

The Republic of Letters Comes to Nagasaki: Record of a Translator's Struggle

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The narrative frame of this paper is supplied by the story of what was probably the first recorded translation of the peculiar and difficult metaphor of the “republic of letters” into an East Asian language.* This microscopic case study in the intellectual history of a conceptual translation is then plotted onto the larger background of the history of knowledge transmission and formation that had, by the eighteenth century, assumed a global character. It thus provides an occasion for a detailed enquiry into the complex conditions of the possibility—material and logistical as well as social, cultural, and intellectual—of such transcultural mediation.

At the same time, the story of the translation of the expression “republic of letters” itself is presented as an example of the ongoing processes of communication that, already by the eighteenth century, had arguably brought into existence something like a republic of letters on a Eurasia-wide, if not global scale. In other words, the story, along with the other episodes mentioned, reflects a situation where some conversations were already drawing simultaneously on sources derived from a variety of spatially, linguistically, and conceptually disparate milieus.

In pursuing this enquiry, therefore, the paper also offers an implicit commentary on what some have called “global intellectual history”¹ in that it

* While working on this paper, I greatly benefitted from comments and suggestions provided by Pablo Blitstein, Fabian Drixler, Martin Dusinberre, Enno Giele, Carol Gluck and my wife, Ana Maria Goy. Monica Juneja and Joachim Kurtz have been the best of editors and have dedicated an extraordinary amount of time and effort to helping improve the manuscript. The responsibility for all the remaining shortcomings is entirely mine. Special thanks belong to Kuga Takashi, of the Matsura Historical Museum in Hirado, who amid a busy schedule made time for an unannounced visitor and went out of his way to make available to me the material without which this essay would have never been even conceived. The archival research was possible thanks to the generous support by the Heidelberg University Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” under the DFG Excellence Initiative framework.

1 Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Stefanie Gänger and Sun Lin Lewis, “Forum: A World of Ideas; New Pathways in Global Intellectual History; c. 1880–1930,” *Modern Intellectual History* 10, no. 2 (2013): 347–351.

poses a situated objection to the reductionist notions of occidental “influence” and the “diffusion” of Western knowledge in non-Western worlds. Such notions appear skewed and unhelpful for the purpose of sketching the outlines of the picture emerging from a case study as the one presented below. Any plausible general account of how our world has historically become a place of globally shared conversations, imaginaries, and conceptual vocabularies should be able to accommodate well-documented cases like the Nagasaki encounter with the “republic of letters” traced here.

I.

Sometime around the mid-1790s, a man in Nagasaki was struggling with a translation. The Dutch expression that he had been commissioned to render into Japanese read “het Republyk der geleerden”¹ and although, given the breadth of his reading, the term “republic” cannot have been unknown to him, the usual meaning did not readily fit the context here. The *geleerden*, on the other hand, did not present any problem. He knew quite intimately who “the learned” were; he could readily count himself as one, a *gakusha* 学者, or *xuezhè*, in the standard Chinese reading of the characters, a “person of learning.”

Shizuki Tadao 志筑忠雄 (1760–1806)—for that is the name under which he is best known today—was, in fact, a man of considerable learning and understood the trickiness of translation well. He had already struggled with the Dutch cognates of terms like “force of gravity” or “adverb.”² Such rudimentary reference resources as they existed then—like the brand new *Haruma wage*, literally, “Japanese Rendering of Halma,” i.e., François Halma’s *Dictionary*—were of no use here.³ They at best accurately listed known or readily ascertainable equivalences between Dutch and Japanese

1 This should be understood as “The Republic of the Learned,” one of the vernacular cognates of the phrase *Res Publica Litterarum*. “Republic of Letters” is the wording followed in the present text as the established English equivalent. The vernacular usage fluctuated quite freely. In French, which came very close to serving as the *lingua franca* of the Europe-wide scholarly community in the eighteenth century, the only difference between the “republic of letters” (*république des lettres*) and, literally, the “republic of the lettered” (*république des lettrés*) was the typographically unstable accent over the final vowel.

2 See W. Boot and W. G. J. Rimmelink, eds., *The Patriarch of Dutch Learning Shizuki Tadao (1760–1806)* (Tokyo: Japan-Netherlands Institute, 2008); Scott L. Montgomery, *Science in Translation: Movements of Knowledge through Cultures and Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 229–232.

3 François Halma, *Woordenboek der nederduitsche en fransche taalen—Dictionnaire Flamand et François*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: De Wetsteins en Smith, 1729). The reprint of the 1796 Japanese version by Inamura Sanpaku 稲村三伯 is Matsumura Akira 松村明, ed., *Haruma wage* 波留麻和解, 9 vols. (Tokyo: Yumani shobō, 1997).

vocabulary items. But they offered little help with idiomatic collocations and none at all in the case of complex concepts for which not even tentative equivalents existed in the first place.

A younger contemporary by name of Shingū Ryōtei 新宮涼庭 (1787–1854), a dedicated student of what was then called “Dutch medicine,” composed later in his life a poem expressive of the difficulties similar to those our translator was facing. A poem, it bears emphasising, set in classical Chinese, in four phrases, each seven characters in length, emulating models from the High Tang dynasty some thousand years earlier.

蘭書ヲ譯ス	Translating a Dutch Text
論括乾坤理析釐	Grasping for the overall sense of the argument, scrutinising the pattern of the text;
苦心讀得下毫遲	With great pains, I finally make sense of what I have read and lay down the brush this late.
自哈五十餘年苦	I laugh at myself: over fifty years of toil
只有窓前夜雨知 ⁶	And only the night rain outside the window knows.

It is telling of the nature of the struggles with the translation of difficult Dutch phrases that the men who faced them were typically also men who could dash off a few stanzas of Tang-style classical poetry and recite from memory passages from canonical texts like the *Analects* or the *Mencius*. It was these accomplishments, after all, that primarily identified one as a man of letters within the broader Sinosphere.

A reader of Dutch texts in eighteenth-century Japan was with his labours mostly alone—apart from the night rain. In his time, Shizuki Tadao almost certainly was the most accomplished reader of Dutch among his compatriots, however that also meant he had hardly anyone else to turn to. In this case, too, he had to find his own solution. *Het Republyk der geleerden*—he saw from the form and contents of the four consecutive volumes dating from the years 1710 to 1712 that he had in front of him⁵—was a publication of the

4 Nakamura Shin'ichirō 中村真一郎, *Rai San'yō to sono jidai* 頼山陽とその時代 [Rai San'yō and his epoch] (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1971), 208.

5 These were the four bound volumes that each collected a half-year's worth of the first two years of the bi-monthly journal *Republyk der Geleerden, of kort begryp van Europa's lettermieuws tot hervorminge der wetenschappen, voor den konst en letterminnaars dezer dagen opgemaakt en verbeteret* (Amsterdam: R. en G. Wetstein, 1710–12). The first four issues (collected in volume 1 and 2) give the name of Johan Ruyter as the editor. Only the first two issues (vol. 1) use the title “Het Republyk der Geleerden,” while the subsequent ones drop the initial definitive article.

learned from what his contemporaries called *Oranda*, Holland, shorthand for the United Provinces of the Dutch Netherlands. From the vantage point of today, we can tell it was a representative of that mushrooming new medium, the journal for book reviews and original scholarship, a follower, for example, of the famous *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, edited from the 1680s by Pierre Bayle in Rotterdam. The *Histoire critique de la République des Lettres, tant Ancienne que Moderne* appeared regularly in nearby Utrecht at the same time that the Wetstein brothers, printers and booksellers in Amsterdam, brought out the first issues of *Het Republyk der geleerden*. The same Wetstein brothers, incidentally, would in 1729 publish the abovementioned French and Dutch dictionary by François Halma, whose name by the end of the century became a synonym for “dictionary” in Japanese.

The genre was not limited to the United Provinces, of course. Among its flagships were the Parisian *Journal des Sçavans*—which in its inaugural issue in 1665 had advertised its scope to be “the coverage of what news transpires in the Republic of Letters”⁶—the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* in London (published from 1665), or the *Acta Eruditorum* in Leipzig (from 1682). These journals were the organs of a dense communicative network that encompassed a whole virtual parallel continent—as Anthony Grafton has described it—a community of conversations, authors, publishers, critics, reviewers, books, journals and innumerable letters, cafés and salons, universities, libraries, collectors and collections, learned societies, and royally sanctioned academies of arts and sciences.⁷ A community, of sorts, we should recall, that thrived despite, or at least talked across, bitter confessional divisions and frontlines in the wars of succession that rent the real continent apart.

A book written in Naples by a catholic subject of the Spanish king and published in Italian in 1710 could, within a few years, be extensively reviewed by a former Genevan Calvinist working in Amsterdam and the review, in French, carried by one of the new journals would bring it to the attention of

6 “L’Imprimeur au lecteur,” *Le Journal des sçavans* (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres) (January 1665).

7 Anthony Grafton, “A Sketch Map of a Lost Continent: The Republic of Letters,” *Republics of Letters: A Journal for the Study of Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–18; also in Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9–34.

other readers in Edinburgh or Strasbourg or St Petersburg.⁸ Edifying reports dispatched by the members of the Jesuit order to update their superordinates on the state of their overseas missions were translated, printed, and attentively perused in England during the very period that saw the ousting of a king who was seen as dangerously sympathetic to the papist, catholic cause.⁹ A treatise composed in Latin by a Westphalian physician, a former employee of the Swedish crown and of the Dutch East India Company, could be acquired by an English collector, translated into English by a Swiss medic based in London, and republished in several French and Dutch editions, the latter pre-advertised in a Holstein newspaper, all within less than two decades.¹⁰ The European Republic of Letters had self-consciously called itself so for some time and, acting on that metaphor, had conjured into existence a real continent-wide community of shared conversations, practices, and standards, many of which centred on periodical publications, Latin or vernacular, like *Het Republyk der geleerden*. But the Nagasaki translator possessed none of that background knowledge to help him.

