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## **JAPANESE LITERARY TRANSLATIONS IN THE ROMANIAN BOOK MARKET BETWEEN 2019-2023**

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### ***Abstract***

*The rising interest in Japanese fiction has changed the profile of the Romanian book market, influenced by international publications, literary prizes and readers' taste for certain trendy literary motifs. After the fall of the communist regime in late 1989, the Japanese literature stopped being translated from other mediating languages such as English, French, German or Russian and was directly connected to Romanian as the target language.*

*This paper focuses on the latest translations from Japanese literature by analysing the data collected from the official websites of the Romanian publishing houses in the last five years (2019-2023). The goal of this study is to identify the features of Japanese literary translation market in Romania and to pinpoint the trends in terms of preference for specific Japanese authors, increasing or decreasing number of Japanese fiction titles published each year, the publishing houses involved in Japanese literature translation as well as the translators who are engaged in the process of translating from Japanese into Romanian.*

**Keywords:** Japanese literature; translation; Romanian book market; Japanese authors.

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### ***1. Introduction***

A book is not only a repository of knowledge and sensibility or an intellectual stimulus, but also a commodity meant to be marketed and sold. Its appeal to the readers is measured in the number of copies sold and the word 'bestseller' has become the ultimate confirmation of a book's success. As books have become increasingly important, the book markets have begun to expand and diversify. For instance, the European book sector is incredibly rich with more than 575,000 titles published every year (<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-and-creative-sectors/books-and-publishing>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023). Book publication is a significant indicator of the cultural values of a nation and it illustrates the capacity to keep up with the world's latest findings and discoveries by means of translation and cultural exposure/exchange.

After each annual Book Fair in Frankfurt – one of the largest and most important in the world – The Federation of European Publishers issues a yearly statistical survey illustrating the current situation of the European book market (<https://fep-fee.eu/European-Book-Market-Statistics-2022-2023>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023). Accordingly, in 2022 the largest book markets by country from the point

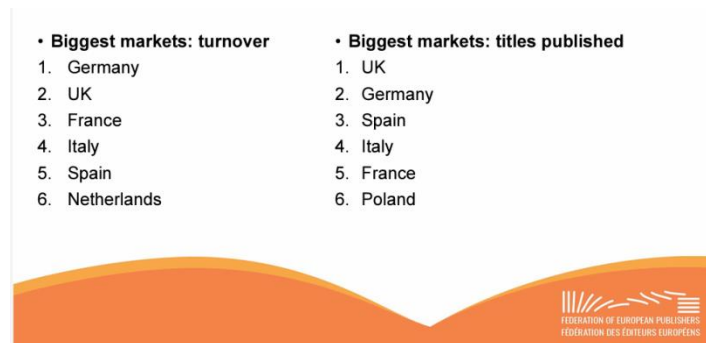
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of view of the turnover and the titles published are the UK, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland, as outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. EU Book Market in 2022**

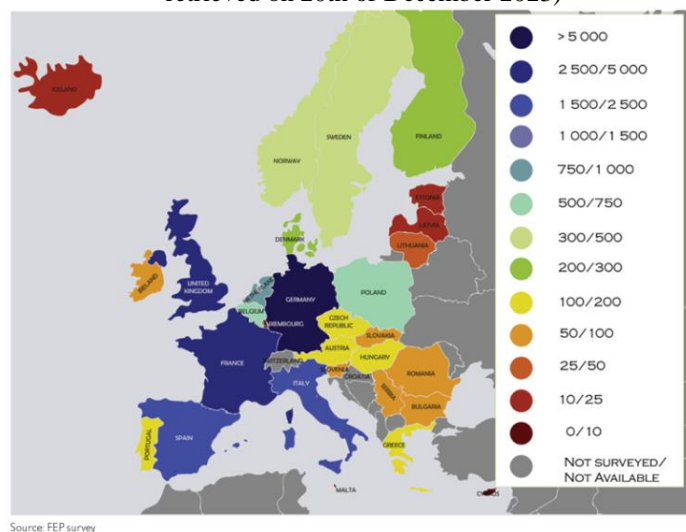
[https://fep-fee.eu/IMG/pdf/presentation\\_the\\_book\\_market\\_in\\_europe\\_2022-2023.pdf?2236/eefa76a8238ffde06c4139de1925fef3b3f461e2](https://fep-fee.eu/IMG/pdf/presentation_the_book_market_in_europe_2022-2023.pdf?2236/eefa76a8238ffde06c4139de1925fef3b3f461e2), retrieved on 20th of December 2023



Even if Romania is the ninth largest country in Europe from the point of view of the population (19 million inhabitants), it is not even in the top 10 countries active on the book market (<https://www.worldometers.info/population/countries-in-europe-by-population/>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023). A previous study focusing on the year 2015 mentions that the publishers' turnover in Romania ranges from 50-100 million euros, as illustrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Publishers' net turnover from book sales per country in the EU in 2015 (€ million)**

[https://fill-livrelecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/20170223\\_-\\_brochure\\_a4\\_final\\_pdf.pdf](https://fill-livrelecture.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/20170223_-_brochure_a4_final_pdf.pdf), retrieved on 20th of December 2023)



Denisa Comănescu, the current director of Humanitas Fiction, one of the major publishing houses in the country, labelled the Romanian book market as „an average market, providing both pleasant and unpleasant surprises” (<https://www.lapunkt.ro/2019/06/interviu-denisa-comanescu-cum-vin-cartile-straine-in-limba-romana/>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023). Mihai Mitrică, who leads the Romanian Publishers' Federation, claims that despite some modest growth, Romania's book publishing market remains the smallest in the European Union, estimated at just €100 million overall (\$109.8 million) in 2023. Another alarming situation signaled by Mitrică was that 51% of surveyed young people aged 18 to 24 in the biggest cities of Romania are not regular readers (<https://publishingperspectives.com/2023/08/notes-from-armenia-and-romania-book-markets-under-pressure/>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023).

In spite of all these concerns regarding the disappearance of the readership, the book market in Romania has changed a lot since the end of the communist regime. After 1989 a lot of publishing houses such as Humanitas (1990), Polirom (1995), Nemira (1991), Rao (1993) etc. were established, each of them working hard to diversify their literary portfolio.

The publishing companies continued to translate books from languages with an international exposure such as English, French, German, Italian or Russian, but also tried to reach out for less accessible cultures and languages, including Japanese. During the communist regime some Japanese fiction books were published, but most of them were translated from French (Yukio Mishima, *Tumulțul valurilor*, Editura Univers, 1975, translated from French by Ana Maria Năvădaru); Russian (*Frumoasa Otikubo*, Editura Univers, 1986, translated from Russian by Alexandru Ivănescu); German (Inoue Yasushi, *Pușca de vânătoare*, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, 1969, translated from German by Platon Pardău); English (Soseki Natsume, *Motanul are cuvântul*, Editura Univers, 1975, translated from English by Mihai Matei). The situation started to change in the early '80 when more and more books were translated directly from Japanese, without any mediating language by translators such as Angela Hondru and Stanca Scholz-Cionca (Diaconu, 1998, 903-905).

