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CULTURAL DIPLOMACY IN THE AGE OF THE EMPIRE: ALGERNON BERTRAM MITFORD (1837–1916)

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In this article I use the figure of a member of the British Legation in Japan as a case study to illustrate how trends in international politics during the third quarter of the XIX century manifested themselves in the field of cultural exchange. The critical lens I am exploring is the modern concept of cultural diplomacy, more specifically – the role of translation as one of its facets. I argue that the scope of an individual's influence in Japanese-British cultural exchange might be broader than we criticaly acknowledge in modern scholarship.

The relationships of the British crown to subordinated states is usually reflected through the idea of post-colonial studies and hardly ever in terms of cultural diplomacy. Evan though Japan was hardly ever treated by the scholars of postcolonialism as a country with relevant legacy, the overall trend and global political trends influenced Japanese policy greatly, as assessed by Komori (2001, p. 12). However, the terms of exchange may take a new inflection if we personify the movement of the underpinning powers and zoom into important figures' perspectives on the intercultural mediation in the age of the empire. On one side, the politically sovereign territory of Japan was bound by a network of unequal treaties, initiated under a military threat of world powers, as a 'weaker', 'backward,' 'feudal' state. Under these conditions, the concept of diplomacy might prove impossible to apply. On the other side the influence Japanese art had on European decorative art, painting, literature, poetry, drama, and to a certain extent even on music, gives us an impression that aesthetic expression somehow was treated as a phenomenon if not superior to European – at least from the viewpoint of an equally plausible set of standards. This dialectic relationship might be seen as a metaphorical embodiment of the modern concept of cultural diplomacy and, applied retrospectively, reveals the translational mechanisms of how culture can occupy the field cleared by military corps.

One of the brightest examples of this shifting dichotomy is a figure of a British diplomat Algernon Bertram Mitford (1837 -- 1916). He was an advocate of British superiority, a firm believer that his duty was to translate the will of the British Empire for the inferior and weaker Japan, and on the other hand -- one of the most influential promoters of Japanese culture in Europe of the third quarter of the XIX century. Pertinently, he was one of the first translators of Japanese language among the British, author of the book *Tales of Old Japan* (1871). Not without his works was conceived the image of the *samurai* – Japanese warrior without fear and reproach, which amalgamated loyalty with extreme violence, arrogance with self-destruction and aggressiveness with refinement.

In this article, I focus on the imagery and atmosphere Mitford created in his work. It is an elegiac dirge lamenting the disappearance of Japanese culture as Mitford saw it. *Hara-kiri* and *samurai* were the kernels of that disappearing feudal code of conduct Mitford amalgamated in his work. I argue that while compiling the texts with alleged authority and authenticity through the critical eye view of a 'culturally competent' mediator, Mitford (deliberately or unwillingly) was mostly projecting his heroic self-ideal onto the repertoire of cultural material rather than facing the realities of Japanese culture per se. Secondly, I point out Mitford's stance as a translator and interpreter and try to reveal the discrepancy between the role of the translator as we credit it today and the diplomatic licence Mitford took creating *Tales*.

Close reading of *Tales of Old Japan*: mediating tradition

Hara-kiri or *seppuku* – ritual suicide by disembowelment practiced by the *samurai* class - can be seen both as a metaphorical and chronological 'cut' that marked the beginning of an era of Western-style diplomacy in Japan. *Seppuku* as a ritual execution was showcased at first to appease the foreigners; these were living within very limited areas of settlement in late feudal Japan and were under constant threat of being assassinated. The assassins' motto *sonnō-jōi,* which means 'veneration of the Emperor, expelling of the barbarians' was the engine that drove Japanese national thought, and the 'criminals' – usually *rōnin* – warriors without a seignor or master – would submit to the death sentence without complaint. For *hara-kiri* in the name of the Emperor was a guaranteed way to martyrdom. So strong was the will of the westernized government of late Tokugawa Japan to demonstrate a dignified compliance to the Western Powers' will, that the procedure would include witnesses from the European legations. This was how British legation officials, second secretary Algernon Bertram Mitford, later known as Baron Redesdale, and his close friend, the legation's official translator, Ernest Mason Satow, were invited to witness the ceremony of *seppuku* of Taki Zenzaburō.

The 'performance' of hara-kiri and the ensuing report submitted to the British Legation became the first of Mitford's Japanese accounts written in 1869. As the invitation of foreign representatives to the official procedure by the Meiji government was an act of political diplomacy, so the publication of the full account on Japanese affairs by Mitford became a true *tour de force* of cultural diplomacy, quenching the thirst for the exotic embodied by Japanese aesthetics – and the West enthusiastically embraced a new artistic paradigm embodying everything feudal and medieval – as opposed to modern industrial British reality.

Before the 1870s the image of Japan in the Victorian eyes was fragmented and superficial. Since the so-called 'opening of Japan' by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853, naval officers, traders, diplomats, and adventurers trod the way to Japan and flooded the European book market with Japan-related travelogues. Most of the writings of this sort would gravitate towards a picturesque image of a dollhouse-like, cute, and miniature countryside inhabited by beautiful *musume* and furnished by Far Eastern paraphernalia. However, rare examples of memoirs of diplomats and naval officers (Matthew Perry and his crew, Sir Rutherford Alcock, Lawrence Oliphant, Sherard Osborn to name a few) assigned to represent Western Powers in Japan would offer a gruesome landscape, filled with cunning and deceitful people and violent to the extreme ruffians. Mitford achieved a more nuanced and complex representation.

