How the Japanese Intelligentsia of the 19th Century Got Educated Based on Books in the Dutch Language (Rangaku)

Masako Nishikawa-Van Eester, Nishogakusha University, Japan

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Abstract

This study aims to rectify the perception that the Shogunate (the Japanese government of the 19th century) mainly received know-how about medical sciences through their information acquisition via the Dutch presence in Nagasaki. Studies of that time, based on the information acquired from the Dutch are referred to 'Rangaku' or Dutch Studies. When discussing 'Rangaku,' the advance of western medical sciences immediately comes to mind as this is the field that is nowadays remembered best for its big advance at that time. Based on the inventory of a cache of more than 1,000 books (discovered in 1954) purchased by the Shogunate and following up on the earlier related studies, this study reports on a simple statistical analysis demonstrating that medical related books and reading materials were merely ranked sixth among the genres while the top ranking was about military sciences. The study introduces three examples that are respectively from three different genres, all of which are significant in the development of the modern Japanese nation.

Keywords: Dutch Studies, Dutch Learning, *Rangaku*, 19th Century, Japan, Medical Sciences, Education



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Introduction

Japan is a country which has been eagerly trying to adopt new knowledge and information from abroad throughout its history (Nishikawa-Van Eester, 2014). Before the Edo era (1603 – 1868), Chinese¹ (Classical Chinese, or *Kan-bun*) was the main language through which the Japanese used to acquire novel cultures and technologies (Shimizu, 2010). It was the language Japan needed as a tool for academic people to access fresh information.

Up till the arrival of the Dutch language in the 17th century, Chinese was still the dominant foreign language for the intellectual and aristocracy (Montgomery, 2000), and Gottliebe reported that "educated" meant, for a long time, being able to read Classical Chinese (kan-bun) and write numerous Chinese characters (kan-ji) (2005). In the 18th and 19th century, wealthy merchants joined the intelligentsia, enjoying cultural and academic activities (Nishikawa-Van Eester, 2014). This is also related to the historical and social background, being a time in which Japan had its longest period of relative peace across the nation, mainly because of the governmental polices by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the mid-eighteenth century (Jackson, 2016).

In 1600, a Dutch ship named "Liefde" (meaning "love" in English) reached Japan. The Dutch arrived at the end of the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573 – 1603), when the Spanish and the Portuguese had already established relationships with Japan. However, at the beginning of the Edo era (period), the Spanish and the Portuguese were banned because of their ties with the Christian mission, regarded by the central government as a liability to their rule. After its independence of Spain in 1648, the Netherlands became powerful and it became the only European power that got permission to trade with Japan (Nishikawa-Van Eester, 2019). Except for traditional Chinese Studies (kan-bun), Dutch became the first and essential contact language for Japan to engage with the rest of the world.

Rangaku, or Dutch Studies (Dutch Learning) in the 18th – 19th century, and its general perception today

The Netherlands was the only western country that was allowed to operate in Japan during the period of *Sakoku* (isolation policy, literally meaning 'Closure of Country' by the government in the Edo era².) The relationship further grew, from simple importing and exporting goods into exchanging knowledge, and 'Dutch Studies' began under the reign of the eighth Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune, who relaxed the Book Ban in 1720 and encouraged to import Dutch books as information source, still excluding the ones related to Christianity (Japan-Netherlands Exchange in the Edo period, National Diet Library).

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¹ According to Shimizu, the Classical Chinese writing system had been already conveyed to Japan by the 4th – 5th century.

² Sakoku means 'national isolation' (1639 – 1853). "The 1630s also marked an important dividing line in foreign relations with the issuance of a series of directives enforcing a policy of national seclusion, later called sakoku (literally, "closed country"). The seeds of this policy had been sown in trade control and in measures against Christianity by the Nobunaga and Hideyoshi regimes. Hideyoshi, although strongly attracted to trade as a source of national wealth and military strength, had issued an order for the exclusion of the missionaries. Ieyasu, even more strongly attracted by profits, made efforts to trade not only with the Portuguese Roman Catholics but also with Protestant Holland and England, protecting trade with the southern regions by granting special licenses, or shuin-jō ("red-seal license"), to oceangoing merchant ships. But Ieyasu's encouragement of trade was aimed at establishing a bakufu trade monopoly... The Dutch and the Chinese were allowed to trade as before, although this trade was restricted and confined to the island of Dejima at Nagasaki". https://www.britannica.com/topic/sakoku

Today, the word 'Rangaku' is strongly associated with the arrival of a totally new type of medicinal sciences, which is regarded as the starting point of modern western medicine in Japan. This is because of the publication of 'Kaitai-Shinsho' translated from Dutch into Japanese by Ryotaku Maeno and Gan-paku Sugita in 1774 (See Appendix A). This was originally written in German as 'Anatomische Tabellen' by Kulmus (1689 – 1745), and later translated into Dutch as 'Ontleedkundige Tafelen' by Dicten in 1722 and 1732³.

