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# Japan and the West

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A Journey through Time and Translation

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## **Abstract**

This essay is a comparative overview of translation theory in Japan and the West from a historical perspective, beginning with the considerations of Cicero and ending with the turn towards literal translation in Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The aim is to find similarities in the development of, and attitudes toward, translation traditions between the West and Japan. The first part of the essay is dedicated to Western translation theory and development, followed by the evolution of translation in Japan. Last, a discussion of the similarities found between the two disciplines, followed by the conclusion that, amongst other things, the attitudes towards translation in the literal vs. free debate were basically identical up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Keywords: translation theory, translation history, Japanese translation.

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## Conventions

Any and all Romanization in this essay is written using the modified Hepburn system. This entails long consonants being written by a repetition of the consonant, (e.g. かつぱ = *kappa*), and ん is always written as *n*. In the cases where ん is followed by an independent vowel, an apostrophe is used to symbolize the syllable break (e.g. ほんやく = *hon'yaku*). Long vowels are indicated by macrons, *ā*, *ū*, *ō*, with the exception of long i, which is always written *ii*, and long e, where the pairing of e+e is written with a macron (*ē*), and e+i is written as *ei*.

In the case of Japanese proper names, they are written according to convention, i.e. family name first, given name second. However, in those cases where the Western convention is known to be used, this essay will follow suit. The same applies to locations and names already well-established in the Western culture though spelled slightly different according to Hepburn romanization (e.g. Tokyo, Osaka).

## Abbreviations

BCE	Before Common Era (Before year 0)
CE	Common Era (Year 0 and forward)
SL	Source Language
TL	Target Language
ST	Source Text
TT	Target Text

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Babel

*A long, long time ago, all human beings spoke just the one language. They got along well, and eventually decided to erect a tower that could reach higher than the very sky. Work began and proceeded smoothly, until the deity on duty found out what the humans were attempting. Angered by their hubris, the deity scattered mankind across the globe and confused their language, so that man would never again unite in defiance of mortality.*

The above, albeit abbreviated, is just one of the many myths dealing with the evolution of language into the multitude we see today. But regardless of how this diversity came to be, there has almost equally as long existed a need to bridge this communicational divide. Particularly with the advent of recreational and business travel, merchant trading, and the like, a need for intercommunication tactics surfaced. The more basic needs were of course covered by different types of pidgin, but interpreters and translators also found a place in the world. It is the history of translation, the manifestation of different theories and approaches within the craft as well as how it may have or has differed between translation in the West and translation in Japan, that will be the focus of this essay.

In this essay, the term ‘West’ is used in a broad sense, for the sake of simplicity and consistency. ‘The West’ is used as an umbrella term referring to Europe and America as a whole, since the translation theory we see today is very much a collaborative effort between the two continents.

Eastern translation theory, on the other hand, has only just begun to make its way into the mainstream of translation studies. It is only in the last decade that volumes containing writings on Asian traditions have made their way to publication. Munday (2008, p. 19) remarks that “there has (...) historically been a very strong tendency to focus on western European writing on translation”, a statement corroborated by Yanabu, who agrees that “translation has been undertaken most prolifically by the West<sup>1</sup>” (2011, p. 47).

## 1.2 Purpose

This essay as a whole is intended to be a comprehensive and critically comparative work in which the development and practice of translation in the West and in Japan is put into a

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<sup>1</sup> As translated by Indra Levy.

historical perspective. Unfortunately, there is very little written in English on the subject of Japanese translation theory, and quite frankly there is not much more written in Japanese. In fact, Haag (2011, p. 15) more or less begins his essay by pointing out that “interestingly (...), extended studies of the Japanese culture of translation have been something of a rarity.” As noted by Kondo and Wakabayashi (1998, p.476):

“Books on translation in Japan fall under two broad categories: academic works that adopt an approach based on comparative literature, and more popular works such as ‘how-to’ books and examinations of mistranslations. Many works have strong sociolinguistic overtones, focusing on cultural differences between Japan and the West as manifest in language. Linguistic scholars in Japan have paid scant attention to translation, and translation theory is not regarded as a discipline in its own right.”

In other words it can be deduced that not only has translation theory been sorely underestimated, but the material that does exist is, as a whole, aimed at new learners rather than seasoned scholars. According to Meldrum, however, more academically oriented works have been making their way onto the market, although these seem to rather utilize and adapt the Western theories to a Japanese setting. For a more detailed view of the more recent works, please consult Meldrum’s essay *Japanese Translation Studies: A New Discipline (n.d)*.

The questions to be answered within this essay are quite simple. With the differences in cultures and the physical distance between them, contact between Japan and the West was limited up until 1853 when the West came banging on the proverbial doors that had been closed to the unfamiliar for over 200 years. Although they have had such a limited relationship for so long, one cannot help but wonder if these two fundamentally different developments of translation have anything in common, and if so, how are they similar?

### **1.3 Method**

This essay will follow the historical development and influence of translation first in the West, and then in Japan. Thereafter the various differences and similarities will be discussed and dealt with in order. Seeing as translation has been in practice since BCE, the timeline in this essay will be cut at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to eliminate the risk of glossing over sections of importance. With the ultimate goal to assist the reader in acquiring a basic working knowledge of Japanese and Western translation theory through history along with key concepts and figures, this essay is a compilation of the most important developments on both sides of the equation. In the unfortunate cases where the source has been unavailable in

original form, second-hand accounts through other scholars have been the option preferred to exclusion.

## 2 Translation in the West

### 2.1 In the Beginning

The early stages of translation theory were not what one might call organized. Although translation was a common enough practice in the West, the theory surrounding it could be boiled down to a broad series of prefaces and comments by practitioners in regard to their own work. Furthermore, the practitioners were often unaware of, or purposefully ignored, that which had been written before them. Early translation theory, in other words, was hardly a step-by-step evolution. Flora Amos<sup>2</sup> suggests the following as a likely explanation:

“This lack of consecutiveness in criticism is partially accountable for the slowness with which translators attained the power to put into words, clearly and unmistakably, their aims and methods.”

