-historical approach that incorporates archival readings of women's magazines, analyses of early Tagore translations, and interpretive readings of editorial paratexts, this essay will reconstruct that network. Through the focus on woman translators forgotten by history, this article reinterprets the intellectual history of Tagore in Japan as gendered. The discovery reveals the oversight of a transnational feminist stance as an archive and makes way for scholarship on women's mediators in Asian cultures.

**Keywords:** *Women Translators in Pre-War Japan, Tagore Reception Studies, Gendered Translation Networks, Taishō and Early Shōwa Print Culture, Indo-Japanese Literary Exchange, Feminist Archival Reconstruction*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore is recognized by Japanese literati, while his two visits spurred great enthusiasm as well as critical debates, particularly about his critique of nationalism. This intellectual presence in Japan has left its mark on its literary work as well as its legacy. Tagore not taking sides when it came to Japan and the West was seen as an indictment of the latter. Yet these discussions, while valuable, remain partial. The focus is mainly on the male interlocutors of Tagore. This includes artists, philosophers,

educators, and political thinkers who became the public face of Indo-Japanese. The academic histories often present figures such as Yokoyama Taikan, disciples of Okakura Tenshin, as well as foremost men of letters who translated, reviewed, or debated Tagore's thoughts. In doing so, they unknowingly imply that Tagore was received by the Japanese as a masculine intellectual.

The impression of Japanese elite intellectuals being orientally childish, however, breaks down when we turn to the periodicals and translation societies and educational institutions of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan. There is another hidden, parallel network, without official status but nonetheless very active, where women played a key role. Women translators adapted Tagore's poetry and essays into clear Japanese prose and verse. Women editors published his contributions to literary magazines aimed at female readerships. Women teachers used some of Tagore's ideas in early childhood education as well as in moral instruction and domestic literature programming. Women activists, especially in urban centres, actively packaged and circulated his spiritual humanism for wider reformist aspirations. Essentially, these contributions were among the first and remained the most influential way through which Tagore's works reached Japanese households.

The fact that no one can see these women translators is not by accident. According to Japanese literature historiography, men as authors, critics, and translators dominate, denying cultural labour to women who worked in domestic realms or lowly editorial jobs. Likewise, the studies on Tagore have been mostly shaped by Indian and Western academics whose focus has remained on Tagore's political and artistic dialogues, not on his gendered address. Consequently, an entire network of intellectuals who have worked

together for decades on various genres of writing is lost. The loss is not merely archival; it is conceptual. If we don't acknowledge these women, then the history of Tagore's reception would become distortingly narrow, hiding the everyday cultural processes through which transnational literary influence actually unfolds.

Recovering the forgotten women translators of Tagore in Japan is essential for a more accurate account of Indo-Japanese cultural exchange, this paper argues. Their evidence refutes the idea that intellectual elites, especially males, were solely responsible for Tagore's reception. The earliest audience for Tagore in Japan included women who accessed his writings in household magazines, education columns, and ongoing translations. These readers played an important role in the ways ideas of Tagore got domesticated in Japan. By foregrounding women as literary mediators, we also understand the politics of translation and its gendering. Compassion, a key concept in Tagore's philosophy, was translated in numerous ways into Japanese. While it was most commonly translated as "*jihī*," a term typically used for Buddhist compassion, other interpretations were adopted as well.

The years 1913 to 1945 are especially helpful for this study. Between the 1910s and 1930s, Tagore gained popularity after the Nobel Prize yet conflicted with the Japanese nationalists. After that, he disappeared from the public eye, mainly due to militarism. Over the years of turbulence, women continued to translate and circulate Tagore's texts in ways that avoided this minefield. The contributions of these writers were involuntarily apolitical and not by choice. The reason for this was that a lot of them offered their writing for magazines that were devoted to. Yet these seemingly modest publications greatly helped Tagore's legacy in case the mainline press were to grow hostile or remain silent.

Even though this historical terrain is very rich, no research has been done to study the women translators who mediated Tagore in Japan. There is a complete lack of information about their identities and motivations. The gap continues because they wrote for the obscure print, which one doesn't give importance to, and moreover, they were not institutional men whose archives have been preserved systematically.

The resulting history renders women's voices almost absent from intellectual history.

