

Making Knowledge Move: translation and the travel of technical textbooks in Meiji-era Japan (1868-1894)

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ABSTRACT

Engineering education in Britain and Japan share a common genealogy. The successful introduction of ‘engineering science’ in British universities owes much to the nous of W. J. M. Rankine, the 2nd Regius Professor (1855-1872) of Civil Engineering and Mechanics at the University of Glasgow. Rankine created an academic niche to ensure the viability of the discipline and staked out its contours through publication of four highly successful manuals, which became the canon of the field. His protégé, Henry Dyer, was hired by the Meiji government in 1872 to establish a curriculum to train a generation of modern Japanese engineers. The institution headed by Dyer catered to an elite: it was staffed by highly paid foreign teachers who taught in English and who used textbooks identical to those in Britain. However, beyond the confines of this institution, a technical literary field developed to service an audience requiring materials in Japanese. Initially, a significant number of these were translations from English, but original works in Japanese soon came to dominate. This study charts the development of a technical literary field in Japan, and explores how textbooks there came to have such divergent characters despite its historical links with Britain.

In this study, textbooks used to train technical workers in mid-nineteenth century Britain and Meiji Japan (1868-1894) are analysed. However, the textbooks are viewed not only as texts, but also as *books*. That is, they are regarded as socio-material objects around which a range of socialised practices converge. Peritexts, such as frontispieces, colophons, prefaces, advertisements, as well as typography and print technology, are scrutinised to understand how publishers, translators, authors and readers engaged with works; and texts are analysed to identify the strategies adopted by Japanese authors and translators to introduce new knowledge to sometimes uninitiated audiences.

The thesis starts by exploring the technical literary field that developed in Britain to support introduction of engineering in the academy. It then considers how the travel of these English technical manuals shaped conditions for the emergence of a Japanese technical literary field, and analyses how authors and translators enabled the circulation of knowledge. Thereafter, it traces the expansion of the technical literary field as the Meiji era progressed, considering how contextual changes affected the translation and circulation of technical knowledge.

This research sheds new light on the role of translators in the travel of technical knowledge by underscoring their intellectual creativity and their adaptability to the shifting conditions under which they worked. It adopts a novel approach that combines theoretical and methodological insights from book history, the history of science and translation studies, which together provide the tools to navigate the myriad complexities of technical translation in modern Japan.

KEYWORDS: book history, Meiji Japan, paratext, technical translation.

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