(as cited in Munday, 2008, p. 25)

Amos also notes that the meaning given to such terms as ‘faithfulness’, ‘accuracy’, and even ‘translation’, varied considerably between the early translators.

Western translation theory up until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems centred around one pivotal debate, the original distinction of which is known as ‘*word-for-word or sense-for-sense*’. Word-for-word, i.e. *literal translation*, means substituting each word in a sentence from the source text (ST) to an equivalent word in the target language (TL). Directly opposite that, sense-for-sense, i.e. *free translation*, aims to rather than keep the original form of the ST, harness the message and produce in the target text (TT) the same feeling as in the original ST.

In 46 BCE, Cicero<sup>3</sup> made the following statement regarding his own translation of the speeches of the Attic orators Aeschines and Demosthenes:

“And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and form, or as one might say, the ‘figures’ of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language.”

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<sup>2</sup> Author of *Early Theories of Translation*, published 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, 108 BCE – 43 BCE. Roman Politician, lawyer, orator, and philosopher.

(as cited in Munday, 2008, p. 19)

In short, Cicero meant that in order for the speeches to have the same impact on the masses as the originals, they would have to have the same fluency and eloquence in the TL as they did in the source language (SL). A few centuries later, Cicero is joined in his opinion by the late 4<sup>th</sup> century CE translator, St. Jerome<sup>4</sup>. According to Munday (2008, p.20), Jerome rejected literal translation because, following so closely the form of the ST, it produced an absurd translation, cloaking the sense of the original. Free translation, however, allows for the sense or content of the ST to be conveyed in a manner better comprehensible in the TL.

## 2.2 Translation and the Church

Despite the fact that the better-known translators up to that point all but abhorred literal translation, there was one type of text they did not dare take such liberties with. In Bible translation word-for-word was the norm, and those translations which deviated from the accepted interpretations were most likely deemed heretical, and thus were censured or banned. The most famous examples of what could happen to the translators were those of English theologian-translator William Tyndale and French humanist Etienne Dolet, who were both burned at the stake in the earlier half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Even Jerome, the avid advocate of free translation a thousand years earlier, said this about his own work:

“Now I not only admit but freely announce that in translating from Greek – except of course in the case of Holy Scripture, where even the syntax contains a mystery – I render not word-for-word, but sense-for-sense.”

(as cited in Munday, 2008, p. 20)

But the Church’s monopoly on scripture was not to last. Advancements in the study and knowledge of Biblical languages and classical scholarship, along with the Erasmus’s edition of the New Greek testament in the general climate of the Reformation, with a little boost from the new technology of the printing press, a revolution in Bible translation practice came about (Munday, 2008, p.23). Non-literal and certainly non-accepted versions were being published and spread, the most crucially influential of these most likely being Martin Luther’s East German translation. Not only did Luther play a key role in the Reformation, but his translation has also been acknowledged as having created modern German (Yanabu, 2011, p.48). Not that Luther’s treatment of free vs. literal translation showed much advancement since the days of St. Jerome, his addition of the language of ‘ordinary people’ and his translation focusing on

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<sup>4</sup> Saint Jerome, ca. 347 – 420. Priest, theologian, and historian. Undertook a revision of the Latin Bible.

the TL and the readers of the TT were significant if not crucial in the development of translation studies.

As previously mentioned, historically translation studies have had a strong tendency to concentrate on Western European writing on translation, although the past decade has seen a definite increase in publications in English addressing the rich traditions of non-western cultures (Munday, 2008). In comparison with the rest of the world, the West does seem to have been keeping the busiest in translating. This is largely due to the efforts of the Catholic Church (Yanabu, 2011, p.47). During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in which the Protestant reform movement was gathering steam, the Catholic Church responded in turn by seeking followers outside of their current comfort-zone. The Society of Jesus was formed, joined forces with Portugal, and ventured forth into Asia to spread the word of God. Wherever they went, the Jesuits had to learn the local languages in order to fully convey the teachings of Christ, something highly characteristic to Christianity. Other teachings, like Islam and Judaism, were equally passionate about promoting their faith, but had a different view on how to accomplish this. In order to take part in the teachings and read the sacred texts, learning the language in which they were written seemed unavoidable. Buddhism had a similar viewpoint: if you want to learn, come to us. Although, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Xuanzang of Tang China went to India and translated a large number of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. These translations eventually made their way to Japan as well, although no effort was then made to actually translate the scriptures into Japanese (Yanabu, 2011, p.48).

### **2.3 From Diad to Triad**

In 17<sup>th</sup> century England, translation into English was almost exclusive to verse renderings of Greek and Latin classics, some renditions of which were translated freely bordering on the extreme. As then contemporary translator Cowley admitted, he has “taken, left out, and added what I please” to his interpretation of *Pindaric Odes* (as cited in Munday, 2008, p. 25). He proposed the term *imitation* for this very free method, and in contradiction to what was believed in the Roman period, that such a free method would enable the translator to surpass the original, Cowley argued that this was the method that permitted the ‘spirit’ of the ST to be best reproduced (as cited in Munday, 2008, p. 25). Naturally, such a free approach on translation was bound to get some reactions, the most noteworthy of which was that of John Dryden, English poet and translator. According to Munday (2008, p.26), Dryden’s brief description of the translation process had an enormous impact on subsequent translation

theory and practice. In the preface to his translation of Ovid's *Epistles* in 1680, Dryden reduces all translation to three categories (as cited in Munday, 2008, p.26):

1. *Metaphrase*: 'Word-by-word and line-by-line' translation, which corresponds to literal translation.
2. *Paraphrase*: 'translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense'; this involves changing whole phrases and more or less corresponds to faithful or sense-for-sense translation.
3. *Imitation*: 'forsaking' both words and sense; this corresponds to Cowley's very free translation and is more or less adaptation.

