Rebekah Clements

A Cultural History of Translation in Early Modern Japan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xii + 275. Hb, \$99.99.

A common perception that translation only gained importance in Japan with the advent of the Meiji period (1868–1912) owes as much to a narrow understanding of what constituted translation as it does to the long held, though now thoroughly undermined, notion of early modern Japan (1603–1868) as a “closed country.” While it is true that the translation of Western texts, both fiction and nonfiction, increased dramatically in the late nineteenth century when Japan re-opened trade with the West, in this new monograph Rebekah Clements demonstrates that missionaries, scholars, commercial publishers, and doctors in Japan used a wide range of translation strategies from as early as the sixteenth century. This impeccably researched and lucidly written study draws deeply on sources from a variety of fields to create a comprehensive look at the cultural significance of translation in early modern Japan, and represents a welcome contribution to the fields of Japanese history and translation studies.

In the introduction, Clements reviews current scholarship on translation and lays out the goals of her study. She notes that most work on pre-modern translation in Japan has been done by linguists or literary specialists in specific fields such as Dutch studies or Chinese literature, and that the multiplicity of languages and fields in which translation took place during the period makes a comprehensive study challenging. Her solution is to avoid the linguistic approach and instead pursue a cultural history with a “macroscopic perspective” that looks at translation across languages and genres, and seeks to answer such basic questions as what was translated, by and for whom was it translated, what translation strategies were used, and what cultural developments drove the need for translation.

Clements also spends some time defining what she means by translation, briefly reviewing debates on the practice in the Western tradition only to reject them as not representative of the texts produced in early modern Japan. These texts include translations from foreign languages such as Latin and Dutch, vernacular renditions of classical Japanese texts, and *kundoku* versions of Chinese texts, in which Sinitic characters are glossed using a system that allows the reader to render the text into Japanese either mentally or by reading aloud (but not by writing it out in Japanese). Clements acknowledges that this definition of translation encompasses much more than the modern Western one that calls simply for accuracy, faithfulness, and authenticity in interlingual translation, but argues that it more accurately reflects the practices of early modern Japan, the variety of which can be perceived in the wide range of Japanese

words that could be understood as meaning translation. Her argument for this broader definition of translation is convincing, and the different strategies and texts it encompasses provide a refreshing and novel look at cultural production in the period.

In Chapter 1, Clements examines a number of cultural and historical developments of the early modern period in Japan that led to a new consciousness of language and translation, including urbanization, increased literacy, and the growth of the commercial printing industry. She notes that continued trade with China and the Netherlands through the port of Nagasaki, along with changing attitudes related to the transmission of knowledge, led to multilingualism and an awareness of linguistic variety not only across cultures but also across time. This understanding of other cultures brought with it a new sense of “Japan” and of a common, shared language, which became more visible in the explosion of texts produced by the commercial printing industry starting in the late seventeenth century. Additionally, the influence of Song Dynasty lexicographic studies of Confucian texts encouraged Tokugawa period Sinologists and eventually Nativists to explore translation as a tool for understanding ancient Chinese and Japanese texts. All of these developments led to the production of a wide variety of translations, which Clements analyzes in subsequent chapters.

In the second and third chapters, which make up the bulk of the book, Clements examines translations from Chinese and classical Japanese, looking at the forms those translations took, the people who translated them, and the cultural forces that influenced them. Greater access to education and growth in literacy created a new class of readers who sought to acquire cultural sophistication by reading and owning texts that hitherto had only been available to the elite. However, these readers still lacked the necessary skills to read classical Chinese or Japanese, so various translation strategies were used by the commercial printing industry to make them more accessible. The cultural importance of original classical Japanese and Chinese texts was such that the earliest versions often preserved the form of the source texts, surrounding them with glosses of difficult characters or *kundoku* readings of Chinese (see above), and adding commentary and explanations in vernacular Japanese. But later on, both classical Japanese texts and non-canonical Chinese texts were subject to a variety of translation strategies, resulting in adaptations, summaries, commentaries and, in some cases, direct vernacular translations. Commercial printers were not the only source of translations of classical Japanese and Chinese works; beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing to the Meiji period, scholars of Chinese and of classical Japanese began to use translation to vernacular Japanese as a tool for understanding the

ancient languages. The scholars' translations and their writings on the ways that translation could further scholarship represent some of the earliest views on translation theory in Japan.

The first translations from Western languages were produced by the Jesuits soon after their arrival in 1549. Altogether, at least sixty-five texts were translated by the Jesuits and their converts into classical or vernacular Japanese, including Portuguese and Latin religious texts. However, a subsequent ban on Christian texts after the missionaries' expulsion meant that most were never widely disseminated (the exception being the Jesuit translation of Aesop's *Fables*). In contrast, hundreds of translations of Dutch texts were disseminated during the early modern period, both in manuscript and in print. Clements notes that these were not just medical texts, as was previously thought, but also books on European history, geography, and foreign affairs. Dutch source texts did not carry the same cultural weight as classical Japanese or Chinese ones did, so translations of them ranged widely between "faithful" translation and broader "interpretations" of the source material. Translators included doctors and teachers as well as professionals, some of whom were sponsored by the Tokugawa government or domain lords.

Clements's book is a thorough and extensively annotated look at the kinds of early modern texts that were translated, who translated them, and the various and fascinating forms that those translations took. As she points out in the introduction, producing a comprehensive study of pre-modern Japanese translation requires dealing with multiple fields of study, and one of the strengths of this book is the depth of scholarship evident throughout and the ease with which she navigates discussions of such varied fields as translation theory, Confucian studies, and classical Japanese poetry. The book provides new insights into Dutch studies, vernacular translation, and the importance of Chinese texts and translations, as well a new perspective on early modern Japanese cultural production reflected in a wide range of translation practices, making it a welcome addition to scholarship on the period.

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