



Title	The Language of Exploration : Poetic Musings of Nakai Hiromu, a Bakumatsu/Meiji Period Globe Trotter An Annotated Poetry Translation with Content Analysis
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Citation	大阪大学世界言語研究センター論集. 2011, 6, p. 57-83
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/4485
rights	
Note	

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The Language of Exploration: Poetic Musings of Nakai Hiromu, a Bakumatsu/Meiji Period Globe Trotter - An Annotated Poetry Translation with Content Analysis

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Abstract

This paper provides an English translation of Chinese poetry written by Nakai Hiromu (1838-1894) on his first journey abroad in 1866-67. Nakai was sent to Britain to examine the conditions of the West. In his lifetime, he became a well known author of Chinese poetry. Known for his wordsmith skills, he is credited with naming the Rokumeikan building, sadly now only a flamboyant symbol of the Japanese failure to renegotiate the so-called Unequal Treaties signed by Japan with Western powers. He is also credited with coining the word, *bōnenkai*, or *end-of-year-party*, celebrated at the end of the year by many a Japanese “salary man”, student and other members of modern Japanese society.

The poems translated herein are a collection of twenty-eight, all of which were published in Nakai’s first account of travel abroad, which this author has translated as, *A Travel Sketch of the West – A New Account of Crossing the Seas*. As the title suggests, the body of the text is taken up with a day-by-day account of the sea journey to Britain. The journey took approximately two months, during which time, Nakai chose to while away the many tedious hours aboard ship with poetry and journal writing. This paper will examine these poetic musings of Nakai, a Japanese man travelling to the Western world at a time when few of his compatriots had made the journey. In many ways therefore, he was a pioneer, exploring the Western world on behalf of his nation. Unskilled in any Western languages such as English, his Chinese poetry is very telling of the feelings he experienced as such a pioneer. The poetry is therefore very relevant for gaining an understanding into the mind of the Japanese people during the Restoration years. It allows us to see how the infiltration of the West to Japan affected the Japanese people.

Keywords : Nakai Hiromu, Chinese poetry, travel diary, English Translation, *Bakumatsu/Meiji* period Japan

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1 . Introduction

In order to avoid confusion, first, clarity of what this paper is not should be made: it is not a literary criticism examining the artistic quality of the poems. It is also not a detailed description or analysis of the historical times in which the poems were written. The primary purpose of this paper is to present, for the first time, the full English translation of a collection of poems first published privately in Japan in 1868. The secondary purpose is to develop an analysis of the poet and his experiences within the context of his social environment. The reason for this is to gain insight into the mind of a contemporary of the *Bakumatsu*¹/Meiji period and see the Western infiltration of Japan from a Japanese perspective. Due to spatial limitations therefore, it is impossible to go into the details of the historical contextual content. It is more important for this paper to present the poetry to an English speaking audience who may be able to gain some sense of the feelings of a representative of Japan of the time.

The poems first appeared in the travel journal of Kagoshima-born samurai, Nakai Hiromu (1838-1894). The journal is called *Seiyō Kikō Kōkai Shinsetsu* (西洋紀行—航海新説), or *A Travel Sketch of the West – A New Account of Crossing the Seas*².

The poetry Nakai produces in his first travel journal is very telling of his feelings on this, his first journey abroad. It was a time when very few Japanese people had ever left the shores of Japan. There was, therefore, little knowledge of the world he was travelling to available. In addition, he had little or no skill in English language. He perhaps, therefore, found great solace in his poetry composition during the long sea journey. It was a time of great upheaval for the Japanese nation, and Nakai himself was deeply involved with the movements of that upheaval. Nakai worked closely with Gotō Shōjirō (1838-1897), the samurai retainer to the lord of Tosa who was a key player in bringing about the restoration of Imperial rule in 1867. The time of this journey, in 1866, was therefore a very tumultuous time in Nakai's life, as well as the history of the Japanese nation. Nakai was entrusted with the arduous task of travelling to the West to discover conditions there in order to report back to Gotō and others of the Tosa domain who were pushing for reform.

There are twenty-eight poems in the publication. Before examining these poems, a brief consideration of Nakai Hiromu's career, is first required.

1 *Bakumatsu*, in this paper, refers to the period from the early 1850s to late 1867 when the ruling Tokugawa government was in its decline just before the return of political power to the Emperor.

2 This English translation is this author's, and the same translation has been used for the author's PhD thesis (as yet unpublished) in which a full translation of the whole travel journal is provided.

2. Nakai Hiromu, the Man and his Historical Significance.

Born into a family of the samurai class in the castle town of Kagoshima, Satsuma, on the 29th day of the 11th month in the old Japanese lunar calendar, in 1838, Nakai Hiromu was the first son of Yokoyama Eisuke (横山詠介). His name at birth was Yokoyama Kyūnoshin³.

When Nakai was a child his mother left his father Eisuke, seemingly due to his alcohol abuse and violent behaviour. Eisuke eventually became a nuisance to his community as well, and he was exiled to a small island off the coast of Kagoshima. The young Hiromu was then left to fend for himself. He decided to leave Kagoshima and travel around Japan [Yashiki 2010: 61]. He went to Edo (present day Tokyo) but was caught by authorities and sent back to Kagoshima because, at the time, it was a crime to leave one's domain without prior consent from the ruling lord. He was imprisoned for approximately one year, during which time the Anglo-Satsuma War, or as it is otherwise known, the Kagoshima Bombardment, of 1863 (August 15th-17th in the Gregorian calendar) occurred [Yashiki 2010: 51].

After his release from prison, Nakai left Kagoshima once more. This time he befriended the Tosa (now Kochi prefecture) samurai, Gotō Shōjirō (1838-1897) who was a retainer to the Lord of Tosa, Yamauchi Yōdō (1827-1872). Nakai assumed the name Gotō Kyūjirō and feigned the status of a Tosa samurai in order not to be caught by Satsuma authorities once more. Little is known of the years prior to his travel to Britain, but it is believed that Nakai became an agent in Kyoto for the Lord of Uwajima (now Ehime prefecture), Date Munenari (1818-1892). His journey to Britain is said to have been suggested by Gotō Shōjirō and another illustrious Tosa samurai, Sakamoto Ryoma [Yashiki 2010: 67-68].