II.

Let us pause for a moment before we follow the translator's struggles. How would someone in 1790s Nagasaki come to grapple with the notion of a "republic of letters" in the first place? There are several different levels at which such a question can be raised and different angles from which an answer

8 This is Paolo Mattia Doria's *La Vita civile*, 2nd ed. (Augusta: Daniel Höpper, 1710) and Jean Leclerc's review of it. Jean Leclerc, review of *La Vita civile*, by Paolo Mattia Doria, *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne* 5, no. 1 (Amsterdam: David Mortier, 1716): 54–125.

9 See William Temple, "Of Ancient and Modern Learning," in *Miscellanea: The Second Part*; 5th ed. (London: Simpson and Simpson, 1705), 21–22; or "Of Heroick Virtue," *ibid.*, 185–186. There are also numerous reviews of Jesuit writings in the early years of *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*.

10 Johannes Caspar Scheuchzer's translation of excerpts from Engelbert Kaempfer's *Amœnitatum exoticarum politico-physico-medicarum fasciculi V* was published as an appendix to *The History of Japan* commissioned by Hans Sloane; the forthcoming Dutch (i.e., Nederduytsch) publication was mentioned in *Staats- und gelehrte Zeitung des Hollsteinischen unpartheyischen Correspondenten* 42 (March 13, 1728). See Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amœnitatum exoticarum politico-physico-medicarum fasciculi V, quibus continentur variae relationes, observationes & descriptiones rerum Persicarum & ulterioris Asiae, multâ attentione, in peregrinationibus per universum Orientum, collecta, ab auctore Engelberto Kaempfero* (Lemgo: H. W. Meyer, 1712); Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan, giving an Account of the ancient and present State and Government of that Empire; of Its Temples, Palaces, Castles and other Buildings; of its Metals, Minerals, Trees, Plants, Animals, Birds and Fishes; of The Chronology and Succession of the Emperors, Ecclesiastical and Secular; of The Original Descent, Religions, Customs, and Manufactures of the Natives, and of their Trade and Commerce with the Dutch and Chinese. Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, trans. and ed. by J. G. Scheuchzer, 2 vols. (London: Printed for the translator, 1727).s

may be attempted, each capturing a facet of the story. At the most global level, the conspicuous presence of products of Dutch printing presses in Nagasaki was no accident, but an outcome of very real constellations of the geopolitical balance of power and commercial interest. This is the familiar history of the European overseas expansion, the rush for spices, gold, silver, silk, and porcelain that turned into an all out scramble for colonial empire; of how, between the seventeenth and nineteenth century, in a major turn of fortunes, the “Far West” came to rule, or at least dictate its terms to, the rest and how other societies supposedly either succumbed to the domination or managed to scrape through by acceding to the new standards and adopting the ways of the Occidentals as best they could, from ballistics to constitutionalism. But although this is how the story is still often told, or tacitly assumed, it has many discontents. For one, it seems to rest on a strange dichotomy that postulates that, when a European undertakes a translation from Chinese or Sanskrit, he is engaged in the scientific cognition of a different culture, whereas when a Japanese, Manchu, or Turkish author translates a text from a European language, he is becoming a conduit of Western influence. Perhaps this is neither the right nor the most helpful way to answer our question. And perhaps answering our question requires us to reconsider the conventional terms of the story of the inexorable diffusion of Western knowledge on the wings of the West’s global hegemony.

But adjusting the zoom to be more precise, this is still the history of how, from the sixteenth century on, small bands of Europeans started arriving in East and Southeast Asian ports to wedge themselves into the bustling and lucrative regional trade there; how the novel joint stock trading monopolies of the north, the Dutch and English East Indies Companies, gradually displaced the Portuguese and Spanish competitors in the region; and how, by the end of the seventeenth century, the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) operated an extensive network of intra-Asian trade with its centre in Batavia on Java and trading outposts in places as far out as Nagasaki. After the catholic Spaniards and Portuguese were banished from the Japanese archipelago by the now stabilised Tokugawa regime, as the assumed threat of Christian subversion outweighed the prospect of gain from commerce, and the English withdrew after having failed to find a viable business model for trade there, the Dutch company’s tiny trading station in the Nagasaki harbour, on the fan-shaped manmade island of Dejima, remained the only official European foothold on Japanese soil. It was definitely on board a Dutch East Indiaman that the copies of *Het Republyk der geleerden* reached Nagasaki. They would have been offloaded in a crate or chest onto a small local boat and one of the hired indigenous labourers making his wages from the annual ebb and flow of global commerce in Nagasaki harbour would

have carried them on his shoulder through the west gate in the Dejima palisade, the sea entrance through which every Western book that was legally imported between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries would have inevitably passed.¹¹

However, a different way to attempt an answer to the question is to shift the sight from the supposed global spread of Western ways, both geopolitical and intellectual, to the local conditions of communication. For struggling with the translation of a strange concept is surely better understood in terms of a communicative situation rather than as an instance of coming under influence. This is therefore also the history of the establishment of an intellectual milieu and the discipline of the reading of Dutch texts as a means of posing one's own questions to sources of knowledge not accessible through other channels. It was the relatively contingent circumstance of the Dutch East India Company's presence in Nagasaki that, from the seventeenth century onwards, called into existence and officially sanctioned the skill in a Western vernacular among some subjects of the united states of the Tokugawa.

The tight control the Tokugawa authorities decided to keep over all commerce with the Western barbarians meant that the communication was not left to spontaneous improvisation by the parties involved, like in many other port cities of early modern Eurasia, where such a situation typically gave rise to simplified purpose-driven language registers known as pidgin (the word itself an alteration of "business") and creole. In Nagasaki, unlike in Canton or Batavia, the acts and means of communication themselves were placed under a regime of meticulous regulation. All the trade was channelled through a government-run clearing house, the VOC employees in residence were kept as much as possible from learning any Japanese or mingling with local commoners, and the dealings between them and the authorities were mediated by the members of a hierarchically organised college of official interpreters, *tsūji* 通事, who were placed directly under the jurisdiction of the chief magistrate, Nagasaki *bugyō*.¹² Like most professions in Tokugawa, Japan, that of the interpreters, too, pertained to corporate families, i.e. 家, rather than individuals, although allowance must be made for the fairly loose sense of "family" where heredity

11 See W. J. Boot, "Transfer of Learning: Import of Chinese and Dutch Books in Tokugawa Japan," *Itinerario* 37, no. 3 (2013): 188–206.

12 The standard study of the Nagasaki interpreters is Katagiri Kazuo 片桐一男, *Oranda tsūji no kenkyū* 阿蘭陀通事の研究 [The study of Dutch interpreters] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985). For a comparison with other major port cities, see Leonard Blussé, *Visible Cities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008) and "Canton and Nagasaki Compared," special issue, *Itinerario* 37, no. 3 (2013), especially Yao Keisuke, "Fundamentally Different Roles of Interpreters in the Ports of Canton and Nagasaki," 105–115; Matsui Yoko, "The Factory and the People of Nagasaki: *Otona, Tolk, Compradoor*," 139–152.

frequently meant the adoption of a suitable successor to the headship of the house as a professional corporation, not just in the absence of, but sometimes even in preference to one's own offspring.¹³

The unintended consequence of all of these measures was, however, that a group of professionals qualified in a European vernacular became, in time, an addition to the intellectual landscape of Tokugawa Japan. Every now and again, one of the corporate families that habitually supplied official interpreters, like the Shizukis, produced a man with scholarly instincts and intellectual curiosity going beyond the business at hand.¹⁴ And with time, even outside of the circle of the Nagasaki interpreters, a mixture of curiosity and utility brought others into the orbit of what was by then self-consciously called “Dutch learning.”¹⁵ This term is usually taken to broadly mean applied Western sciences, from surgery and botany to cartography and metallurgy. The availability of that channel, however, always depended on basic qualifications of a philological nature. Dutch texts—like Chinese, but unlike, say, Latin, Persian, Manchu, or French texts—could be read, comprehended, debated, and put to use for domestic purposes and tested against local agendas. It was Dutch books, which often meant Dutch translations from other European vernaculars or Latin, that provided Japan's own community of the learned with snippets of not only Newton and Kepler, but also Grotius, Justinian, and Virgil.

13 On the other hand, hereditary lineages of professional interpreters may not be such a historical peculiarity. Noel Malcolm reports that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Istanbul the professional interpreters, “dragomans,” working for the Venetian or Spanish diplomats at the Ottoman court were often recruited from the same families, the job becoming effectively if not institutionally hereditary. Noel Malcolm, “Cristoforo Bruti and the Dragoman Dynasty,” in *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2015), 362–378. In China, translator posts under the Ming and Qing governmental Office of the Four Barbarians also became practically hereditary; see Pamela K. Crossley, “Structure and Symbol in the Ming-Ch'ing Translators' Bureaus (*ssu-i kuan*),” *Central and Inner Asian Studies* 5 (1991): 38–70.