Amidst a scarce amount of research on Mitford as a persona, even fewer publications delve into a deep textual analysis of the *Tales*. In this regard, Toshio Yokoyama's study has done justice to Mitford's work as a threshold in the evolution of the image of Japan and is a valuable secondary source for my analysis. Morton's recent detailed biography is also proof of the need to shed light on this historical figure. The author of *Japan in the Victorian mind* (1987) Yokoyama points out general trends which shaped the strategies of publications on Japan in the late XIX century. Even before Japan was forced to break its seclusion, the British public was aware of the singularity and likeability of Japanese customs. The first author to be found responsible for the rosy image of Japan was Henry Morley, an author in Charles Dickens' magazine *Household Words*. He published an account of an imaginary vessel called *Phantom Ship* entering the port of Nagasaki as one of the several stories on yet unknown countries of the world. This publication appeared in 1851 and anticipated the actual expedition of Matthew Perry in 1853, which resulted in the first unequal treaty signed by the Japanese government in 1854 and also in the publication of the expedition's materials in the form of voluminous and raw impressions of the Commodore. The flow of information about Japan in print steadily grew along with a rise in the audience's interest. The publications of the time covered miscellaneous topics starting from the landscape and nature and extending to Japanese traditions. The leitmotif was the exemplification of the differences between the West and unique Japan.

The early 1850s were approximately the time when the idea of Japanese XIX century feudalism as a direct reflection and a counterpart of the European Middle Ages became salient in print. An image of picture-like idealised Japan was disturbed after the 1861 attack of ronin on the headquarters of the British legation. Sir Rutherford Alcock and Lawrence Oliphant, both members of the legation, submitted their memoirs in print. While Lawrence Oliphant further contributed to the plausible image created by earlier works, Alcock's opinion at some points oscillated towards unveiled dislike. After the incident, the opinions of the British audience split and the tone of the articles changed. Victorian readership was unsure whether it was worth interfering in Japanese domestic affairs and whether the presence of the world powers was detrimental to Japan at all. Around the time, so-called globe trotters flooded Japan; therefore to obtain a certain authority to pass judgement on Japan it became necessary to emphasise the length of the stay or otherwise to justify one's sources of information. This trend manifested itself even in the titles, let alone the content of the books.

A full historical overview of the underpinnings behind an image of Japan in Victorian society is beyond the scope of this article, so I will focus on the singular figure A.B. Mitford. As an author and diplomat who survived the turmoil of the Japanese civil war, who spent more than four years in Japan, and had a command of the Japanese language, Mitford and his book *Tales of Old Japan,* published in 1871, became a great revelation for most of Victorian readers. As Mitford mentions in the foreword it is the thoroughness and the comprehensiveness of his approach that stood out:

> The books which have been written of late years about Japan have either been compiled from official records, or have contained the sketchy impressions of passing travellers. Of the inner life of the Japanese the world at large knows but little: their religion, their superstitions, their ways of thought, the hidden springs by which they move—all these are as yet mysteries. […] The lord and his retainer, the warrior and the priest, the humble artisan and the despised Eta or pariah, each in his turn will become a leading character in my budget of stories; and it is out of the mouths of these personages that I hope to show forth a tolerably complete picture of Japanese society (Mitford, 1910)

The reception of Mitford's writings and their influence on the publishing trend and readership taste is seen as 'an important event in the history of ideas about Japan in British periodicals' as the publication of *Tales* gave rise to the trend for a 'quest of inner life' of the Japanese (Yokoyama, 1987, p. 88). It was the time when the aesthetics of *Japonisme* found its way to decorative art, painting, design, theatre, and literature.

Mitford matched all criteria for authorial unity in the field of Japanese writings: he possessed the knowledge, guaranteed by his long stay in the country; his position in the Legation provided access to the highest social classes and even to the Emperor's person; fluency in Japanese expanded his opportunities for research; and his effortless and exciting style of writing provided ease of consumption. On the other hand, the book matched the fashion for exotic and orientalist writing along with a high degree of fascination with the feudal past in higher British society. Perceived as being so natural and authentic, so explicitly British, Mitford, moreover, offered a palatable and relatable image of the singular oriental culture, providing a glimpse into the Japanese 'floating world,' then dissolving in the course of modernization. The *Tales* were illustrated with hand engravings made by an anonymous native artist, commissioned to do this job by the author himself.

As mentioned before, in 1869, before the publication of *Tales of Old Japan,* three articles were submitted for publication in *The Cornhill Magazine*, a prestigious and respected literary journal at the time. Two of those on Japanese sermons had cold reception, but the article on *hara-kiri* somehow met the expectations of the Victorian audience for macabre reading (it should be remembered that the time was marked by the rise of the Victorian Gothic novel, and the article went out during the part of the century marked by the popularity of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley in 1818 and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, 1897). As Robert Morton, Chuō University professor and a researcher of Mitford's life based on the personal archive and correspondence with his father, comments on Mitford's intent:

> Death over dishonour was at the heart of Mitford's beliefs and he had the highest respect for the combination of courage and adherence to tradition that the hara-kiri demanded. […]
>
> He thought it important to educate the British about the hara-kiri and described the act in terms that Victorian upper class Englishmen would

> relate to, indeed something that could almost have been part of their own gentleman's code (Morton, 2017, p. 95).

The thirst for danger and adventure, mixed in Mitford's heart with admiration for the valiant and noble, was contradictory to Mitford's primary duty in the Legation which included mostly paperwork, taking a toll on his career. He wrote to his father on his way back that he was going to provoke the interest of the British public to his writing by an upfront publication even if that meant he was paying for the publication from his own pocket. As he wrote, 'don't stick out for money – I want them in print – with my name attached – "translated by A.B. Mitford."'[1]

To understand why the expertise on Japan was such a valuable symbolic commodity for Mitford, that he voluntarily risked forfeiting a significant sum of money, it is necessary to look at his biography. Algernon Bertram Mitford was the third son of Henry Reveley Mitford and a descendant of the earls of Beverly Georgiana, born in London in 1837. His family left for the continent three years later and settled down in Frankfurt am Main. Between 1842 and 1846 they spent most of their time in France. By 1846 Mitford had entered Eton College, and in 1855, Christ Church College, Oxford. After leaving university in 1858 he was appointed to the Foreign Office, and in 1863 was sent to St. Petersburg as the second secretary of the embassy. A year later he left the Russian Empire as envoy to Constantinople. In 1865 he volunteered to go to China, and finally by 1866 was transferred to Japan (Gosse, E., & Matthew, H., 2004). Mitford had two elder brothers and felt like he had to fight for his place in life, without much hope to inherit a fortune. This is probably the reason why he pushed himself to pursue both a diplomatic career as well as aspiring to gain acknowledgement as a writer - a way of symbolically conquering a new field.