After his return from Britain in 1867, Japan was on the verge of tremendous change. The Shogun relinquished power to the Emperor in the final months of 1867. The Emperor Komei passed away and the Emperor Meiji took his place, thus changing the era name to Meiji. It was 1868, the beginning of a new period in Japanese history.

In the first months of 1868, there were three major attacks on foreign nationals in Japan. Nakai, who was then attached to the newly established Japanese Foreign Department, was involved to some degree in each of these incidents; the first was the Kobe Incident. This occurred on February 4th 1868 (11th day of the first month of the lunar calendar). The incident has been well-documented elsewhere, rendering little need for explanation here⁴. It ended with the Tosa samurai, Taki Zenzaburō, taking full responsibility and committing *seppuku* (ritual suicide). The ritual was witnessed by foreign representatives in Japan, including the British representative, Algernon B. Mitford. That was followed

3 For more information on the various names Nakai Hiromu used in his lifetime, see Robinson 2007: 26-27.

4 For example, see Cortazzi 2002.

by the Sakai Incident on March 8th (15th day of the second month on the lunar calendar). Eleven French sailors were attacked by samurai guards when they landed at the port of Sakai. Nakai was again involved from an administrative perspective. He was given the gruesome task of recording the injuries of the dead after their bodies were recovered from the water. As a result, eleven samurai were made to commit *seppuku* and the French demanded payment of indemnities.

Finally, there was the Nawate Incident, or Parkes' Incident as it is also known, which occurred on March 23rd (30th day of the second month in the lunar calendar). This time Nakai was more directly involved. He was given the task of accompanying the British dignitaries upon their visit to the Emperor Meiji. The then British Minister, Harry Parkes, was on his way to meet the Emperor at the Imperial Palace in Kyoto for the first time. He was accompanied by other well known, British representatives, Ernest Satow, Algernon B. Mitford and Dr. William Willis as well as a large contingent of British and Japanese soldiers. The procession left Chion-ji Temple in Kyoto and along the way was attacked by what were believed to have been two rogue samurai. One was caught and questioned after the attack, but Nakai Hiromu and Gotō Shōjirō got into a fight with the other, which ended with Nakai receiving a scalp wound. However, he managed to take off the head of his attacker⁵. A number of British and Japanese soldiers were injured but fortunately nobody was killed.

It is after this Nawate Incident that whilst recovering from his head injury, Nakai is believed to have worked on the publication of his first travel journal, *Seiyō Kikō - Kōkai Shinsetsu*, of which the poems in this paper are taken.

Afterwards, Nakai continued to work for the Meiji government in several different capacities. In 1873, he had the opportunity to travel around the world again. This time he visited China, Russia, Turkey, Greece, India, Egypt, France, Britain and the US. Again he wrote and published a travel journal, including poetry, called *Man'yū Kitei*. In October 1874, Nakai was ordered to accompany Ueno Kagenori (1845-1888) who took over from Terashima Munenori (1832-1893) as the Japanese Minister to Britain. At that time, Nakai was made secretary to the Japanese legation in London. He returned to Japan in 1876, and in 1877 he was made secretary to the minister of the Ministry of Works. He was called for his skills in escorting foreign dignitaries once more in 1881, when the King of Hawaii, David Kalakaua, visited Japan. For his services, Nakai was awarded the Hawaiian Order of Knight Commander.

In 1883, for the entertainment of diplomats and other foreign dignitaries, the Rokumeikan building was built in Tokyo. Nakai is credited with giving the building its name. The word 'Rokumeikan' translates into English as, 'The Hall of the Baying Stag', or, 'The Deer Cry Pavilion'. The word *rokumei* (鹿鳴), comes from one of the poems of the Chinese Classics (*Shi Jing*). The poem was

5 A good account of this incident can be found in Satow 2000: 356-357.

translated by Arthur Waley and was published in his translation of The Book of Songs (1937) as poem number 138, *The 'Ways of Chou' are Foreign Ways*. Waley's translation is reprinted in Pat Barr's publication, *The Deer Cry Pavilion* [Barr 1968: 13], and reads as follows,

*Yu, yu, cry the deer
Nibbling the black southernwood in the field.
I have a guest.
Let me play my zither; blow my reed-organ,
Blow my reed-organ, trill their tongues,
Take up the baskets of offerings,
Here is a man that loves me
And will teach me the ways of Chou.*

This choice of the word *rokumei* demonstrates how well-versed Nakai was in the Chinese Classics. He clearly knew this poem to be one describing the receiving and entertaining of foreign guests, which was exactly the purpose of the Rokumeikan building. The notion of 'being taught the (foreign) ways of Chou' also cleverly demonstrates the idea that the Japanese were still at the learning phase of their relationship with the West and had a strong desire to learn from the West about industrial, political, educational and other methods for developing their society into a modern one comparable with Western culture.

In 1884, Nakai was made Prefectural Governor of Shiga Prefecture. He remained in this capacity for a period of approximately seven years. Then in 1890, he was promoted to the position of elder statesman within the Meiji government. He was created a member of the high-level body on legislation.

On November 4th 1893, Nakai was given the post of prefectural governor of Kyoto. However, he died just under a year later on October 10th, 1894. He had suffered a brain haemorrhage. He was 56 years old. He was buried in Sokushūin Temple within the precincts of Tōfukuji Temple in Kyoto city. His son-in-law, the first commoner appointed to the office of Prime Minister in Japan, Hara Takashi (1856-1921), helped see to the funeral arrangements.

3. The Travel Journal

This first travel journal of Nakai's is called 西洋紀行—航海新説 (*Seiyō Kikō - Kōkai Shinsetsu*) in Japanese and I have translated the title into English as *A Travel Sketch of the West – A New Account of Crossing the Seas*. This may appear a little long-winded and some may prefer the more succinct translation of other authors such as Andrew Cobbing who entitles the work, *Journal of a Trip in the West* [Cobbing 1998: 45]. I have chosen to maintain the concept of 'crossing the seas' because a large portion of the text covers the sea journey itself.