14 See Isabel Tanaka-Van Daalen, “The Shizuki Family of Nagasaki Interpreters in Dutch Sources,” in Boot and Remmelink, *The Patriarch of Dutch Learning*, 148–172; Harada Hiroji, “The Shizuki as a Family of Interpreters,” *ibid.*, 173–189.

15 The term *rangaku* 蘭学 was established as a brand name to carve out a distinct niche in the crowded and competitive intellectual marketplace of the later Edo period and was diligently flagged in titles of works like Ōtsuki Gentaku's 大槻玄沢 (1757–1827) *Rangaku kaitai* 蘭学階梯 (The ladder of Dutch learning) of 1783 or Sugita Genpaku's 杉田玄白 (1733–1817) *Rangaku kotohajime* 蘭学事始 (The origin of Dutch learning) of 1814–15. This latter work in particular went on to exercise a considerable influence by retrospectively canonising the pedigree of the “Dutch studies” (and the Sugita family's central place in this pedigree) as well as establishing the discipline's privileged position as a precursor of Japan's national modernity. As such, the label “Dutch learning” tells us more about how practitioners sought to sell their expertise than how they went about their scholarship. For a standard overview, which tends to accept the sharp contrast between “Chinese” and “Dutch” studies as if it were a fact and not a marketing move, see Grant K. Goodman, *Japan and the Dutch: 1600–1853* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).

III.

This is all very well, but while we have the translator, Shizuki Tadao, we still do not have him sitting over our text. That requires telling yet another story of how a scion of a Kyūshū warlord house became a peacetime collector of curiosities ranging from tribal Ainu spearheads and old roof tiles, to illustrated Dutch books. Enter Matsura Kiyoshi 松浦清 (1760–1841), the heir of the Hirado domain and one of the scores of *daimyō*, or what European observers called “petty kings.” His small principality on the western coast of Kyūshū had once, back in the early seventeenth century, been a genuine global *entrepôt*, a bustling main port of call for overseas merchant (and pirate) ships, including the monopoly trading companies of the Dutch and, for some time, even the English.¹⁶ As the rough age of intermittent internal warfare of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had given way to the great peace under the Tokugawa hegemony, the immediate relevance of battlefield virtues receded a bit and opened up room for more polite pursuits. Indeed, Matsura Kiyoshi is better known by his Chinese-style studio name (*gō* 号) Seizan 静山, and it was under this penname that he kept one of the longest extant diary-like collections of occasional jottings and reminiscences, the *Kasshi yawa* 甲子夜話, or Tales Commenced on the Night of the Wooden Rat.¹⁷

Born in 1760, in other words well over a century since Japan had seen any serious military conflict, Seizan—like most other members of the warrior class—kept all the appearances of taking his duties as an armed vassal with utmost seriousness despite the enduring conditions of commercialised and leisured peacetime. He continued to stamp his book acquisitions—like a Dutch translation of the complete works of Ovidius—with a big red *ex libris* seal, *seihan no chin* 西藩之鎮 (C: *xifan zhi zhen*), “the military outpost for quelling the tribes off the western border.”¹⁸ His role in performing the great peace¹⁹ as a notional vassal to the Tokugawa house did indeed involve security inspection tours of the contact zone with the western tribes in Nagasaki. But whenever there, curious about novelties and hunting for acquisitions, he spent his time associating with the official interpreters, scholars, and occasionally even with some of the Dutch Company representatives. Symptomatic of the

16 Adam Clulow, “From Global Entrepôt to Early Modern Domain: Hirado, 1609–1641,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 65, no. 1 (2010): 1–35.

17 Nakamura Yukihiko 中村幸彦 and Nakano Mitsutoshi 中野三敏, eds., *Kasshi yawa* 甲子夜話 [Tales commenced on the night of the wooden rat], 20 vols (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977–83).

18 Matsuda Kiyoshi 松田清, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū* 洋学の書誌的研究 [The bibliographical research on Western learning] (Kyoto: Rinsen shoten, 1998), 541.

19 Luke S. Roberts, *Performing the Great Peace: Political Space and Open Secrets in Tokugawa Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012).

new age of peace and commerce, some of the money for the purchase of the expensive imported books came from the windfall dividends on the profitable whaling operation run from Hirado by the Masutomi-gumi corporation.²⁰ By the early 1800s, Seizan was the owner of one of the largest collections of “Dutch” (i.e., Western) texts in Japan, likely rivalled only by the Momijiyama library at the shogun’s castle in Edo.²¹

So this is, too, a significant part of the story of how *Het Republyk der geleerden* found its way to the desk of our translator: by entering the possession of a warlord collector, most likely as a result of a purchase with whaler money and through the good offices of some of the Nagasaki interpreters, of printed materials privately brought there by one of the VOC staff who aspired to stay in touch with the Republic of Letters back on the distant shores of the Far West.

This is also what dates our translator’s own encounter with the “republic of letters,” most likely the first recorded attempt to translate the notion into an East Asian language. For while the catalogue of the “barbarian writings” section of Seizan’s extensive library is prefaced in the twelfth year of Kansei (1800), it also records the ninth lunar month of the first year of Kansei (1789) as the moment of the acquisition of the journal issues in Nagasaki. It is an entry in this same catalogue that is our sole record of the struggles with this early translation of the peculiar phrase.²² Seizan would have approached the Shizuki—either Tadao or his adoptive father Zenjirō—sometime between those dates, possibly sooner rather than later, considering an avid collector’s impatience to file away his new acquisitions. For inquisitive as he was, and greatly intrigued by Dutch books, Seizan himself never acquired the linguistic facility to read any of them. In this he was not unlike many librarians and collectors around the European Republic of Letters at the time, who also eagerly collected texts in Manchu, Chinese, or Japanese, even though the

20 Matsuda Kiyoshi 松田清, “Matsura Seizan—Ranpeki daimyō 松浦静山—蘭癖大名” [Matsura Seizan: the Dutch-crazed daimyo], in *Kyūshū no rangaku* 九州の蘭学 [Dutch studies in Kyūshū], ed. Wolfgang Michel, Kawashima Mahito, and Torii Yumiko (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 2009), 96.

21 See Fukui Tamotsu 福井保, *Edo bakufu no sankō toshokan: Momijiyama bunko* 江戸幕府の参考図書館: 紅葉山文庫 [The reference library of the Edo shogunate: The Momijiyama collection] (Tokyo: Kyōgakusha, 1980); Tokugawa kinen zaidan 徳川記念財団, eds., *Tokugawa shōgunke no gakumon: Momijiyama bunko to Shōheizaka gakumonjo* 徳川將軍家の学問: 紅葉山文庫と昌平坂学問所 [Scholarship of the Tokugawa house: The Momijiyama library and the Shōheizaka Academy] (Tokyo: Tokugawa kinen zaidan, 2006).

22 *Shinzō shomoku, Gaihen: Bansho* 新增書目 外篇 蛮書 [The new expanded catalogue (of the Rakusaidō library), outer part: Barbarian writings], Matsura shiryō hakubutsukan, Hirado, ms. VII-1 (i) 3. See figure 2 below.

ability to make any sense of them was even scarcer in Paris or London than the ability to read Dutch was in Nagasaki or Edo.²³ That must be why Seizan appreciated the visual element of copperplate illustrations, tables, and maps, whose captions are frequently accompanied by Japanese translations carefully written into the margins of his acquisitions.

But to make sense of even the titles of his Western books, let alone the captions, Seizan had to rely on the help of others. Most of the corporate families of the licensed official interpreters originally hailed from Hirado, from where they followed Westerners who were herded to Nagasaki in the seventeenth century. As the lord of Hirado, Seizan could still informally call on their services invoking the old ties of vassal loyalty that bound their corporate forefathers to his own ancestors. The Shizuki were one of these families and it is probably also by virtue of this connection that the more scholarly minded among them were able, in turn, to draw on Seizan's growing book collection.

Thus, to account for how a few issues of an Amsterdam-published newsletter of the Dutch branch of the Republic of Letters turned up in Nagasaki requires answering some basic questions about the generation, processing, and circulation of knowledge on a scale that was undeniably global. Yet, at a time when no text could travel faster than its human carrier, assisted at best by animal power on land and the power of wind and drift on the water, this question can only be answered at a level that is quite literally pedestrian. We are concerned not with influences and diffusions, but with people who wrote, read, sold, owned, lent, translated, and transported books, pamphlets, journals, and letters. And we also look for social environments or institutional and intellectual networks that enabled or encouraged or required them to do so, for the value attached to having texts, for the practices of dealing with them, sharing, copying, and storing them, both as a source of knowledge and as a marketable and collectible commodity.