Sakai reported, in 'Journal of the Japanese Society of Medical History' in 2010, as below:

The great impact of European medicine was furthered by the publication of "Kaitai Shinsho" (1774), meaning "new book of anatomy", which was a translation of the Dutch book on anatomy "Ontleekundige tafelen" (1734), originally written in German by Johann Adam Kulmus (1689–1745) with title of "Anatomische Tabellen" in 1722. The project of translation had been undertaken by Gempaku Sugita (1733–1817) and Ryōtaku Maeno (1723–1803), when they observed dissection of a female body after execution in 1771 at Kotsugahara in Edo (today called Tokyo). After "Kaitai Shinsho", Japanese doctors frequently attended dissections of executed bodies, and observed precisely the interiors of the cadavers.

We can read a series of episodes concerning the birth of 'Kaitai-Shinsho' as an epoch-making incident in official high school textbooks for the class of Japanese history. (See the figure below.) As seen on the page, this picture in the right middle gives high school students a tremendous visual impact regarding 'Kaitai-Shinsho'.



Figure 1: Japanese History B (Senior High) by Yamakawa Shuppansha Ltd (Publisher), 2017

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³ Maeno and Sugita translated the 1732 version. https://www.kohjinkai.or.jp/kurakata/txt/01.html

Although *Rangaku* brought a large volume and of quality knowledge to Japan in diverse fields, we tend to remember just this picture and the name 'Kaitai-Shinsho' to go with it, and memory of the rest of *Rangaku* fades away.

Real Rangaku

In 1954, a number of old books, mostly written in Dutch, were coincidentally discovered at a library in Tokyo. It was revealed that those piles of books were purchased by the Shogunate (The Tokugawa administration) in the 19th century, or earlier. A project was launched to classify the books and compile a report. The work resulted in a listing of the collection (See Figure 2).

PREFACE

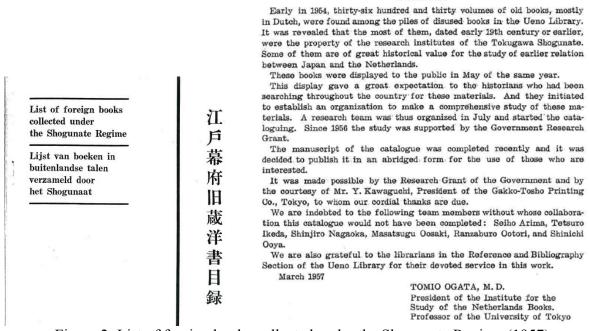


Figure 2: List of foreign books collected under the Shogunate Regime (1957).

This list shows how diverse the fields of the books are, which is far beyond just medical knowledge. In this study, we examined the said list by categorizing mentioned books as much as possible (see Figure 3):

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Nieuw handwoordenboek voor de spelling der Nederduitsche taal. Zalt-Bommel, 1846. 240 p. 14\times12 cm. (N) (a-5) (3480)
            Nieuw Hollandsch-Fransch en Fransch-Hollandsch woordenboek. 2de druk, Leiden, n. d. 525 p. 15 \times 12 cm. (T) (760) (761)
                                                                                                                                                                     Bosch, D. W.

Geschied- en aardrijkskundige beschrijving van Nederlands Oosten West-Indische bezittingen. 2de druk, Amsterdam, 1866, 200 p.

17 v 10 cm (N) (2483-2485) (3154)
             Nieuw woordenboek der Nederduitsche en Engelsche taal. 4de
druk. Nijmegen, 1851. 1254 p. 17×12 cm. (B) (Kana) (92)
            Opstellen met fouten, inzonderheid tegen de spelling der Nederlandsche taal. Zutphen, 1854. 88 p. 19×12 cm. (N) (2556) (2557) (3424)
                                                                                                                                                                     Bosch, J. van den
Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika. 's Gravenhage, Amsterdam, 1818. 309 p. 23×14 cm. (B) (601)
           Uitspraak der letters in de Nederlandsche taal. Zutphen, 1854. 60 p. 19 \times 12 cm. (N) (2530-2532) (3419)
                                                                                                                                                                     Bosch, W.

