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BOOK REVIEW

W. F. Vande Walle (editor)
Kazuhiko Kasaya (co-editor)

Dodonaeus in Japan.
Translation and the Scientific Mind
in the Tokugawa Period.
(Louvain, Leuven University Press,
International Research Center
for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, 2001),
383 pp.

Rembertus Dodonaeus (Rembert Dodoens, 1516/7-1585) was a Flemish medical doctor who studied at the University of Louvain under the famous cosmographer and physician Gemma Frisius. After practicing medicine in his native town, he served as physician of the emperors Maximilian II and Rudolph II, and ended his career as professor of medicine at the University of Leiden. Throughout his life Dodonaeus was especially interested in botany and herbal collections. He published several books on these matters culminating in his masterpiece, the encyclopaedic *Cruijdeboeck* (first edition, Antwerp, 1554). The *Cruijdeboeck* – whose transmission and dissemination in Japan lies at the center of *Dodonaeus in Japan* – is divided in six parts. “The first part contains a number of plants that have no clear relationship with one another. The second part contains

descriptions of flowers and odoriferous herbs; the third is devoted to medicinal and harmful plants, the fourth to vegetables and fodder plants. The fifth part deals with herbs, roots and fruits that are used in cooking, while the sixth and last part present descriptions of trees and other ligneous plants” (p. 35). By mid seventeenth century the *Cruijdeboeck* was introduced into Japan by the Dutch traders in Nagasaki. Written in a Western language, the book remained forgotten for decades until being “rediscovered” around 1740 during the shogunate of Tokugawa Yoshimune, a “rediscovery” that triggered the attempt of translation, interpretation and incorporation of its contents in Japanese learned circles.

Dodonaeus in Japan is a collection of essays, the outcome of an international symposium held at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in 1998. The subtitle, *Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period*, clarifies that while the core of the book is devoted to the study of the transmission of the work of Dodonaeus, the objectives are broader. W. F. Vande Walle, one of the editors, explains: “The collection of essays presented here lies at the intersection of two lines of perspective: the study of translation of science and that of the science of trans-

lation. More specifically, it endeavours to trace how the Western herbal tradition, notably the herbal of Dodonaeus, was received into the intellectual discourse of Tokugawa Japan, and to demonstrate how it contributed to the articulation of modern episteme, the scientific mind" (p. 23). Editors and contributors are plain in asserting the importance of the introduction of the *Crujdeboeck* in Japan. As one of the authors puts it: "It can be said without exaggeration that Dodonaeus' book opened the way to *Rangaku*", that is, to the Dutch/Western "scientific inquiry of nature, an approach which was quite new to the Japanese scholars of the time" (p. 264). Thus, *Dodonaeus in Japan* is an ambitious collection of essays that by centering in the introduction of a Western scientific book in Japan, unfolds backwards with studies on the European herbal tradition, and forwards with studies on the transformations of Japanese natural science, while at the same time addressing many different topics.

The book consists of sixteen essays grouped in four major thematic divisions: I. Dodonaeus in the European context; II. Translation and the Articulation of the Modern Episteme in Japan; III. Japanese renditions of Dodonaeus; IV. The *Rangaku* Context. Evidently, while sections I and IV provide much important information, the core of *Dodonaeus in Japan* lies in sections II and III, devoted to the complex issues of translation – considered both from a linguistic and a broader cultural perspective – trans-

mission, interpretation, and dissemination of a scientific book from one culture to another. This set of questions is especially relevant for Japanese culture. In this case, the mere existence of the term *honyaku bunka* [culture of translation], "suggests that there is a whole set of values, rules, patterns and attitudes involved in it" (p. 124). Indeed what exactly is "translation" and in what way eighteenth century Japanese scholars understood this task are topics that permeate all of the essays.

Although this reviewer's overall evaluation of this book is highly positive, it is impossible to escape the obvious remark that a work such as this is destined to suffer from the fluctuations in the quality of each of the essays. Furthermore, I suspect that authors were also faced with rather severe limitations of space. For example, one cannot but admire the courage of one of the contributors in treating the (immense) topic of "Dodonaeus and the Herbal Tradition" – which starts with Teophrastus and extends to the sixteenth century – in only 11 pages. In these conditions, omissions and fragile arguments are bound to appear, but it would be unfair to attribute them to the author's lack of command of the subject. (To mention one of the omissions, one cannot but regret that no author notices that in the Western/Japanese relations, in what concerns matters of medicine, introduction of pharmaceuticals and herbals, a seed had been planted – to use the most adequate metaphor – with the sixteenth century contacts with the Portuguese,

in particular Luís de Almeida and Cristóvão Ferreira). But there is no point in insisting on these limitations since they are all constraints well known to those who contribute to Conference Proceedings.

My main critique of this work is not this. What I feel is that it is exceedingly difficult in a collection of essays by many different authors, to achieve the ambitious goal that the editors announced. The multiplicity of themes, approaches, and personal points of view – which is perhaps one of the most appealing aspects of this book – is also what inhibits the argumentative and elaborate approach that is required if one aims to demonstrate how the reception of Dodonaeus in Tokugawa Japan “contributed to the articulation of modern episteme, the scientific mind”. Comparisons with other books of a different nature (that is, not collections of essays) cannot be easily made, but one should point that it is not difficult to find recent publications where the question of translating science in different cultures was studied with more success than in this book.