We know that some remarkable books changed hands in Nagasaki from the second half of the eighteenth century and not only books on medicine and astronomy. In the eighth month of Kansei 12 (1800), for example, a not too well advertised sale took place at Dejima. It disposed of some of the effects of the VOC chief representative, one Gijsbert Hemmij, who had died suddenly on the way to the regular audience in Edo. The auctioned estate included a collection of books, 77 titles, comprising in total 195 physical volumes. The list gives one an idea of what a relatively prominent Dutch business

23 See Timothy Brook, *Mr. Selden's Map of China* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 56.

executive, a man aspiring to a certain status and decorum, though by no means a professional academician, might have had on his bookshelves. And in both the array of languages and the diversity of the places of provenience, it is a telling cross-section of the eighteenth-century European Republic of Letters.²⁴ It included, for instance, Hugo Grotius's introduction to Dutch jurisprudence, *Inleiding tot de Hollandsche Rechtsgeleerdeheit*, in a Den Haag edition of 1776; a 1664 Amsterdam edition of Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis*; a 1776 Dublin edition of Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*; a 1730 London edition of James Thomson's poem *The Seasons*; the first edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica* in three volumes (Edinburgh, 1771); Mary Wollstonecraft's *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (London, 1794); Jacques Necker's *An Essay on the True Principles of Executive Power in Great States* (London, 1792); abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (a Geneva edition in ten octavo volumes from 1780); 21 quarto volumes of Buffon's (at that point still unfinished) *Histoire naturelle* (Paris, 1749–1804); the Dutch translations of François Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque* (Amsterdam, 1720) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Amsterdam, 1720–22); an English version of *A Thousand and One Nights* from Galland's French translation-fabrication (Dublin, 1776); plus a Dutch version of the records of Bougainville's travels (Dordrecht, 1766–69) and a French version (Paris, 1795) of Cook's journeys of discovery.

This sale, however, went on unbeknownst to the interpreters and Dutch studies enthusiasts alike, and most of the buyers seem to have been other Dejima staff or the captain and officers of the American ship *Massachusetts*, commissioned under disguise as a VOC vessel to ferry in the new director from Batavia. Only a handful of the books can be traced beyond the sale. Raynal found its way to the holdings of the Date clan of the principality of Sendai, and the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* ended up in the shogunal library.²⁵ But there is no trace of either being referred to or put to any substantial use. The mere presence of information obviously does not constitute knowledge, and there was hardly anybody in the Kansei era (around the year 1800 by Western counting) that could make much sense of any Latin or French.

24 Matsuda Kiyoshi, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū*, 354–368. Matsuda established the identity and probable provenience of the items from the auction list. The list itself contains only abbreviated versions of the titles and number of volumes. Some of the editions may not be established with certainty; nevertheless, it is clear that many of the titles appeared in Nagasaki within a decade or two of their publication in Paris, Geneva, or London.

25 Ibid.

IV.

So when Shizuki Tadao came across a Latin verse in one of his translations, he was at a loss. This happened in a text by Engelbert Kaempfer, the treatise that was to establish the “closed country” trope as a defining characteristic of Tokugawa Japan.²⁶ Based on his observations of Japan a century before, in the early 1690s, when he stayed in Nagasaki as a doctor hired by the VOC, Kaempfer penned this treatise, in Latin, after his return to Europe and first published it at the author’s expense in his home town of Lemgo.²⁷ Only after his death was it appended to his previously unpublished manuscript, *Das Heutige Japan*, as edited and translated into English at Hans Sloane’s behest in London. The result, Kaempfer’s comprehensive *History of Japan*, became the default source of information on the Tokugawa polity in the European and Atlantic Republic of Letters. Montesquieu, Rousseau, Kant, and the prolific encyclopedist Louis de Jaucourt were not the only ones who drew solely on Kaempfer whenever they discussed the example of Japan.²⁸ Even much later, in 1853, when U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry led his fleet to Japan’s shores and Townsend Harris set up the first Western consulate on Japanese soil, both still relied on Kaempfer’s *History* for their basic grasp of the land and polity in their mission, to talk or bully its rulers into establishing diplomatic and trade relations, thus “opening” the “closed” country.²⁹ But long before that, in the 1770s, a copy of the Dutch version of the text found its way back to Nagasaki—presumably as a Japan guidebook in the luggage of one of the

26 Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan*. This was the first published edition ever, based on Kaempfer’s original German manuscript acquired by Sir Hans Sloane along with the rest of Kaempfer’s literary inheritance between 1723–25. The English edition was further augmented by a set of appendices translated from the author’s Latin (see the following note); subsequent Dutch and French retranslations were both made from this edition. Shizuki Tadao was working with a Dutch version: Engelbert Kaempfer, *De Beschryving van Japan, behelsende een verhaal van den ouden en tegenwoordigen Staat en Regeering van dat Ryk, [...] Uyt het oorspronkelyk Hoogduytisch Handschrift nooit de vooren gedrukt in het Engelsch overgezet, door J. G. Scheuchzer, Lidt van de Koninklyke Maatschappy, en van de Geneesheeren in London. Die daar by gevoegt heeft het Leven van den Schreyver. Vorzien met kunstige Kopere Platen Onder het opzicht van den Ridder Hans Sloane uytgegeven, En uyt het Engelsch in ’t Nederduytisch vertaalt* (Amsterdam: Arendt van Huysteen, 1733). For more see Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer’s Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, ed. and trans. Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

27 Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum exoticarum politico-physico-medicarum fasciculi V*. See J. W. Carrubba, ed. and trans., *Engelbert Kaempfer: Exotic Pleasures* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996).

28 Peter Kapitza, “Engelbert Kaempfer und die europäische Aufklärung: Zur Wirkungsgeschichte seines Japanwerks im 18. Jahrhundert,” in *Engelbert Kaempfers Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan: Beiträge und Kommentar*, ed. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens (Berlin: Springer, 1980), 41–63.

29 Beatrice Bodart-Bailey and Derek Massarella, eds., *The Furthest Goal: Engelbert Kaempfer’s Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1995), 1.

VOC officials—thereby closing the circle some eighty years after its author had departed through the same sea-facing west gate of Dejima. There it quickly entered another debate, that of Japan’s self-conscious articulation of its place in an insistently connecting world.³⁰ It was circuits like these that were transforming the local republics of letters into a world wide web.

Once in Nagasaki, the treatise did not fail to catch the attention of scholars and collectors alike. Indeed, the Dutch edition of Kaempfer’s history was apparently Matura Seizan’s first Western book acquisition ever.³¹ It was Seizan’s copy that was used for the translation, and it is duly listed in the same annotated library catalogue of his that contains the sole record of our translator’s struggles with the “republic of letters.”³² Shizuki Tadao is believed to have perused the copy early on, at least a decade before 1801, when he famously chose to translate this particular short appendix, coining the neologism *sakoku* 鎖国 that corresponded to the *regnum clausum*, or “closed kingdom,” of Kaempfer’s description.³³

The Latin verse in question appeared near the opening of the text and went: *Hic Segetes, illic veniunt felicius Uvae: India mittit ebur, molles sua thura Sabaei*.³⁴ It was Kaempfer’s wink towards Hugo Grotius and the Latinate erudition they both shared. The young lawyer Grotius had cited the same *locus classicus* from Virgil’s *Georgica* in his *Mare Liberum* in support of his client’s claim

30 See W. J. Boot, “Shizuki Tadao’s *Sakoku-ron*,” in Boot and Rummelink, *The Patriarch of Dutch Learning*, 88–106. From the Japanese literature on this topic, see a comprehensive reception history of the “closed country” notion in Ōshima Akihide 大島明秀, “*Sakoku*” to *iu gensetsu* 「鎖国」といふ言説 [The discourse of “closed country”] (Tokyo: Minerva shobō, 2009).

31 Engelbert Kaempfer, *De Beschryving van Japan, behelsende een verhaal van den ouden en tegenwoordigen Staat en Regeering van dat Ryk, [...] Uyt het oorspronkelyk Hoogduytisch Handschrift nooit de vooren gedrukt in het Engelsch overgezet, door J. G. Scheuchzer, Lid van de Koninklyke Maatschappy, en van de Geneesheeren in London. Die daar by gevoegt heeft het Leven van den Schreyver. Vorzien met kunstige Kopere Platen Onder het opzicht van den Ridder Hans Sloane uytegegeven, En uyt het Engelsch in ’t Nederduytisch vertaalt* (Amsterdam: Arendt van Huysteen, 1733).

32 Matsuda Kiyoshi, *Yōgaku no shoshiteki kenkyū*, 486–93; Boot, “Shizuki Tadao’s *Sakoku-ron*,” 90.

33 The relevant appendix is “VI. Onderzoek, of het vanbelang is voor ’t Ryk van Japan om het zelve geslooten te houden, gelyk het nu is, en aan desselfs Inwooners niet toe te laten Koophandel te dryven met uytheemsche Natien ’t zy binnen of buyten ’s Lands,” in *De Beschryving van Japan*, 476–494.

34 *Georgicorum*, I: 54–61. In a historical translation, the full quotation reads: “Here corn, there grapes come more prosperously; yonder the tree drops her seedlings, and unbidden grasses kindle into green. Seest thou not how Tmolus sends scent of saffron, India ivory, the soft Sabaeans their spice; but the naked Chalybes steel, and Pontus the castor drug, Epirus mares for Elean palms? From of old Nature laid such laws upon certain regions.” *Eclogues and Georgics of Virgil: Translated from the Latin by J. W. Mackail* (London: Longman and Green, 1905), 41.

that free commercial exchange was providentially ordained as evidenced by the sheer fact of unequal distribution of resources over the face of the earth: “Here corn, there grapes come more prosperously...”