In an attempt to fill up this gap, the present study reconstructs the intellectual network of the forgotten women translators who helped shape Tagore's Japanese reception between 1913 and 1945 based on materials from women's magazines, archival materials, serialized literary translations, and teachers' journals. This reconstruction not only shows the extent of their involvement but also proves that Tagore's reception was sustained by far more diverse actors than hitherto acknowledged. When we recover these women's contributions, we can see Tagore's impact not as elite male discourse alone, but rather as a cultural phenomenon rooted in the everyday reading practices of Japanese life.

This study is placed within the existing literature, demonstrating the gap that this study seeks to fill.

## 1.1 Literature Review

### Studies on the Reception of Tagore in Japan

Japanese studies on Tagore generally related his influence on arts, literature, philosophy, and nation. Experts have followed his contact with leading members of the Nihonga school, his controversial lecture tours, and the flip-flopping media portrayal that informed his public persona. But the studies in favour of men intellectuals make it seem as though Tagore's reception in Japan took place only among elite men. Not much attention has been paid to the popular readership who engaged in translations of his writing.

### Women in the History of Japanese Translation

Translation histories in Japan include women in early modern and Meiji literature but do not address women translators of foreign literature at the turn of the twentieth century. Women's magazines have certainly diversified their female readerships, but studies don't track how global literature is being mediated via them. Thus, the roles played by women who translated or disseminated Tagore's works are unknown.

### Feminist Approaches to Cultural Mediation

Translation is not neutral; it is influenced by gendered subjectivities and socio-cultural conditions—a key principle of feminist translation studies. However, the

practical application of this theoretical insight has never been done so on Indo-Japanese cultural exchange. Lack of scholarship in this area indicates a clear gap, as no study exists to show how women in Japan interpreted, reframed, or reshaped Tagore's writing for the Japanese audience.

#### 1.1.4 Identified Research Gap

No existing study reconstructs the network of women translators of Tagore in Japan between 1913 and 1945. Their archival erasure leaves a major void in Indo-Japanese intellectual history, translation studies, and gender studies. This paper fills that gap by learning to understand their presence and analyze their contributions as agents of cultural mediation.

## II METHODS

### 2.1 Research Design

This research offers a qualitative, archival, and historical-comparative study that attempts to recover a neglected intellectual network of women translators who mediated Tagore's writings in Japan during the period between 1913 and 1945. Given that the contributions of these women have not been systematically documented, the research design prioritizes reconstruction rather than verification. With the broader social and cultural background of pre-war Japan and with inferences drawn with reference to this as well as this, I see the below text. The novel relies on getting back scattered textual traces. Women's magazines serialized translations of teachers' private journals. The design includes close reading, contextual interpretation, and reception analysis such that the study can account for not just who these women were, but also how their translations functioned as cultural mediations. This technique takes into account that well-known archive systems do not include women writers engaged in domestic literary and semi-professional literary practices. Hence, some sources outside the canonical repositories usually privileged in Tagore studies have been used here.

### 2.2 Hypothesis

The central hypothesis of this study is twofold. To begin with, it suggests that women translators constituted an important but invisible intellectual network that was critical to the reception of Tagore by

Japanese readers, especially in domestic and pedagogical spheres, which male-centric scholarship has overlooked. Secondly, the women were not just translating his work but transforming it through their interpretations, producing gendered readings that mediated Tagore's universalist humanism and spiritual philosophy into locally meaningful forms for early twentieth-century Japan.

According to the hypothesis at stake, this network must be seen as a missing chapter in Indo-Japanese intellectual history, and recovering it will help us understand how literary circulation at the global level happened outside elite male circles.

### 2.3 Data Collection

Data collection proceeded through multiple phases. The first step consisted of locating and gathering women's magazines, household journals, literary journals directed to women readers, educational journals for women teachers, and magazines focused on spiritual or self-cultivation literature appearing from 1913 to 1945. Collections like Fujin Kōron, Shufu no Tomo, Josei, Fujokai, Katei no Tomo, and pedagogical magazines including Joshi Kyōiku Zasshi were then systematically examined in searches for references to Tagore, translations of either poetry or essays, editorial introductions, and of course reviews or reflective pieces exploring his impact.

During the second phase, designated and undesignated translators who were noted in those magazines were identified. Because many translations came out under pen names or anonymously, cross-referencing was often necessary. This was done using the editorial pages, letters-to-the-editor sections, and bibliographic notices in contemporary periodicals. Whenever possible, biographical information such as occupation, marital status, and publication history was gathered from available sources.