Having pointed these limitations of *Dodonaeus in Japan* I want to state my praise for this rich collection of essays. The best way to explain what is most appealing in this book is to list those who can benefit from reading it. Historians of natural science, of botanical collections and of the herbal traditions will certainly profit from its study; students of the history of the scientific book and all the questions related to the production and transmission of scien-

tific books will also find relevant materials in here; those interested in the linguistic and conceptual questions of translation have plenty to draw from these essays. Needless to say, all those interested in the cultural history of Tokugawa Japan, or in the intellectual relations between Japanese and Dutch at the period will find the reading of *Dodonaeus in Japan* a rewarding experience.

That one single book can interest persons with such varied backgrounds and expertise is, in my opinion, a confirmation of the vitality and interest of these essays.

By approaching the question of scientific translation from one culture to another using the strategy of inspecting this problem from many different points of view, the authors successfully convey the great complexity of this subject. They also depart from the more common format used in the studies on the reception of Western science in early modern Japan, a format which is usually more “internal” and narrow. One can argue that many of the questions raised in this book are not properly answered, but to do justice to it one must also agree that this book presents an uncommonly rich and varied collection of insights, points of view, and suggestions for further research. *Dodonaeus in Japan* may be just a starting point for those interested in studying the complex questions around “Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period”, but it is surely a most charming and attractive introduction to the subject.

One final word about the physical presentation of this work. In an age when the standards of book production seem to be declining, it is joy to find a book such as this: beautifully printed in high quality paper, adorned with excellent images, bound with care. One cannot but wish that all Conference Proceedings were produced with comparable craftsmanship.

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Ernst van Veen

Decay or Defeat?

An Inquiry into the Portuguese Decline in Asia, 1580-1645

(Leiden, The Netherlands: Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, Center for Non-Western Studies, 2000).

Ernst van Veen's recent study of Portuguese imperial structures in Asia presents an overview of the processes that have been called "decline" by the traditional historiography of the field. Attempting to see beyond the nationalistic preoccupations of certain, albeit now dated, scholars, van Veen provides a reassessment of the state of affairs in the *Estado da Índia* during the Philippine period, highlighting above all its economic dimensions and basic institutional structures. By focusing on a time that witnessed both the rise of Dutch power in Asia and the Castilian political control of Portugal, he encourages

his readers to confront one of the least well-known periods in the history of the Lusophone world in the light of a selection of the available data. Van Veen's primary point in surveying this topic is to assert that the process of Portuguese imperial decline was neither a linear one, nor one destined by fate to end in Dutch dominance of Maritime Asia. Relying on a wide array of published sources on the *Estado da Índia* and some of the recent scholarship on this topic, he presents a view of the Portuguese empire that stresses its absolute decline in certain areas (revenues from a diminishing *Carreira da Índia*), and relative decline in others (participation in the pan-Asian "country trade"). Using archival evidence concerning the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), he also sketches the initial years of the Dutch enterprise, asserting that its original goals did not include the destruction of the *Estado da Índia*. This goal, he contends, only gradually became the Dutch ambition as the company's profit margins fell in the once-lucrative trade in luxury goods between Asia and Europe. Rather than ceding its commercial supremacy immediately to the Dutch at the beginning of the Philippine period as earlier scholars have claimed, the Portuguese state maintained its trading power in Asia until the VOC was forced to adopt more violent means to eliminate competition in the 1630s. By looking into the official structures of the *Estado da Índia*, van Veen concludes that its waning fortunes were not the product of luke-

W. F. vande Walle, "Linguistics and Translation in Pre-modern Japan and China: A Comparison"™ in *Dodonaeus in Japan: Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period*, ed. W. F. Vande Walle, Leuven, 2001, pp. 123-48 (142). 55. C. Whelan, "Written and Unwritten Texts of the Kakure Kirishitan"™, in *Japan and Christianity: Impacts and Responses*, ed. J. Breen and M. Williams, London, 1996, pp. 122-37 (123). 56. Conroy Hilary and two others (ed.): *Japan in transition: thought and action in the Meiji era, 1868-1912*. 318 pp. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, [1985]. £26. 50. Daikichirokawa: *The culture of the Meiji Period*. Translation edited by Marius B. Jansen [and others]. (Princeton Library of Asian Translations.) xvi, 320 pp. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, [1985]. £36. [Show full abstract] 30. Yandex.Translate is a mobile and web service that translates words, phrases, whole texts, and entire websites from Japanese into English. The meanings of individual words come complete with examples of usage, transcription, and the possibility to hear pronunciation. In site translation mode, Yandex.Translate will translate the entire text content of the site at the URL you provide. Knows not just Japanese and English, but 97 other languages as well. Results for Dodonaeus in Japan: *Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period*. (Based on papers presented at an international symposium jointly organized by the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, and the Section of Japanese Studies of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, October 1998, Leuven.) 383 pp., illus., tables, index. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2001. £81.15 (cloth). W. F. Vande Walle, Kazuhiko Kasaya. *Dodonaeus in Japan: Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period*. 383 pp., illus., tables, index. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2001. £81.15 [Book Review]. Shigeru Nakayama. *Isis* 94 (1):149-150 (2003). Abstract. This article has no associated abstract. (fix it). Juan Carlos Flores, *Henry of Ghent: Metaphysics and the Trinity*. With a Critical Edition of Question Six of Article Fifty-Five of the *Summa Quaestionum Ordinariaum*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006. Pp. Viii, 239. \$50.50. Distributed by Cornell University Press. Henricus de Gandavo, *Quodlibet XV.*, Ed., Girard Etzkorn and G. A. Wilson. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007. Pp.