Protesting the Portuguese exclusion of other European nations from the lucrative East Indies trade, Grotius, on behalf of his employer VOC, invoked the creator’s universal natural order—which, at the hands of a jurist and in a debate that took a legal twist, came to be phrased as “natural law”—to defend the Company’s right to freely sail to places like the Molucca Islands, Canton, or Nagasaki, and contribute to the peaceful exchange of necessities among differently endowed regions. Kaempfer, also a VOC employee though no lawyer, gave a summary of the Grotian position before moving to demolish it with the counterexample of a flourishing empire of Japan, happily closed from nearly all intercourse with foreigners.³⁵ But both Kaempfer’s presence in Nagasaki in the 1690s and Shizuki Tadao’s struggles with the Virgil quotes and the *Republics of Letters* a century later were proof that some parts of the Japanese archipelago were always more involved in the global traffic of texts and ideas than any “closed country” trope that became so established in subsequent historiography would warrant. The entrance of Kaempfer’s apology of a happily closed country—supported by the example of Japan—onto the stage of the eighteenth century European debate, as well as the articulation of a “closed country” policy in Japan that took its key concept from a neologism adapted via Latin, English, and Dutch, were symptomatic of the production, transmission, and translation of texts passed along the synapses of commerce that spanned the whole of Eurasia.

Linguistically at his wits’ end, Shizuki Tadao must have first somehow managed to identify the language of the mysterious quote in his Kaempfer text as Latin, probably by visually comparing it with other samples (the quote was typographically distinguished by italics) and by drawing on his previous rich experience with the conventions of similar Western texts. Then, he would rummage through the collection of Western books available to him—the same Hirado library whose catalogues he had helped to annotate—and manage to locate a Latin-Dutch handbook that gave vernacular translations of famous passages from the ancient classics, Benjamin Jacques and Samuel Hannot’s *Dictionarium Latino-Belgicum*.³⁶ He probably tried looking up individual words from the Latin quote one by one. *Hic* did not help, but he was lucky,

35 See David Mervart, “Closed Country in the Open Seas—Engelbert Kaempfer’s Japanese Solution for European Modernity’s Predicament,” *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 3 (2009): 321–339.

36 Benjamin Jacques and Samuel Hannot, *Dictionarium Latino-Belgicum* (Rotterdam: Pieter van der Slaart, 1699).

for the second word returned a positive result. The entry *Seges* conveniently offered as an example occurrence Virgil's oft-cited line and duly provided the Dutch rendering that he needed. Kaempfer himself had written in Latin, and both his English and Dutch translators operated in a world where Latin classics were naturally kept in their original. The seventeenth-century Republic of Letters, to an important extent, represented a community of the culture of neo-Latin learning.³⁷ But, at the same time, Latin proficiency was by no means a universal skill and there were sufficient numbers of aspiring citizens of the various post-Roman European polities who wished to appear cultured and respectable, even without possessing all the necessary classical erudition. This type of demand spawned a commercially viable market for vernacular reference books like the one Shizuki Tadao was able to consult, improbably, in Nagasaki.

Shizuki Tadao must have felt rather smug having solved this riddle, but he leaves no trace of that in his own text.³⁸ The language is lucid, measured, and matter-of-fact. In his clearly marked translator's interlinear commentary—the equivalent of footnote in his tradition of textual scholarship—he provides the minimum necessary background on what that difficult language is (Latin) and who Virgil was (an ancient poet), identifies his sources (citing the Latin dictionary by the stated name of its Rotterdam publisher, Pieter van der Slaart), and acknowledges that he can only provide the apparent general meaning of the verse based on his reference handbook. Yet, in recognition of the conventional understanding of the status of ancient poets in his own culture, he renders the Latin of Virgil not into Japanese, as he does with the vernacular Dutch of the rest of the treatise, but rather to the elevated register of *kanbun*, or classical Chinese, proposing something of a functional parallel between the two bodies of authoritative classics. Then, he explains the function of the quote and the preceding passage in the structure of Kaempfer's overall argument and moves on. Surely this was an embodiment of the best of the learned standards of his time and place. And all this serious commitment and intellectual energy, all the lonely late hours of struggle guided by the best scholarly ethos of the day, went into decoding and making accessible not an Adam Smith, a Montesquieu, a Hugo Grotius, or some such looming classic of early modern Europe—even where such alternatives may have been, in principle, available—but a minor

37 April G. Shelford, *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life; 1650–1720* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 5.

38 Shizuki Tadao, *Sakoku-ron* 鎖国論 [Discourse on the Closed Country], quoted from Kurosawa Okinamaro's 黒沢翁満 printed edition *Ijin kyōfuden* 異人恐怖伝 [Of Dread of Foreigners] (Tokyo, 1850), fascicle 1, folio 7, *recto*. See Sugimoto Tsutomu 杉本つとむ, ed., *Shizuki Tadao-yaku Sakoku-ron: keiin, honkoku, kōchū* 志筑忠雄訳「鎖国論」影印 翻刻 校注 [Shizuki Tadao's *Sakoku-ron*: facsimile, transcription, critical annotation] (Tokyo: Yasaka shobō, 2015), 22.

appended treatise by an author all but unknown to anyone occupied today with the history of Europe's Republic of Letters. It was often precisely texts which were not major classics that travelled and attracted attention most easily and tied the threads of the world wide web of knowledge.

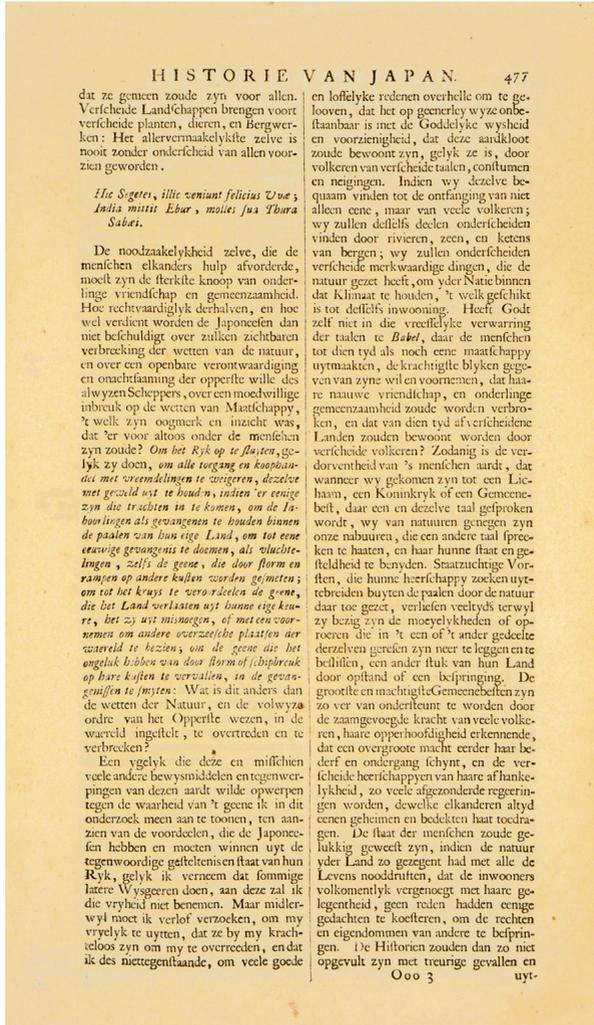


Fig. 1: A page from the appendix to the 1733 Dutch edition of Kaempfer's History of Japan with Virgil's *Hic Segetes* quote at the top left. (Doshisha University digital library. https://doors.doshisha.ac.jp/duar/repository/ir/22456/211_057.jpg [Accessed on 10. December 2015])

V.

One could regard such tales of late night struggles with strange foreign keywords as a pedantic footnote to the stride of global modernity and dismiss them as mostly irrelevant and rightly forgotten. Except that, in the world we have come to inhabit since the eighteenth century, the very shapes of social and political lives of a large portion of humanity have reconstituted themselves around conceptual vocabularies that were precisely the product of such contingent and seemingly irrelevant struggles with translation as transcultural mediation. Today, most people in most parts of world live, for example, quite inescapably in formations that define themselves as “states”—often indeed even as “republics.” Many take for granted that states have “constitutions,” supposed safeguards of “rights” and “liberties;” many accept that the relations among polities defined as “states,” the sole holders of territorial “sovereignty,” can be usefully and legitimately captured by the metaphor of “law” as in “international law,” whose foundations are commonly assumed to have been laid by the jurisprudential opinions of the likes of Hugo Grotius.

However, as recently as the turn of the nineteenth century, the language of “states,” “constitutions,” “laws,” “sovereignty,” “rights,” or “liberty” was very far from representing common sense. So far from it, in fact, that in many parts of the world, including Canton or Nagasaki, it would have sounded like a local idiom peculiar to distant barbarians, irrelevant to most, and difficult to comprehend; whose claim to universal validity was no more plausible or inherently convincing than the lore of any other remote tribe. And yet, the efforts to understand these peculiar foreign terms often preceded the actual hard geopolitical necessity that at last made facing them unavoidable. In the case of Tokugawa Japan, around the end of the eighteenth century, there was not much in the air that would presage the full-blown crisis over half a century later, when the insistent Occidentals equipped with indisputably superior military and organisational knowhow forced the opening of new forms of diplomatic and commercial relations, and on terms mostly of their own choosing.³⁹ Still, decades earlier—and for a variety of reasons, including whaling money and collectorship of curious Dutch books—someone was puzzling over the transposition of some of these unfamiliar bits of knowledge from the Western tribes into something that made sense.

In order to understand how this world of ours has come about, we need to take into account both the impersonal large-scale processes that spun the webs of communication and the individual struggles of the people who actually inhabited the nodal points of this web, and who sought to make sense of those

39 Mitani Hiroshi, *Escaping the Impasse* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2006).

processes and articulate the experience of coming to terms with them. In all of these cases, the process of arriving at a translation is more interesting and more telling than the resulting translation itself, the term that stabilises as the conventional equivalent of the original word or phrase. The struggles with translations are telling of the ways in which humans endow their worlds with meaning and navigate their lives along the paths they chart on the landscapes thus created. The resulting translated vocabularies themselves, on the other hand, while often the only trace we have of the struggles, more often than not become established for quite accidental reasons.