Dryden himself preferred paraphrasing, advising that metaphrase and imitation ought to be avoided. In general, writing on translation at the time was highly prescriptive, attempting to template the process of a successful translation. Following Dryden's example, other writers also began stating their 'principles' in a similar way. Etienne Dolet, who unfortunately enough was convicted for heresy and burned at the stake just a few years later, set in his 1540 manuscript<sup>5</sup> out five principles for translation, highlighting the importance of reproducing the sense while avoiding word-for-word translation, as well as stressing the importance of an eloquent and natural TL form in order to reinforce the structure and independence of the new vernacular French language (Munday, 2008, p. 27).

In 18<sup>th</sup> century England, much like Dryden and Dolet before him, Alexander Fraser Tytler defined a 'good translation' by three general laws. The crucial difference, however, was that where Dryden's description was author-oriented, i.e. the translation is written as it would have been by the original author had he known the target language, Tytler went for a TL-reader-oriented approach.

#### 2.4 Schleiermacher's Contribution

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, German theologian and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote a treatise on translation<sup>6</sup> which greatly impacted subsequent translation theory. First, he distinguishes between two types of translators, the *Dolmetscher*, who translates commercial texts, and the *Übersetzer*, who works on scholarly and artistic texts (Monday, 2008, p. 28). It

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<sup>5</sup> *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre.*

[The way of translating well from one language to another.]

<sup>6</sup> *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens*, [On the different methods of translating].

is the latter which Schleiermacher views as being on a higher creative plane, and although it may seem impossible to translate scholarly and artistic texts, due to the ST language often being riddled with culture-bound references and vocabulary to which the TL can never fully correspond (Munday 2008, p. 28), Schleiermacher proposes that the real question is how to bring the ST writer and the TT reader together. He goes beyond the issue of literal, faithful, and free translation, and instead proposes only two paths for the ‘true’ translator; either leave the writer in peace and move the reader towards the writer, or leave the reader in peace and move the writer. The first, moving the reader towards the author, meant not writing as the author would have done, had they known the TL, but rather aiming at giving the reader the same impression he would have received had he been reading it in the original language. There are, however, several consequences to this approach, the most notable of which is that the ability to communicate the original impression received from the ST is highly dependent upon the translator’s understanding of the ST, as well as the TT readers’ level of education and understanding. Not surprisingly, the two can differ significantly.

### 3 Translation in Japan

At this point we will shift our focus to the other half of our equation, the theory and practice of translation in Japan. To begin with, it is not only interesting but also highly important to point out the significant and long-lasting relationship between Japan and China. It has been deduced that sometime during the Yayoi period<sup>7</sup> the art of rice-cultivation as well as several metalworking techniques made their way into Japan from China (Ekholm & Ottosson, 2010, p.28), and the first recorded official contacts date as far back as 57 BCE (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 468). Indeed, China and Japan have had the better part of two millennia to get to know one another, but that does not necessarily mean they have always been on equal ground as neighbours. Quite the contrary, up until just a few centuries ago China was more of a mentor to Japan, influencing the smaller nation culturally, religiously, intellectually, and linguistically.

Arguably the greatest influence of all would be the adopting of Chinese script into Japan in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, although it was not actually brought in by the Chinese. In fact, Korean scribes thought to pass along the knowledge whilst simultaneously spreading the word of Buddha, and as Japan at the time had no script of their own it was only a couple of

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<sup>7</sup> ca. 250 BCE – 250 CE.

centuries before it was well in use among the Japanese elite (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 468).

### 3.1 Kanbun<sup>8</sup>

However, the advent of Chinese script did not set the wheels of literacy in motion all on its own. It was somewhere in the 6<sup>th</sup> century that Chinese scholars, monks, merchants, and the like began frequenting Japan more and more often, bringing with them, amongst other things, “new cultural elements and ideas (...) in the form of writing” (Mitani & Minemura, as cited in Meldrum, 2009, p. 54). These new ideas were not within the grasp of everyone to access, however, since it required learning the Chinese writing system first.

It seems that originally, immigrants from China and Korea were greatly employed in reading and writing what is now most commonly known as *kanbun*, or ‘pure *kanbun*’, which is written language essentially identical to then contemporary classical Chinese. *Kanbun* “was mainly used in writings of government and religious (Buddhist) affairs” (Meldrum, 2009, p. 54), meaning literacy was not yet a luxury afforded to the common man. As previously mentioned, the Japanese elite was the part of society that utilized *kanbun* to the most significant extent, but it is still essential to remember that Japanese and *kanbun* stood (and still stand) on individual branches of the language tree. For example Chinese, like English, utilizes a Subject-Verb-Object word order, whereas Japan makes use of a Subject-Object-Verb order.

It was not until the 7<sup>th</sup> century that the Japanese began adapting Chinese script to their own language style. As cited in Meldrum (2009, p. 55), Seeley<sup>9</sup> lists several developments beginning the use of Chinese writing as Japanese, such as auxiliary verbs and honorific expressions added in a way that would not have sounded natural to then contemporary Chinese, as well as “common nouns and [grammatical] particles (...) occasionally being written in phonogram orthography”. By the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese had “mastered the use of Chinese characters as a phonetic means for writing Japanese” (Shibatani, 2005, p. 126). To explain further, the Japanese before Chinese script naturally had a working language of their own already, but no script to immortalize it. When Chinese script was adopted, it came with a whole new set of names for concepts already existing within the Japanese language. As

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<sup>8</sup> 漢文, [Chinese Script].

<sup>9</sup> Author of *A History of Writing in Japan*, published 1991.

Shibatani demonstrates, *yama*<sup>10</sup> could be written in two ways. Either with one *kanji*<sup>11</sup>, 山, which is pronounced *san* in accordance with Chinese, or it was written as a compound, with whatever two *kanji* the writer at the time saw fit as long as they corresponded to the Japanese pronunciation, *ya-ma*. This practice of establishing a relationship between the original character and its Japanese semantic equivalent helped establish the practice of assigning dual meaning to Chinese characters; Chinese (*on'yomi*<sup>12</sup>), as well as Japanese (*kun'yomi*<sup>13</sup>) (2005, p. 126).