Mitford's life and welfare, in the end, was hardly dependant on his years in Japan, as his fortune came from a different source rather than commission income from publications. But little did he know about ~~it~~ this earlier in life while preparing the *Tales* for print. As Morton writes:

> Mitford could not see his future clearly, but, in combination with his fluent Japanese and Chinese, he was thinking this book could be the key to maximising the profit from his stay in the Far East. Being so calculating was frowned on by the upper classes in Britain, and even more so in Japan. But Mitford was skilled at giving the impression that he was above the rat race [...] (Morton, 2017, p. 137)

The cost of the illustrations and publication of materials he had gathered was a natural extension of the financial investment Mitford made in his decorum and native language proficiency. Mitford complained, that the cost of learning the language was not covered by the Foreign Office. Moreover, he said he had earned 400 pounds a year, but spent 800 pounds. “When asked whether he thought he had been extravagant, he said that such expenditure was ‘necessary if you wish to keep up your position at all towards the natives’” (Morton, 2017, p. 154) – additional evidence of the message Mitford was trying to communicate.

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[1] Cited by Morton, 2017, p. 156 after A.B. Mitford to H.R. Mitford, 24 March, 1869.

A.B. Mitford planned to publish the materials – collected and written down during his stay in Japan - well before his return. He carefully recorded the information from expeditions in the rural areas of the country, ordered the illustrations by Japanese artists and rewrote some of the materials, and submitted as a report to the Legation (Yokoyama, 1987. p. 92). As much as Mitford was counting on igniting an interest towards Japan in the Victorian readership, he was not expecting an immediate success of his debut on the literary field (Morton, R., 2017, p. 158).

The book turned out to be a bestseller, and hardly was there a bookshelf in Britain which could get away without it. In his desire to see the book out in print, Mitford had sold the rights on pitifully unfavourable conditions, having received only 240 pounds sterling of remuneration (which probably hardly covered the expenses of creating the illustrations), and the success of the first edition made him regret the ‘mistake which [he] made’ (Redesdale, 1915, p. 554). This may be evidence that Mitford was above all aiming to please the taste of the general audience and find a place in a highly specialized publishing market at that time.

Close reading of the text explains the popularity of Mitford’s publication. The first part of the two-volume hardback is comprised of stories which are portrayed with remarkable skill and the thrill of the explorer. Here Mitford ingenuously betrays his promise of social inclusiveness as the *samurai* class dominates the repertoire. Duty, loyalty, chivalry and justice thematically form the kernel of the book. Passages are held together by the image of the sword and the figure of the warrior or fighter, who sometimes is exemplified by *samurai* or *rōnin*, and sometimes by a person in a position of the outlaw – *otokodate* – in competition with samurai. The plot either revolves around sentimental love and the crimes justified by the feelings of the characters, or an offence avenged by homicide. Even the story of an Eta[2] Maiden is actually the telling of the story of a samurai lord, who has fallen in a ‘forbidden’ love with the woman from the despised class. The plots of the stories mutually overlap to the extent that the Russian translation of the *Tales* (2011) was published under the title *The Legends of Samurai*, severely uprooting the intention of the author to create a holistic image of the society, but creatively summarising the impression the finished work provides.

In the first place, I want to focus on the mode of narration and its distinctive features. The very first opening passage is offering us a story, which will become probably the most iconic image of the military prowess of Japanese warriors’ – the tale of the forty-seven *rōnin*. A narrator, the yet invisible author, depicts a view of the Edo landscape as if giving us a first-person immersive impression or framing a tableau.

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[2] Pariah, a group of outcasts related to unclean jobs involving human and animal corpses

> I beg my readers to fancy themselves wafted away to the shores of the Bay of Yedo—a fair, smiling landscape […]
>
> In the midst of a nest of venerable trees in Takanawa, a suburb of Yedo, is hidden Sengakuji, or the Spring-hill Temple, renowned throughout the length and breadth of the land for its cemetery, which contains the graves of the Forty-seven. Rônins, famous in Japanese history, heroes of Japanese drama, the tale of whose deeds I am about to transcribe.
>
> On the left-hand side of the main court of the temple is a chapel, in which, surmounted by a gilt figure of Kwanyin, the goddess of mercy, are enshrined the images of the forty-seven men, and of the master whom they loved so well. The statues are carved in wood, the faces coloured, and the dresses richly lacquered; as works of art they have great merit—the action of the heroes, each armed with his favourite weapon, being wonderfully life-like and spirited. […] (Mitford, 1910)

The above selected passages offer only a taste of the visual references and intriguing comparisons. This is a picturesque introduction, which then follows in a third-person narrative similar to that of Victorian novels and ghost stories. The narrative of the incident of the past is mixed with the fantasy of the author to the extent that it is hard to distinguish what was told to him by his anonymous informant and what was added to season the dry facts.

As brackets, encircling the authentic Japanese story reproduced in details, the author provides a frame of the narrator's figure wandering around the temple.