I have created a translation of the entire text elsewhere⁶, and this paper focuses solely on the poetry, which peppers the journal and may be viewed as a vital seasoning to what otherwise may be described as a comparatively bland work. Nakai does not provide a detailed itinerary of Western culture or other aspects of the West as authors such as Kume Kunitake⁷ did later on with his work on the Iwakura Mission of 1871-1873. One of the key questions about this journal might be, why send Nakai? As he mentions frequently in the journal, he has no English skills and he had not studied medicine or other Western sciences. He was skilled in the Chinese Classics and in writing Chinese poetry. However, as some of the poems will demonstrate, he criticises the old fashioned Confucian scholars, suggesting those old books should be abandoned in place of books on Western-style navigation skills. Yashiki [2010: 71] suggests the reason he was sent was, in part, to avoid being caught by Satsuma authorities for abandoning his domain in Kagoshima (for a second time), and this may have been a good reason, although a somewhat extreme measure of escape. After a two month period of travelling, Nakai stayed in Britain for about four months. However, the daily entries of the journal stop shortly after his arrival in Britain. This is evidence that he did not have much time for journal writing upon arrival. Instead, we get a longer section of information about Britain. In particular, one section toward the end of the journal is given the subheading 'London News'. Here, Nakai provides a brief summary of news he has picked up during his time there, which depicts the conditions of Britain and Europe. In particular, he touches upon the British and European political situations. He describes his visits to munitions factories, parks, museums, poor houses and hospitals. He also describes seeing Queen Victoria in her carriage, among other things. He made short trips to Liverpool, Manchester and Dover, but not much detail is given. Finally, he tells us that on his return journey, he visited France before heading back to Japan.

6 My own (as yet unpublished) PhD thesis includes a full translation of the journal in the appendices.

7 Kume Kunitake was author of the Iwakura Mission account, *Tokumei Zenken Taishi Bei-O Kairan Jikki* (1878).

4. The Poetry

The following section of the paper provides the original Chinese poems, followed by their English translations. Analytical commentary, with reference to the travel journal as a whole, is provided and where necessary, other relevant sources are also referenced. A small number of the poems have headings or a line of explanation before them in the journal text. These headings have been maintained in this paper, and given in bold lettering before each poem. The poems have also been provided in Chinese characters first. However, although it may be self-evident, for the sake of clarity, it should also be noted that they are written following English style texts, i.e. the lines of characters read horizontally from top to bottom and from left to right.

1)

発長崎赴上海
遙指扶桑以外天
三山五岳在何邊
火船驀忽如飛鳥
載破鯨濤萬疊烟

Departing from Nagasaki I go to Shanghai

From Japan, I head off to distant foreign lands

Wondering where are the sacred three peaks and five summits?

My ship darts across the ocean like a bird,

Cutting through the many thousand leagues of misty spray water.

This first poem in the journal gives a clear sense of the anxiety, excitement and feelings of adventure that Nakai would have experienced as he began his journey to Britain. This was his first experience of travel abroad. He left Japan in the final months of 1866, and arrived in Britain during winter, in January 1867.

Nakai mentions the sacred three peaks and five summits, a well-known artistic device for description and comparison in Chinese poetry and prose. This perhaps portrays his feelings of anxiousness. He appears to be looking for something familiar and recognizable after having left his homeland. Of course, he has never been to China before, but he knows much about it from his studies. Nakai lived in a time when Japan still borrowed a great deal from China in terms of its cultural influences. It is from around the period of the mid to late 1800s however, that the Japanese had really begun to change their perspective and recognize the Western world as the great civilisation to learn from and emulate. Nakai demonstrates his skills in Chinese studies clearly in his journal through these poems. He also tells his readers several times in the prose of the journal about his lack of English skills.

In the poem, Nakai describes the speed of the ship. He travelled on a British ship, which had been arranged for him by the British trader in Nagasaki, William Alt (1840-1908). The description of the “misty spray water” gives us some idea of the impressive speed of the ship. In Britain and other Western countries at this time, the development of industry was reaching great heights in advancement. The sight of American Commodore Perry’s huge “black ships” back in 1853 and 1854 had already awed the Japanese into submission causing them to sign treaties with Western nations. The Industrial Revolution had brought the invention of steam; ships were more frequently built of iron rather than wood. Travelling on one of these huge inventions was surely an unforgettable experience for Nakai and his fellow travelling companion Yūki Yukiyasu from Tosa.

2) 風船搖蕩海煙晴
起檢羅鉞天已明
水枕怪生終夜煖
紅輪直下是行程

*The ship rocks about greatly in the strong wind,
But the hazy sea air clears
On waking, I look over to see the coastline of Singapore
My ice-pillow useless; I was hot all night
My ship sails the equator, directly under the sun.*

By the time of writing the second poem, Nakai had almost reached Singapore. In the prose of the journal, he describes how he talked to the captain who informed him that the ship would travel from Singapore, spend one night at the island of Penang, travel on to Ceylon, and then go up to Bombay in India. Nakai had to transfer to another ship because he did not need to travel as far as Bombay. The captain talked to him about Bombay; he told him “it is one of the great cities of India”. He described the tea and silk trade, and how numerous Westerners had begun to live there. Again, this is another example for Nakai to truly grasp the huge scale of British power and that of other Western imperialist nations; a power brought about by industrial development and the advancement of a global trading system. Nakai’s ship had taken the southern route from China. Nowadays, an aeroplane to Britain from Japan using the quickest northern route over Siberia takes between nine to ten hours. In Nakai’s time, the days before flight, he is forced to travel around the landmasses. When he left Japan, it was winter, but as he describes in the poem at the time of writing, he was sailing along the equator, travelling to the southern hemisphere of the globe. The heat would have been tremendous. He describes the “ice-pillow” on his bed to help him sleep, but the heat was so great that the pillow was of no use. In the journal text also, he occasionally tells his readers that he feels seasick because of the rolling of the ship on the waves. He even became partial to Western foods because of his feelings of seasickness.

3) 屋大驚瀾百丈強
黒煙壓海夜茫茫
忽看月出大洋上
却望神州天一方

*The huge, violent waves are taller than a house.
Black smoke from the ship rises and spreads into the night sky.
I see the moon above the vast ocean,
And looking behind me, I desire to see the skies over Japan.*

In this third poem, Nakai describes the rough seas with its waves larger than a house. He paints the picture of a long-haul steamship journey well. He describes the smoke bellowing from the ship's funnels, but when he stares up at the sky, he is reminded of Japan. No doubt beginning to tire from the long journey, he already begins to feel a sense of homesickness. At this point however, he was still only around the seas of Singapore. It appears that the novelty of his journey has already worn off, yet he still had a long way to go.