The practice of using Chinese characters phonetically (i.e. not as ideograms) is among Japanese grammarians known as *man'yōgana*<sup>14</sup>, though using Chinese characters purely phonetically was not necessarily an idea that originated in Japan. Shibatani gives examples of similar phonetic usage in both China and Korea (2005, p. 126). It was also sometime in the 8<sup>th</sup> century that the *kana* syllabary systems began to develop, though it would be centuries still before the process was complete (Meldrum, 2009, pp. 59-60).

Turning our attention back to the adaptation of Chinese script to Japanese language, the addition of grammatical particles and the use of *kanji* phonetically, as well as ideographically, marked the beginning of using Chinese writing as Japanese. The practice of reading Sino-Japanese this way was not without its difficulties, however. One of the more common manners in which to deal with it is known as *kanbun kundoku*<sup>15</sup>. Roughly translating into “Chinese text, Japanese reading”, this practice entails placing special marks alongside the Chinese characters indicating where each piece fits into Japanese word order, complete with a system of grammatical indicators to show inflections. *Kanbun kundoku* “directly converted Chinese texts into understandable, albeit rather unnatural, Japanese that retained a strong Chinese flavour” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 468). Learning to read and write in this manner was difficult and time-consuming, since it required a vast knowledge of Chinese characters as well as the ability to rearrange the word order of the Chinese text to read as Japanese, and was thus the mark of an educated person (Shibatani, as seen in Meldrum, 2009, p.58).

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<sup>10</sup> [Mountain.]

<sup>11</sup> [Chinese character(s).]

<sup>12</sup> 音読み。

<sup>13</sup> 訓読み。

<sup>14</sup> 万葉仮名。

<sup>15</sup> 漢文訓読。

The reason such a focus is being put on the utilization and integration of Chinese script into Japanese culture is not only because *kanbun kundoku* is widely considered a translational act and a precursor to Japanese translation theory (Wakabayashi, Yanabu, Kawamura, Kamei, as cited and referenced in Meldrum, 2009, p. 56), but also because it speaks volumes about the Japanese's ability to adopt foreign concepts and make them their own. Along with the script system, Japan adopted Buddhism and Confucianism along with various cultural and intellectual aspects of China. The Japanese ability to take in and utilize new knowledge manifested itself again clearly in the time surrounding the Meiji<sup>16</sup> period, when Japan had to modernize fast in order to stand on their own against the Western forces threatening their borders.

### 3.2 Pre-Meiji

After the spread of Chinese script in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that documentation regarding translation practices and the theory thereof is somewhat scarce. In fact, it was not until the early 1600's that translation was truly brought to the table. In 1611, an increased demand for Tang Chinese interpreters coupled with an influx of Chinese books marked the arrival of Chinese merchants come to trade in Nagasaki, greatly encouraged by the shogun of the time. As remarked by Kondo and Wakabayashi (1998, p. 469), "it was also around this time that the first true translations from classical and colloquial Chinese were produced, particularly colloquial fiction from the Ming dynasty<sup>17</sup>." As a result, a difference in preference could now be distinguished among writers regarding translation technique.

On the one hand, you had writers such as Asai Ryōi<sup>18</sup> who went for the ST-based approach and followed the original text line by line (Keene, as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 469), and on the other hand you had the likes of Ogyū Sorai<sup>19</sup>, who preferred free translations in colloquial Japanese (Kato, as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 469). Sorai, a prominent scholar of Chinese culture and an influential Confucian philosopher, is presented by Maruyama as the first Japanese scholar to consider the Japanese convention for reading Chinese as an act of translation. It was not uncommon for translators at the time to put together dictionaries of their own, and it was in his *Yakubun sentei*<sup>20</sup> that Sorai first approached the matter. Maruyama explains that the book lists Chinese characters

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<sup>16</sup> 1868 – 1912.

<sup>17</sup> 1368 – ca. 1644.

<sup>18</sup> 浅井了意, a samurai and a popular and professional writer (the first in Japanese history).

<sup>19</sup> 荻生徂徠, 1666 – 1728.

<sup>20</sup> 訳文筌蹄, [A Guide to Translation].

that when read in Japanese become homonymous, and Sorai illustrates how two different characters that translate into the same word in Japanese, can differ greatly in meaning in ancient Chinese. Maruyama then goes on to claim Sorai's point to be that "because different Chinese characters with different meanings are often pronounced the same way in Japanese, there is a possibility when reading Chinese poems and texts in Japanese that the true meaning may be lost" (Maruyama & Katō, 1998, pp.24-27).

### 3.3 Enter the West

#### 3.3.1 The Portuguese and Christianity

In stark contrast to Japan's long-standing relationship with China, the West did not enter the scene until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Latin and Portuguese became two of the first Western languages brought to Japan (Meldrum, 2009, p. 66). The first contact with the West was a Portuguese shipwreck in 1543. A second ship visited 3 years later and took a fugitive samurai by the name of Anjirō back to Malacca, where he befriended Francis Xavier of the newly formed Society of Jesus. Anjirō, having become the first Japanese Christian, inspired Xavier to begin missionary activities in Japan. Anjirō at the time only spoke some broken Portuguese, so he was sent to a Christian college in India to study Christianity and Portuguese. While there, he also took the time to translate some Christian materials into Japanese (Schurhammer, as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 469).

With Anjirō by his side as an interpreter and translator, Xavier arrived in Kagoshima in 1549. Little by little, the other priests picked up on the Japanese language, and began translating various Christian works into Japanese with the help of converts. This presented the substantial problem of finding words in Japanese to express these new concepts, such as *god*, *heaven*, and *cross*, which in turn led to some unfortunate but unavoidable discrepancies in meaning (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 469). One missionary, João Rodrigues, is highlighted by Kondo and Wakabayashi (1998, p. 469) as particularly noteworthy of this time. Having arrived in Japan in 1577, he studied Japanese and went on to become the mission's chief interpreter. He is also known for having compiled *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam*, "a grammar of Japanese in which he discussed Chinese poems translated into Japanese and the difficulty of translating Portuguese into Japanese, and recommended translating the sense rather than giving a literal rendition" (Cooper, as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 469).