> A silver key once admitted me to a private inspection of the relics. We were ushered, my friend and myself, into a back apartment of the spacious temple, overlooking one of those marvelous miniature gardens, cunningly adorned with rockeries and dwarf trees, in which the Japanese delight. One by one, carefully labelled and indexed boxes containing the precious articles were brought out and opened by the chief priest. (Mitford, 1910)

As the silver key opens the gate to the treasury and boxes are opened in front of the narrator's eyes, the stories, contained in the frame of Mitford's own's words and impressions, are deployed in a carefully coordinated way. In the manner of an experienced playwright, the author not only gallantly offers his viewpoint as a lens to observe the scenery, but he also steps onto the stage to escort the reader through the plot, providing exhaustive explanations to what we might stumble upon during the journey.

The Tale of the Forty-seven rōnin or *Chūshingura,* a story of Ako ronin, or a story of Forty-seven loyal retainers, hardly needs any further introduction and the person to be praised for that should undoubtedly be Mitford. Previous accounts (such as short articles on Japanese art and drama in popular periodicals of the time including *London Illustrated News, Blackwood Magazine* and *Cornhill Magazine)* on Japanese literature and theatre mention the story, but in a fraction of the length of Mitford's depiction.

The visibility of the author in the text is important. On one hand, Mitford was well aware of himself and his position within the Japanese landscape. The authorial presence in his writing, quite alien to comprehensive ethnographic research of the Japanese people and society, is well-founded in the genre of travelogue and more so in guidebooks. It gives an interpretative lens for the reader, who will supposedly relate to the reassuring persona of the author and will be invited to share a vantage point of the educated gentleman on another culture.

Self-awareness which borders on narcissism is evident in Mitford's letters and diaries. A passage of Mitford fleeing the fire from the Legation is described in the following manner:

> As I was shaving, my Chinese servant came and told me that there was a fire two-thirds a mile off. 'All-right,' I said. 'When I am dressed I will go and see it'. Little did I know the rapidity of flames in a native town. By the time I had shaved I saw that there would be just time to huddle on a pair of trousers and a pea-jacket. (Redesdale, 1915, p. 382)

The anecdotes of British nobility, preferring to perish in flames to showing up in public underdressed or breaking a daily hygiene routine for the sake of seeking refuge from all-consuming fire has become quite proverbial. This is only one anecdotal example of how Mitford saw and presented himself and created an image of a *sang-froid* and impeccably groomed gentleman, and there are plenty more in his writings.

The tales Mitford is telling are permeated with noble intentions, courage and valour irrespective of how mundane the setting might appear. For instance, when portraying the death of Chōbei of Bandzuin, who was deceived and tricked into entering a 'bath-room', which became his execution room, Mitford dramatizes the scene:

> So he went to the bath-room, and, leaving his clothes outside, he got into the bath, with the full conviction that it would be the place of his death. Yet he never trembled nor quailed, determined that, if he needs must die, no man should say he had been a coward. (Mitford, 1910)

Thus, a narrative of trickery and outwitting by the foes of Chōbei is turned into a self-sacrificial act for the sake of demonstrating courage, pride, and indifference.

Another distinctive feature of Mitford's writing is narration that fictionalizes events to the point that the text becomes like the script for a drama. Mitford is prone to attribute deep feelings to his characters: characterizations which sit well within his own personal code of conduct, fulfilling the demand for romantic, inner conflict and justifying the character's actions in the eyes of readers. While depicting the *hara-kiri* in *Memoirs,* he mentions that the gruesome scene had so intimidated the French officers on a previous occasion of a mass execution to the point where the head of the French legation stopped the ceremony half-way through, as they were unable to keep watching.

> The whole spectacle was so gruesome that when eleven men had died— this being the number of the murdered victims-the Frenchmen could hold out no longer, and Captain du Petit Thouars prayed that the remaining nine men might be spared. His account of the scene to me was blood-curdling. Brave man as he was—one of the bravest—it nearly made him sick only to think of it, and his voice faltered as with difficulty he told the tale. (Redesdale, 1915, p. 446)

Satow, writing on the same issue, contemplates the French marine's impetus in a more biblical eye-for-eye way. However, even his assessment offers more practical and rational reasoning behind French captain's behaviour compared to Mitford's text.

> Twenty were condemned to death, and one could only regret that Captain du Petit Thouars judged it necessary to stop the execution when eleven had suffered, for the twenty were all equally guilty, and requiring a life for life of the eleven Frenchmen looked more like revenge than justice. (Satow, 1921, p. 347)

Captain du Petit Thouars himself gives pragmatic reasoning for his actions in a report to his superior. As mentioned by Bargen, a French officer was worried about the change of the place of execution and returned to his ship and crew, postponing the rest of the ceremony to the next day (Bargen, 2006, p. 133).

> Meanwhile it was getting late; the weather was threatening, and I deemed it important to join the boats again, so that our men might be aboard before dark. To demand the postponement to the next day of the execution of the men that remained did not appear practical. I determined, therefore, as soon as the eleventh head should have fallen, to inform Mr. Godoi that in view of the manner in which the engagement had been kept, I begged him to suspend the execution […] (United States Department of State, 1868–1869, p. 713)

This report was written on March 16, 1868, the day after the execution. No one but Mitford presents the action – no doubt unpleasant to see –with stirring epithets such as 'blood-curdling' and 'gruesome'.

This example is not the only which might put the objectivity of Mitford's writing under a question mark. To be added, even contemporaries found Japanese-related 'faith in fakes' to be worrisome. As Tokyo University linguistics professor, British by descent, translator and author B. H. Chamberlain wrote:

> The foreigner cannot refuse the bolus thus artfully forced down his throat. He is not suspicious by nature. How should he imagine that people who make such positive statements about their own country are merely exploiting his credulity? He has reached a stage of culture where such mythopoeia has become impossible. On the other hand, to control information by consulting original sources lies beyond his capacity. (Chamberlain, 1933)

Captive to a fascination with dignified masculinity, Mitford relishes in blurring the boundaries between ‘stages of culture’.