4) 氣候宛如三伏時
滿艙炎暑汗沾肌
臨風四顧步船板
林立帆檣各國旗

*The climate, akin to Japan's hottest season,
The inside of the ship is cloaked with a thick heat,
My skin is moist with sweat.
Facing the wind outside, I look in all directions.
As I walk the decks of the ship,
A forest of ship masts, carry the flags of all nations.*

Here we have another poem describing the heat. It ends by informing readers again of the international context that he was in. In the text of the journal, he tells us he wrote this poem whilst in Singapore. He compares the heat to Japan's hot summers and yet where he is, is very far from Japan. The context is therefore familiar and yet at the same time unfamiliar. This is a typical experience of travellers even today. When people travel, they very often find similarities to the surroundings they are accustomed to. The foreign student studying abroad today, for example, experiences similar situations to travellers and sojourners of yesterday. This travel journal of Nakai's is a good example of how the human condition does not change very much despite the years, decades, centuries or millennia,

separating such experiences.

5) 火輪運動響如雷
夜雨殘燈夢忽回
指點虛無爲絕叫
坐看南極出潮來

The movement of the ship is like the sound of thunder.

The night sky looks like rain.

In the remaining light I cannot sleep; dreams come and go.

Thinking of the difficult journey ahead,

I cannot but point a finger at the sea and scream aloud.

I look casually toward the southern hemisphere,

And feel like the surge of the waves are flooding over me.

Here, in the poem above, it appears that the stress of homesickness, the heat, the seasickness, the lack of communication skills and perhaps a myriad of other discomforts were truly beginning to cause him great anxiety. Again, this form of expression is often typical of the experience of foreign students travelling abroad today. Feelings of frustration set in, and sometimes, it becomes difficult for the student to see the benefits or purpose of their journey. Such experiences frequently lead to a make-or-break situation. The following poem shows us clearly the direction this foreign student, Nakai Hiromu, took:

6) 神州不啻穂禾嘉
人物精英最可誇
今日若諳航海術
渾圓球上皆吾家

Japan is not just a nation blessed with an abundance of crops,

It is a nation of excellent people to be proud of.

If today the Japanese had the skills of navigation,

The entire globe would be our backyard.

Nakai's direction is a typical one; he became more appreciative of his own country. He had plenty of time aboard this foreign vessel to think about the situation in his homeland, Japan. Much of what he sees on his journey leads him to make comparisons with Japan. On the journey, he has been experiencing severe homesickness, and he begins to compare and think of all the things that are great

about Japan. However, he also realises what Japan is lacking. This again, may be described as a typical experience of foreign students, or of those who stay abroad for long periods. They become more aware, and sometimes more appreciative, of their own countries. With the grandeur and impressive sights of imperialist nations and the results of the Industrial Revolution in front of him, Nakai cannot help but recognise what areas Japan is lacking in order for it also to become a great nation. This attitude may be seen as typical of the many other *Bakumatsu/Meiji* period travellers who went on to become leaders of Meiji Japan. Already, in the poem's line, "the entire globe would be our backyard", we also see Nakai's aspirations for Japan to become a strong nation. This is clearly demonstrative of the feelings among the Japanese people at this time, for Japan, not to end up with a similar fate to that of China or India. The line also demonstrates that, to Japanese eyes at least, the threat of invasion was very real.

Some scholars have suggested that the imperialistic and militarist ways of Japan in the 1930s and 1940s really began with the seeds planted in the *Bakumatsu/Meiji* period. The maxim, "if you can't beat them, join them" was evidently clear in the minds of Meiji leaders. Foreign powers were not going to leave Japan to remain a closed and isolated nation. Japan's natural fear of ending up like China or India by being sliced up and controlled by Western powers, was certainly the impetus for her to aim for an equal footing with those Western powers.

7) 風土人情異古今
男兒到處曠胸襟
一身已化西洋俗
也是尊王報國心

The customs, the people, everything is different to what I've known before.

But wherever I go, whoever I talk with I will be frank.

I have adjusted to the manners of the West,

But this, after all, I do for the love of

My Emperor and my nation.

Again in this poem, echoes of nationalism are perhaps evident in Nakai's words. Yet, when considering the fear that many Japanese had, at the time, of being invaded by Western powers, such echoes may become understandable albeit not necessarily justifiable.

Nakai died in late 1894 just as the Sino-Japanese War had begun, and later there would be the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Japan, in Nakai's time, was just beginning the walk down the path of militarism, which led to the tragedies of the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, many scholars have blamed Meiji leaders for being the catalyst of the rise of militaristic Japan. However, I am tempted to re-evaluate that notion. The Japanese knew what the threat of militarist power and gunboat diplomacy

was like; they were themselves attempting to avoid submission into that very fate. Would the Japanese have turned to militarism if they had not been faced with the threat themselves? The question is a subject for an entirely separate thesis, and the scope of this paper unfortunately does not allow further enquiry in this vein.

8) 印度洋中月夜舟
絶無山岳落吟眸
風濤慣得羈眼穩
獨有鶴聲管客愁

*Our ship sails the Indian Ocean under a moonlit sky
The roar of the rolling mountain-like waters is finally no more
I become accustomed to the push and pull of the waves
And a peaceful sleep is mine at last
But then the trill voices of the cockerels sing
And I am woken once more to be reminded of my journey*

When his sleep is not being disturbed by rough seas, Nakai is woken by the crying of cockerels kept on board ship. He is woken to be reminded that he is still on a ship. There is almost a sense of humour here. However, this last line very clearly expresses the feelings of monotony, boredom and frustration. This poem was written on the thirtieth day of his journey; exactly one month had passed. He was still sailing, and still had a long way to go. For someone not accustomed to sea travel, at this point, he would have felt quite exhausted. His ship had only just left Sri Lanka.