The third stage looked at early Japanese editions of Tagore, which credited women as either translators or co-translators. These translations did not appear to be made by the major publishers. However, they did appear from smaller presses and local educational societies. Through paratextual materials, including prefaces, afterwards, translator notes, and footnotes, we can glimpse the lens through which these women interpreted Tagore.

The last step included materials that helped recreate the context where these translators were functioning. This comprised essays on women's reading habits, reports of women's literary clubs, literature on home education, and early feminists who engaged with foreign literature. These sources create a patchwork archive that tells the story of a female readership invested in reading translations.

#### 2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis had three overlapping interpretive processes. The initial step involved systematically categorizing themes from translated works and translator commentaries. A few recurring themes ranged from spiritual reflection, ethical motherhood, and the emotional education of children to the importance of self-cultivation and the pursuit of inner freedom. All this linked Tagore to early twentieth-century discourses on Japanese womanhood. The research reveals women translators' choices of specific Tagore texts to translate and the aspirations reflected in their choices and their readers' sensibilities.

The second method used reconstructive archival interpretation. Many contributors remained anonymous, so the analysis must rely on the interpretation of textual footprints, unique stylistic traits, idioms, and translation edits. These footprints show the presence of the same voices in different publications. This method does not claim to identify definitively but aims to recover ways of participating and literary labour.

The third procedure was comparative contextualization. We looked at translations, and not just the text, but also the art and the cultural background of its making. Comparative analysis with the translations of male contemporaries was used to identify tonal, emphatic, and interpretive differences. A particular emphasis was placed on the various ways through which women translators softened or reframed Tagore's critiques of nationalism, emphasized his motifs of spirituality, and highlighted his attention to the emotional worlds of children and families. There are different ways in which Tagore's ideas entered Japanese cultural life depending on gender.

#### 2.5 Limitations

Researching actors who are marginalized and who have worked in the past shapes the study. It is impossible to name them exactly because a lot of women contributors used a pseudonym or wrote anonymously. Some issues of women's magazines are either missing or have ugly prints. Also, the translation was sometimes a collaborative process involving an editor, copyist, and illustrator, making attribution more difficult. Notwithstanding the limitations assigned above, the cumulative evidence is sufficient to conclude that the women translators presented a coherent, meaningful, and hitherto unrecognized network that influenced Tagore's reception. This approach focuses more on reconstruction, nuance, and sensitivity through context than biographical proof.

### III RESULTS

The study finds a complex, multi-layered landscape where a group of women translators played a key sustaining role for Tagore, though an unacknowledged one. We see them everywhere in women's magazines, school journals, and serials, even if they are not named. This suggests the significant involvement of a large workforce engaging with cross-cultural literature during a time of rapid social change, which could be gendered work.

The first batch of women translators emerged between 1913 and 1916, when interest in Japan surged following Tagore's win of a Nobel Prize. Short prose adaptations of poems from Tagore's *Gitanjali* and reflective essays about the poet and his spiritual-scientific perspective were published in popular women's magazines. These translations were published next to essays on household ethics, maternal education, and women's morality. Women readers of Tagore may have considered him not a political critic or a philosopher but a "guide" to the inner life, moral clarity, and emotional honesty due to the positioning of his texts with domestic literature. This framing contrasts with the male-centric press, which usually framed Tagore as someone who speaks for Asian modernity or as a commentator on nationalism.

The second major trend is between 1916 and 1924, when Tagore's critiques of Japanese nationalism affected his public image. Male commentators were divided into a camp of admiration and a camp of hostility, but women's magazines published

translations of his works. However, their choices usually focused on human togetherness, love for the mother, and the dignity of the inner self. By not being too political or self-reflective, women translators helped keep Tagore alive in Japanese homes as tensions grew. Tagore's spiritual reputation managed to survive this age thanks to these female mediators, as they offered alternative mediations of reception outside of public ideological battles.

A third layer of findings pertains to women teachers who used Tagore in early childhood education. Women's training colleges' and normal schools' journals sometimes had simplified translations of Tagore parables, moral tales, or poems for children. These texts were applied in classroom activities geared toward developing kindness, imagination, and emotional expressiveness in early childhood. According to the educational use, Tagore was not a global intellectual figure. Instead, he was a moral authority fit for the parenting of childhood. While these teaching methods may seem simple, they have had a great impact because they were used in everyday learning and life lessons.

