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Rebekah Clements

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Introduction

Translation, in one form or another, has been present in all major exchanges between cultures in history.¹ Japan is no exception, and it is part of the standard narrative of Japanese history 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 and there are no monograph-length overviews of the history of pre-modern Japanese translation available in any language. This phenomenon is not confined to Japanese studies, for, as Burke and Hsia note in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, the study of the cultural history of translation is still in its infancy worldwide.² Although for some years there has been interest in the historical dimension among translation studies specialists, this has yet to be matched by the study of translation by historians.³

In the Japanese case translation is a vital part of coming to grips with the cultural fabric of the pre-modern period, questions of intellectual exchange, and the way readers interacted with texts. Despite the sometimes persistent notion of ‘national isolation’ (*sakoku* 鎖国), during much of the pre-modern period Japan was the final stop on the Silk Road, and through contact with Chinese merchants, Catholic missionaries, and Dutch traders during the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, was on the receiving end of a vast network of intellectual exchange, spanning continents. This network encompassed not only texts written in Chinese, such as the Buddhist and Confucian canons, which circulated in the countries now known as India, China, Vietnam, Korea, and from there to Japan, but also European-language works that were part of emerging discourses on the natural sciences,

¹ Burke and Hsia 2007, p. 1. ² Burke and Hsia 2007, pp. 1–3.

³ On the historical dimension in translation studies, see St André 2009. A book chapter providing an introduction to the history of translation in East Asia is the only research to consider in a broad context the practice of translation in pre-modern Japan, and is by a translation studies specialist: Wakabayashi 2005b.

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geography, and history; texts like Anthelme Richerand's *Nouveaux éléments de physiologie* (1801), Johann Hübner's *Allgemeine Geographie* (1730–1), as well as biographies of Napoleon Bonaparte, reached Japan in Dutch translation via the Dutch East India Company trading post at Nagasaki. During the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the Dutch were prolific translators of works in other European languages, and so Japanese scholars had access to parts of the world of European scholarly endeavour via the medium of the Dutch language.⁴

Moreover, Japanese readers interacted with their own past by means of translation: the development of a commercial publishing industry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to a growing market of readers with lower levels of literacy who nevertheless wished to read the great works of Japanese court literature from the tenth and eleventh centuries, such as *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, c.1008) and *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari* c.900), which were written in what is now known as classical Japanese. Vernacular translation was one means by which they were able to do so. Nor was vernacular translation a technique used only for the benefit of those with low levels of education. From the end of the eighteenth century, a new breed of scholar, exemplified by Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) and Suzuki Akira (1764–1837), used vernacular translation as a means of studying and teaching classical Japanese texts like the *Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* (*Kokin wakashū*, c.905) as well as *The Tale of Genji*; moreover, eminent thinkers like Itō Jinsai (1627–1705) and Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728) advocated and practised translation from Chinese texts as a teaching method in their sinological academies.

The study of translation in the pre- and early modern periods is also important because it provides necessary background for understanding translation as it was practised in Japan during modern times, particularly the Meiji period (1868–1912) – a topic that has received much scholarly attention, unlike translation in the centuries beforehand. It is well known that the contours of Japanese modernity were shaped by a wave of translations that broke over the Japanese cultural landscape in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, in contrast to the relative lack of interest in pre- or early modern translation, there are numerous studies of translation in Japan that begin with texts translated after the Meiji Revolution of 1868.⁵ In sharp contrast to the paucity of

⁴ On early modern Dutch translation activities, see the essays contained in Cook and Dupré 2012b.

⁵ The works in this field are too numerous to list in full, but some of the important studies on the phenomenon as a whole are: (in Japanese) Yanagida 1961, Kimura 1972, Yanabu 1976, Yanabu 1982, Maruyama and Katō 1991, Kamei 1994, (and in English) Miller

bibliographic materials on pre-Meiji translation, there is a catalogue of all the National Diet Library's holdings of translated Western literature produced in book form in Japan during the Meiji period.⁶ In addition there are also modern reproductions of the corpora of Meiji translations of Western literature that appeared in books, or magazines, and newspapers.⁷ This study will attempt to redress the balance of scholarship as well as show that many Meiji translation practices have their roots in the years prior to 1868.

How should translation be studied?