9) 神州勇武冠東方
堪笑一儒生說海防
欲識富強充實道
抵當拋卷講航洋

*The prowess of the warrior in the Land of the Gods
Is the greatest in the east,
But the ridiculous Confucian scholars
Talk only of protecting the surrounding seas.
If they want to find the path to wealth and strength
They need only rid themselves of the old books
And take up the Western study of navigation*

The “ridiculous Confucian scholars” he talks about here perhaps includes himself to some degree. His own learning was in Chinese studies, but he was also quick to recognise that those studies were becoming outmoded. Japan, he espouses, needed to learn and learn quickly, from the West. Nakai continued to write Chinese poetry and read the Chinese Classics all his life. He never thought, like some, that it was necessary to completely abandon the cultural heritage of the past and follow Western ways to the letter. However, he did recognise the need for Japan to re-invent itself and take what it could from Western learning in order to improve. It may strike the reader as a little dramatic when he says, “they need only rid themselves of the old books”. However, his feelings of urgency are clearly expressed. He saw the West with all of its innovations, and he clearly felt that Japan needed to change and change quickly in order to deal with the threat of Western encroachment, whether real or imagined. Again, the notion of, “if you can’t beat them, join them” is very evident in this poem.

10) 洋酒三杯意氣豪
醉持長鋏對風濤
舟人背客低聲語
始見堅剛日本刀

I felt quite jolly after three glasses of foreign liquor

Feeling quite drunk, I brought out my long sword

And stood on deck facing the wind and waves of the great ocean

The other passengers, with their backs to me,

Whispered to each other in low voices

It was most certainly the first time they had seen

A strong, sharp sword of Japan

This poem paints a clear and somewhat amusing picture. It is not difficult to imagine the scene he portrays. A drunken Japanese “samurai warrior” wielding a sword, although he is likely wearing a Western suit rather than Japanese attire, would have been a worrying sight indeed for the other nationalities on board. Tales of “samurai warriors” and their famous deadly swords were quite common at this time. News of attacks on foreign nationals in Japan was also prevalent in the early 1860s. The British merchant Charles Lennox Richardson had been murdered in the famous Namamugi Incident in September 1862. In addition, it was during these years that the slogan, *Sonnō Jōi*, or “revere the emperor, expel the barbarians” was widely espoused in Japan.

Why he brought a sword with him to Britain is perplexing. However, having been raised in a family of the samurai class, he would have learned that the samurai’s sword is his life and he must keep it with him at all times.

11) 煙鎖亞羅比亞海
雲迷亞非利加洲
此身遙在青天外
九萬鵬程一葉舟

*The mists close in on the Arabian Sea.
In the fog we lose sight of the African Continent.
I feel like I am far outside the blue of the heavens.
Like the Great Peng bird, ninety-thousand leagues above the earth
This one small ship glides along.*

Again referencing his Chinese Classics studies, Nakai talks of the Great Peng bird. The Great Peng bird here refers to a mythical bird of Chinese origin, which makes an appearance in a number of the Chinese literary classics, particularly in poetry, for example in The Classic of Mountains and Seas. It is a gigantic bird-like creature that, as described, flies '90,000 leagues above the earth'. This poem cleverly portrays an ethereal picture of his situation. Floating on a foggy sea, far away from home and anything he knows, he would have felt like he was in some kind of dream world. On top of that, the heat would have made him feel very foggy-headed. It gives a sense of the surrealism of his experience. He is a pioneer, embarking on a journey that few in his circle of acquaintances have taken before. For him, the experience is almost other-worldly. He explains that he feels like he is "outside of the blue heavens".

12) 炎熱如烘難就寢
非關寵辱牽憂念
店娘解事滌煩襟
能使椀冰和酒飲

*The heat of the Indian Ocean seems to roast everything,
Even lying down in bed is difficult to do.
Sleep itself seems to hang on the notions of honour and shame.
Not from anxiety or worry, but from not being used to the heat.
The waitress understands me though.
She helps to swill away my agony,
As she serves me with an ice-cold drink*

Another scene well depicted in this poem, the line, "sleep itself seems to hang on the notions of honour and shame," is perhaps confusing at first. What does he mean? Being in a foreign environment,

Nakai says he feels shame because he is ‘not used to the heat’. Perhaps he would like to strip down to his underwear. However, onboard this foreign ship, he is constrained by Western morals and must remain covered up. Japanese houses are well designed to deal with hot weather, being made from cool *tatami* straw mats and paper thin walls that easily let in the breeze. Instead, here Nakai must sleep within the hot confines of an iron-clad ship with little ventilation. Perhaps he would rather sleep out on deck, but that would be considered strange or bad manners by his fellow passengers. Nakai must constantly watch himself in order to demonstrate that he is a civilized man from an equally civilized country. Nakai is very aware of his position as a representative of Japan, a nation which had largely been secluded from Western observation thus far. There were many in the West who did not understand Japan and the Japanese people, so Nakai was certainly being observed by the non-Japanese passengers on board. The previous poem 10 is also good evidence of this fact. It would bring shame and dishonour upon him, and his country, if he was not seen to be civilised.

13) 夢破西洲萬里天
遠離故國在洋船
半生未遂經時用
汗漫之遊度卅年

*My dream was broken.
I was ten thousand leagues away under Western skies.
Though I am far away from my homeland,
I am still only on the ship.
Half my life has passed,
And I have not yet made good use of my years.
As a drifter, thirty years I have squandered.*

With little to do aboard ship, he has too much free time. Being far from Japan, he suffered feelings of isolation and loneliness. He naturally then, took to pondering the meaning of his own existence with this melancholy poem. He clearly felt helpless just sitting around on a ship. He felt he had not yet made good use of his years despite his age. Incidentally, he is actually only 28 years old at the time of writing, or 29 if counting by the Japanese method. The ship is on its way to Aden from Sri Lanka. It was certainly very frustrating for him with nothing to do but wait until his arrival at the next port.

14) 同友某生貶謫
南島遙有此奇
絕海雲濤路不通
謫居知汝感無窮

想思一夜客船夢

飛向彈丸孤島中

I Dedicate the Following to Such-and-Such Exiled to the Southern Islands

You have been left exiled on a lonely island,

With no means of return.

I can sympathize with the loneliness of such solitude.

My thoughts turned to you one night.

On the ship, I had a dream.

I was, as a cannonball, shot,

Flying over to that lonely island to where you are.