### 3.3.2 Isolation

Due to mounting tensions between the missionaries and the ruling forces of Japan, the Tokugawa shogunate in 1639 issued a series of seclusion orders in order to protect the country from outside influences deemed unbeneficial to Japan. Banning traders, missionaries, and even Christianity itself, “this move brought the already minimal translation of Western literature to a virtual halt.” In fact, other than Christian literature there had been very little translation of Portuguese works (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 469). The few works that had been translated, however, were done so using a similar technique to *kanbun kundoku*, known as *ōbun kundoku*<sup>21</sup>, or *chokuyaku*<sup>22</sup> (Meldrum 2009, p. 68).

### 3.4 Nagasaki

The only exceptions to these new rules were the Chinese, who were confined to trading only in Nagasaki, the Koreans, who were restricted to Tsushima, and the Dutch. The Dutch had arrived in 1609 and had at that time been restricted to a town called Hirado, in Kyushu. In contrast with the Jesuit Portuguese, the Dutch were exempt from the 1639 bans because they were not interested in spreading the word of God along with their trading, so instead they were relocated in 1641 to Dejima, the artificial island in Nagasaki.

Translating and interpreting in Nagasaki had previously been left up to merchants, officials and samurai who could speak foreign languages, but this changed when the Dutch arrived in Nagasaki. Government officials known as *oranda tsūji*<sup>23</sup> took over the market for translation and interpretation, acting among other things as custom officials at the same time (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470). Torikai lists three characteristics representative of the *oranda tsūji*:

1. “Their work entailed not only interpreting and translating but also administrative work in connection with diplomacy, trade, or anything related to foreign relations.”
2. “They were not freelancers but were local officials employed by the government, and as such their loyalty was to the central government, demonstrating that the notion of neutrality in interpreting is not a traditional one but is rather a modernistic concept.”

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<sup>21</sup> 欧文訓読, [European text, Japanese reading].

<sup>22</sup> 直訳, [Direct translation].

<sup>23</sup> オランダ通事, [Dutch interpreter(s)].

3. “As most professions in feudal Japan, *oranda tsūji* was hereditary and about twenty families held the position.”  
(2011, pp. 90-91)

Although *tsūji* was a prestigious and well-paid profession, not all practitioners had impeccable reputations. Theft of foreign goods happened sometimes, and it was not unheard of for *tsūji* to be criticized for poor linguistic abilities, sometimes even arrested for mistranslations. Thankfully, a decent *tsūji* training system culminating in a qualification exam had come into being by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Sugimoto, as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470).

What is interesting to note during this time is that many *tsūji* actually found new careers in what they learned through translation. The majority of the works translated were of a non-literary kind, with medical texts being high in priority and some of the first texts translated, aside from trade-related documents. As a result, “many *tsūji* became so well-versed in the field that they switched to full-time medical careers” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470). Works within the natural sciences and military science followed the medical texts, with the field of humanities standing as the last priority. The translations followed much the same pattern as previously with *kanbun* and *ōbun kundoku*, i.e. the word order was adapted and each word was supplemented for its Japanese equivalent. When a Japanese equivalent did not already exist, the *tsūji* often coined new expressions using already existing Chinese words (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470; Meldrum, 2009, p. 72).

As explained by Kondo and Wakabayashi (1998, p. 470), the more academically inclined *tsūji* “played an important role in teaching Dutch and introducing Western knowledge and culture.” Shizuki Tadao, for example, wrote several books on the Dutch language, parts of which deal with issues in translation, and he is “widely regarded as the father of physics in Japan” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470). Motoki Yoshinaga<sup>24</sup> introduced Copernican theory into Japan and was a translator of astronomical works. In 1792 he added a second volume to a translation he had undertaken, in which he explained his method of translation. Discussing translation problems and comparing Dutch and Japanese, “this was probably the first coherent essay in translation methods in Japan” (Sugimoto, as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470).

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<sup>24</sup> 本木良永, 1735 – 1794.

In 1811, the gifted young trainee *tsūji* Baba Saijūrō<sup>25</sup> was put in charge of what is probably the largest national translation project ever undertaken in Japan; translating the Dutch version of a French encyclopaedia, under the title *Kōsei Shinpen*<sup>26</sup>. Although never actually completed, it adopted an accessible style, with the occasional added explanatory commentary from Baba who, like many of his peers, believed that Japanese readers lacked sufficient familiarity with the West. The project was undertaken by a national bureau set up by the government that year specifically for the translation of ‘barbarian books’ (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470). As previously noted, it was not an uncommon practice for *tsūji* to compile dictionaries, and quite often these were based on already existing dictionaries in other languages. These compilations were helpful in compiling the largest dictionary produced during the Edo period<sup>27</sup>, the *Doeff Haruma*, so named after its creator and the head of the Dejima settlement, Hendrik Doeff<sup>28</sup>. The project took a quarter of a century, but when it was finished the colloquial style of the *Doeff Haruma*, “represented the birth of a new style of translation” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 470).

In 1808 a British ship pretending to be Dutch attacked the Dutch traders and residents in Dejima. The ensuing battle played out on Japanese territory, prompting the Tokugawa shogunate to order the *tsūji* to learn English, initially from the Dutch (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 471). Russian and French became languages of importance in Japan soon thereafter. Baba was the first translator to introduce Russian literature to the area and had earned a reputation as the first Russian linguist in Japan, no doubt in no small way due to his translating a Russian book on Jennerian vaccination in 1820, when smallpox was a serious problem in Japan. Since many Russian documents at the time were written in French, the increasing contact with Russia meant that the *tsūji* needed to master French as well, and they were sent to Doeff to learn. At this point, Kondo and Wakabayashi underline that very little literary translation was done during this period; rather the emphasis was “overwhelmingly on works that would help Japan learn from the West” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 471).