In an interview in 2019 Denisa Comănescu publicly confessed her fascination with the Japanese literature and talked about her attempt to find Japanese language translators in the late '70s, while she was working for Univers Publishing House (<https://www.lapunkt.ro/2019/06/interviu-denisa-comanescu-cum-vin-cartile-straine-in-limba-romana/> retrieved on 20th of December 2023). After the end of the Communist regime, the situation has changed even more and nowadays an overwhelming number of books are translated directly from the source language due to the increasing number of Japanese Studies graduates, in other words, qualified people, who have also developed their literary translation skills. Moreover, a lot of readers showed more and more interest in Japanese literature and the translations into Romanian provided better accessibility to such literary works. The interest in Japanese culture became overtly manifest a few years ago when the launches of new Japanese literature titles were marked by Japanese Cultural Evenings – a partnership between Humanitas Fiction Publishing House and the Romanian-American University in Bucharest – which anyone can attend. This is a public event in which the director of the publishing house, a prominent literary critic and the translator of the book were invited to share their insights on the newly released book.

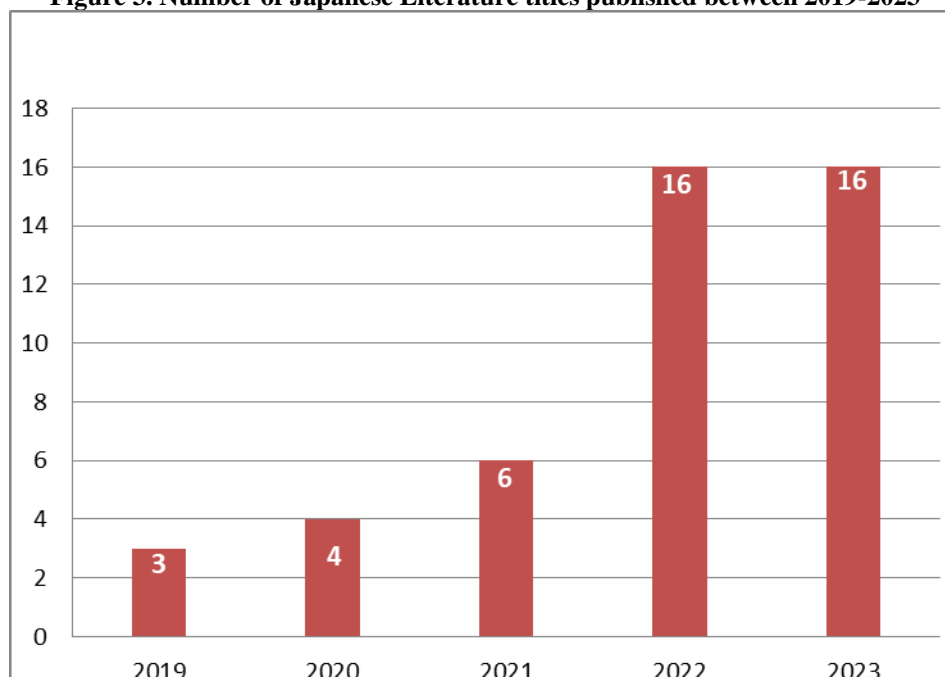
Given the increasing interest in Japanese literature, in this paper I shall try to analyse the data collected from the official websites of the Romanian publishing houses focusing on the new releases of Japanese fiction published in the last five years (2019-2023), without taking into account the reprinting of some titles and the number of copies for each title since this information is not public. The goal of the paper is to identify the features of Japanese literary translation market in Romania and to pinpoint any trends in terms of preference for specific Japanese authors, increasing or decreasing number of Japanese fiction titles published each year, the publishing houses involved in Japanese literature translation as well as the translators who are engaged in the process of translating from Japanese into Romanian. However, I did not take into consideration the children literature (massively translated by Cartea Copiilor Publishing House), which I believe should be the focus of a different study.

## **2. Publication by year**

The year 2019 was marked by the publication of 3 literary translations released by 2 main publishing houses, Humanitas Fiction (Yukio Mishima, *O dimineață de iubire pură*; Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, *Paravanul-Iad*) and Polirom (Junichirō Tanizaki, *Istoria secretă a seniorului din Musashi*). In the following year the situation did not change much – 4 literary translations were published perhaps due to the fact that 2020 was the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemics. The publishing houses Humanitas Fiction (Yōko Ogawa, *Înotând cu elefantul în brațe cu pisica*; Hiro Arikawa, *Memoriile unui motan călător*) and Polirom (Yōko Tawada, *Ultimii copii din Tokyo*) continued to publish books translated

from Japanese. In addition, in 2020 Art Publishing House released a Japanese literature title, *Elogiul umbrei* by Junichirō Tanizaki (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Number of Japanese Literature titles published between 2019-2023**



In 2021 the number of translations slightly increased to 6 titles published by Polirom (Hiromi Kawakami, *Jurnalul unei nopți nedesăvârșite*), Humanitas Fiction (Yōko Ogawa, *Poliția Memoriei*<sup>2</sup>), and Litera, a publishing house which introduced Japanese literature in its portfolio for the first time (Tochikazu Kawaguchi, *Până nu se răcește cafeaua*; Mieko Kawakami, *Povești de vară*). With Matsuo Bashō, *Toamna*, Cartea Inspirată Publishing House made another addition to the range of publishers interested in Japanese literature. Alice Books, a publishing house established in 2021, also started off with a translation from Japanese (Osamu Dazai, *Dezumanizat*).

The number of titles translated from the Japanese literature reached a peak in 2022 (16 titles) and 2023 (16 titles). In 2022 Nemira publishing house started an imprint called Nezumi whose goal was to translate *manga* for the first time in the Romanian book market<sup>3</sup>. In 2022 Nemira/Nezumi put forth 2 titles and in 2023, 6 *manga* titles. As a result of the activity of the above mentioned publishing companies, 45 titles came out in the last five years, with an average of 9 books per year. Bellow you can find the explicit Japanese fiction titles published in 2022-2023 (the most prolific years) by publishing house.

2022		2023	
POLIROM <sup>4</sup>	* Haruki Murakami, <i>Persoana întâi singular</i>	POLIROM	* Sayaka Murata, <i>Pământeni</i>
	* Haruki Murakami, <i>Strania bibliotecă</i>	HUMANITAS	* Hiro Arikawa, <i>Motanul care și-a luat rămas-bun</i>

<sup>2</sup> There was also another Humanitas Fiction publication, *Inimă frântă*, by Akira Mizubayashi, a Japanese author who writes in French, not in Japanese.

<sup>3</sup> Some graphic novels (Marjan Satrapi, *Persepolis*, published by Art/Arthur; *Art Spiegelman, Maus. Povestea unui supraviețitor*, also published by Art/Arthur) had been already published, but not Japanese *manga*.

<sup>4</sup> The author Yōko Tawada writes in both Japanese and German. In 2022 *Memoriile unui urs polar* was translated from German by Monica Tamaș.