In so far as the history of pre-modern Japanese translation has been studied, it has been largely thanks to the efforts of linguistic or literary specialists working in discrete fields of enquiry – Dutch studies, vernacular Chinese novels, or linguistics, for example (*rangaku* 蘭学, *hakuwa shōsetsu* 白話小説, and *hon'yakugo* 翻訳語, to give their Japanese field names).⁸ This is partly because a big-picture study dealing with the wide variety of texts encountered and translated by Japanese readers in history means dealing with a large number of languages and multiple fields of study. The list of languages from which Japanese translations were made prior to the Meiji period includes but is not limited to classical Chinese, vernacular Chinese, classical Japanese, Latin, Dutch, English, French, and Manchu. And this is to say nothing of the necessity of coming to terms with documentary traditions as varied as Chinese and Western medicine, Roman Catholic theology, tenth-century Japanese court poetry, and Ming fiction.

Exceptions to the narrow scholarly focus usually take the form of short, introductory overviews, which are tantalizing for the questions they raise. The mainstream position on pre-Meiji translation in Japan is best summed up in a series of dialogues between Maruyama Masao (1914–96), one of Japan's leading post-war intellectual historians, and Katō Shūichi (1919–2008), a prominent literary critic, as Katō prepared

2001, Howland 2002, Levy 2008a and Emmerich 2013. A more detailed bibliography of works in English and Japanese is available in Quinn 2008, which also includes some studies of pre-Meiji translation.

⁶ Sakakibara 1988–91.

⁷ Kawato and Sakakibara 1996–2001 and Kawato and Nakabayashi 2001–3.

⁸ In studies of the history of Dutch studies, the work of Sugimoto Tsutomu has been particularly important (e.g., Sugimoto 1976–82, Sugimoto 1990a). The study of translated vernacular Chinese novels began with Ishizaki 1940 and Asō 1946, and remains a significant field of enquiry (e.g., Nakamura 2011). Yanabu Akira has published a number of important monographs on the history of *hon'yakugo* – that is to say, linguistic analysis of the ways in which (usually Western) concepts such as 'liberty' or 'society' were translated into Japanese or Sino-Japanese. A list of Yanabu's major monographs on this topic is available in Quinn 2008, pp. 294–6.

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to replace the ailing Maruyama as editor of a volume on translation in the *Modern Japanese Thought* (*Nihon kindai shisō taikēi*) series.⁹ The published record of their discussion touches upon translation in Japan from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century with a view to understanding the role translation played in Meiji modernization. Useful though the overview is, this period of translation is seen almost entirely in the light of Meiji modernity. The picture that Maruyama and Katō paint in this discussion and in the introduction to the edited volume that followed is of translation's role in Japan's triumphant catch-up to modernity and successful preservation of sovereignty in the face of Western imperialism. The contrast is drawn with perceived failures by China, and Maruyama's modernist hero Ogyū Sorai, with his call for translation from Chinese into Japanese, features prominently.¹⁰

In addition to Maruyama and Katō, in more recent years there have been at least two chapter-length attempts to examine the history of early modern Japanese translation theory and practice. The Japanese historian, Sugimoto Tsutomu, who has mainly worked on translation from Dutch, has written a brief but insightful overview, noting the proliferation of theoretical works on translation during the eighteenth century.¹¹ A historical turn among translation studies scholars has seen Judy Wakabayashi examine the pre-modern history of translation in East Asia, including Japan, in a chapter-length overview, arguing for the importance of the regional perspective as well.¹²

Given the diversity of Japanese translation practices in history, it is unsurprising, however, that with a small number of exceptions, studies of pre-modern translation have tended to stay within a single tradition or language field. These have yielded valuable insights into such questions as the influence of foreign languages on Japanese syntax and vocabulary, early Japanese Christianity, the history of medicine, and the development of Japanese literary forms. However, such studies remain separated from each other, and contribute to a fractured understanding of the multilingual Japanese past. For it was indeed multilingual: a scholar active

⁹ Maruyama and Katō 2008. Although this has yet to be translated into English, an English overview with discussion is available in Haag 2008.

¹⁰ Maruyama 1952 (in English translation: Maruyama 1974). For an overview of the importance of Maruyama's work on Sorai, and its critical reception, see Ooms and Harootunian 1977.

¹¹ Sugimoto 1991, pp. 363–90.

¹² Wakabayashi 2005b. Wakabayashi is also the co-author of the entry on the history of the Japanese translation tradition in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*: Kondo and Wakabayashi 2009. In addition, Okada Kesao has written several monographs in Japanese with a linguistic focus comparing two or more languages that were subject to Tokugawa translation: Okada 1991, 2006.

during the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), for example, would usually have read classical Chinese texts as well as classical Japanese, and may also have known Dutch or vernacular Chinese. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, some educated Japanese converts to Christianity also learned Latin and Portuguese as well. Even less-educated readers to varying degrees encountered works in literary or vernacular Chinese as well as classical and contemporary forms of Japanese, and large urban centres like Edo and Kyoto were melting pots for dialects from across the country. The tendency in modern scholarship, however, has been to pigeonhole historical personalities as either Kokugaku (i.e., scholars of Japanese language and literature), Confucianist (Chinese) or a scholar of Western learning (usually Dutch); ordinary readers are largely overlooked. Although many early modern scholars did specialize, and for practical reasons it is necessary for researchers today to limit their field of view somehow, in the long term, the risk of relying too much on such classifications is an oversimplification of historical realities and the balkanization of scholarship.

