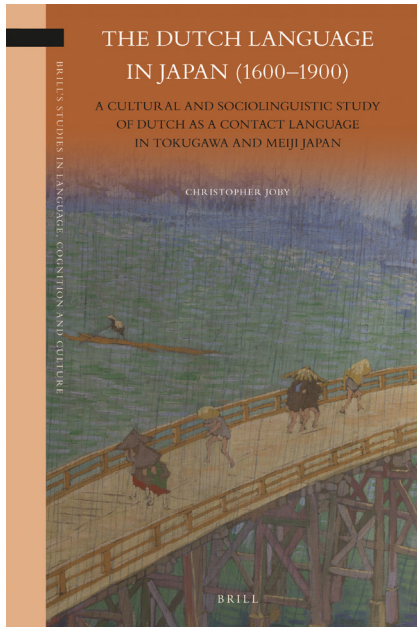


Review

Christopher Joby, *The Dutch Language in Japan (1600–1900). A Cultural and Sociolinguistic Study of Dutch as a Contact Language in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan*, Leiden, Brill, 2020, 494 pp. ISBN 9789004436442.



Neither among Japanologists or *neerlandici* does one easily find experts in the history of the relationship between the United Provinces and Japan from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Christopher Joby's book makes an attempt at establishing itself as a milestone in the research on the so-called *rangaku* ('Dutch studies') and Dutch-Japanese contacts. The book proposes a roughly 500-pages long 'cultural and sociolinguistic' analysis of the role played by the Dutch language as it came into contact with varieties of Japanese and other languages used in Tokugawa Japan, up until the first decades of the Meiji period.

The main body of the work is composed of eight chapters, each analysing different instances of the use of the Dutch language in Japan. The first three chapters are dedicated to the presentation of the many speakers of Dutch, illustrating the processes of learning

and employing the language by both VOC crew members and the Japanese. Chapters four, five, and seven analyse the instances of language contact and mutual interference between Dutch, Japanese, and several other languages that still played a role in Japan. Chapter seven in particular aims to provide a comprehensive list of Dutch influences on Japanese, mostly – though not exclusively – regarding vocabulary. Chapter six ('Translation from Dutch') sheds light on the translators of *rangaku*, and on the process of translation itself, in order to understand what type of books they were mostly interested in. Chapter eight ('Language Shift and Recession') illustrates the decline in the use of Dutch in Japan, following the country's opening to global trade.

The author's bibliography proves his expertise in the study of language contact, particularly English and Dutch, which is evident in the central sections of the book. Here the author illuminates the vitality of the often underestimated cultural and linguistic context of Tokugawa Japan, paying attention to the multiculturalism and multilingualism of the crew of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This is made explicit in chapter one ('Those who already knew Dutch in Japan'), in which the author points out the diverse nationalities of the VOC agents with whom the Japanese interpreters often interacted, thus questioning the command of Dutch of the crewmembers. A remarkable feature of this book is the inclusion of an analysis of what some VOC agents (mostly Hendrik Doeff and Cornelis Theodoor van Assendelft de Coningh) called *Japansch-Nederlandsch* ('Japanese-Dutch'), a small idiolect of Dutch used in the Japanese trading post. Joby also examines how the use of Dutch in Japan, by both native and non-native speakers, slightly changed under the influence of the languages of Asia which the crewmembers encountered.

Although only a handful of sources (both primary and secondary) are available, this investigation was made possible by the extensive use of two main types of Dutch sources, namely the memoirs the VOC agents published after their return to the Dutch Republic, and the content of the diaries (*dagregisters*) they compiled on the island of Dejima/Deshima, in the bay of Nagasaki. However, Joby's reliance on these sources proves something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they allow for a better understanding of the multiculturalism of the VOC crewmembers, since non-Dutch individuals were – at least in theory – not allowed in Japan and therefore underreported in Japanese sources. On the other hand, these sources can mislead the researcher with their implicit biases: the memoirs were not devoid of self-aggrandisement and overt patriotism, while the honesty of the *dagregisters* may be questioned because of the authors' fear of Japanese inspection. Joby does discuss these potential pitfalls, yet he nonetheless seems to have been influenced by them when downplaying the role of 'comfort women' (for lack of a better word) called *oranda-yuki* (literally: 'to go to the Dutch'). These women were most likely the Japanese individuals with whom the VOC agents most interacted, unlike the Japanese interpreters for example, who were not allowed to stay the night in Deshima. The almost complete absence of these women in Joby's book is an unfortunate shortcoming. A brief section based on, for example, Katagiri Kazuo's *Dejima yūjo to oranda tsūji* ('The Deshima comfort women and the Dutch interpreters', 2018) would have been helpful.