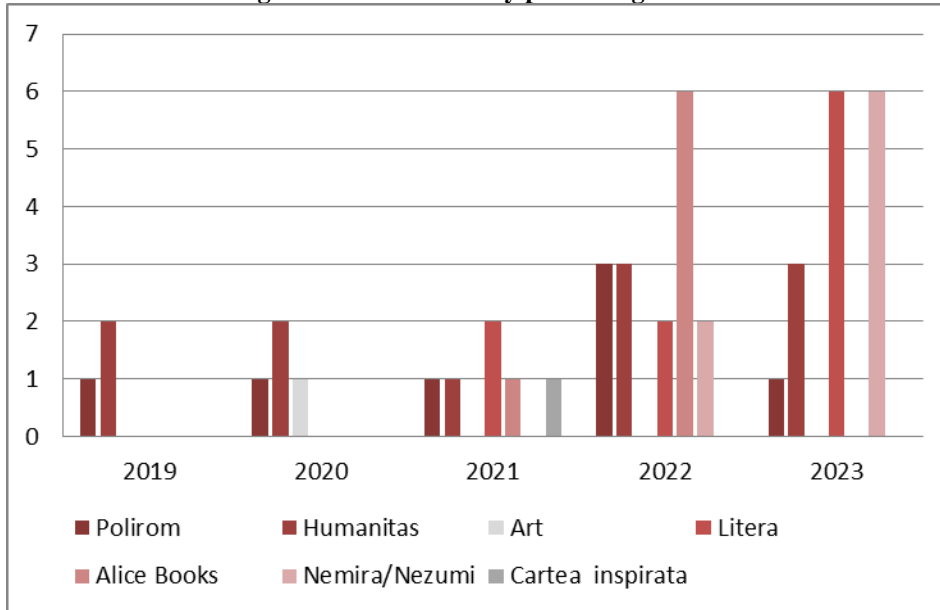
	* Ryū Murakami, <i>69</i>		* Yukio Mishima, <i>Starul</i>
HUMANITAS	* Genki Kawamura, <i>Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume</i>		* Natsuko Imamura, <i>Fata care s-a transformat în bețișoare</i>
	* Natsuko Imamura, <i>Femeia cu fustă violet</i>	LITERA	* Mieko Kawakami, <i>Îndrăgostiții de la miezul nopții</i>
	* Teru Miyamoto, <i>Vis de primăvară</i>		* Sōsuke Natsukawa, <i>Motanul care voia să salveze cărțile</i>
LITERA	* Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Povești din cafenea</i>		* Sanaka Hiiragi, <i>Fotograful amintirilor pierdute</i>
	* Mieko Kawakami, <i>Heaven</i>		* Kanae Minato, <i>Confesiuni</i> (translated from English)
ALICE BOOKS	* Osamu Dazai, <i>Human Lost și alte proze scurte autobiografice</i>		* Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Până nu se șterg amintirile</i>
	* Osamu Dazai, <i>Demoni chipeși și tutun și alte proze scurte autobiografice</i>		* Satoshi Yagisawa, <i>Viața mea la librăria Morisaki</i>
	* Osamu Dazai, <i>Florile bufoneriei. Testamentul lui Ōba Yōzō</i>	NEMIRA/NEZUMI	* Ken Wakui, <i>Justițiarul din Tokyo</i>
	* Osamu Dazai, <i>Școlărița</i>		* Kamome Shirahama, <i>Atelierul vrăjitoarelor</i>
	* Yu Miri, <i>Gara Ueno, ieșirea spre parc</i>		* Hajime Isayama, <i>Atacul titanilor</i>
	* Makoto Shinkai, Naruki Nagakawa, <i>Ea și pisica ei</i>		* Naoshi Arakawa, <i>Minciuna ta din aprilie</i>
NEMIRA/NEZUMI	Yamazaki Kore, <i>Mireasa străvechiului mag</i>		* Oshimi Shuzo, <i>Shino nu își poate spune numele</i>
	Yoruhashi, <i>Regatele ruinei</i>		* Kikori Morino, <i>Lecții de vals</i>

The best years regarding the number of Japanese literary translations were 2022 and 2023 (16 titles each year), while the worst years were 2019 and 2020, in which only 3 or 4 titles were published. In 2019 and 2020 there were only two actors involved in Japanese literature translation (Polirom and Humanitas Fiction). In 2020 Art Publishing House made an attempt to translate Japanese literature, resulting in the publication of one title, but the publication of other Japanese literature books was discontinued in the next years.

### 3. Publication by publishing houses

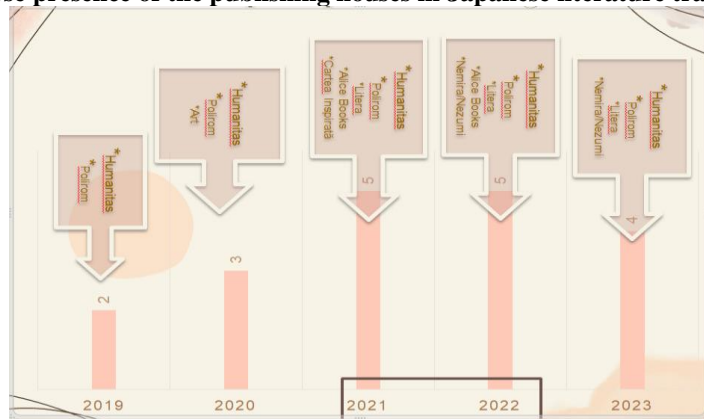
In the last five years seven publishing companies translated and published Japanese literature. Some of them were long established publishers (Humanitas Fiction, Polirom) and started publishing the full portfolio of certain Japanese authors such as Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima (Humanitas Fiction), respectively Haruki Murakami (Polirom). Except these large publishing houses, new companies, such as Cartea Inspirată and Alice Books, emerged. Unfortunately Cartea Inspirată gave up the publication of Japanese literature after releasing only one title. However, Alice Books was very active in 2022, when it published six titles. On the other hand, Nemira/Nezumi, another long-established publishing house, decided to take a more unconventional path and began to publish Japanese *manga* in translation, as detailed in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Publications by publishing houses**



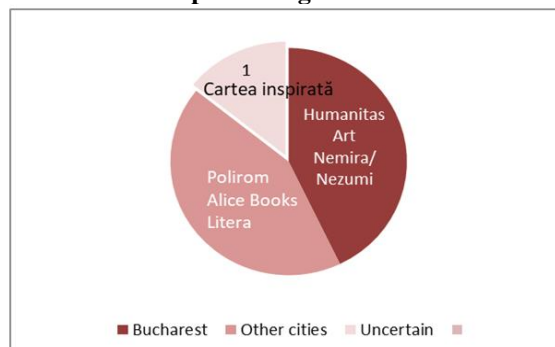
Taking into consideration the number of the publishing houses involved in the publication of Japanese literature, the years 2021 and 2022 were very prolific, since five publishing companies took active part in Japanese translation market (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Diverse presence of the publishing houses in Japanese literature translation**



Almost half of the publishing companies that published Japanese fiction are based in Bucharest, but the ratio is somehow vague since I could not find much information about Cartea Inspirată Publishing House, only a Facebook page which has been inactive since November 2022 (<https://www.facebook.com/carteinspirata/>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023; see Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Central and regional ratio of the publishing houses involved in Japanese literary translations**



Let us take a closer look at the main actors involved in Japanese literature translation. One of the oldest and most respected publishing companies is Polirom, which managed to publish seven titles in the last five years. The best year considering the number of released titles was 2022 when three new titles were launched.

<b>Polirom</b>	
Sayaka Murata (Yōko Tawada)	<i>Pământeni</i> <i>Memoriile unui urs polar</i> (translated from German)
<b>Haruki Murakami</b>	<b><i>Persoana întâi singular, 2022</i></b>
<b>Haruki Murakami</b>	<b><i>Strania bibliotecă, 2022</i></b>
<b>Ryu Murakami</b>	<b><i>69, 2022</i></b>
Hiromi Kawakami	<i>Jurnalul unei nopți nedesăvârșite</i>
Yōko Tawada	<i>Ultimii copii din Tokio</i>
Junichiro Tanizaki	<i>Istoria secretă a seniorului din Musashi</i>

Another large actor is Humanitas Fiction which put out 11 titles in the last five years. Its most prolific years were 2022 and 2023 when it published three titles per year. Although the number of annual titles published by Polirom and Humanitas Fiction is relatively small, they managed to keep up a steady pace whereas the activity of other publishing houses fluctuated massively along the years.