De dysenteria tropica. 's Gravenhage, 1844. 335 p. 22×14 cm
(N) (a-5) (1506)
           Vollständiges Deutsch-Holländisches und Holländisch-Deutsches
Taschenwörterbuch. 1 theil: Deutsch-Holländisch. Leyden, 1756.
958 p. 14×11 cm. (Sya) (827)

        Bosscha, H. C.
        Bedenkingen
        tegen
        de wijze
        van
        bouwen
        van
        pakhuizen.

        Deventer, 1856. 40 p. 23×14 cm.
        (N)
        (2184) (2777) (3220)

 Booms, P. G.

Veldtogt van het Fransch-Afrikaansche leger tegen Klein-
Kabylie in de eerste helft van 1851. 's Hertogenbosch, 1852.

193 p. 23×13 cm. (N) (a-4) (a-5) (405 (1857)
                                                                                                                                                                     Bosscha, J. Blikken in het leven der natuur. Leeuwarden, 1860. 284 p. 19 × 11 cm. (K) (691)
           Verhandeling over het schot der draagbare vuurwapens. 's
Hertogenbosch, 1855, 74 p. 17×11 cm. (N)
(2277) (2561) (2590) (2690) (3832)
                                                                                                                                                                              Het leven van Willem den Tweede; Koning der Nederlanden ex Groothertog van Luxemberg. 2de druk. Amsterdam, 1854. 777 p. 23\times15 cm. (N) (2051)
           De stereoscoop en zijne verschillende inrichtingen. Wageningen,
1855. 83 p. 22×14 cm. (N) (1804) (2778)
                                                                                                                                                                              Schets der algemeene geschiedenis en van die des Vaderlands. 11 de druk. Breda, 1858. 269 p. 23 \times 13 cm. (B) (a-4) (388)
Borski, G. van Wieringhen

Handleiding voor de praktische oefening in de zinsontleding;
naar de 2., verb. en verm. uitg. van het werk van den Hoogleeraar
T. Roorda: Over de deelen der rede en de rede-ontleiding. Delft,
1866. 86 p. 23×14 dm. (B) (N) (a-6) (126) (127)
                                                                                                                                                                     Bottiger

Algemeene geschiedenis voor school en huisgezin, vertaald door

W. C. Mauve. [←Ger.] 1* gedeelte. Utrecht, 1856, 237 p. 18×12 cm.

(N) (1108) (2693)
                                                                                                                                                                   Boutan, A.

Leerboek der natuurkunde en van hare voornaamste toepassingen, vertaald door Dr. J. Bosscha, [←Fr.] 4 dln, 2de druk.

Leiden, 1887–1870. 23×15 cm. (R)

(995–694). (8840–8642). (8877). (8830). (8831)
Bosch, D. van den
         De stommachine van lage drukking voor vaartuigen. Amsterdam, 1845. 16 p. 22×14 cm. (N)
(2071) (2183) (2764) (2766) (2767) (2785) (3627)
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Figure 3: List of foreign books collected under the Shogunate Regime (1957), pp. 8-9.

Simple statistical analysis

First of all, the languages used in the collection were sorted out. Among 1,062 books, 846 were written in Dutch, and 134, translated into Dutch from other languages. All the results are as below:

Language used			
number of books	%	language	
846	80	Dutch	
134	13	Dutch (translated into Dutch)	
44	4	English	
23	2	French	
7	1	German	
2	0	Latin	
6	1	Could not be decided from the title	

Table 1: Languages used in 'List of foreign books collected under the Shogunate Regime'

We read in Ogata's remarks that most of the discovered books were in Dutch, and indeed, 93% (80 + 13) of the whole collection was in the Dutch language.

Then, in a second phase, it was checked what types of books and documents were in the collection (See Table 2 below).

Type of publication				
number of books	%	kind		
776	73	book		
72	7	dictionary		
62	6	report / set of rules		
56	5	schoolbook (to be used in class)		
31	3	almanac		
22	2	magazine		
16	2	paper		
12	1	chart / graph		
10	1	list		
4	0	map		
1	0	diary		

Table 2: Types of publication in 'List of foreign books collected under the Shogunate Regime'

As seen in the table, most of the publications were categorized in the section of books and dictionaries, which makes 80% together. After that, reports, rulebooks, regulations, and textbooks for class follow.

Finally, categorization of topics was conducted. (See Table 3 below).