Finding four has to do with important but subtle differences in translation methodology. Woman translators preferred to soften the language of Tagore in emotional terms. English philosophical texts were translated into flowing Japanese prose that emphasized warmth and relationality rather than abstractness. This choice of style suggests that woman translators read Tagore through Taishō-era discourses on feminine spirituality and domestic virtue. Meanwhile, we should not just dismiss their agency as mere domestication. Their translations seem to be a more sophisticated attempt to unite Tagore's universalism with Japan's cultural landscape.

The ultimate finding of the results shows that the women translators were able to maintain Tagore's visibility through the 1930s and early 1940s. Political censorship and the rise of militarism ultimately made many publishers shy away from foreign authors. Women's magazines, especially those on spirituality, household culture, and cultivating the self, kept reproducing sentimental poems or stories credited to Tagore, whether faithfully, loosely, or shortened. These works of Tagore's were disassociated from any political commentary and circulated quietly so that he

remained part of Japan's cultural imagination even when state ideology.

#### IV DISCUSSION

Women translators played an important role for Tagore's reception in Japan, revealing a dimension of Indo-Japanese cultural exchange that has remained undocumented. Tagore's presence in Japan wasn't simply contrived by public intellectuals, artistic elites, or political disputes, the results show. Women who laboured in the shadows also shaped history whose contributions were rooted in domestic culture, educational practice, and spaces designed for intimate interpretation. These women were able to negotiate foreign literature for Japanese everyday life. Moreover, they were historically overlooked cultural interpreters for a wide, often non-specialist audience.

A key finding of this research indicates that during politically turbulent times, women translators have a stabilizing role. When Tagore's critique of Japanese nationalism provoked defensive responses among conservative intellectuals, women readers encountered a different Tagore, who spoke about compassion, self-criticism, spiritual unity, and emotional balance. They're closely related to discourses of inner cultivation and domestic morality in the Taishō era that often represent women as custodians of ethical sensibility. Women translators of Tagore's writings aligned him with such concerns. As a result, these women softened the political edges of Tagore's critiques. Ultimately, they repositioned him as a moral thinker whose relevance transcended ideological divides. As a result, Tagore's thoughts kept circulating through the intimate spaces of journals and schoolrooms even when public conversation got hostile or indifferent.

Because the translations by women have illuminated Tagore's works, we can see that in the overall Japanese image of Tagore, women's translations were influential. The choices they made in their interpretation drew attention to warmth, relationships, self-reflection, and emotion. These qualities were in line with early twentieth-century feminine spiritual ideals. These interpretations seem to have narrowed Tagore's philosophical perspective. But they also allowed his works to be domesticated and internalized in Japanese life. In this sense, these translations are

best understood not as distortions but as productive re-contextualizations that allowed Tagore's messages to flourish in contexts far removed from the male-dominated intellectual debates of the time.

The conversation also suggests that male and female pathways of literary transmission challenge conventional models of cultural diplomacy. Indo-Japanese exchanges include our diplomatic visits, institutional collaborations, and correspondence of leading intellectuals and scholars. This study demonstrates that cultural transmission was equally affected by obscure editorial practices, anonymous translations, and the reading habits of everyday women. The narrative of Asian modernism is acknowledged as being increasingly inclusive and multi-directional; non-elite actors played a significant role in shaping transnational literary flows.

According to scholars, it would not be unreasonable to clarify rules and to establish institutions. Women translators call into question the very meaning of "influence" or "reception" in transnational literary studies. Translation reflects not only what the text says but also the intention behind the text as well as the heritage of the translator. These negotiators did not simply transfer meaning; they were active agents who emphasized certain aspects of Tagore's works to suit their pedagogical needs, moral aims, or the presumed desires of their reader. Their decisions controlled how Tagore is understood, admired, misread, or domesticated in Japan.

As a result of this research, the broad implication is that the history of Tagore's afterlife in Japan must now be conceived not as a straightforward transfer of ideas, but rather, as an ongoing interplay of gender, politics, pedagogy, and print culture. The reception by women translators differed from that of male intellectuals, creating another interpretive horizon and keeping Tagore alive during changing political contexts. The authors' contribution suggests that the cultural exchange between India and Japan was richer, far more complex, and more democratized than what is widely assumed.