<b>Humanitas</b>	
<b>Hiro Arikawa</b>	<b><i>Motanul care și-a luat rămas-bun, 2023</i></b>
<b>Yukio Mishima</b>	<b><i>Starul, 2023</i></b>
<b>Natsuko Imamura</b>	<b><i>Fata care s-a transformat în bețișoare, 2023</i></b>
<b>Genki Kawamura</b>	<b><i>Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume, 2022</i></b>
<b>Natsuko Imamura</b>	<b><i>Femeia cu fustă violet, 2022</i></b>
<b>Teru Miyamoto</b>	<b><i>Vis de primăvară, 2022</i></b>
Yōko Ogawa	<i>Poliția Memoriei</i>
Yōko Ogawa	<i>Înotând cu elefantul, în brațe cu pisica</i>
Hiro Arikawa	<i>Memoriile unui motan călător</i>
Yukio Mishima	<i>O dimineață de iubire pură</i>
Ryūnosuke Akutagawa	<i>Paravanul-Iad</i>

Litera Publishing House was established in 1989 but it took several decades until the company decided to publish the first title in Japanese literature in 2021 (Toshikazu Kawaguchi, *Până nu se răcește cafeaua*). After 2021 Litera gained momentum and published 10 Japanese fiction books in translation in three years. The best year was 2023 when six new titles came out.

<b>Litera</b>	
<b>Mieko Kawakami</b>	<b><i>Îndrăgostiții de la miezul nopții, 2023</i></b>
<b>Sōsuke Natsukawa</b>	<b><i>Motanul care voia să salveze cărțile, 2023</i></b>
<b>Sanaka Hiiragi</b>	<b><i>Fotograful amintirilor pierdute, 2023</i></b>
<b>Hanae Minato</b>	<b><i>Confesiuni</i> (translated from English), 2023</b>
<b>Toshikazu Kawaguchi</b>	<b><i>Până nu se șterg amintirile, 2023</i></b>
<b>Satoshi Yagisawa</b>	<b><i>Viața mea la librăria Morisaki, 2023</i></b>
Toshikazu Kawaguchi	<i>Povești din cafenea</i>
Mieko Kawakami	<i>Heaven</i>
Toshikazu Kawaguchi	<i>Până nu se răcește cafeaua</i>
Mieko Kawakami	<i>Povești de vară</i>

In contrast with the previous publishing houses, a new publishing company, Alice Books, emerged in 2021 and in 2022 impressed the readership with its literary portfolio of Japanese translations. Unfortunately, in 2023 no Japanese translation book was released, even if several Japanese literature titles were mentioned on the official site regarding the forthcoming publications (Keiichiro Hirano, Yūko Tsushima) (<https://alicebooks.ro/in-pregatire/>). In the last three years Alice Books published seven titles.

Alice Books		
Osamu Dazai		<i>Școlărița, 2022</i>
Yu Miri		<i>Gara Ueno ieșirea spre parc, 2022</i>
Osamu Dazai		<i>Human Lost și alte proze scurte autobiografice, 2022</i>
Osamu Dazai		<i>Demoni chipeși și tutun și alte proze scurte autobiografice, 2022</i>
Osamu Dazai		<i>Florile bufoneriei. Testamentul lui Ōba Yōzō, 2022</i>
Makoto Shinkai,	Naruki	<i>Ea și pisica ei, 2022</i>
Nagakawa		
Osamu Dazai		<i>Dezumanizat</i>

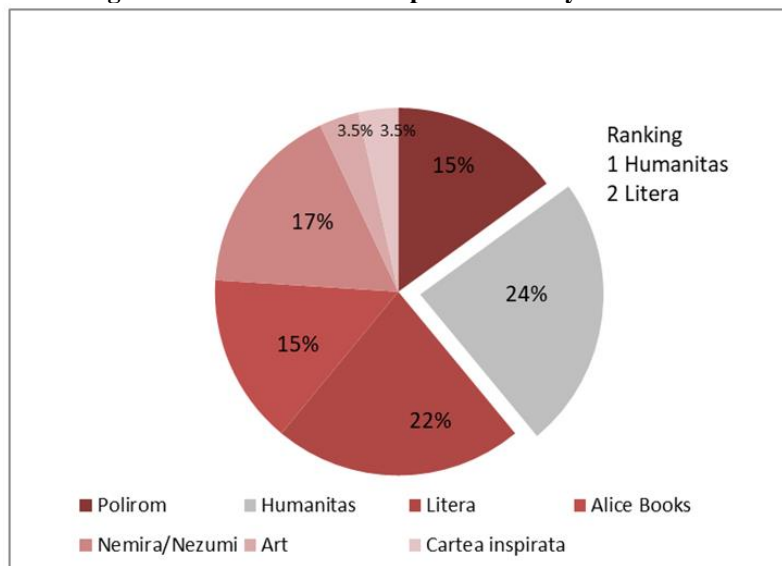
Cartea inspirată Publishing House turned out to be an accidental entry on the Japanese translation market. It published only one book in 2021, Matsuo Bashō, *Toamna*. We can find a similar situation regarding Art Publishing House which put out only one Japanese literature book (Junichirō Tanizaki, *Elogiul umbrei*)<sup>5</sup>.

Nemira publishing house with its Nezumi collection of *manga* books intended to break the literary cannon and to find a niche in the Japanese translation market. Nezumi collection started in 2022 with two titles and in the following year it expanded its literary portfolio to other six titles. The best year for Nezumi/Nemira was 2023, when it released six *manga* titles.

Nezumi/Nemira		
Ken Wakui		<i>Justițiarii din Tokyo, 2023</i>
Kamome Shirahama		<i>Atelierul vrăjitoarelor, 2023</i>
Hajime Isayama		<i>Atacul titanilor, 2023</i>
Naoshi Arakawa		<i>Minciuna ta din aprilie, 2023</i>
Oshimi Shuzo		<i>Shino nu își poate spune numele, 2023</i>
Kikori Morino		<i>Lecții de vals, 2023</i>
Yorushashi		<i>Regatele ruinei</i>
Yamazaki Koré		<i>Mireasa străvechiului mag</i>

The market share of Japanese literary translations in the last five years makes Humanitas the market leader (24%), followed by Litera (22%) and then by Nemira/Nezumi (17%), as Figure 7 outlines.

Figure 7. Market share of Japanese literary translations



<sup>5</sup> In 2024 the publishing house put forth *Crizantema și sabia*, by Ruth Benedict, a book regarding Japanese culture, but not a literature book.



Besides the long-established publishing companies we should highlight two new items: Litera (set up in 1989, but starting to publish Japanese literature books in 2021) and Alice Books (set up in 2021).

An interesting presence in the Japanese translations market is an old/new entry, Nemira, which translated Japanese authors such as Natsume Sōseki, Mori Ōgai many years ago and then lost interest in Japanese literature. After a while it decided to establish the Nezumi collection, designed to publish *manga* books.

Moreover, Cartea Inspirată (which published Matsuo Bashō) and Art (which released one of Junichirō Tanizaki's books) became two solitary (or maybe accidental) entries. Maybe in the years to come they will put out some other translations from Japanese literature.

The most productive publishing house regarding the number of released titles per year was Litera (10 titles in three years, published from 2021-2023). In addition, the publishing houses with a steady pace of publishing were Polirom – one title per year- and Humanitas – about two or three titles per year. In contrast, Alice Books had tremendous ups and downs in the editorial plan concerning Japanese literature: one title in 2021, six titles in 2022, and no titles in 2023.

### 3.1 Book fairs in Romania

Book fairs are major events that promote the book industry and offer a commercial nexus for different publishing houses. In Bucharest there are two famous book fairs: Bookfest (hold annually in May/June) and Gaudeamus (taking place in November/December every year). It has been a long established tradition to bring forward a guest of honour at each Bookfest fair. In 2020 Japan should have been the guest of honour, but, unfortunately the book fair was cancelled due to the pandemics and it was rescheduled to take place in 2022, when the Covid-19 restrictions were over.