The end of Japan’s isolation in the 1850’s also brought with it the beginning of the end for the *tsūji*’s monopoly on interpreting and translation. When the first American consul in Japan met with Japanese officials, his English was first interpreted into Dutch by a Dutch-speaking American, and then relayed from Dutch into Japanese. This middle-step to Dutch

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<sup>25</sup> 馬場佐十郎, 1787 – 1822.

<sup>26</sup> 厚生新編, [New Volumes for the Public Welfare].

<sup>27</sup> 1602 – 1867.

<sup>28</sup> 1772 – 1835.

later became superfluous thanks to Englishman Sir Ernest Satow, an exceptional linguist and prominent interpreter who had studied Japanese (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 471).

### 3.5 Meiji

In 1853, the West came to Japan with the intent to stay. Commodore Matthew C. Perry, on behalf of the United States of America, sailed to Japan carrying communications from then president Millard Fillmore asking that Japan treat American castaways in a kinder manner than they were known for, that they allow for American supply depots en route to China, and that they end their self-imposed isolation and take up trading with the United States. Although these requests were officially made in the spirit of peace, since the president of the US had no authority to declare war on foreign nations by himself, it was known back in the States that the Commodore had come to Japan to deliver an ultimatum (Ekholm & Ottosson, 2010, pp. 190-191). After Japan agreed to the US' terms of trading, more countries came to sign similar contracts and Japan was no longer a self-isolated nation. As a result more Japanese were able to study foreign languages, abroad and domestically, and there was a massive influx of English, Russian, French, and German works. The first decade of translations in the Meiji period focused on translation for educational purposes, as Japan at the time was desperate to learn more about and catch up to their new friends. When the West came to their shores, Japan realized just how far behind the West they were in terms of industrial and technical advancements, an insight that according to Katō triggered a rush to learn more about the West (Maruyama & Katō, 1998, p. 6). As Shinkuma explains further; “translation was a means to learn about governing systems, economics, education and other social systems from the West” (as cited by Meldrum, 2009, p. 77).

Particularly important during this time, according to Yoshitake (as cited in Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 471), were the translations made by the renowned educator and interpreter Fukuzawa Yukichi<sup>29</sup>. These were particularly important as they served to introduce “the thought and institutions of the West, coined many words to express foreign concepts and laid the groundwork for the transition from the difficult Chinese style to a more accessible vernacular style.” The Meiji translators, like the Edo translators before them, made good use of their knowledge of Chinese to coin new terms as well as use already existing terms for new concepts. However, this practice was not without its drawbacks, as it “resulted in some

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<sup>29</sup> 福沢諭吉, 1834 – 1901.

distortions and a certain degree of incomprehensibility” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 471).

According to Yanabu (as cited in Furuno, 2005, p. 149), the coinage of expressions to fit Western ideas during the Meiji period was not entirely successful, as Japanese readers even today have not fully grasped the meanings of the terms coined at that time. Taking newly-translated concepts and coined expressions at face-value and accepting them as valid translations without fully comprehending their true meaning, this is what Yanabu refers to as the ‘Cassette Effect’, a theory that supposedly stands equally true today as it did during earlier time periods (Yanabu, as cited in Meldrum, n.d, pp. 12-13).

A contemporary of Fukuzawa, Nakamura Keiu<sup>30</sup>, translated Samuel Smiles’ book, *Self-Help*, in the early 1870’s. The translation contained notes explaining unfamiliar objects and customs, parts he deemed uninteresting or incomprehensible to Japanese readers had been simplified or simply omitted, and certain references to Christianity were removed altogether since it was still banned<sup>31</sup>. What is most interesting in the context, however, is that Nakamura essentially tried to turn the ST Japanese by attempting “to reproduce the word order, punctuation, pronouns and relative pronouns of the original, and this helped create a new style of translation” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 471).

The reason Nakamura’s translation stood out so much from the others of the time is that up to this point so called domesticated translations had been in majority. A domesticated translation is, as Meldrum explains it (2009, p. 78), an extreme kind of free translation. The translator employing the domesticated approach would strive to produce a translation as close to a TL original as possible. Changing foreign character and place names to sound more Japanese; conveying only the general meaning and stories; and eliminating parts deemed incomprehensible to Japanese as well as adapting the language style to fit the scope of the common Japanese reader – these are a few of the features tied to Japanese domesticated translation (Sato; Shinkuma, as cited in Meldrum, 2009, p. 78). Indeed, free translation seemed the custom in early Meiji Japan. The translator who worked on the political novels in the period of 1877-86 tended to focus on content rather than literary style, which not uncommonly meant omitting pieces the translator deemed uninteresting and similar liberties taken on the translator’s part with the original work (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 472).

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<sup>30</sup> 中村敬宇, 1832 – 1891.

<sup>31</sup> Until 1872.

Meiji also saw a staggering upswing in literary translation, although the quality of the translations tended to vary. Quite often the translation was bridged or partial, following the original plot roughly at best. But although these early translations were rendered into Chinese, they were also free and informal in their language, something that helped break down the traditional *kanbun* style and merge the Japanese, Chinese, and Western styles into something new (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 472).

### 3.6 Approaching the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

In the latter half of the 1880's, criticism against domestication translation began making itself known. The first occurrence seems to have been in 1885, when the translators of Bulwer Lytton's *Kenelm Chillingly* "emphasized the importance of carefully reproducing the forms of the original" (Sato; Shinkuma; Yoshitake, as cited by Meldrum, 2009, p.79). The translation of *Kenelm Chillingly* was as literal a reproduction as possible, utilizing idiomatic expressions and personal pronouns that were outside the Japanese custom. Because there was absolutely no attempts to adapt the form to Japanese, "this translation shaped not only later translations, but also Japanese style in general" (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 472).