Another melancholy poem about loneliness and solitude again demonstrates his feelings clearly. Kawaguchi Hisao *et al.* [Kawaguchi 1984: 48] have suggested that this poem is dedicated to a friend or friends who had been exiled. However, this dedication might also be referring to Nakai's father, Yokoyama Eisuke. Why does he refer to the person, or persons, as "such-and-such"? Is it out of respect for their anonymity? Nakai's descendant, Yashiki Shigeo, notes the possibility that Nakai originally left Kagoshima in order that he might save his family name, which has been marred by his father Eisuke's alcohol-infused violent escapades [Yashiki 2010: 61]. He left because he wanted to make a success of himself and restore the family circumstances. Eisuke had used up all the family wealth and Nakai, as the first son, was naturally under pressure to save the family from ruin. Perhaps Nakai feels too ashamed to mention his father by name, but at the same time wants to express something personal. Is this a poem to a lonely father from a lonely son?

15)

同

天連水處水連天

東指支那州盡邊

遙向故人傳近況

西洋風月了前緣

And Again

Are the heavens a continuation of the waters?

Or, the waters a continuation of the heavens?

I know not; but facing east, in the direction of China,

I call to you and tell you of my recent endeavours.

I realise now that my journey to the west,

Was decided by the Fates long ago.

The title of the poem above, *And Again*, demonstrates that this poem is also dedicated to “such-and-such” as was the previous one. Possibly this is also dedicated to his father Eisuke. Nakai says, “I call to you and tell you of my recent endeavours”. Is it a son telling his father of his endeavours, telling him that he’s alright, telling him not to worry, everything is well? Nakai’s realisation that this journey was his destiny further paints a picture of the ethereal, mysterious beauty he has developed in these poems. Amongst the prose of the published journal, there is a comment by the well-known author of Chinese poetry, Washizu Kidō (1825-1882). He praises Nakai for his poetic mastery saying, “The number of those travelling to the West recently is uncountable. Of those who understand poetry however, he is the only one who is an expert on the West.” [Nakai 1928: 287]. Through his poetry, Nakai is clearly able to portray a very visual image of the West despite lacking English skills. He expresses his experiences well through Chinese poetry. This suggests the publication is more about poetic artistry than being an itinerary-like, information-laden account such as those produced by authors like Kume Kunitake or Fukuzawa Yukichi.

16)

憶礪弘庵

羨君卜地結茅廬
春雨秋風伴釣魚
愧我莽忙隨異俗
絕無幽致到琴書

Thinking of Gi Kōan

*I envy you finding a tranquil place to live, building a simple house,
During the spring rains and autumn breezes,
You can fish and live a romantic way of life.
I though, am ashamed;
I am off running around the globe,
And have no time even for my interests of music and writing.*

It is unclear who Gi Kōan is. From the context however, the person (or persons?) is a friend; perhaps a colleague from school. Nakai was acquainted with Fujimori Kōan (藤森弘庵) and Iso Atsushi, the character for Iso also being 磆, or ‘Gi’ who was a student of Fujimori’s. Possibly the poem is dedicated to them. In poems 13 and 15, we see Nakai first considering that he has not done as much with his years as he could have done, and then suggesting that it was always his fate to travel across the world. In this poem, he expresses envy for his friend’s simple, comfortable way of life. The journey is an arduous one. Nakai was under much stress in this new, foreign environment that whilst being boring on ship, brought new sights and sounds at every shore the ship docked at. Nakai suffered from seasickness, homesickness, heat exhaustion and occasional bouts of asthma. It is natural he

envied his friend's more relaxed lifestyle.

17) 借得洋人折脚床
葡萄美酒挹涼香
醉餘還有并州感
萬（里）疊煙隔故鄉

*I borrowed a fold-away deck chair from a Westerner.
As I savoured the cool scent of the delicious wine,
I became intoxicated and was again reminded of the words: "this is home".⁸
Being draped in a dense fog, my home feels a million miles away.*

Here is another melancholy-toned poem; this time expressing homesickness. As he drinks the Western wine and becomes gradually inebriated his thoughts again turn to Japan and home. The affects of alcohol can often cause sentimental feelings of emotion. Added to that, Nakai is in a foreign environment with a lack of language skills and other difficulties. Such a sullen mood may again be typical of foreign students abroad, particularly those with a lack in linguistic ability. The image of him asking one of the Western passengers for the deck chair, perhaps waving his hands about in a form of sign language, gives a sense of familiarity to anybody who has travelled abroad. Again Kidō commends Nakai for his poetic mastery. He says, "These words make for true poetry. His word craft is interesting, whatever he says" [Nakai 1928: 287]. As already noted, Nakai was well-known for his skills in Chinese poetry. These poems and the poems from his second travel journal, *Man'yu Kitei*, were also published as a separate two volume work called, *Ōshū Sanjin Kikō*, in 1896, two years after his death, by Nakai's younger half brother, Yokoyama Eitarō.

18) 南連大漠北平疇
行駕車輪不倩舟
瞬息之間三百里
一條鐵路向歐洲

*To the south is a vast desert.
To the north, an expanse of fields,
My journey from here is not by ship.*

⁸ From a Chinese poem by Jia Dao (賈島、779-843).

*I board a train, and travel 300 leagues in an instant.
This single train line will take me all the way to Europe!*

Finally Nakai has reached Suez, but the Suez Canal is not yet built. It was not completed until some months later, in 1867. Therefore, Nakai had to take a steam train from Suez to Cairo. With the steam train, the wonders of Western industrial development impress upon Nakai the tremendous scale of advancement the West has made. This and the following poem demonstrate how impressed he is by this advancement.

19) 始覺火輪眞活機
車窓回首又斜暉
滿山風景看難辨
一瞬趁他歸鳥飛

*I realise for the first time,
The steam train is truly a wonder of civilization.
I turn to look out from the window of the train,
And see the setting sun over the mountainous landscape.
But it is all so difficult to see,
As it all goes by in an instant.
Like a bird rushing to return to the nest,
We fly past it all.*

Nakai is impressed with the distance the railroad stretches and with the speed with which the train can travel in poem 18. Here in poem 19, he again expresses his amazement at the speed, stressing how difficult it is to see the scenery as it flies by. Although impressed by it, however, there is also a sense of lamentation in his words toward this development, almost as though he regrets the loss of the slow pace of life of years past. In the prose of the journal, Nakai goes on to give some description of the trains, their history, how the railroads are built and so on. He is clearly impressed.