The presence of Japan as the lead actor of the book fair became the main reason why the number of titles published in 2022 almost doubled and the Japanese literary translations gained impetus. At the opening festivity of the Bookfest in 2022, H. E. Hiroshi Ueda, the Ambassador of Japan to Romania, delivered a speech entitled “A Chorus of Narratives” in which he pointed at the harmonious overlapping of various types of narratives manifesting in Japanese literature, *manga*, *anime* and tourism (<https://www.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100350466.pdf>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023

To celebrate the guest of honour, a lot of events focusing on Japanese authors or authors who wrote novels inspired by Japan took place. For instance, Francesc Miralles – who wrote *Wabi-Sabi* (Humanitas Fiction, 2018) or *Un ceai la capătul lumii* (Humanitas Fiction, 2022) – attended the book fair to mark this event. Akira Mizubayashi, a Japanese-born author who writes in French joined the book fair to celebrate the publication of his book, *Inimă frântă* (Humanitas Fiction, 2022). Yōko Tawada was another special guest invited by Polirom Publishing House to launch her book, *Memoriile unui urs polar* (Polirom, 2022), translated from German by Monica Tamaș. A series of interviews with Yōko Ogawa and Hiromi Kawakami were recorded and screened during Bookfest in addition to several book launches such as Teru Miyamoto, *Vis de primăvară* (Humanitas Fiction, 2022); Natsuko Imamura, *Femeia cu fustă violet* (Humanitas Fiction, 2022); Haruki Murakami, *Persoana întâi singular* (Polirom, 2022); Haruki Murakami, *Strania bibliotecă* (Polirom Junior, 2022).

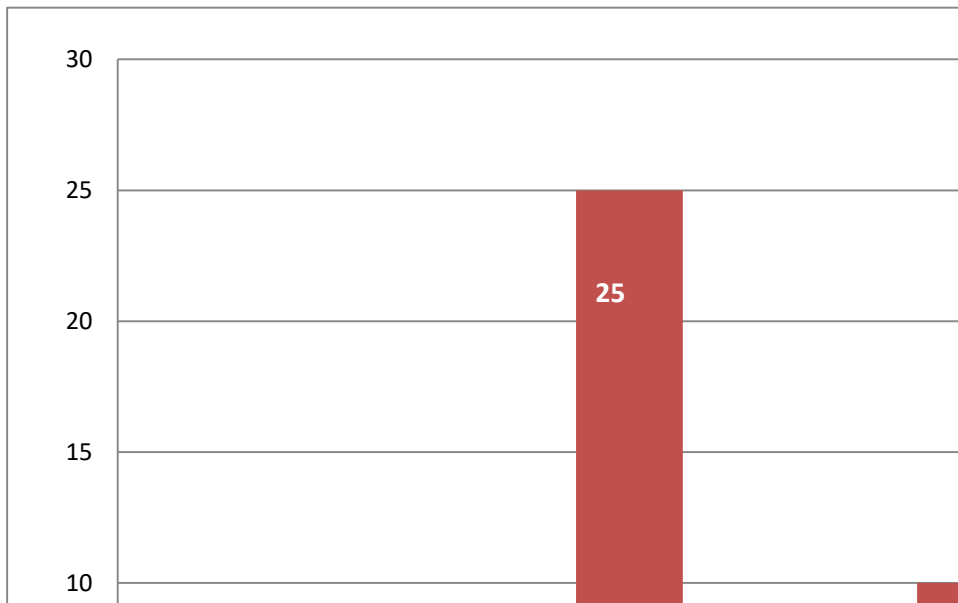
## 4. Publication by genre

As previously mentioned, 45 titles were published in the last five years, but none of them is a poetry book<sup>6</sup>, thus the diminishing interest in poetry in general and in Japanese poems in particular. We can identify 25 novels among the titles released from 2019-2023, an overwhelming number in contrast

<sup>6</sup> Maybe one debatable exception could be Matsuo Bashō, *Toamna*, which contains some *haikus*, but it is not a poetry book as such.

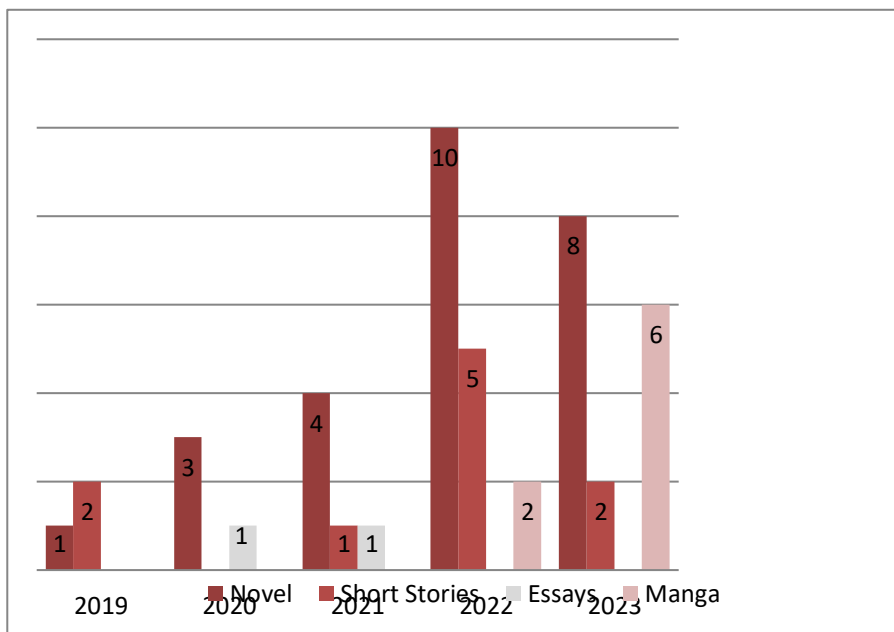
with the two essay books (Tanizaki Junichiro, *Elogiul umbrei*; Matsuo Bashō, *Toamna*) and ten short story books, complemented by the eight *manga* series (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Distribution by literary genres**



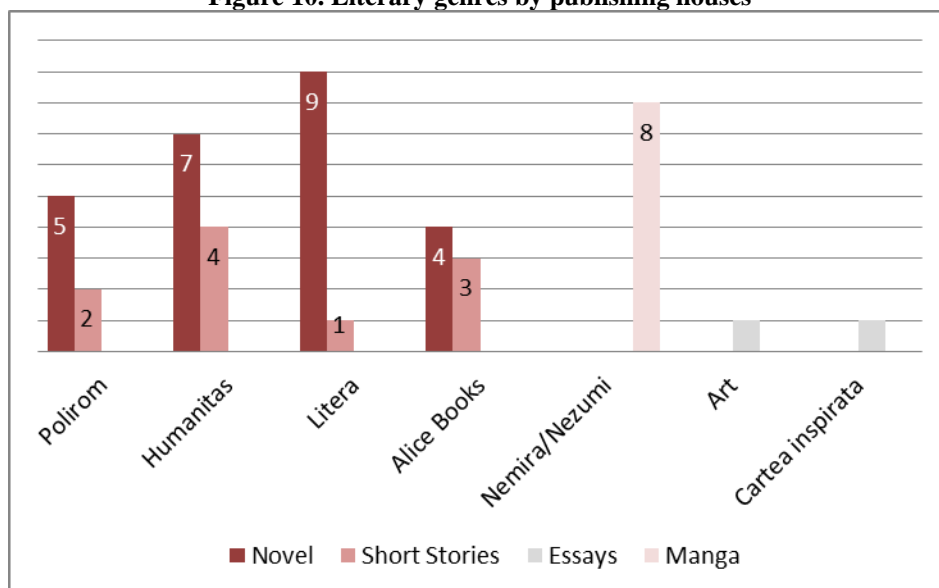
Looking closer at the genre distribution by years as detailed in Figure 9, the years 2019 and 2022 were somehow conventional because only novels and short stories were released, while 2020, 2021 and 2023 were more diverse since they also introduced the publication of essays and *manga*.