The other convenient but problematic way of dealing with the unwieldy contents of the history of Japanese translation has been to treat ‘literary’ translation as an entirely separate phenomenon to the contemporaneous translation of science, law, current affairs, and other types of non-fiction. Even the numerous historical studies which consider the influx of foreign works during the Meiji period tend to focus exclusively on the translation of Western literature at the expense of non-fiction.¹³ In reality, both non-fiction and fiction were translated in large quantities, and were often subject to the same translation strategies. Indeed, works of fiction were sometimes translated as fact, as was the case with *Robinson Crusoe*. Often cited as the first example of Western ‘literature’ (*bungaku* 文学) translated into Japanese, this work was translated as a real example of castaway life (*hyōryūki* 漂流記).¹⁴

Thus, although a start has been made and scholars acknowledge its importance, the long story of translation in Japanese history is yet to be told in detail. There is much useful research which exists cordoned off within disciplinary boundaries, and the time is ripe for scholars to begin to bring this together for more comprehensive examination. It is also desirable to move beyond a linguistic focus on the nuts and bolts of translation and use insights gleaned from such approaches to consider the wider role translation and translators have played in Japanese history, a role that until now has been acknowledged but never investigated on a large scale.

¹³ E.g., Yanagida 1961 and Kamei 1994. A work which attempts to avoid this pitfall is Miller 2001, which compares the translation both of novels and scientific writings.

¹⁴ Matsuda 1998, pp. 165–242.

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Scope of the present study

This book looks at translation in early modern Japan (1600–1868) from a macroscopic perspective as it pertains to written texts across different languages and genres. The mode of enquiry is that of cultural history. Since the topic has not been dealt with on a large scale in Japanese studies before, I follow the pioneering example of Burke and Hsia, who considered the cultural history of translation in early modern Europe, and approach the history of translation in early modern Japan broadly by means of the following three questions: what forms of translation were practised, who were the translators, and what, exactly, were they translating (or not translating)?¹⁵ I also consider how the answers to these questions differ depending on the languages involved. Consistent with previous scholars who have acknowledged the importance of Chinese and Western language texts in translation, I consider both these language groups. However, I add a third linguistic axis to the equation and look also at texts translated from and into different forms of Japanese as translators and readers began to interact with their own language, past and present.¹⁶

The period of enquiry is the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) – nearly two-and-a-half centuries during which the land was ruled by the hereditary shoguns of the Tokugawa house. It is also a time known as Japan's early modern period. Although 'early modern' is a term derived from European historiography, where it denotes a slightly earlier time period, the centuries approximately 1500–1800, it is a classification that has also been adopted by historians of Japan, not without controversy.¹⁷ While being mindful of the danger of viewing the Tokugawa period solely as a prelude to nineteenth-century Meiji modernization, the term 'early modern' nonetheless has relevance from a comparative perspective because, like early modern Europe, the period ruled by the Tokugawa shoguns was characterized by the growth of cities, spread of secular thought, the expansion of mercantile capitalism and the development of a commercial publishing industry.¹⁸ There was a thirst for information and this was satiated in part by investigating past classics as well as new sources of information. It is against this backdrop that the

¹⁵ Burke and Hsia 2007.

¹⁶ Though I do touch upon the translation of poetry, it is not one of the main lines of enquiry. This is partly for reasons of space but also because by and large, the kinds of issues and approaches encountered in relation to poetic translation differ from those encountered in the translation of prose. See e.g., Weissbort 2005.

¹⁷ Hall 1991, pp. 33–4. For a discussion, see Wigen 1995 and Berry 2012. Berry suggests an earlier beginning: 1573, when the last of the Ashikaga shoguns went into exile following escalating conquests by the warlord Oda Nobunaga (2012, p. 43).

¹⁸ On the differences with other early modern periods see e.g., Berry 2012, pp. 42–3.