<u>TOPIC</u>		
157	military sciences	
127	language learning	
116	geography / travel	
114	engineering	
63	mathematics	
60	medical sciences	
58	maritime sciences (incl. ship building)	
47	nature / natural sciences	
46	history	
35	chemistry	
29	topic could not be decided	
28	reader / literature	
25	law	
24	general	

<u>TOPIC</u>			
23	astronomy		
19	botany / agriculture		
19	didactics		
14	economics / commerce		
10	crafts		
9	people (biographies)		
7	administration		
6	physics		
6	society / sociology		
5	other topics		
5	religion / morality		
4	biology		
4	philosophy		
2	cooking / housekeeping		

Table 3: Topics dealt with in 'List of foreign books collected under the Shogunate Regime'

In first place, we see 157 books on military sciences and 127 on language learning. It is noteworthy that the categorization of medical sciences (n = 60) appears only after the sections of engineering and mathematics.

Three examples

In the previous section, we saw that

- 1. Dutch is used in most publications
- 2. most publications are books
- 3. 'military sciences,' 'language learning,' and 'geography/travel' are the most dealt with topics
- 4. 'medical sciences' comes only in the sixth place.

Then, what is actually described in those books? What are those books about? Here three examples are presented, one in the field of military sciences, one in the field of geography, and one in the field of didactics.

Example 1: 'Oorlogs-Vuurpijlen' (1829) from the field of military sciences (Appendix B). This is written by a Dutch military engineering officer describing the history and use of 'oorlogs-vuurpijlen'.

There is no modern word that is the exact equivalent: 'oorlog' = 'war', 's' = genitive-indicator, 'vuur' = 'fire', 'pijl' = 'arrow', 'en' = plural-indicator.

This is a treatise about the early use of rockets (as in Rocket-Propelled Grenade), including calculations regarding the speed and the targeted location based on the elevation-angle of the launcher etc.

Example 2: 'Algemeene Geographie of Beschryving des Geheelen Aardryks' (1769) from the field of geography (Appendix C).

This book is volume 2 of a 6-volume series on geography. This volume deals with Great Britain, Ireland and the Netherlands.

The meaning of the title: 'Algemeene' = 'General', 'Geographie' = 'Geography', 'of' = 'or', 'Beschryving' = 'Description', 'des' = genitive-case version of definite article, 'Aardryk' = 'Earth', 's' = genitive-indicator

Example 3: 'Handleiding bij het Zangonderwijs in de Lagere Scholen' (1854) from the field of didactics (Appendix D).

This book is describing theory and teaching methods for the use of music teachers in elementary schools.

The meaning of the title: 'Handleiding' = 'Manual', 'bij' = 'for', 'het Zangonderwijs' = 'the Teaching of Singing', "de Lagere Scholen" = "the Elementary Schools"

Discussion

As observed and analyzed, the 'Three examples' demonstrate that the books cover very interesting and unique fields, not only 'medical sciences.' For instance, the first case is a very clear example of a typical document that is very different from the 'medical sciences' books that are assumed by the general public to be the main topic of *Rangaku*.

The other two are unique as well. the second book offered Japan at the time, a closed country, significant geographical, and furthermore, geopolitical information regarding Great Britain,

Ireland, and the Netherlands in Europe. The other books in the series covered other areas of importance. Japan was in the state of so-called 'Sturm und Drang' toward the end of the Edo era, which made the government seriously consider reconstructing or changing the entire national system.

The third one was obviously intended for music teachers of European (western) music which is fundamentally different from that of Japan. In 1872, the Ministry of Education of the new (Meiji) government (after the Edo era) announced to implement 'singing songs' as an official school subject nationwide because of its supposed effectiveness in raising Japanese people's awareness for patriotism as taught in a German pedagogical theory (Ishida, 2007).

The common denominators shared by those three books are that they offered Japan of the 19th century valuable information, and that the information was practical and immediately useful. Japan went through one of the major changes as a nation in its history during the period of the end of the Edo era and the beginning of the Meiji. When a nation tries to change itself, it wants and needs some measures that are immediately effective. *Rangaku* was, in that sense, what they used as a major tool to later open the country.

Conclusion

It is interesting to see that the Shogunate purchased such a huge collection of *Rangaku* books covering a wide range of fields offering Japan cutting-edge information, knowledge, culture, and technologies of that time. It is not just about medicine (as most of us remember as the result of *Rangaku*), but we can find many more profound insights.

The study of the mentioned list showed us the variety of books that were imported. The current worldwide drive to digitize old books (partially thanks to Google's efforts) helps us as researchers to also access the contents of these books without traveling to remote or secluded libraries.

Appendices

Appendix A

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'Kaitai-shinsho' by Maeno and Sugita, published in 1774 (National Diet Library)





Appendix B (Digitized by Google)

Oorlogs-Vuurpijlen (Military)

STELSEL

DER

OORLOGS-YUURPIILEM.

NAAR

CONGREVE, MONTGÉRY EN ANDEREN;

VOORZIEN VAN EEN AANHANGSEL OVER HET

Perkinsche Stoom-Geschut.