**Figure 9. Literary genres by year**



The publishing houses which attempted to break the routine were Art and Cartea inspirată, which published essay books. Unfortunately, they stopped the publication of essays quite abruptly. Nemira/Nezumi was the only one publishing house which has tried to keep its ‘promise’ to release the latest *manga* translations (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Literary genres by publishing houses**



Needless to say, among genres, the novel is the most appealing one. In contrast, only ten books of short stories were published from 2019-2023. The first ranking company regarding the publication of short stories is Humanitas Fiction, which released four titles, followed by Alice Books with three titles.

#### HUMANITAS

- \* Yukio Mishima, *O dimineață de iubire pură*
- \* Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, *Paravanul-Iad*
- \* Hiro Arikawa, *Motanul care și-a luat rămas bun*
- \* Natsuko Imamura, *Fata care s-a transformat în bețișoare*

#### POLIROM

- \* Hiromi Kawakami, *Jurnalul unei nopți nedesăvârșite*
- \* Haruki Murakami, *Persoana întâi singular*

#### LITERA

- \* Toshikazu Kawaguchi, *Povești din cafenea*

#### ALICE BOOKS

- \* Osamu Dazai, *Human Lost și alte proze scurte autobiografice*
- \* Osamu Dazai, *Demoni chipeși și tutun și alte proze scurte autobiografice*
- \* Makoto Shinkai, Naruki Nagakawa, *Ea și pisica ei*

The book sector has accelerated its transition to digitalisation to address the changes and challenges in the fiction market and to broaden its readership. Several publishing houses decided to embark on the journey to e-book publishing (Humanitas Fiction, Polirom, Litera), while the vast majority of publishing companies were limited to the printed format. In spite of the fact that three publishing companies have included the e-books in their portfolio, the Japanese literature books are still few and far between, promoted only by Humanitas Fiction and Litera. The most popular Humanitas Fiction's books are uploaded as e-books on Google Play or on phone/table applications such as Voxa and Audio Tribe<sup>7</sup>. Humanitas Fiction and Nemira have released audiobooks, but none of them belongs to the Japanese literature. Since 2021, marking the launch of Voxa<sup>8</sup>, an application based on subscription which contains thousands of e-books and audiobooks, Litera Publishing House has uploaded most of its Japanese literature translations both as e-books and audiobooks.

<sup>7</sup> Nemira has its own e-book and audiobook platform called Audio Tribe, comprising a lot of partners such as Humanitas, Corint, Bookzone, Niculescu, Curtea Veche (<https://audiotribe.ro/>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023).

<sup>8</sup> The start-up Voxa was financed 300,000 euros by Litera Publishing House (<https://www.zf.ro/business-tech/start-up-ul-voxa-a-lansat-oficial-aplicatia-de-carti-audio-si-2033286>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023).

	e-books		audiobooks
<b>Humanitas</b> Fiction (10 titles)	*Yukio Mishima, <i>O dimineata de iubire pură</i> (Google Play) *Yōko Ogawa, <i>Politia memoriei</i> (Google Play) *Yōko Ogawa, <i>Înotând cu elefantul în brațe cu pisica</i> (Voxa) *Hiro Arikawa, <i>Memoriile unui motan călător</i> (Google Play) *Genki Kawamura, <i>Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume</i> (Voxa) *Natsuko Imamura, <i>Femeia cu fustă violet</i> (Google Play) *Teru Miyamoto, <i>Vis de primăvară</i> (Google Play) *Natsuko Imamura, <i>Fata care s-a transformat în bețișoare</i> (Voxa) *Hiro Arikawa, <i>Motanul care și-a luat rămas-bun</i> (Voxa) <i>Starul</i> (Voxa)	<b>Litera</b> (6 titles)	*Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Până nu se răcește cafeaua</i> *Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Povești din cafenea</i> *Sōsuke Natsukawa, <i>Motanul care voia să salveze cărțile</i>  *Satoshi Yagisawa, <i>Viața mea la librăria Morisaki</i> *Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Până nu se șterg amintirile</i> *Kanae Minato, <i>Confesiuni</i>
<b>Litera</b> (8 titles)	*Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Până nu se răcește cafeaua</i> *Toshikazu Kawaguchi, <i>Povești din cafenea</i> *Sōsuke Natsukawa, <i>Motanul care voia să salveze cărțile</i> *Satoshi Yagisawa, <i>Viața mea la librăria Morisaki</i> *Mieko Kawakami, <i>Povești de vară</i> *Mieko Kawakami, <i>Heaven</i> *Sanaka Hiiragi, <i>Fotograful amintirilor pierdute</i> *Kanae Minato, <i>Confesiuni</i>		

#### 4.1 Recurring motifs in the Japanese literary translations

Sometimes a book could become a bestseller if the motifs revealed in its pages appeal to the readers. Taking a closer look at the books published between 2019-2023, we can identify several recurring motifs, appearing in both novels and short stories. One example is the rising interest in *cats* as we can notice in books such as Hiro Arikawa, *Memoriile unui motan călător*; Hiro Arikawa, *Motanul care și-a luat rămas bun*; Makoto Shinkai, Naruki Nagakawa, *Ea și pisica ei*; Sōsuke Natsukawa, *Motanul care voia să salveze cărțile*; Genki Kawamura, *Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume*. Another recurring motif is *memory*, which could be spotted in Toshikazu Kawaguchi, *Până nu se șterg amintirile*; Sanaka Hiiragi, *Fotograful amintirilor pierdute*; Yōko Ogawa, *Politia Memoriei*, as well as *books, bookstores and libraries* (Satoshi Yagisawa, *Viața mea la librăria Morisaki*; Sōsuke Natsukawa, *Motanul care voia să salveze cărțile*; Yōko Ogawa, *Politia Memoriei*; Haruki Murakami, *Strania bibliotecă*).