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seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries saw a proliferation of translation in Japan. The period is of interest both for this abundance and for its place in Japanese history – encompassing the changes that occurred with Tokugawa rule, and preceding the well-known influx of European works and models from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Moreover, like early modern Europe, the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in Japan were characterized by a growing awareness of language as an abstract concept. This awareness was accompanied by debates about the nature of language, reading practices, and translation that had not been observed in Japan before to such an extent and which were to become of great importance during the modern period.¹⁹

Though the field of view of the monograph is the Tokugawa period, for reasons of space there are inevitable softenings and sharpening of focus. The main focus is the mainstream and most prolific translation activities of Tokugawa society as it grew in literacy, wealth, and curiosity about native, Chinese, and Western knowledge. Although the translation activities of the Christian missionaries are discussed in Chapter 4, these do not receive as much attention as other fields of translation, since they were by no means mainstream, and the vast majority was destroyed in the persecution of the 1620s. They do offer an example of alternative ways of translating European languages into Japanese but were never part of either commercial print or widespread manuscript culture, and those that have survived did so in secret.

At the other end of the period, the focus of analysis begins to blur after the 1850s. As discussed in Chapter 5, the closing decades of Tokugawa rule saw a change in official, shogunate attitudes towards translation and the circulation of translated information following a series of increasingly alarming encounters with the representatives of Western powers. At this time there was correspondingly greater shogunate support for translation in order to better understand the Western nations whose representatives were sitting in warships alarmingly near to the coast of Japan. Shogunate support also resulted in more freedoms in what sort of materials were available for private scholars to translate. Traditionally, these factors are discussed as the defining characteristics of Meiji translation, but when it comes to government support for translation of Western language works the 1850s to 1860s have much in common with practices usually associated with Meiji translation that followed.

As the case of these late Tokugawa translations demonstrates, in places it is necessary to bring the analysis over into the periods before and

¹⁹ On the ‘discovery of language’ in early modern Europe, see Burke 2004, pp. 15–42.

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after the Tokugawa to consider the roots of the translation practices that flourished during the period and the direction they took afterwards. Translators who were active during the Tokugawa period were drawing upon the textual traditions of previous centuries, and it should also be noted that many Tokugawa translators continued to be active on the other side of the 1868 ‘watershed’ and into the Meiji period. Though for practical reasons it is necessary to draw rough boundary lines, the Tokugawa period is often treated as a hermetically sealed section of history stretching in isolation from Tokugawa Ieyasu’s victory over the western daimyo warlords in 1600 to his house’s fall from power in the Meiji Revolution of 1868.²⁰ This study will attempt to avoid such pitfalls.

What is translation?

However, one cannot wade off in to the depths of Tokugawa history in search of translation without some idea of what that might actually look like. And this is by no means simple. There are two fundamental difficulties: the first is the shifting boundaries of the term ‘translation’ when people write about it in English, and the second is that, even if a meaning for ‘translation’ in the language and intellectual tradition of this monograph can be pinned down, there are complications when trying to apply the term to past Japanese practices.²¹ Of course, the English word ‘translation’ was not used in Tokugawa Japan, and, less intuitively, there was no one Japanese word corresponding to ‘translation’ at the time. To complicate matters further, current expectations of what a translation should be can interfere with a discussion of what translators in the past were actually doing.

Turning for guidance to the writings of prominent thinkers and translators throughout the history of translation in the Western tradition, to which this monograph belongs, results in a dizzying array of contradictions, for people have disagreed from the very beginning. And these contradictions risk affecting the way Western scholars write about Japanese translation. Debates about translation of classical Greek into Latin occurred between proponents of rhetoric and proponents of grammar in the Roman world, and it is from these that much of

²⁰ On reasons for describing the events of 1868 as a ‘revolution’ rather than the more traditional term ‘restoration’, see Watanabe 2012, p. xiii.

²¹ See the essays contained in Venuti 2000 for examples of the competing meanings of ‘translation’. On the problems of applying Western translation theory to non-Western cultures, see Tymoczko 2006. On the Japanese case see Yanabu 2008a and 2008b (the latter is an English translation of a slightly modified version of Yanabu 2008a).

European writing on translation descends.²² The debates produced a bifurcated notion of translation, split between approaches that warped the target language so as to convey the syntactical feel of the source text – advocated by grammarians, who used it as a tool of linguistic learning – and approaches that were written in language more natural to the target audience conveying the sense of the source text, which were advocated by rhetoricians, who wished to mine Greek texts for ideas and expressions to enrich their own. This split continued in Bible translation, with battles fought over the ‘word for word’ versus ‘sense for sense’ approaches to the sacred text. Indeed, the fact that so much of Western translation theory resulted from the need to justify the very act of translating Scripture or the methods used to do so has indelibly marked both theory and practice with a high degree of anxiety. Even for texts that are not scriptural, reverence for the original work was strengthened in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by the Romantic notion of the author as wellspring of intellectual activity producing a work of sacrosanct genius.

