

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*. Brill's Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture 24 (Leiden: Brill, 2020, 494 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-43865-1).

Christopher Joby is an expert on the uses of the Dutch language, or a variety of 'Dutches' to be precise, outside the Low Countries in the early modern period. A versatile researcher and prolific author, he serves as visiting professor in the Department of Dutch and South African Studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in Poland and as visiting scholar at Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan. Among his more recent publications are *The Multilingualism of Constantijn Huygens, 1596-1687* (2014) and *The Dutch Language in Britain, 1550-1772* (2015).¹

The Dutch Language in Japan is Joby's most ambitious project so far. The question he seeks to answer is 'what happened when Dutch came into contact with other languages in Tokugawa Japan?' (4). His approach is primarily a linguistic one. The monograph analyses 'the extent to which the contact between Dutch and other languages in Japan, above all varieties of Japanese, led to interference in these languages on a lexical, syntactic and graphic level' (4). Joby considers historical context to be crucial for the study of language contact. For the many Japanese translations of imported books in Dutch had an enormous impact on the country's social and intellectual life. Joby's research materials consist of manuscript sources in several European languages, including, of course, the Dutch East India Company (voc) archives, as well as Japanese translations of Dutch books available in Waseda University Library in Tokyo. The monograph's 'Index of Japanese Primary Sources by Title' (465-474) reveals the bountiful harvest of centuries of *rangaku* ('Dutch studies'). Joby also draws on a rich body of secondary literature on Japanese-Dutch relations, which he and Nicoline van der Sijs showcase in the sixth 2021 issue of the magazine *Onze Taal*.² His mastery of the source materials and secondary literature is impressive indeed. Moreover, he presents a clear and systematic argument, laid out in a prologue, eight chapters and an epilogue.

Joby's social history approach is clear from the start. In Chapters 1 and 2 he discusses the people who already knew Dutch before they arrived in Japan, mostly persons who worked at the voc's trading post on Deshima (an island near Nagasaki) and those who learned Dutch in Japan. Joby explains how and why the latter learnt Dutch in early modern Japan. For example, the interpreter guild of Nagasaki was accustomed to Portuguese as LWC ('Language of Wider Communication') and made the switch to Dutch rather slowly. Members of hereditary interpreter families in Nagasaki began learning Dutch from family members, rather than from the Dutch on Deshima. Their

command of the language was frequently poor: according to Otsuki Gentaku, an eighteenth-century *rangaku* scholar, the interpreters' learning method consisted of little more than the rote learning of Dutch phrases, with no attention paid to the language's structural features.

Japanese scholars interested in Western science were keen students of *rangaku*. They encountered native speakers during the *hofreis*, the annual journey of voc officials to Edo (modern-day Tokyo). The voc delegation was required to present the shogun with gifts imported from Europe and to report on events outside of Japan, translated as *Oranda fusetsugaki* ('Dutch Book of Rumors'). Many of these survive in Waseda University Library. Proficiency in Dutch allowed Japanese scholars to access European publications on astronomy, cartography, physics, chemistry, botany, medicine, and military technology. The materials for learning Dutch initially consisted of handwritten and rather rudimentary wordlists, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a variety of printed dictionaries, lexicons, grammars, and guides to Dutch pronunciation became available in Japan.

Joby explores 'The Many Uses of Dutch in Japan' in Chapter 3. Obviously, Dutch was employed by voc officials, but less obviously, we encounter Dutch names and phrases on early modern Japanese artworks and maps. Dutch phrases in Latin script gave an exotic feel to the work of artists, making it more attractive to customers. Japanese mapmakers necessarily relied on Dutch cartographical knowledge for the world beyond East Asia. They did not just copy geographical features from imported maps, but also translated Dutch geographical terms into Japanese. The opening of Japan in 1854 created even more demand for books in Dutch. Nagasaki for instance saw a glut of reprints of Dutch-language books in Latin script, including books on English language acquisition.

In Chapter 4, Joby examines the competition which Dutch faced from other languages in pre-modern Japan. Language contact and competition depended on the circumstances. In the domain of commerce, Dutch initially competed with Portuguese and later with English, which became the dominant LWC in Japan from about 1870 onwards. In the domain of learning, literary Sinitic offered the most competition. Yet it is hardly a black-and-white picture. As Joby notes, Japanese scholars specialized in reading and translating Chinese texts were also the ones who put serious effort into developing *rangaku*.