Many pages are devoted to the presentation of the material and methodology used by the Japanese scholars to learn the Dutch language and 'Dutch science'. Trying to bring all the pieces of the history of *rangaku* together is not an easy task, since the legality of such scholarship depended heavily on the ruler's will. This could at times discourage the Japanese from openly discussing their studies. This issue is evidenced by Sugita Genpaku's pivotal work *Rangaku kotohajime* ('The Beginning of the Dutch Studies'), completed in 1815, and the 1839 purge of the scholars of the West (*bansha no goku*). Although Joby demonstrates awareness of such problems, he nonetheless attempts to provide a general overview of the language-learning materials which circulated and were compiled in Tokugawa Japan. However, the reader is left with some doubts regarding the reliability of the main source the author claims he has mostly used to compile these sections. One wonders why De Groot's unpublished 2005 PhD thesis was preferred over

Katagiri Kazuo's *Edo jidai no tsūyakukan* ('The interpreters' guild of the Edo Period', 2016) and Sugimoto Tsutomu's *Rangaku to nihongo* ('The Dutch studies and the Japanese language', 2013), which represent a more thorough and up-to-date analysis of these primary sources.

A remarkable passage found in chapters six and seven illustrates the approaches used by the Japanese when first translating Dutch books (which generally concerned science and medicine) and the subsequent impact they had on the Japanese language. The author presents what translation meant for Edo Japanese scholars, who mostly produced Japanese 'adaptations' or 'renditions' of the Dutch books, rather than word-for-word translations of their sources. Another valuable addition is the lengthy list of words coined in Japanese based on, or influenced by, the necessity of translating Dutch books. This extensive list has been compiled by mainly combining two older publications, one by Frits Vos (1963) and the other by Saitō Shizuka (1967), and as such represents a much-needed corpus of vocabulary for a broader readership. Unfortunately, the list concerning the vocabulary of grammar and language in general is disappointingly short. It also overrepresents the scholar Mitsukuri Genpo, who is said to have first used some lemmas (e.g., *dōshi* for 'verb' and *daimeshi* for 'pronoun'), which are actually found in earlier works, like those of Shizuki Tadao. This small inaccuracy seems to have originated in the secondary sources on which Joby relied, and which are only sparsely questioned in his book.

Joby also covers further relevant information, including the morphosyntactic influence which translation from Dutch has had on contemporary modern Japanese. Clearly, terminology and concepts were not the only issues facing the rendition of Dutch sentences into Japanese. Consequently, a handful of rhetorical artifacts typical of Dutch have been adopted by formal written Japanese. The author's sources report that, for example, the problematic issue of the construction of passive sentences in Japanese, in contrast with its abundant use in Dutch, led to the crystallization of *ni yotte* to render the Dutch *door* ('by'), both marking the agent of what we might call a passive voice.

The last chapter of this book, again, demonstrates the author's expertise regarding the sociolinguistics of language contact. This section covers the post-Tokugawa period and analyses the slow but steady decline of the use of Dutch in Japan in any functional sense. This is also a valuable contribution, providing a clear picture of this period, which still lasted some twenty to thirty years after the 'reopening' of Japan. It appears to be, in fact, common practice to conclude similar works by simply stating that the Dutch language fell into disuse as soon as English reached Japan, but as Joby correctly points out, that is mostly an exaggerated myth.

In conclusion, this book has what it takes to become an important source for scholars interested in studying the fascinating scholarship of *rangaku* and the unique history of Dutch-Japanese relations. The work is well written and regardless of its very academic and technical content, I believe it can be enjoyable even to more casual readers. It will undoubtedly be cited and referenced by future researchers, particularly non-Japanese scholars, because of Joby's wide scope and extensive bibliography, which includes many older and rare sources that may be difficult to identify by non-experts. In addition, the book manages to debunk some salient myths, in particular the presumed irrelevance of the Dutch language in Dutch-Japanese contacts. Unfortunately, as discussed above, the book

does have some shortcomings. The sources Joby consulted are, at times, defective and might lead the reader towards an excessively Eurocentric perspective, while he sometimes prefers to cite secondary literature rather than using the original Japanese documents. Nevertheless, the author's experience in studying language contacts is evident throughout this book, which presents an interesting take by means of sociolinguistic tools – an oftentimes underemphasised field of research.

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