What remains omitted from the frame of Mitford’s *Tales* is no less characteristic. The Chinese servant is fleetingly mentioned in the passage about the fire – and hardly ever seen again – discreetly leaving the baron’s unperturbed lonely figure to loiter in *Tales* and *Memories.* The name of this servant was Lin Fu and he accompanied Mitford to Japan from China. Obviously, Mitford was fond of him, but also secluded him within a very narrow inner space of his personal life, as the servant likely could not speak any language except Chinese. The selectivity of Mitford’s writing resurfaces in the omission of the detail of his having fathered a child with a Japanese woman: left out from both his memoirs and private correspondence.

The British sense of controlled humour and the spirit of Enlightenment in contrast to the ‘natives’ manifests itself as a narrative as well as a compositional device. In the story of Eta Maiden,

> The mounted escort of the British Legation executed a brilliant charge of cavalry down an empty road; a very pretty line of skirmishers along the fields fired away a great deal of ammunition with no result […]. In fact, it was like fox-hunting: it had “all the excitement of war, with only ten per cent of the danger.”(Mitford, 1910)

This haughty view from the perceived vantage point of civilization and technological advancement on the so called ‘backward’ Japanese warfare is taken further by seizing the higher moral ground in the following passage:

> The first thought of the kind-hearted doctor of the British Legation was for the poor old woman who had been wounded, and was bemoaning herself piteously. When she was carried in, a great difficulty arose, which, I need hardly say, was overcome; for the poor old creature belonged to the Etas, the Pariah race, whose presence pollutes the house even of the poorest and humblest Japanese; and the native servants strongly objected to her being treated as a human being […] (Mitford, 1910)

Whilst the Western morality leaves no human behind and is merciful even to the people who insulted and chased the Westerners on the dark empty streets of Yedo, the Japanese reject the *Eta* woman, though she is of their own race. While fulfilling the agenda of describing the salient view on all classes of Japanese society, Mitford misses no opportunity to point out the higher standing of European morality. His limited capacity for self-critique is demonstrated later in briefly admiiting the flaws of Englishmen in not following the Japanese etiquette and only reconfirms a sense of control and the confidence of access to the ‘native’ culture.

> At these the visitor is warned by a notice to take off his boots, a request which Englishmen, with characteristic disregard of the feelings of others, usually neglect to comply with. (Mitford, 1910)

Mitford's awareness of the etiquette accompanying the admission into the cultural space of Japan allows him to traverse cultural barriers. An etiquette is comprised of both respect and also a conservative code of conduct which manifests itself in a comportment. Its reason is not necessarily understood by an actor but by observing it they acknowledge the tradition and the expectation of the second party to fulfil the protocol. The same way a tombstone is a reverent keeper of a selected past, which acknowledges and translates its importance to posterity.

A key will open a cemetery gate again in the introductory passage of the story of Gompachi and Komurasaki:

> Through all this discourse about temples and tea-houses, I am coming by degrees to the goal of our pilgrimage—two old stones, mouldering away in a rank, overgrown graveyard […] The key is kept by a ghoulish old dame, almost as time-worn and mildewed as the tomb over which she watches. Obedient to our call, and looking forward to a fee ten times greater than any native would give her, she hobbles out, and, opening the gate, points out the stone bearing the inscription, the "Tomb of the Shiyoku". (Mitford, 1910)

This passage gives us another dimension of Mitford's writing style oscillating from grim depictions of battles and combats, death and graveyards to the pastoral countryside. The only point in the middle is the practical transactions with the so called gate-keepers of the past. The tombs of the forty-seven ronin will open the stories, and the plot will unveil while the reader is silently standing in front of forty-eight stones. Tombstones of star-crossed lovers will open the passage on Gompachi and Komurasaki. Another graveyard will be visited in Zōzōji temple – the burial place of the *Shōguns* in Yedo. The stories, which were spun around the gruesome sight of Taki Zenzaburō, taking his own life in front of despised foreigners, meander around their author's visits of one memorial site after another. Metaphorically Mitford was witnessing the death of the Japanese feudal state, and he did not conceal his awe and grief towards Medieval Japan, even though the political demolition of this very system guaranteed his free movement in the country:

> The feudal system has passed away like a dissolving view before the eyes of those who have lived in Japan during the last few years. But when they arrived there it was in full force, and there is not an incident narrated in the following pages, however strange it may appear to Europeans, for the possibility and probability of which those most competent to judge will not vouch. Nor, as many a recent event can prove, have heroism, chivalry, and devotion gone out of the land altogether. (Mitford, 1910)

The title of his writing – tales of 'Old Japan' – also implies that the country he is writing about remained in the past, and the book itself is a metaphorical engraving on a tombstone of the Shōgunate.

The elements of Japanese culture Mitford admired the most were exactly the relicts of the past. Feudalism (chivalry was an exemplary quality of the feudal hero) was opposed to the pragmatic thought of the age of almighty capital, promoting merchants to the leading roles and pushing people of noble descent – including Mitford himself – to the back lines. Furthermore, the reason for Mitford to return home was boredom – he survived the most dangerous years of the political feuds, and peaceful times along with a routine of diplomatic service did not please his taste. Neither did they provide exciting material for publication. The success of a diplomatic mission was precisely what has eliminated the challenge of political manoeuvring and gave impetus to modernization in Japan, wiping away all the exotic charm and the adventure of overcoming inaccessibility. Ages of presumable chivalry were eradicated, Japan was quickly turning into a Western country whereas Mitford was the one to advocate Japan staying as pure (and naïve) as possible. Mitford, as he wrote in a letter to his father, had no intention of seeing the baby teething (Morton, 2017, p. 138). As he admitted in the lecture *Old and New Japan*: 'indeed, I sometimes think that no retrograde or reactionary Samurai of the old school could look back on those times more regretfully than I do' (Redesdale, 1913).