1 Christopher Joby, *The Multilingualism of Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687)* (Amsterdam 2014). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089647030>; Christopher Joby, *The Dutch Language in Britain (1550-1702): A Social History of the Use of Dutch in Early Modern Britain*. Brill's Studies in Language,

Cognition and Culture 10 (Leiden 2015). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004285217>.

2 *Onze Taal* 90:6 (2021), with contributions by Paulien Cornelisse, Chris Joby, Nicoline van der Sijs, Elbrich Fennema, Jan Erik Grezel and Marc van Oostendorp.

Language contact inevitably led to interference in Dutch texts, the topic of Chapter 5. Joby showcases a wonderful variety of loanwords and code switching in Dutch texts produced in Japan, with borrowings from several languages. A lot of technical terms were transliterated into Dutch and morphologically integrated into the language. To give just one example, the suffixes *-en* and *-s* are used in Dutch to make nouns plural. Thus, voc merchant Nicolaes Couckebakker mentioned ‘2000 goude coebans’ – meaning 2000 golden *koban* (gold coins) – in a 1636 diary entry, while *opperhoofd* Isaac Titsingh referred to *nagamoetsen* in his 1780 *hofreisjournaal*, giving a Dutch plural form to *nagamochi*, a long oblong chest carried on poles (248).

Japanese translations of imported ‘Dutch’ texts take center stage in Chapter 6. Joby first discusses who the Japanese translators were, and then examines the wide range of materials they rendered into native language. He observes that not all the works translated into Japanese were originally written in Dutch. Given the high literacy rates in the Dutch Republic and its outsized role in the European book trade,³ it is hardly surprising that a steady stream of Dutch translations out of other European languages rolled off the Dutch printing presses. Most ‘Dutch’ texts imported into Japan had gone through one or more translations already. For this reason alone, renderings into Japanese could differ quite significantly from the original European source text. Joby examines the political consequences of this feverish translation activity at the end of the chapter.

In Chapter 7, Joby analyzes lexical, syntactic, and graphic interference by Dutch in Japanese. This is by far the most technical chapter in the book, better appreciated by linguists than by historians. Still, it contains plenty of food for thought. What do we make of the fact that, for example, the Japanese word for ‘gravity’ (*ju-ryoku*) is a translation of the Dutch compound *zwaarte-kracht* and that Japanese words for the chemical elements of the periodic table are invariably translations from Dutch? Historians of science may wish to ponder the multiple layers of translation inherent in Japan’s adoption, adaptation and reshaping of Western science and technology.

Chapter 8 focusses on the shift away from Dutch as LWC between the Japanese and Europeans. Dutch more or less ceased to be used in Japan by 1900. Yet it went out with a bit of a bang. At first, the opening of Japan in 1854 served to boost *rangaku*. When Sir Ernest Satow, a leading historian of Japan, recalled his days as an interpreter at the British Legation in Tokyo in the 1860s, he noted that affairs had to be conducted through Dutch speakers. In negotiating the initial set of treaties between Japan and Western powers, Dutch was the diplomatic language of choice. Treaty texts were, quite literally, translated in and out of Dutch. Joby emphasizes the role which

3 Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World: Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven 2019).

Dutch-Americans played in US-Japanese relations in this regard. Again, he examines Dutch book imports into Japan, the Nagasaki reprints of Dutch books, and the flurry of Japanese translations in the period 1840-1870. Once the Japanese realized that the Dutch were by no means the most powerful Western nation, however, it was only a matter of time before English replaced Dutch as LWC.

This book review cannot do full justice to the richness of Joby's interdisciplinary research. One of the few minor criticisms of the publication is its repetitiveness in some places, with the same examples being mentioned by the author multiple times, albeit in different contexts. Perhaps a more ruthless editor could have pared down the text? Even so, Joby's comprehensive approach – combined with an eye for the telling detail – makes *The Dutch Language in Japan* an extremely worthwhile read. There is much to savor and learn here for Dutch historians.

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