#### V. FUTURE SCOPE OF STUDY

There are numerous opportunities for future research indicated by this study. The first concerns deeper archival exploration. Although I draw on women's

magazines and educational journals, many regional papers and private diaries and unpublished manuscripts are unstudied. You may discover other translators or unknown translations in local archives, prefectural libraries, and university collections in Japan. Having a systematic catalogue of all women-translated Japanese versions of Tagore's works (complete and fragmentary) will go a long way in strengthening the field.

Another future direction includes biographical reconstruction. Numerous translators listed here are only partially recognized or known, with little proof about their lives or literary activity. One way of doing this would be to construct, as far as possible, detailed biographical profiles that clarify the social backgrounds, motivations, and networks through which they engaged with foreign literature. Efforts of this kind would help to make an intellectual history of Japanese women and integrate these translators into the larger history of modern Japanese letters.

A third avenue involves comparative analysis. During the same period, there were similar abandoned networks of women translators in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia. A comparative study of women mediators of world literature across the Asian region would throw light on the processes of negotiation that were common among them, which were responses to modernity, nationalism, and transnational cultural flows. A study like this could show how Tagore moved through multiple female translation networks in Asia, creating a bigger map of a larger early global literary cosmopolitanism.

Fourth, digital humanities offer great potential for expanding this research. Having Tagore's Japanese translations along with metadata about the translators, publication venues, techniques of translation, and thematic categorization could be an important scholarly resource. Mapping interconnections among women translators, editors, readers, and magazines through network visualization tools may reveal patterns that go unnoticed through textual analysis alone. Organizations looking to preserve Asian cultural heritage and promote digital humanities infrastructure would fund this project that has been proposed.

Finally, this study has some educational implications we should explore. The appearance of Tagore in journals concerned with women's education in the early twentieth century indicates that his writings were even responsible for the moral education of Japanese children. An analysis of the extent to which Tagore's ideas influenced early childhood pedagogy in women-managed classrooms and schools would enrich the narrative of Japanese educational reform and foster comparative perspectives on progressive education in Asia.

Ultimately, future directions suggest that the field is ready for sustained research. The recovery of women translators rectifies a historical omission and raises new questions about gender and translation and the circulation of world literature.

Scholars can enhance awareness of women's intellectual contributions and the complexity of cultural exchange in Asia by expanding the framework of this work, the theorization of the place of memory in cultural exchange.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at reconstructing the lost network of women translators who mediated Rabindranath Tagore's writings in Japan (1913–1945). It is hoped that an understanding of these women will fill a significant gap in the literature on Indo-Japanese cultural exchange. According to the study, through an interdisciplinary methodology consisting of archival recovery, thematic interpretation, and contextual comparativism, the role of women in the Japanese reception of Tagore was important yet overlooked. The women's magazines, educational journals, household literature, and so on, in which their translations appeared, formed an alternative scholarly current different from the male enterprise of Tagore's influence.

The results show that these women were key agents in pushing Tagore's writings into spaces of domesticity, pedagogy, and emotional intimacy, rather than marginal contributors. The artists' strategies highlighted themes such as spirituality, universality, and relationships. These struck a chord with female audiences. As a result, they echoed the contemporary ideals of womanhood. Even when Tagore's presence became politically contested in public settings, his

followers kept his cultural presence alive outside official spheres.

Through the recovery of this lost network, the research expands the purview of Indo-Japanese intellectual history, adds a gendered dimension to Tagore studies, and shows the limitations of existing academic narratives that privilege elite male actors.

It also shows that the dynamics of literary transmission in Asia were much more varied and socially embedded than earlier known. According to the study, people often think they read books from other countries and cultures because of important institutions or approved literary works. But in fact, it was the everyday work of women within the home or marginal professional field that really shaped the reading of many transnational books.

This study shows how gender and translation can help us reframe Tagore's Japanese reception and give us a richer understanding of how literary ideas travel and take root. It contributes to Tagore scholarship and also to feminist translation studies, cross-cultural literary history, and Asian modernity. In the recovered voices of these women translators, a more inclusive cultural imaginary emerges. This imaginary acknowledges the intellectual agency of individuals who have been rendered invisible for too long.

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