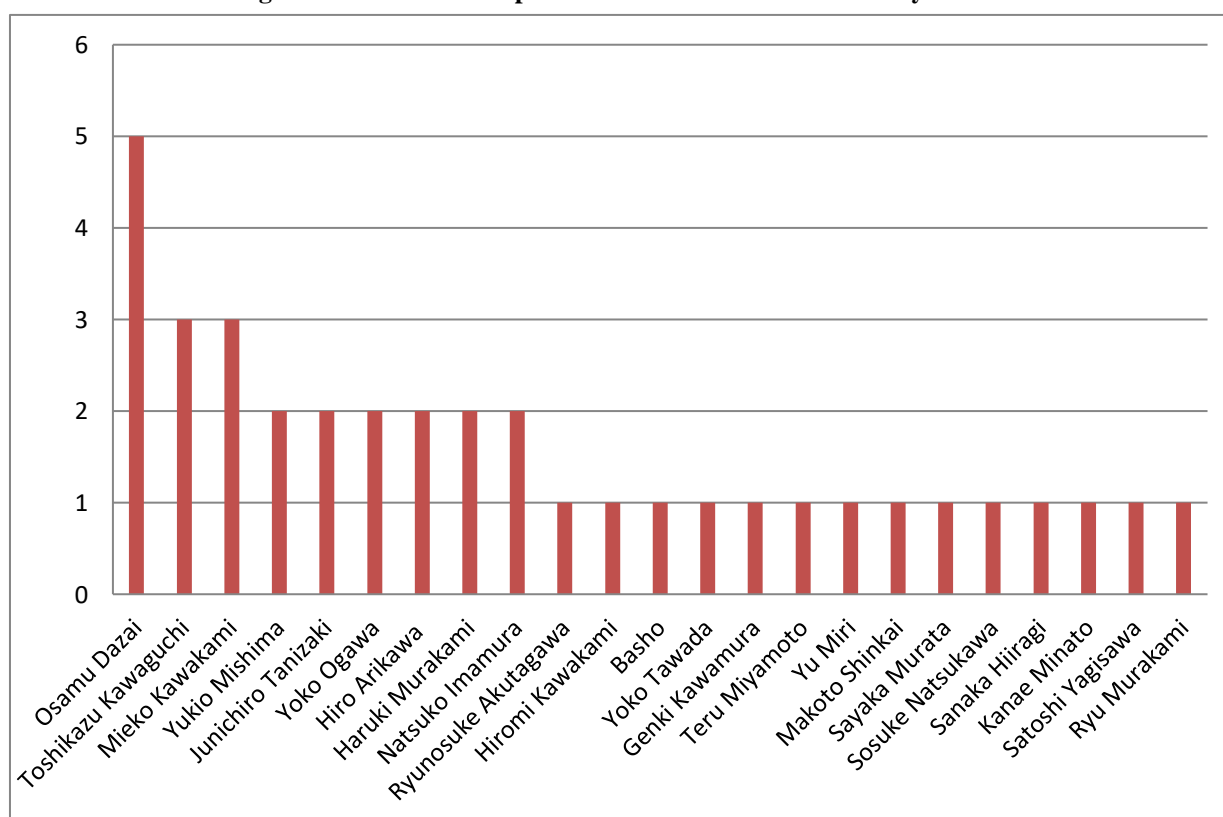
#### 5. Publications by authors

The choice of translating an author is influenced by many facts – on one hand the copyright agencies' preference for certain authors, on the other hand, the international trends. In the context of foreign book markets and international trends, the Romanian publishing companies should permanently refer to other large foreign publishing companies and see what they published as national literature or as translations. Another key-factor is choosing an author who has been the recipient of several

prestigious literary prizes, although the decision of awarding a prize is, in many cases, a political one and many books tend to follow this criterion. In addition, the motifs or themes in high demand in a certain period shape the preferences of the readers and, consequently, could transform the book into a bestseller, regardless its literary value (<https://www.lapunkt.ro/2019/06/interviu-denisa-comanescu-cum-vin-cartile-straine-in-limba-romana/>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023).

The table in Figure 11 illustrates the most translated Japanese authors on the Romanian fiction market.

**Figure 11. Number of Japanese literature titles in the last 5 years**

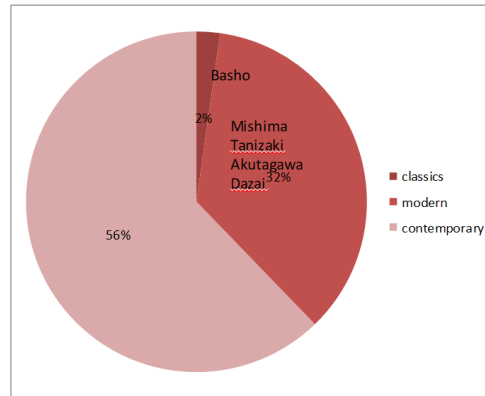


Osamu Dazai is the most translated Japanese author (five titles). All these titles were published by Alice Books, a small publishing house doing its best to secure a stable place on the fiction market.

Litera translated three international bestsellers by Toshikazu Kawaguchi (*Povești din cafenea; Până nu se răcește cafeaua; Până nu se șterg amintirile*) and three titles by Mieko Kawakami (*Heaven; Povești de vară; Îndrăgostiții de la miezul nopții*). Humanitas Fiction continued to translate and publish books by Yukio Mishima and Yōko Ogawa almost yearly. As a result, two titles by Yukio Mishima and two titles by Yōko Ogawa were published between 2019 and 2023. Similarly, Polirom continued its Haruki Murakami series with two titles released in the last five years. Some examples of moderate success could be Junichiro Tanizaki (two titles), Hiro Arikawa (two titles), Natsuko Imamura (two titles).

The publishing houses were more likely to translate the works of contemporary Japanese writers than those of modern classics, such as Yukio Mishima (two titles), Osamu Dazai (five titles), Junichiro Tanizaki (two titles), Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (one title) or classic authors, such as Bashō. The case of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa is somehow paradoxical since almost everyone has heard of the Akutagawa Prize, but few people are familiar with his works (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Distribution of classic/modern and contemporary writers**

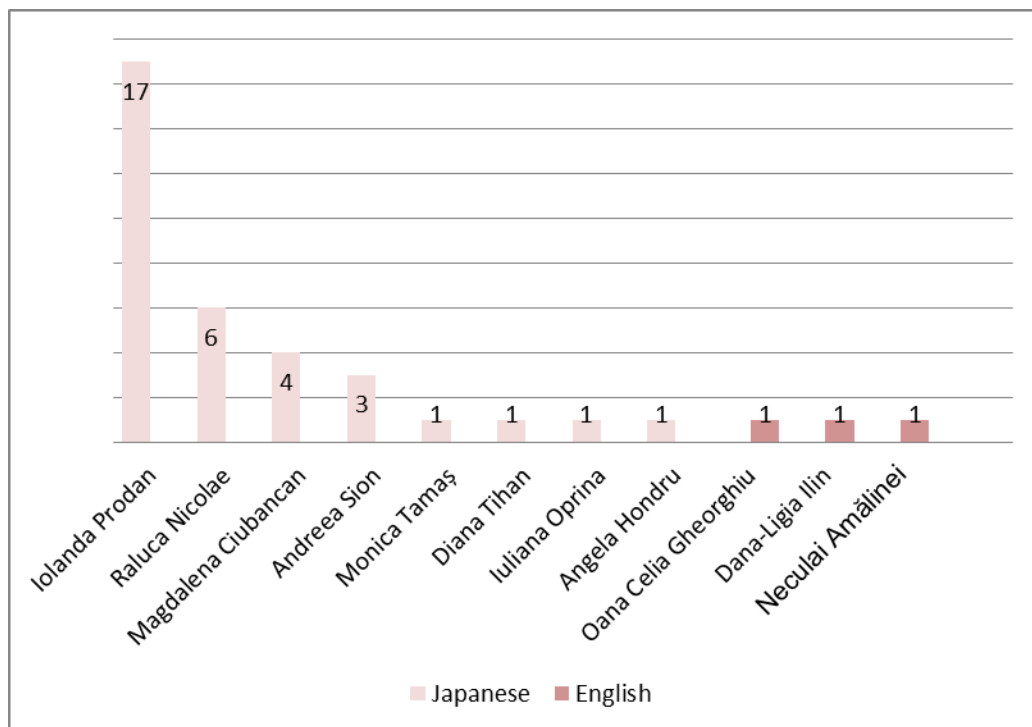


Along with translations from well-known contemporary writers such as Haruki Murakami, Yōko Ogawa, Yōko Tawada, Teru Miyamoto, Mieko Kawakami, Hiromi Kawakami, Sayaka Murata, Natsuko Imamura, some publishing companies started experimenting with new authors such as Sanaka Hiiragi, Satoshi Yagisawa, Genki Kawamura, Hiro Arikawa, Tashikazu Kawaguchi, whose translated books became international bestsellers.