The turn of the century brought reinforcements to the literal translation advocacy. During Meiji period quite a large number of the active translators were writers in their own right, who viewed translation as an art form meant to reproduce the 'flavour' of Western literary works (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 473). One of these, a well reputed translator of Russian literature named Futabatei Shimei<sup>32</sup>, was adamant about sticking to the original right down to the number of words and the punctuation, whilst at the same time keeping a colloquial style. Morita Shiken<sup>33</sup>, a writer/translator well-known for his translations of Victor Hugo's works, debated in his 1887 essay *Hon'yaku no Kokoro*<sup>34</sup> the question of how far a translator could, or in fact should, go in adapting the ST into readable Japanese. A believer in literal translation, he even advocated letting the Japanese language be actively influenced by the foreign (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 473). Morita even advocated literal translations of idiomatic expressions into Japanese rather than replacing them with local variants carrying the same sentiments, regardless of whether the translation made sense in Japanese or not (Meldrum, 2009, p.80).

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<sup>32</sup> 二葉亭四迷, 1864 – 1909.

<sup>33</sup> 森田思軒, 1861 – 1897.

<sup>34</sup> 翻訳の心得, [Hints on Translating].

The final noteworthy translation project before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the completed first translation of the Bible, in 1888. Although bible translation had been a more or less continuous project since Xavier first set foot in Japan, it took over 300 years to complete the first translation. And although in later years the New Testament was replaced and new translations were made public in the century to follow, “it is the Meiji version which has won the most praise for its literary merit” (Kondo & Wakabayashi, 1998, p. 473).

## 5 Discussion

With the conclusion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we have come to the end of our proposed timeline. To answer the question we set for ourselves in the beginning of this essay, we will now take a look at what similarities we can find between the evolution of translation theories in the West and in Japan up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first thing that comes to mind is actually the little things. How translators seemed to prefer placing their thoughts on translation within their work, as prefaces or commentary. How, provided we view *kanbun kundoku* as a translational act, both sides seem to have an inexplicable ca. 1000 years hole between their earliest recorded translations and the next generation of theorists. And somehow, both sides seem to have spent the better part of translation theory history spinning around in the same merry-go-round: The literal vs. free debate.

The earliest divide we can see is that during the first millennia of the Common Era. One cannot quite name it a difference in opinion since the Japanese were not consciously performing an act of translation in *kanbun kundoku*, but the approach to *kanbun* was definitely of the ST-oriented sort, while Cicero and Jerome among their peers advocated the superiority of the free translation.

Leaping over the next thousand years or so, we find ourselves in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The printing press has been invented, Martin Luther has publicized his East German translation of the Bible, and coincidentally the Bible is also the reason Japan is experiencing a surge in lexical items, since the Bible brought with it foreign concepts that had no equivalents in Japanese. The project of bible translation is undertaken in Japan, where Portuguese missionary João Rodrigues begins preaching the gospel of free translation.

Moving on to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the debate of free vs. literal is taken one step further in England. Cowley advocates the free to the extreme translation, which allows the translator such liberties with the work that he could surpass the creator of the original texts. Cowley's theories are not, however, without their opposites. Dryden, in a preface to one of his translations, states his opinions on translation and enters a third category, paraphrasing, to the debate. Coincidentally, this is also the century in which Japan's first 'true' translations come into being and with them the distinction between two types of translators; the literal, and the free. This is when the debate seems to truly take root in Japan, leaning in favour of free translations.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, very little has changed in the literal vs. free debate. Japan still favours the free translations, as does the West. Tytler advocates free translation with a TL-oriented approach, and Yoshinaga writes the first coherent essay on translation.

By the time we've reached the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, free translation in Japan seems to have taken a turn to the extreme. Domesticated translations are in abundance, with translators essentially creating new Japanese works based on the Western work they are translating. By the 1880's this tradition of translation more or less stops, however, and changes into a trend for thoroughly literal translation that holds strong until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. On the Western end, the debate is temporarily on hold as Schleiermacher explores his own alternative theories.

## **6 Conclusion**

Although this essay could serve a greater purpose if made on a larger scale, I find that I am quite content with my findings thus far. As far as the question of free vs. literal debate, there was either going to be a concurrence in attitudes or not, since there was a 50-50 chance of either. What was not expected, however, was that the concurrence would be so consistent. If one considers the differences in social and cultural attitudes between Japan and the West, it is interesting to note that they were in such agreement on something so obviously tied to culture.

We are, however, not without inkling as to where the developments might lead. When we left off at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the West was heading towards new thoughts on how to approach translation, and Japan was reverting back to the literal meaning of literal translation. This could be a precedent to what later has become known as 'Translationese', a

new direction in Japanese translation theory primarily, and is the result of a thoroughly literal translation, most commonly from English to Japanese<sup>35</sup>.

It is however evident that the culture of translation in Japan has led to significant influences on the Japanese language. The first and perhaps most noticeable is the adopting and adaptation of Chinese script to the Japanese language. Not only are Japan's own writing systems, the syllabaries *hiragana* and *katakana* derived from Chinese characters, but also a great number of contemporary Japanese lexical items have their origins in Chinese. Some centuries later, with the arrival of the Jesuits the Japanese vocabulary experienced another growth spurt as translators coined a variety of new words and expressions to create Japanese equivalents to biblical terms such as 'angel', 'demon', and 'God'.

It is, I confess, regrettable that I was not able to pursue this project further than the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as it would have been highly interesting to see if the split in attitudes we saw between Japan and the West at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century continues all the way to present day. The existence of translationese may suggest as much, but there are still a good 100 years between translation theory today and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Future projects will include a closer look at the last century and comparing the results to the findings in this essay.

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<sup>35</sup> For more information on Translationese and its characteristics, please consult the works of Yanabu Akira, and Yukari Meldrum.

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## Appendix A – A closer look at *Kanbun* and *Ōbun*.

An example of *kanbun*.