VI.

In modern Japanese and Chinese, the translation for “republic” ultimately settled into an expression altogether different from any that Shizuki Tadao had ever considered, although with no less intriguingly complex a pedigree. When, some four decades later, the young Dutch studies prodigy Mitsukuri Shōgo 箕作省吾 (1821–1846) was in turn struggling with the term in its expressly political sense, a senior colleague suggested a solution.⁴⁰ Ōtsuki Bankei 大槻磐溪 (1801–1878) allegedly brought to his attention the compound *kyōwa* 共和 (Chi: *gonghe*). Among their contemporaries, both men were possessed of an extraordinary amount of knowledge about Western legal and political institutions, knowledge that they were capable of obtaining thanks to their competence in the Dutch language, an heirloom of their corporate families. But both also inhabited a world in which the frustrations of decoding difficult Dutch terms lent themselves to expression in the form of the classical stanzas of Tang-period poetry. And both shared with Shizuki Tadao and other learned members of the East Asian version of the *république des lettrés* the intimate philological and historical grasp on those classics that we cannot help but name “Chinese,” although they were no more “Chinese” to them than Virgil or Tacitus were “Italian” to their European counterparts, and no less universal. True, a backlash against the foreign “Chinese intellectualism” in the name of pure and uncorrupted indigenous Japanese essence had just been launched by the so-called “nativist studies” 国学 of the likes of Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801).⁴¹ But it was the very novelty of this attack that confirmed the universalist understanding of classical China as the default position.

40 See Saitō Kowashi 齋藤毅, *Meiji no kotoba—Bunmei kaika to Nihongo* 明治のことば—文明開化と日本語 [Meiji words: Progress of civilisation and Japanese language] (1977; repr., Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2005), 118–120.

41 See Watanabe Hiroshi 渡辺浩, *Nihon seiji shisōshi, 17–19 seiki* 日本政治思想史：十七–十九世紀 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2010), 260–273. Translated by David Noble; as *A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600–1901* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2012), 238–252.

The term *kyōwa* was picked directly from the ancient histories, in fact from the most classic of them, Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*. It echoed an episode from the twilight of the classical period, the last days of the Western Zhou, when the corrupt and oppressive king Li, through his tyrannical ways, forfeited the trust and loyalty of his subjects. When their patience ran out, he was ousted in an open uprising (dated by tradition, for whatever it is worth, to the year 841 BCE) and fled to end his life in exile. After his departure, his morally upright ministers carried on the government together in peaceful cooperation for fourteen years without appointing another supreme ruler or trying to usurp the kingship themselves. The era was therefore named *gonghe* 共和 (J: *kyōwa*), "mutually in unison" or "agreeing together," to reflect this situation. Shōgo liked the term, which captured, by familiar reference, the salient features of a kingless political arrangement and rendered "republic" accordingly as "kyōwa seijishū" 共和政治州, "the land [practicing] the government of agreeing together." He wrote it down, and since he wrote it in a book that happened to go on to serve as the standard mid-nineteenth century textbook summarizing Japan's knowledge of the West, *Kon'yo zushiki* 坤輿圖識 (The comprehensive survey of the world) (1845-47), it stuck.⁴²

At some point, Shizuki Tadao also had had to face a cognate of "republic" as a designation of a form of polity. Like Mitsukuri Shōgo's later solution, his was equally suggestive of the world wide web of connections that at once required and inspired the co-productive constitution of new conceptual vocabularies. In his translation of the aforementioned "Discourse on the Closed Country" by Engelbert Kaempfer, Shizuki had to deal with the complementary terms contrasting monarchy with a kingless form of government. His Dutch original juxtaposed a "kingdom," *koninkryk*, with a "commonwealth," *gemeenebest*, the standard seventeenth-century term for such polities that, like the people of Zhou, the Dutch estates, or the parliamentarians of England, ousted or beheaded their kings and chose not to elevate any new ones.⁴³

The solution needed to be equally novel here. The "land of a king," *ōkoku* 王国 (C: *wangguo*), was easy. But to conceive of a polity without a prince at its top, a "commonwealth" or "republic," was a major terminological as well as conceptual challenge. Shizuki opted for a four-character phrase, *dōkō gōitsu* 同好合一 (C: *tonghao heyi*), combining the term for "accord of purpose," or

42 The *kyōwa* translation appears on Mitsukuri Shōgo's map of the world as a tag for the North American United States and in the accompanying volume 3 of the 1845 edition of the *Kon'yo zushiki*. *Kon'yo zushiki* 坤輿圖識 [The comprehensive survey of the world] (1845-47), fascicle 4, part 2, folio 3, verso.

43 Engelbert Kaempfer, *De Beschryving van Japan*, 477.

even “friendly communion,” *dōkō*,⁴⁴ with a relatively commonplace compound, *gōitsu*, designating “unity” or “union,” which had no particularly political valence in its previous usage.⁴⁵ In a gloss on the translated terms, Shizuki explained that the newly coined compound phrase designated a situation when “various localities, although distinct, ally together and appoint a common leadership to serve; such a leader does not hold the land in possession.”⁴⁶

This was a neat sum of his best understanding of the actual workings of the one republic that he did know more about, namely the Dutch Republic of the Seven United Provinces (*Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden*), with their representative States General and elected stadtholder. And it was indeed the most ready way to embed the logic of the elected government in the available normative cultural framework. A polity without a ruler seemed like a contradiction. But for a non-hereditary leadership confirmed by common consensus, for sovereignty as an entrusted mandate and not a private possession, there existed well-established references.

For, at least according to the account of those same universal (“Chinese”) classics, it was during the time of the earliest legendary rulers and founders of civilisation, the ancient sage kings, that the kingship was not bequeathed as private property to progeny, but rather passed on as heaven-entrusted stewardship to the man of greatest virtue. Thus, at the pre-dynastic dawn of historical time, the sage Yao bypassed his kin and handed the rule over to his minister Shun, who in turn chose for his successor the Great Yu, the tamer of floods and inventor of wet field cultivation. Only after Yu’s son took over from his father did the dynastic cycle commence, with all the inevitable dangers of corruption inherent in it and abundantly manifested by subsequent history. So while the practiced standard for the handover of government throughout most of ancient and modern history has been dynastic heredity, the cultural imaginary of the non-hereditary elevation of the most virtuous person into the position of kingship always retained a high prestige.

Neither were the criteria for the selection of such a supremely virtuous successor meant to be the arbitrary preferences of the previous king, regardless of how superhumanly wise and provident he was. The virtue had a

44 The same term *dōkō* 同好 was also used on the same page to translate the Dutch *vriendsapt en gemeenzaamheid*, which was the translation of the English *friendship and communication* which in its turn rendered Kaempfer’s original Latin *societas humana*, the providentially ordained universal communion of mutual dependence and exchange.

45 Shizuki Tadao, *Sakoku-ron*, fascicle 1, folio 6, *recto*; Matsumoto Tsutomu, *Sakoku-ron*, 25.

46 *Ibid.*

demonstrable, sociological dimension, so to speak, in that the populace would spontaneously flock to the feet of the man of such radiance. When, mindful of Yao's own offspring, Shun tried to renounce the kingship in their favour, the people would not allow him to do so and refused to follow any other prince. In the nineteenth century, when the early reports of an elected presidency in the other emergent republic of united provinces, the newly formed United States of America, reached Chinese and Japanese audiences, the startling phenomenon was without hesitation filed away under the same rubric of the selfless handover of rulership practised by the ancient sage kings.⁴⁷ Most attempts to come to terms with the new concepts and institutions involved similar creative equations, subsumptions, and appropriations.

In today's Japanese and Chinese, even the "republic" in "the Republic of Letters" translates quite mechanically into *kyōwakoku* 共和国, "the polity of agreeing together," which the above anecdote links to Mitsukuri Shōgo's 1840s coinage. The new name for a peculiar political order has long since passed into common usage, its self-consciously classicising reference to the "Chinese" (universal) histories has been forgotten, and it has become capable of carrying many of the metaphoric connotations that the original term "republic" acquired in the Latinate languages. In the 1790s, however, Shizuki Tadao obviously could not assume that whatever translation he may have devised for kingless federative political formations would also fit this peculiar phrase. He would have realised that "republic of the learned" was being employed as a metaphor of sorts, but a metaphor for what? And how to render the "republic" of the learned, of the *gakusha*, into something similarly metaphorically suggestive to the contemporary learned readers of Japanese?

VII.

Eventually, as our page from the library catalogue tells us, the term he settled on was *kaidoku* 会読.⁴⁸ In Shizuki Tadao's world, *kaidoku* designated an extant form of learned sociability, a semi-institutionalised pattern of intellectual interaction in the academies of "Chinese" (universal) scholarship.