No tombstone happens without death, and the honourable deaths entombed in the stories involve and revolve around swords. As an epitome but also a relic of the pristine chivalric culture, the image of the sword is highly visible in the *Tales*. Mitford renders the story of the Kazuma Revenge as 'The Tale of the Sword' (Mitford, 1910) and starts it with a preface devoted to a swordsmith in Osaka and the craftsmanship of blacksmiths in general. But in reality, there is more than one tale of the sword, involving vital issues of ownership and connoisseurship. The story of the Otokodate of Yedo, which links to the story of Gompachi and Komurasaki, has its beginning in an argument about the swordsmith that produced a family heirloom of one of the characters, and while Nagoya Sanza – a popular warrior trope in kabuki theatre – turns out to be right, the other samurai decide to kill him for the humiliation they feel for having mistaken a work by a famous artisan. Mitford further consolidates the image which is covertly present in the narrative and justifies his choice of the belligerent topic by the acknowledgement that 'It is a law that he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword. In Japan, where there exists a large armed class over whom there is practically little or no control, party and clan broils, and single quarrels ending in bloodshed and death, are matters of daily occurrence' (Mitford, 1910).

A thrill of danger Mitford felt blended well into a picture of the feudal world in a form of a knightly tournament. A defeat is a loss of one's face which metaphorically equals death. The Lady of Roses remains immaculate even in the brothel according to the supreme rule of the genre, and all the characters in the list are abiding to their roles. No wonder this world felt less chaotic and invigorated with a real taste for live – as opposed to repulsive death – but it was nevertheless artificial in its core. As an outsider, Mitford lived in Japan through the time of a civil war and witnessed bloodshed every day, but it is a grave overestimation to think that unmotivated homicide was an everyday reality for the Japanese capital.

Orientations and strategies behind Mitford's writing

The features of the Mitford's writing style, discussed in the first part of this article, have been reflected in the selection of the texts for publication. What attracted Mitford to the Orient in the first place was a formative experience built on a visually presented fantasy of excess. Mitford himself describes the circumstances of his appointment in the memoirs:

> I too, as a child, had dreams which carried me far away. A kind aunt had given me a set of so-called rice-paper pictures of lovely imperial ladies with architectural structures of hair on their heads, gentlemen clad in purple silk robes with ephods embroidered with five-clawed golden dragons, drawings of vividly-coloured flowers and fruit, of horror-striking tortures, unheard of out of Tartarus, being inflicted upon bleeding criminals. But beyond all was the story of Aladdin falling in love with the Princess Badroulbadour on her way to the bath at Peking. My young brain was aflame with the longing to go to China and see all these things. (Mitford, 1915, p. 328)

This passage substantiates his collector's zeal mentioned in his introductory remarks to the *Tales'* sub-section of Fairy-tales:

> Knowing the interest which many children of a larger growth take in such Baby Stories, I was anxious to have collected more of them. I was disappointed, however, for those which I give here are the only ones which I could find in print; and if I asked the Japanese to tell me others, they only thought I was laughing at them, and changed the subject. (Mitford, 1910)

It is easy to believe that Mitford collected children's stories partly for his own interest in the Far East which was influenced by a children's book in the first place. Another substantial notice to be taken is the behaviour of the native informants he points out. The stories were fixed in their print versions even in the land of their origins. In his pursuit of the unique content for his translations, Mitford encountered an unforeseen resistance. The informants refused to discuss the folklore with a British diplomat. The intercultural communication with the informants could not be easily established, probably due to lack of consensus on genre and folklore – a well-established, by that time, viewpoint on the orality of the European folklore as a cradle of the national identity. This idea was far from finding its way in Japanese discourse.

An article by *The London Illustrated News*, published on March 5, 1859, might shed some light on the assortment of the books in a 'native Japanese bookshop'. The correspondent mentions numerous publications on education, books from the Confucian canon, and more:

> The small works to be found in every shop, and sold for a few cash to the children, are objects of great curiosity. They are profusely illustrated, and in some cases very carefully and skilfully so. […] From the Chinese

> introductions which are prefixed to several of them, it is plain that the subject of the books are narratives or stories connected with their national history […]. It is thus a military taste is nurtured amongst the people. (Bennett, Cortazzi, Hoare, 2006, p. 59).

The reason Mitford's writing focused around similar topics can be explained 'merely' by the availability of the primary sources he could translate. Mitford, whose passion towards everything exotic was ignited by a children's book on China, could see no reason to omit Japanese fairy tales. Mitford's curiosity, however, was met by the natives' bemusement of a plain ignorance towards the publications he never attempted to translate. As Anthony Pym suggests in his *Method in Translation History* (1998), the meaningful source of information can be found not only in the selection of texts which were translated, retranslated, or re-printed but also in a conceptual absence of certain texts and non-translations within a target culture's discourse.

The heterogenous content of the book, containing *kabuki* plays along with historical documents, children's fairy tales and reports on such a horrific ceremony as *hara-kiri*, was skilfully bound together and levelled by a smooth writing style with apt commentaries. However, the rhetoric behind the book's value was to give an impression of an authentic Japanese text. The quest for authenticity was reflected on a meta-textual level – manifesting the text to be a genuine product of Japanese culture – and in the text itself with the attempts of the author to do justice to a Japanese text, saving peculiarities of Japanese long titles and unfamiliar terms with no counterpart in English. Yokoyama (1987) points out several distinctive features of Mitford's writing, which provide a useful reflection upon the influence of his writing on contemporary Victorian society. In the first place, Mitford uses the strategy of foreignizing when describing the phenomena, which could be seen by the Victorians as sinful. The examples of this are direct loanwords such as *hara-kiri* or *kaishaku.*[3] Direct adoption of the specific terms, according to Yokoyama, is a sign of recognition of certain traditions as having no counterpart in European culture.