有三友曰華嚴和州人。世稱菩薩。曰體能。能州人。曰行滿。甲州人。仁聞於津波戶。窟繕寫法華。五智窟。修不動法。此四大德隨輔。覺滿後於豐後州山香鄉松尾村世尊院。入石壙唱泥洹。釋豐國百濟國人。史失其名。以國呼之。生資俊。邁慕風化。而來。是時佛法未周。寓豐後。民間焉用。明年夏四月。帝弗豫。語侍臣曰。朕思歸三審。鄉等議焉。守屋勝海奏曰。先皇以來。未有此義。何背本邦神奉異域。佛乎。蘇馬子曰。己承睿旨。何異謀之有。於是皇第穴德皇子。聞豐國法師之名。降書招請。入內說法。聖德太子建中山寺。于攝之。駒嶽落慶之日。請豐國為其導師。後任住持。釋那伽天竺人也。推古帝李年。遙踰支那。觀光日本。望豐後植田山。愕然嘆曰。奇哉。此山恰似西域驚峯。小嶺益非彼。一朵飛來。此邦乎。先此植田有大神。祐世那之豪翁也。一日。暇獵登山。薄暮。徜徉。偶見一處赫發異光。即往檢之。方得十一面大悲像。歡喜踊躍。乃擬草堂奉安焉。逮乎那伽卓錫。煽修佛事。創立伽藍。名曰飛來山靈山寺。以其肖聖境也。伽寓山數十年。檢德光。還燭四方。嚮焉。

Taken from [http://www.euskadiasia.com/NOTICIAS/kanbun\\_newcastleuniversity.html](http://www.euskadiasia.com/NOTICIAS/kanbun_newcastleuniversity.html) on June 4th 2012.

Meldrum (2009) summarizes the works of Mitani & Minemura by explaining that diacritic marks were placed on the lower left side of the character, to signal the inversion of adjacent characters, phrases containing more than two characters, inversion involving more than two phrases at a time, or a combination of character and phrase inversion. On the lower right side of characters, diacritic marks in *katakana* were added to indicate morphological information, such as grammatical inflections (pp. 56-57).

In regards to the *ōbun kundoku* (aka direct translation) that came into existence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Meldrum is clear to point out the difference between direct and literal translation. “The fundamental difference”, according to Meldrum (2009, p. 68), “between Japanese direct translation and literal translation is whether or not each word is dealt with or not.” In other words, direct translation meant producing a TT where the word order of the ST had been changed to fit Japanese syntax and where each and every word of the ST had a correspondent in the TT.

## Appendix B – General Timeline

57 BCE	The first recorded official contacts between China and Japan.
46 BCE	Cicero makes a statement in favour of free translation.
3 <sup>rd</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> century	Chinese script is adopted into Japan.
6 <sup>th</sup> century	Chinese scholars, monks, and merchants begin frequenting Japan on a larger scale, bringing with them a variety of literature.
7 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> century	Chinese scripts becomes more and more adapted to Japanese. <i>Kanbun kundoku</i> comes into existence, and Chinese characters gain multiple readings. The <i>Kana</i> syllabaries begin to develop.
1534	Martin Luther completes his East German translation of the Bible.
1540	Etienne Dolet publishes a manuscript complete with 5 principles of translation.
16 <sup>th</sup> century	William Tyndale and Etienne Dolet are burned at the stake for heresy.
1543	The Portuguese shipwreck.
1546	Anjirō sails with a Portuguese ship back to Malacca.
1549	Francis Xavier arrives in Kagoshima.
1577	João Rodrigues arrives in Japan, and later compiles <i>Arte da Lingoa de Iapam</i> .
17 <sup>th</sup> century	Nagasaki becomes a popular port for trading, marked by an influx in Chinese literature and a higher demand for Tang Chinese translators. This is also the time when the first true translations from classical and colloquial Chinese were produced.  Asai Ryōi advocates literal translation, whereas Ogyū Sorai prefers free translation.

17 <sup>th</sup> century	Cowley proposes the term ‘imitation’ for a new style of free translation.
1609	The Dutch arrive, restricted to Hirado, Kyushu.
1639	Seclusion orders are issued, banning traders, missionaries, and Christianity.
1641	The Dutch are relocated from Hirado to Dejima, the artificial island in Nagasaki. <i>Ōranda tsūji</i> now take over the market for translation and interpretation in Nagasaki.
1680	Dryden reduces all translation to three categories: Metaphrase, Paraphrase, and Imitation.
1713	Sorai publishes <i>Yakubun Sentei</i> , in which he recognizes <i>kanbun kundoku</i> as an act of translation.
Late 18 <sup>th</sup> century	Alexander Fraser Tytler defines ‘good translation’ by three general laws.
1792	Motoki Yoshinaga writes what is now credited to be the first coherent essay in translation methods in Japan.
Early 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Friedrich Schleiermacher makes the distinction between the commercial translator and the scholarly translator.
1808	A British ship pretending to be Dutch attacks the Dutch traders and residents of Dejima. As a result, English, along with Russian and French, now became important languages and translators were ordered to learn them.
1811	Baba Saijūrō is put in charge of the <i>Kōsei Shinpen</i> project.
1820	Baba translates a Russian book on Jennerian vaccination, at a time when smallpox was a big problem in Japan.
1833	Hendrick Doeff compiles the largest dictionary produced during the Edo period, the <i>Doeff Haruma</i> .

1853	Commodore Matthew C. Perry approaches Japan on behalf of the United States.
19 <sup>th</sup> century	The translations made by Fukuzawa Yukichi during this time period are now credited as having been particularly important as they served to introduce Western thought and institutions to Japan, coining many words to express foreign concepts.
1870's	Nakamura Keiu introduces the idea of liberally free translation, where the translator nips, tucks, adds and omits things in the TT, to his own liking.
1885	The translation of Bulwer Lytton's <i>Kenelm Chillingly</i> is published, in a completely literal style radically contrasting the domesticated translations of the time.
1888	The first translation of the Bible into Japanese is completed, after 300 years.
End of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Futabatei Shimei and Morita Shiken are both outspoken advocates of strongly literal translation.