Met Platen en Tabellen.

Het Hoogduitsche van den Generaal

J. G. VON HOYER

Omgewerkt, nitgebreid en met aanteekeningen verrijkt,

J. G. W. MERKES,

те 's GRAVENHAGE, вы А. К. L. О. О. Т. S. 1829. Voor de stielheid bij eene elevatie van 30° is: $v = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{4} b^{c} \log^{2} \frac{am}{am-ct} + (\frac{1}{2} b \log \frac{am}{am-ct} - 2 gt)^{2} \end{cases}^{\frac{1}{2}} \dots (7)$ en voor eene elevatie van 60° $v = \left\{ (\frac{1}{4} b^{2} \log^{2} \frac{am}{am-ct}) + (\frac{1/3}{2} b \log \frac{am}{am-ct} - 2 gt)^{2} \right\}^{\frac{1}{2}} \dots (8)$ wijl voor den straal = 1, de sin $A = \sin 30^{\circ} = \cos 60^{\circ} = \frac{1}{2}$; en cos $30^{\circ} = \sin 60^{\circ} = (\frac{3}{4})^{\frac{1}{2}} = \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{3}$.

Om de geheele worpsverheid des vuurpijls te berekenen, wanneer de elevatiehoek en de durig der drijfsas gegeven zijn, zoo merke men op, dat het eerste deel x = z cos A is en het tweede deel de abscis eener parabool, welke den vuurpijl doorloopt, wanneer de drijfsas verteerd is: om dus deze kromme te bepalen, moet de snelheid des pijls op dezen oogenblik en de rigting bekend zijn. De eerste hebben wij reeds gevonden; terwijl de sinus van den hoek welke deze rigting met den horizont maakt = $\frac{v}{v}$ cos A is; alzoo de sinus en cosinus dezes hoeks door i en k voorstellende en u de snelheid des vuurpijls in de paraboolvormige tak der baan, dan vindt men voor de geheele worpsverheid, na zekeren tijd t, $P = \frac{ku}{vg} \left(\frac{i^2u^2}{4g} + z \sin A \cdot gt^2\right)^{\frac{v}{2}} + \frac{i}{2g} + z \cos A$ (9)

Geographie (Geography)

ALGEMEENE GEOGRAPHIE,

BESCHRYVING DES GEHEELEN

AARDRYKS;

Eerst ontworpen en merklyk voortgezet door den bero

tran in het Noderduitsch Vertaald, met Invoeging van al het Merkwaardige van den Franfchen Druk. Vervolgens met eene gantsch nieuwe Befchryving der Nederlanden en doorgaans inet nieuwe Anmerkingen verrykt, door den Heer W. A. B. A. C. H. I. E. N. E. Toen Predikant te Kullenburg, than Hoogheraar in de Sterre- en Aardykkkunde en Predikant te Maufricht.

Ea nu on nieuw over het geheel verheterd, vermeerderd, tot den tegenwoordigen Tyd voorregezet, en met eene Algemeene Inleiding tot de Ardrigksbefchryving voorzien, door ERNST WILLEM CRAMERUS.

een Stel LANDKAARTEN van een gantsch nieuw Ontwerp. T W E E D E D E E L,
Bevattende GROOT-BRITANJE, IERLAND
en de NEDERLANDEN.

TE AMSTELDAM, By PIETER MEIJER, op den Dam.
MDCCLXIX.

GROOT-BRITANJE bestond, voorheen, ook uit twee byzondere Koningryken, Engeland en Schotland, insgelyks jeder zyn byzonder. Parlement hebbende; maar, onder de Regering van Koningin Anna, zyn zy, in den jare 1706., tot één Koning-ryk gebragt, onder den naam GROOT-BRITAN-Het Parlement van Schotland werd aan dat van Engeland ingelyfd, waardoor de byzondere Regering van Schotland is opgehouden: gelyk wy in vervolg breder zullen melden.

Het Koningryk GROOT-BRITANJE bestaat dan tegenwoordig uit ENGELAND en SCHOT-LAND, noemende de Engelschen, ter onderscheiding, het eerste ZUID- en het laatste NOORD-BRITANJE.

Appendix D (Digitized by Google)

Didactics (Music - Singing)

HANDLEIDING

ZANGONDERWIJS

LAGERE SCHOLEN:

DOOR

B. BRUGSMA



2º CURSUS.

1. Toepasfing van het dus ver geleerde op het Notenstelsel.

1. Kennis van de noten/deverschillende sleutels en deschalen voor de verschillende toonsoorten in de Harde- of Duur- klankladder.





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Contact email: masako.nishikawa@gol.com