In other cases, he proposes unusual and non-conventional associations between terms. The word *samurai* is translated as gentleman, drawing inevitably the association with British nobility. In this case, Mitford confronts the writing of Sir Rutherford Alcock, who tended to call *samurai* 'ruffians' or 'swashbucklers'. Noteworthy, that Victorian writers were prone to the appropriation of Japanese culture in English terms. In one instance the correspondent of *The London Illustrated News* even renders the Gempei War as the War of The Roses.[4]

Another difference from the majority of writers lies in Mitford's knowledge of Japanese. While most of the travellers (and even diplomats, such as Alcock and Parkes) relied generally on observations, Mitford was trying to have the story written down by the reliable informant and then to translate the text.

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[3] An adjutant of the person, commiting seppuku. His duty was to cut off the head of the sentenced.

[4] Bennett, Cortazzi, Hoare, 2006. p. 59.

The last feature is that Mitford explicitly avoids patronising Japanese culture from the viewpoint of Christian morality or mainstream Victorian ideas. For instance, while Christian beliefs taught that suicide is a grievous sin, and Victorians referred to *hara-kiri* as a 'happy dispatch', Mitford's rhetoric lies beyond these popular concepts and shares his understanding of the 'Japanese' perspective of the named cultural phenomenon. The respect Mitford pays to Japanese culture of the military class as a counterpart of English gentry while admitting that their rituals and cults might have no equivalent in a hierarchy of the Western values and virtues, and standing as a witness of the disintegration of the feudal world, is closely intertwined with the 'respect' Japanese officials paid to the Westerners allowing them to witness the sacred ritual of disembowelment of Taki Zenzaburō. This intention to demonstrate the obligation of the Japanese court to the Europeans was reciprocated by the first British to ever see *seppuku* with his own eyes and his loyalty became an asset that Japanese were to use at a later stage. More importantly, there is a secondary framework to Mitford's stories, beside the fieldwork-style overtures and landscapes. That is the frame of faithfulness as translation.

The Diplomat as a translator

The foundation of the theory of translation in the Western world may be metaphorically seen in the reflection on the legend of Septuagint, which, in the words of André Lefevere:

> has given us the basic categories of the history of translation. These categories are: authority (the authority of the person or institution commissioning or, later, publishing the translation: the patron; the authority of the text to be translated […]; the authority of the writer of the original […], and the authority of the culture that receives the translation), expertise, which is guaranteed and checked, trust, which survives bad translations, and image, the image a translation creates of an original, its author, its literature, its culture. (Translation, history, and culture, 1990, p 17)

For a long time, the Western world remained multilingual, and all the literati of Europe were expected to share at least one language in common – first Latin and then French – until the end of the Enlightenment. This made translation unnecessary. It served merely as an exercise in achieving language proficiency. However, by the end of the XVIII century, the rise of Romanticism, which venerated the national literature, and a great increase in literacy by the beginning of the XIX century split the readership into a wider audience and scholars. That was the time when translation properly came into play. The translations and their publications split into two uneven groups as well, separating specialised translations published by translators for the scholars working in the same field, and regular translations aimed at a wider audience.

The notion of the 'original' work was contemplated differently as well, and a translation could take the form of an adaptation and even of another original, the power balance between an author of the original and a translator gravitating towards equilibrium rather than to unequivocal acknowledgement of the dominance of the original (Brown, 2012).

If we let Mitford speak for himself, we would find out his presentation of the work on the *Tales* was mostly one of the translator, with the translation activity organically blended into his routine:

> I rise at seven after a cup of tea in bed, Eastern fashion – till nine I dress and dawdle. Then I have my official work and letters to write. This occupies me until twelve when I breakfast. At one I have a class of three Japanese whom I am teaching English. At about half past two I go out, returning at five. I then work at my translations for about two hours, after which dinner is ready, and at eight I work away again until 10 or eleven o'clock when I go to bed.[5]

The following question then must undoubtedly emerge. In what proportion can Mitford's work be counted as a translation? In the first place, the nature of the book is heterogeneous. The author sporadically mentions the sources of his information, which can be considered as source texts, loosely binding the stories with ample reasoning concerning his interpretation of Japanese culture or the circumstances of his artistic endeavour. As one of the examples of Mitford's strategic use of the term 'translation,' which has already been mentioned, Mitford contemplated his three articles, published in 1869, as translations, even though he had clearly based at least one of them on his own report written for the legation.

As the author mentioned at multiple places in the text of the *Tales,* his method of deriving information may be divided into several groups (Mitford, 1910).

Proper translation:

> […] Translated from a native book called the "Yedo Hanjôki," or Guide to the prosperous City of Yedo, and other sources.

The proper translation of the text, written in Japanese by native informant at Mitford's demand:

> […] I translated it from a paper drawn up for me by a Japanese who was able to speak of what he had seen himself.

And Mitford's own interpretation of the stories, told by eye-witnesses or connoisseurs:

> […] The case of a young fellow, only twenty years old, of the Choshiu clan, which was told me the other day by an eye-witness […]

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[5] Cited in Morton, 2017, p. 137 after the letter of A.B. Mitford to H.R. Mitford, 11 December 1868.