47 See Yokoi Shōnan 横井小楠, *Kokuze sanron* 国是三論 [Three essays on national policy] [1860], in *Watanabe Kazan, Takano Chōei, Sakuma Shōzan, Yokoi Shōnan, Hashimoto Sanai* 渡辺華山 高野長英 佐久間象山 横井小楠 橋本左内 [Watanabe Kazan, Takano Chōei, Sakuma Shōzan, Yokoi Shōnan, Hashimoto Sanai], *Nihon shisō taikai* 本思想大系 [Systematic collection of sources in Japanese thought] 55, ed. Satō Shōsuke 佐藤昌介 et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1971), 448; or Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之, *Tonarigusa* 隣草 [Jottings on a neighbouring land] [1861], in *Meiji bunka zenshū* 明治文化全集 [Collected works of Meiji culture], ed. Yoshino Sakuzō 吉野作造, (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1992), 8:8.

48 *Shinzō shomoku, Gaihen: Bansho*. See figure 2 below.

It was a relatively recent, domestically coined neologism, though this time not a translation. Certainly the combination of the two Chinese characters that designate *encounter* (C: *hui*) and *reading* (C: *du*) had not been in evidence in the authoritative classical layer of the language of the learned, which here meant of course neither Dutch nor Latin, but classical Chinese which, until the end of the nineteenth century, provided the shared cosmopolitan idiom for the wider East- and South-East Asian Sinosphere. In antiquity, Kongzi, or Master Kong, who has come down to us transcribed by the Jesuit missionaries as Confucius, may have held polemical discussions with his disciples over passages of the revered texts that the tradition ascribes to him as having preserved and edited, the “Confucian” classics. Yet even if he had, it did not occur to anybody then to single out such disputations as a distinct format of a learned association.

By the eighteenth century, in Tokugawa Japan, however, a host of institutions of higher instruction advertised standardised curricula built around the canonical (“Confucian”) texts and consisting of a few basic modes of schooling, including the *kōshaku* 講釈, or lecture, and the *kaidoku*, which might be compared to the seminar in the modern university, and which was typically oriented towards the more advanced students. In contrast to a lecture, a “reading-together” (*kaidoku*) session did not have a single appointed speaker. Participants would assemble over assigned passages of a text and take turns, often by drawing lots, to read and expound their meaning. The others would seek to improve, correct, or discredit the interpretation, giving rise to much argument and contestation. A lecturer would supervise the interpretive efforts and the ensuing debates, but would normally not intervene unless arbitration was required.⁴⁹

The rise of the *kaidoku* is ascribed to the early eighteenth-century wave of popularity of some private academies that made this novel form of instruction their selling point. But by the century’s end, it spread increasingly even to the many emergent schools of higher learning sponsored by the numerous local principalities and by the Tokugawa government in Edo.⁵⁰ As it stabilised as a

49 See Maeda Tsutomu 前田勉, *Edo kōki no shisō kūkan* 江戸後期の思想と空間 [The intellectual space of the later Edo period] (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2009) and most recently Maeda Tsutomu, *Edo no dokushokai: Kaidoku no shisōshi* 江戸の読書会: 会読の思想史 [Edo-period reading groups: An intellectual history of *Kaidoku*], (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2012). See also Makabe Jin 眞壁仁, *Tokugawa kōki no gakumon to seiji: Shōheizaka gakumonjo jusha to bakumatsu gaikō henyō* 徳川後期の学問と政治: 昌平坂学問所儒者と幕末外交変容 [Scholarship and politics in the late Tokugawa period: Confucians of the Shōheizaka Academy and transformation of Bakumatsu diplomacy] (Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai, 2007). In English, see Margaret Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan: The Decline and Transformation of the Kangaku Juku* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2003), 128–135.

50 See Wajima Yoshio 和島芳男, *Shōheikō to hangaku* 昌平校と藩学 [Shōheizaka Academy and domain schools] (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1962).

class format, it also transgressed the boundary of the subject of instruction. The seminar-like reading groups were originally instituted to study and expound the difficult and ambiguous texts of the universal (“Chinese”) ancient classics and their commentaries. But when the first academies of “Dutch studies” sprang into existence, the philological struggle with yet another set of difficult texts, this time Dutch, readily lent itself to the same collective and competitive form of learning. The memoirs of some famous graduates of such curricula, like Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1834–1901), who attended the Dutch studies academy Tekijuku in Osaka, give one a sense of the thrill and pressure as the weekly *kaidoku* session approached. We also know that students’ achievements in the reading sessions were reflected in the ranking of the seating order and other symbolical privileges.⁵¹

Historical woodblock print illustrations of the two types of class make the distinction very clear.⁵² To the modern sensibility, the salient feature of the *kaidoku* scene—especially as contrasted with the hierarchical and sermon-like arrangement of the lecture—is the informally open, conversational, and multipolar nature of the interaction, what we would probably be tempted to describe as its “democratic” character, although that notion would be as incomprehensible to an eighteenth-century Nagasaki reader as that of a “republic,” “force of gravity,” or “adverb.” Because of this assumed potential for open-ended discussion and a sort of democratic equality of participants, the *kaidoku* has recently received increased attention from scholars of Japanese intellectual history.⁵³ It seemed to promise an indigenous sprout of a discursive public sphere, a home-grown historical source of a future liberal and pluralist modernity, or at least the potential thereof, which was trampled underfoot in the subsequent march of militarist nationalism. That may be. But that may not have been its most salient feature to our translator.

After all, although the *kaidoku* seminar made its steady headway from private academies into the curricula of the domainal schools, and even to the official school sponsored by the Tokugawa government, at Shōheizaka, to the north of the Edo castle’s outer moat, it never entirely escaped misgivings and criticism. It was prone to being denounced as engendering a quarrelsome disposition and ambitious cleverness at the expense of the search for truth; or as institutionally

51 Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉, *Fukuō jiden* 福翁自伝 [The memoirs of old man Fukuzawa] (Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1978), 83–84.

52 See illustrations 2-4 “Seidō kōshaku-zu” 聖堂講釈図 [Illustration of a lecture at the Shōheizaka Academy] and 2-5 “Seidō kaidoku-zu,” 聖堂会読図 [Illustration of a reading group session at the Shōheizaka Academy] in Makabe Jin, *Tokugawa kōki no gakumon to seiji*, 117–118 (images credited to Tokyo University Historiographical Institute: Shiryō hensanjo).

53 See Maeda Tsutomu, *Edo kōki no shisō kūkan* and *Edo no dokushokai: Kaidoku no shisōshi*.

endorsing personal vanity at excelling over others at the expense of commitment to the study and practice of the Way as moral uprightness. It served well to “show clearly who the bright ones were and who the dull, and made people defer to the former,” in the words of a contemporary observer and practitioner, Kamei Shōyō 亀井昭陽 (1773–1836),⁵⁴ but showing off personal intelligence and argumentative skill was quite distinct from a shared pursuit of the truth in joint humility. Unlike in Plato’s dialogues, in real life a skilled Sophist would probably often outshine a Socrates. Was this the proper way of the learned? “But when group readings (*kaidoku*) and discussions are held,” the regulations of one of the academies stated in 1839, “harmony and peace of heart must be placed above everything, and fairness must be sought. If someone insists on their biased opinion [...], then at the beginning of his studies he is the first to fall in with what is wrong, and thus it becomes a habit and later, when he enters public office, the harm he causes is significant.”⁵⁵

VIII.

Some years later, after Shizuki Tadao’s premature death in 1806, Matsura Seizan asked another reader of Dutch to have a look at the four issues of *Het Republyk der geleerden* and expand the catalogue entry beyond the bare translation of the title. The daimyō of Hirado was a conscientious bibliophile. Like Shizuki Tadao, Ishibashi Sukezaemon 石橋助左衛門 (1757–1837) was, by his family’s corporate profession, also a Dutch interpreter in Nagasaki and, in fact, one of the two senior head interpreters among the body of well over a hundred official language professionals and apprentices.⁵⁶ And, like the Shizukis, the Ishibashi family traced their corporate origins to Hirado, so that Matsura Seizan felt entitled to turn to Sukezaemon for assistance. The expanded annotation, dated 1808, is copied out in the same neat hand as in the Rakusaidō library’s catalogue of barbarian books, following right after Shizuki Tadao’s translation of the title.⁵⁷

Cautiously, Ishibashi Sukezaemon noted that, without close perusal of the actual contents, it was impossible to say anything conclusive, but that the four volumes of the Dutch newsletter of the *Republyk der geleerden* appeared to

54 Kamei Shōyō 亀井昭陽, quoted in Maeda Tsutomu, *Edo kōki no shisō kūkan*, 25.

55 Yasui Sokken 安井息軒, *Sankei juku gakuki* 三溪塾学記 [Regulations of the Sankei Academy], quoted and translated in Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan*, 65.

56 Torii Yumiko, “‘Dutch Studies’: Interpreters, Language, Geography, and World History,” in *Bridging the Divide: 400 Years The Netherlands–Japan*, ed. Leonard Blussé et al. (Leiden: Hotei, 2000), 117–118.