20) 舟中雜詩示諸生
狂瀾當面雪山頽
千里洋程一夜來
却笑徐生尋異葉
片帆咫尺訪蓬萊

Life Aboard Ship Described in a Variety of Poems

Seeing the huge wild waves with my own eyes,
It feels like a mountain of snow is collapsing all around me.
My being a thousand miles away in Western seas,
Seems to have happened overnight.
It is laughable to think that Xufu⁹.
On his search for the Elixir of Life,
Only got as far as Japan in his poor vessel.

This poem above is the first in part two of the journal. Nakai has reached Malta. The underlining in this poem is given in the original Japanese text: Nakai wishes to emphasise the importance of his words. In the journal, Kidō comments, “Such ridicule is peculiar” [Nakai 1928: 289]. However, this boastful nature of Nakai’s is not peculiar to his personality. There are several stories of Nakai being boastful, but, he is not often criticised for it. Indeed, it is one of the likable elements of his character. He is seen as a cheery, fun-loving, almost larger-than-life character¹⁰.

21) 世上榮華不可求
漫遊空度幾春秋
吾生只喜多喜福
歷遍地球三大洲

I do not want for any earthly glory.
Many years I have spent just drifting through life.
Simply happy with the abundance of lucky coincidences I've had.
I am travelling around three continents¹¹ of the globe.

Despite his apparent boastful nature in the previous poem, we see here in poem 21, almost the opposite side of his personality. He says his does not want earthly glory. From his career history, it is clear he never reached the heights of other famous Meiji period politicians and leaders. He is recorded as saying he did not want important titles, medals of honour or other decorations like many of his fellow Meiji leaders had. Nakai merely wished to lead a comfortable life as we have already seen in poem 16 dedicated to ‘Gi Kōan’.

9 On the Chinese Emperor’s command, Xu Fu took many young men and women on a sea journey to find a medicine to stop the aging process and death. According to legend, they never found such medicine, but instead landed on the islands of Japan and populated the country.

10 For perspective on Nakai’s character see Satow 2000.

11 “Three continents”, here refers to Asia, Africa and Europe.

22)

四海交通唱太平
休論富國又強兵
男兒第一開心事
駛過西洋萬里程

*Now there is much intercourse between nations,
Across the four corners of the globe; many advocating peace.
It is time to stop the cries of “Rich nation, Strong army”.
As a man, my top priority is to open my heart to the world,
And so I have raced across the many thousands of leagues to see the West.*

In this poem, Nakai brings up political topics once more. It perhaps seems odd that he would suggest stopping “the cries of ‘Rich nation, Strong army’”. At the time in Japan, this slogan was becoming popular. However, in the next line, Nakai says, “As a man, my top priority is to open my heart to the world”. This begs a question; is his mind more inclined toward a sense of global citizenship? In other poems, we see how he encourages Japan to become stronger in order to be able to compete with Western encroachment and stand her own ground. However, here we see that he also recognises the importance of collaboration and cooperation with the West. By ‘opening his heart to the world’, he will be able to gain a better understanding of it. The ‘intercourse between nations’, he speaks of, ‘advocating peace’, again gives an indication of the influence he is receiving from his experience abroad. He clearly understood that Japan could not continue to be a closed nation. It could not ignore the rest of the world any longer. Japan must play its part in the global arena. This poem of Nakai’s is just as relevant today as it was when it was written in 1867. In a modern context, global cooperation is vital in areas such as the environment, finance, business and other areas. In the same way, the following poem too, may also be relevant to Japanese politics today.

23)

時世于今幾變遷
一治一亂理其然
何人爲具拔山力
掌握皇州兵馬權

*How much Japan has changed in recent years,
First peace, then chaos,
Naturally there is good reason for this
But just who has the power,
To get through this mountain of chaos?*

*To take the horse by its reins and control,
The provinces of our Emperor?*

If Nakai was writing this poem today, although some of the terminology is antiquated, the sentiment may certainly be applicable to modern Japanese politics. The frequent changing of prime ministers in recent years, for example, has demonstrated that modern Japan is yet to find someone capable of ‘taking the horse by its reins’. Poem 23 was written on the day that Nakai had been discussing Japan with an English man who showed him an English book in which there were maps of Osaka and Hyōgo as well as descriptions of the Japanese people, their customs and character. This discussion, although he had limited language ability, clearly led him to consider international issues and Japan’s stance. In the text, he underlines one particular section that in translation reads,

Today, Western nations have overrun the four seas. Over many hundreds of years of history and development, their peoples have settled into peaceful and sufficiently prosperous nations.
They did not develop instantaneously. [Nakai 1928: 290, underlining by Nakai to stress the importance of the statement].

He seems to be suggesting that it may take some time, but Japan may also become a prosperous nation. This begs the question, how much was it in his mind for Japan to ‘overrun’ the seas around Asia? As discussed under poem 7, it is easy to see why past scholars have blamed the rise of militaristic Japan on Meiji leaders.

24) 先扼咽喉不詳開
人家數戶倚巖隈
異鄉異客將驚殺
日夜三軍護炮臺

*Ahead of us is a narrow throat,
That refuses to open to its enemies.
Numberless houses cling to the rock's face.
A foreigner in a foreign place,
I try to suppress my amazement.
But all hours of the day and night,
Numberless soldiers guard their stations.*

The “narrow throat” he speaks of here is the Strait of Gibraltar, which the ship is sailing through as he writes. Gibraltar was a strategic point for the British at this time. The Anglo-Spanish War, fought between 1727 and 1729, allowed the British to confirm their claim on Gibraltar and their power over the Strait. In the text, Nakai explains, “...now there are always several thousand British troops

stationed here, guarding the batteries," [Nakai 1928: 290]. Clearly he is impressed by the tremendous scale of military strength.

25)

今夜月色朦朧
偶壞友人
凍雲籠月海漫漫
船到歐洲夜轉寒
京洛故人無恙否
尺書侍汝報平安

Tonight the Moon Shines Faintly in the Sky and I am Thinking of Friends

*Wintry clouds envelop the moon,
The sea stretches out far into the distance,
My ship has reached Europe.
The nights grow ever colder.
I wonder whether my good friends at home in Kyoto are safe.
I wait for your letter letting me know that you are fine.*

Among the 'friends' in Kyoto he talks about in this poem, it is possible that he includes his then wife, Fumiko who at the time would have been pregnant with their first child Ryūtarō. The image of the moon hanging among cold, wintry clouds sets the scene for the sentiment of loneliness and homesickness once again.