Mitford's role was far beyond the contemporary conventional understanding of the translator's contribution. Mitford acted at the same time as the patron, as author, interpreter, translator and compiler. Moreover, he ordered a set of illustrations, acting as a layout artist and editor, in an attempt to recreate an authentic experience for the reader and stage his storytelling. Even though in the modern age of copyright his text can be called an original, during the Victorian times he could definitely claim publishing the translation, giving his work more first-hand credibility. Such a method was used by Horace Walpole in the *Otranto Castle* novel as an artistic device, known as a translation of a non-existing original. This would have placed a seal of professionalism on him as a diplomat, showcasing a virtue of proficiency in Japanese and therefore enjoying all the advantages of such an approach without strenuous responsibilities of the sole author of the ground-breaking work. As P. Rangarajan mentions with regard to the early translation of *The Arabian Nights*, 'the extent to which "good" oriental tales were considered the result of a translative process that obscured author identity and involved substantial rewriting, implying that regardless of the intrinsic value of original oriental tales, an excellent one was always assumed to have been subjected to substantive translative tampering' (Rangarajan, 2014).

Mitford's diplomatic career, permeating into the text, conflicts with the beliefs he advocates. He praises straightforward courage and integrity in following the code of the gentleman as opposed to outmanoeuvring and outwitting the opponent. Here the trope of Nagoya Sanza, who lost his life in a fight over the authenticity of a respected item, misidentification of which was portrayed almost like sacrilege, is embedded in the promoted set of values. It is disrupted by Mitford's career as a diplomat with a constant play of minds as a *modus operandi* for all diplomatic service. This tension is projected onto his translational tampering and the grey zone of his work is on the borderline between translation and authentic creative work, between truth and embellished version of his perception of such, which is disturbingly close to misinterpretation.

Reception of *Tales*

Mitford's promotion of Japanese culture yielded impressive results. After his return, he was treated as probably the most authoritative expert in the field. It was only with his mediation that the Japanese government was granted a bank loan to build a railway, and he participated in a mission to Japan to negotiate an establishment of a submarine telegraph line. Gilbert and Sullivan used Mitford's expertise during the preparation of the *Mikado* opera, and he was the person to reproduce the tune of *Miya-sama* piece for a record.

In 1906, after Japan's victory over Russia, Mitford was granted the title of Baron Redesdale to accompany Prince Arthur on the mission of a highest diplomatic influence – to present an Order of Garter to the Meiji emperor. Even forty years after he resigned from the Foreign Office, Mitford was still an acknowledged expert on Japanese matters and read lectures as such.

However, his major achievement remained the publication of *Tales*. Robert Morton observes, that 'the press wrote about the *Tales* at length, clearly considering their appearance to be newsworthy' (Morton, 2017, p. 160). Opinion was on the spectrum between the highest praises to accusations of simplifying characters to the level that they become caricatures.

It is noteworthy that intending to emphasise the sense of honour, duty and spirit of chivalry in Japanese culture, Mitford has distilled a popular image of *samurai*. A Japanese warrior values his honour over his life, is loyal to the lord till the last breath and follows a strict code of conduct, which forbids to take an offence lightly. This symbol, featured in theatre and literature, became the frontline in cultural diplomacy. This motif was incorporated later in works by Nitobe Inazō and Ruth Benedict among others.

A vivid image of the warrior, armed with a pair of swords, ready to take the life of himself as easily as one of the enemy, became so deeply embedded in the Victorian mind, that it found its reflection in the 'Mikado' opera, exploiting the public impression of the Japanese as a bloodthirsty, irrational nation. As mentioned by Morton (2017, p. 162) '[i]n Mitford's stories, so many of the deaths stem from trivial matters – the vendetta in *The Forty-Seven Rōnin* originates in nothing more than insulting behaviour. Such stories seem to invite the kind of parody they get in *The Mikado*'.

Among the writers, referencing Mitford's book, there are both Western and Japanese scholars. Basil Hall Chamberlain, the author of *Things Japanese*, mentions the *Tales*. Almost thirty years after the first publication, Nitobe Inazō, the contributor to the worldwide popularity of *Bushido*, references Mitford as 'by a far abler writer, whose book is not much read now-a-days' and in his chapter on hara-kiri acknowledging that he has nothing to add to Mitford's observations (Nitobe, 1918). Even though Nitobe assumes that Mitford's writing is losing popularity, after the first edition in 1871, the second edition followed in 1874 and was succeeded by multiple reprints up to 2012 (even though the e-book was uploaded into the public domain in 2004).

The book was published in Russian as *Legends of Samurai. Traditions of Old Japan* in a commissionned translation by O. Sidorova in 2011.

> The combination of martial art with philosophy is the main tradition of samurai. As a courageous warrior, sophisticated poet and inspired artist the samurai is always eager to sacrifice his life for the greatest ideals. In the foundation of this unique phenomenon lies the philosophy of Bushido (Way of the Warrior) – a harmony of the unquestioned belief and an ability to appreciate the beauty in all its manifestations. (translation from Russian)

This advertising blurb published on the Internet, proclaims *Bushido* as the backbone of the narrative, closing the loop of cross-references of the Japanese ideology, circling it back to the British diplomat of the Imperial era.

Mitford's legacy is mostly buried in history nowadays, overshadowed by his infamous descendants and influential contemporaries. However, through research on his diplomatic career and artistic endeavours, I conclude that Mitford's influence and the imagery he inspired with his writings are seen in the popular view on samurai until nowadays. Moreover, his worldview expressed through the corpus of texts produced through the process of creative translation of the personal experience into a text palatable for a wide audience has never been critically re-interpreted and assessed. Mitford's agency that exceeded a conventional translator's authority is a key to understanding the implications permeating the text. One of them is the formation and imposition of a taste Mitford demonstrated in the compilation of the subjects for his book. When seen in the wider context of his works, it is noticeable how homogenous is the representation and therefore the scope of its selectiveness. Secondly, Mitford claimed the role of a translator – the figure whose invisibility has been only recently theorised – while in reality he was a magnifying lens emphasizing and amplifying certain features. The influence Mitford's *Tales* had on contemporary representations of immersive military aesthetics is hardly charted, and it is up to the scholars of the XXI century to outline it. Mitford's legacy can become an important case study on the forging of the soft power of the sword.

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