57 *Shinzō shomoku, Gaihen: Bansho*. See figure 3 below.

be the records of collective deliberations of the men of learning gathered in Amsterdam to decide questions of all branches of learning, from medicine through religion to statecraft. Even in the brief description, Ishibashi's choice of words betrays that, to him, the purpose of pooling the erudition and wisdom of many was not to accommodate or even enhance a plurality of opinions, but to assert the truth and rule out falsehood. Plurality in itself was not a recognised value, neither a goal nor a means to anything inherently worthwhile. What was appreciated was rather the ability to overcome the bias of private and arbitrary opinion, to collectively reach a consensus on truth, to weigh the advantages and shortcomings of arguments and positions, and to rule out mistaken views and adopt the right ones—the underlying meaning of the verb *rontei* 論定 (C: *lunding*), i.e., “to conclusively settle and pass comprehensive judgment by discourse,” by which Ishibashi described the proceedings of the gathering of the learned of Holland.⁵⁸ This was a goal widely acknowledged as valid by the East Asian learned ecumene and Ishibashi's annotation may be a hint that the European Republic of Letters could appear to have mechanisms for generating such a consensus. This could salvage it from the barbarism of diversity and arbitrariness of mere private opinions, and render its efforts respectable under the shared pursuit of the universal order of things, both moral and cosmological—the same order of which the ancient sage kings Yao, Shun, and Yu were paragons. To at least some readers of Dutch texts in Japan, it seemed that the best contemporary embodiment of the classical universal China might not be the Qing empire across the sea, but precisely the distant countries of the Far West.⁵⁹

As metaphors go, Shizuki Tadao could do worse than this. *Gakusha no kaidoku* 学者之会読, “the collective reading session of the learned,” as a translation of the *republyk der geleerden*, would have made sense to many of his European counterparts, had they had a chance to hear of it. His chosen term evoked the concern with a body of texts and philological practices as the means of attaining the truth: a concern certainly shared by the members of the European Republic of Letters. It conjured up the memory of those long hours of poring over difficult passages filled with mysterious idiomatic expressions in old or foreign tongues, the lonely labour witnessed only as Shingū Ryōtei's poem would have it, by the night rain. It resonated with the intense interaction within a peer group of fellow-students, at once competitors and the ultimate judges of one's efforts to understand and articulate, a community of practitioners who

58 Ibid.

59 See Watanabe Hiroshi, “‘They Are Almost the Same as the Ancient Three Dynasties:’ The West as Seen through Confucian Eyes in Nineteenth-century Japan,” in *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*, ed. Wei-ming Tu (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 119–131.

shared certain standards and values that supported the notions of what counts as correct, legitimate, and valid. It echoed the cacophony of voices striving to out-argue each other and gain recognition and respect among their peers for their erudition or cleverness or depth of insight, often the only worldly reward to be gained for all their efforts. The Republic of Letters as an imaginary seminar reading room. It is a passable portrait. We may declare our translator qualified for membership.

Epilogue: A note on global intellectual history

To refer to the classical Chinese histories while puzzling over a suitable Japanese translation of a tricky metaphor encountered via Latin and Dutch, or to fetch, from Japan, evidence for making, in Europe, a general case for closing off a country from international trade, and then to pick from a Dutch book that very same argument as ammunition for actual foreign policy debate back in Japan, are examples of a complex sort of conversations. Conversations which were carried on over considerable distances and despite logistical odds, where two or more different linguistic registers were involved at every stage. Our disciplines, as well as our habits of mind, typically lead us to posit, on the one hand, a natural and necessary continuity among conversations that take place in Japanese and within the bounds of the Japanese archipelago and, on the other hand, their fundamental discontinuity with other conversations that take place in other idioms and other places. Such assumed continuity subsequently and naturally presents to our disciplinary sight a contiguous field of “Japanese thought.” By the same token, French or Chinese conversations effortlessly blend into the respective landscapes of French and Chinese thought, as in “French enlightenment thought” or “Chinese thought of the Ming period,” that are marked by inner contiguity and external difference. These continua then constitute intuitive venues for primary research and are the stuff of readily generalisable accounts. By contrast, other instances of conversations, those consisting of, say, Latin texts in Dutch translations entering Japanese debates, or Chinese texts in French translations entering English debates, are kept out of the range of what is supposed to be typical or representative. We have hardly begun to uncover such examples and it will take a certain critical mass of these before useful generalisations may be attempted. But we can venture some preliminary observations.

These complex conversations take on a dimension that we can plausibly call “global.” But calling them “global” partly runs the risk of evoking mistaken motivations and misplaced expectations. These conversations do not necessarily or even usually take the globe as their subject matter, nor does investigating them require us to discard the rigorous, microscopic approach of a historian

or philologist and adopt some macroscopic vision of a synthetic generalist. To trace the transcontinental synapses that have made these conversations possible is certainly crucial for recovering and understanding them in all their particular materiality and contingency. But they are perfectly amenable to the standard toolkit of philologically informed historical humanities that only can unlock for us the moment when an incident of mere mechanical transmission becomes a purposeful act of selective and interpretive appropriation. To single out these complex communicative acts as something of a peculiar sort and taking place at a different level, and to file them away as material for “global intellectual history,” working by different methods distinct from other intellectual histories that are not global, would be to excuse ourselves from questioning the assumed natural continuity of the fields of “Japanese thought” or “Chinese thought of the Ming period” or “French enlightenment thought.” And yet, to question that assumed natural continuity seems to be one of the main effects of reconstructing these complex, multilingual, long-distance conversations in the first place. There is no reason why we should consider them less representative of “cultures” or less formative of “traditions” than instances of conversations conducted in the same language, at the same location, and by people of the same ethnic group.

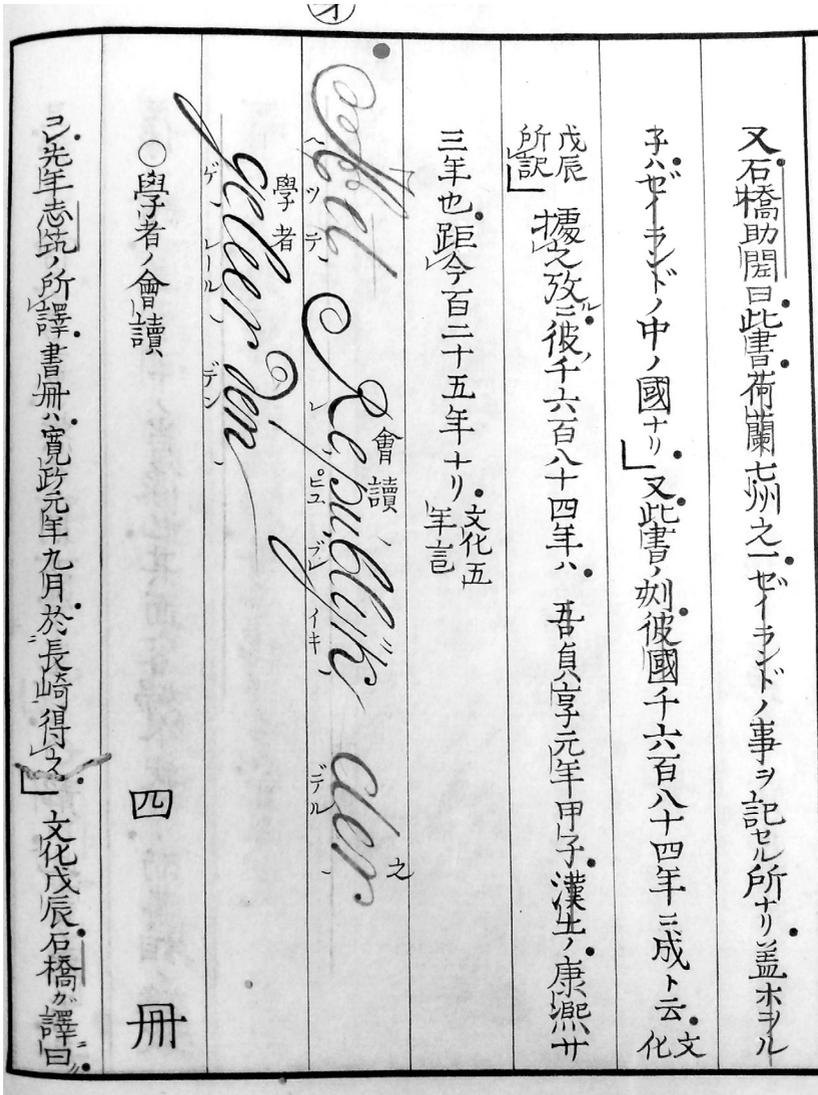


Fig. 2: Entry with Shizuki Tadao's translation of the title *Het Republyk der geleerden*. *Shinzō shomoku*, *Gaihen: Bansho* [The new expanded catalogue (of the *Rakusaidō* library), outer part: *Barbarian writings*], *Matsura shiryō hakubutsukan*, *Hirado*, ms. VII-1 (i) 3. (Courtesy of the *Matsura Historical Museum*; photo by the author.)

二歐邏巴州中ノ醫學教學ノヲ載其餘ニ政治ノ得失ノヲモ録セルル
 當シ件ノヲ阿蘭陀ノ國都亞護斯的尔草ニ於テ有學ノ徒集會論定聚
 録セシ書ト見ユ但熟覽ニ非レバ分明ヲ云ニ不レ也 又曰
 題辨ノ言ニヨレバ當ニ如斯ナルベシ
 其一卷ハ阿蘭陀ノ千七百十年ノ記ナリ 吾室永七年庚寅
 其二卷三卷ハ共ニ千七百十年ノ記 吾正徳元年辛卯
 其四卷ハ千七百十二年ノ記ナリ 吾正徳三年壬辰
 而此卷末ニ至テ脱
 葉アリ書尾不全故ニ此書ノ終コニ止ルヤ否ヲ審ミセス 阿蘭陀ノ千七百
 十年ヨリ至テ九十九年文化五年戊辰言

Fig. 3: Continued from previous page. Ishibashi Sukezaemon's annotation of the title Het Republyk der geleerden. Ibid. (Courtesy of the Matura Historical Museum; photo by the author.)