### 6. Publications by translators

The works of 22 Japanese authors were translated into Romanian, mainly from Japanese, with few exceptions such as Kanae Minato, *Confesiuni* (translated from English by Oana-Celia Gheorghiu) and Mieko Kawakami, *Povești de vară* (translated from English by Dana-Ligia Ilin). This is illustrated in Figure 12.

**Figure 13. Translators by number of translated titles**



The most productive translator is Iolanda Prodan (17 books in three years, from 2021-2023) with an average translation rate: 5.6 books a year, i.e. a book almost every two months. The next translator from the point of view of the number of translations is Raluca Nicolae, six titles (Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, *Paravanul-Iad*; Yōko Ogawa, *Politiia Memoriei*; Yōko Ogawa, *Înotând cu elefantul în*

*brațe cu pisica*; Hiro Arikawa, *Memoriile unui motan călător*; Hiro Arikawa, *Motanul care și-a luat rămas-bun*; Natsuko Imamura, *Femeia cu fustă violet*), followed by Magdalena Ciubăncan, four titles (Junichirō Tanizaki, *Istoria secretă a seniorului Musashi*; Junichirō Tanizaki, *Elogiul umbrei*; Genki Kawamura, *Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume*; Natsuko Imamura, *Fata care s-a transformat în bețișoare*) and Andreea Sion, three titles (Yukio Mishima, *O dimineață de iubire pură*; Haruki Murakami, *Persoana întâi singular*; Yukio Mishima, *Starul*).

As part of the publishing company policy, some translators continued translating the works of the same authors. For instance, Andreea Sion “has specialised” into Yukio Mishima or Haruki Murakami’s books and Iolanda Prodan translated almost all Osamu Dazai’s works.

Some translators collaborated with different publishing houses. For example, Iolanda Prodan worked for Polirom, Litera, Cartea Copiilor<sup>9</sup>, and Alice Books; Magdalena Ciubăncan collaborated with Polirom, Humanitas Fiction, and Art; and Andreea Sion translated for Polirom, Humanitas Fiction and Cartea Copiilor.

However, the *manga* translations for Nezumi/Nemira were not done by a single person, but by a group of translators. For example, *Atacul titanilor* by Hajime Isayama was translated by Antonia Ivanciu, Mălina Coșan, Cosmin Țița or *Regatele ruinei* by Yoruhashi was translated by two people, Alexandra Baranyi and Andrei Perciun.

## 7. Conclusion

The end of pandemics and the Bookfest fair in 2022 – hosting Japan as the guest of honour – gave a valuable boost to the publication of Japanese literature in translation. The most productive years were 2022 and 2023 (sixteen titles each), in contrast with 2019 and 2020. However, in 2023 almost one third of the books were *manga* translations (six out of sixteen titles).

While well-established publishing houses continued to publish Japanese literature (Humanitas Fiction, Polirom and later on Litera), there were also “new entries” such as Alice Books which started off with ambitious plans, but then lost momentum.

The most active publishing houses were Humanitas Fiction (eleven titles), Litera (ten titles) and Nezumi/Nemira (eight titles), followed closely by Alice Books (seven titles). The translation of so many titles from Japanese literature is closely connected to the endeavours of several active translators. The top most productive translator was Iolanda Prodan (seventeen titles), followed by Raluca Nicolae (six titles), Magdalena Ciubăncan (four titles), Andreea Sion (three titles).

The top most translated Japanese authors were Osamu Dazai (five titles), Mieko Kawakami (three titles), Haruki Murakami (three titles), and Toshikazu Kawaguchi (three titles). Some authors had been previously translated (Haruki Murakami, Yōko Ogawa, Yukio Mishima etc.), while other writers were published for the first time in Romania (Hiro Arikawa, Natsuko Imamura, Genki Kawamura, Yu Miri etc.)

Some of the translated books won international literary prizes. Such is the case of *Femeia cu fustă violet* by Natsuko Imamura, which won the Akutagawa Prize in 2019. Yōko Tawada’s book, *Ultimii copii din Tokyo*, was the recipient of the National Book Award for Translated Literature in 2018. *Poliția Memoriei* by Yōko Ogawa (was the winner of the American Book Award in 2020, short listed for International Booker Prize in 2020, short listed for National Book Award 2019).

Besides the international acknowledgment, some books translated in Romania in the last five years became local bestsellers. *Memoriile unui motan călător* by Hiro Arikawa was one of the Humanitas

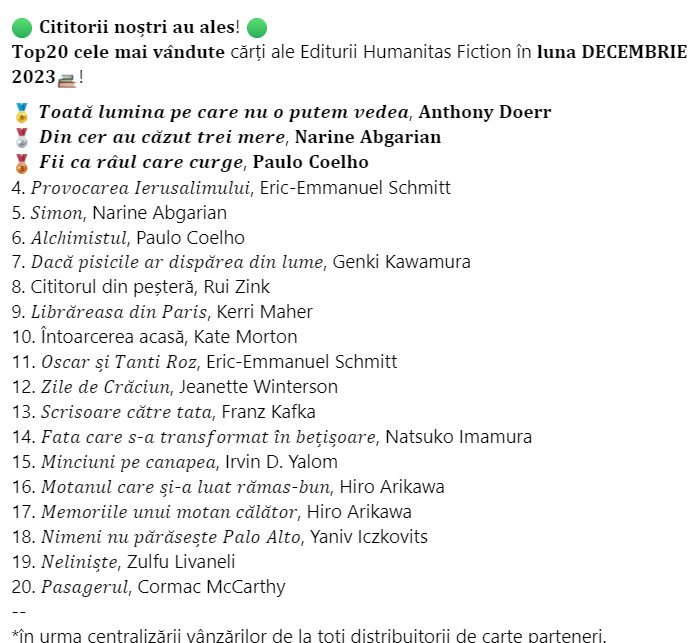
<sup>9</sup> I have not included children literature in this study even though writers such as Kazuo Imamura, Eiko Kadono, Kaia Doi are relatively successful in Romania.

Fiction bestsellers in the 2020. Other translations turned out to be very popular in the Romanian book fairs such as Yukio Mishima, *O dimineață de iubire pură* (Gaudeamus bestseller in 2019); Imamura Natsuko, *Femeia cu fustă violet* (Bookfest bestseller in 2022); Genki Kawamura, *Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume* (Gaudeamus bestseller in 2022).

Some publishing houses added their own rankings. For instance, Humanitas Fiction centralised the data received from retailers and made a monthly ranking, displaying the bestsellers on their official Facebook page.

As you can see in Figure 14, in the top 20 bestseller of December, there are four titles belonging to Japanese literature – three are recent translations (*Dacă pisicile ar dispărea din lume*, 2022; *Fata care s-a transformat în bețișoare*, 2023; *Motanul care și-a luat rămas-bun*) and one is an all time bestseller (*Memoriile unui motan călător*, 2020).

**Figure 14. December top 20 bestsellers of Humanitas Fiction**



Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/humanitas.fiction/posts/pfbid0rhgdfeQymJeM5qALtckUKVq8W4Vcs5epLvWuRtz7rRoSpAS88Jq4ntOCszwUweukl>, retrieved on 20th of December 2023

The year 2022 marked a significant shift regarding the number of translated titles and the same trend continued in 2023 (sixteen titles each year). We can only hope that the year 2024 will be a prolific year for Japanese literary translations, that the publishing houses which kept a low profile in the last year will make a spectacular comeback, and maybe the most important aspect, that the market/marketable value of a book will be equal to its literary value.

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