The old dichotomy, which is also articulated in various other ways including ‘faithful’ versus ‘free’, and ‘literal’ versus ‘liberal’, is to be found in writings on translation beyond the fields of classics or scripture, and continued into the modern period.²³ Among practitioners of translation in more recent years the spectrum of opinion has ranged from Vladimir Nabokov, for whom the expression ‘literal translation’ was ‘tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody’; to Octavio Paz, who argued that literalism was not translation at all but instead ‘a mechanism, a string of words that helps us read the text in its original language ... a glossary rather than a translation’.²⁴

Needless to say, Japanese translation practices prior to the modern period do not descend from any bifurcated Greco-Roman model, nor was there any established vernacular tradition of scriptural translation before the nineteenth century when foreign missionaries made a concerted effort to translate the Bible. It is only recently that vernacular Japanese translations of Buddhist sutras have appeared on the market and it is the Chinese versions that are still used in ritual practice in Japan.²⁵ Thus it is wise to be cautious about applying European-derived

²² The first and most thorough treatment of this subject is Copeland 1991.

²³ The standard work on translation studies is Baker and Saldanha 2009.

²⁴ Nabokov 1992, p. 134; Paz 1992, p. 154.

²⁵ On the history of Buddhist translation in Japan, see Kitagawa 1963. In Japanese Buddhist liturgy sutras are chanted using an approximation of Chinese pronunciation, and such translations as exist are produced by means of affixing a complicated series of diacritical

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translation concerns to the kinds of materials discussed in this book. That is not to suggest that pre-modern Japanese translators were unconcerned with questions of accuracy or even with ‘faithfulness’ – as it turns out, in some cases they were – but the reasons for this lie in the Japanese experience of engaging with texts and in the cultural context of the Sinographic world. For the most part, dichotomies between ‘word for word’ and ‘sense for sense’ or ‘faithful’ versus ‘unfaithful’ were not used by Japanese translators themselves.²⁶

Also problematic in a study of past translation practices are current understandings of what constitutes a ‘translation’. As Table 1 demonstrates, in Japan there was simply no one handy term that corresponds to a sweeping category of ‘translation’ as we know it in English. Moreover, *hon’yaku* 翻訳, the term that is most commonly used to mean ‘translation’ in Japan today, was not the most commonly used during the period.²⁷ In pre-modern Japan *hon’yaku* was associated with the translation of sutras into Chinese,²⁸ and it is likely that the absence of similar, large-scale translation projects attempting to render sacred texts into equally authoritative Japanese versions in part accounts for the lack of popularity

markers to the source text that when read or transcribed produce a highly bound form of translationese that is itself difficult to understand. These methods are discussed in Chapter 3 of this monograph.

²⁶ A recent example serves to illustrate this point: a groundbreaking and valuable study that sought to avoid previous pitfalls by examining the translation of works of both fiction and non-fiction, J. Scott Miller’s *Adaptations of Western Literature in Meiji Japan*, was nonetheless troubled by a conceptual framework based on European precedents (2001). Miller divided the translation of non-fiction and fiction according to a ‘translative–adaptive’ dichotomy (*hon’yaku* 翻訳 versus *hon’an* 翻案) based on the kind of split seen in European translation history. Although in creating the dichotomy Miller used Japanese words, the dichotomy itself was not taken from nineteenth-century Japanese sources. Thus, *hon’yaku* was posited as something equivalent to ‘literal translation’ as opposed to the liberal freedom of *hon’an*. Works of non-fiction, Miller argued, were translated literally, while fiction was freely adapted. In fact, as one reviewer pointed out, in the Meiji period very few translations of any subject could be called ‘literal’, and there was not such a clear divide between fiction and non-fiction when it came to translation at the time (Kornicki 2002, p. 132).

²⁷ For example, despite the hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of translations that were produced in Tokugawa Japan, only forty-five works in the most comprehensive bibliography of early modern Japanese texts (*Nihon kotenseki sōgō mokuroku*) have *hon’yaku* in the title, and most of these date from the mid-nineteenth century. This of course does not include any works which may have used the word *hon’yaku* in their prefaces or introductions; however, together with the plethora of other terms in use it offers a glimpse of the less-than-mainstream status of the term. By way of comparison, the term *yakubun* 訳文 as used in book titles scores 63 hits, *yakkai* 訳解 57, and *wage* 和解 an astonishing 498 (although some of these may include ‘translations’ more loosely defined).

²⁸ On the perceived links between the word *hon’yaku* and Chinese sutra translation, see Sugimoto 1991, pp. 363–90.