26)

有洋人話兵庫開港者因賦一絕
東瞻皇國浪連天
講約過期又一年
勇斷何人成血戰
楠公墓畔碎洋船

A Westerner was Talking about the Opening of Hyogo Port, so I Wrote the Following Poem

*Looking toward Japan far away in the east,
The ceaseless waves continue.
It has been another year,
Since the demands of the West.
How many decisive men are there,
Who can fight a bloody battle,
And, next to the grave of the great Lord Kusunoki,*

Smash the Western ships?

Lord Kusunoki, or Kusunoki Masashige (1294-1336), mentioned in this poem was a great hero for many of the Meiji elite. He was well regarded as the epitome of samurai loyalty. He fought and died for the Emperor Go-Daigo in an effort to regain power from the Kamakura Shogunate. He was a great hero for those who saw themselves as having regained power for the Meiji Emperor from the former ruling Tokugawa Shogunate. In this poem, we can see similar sentiment. However, rather than mentioning the Shogunate as the enemy, he talks about ‘a common enemy’ for both the Shogunate and the Emperor, for the Japanese nation, that is, the foreign threat. As he travelled around the world seeing the great strength and power of Western nations, he realised the need for Japan to forget about its own internal problems and consider what had to be done about the threat from outside.

27) 一從洋舶入橫濱
萬里波濤如比隣
吾亦單身航絕海
海西長作漫遊人

*Since Western ships started coming to Yokohama,
Crossing many thousands of leagues of waves,
It has been as though Japan and foreign nations are close neighbours.
And now I too am sailing off alone far across the seas.
I suppose I will be roaming around Europe for a long time.*

Nakai only stayed in Britain for about four months after his two month sea journey, so he was not away for the long time he assumed in this poem, nor compared to other Japanese who travelled abroad around the same time. From Nakai’s time onward, Japan continued to develop its ties with other nations, and Nakai is one of the pioneers of that new phase for Japan. What he learned whilst “roaming around Europe”, was beneficial to Japan in those developing stages.

28) 中宵御碇是何邊
溽暑撩人歛穩眠
詰且放眸胡榻上
旗章風颶數邦船

*Just where has my ship dropped anchor tonight?
The heat is getting to everybody,
And a peaceful sleep is unobtainable.*

*From early morning I went to sit,
On an exotic-looking lounge chair,
And I look into the distance across the ocean,
There I see countless foreign ships anchored in the bay,
Each with their different national flags flying in the wind.*

There ends the last poem in the journal. This poem was written earlier, in Singapore, although it is given last in the journal text. The poems stop before Nakai reaches the shores of Britain. He did not have time for writing poetry once he had reached Britain. He did not write very much more in his journal, in general. On board ship he had plenty of time to write and much time to become bored. There was usually nothing to observe except expanses of sea water, and he was linguistically limited in his ability to mingle with many of his fellow passengers. Upon arrival in Britain, however, there was plenty to keep him occupied. He visited museums, hospitals, a munitions factory, a poor house and the Crystal Palace among other places.

5. In Translation – A Conclusion

Perhaps because of his Classical Chinese studies and his lack of English skills, Nakai was not overly influenced by Western culture and innovations. This demonstrates the necessity of language ability in coming to understand another culture fully. What he sees in Britain, and other places, he recognises is important for Japan to incorporate for its own development, but he does not become an Anglophile. His understanding of Western culture is coloured by his own perspective steeped in classical Chinese study, plus a firm belief in Japanese culture. A tendency commonly observed in many language learners is a feeling of sympathy for the culture of that language. The more a person learns of a language, the more they learn of its culture; thus it is only natural that a sense of sympathy for the culture and people is developed.

Nakai Hiromu's first adventures to Britain, when very few Japanese had left Japan, are well depicted through his poetry. Some have criticised the prose of the journal as being uninformative in comparison to other writers. However, in the accompanying poetry, his true feelings are clear, thanks to the artistic license with which he is able to express himself. The translations created here may unavoidably leave out some of this artistic license, as translations of literature and poetry often do. The concept, "lost in translation", is common in literature and poetry because much of the culture can be lost. Translators often argue their own use of "artistic license" because it is a form of art that is being translated. The question, "what am I creating; a translation, or a piece of art?" is common. Is the translation merely attempting to get across the meaning of the original text, or is it an expression of art in itself? Questions like these can vex many translators, not only in the area of literary translation. In the case of legal documentation, for example, the question of which document, the English, or the Japanese, is the official one, the one to which reference should be made in case of legal disputes? For

the literary translator however, the question of legality does not usually arise. Instead, they may be criticised for their word choice, phrasal usage, or otherwise questioned in their method of translation. There can possibly never be a ‘perfect’ translation. There will always be other translators who will use another turn of phrase, or piece of vocabulary. There is always room for improvement, although, one particular translation may eventually be settled upon or approved.

In conclusion, the translations presented here, and likewise, the analyses made from these translations are one perspective. By grasping some notion of what Nakai Hiromu wished to express through his poems, this paper has attempted to examine his experiences. Two major themes can be observed: first, his personal feelings of loneliness and homesickness, on top of his physical ailments of asthma, seasickness, heat exhaustion and stress, and second, his concern for Japan’s current and future condition. It has been possible to gain some insight into the mind of a Japanese person who experienced the environment in which Japan felt threatened by the encroachment of Western powers. It has also been possible to observe his reactions upon experiencing one of those Western powers, namely, Britain.

With two languages and cultural diversities as different as Japanese and English, there will always be something not portrayed or understood through translation. However, that something will not necessarily diminish the finished product, and some degree of the other culture will be portrayed and understood by the readers. Some element of the target language and culture is shared, allowing for better communication and understanding. This is the vital role that translation plays, whether in cultural, political, legal or other spheres. As long as the world maintains its diversity of language and culture, there will remain the need for translation.

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(2011.07.21 受理)

12 As is sometimes the case, this English translation is given at the end of the Japanese publication itself for what appears to be a reference for non-Japanese speaking readers.

13 As already noted in the introduction, this English translation is this author’s own translation of Nakai’s first travel journal produced for inclusion in a PhD thesis.

14 There is no available English translation for this title.

