

Rebekah Clements. *A Cultural History of Translation in Early Modern Japan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Illustrations, tables. 288 pp. \$34.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-107-43916-0.

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In her introduction, Rebekah Clements tells us that her motivation for this book is her belief that “translation has played a formative role in the development of indigenous legal and religious systems as well as literature, from early contact with China to the present-day impact of world literatures in Japanese translation. Yet translation is by no means a mainstream area of study for historians of Japan” (p. 10). She draws inspiration from a groundbreaking edited volume published in 2007, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia, that, for the first time, drew attention to the great significance of the practice of translation for cultural history. Translation was actually an essential element in the process of modernization of early modern Europe and should not be left only to specialists in literature and language.

Clements wants to fill in this gap for the Tokugawa period. Like Burke and Hsia, she focuses on three questions: what forms of translation were practiced, who were the main translators, and what exactly were they translating and what were they not translating? Her main aim thus is to present a comparative case for Japan by showing how the practice of translation was a pervasive and essential part of its early modern history. Other goals she sets are to contest two received opinions on the history of early modern Japan: first

the notion of “national isolation” during the Tokugawa period that made it a period with very limited foreign contact and influence (p. 1), and second the idea that translation was the hallmark of the Meiji period.

In her first chapter (“Language and society in Tokugawa Japan”), Clements lays the groundwork for a comparison. The characteristics she introduces here include the growth of cities, the expansion of mercantile capitalism, the development of a commercial publishing industry, and popularization of education causing an increased demand for knowledge and publications that can cater to this new need. All of these topics indicate that “that the growing numbers of translations that appeared in early modern Japan are linked to some of the key characteristics of the period that make the label ‘early modern’ itself appropriate, many of which Japan shares with early modernities elsewhere” (p. 45).

Turning to the actual practice of translation, Clements, unlike previous studies on Japanese translations that focused on a single “traditional or language field” discerns three different language groups (p. 4), each represented by the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 (“Classical Japanese texts”) reviews the perhaps most prevalent form of translation in this period: the vernacular translations of classical—and elite—Japanese or Sino-

Japanese texts. Chapter 3 (“‘Chinese’ texts”) focuses on the new forms in which originally Chinese texts, from past and present, are rendered into intelligible Japanese forms. The kinds of translations reviewed here vary from *kundoku* additions (brief “reading aids” that restate original—usually classic—Chinese texts in a syntactical way to make them more readily intelligible to Japanese readers) to outright vernacularization and even looser renderings of foreign texts, especially Chinese novels and plays, that were now appropriated to the tastes and fashions of the Japanese reading and theater public. Chapter 4 (“Translation of Western languages”) delves into the intricacies of translating Dutch and other European languages into Japanese. The final chapter, chapter 5 (“Late Tokugawa ‘crisis’ translation”) takes a different, chronological, angle, and discusses how late Tokugawa translations included a wider range of languages—not only Dutch and Chinese but also Russian, Manchu, and English, for example—and a greater focus on military and technical translations, in order to cope with the changing international conditions in which Japan found itself.

Like the contributors to the Burke and Hsia volume, who consider various forms of translation not only between languages but also between past and present, Clements casts her net wide across time as well as geographically. To discuss translations from classical Japanese, from both vernacular and classical Chinese, and from Dutch and other European languages, as she does, results in a comprehensive—and much-needed—overview of “translation activities” in Tokugawa Japan. The book presents a tremendous, one can say encyclopedic, overview of translators and translated works in early modern Japan, in particular in institutional settings. It focuses on influential translation projects, partly instigated by local or government-sponsored institutions. She traces their influence on social, intellectual, and literary developments of their time. Her conception of what can be considered “translation”—discussed in her introduction is intentionally left vague,

which, from a descriptive point of view, is not a disadvantage. Her aim is mainly to describe the practice of translation. Clements knows her field very well and presents a strong case for comparison.

Moreover, by presenting her case meticulously, she convincingly shows that Japan was far from an “isolated country” in the Tokugawa period. Engagement with things foreign was deeply rooted in many aspects of Tokugawa daily life and exerted strong influence on various developments in this period, intellectual and technological, as well as literary. Also, her discussion makes it clear that translation was obviously not something that started with the Meiji period, but was already pervasive in Tokugawa Japan.

This publication is uncontestably a milestone also for early modern Japan specialists. This much-needed and wide overview of translation activities results in a comprehensive examination of fields that are usually discussed separately and that cater to a Japanese reading public for various purposes. It places important elements of early modern life in Japan in a new light. The author discusses a wide range of scholars and others involved in translation from the perspective of different traditions and language fields.

The comparative contextualization in her book primarily concerns the sociopolitical importance of translations in early modern Japan. What a reader will not find is “cultural history” in the sense of a micro-history escaping from a “grand narrative” approach, and presenting local experience from an insider (translator’s) perspective. How did the translators consider their project; how did they perceive “language” and the cultures behind the languages they studied, whether foreign or classic or both; and how did this relate to their mission to “translate” their texts for a Japanese public? What did they have in common and what divided them across the different fields and traditions? Clements makes it very clear that her aim is not to present a linguistic analysis of

translation but to relate the significance of translation to Japan's early modern history. However, what is at stake here is not linguistics but what she herself calls "language consciousness." In her discussion of "language consciousness" across different fields (Nativists [*kokugaku*], Sinologists, Dutch studies scholars), she does not consider the integrating and encompassing elements that characterize Tokugawa Japan to include a more pervasive view of how translators were conscious of what they were doing, how they were doing it, and why they were doing it in a specific way.

For example, although she presents in her introduction a useful overview of "terms for translation in pre-modern and early modern Japan" (table 1, p. 11), she does not include some terms used by, for example, Dutch studies scholar Sugita Genpaku in the introduction to his seminal translation *A New Treatise of Anatomy* (*Kaitai Shinsho*, 1774). His reflections on the process of translation here can be considered an early form of "translation theory" according to Clements, who finds it relevant enough to translate several passages (p. 166). But Clements then places it in the context of Meiji and contemporary terms for translation. The terms he uses, however, like *giyaku* (translation of meaning) and *chokuyaku* (direct translation), were obviously directly relevant terms for Genpaku himself in his understanding of what were relevant categories in the field of translation. It is remarkable then that they are not addressed by Clements in her overall discussion on translation and language awareness in early modern Japan in her introduction, in table 1 discussing native terms and categories for translation, or in the conclusion.

That being said, although the book in this respect is not a "cultural history" about translation in Japan's early modern period and therefore the title is somewhat misleading, it does provide an immensely valuable perspective on how translation could be a stimulant and source of inspiration, scientifically, literarily, and creatively, to pro-

vide fresh perspectives from an outside world one could not visit at the time. It also makes clear how the history of Japanese culture, in particular the classic literary and historic writings by upper classes, was being reviewed and re-appropriated by much broader social layers of Japanese society, and thus was contributing to a new, encompassing "Japanese consciousness." Finally, the book is a pleasure to read as it is very precise, carefully executed, and an impressive achievement.

Erratum: The original version of this review had a misspelling of Sugita Genpaku's name.—ed. (8/28/17)

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