

**TRANSLATING THE OTHER CONSTRUCTING  
THE SELF**

**Japanese premodern encyclopedias and the transculturality of  
knowledge**

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***Abstract:** In its sublimated and highly stylized premodernity as a closed country, Japan reached an impressive level of assimilation and conversion of foreign cultural and technological assets, originating primarily from the Chinese mainland. However, by the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the greatest achievements of the school of the so-called rangaku-sha (scholars of Dutch studies, residing mainly in Nagasaki) became the translation process of important Western books tackling the problematic of organizing and systemizing Western knowledge which was on the brink of an unprecedented explosion due to the industrial and technological development. This paper analyzes two early Japanese encyclopedias, both emerged as translations: one of Chinese origins (Wakan sansai zue, 1712) and one of French origins, transported to Japan via Dutch merchants arriving at Dejima (Kôsei shinpen, 1811-1840). Thus, oscillating between original Chinese models and subsequent Western archetypes, along the history, Japanese encyclopedias seem to challenge such asymmetrical notions as identity and alterity through new formulations of ideas flows and their transformational nature: Emerging knowledge as means of historical power metamorphoses*

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*through educational implementation into real – political as well as economic – power and reveals encyclopedic practice in Japan's case as one of the secret weapons in the course of its astonishingly fast modernization and its miraculous postwar resurrection.*

**Keywords:** *encyclopedias, pre-modern Japan, Wakan sansai zue, Kôsei shinpen, encyclopedic practice in Japan*

## **1. Introduction: coping with the other**

Michel Foucault writes at the beginning of his seminal study *Les Mots et les choses* (Foucault 1966:7):

Ce livre a son lieu de naissance dans un texte de Borges. Dans le rire qui secoue à sa lecture, toutes les familiarités de la pensée – de la nôtre: de celle qui a notre âge et notre géographie –, ébranlant toutes les surfaces ordonnées et tous les plans qui assagissent pour nous le foisonnement des êtres, faisant vaciller et inquiétant pour longtemps notre pratique millénaire du Même et de l'Autre. Ce texte cite a une «certaine encyclopédie chinoise» où il est écrit que les animaux se divisent en: a) appartenant à l'Empereur, b) embaumés, c) apprivoisés, d) cochons de lait, e) sirènes, f) fabuleux, g) chiens en liberté, h) inclus dans la présente classification, i) qui s'agitent comme des fous, j) innombrables, k) dessinés avec un pinceau très fin en poils de chameau, l) et caetera, m) qui viennent de casser la cruche, n) qui de loin semblent des mouches». Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxinomie, ce qu'on rejoint d'un bond, ce qui, à la faveur de l'apologue, nous est indiqué

comme le charme exotique d'une autre pensée, c'est la limite de la nôtre: l'impossibilité nue de penser cela.

While it is unclear what specific Chinese encyclopedia both Borges and Foucault refer to, it is important to note the fact that Foucault uses the bizarre taxonomy mode quoted as a means to highlight the different paradigms of knowledge organization in different cultures and at different points in time. Backing on this seminal study of the paradoxes and contradictions of knowledge administration across times and spaces, the current paper's main goal is to underline the paradigm shift from Chinese to Western models in Japanese premodern encyclopedias, in a comparative approach. Accordingly, two encyclopedias are taken into account as emblematic archetypes of this process: *Wakan sansei zue* and *Kôsei shinpen*, which both marked at the time of their release turning points in the history of ideas and knowledge administration in Japan. Within the comparative analysis, the two works are regarded both in their intrinsic dimension as containers of knowledge and in their extrinsic aspects in a wider historical-geographical context referring to cultural orientation on a specific social background while including economic developments and political on-goings.

A further dimension of these proto-encyclopedias functioning as socio-cultural phenomena is the relationship between culture and power, as well as the asymmetries between these two parameters, affecting illustrations and (auto-)biographical writing as means to express the self and the other in a coherent, convincing manner. In the same way as works of consumption literature reflect the tensions between production processes and readership, on the one side, and publisher and bureaucrats, on the other side, encyclopedias as containers and manipulators of historical knowledge in a close country as Japan used to be from 1602 until

1686 refer to themselves as sources of power, overcoming the status of cultural products and turning into important social agents in the making of historicities between Japan and China and between Japan and the West. Thus, the historical flow of encyclopedic knowledge within Asia and between Europe and Asia as concretized in Japan's case includes transcultural discursive elements deeply implemented in the narrative structures of Japanese encyclopedias as "knowledge depositors and manipulators" (as stated by Mr Saitô Fumio, editor of the Heibonsha World Encyclopedia, in March 2010). In this train of thoughts, the following lines analyze the process of the emergence of the self as an ideological construction (on the basis of Louis Althusser's concept of ideology; Althusser 1976:34) while translating and internalizing the "Great Other" represented in Chinese and Western encyclopedias imported to Japan and translated into Japanese before the Meiji Restoration. Hereby, Julia Kristeva's 'semiotic' and 'symbolic' concepts in the process of identity formation as discourse is of great help (Kristeva 1974:144): within the ongoing process of maturing identity awareness in the "symbolical order" – that is, the order of the individual tackling the problematic of its inner and outer world(s) –, constant remembrances of the "semiotic order" – that is, the infant worldview being confronted with realities not yet understandable or hidden – erupt and disturb the self searching for balanced freedom.

I approach the research on encyclopedias anthropologically, regarding them in the larger context of their emergence and development rather than as linguistic artifacts. Anthropologically grounded, there are two levels of encyclopedic practice to be taken into account in the forthcoming analysis – as form and as contents, underlying five paradigms of theoretical thinking related to encyclopedias:

1. Encyclopedias exist and flourish in the stress ratio between media and message as these terms were defined and implemented by Marshall McLuhan (1962:14): on the one hand, they conserve and preserve knowledge as given in a certain region at a certain moment in time, whereas they are also “living, printed witness” of the state of knowledge in that particular context, referring to what their producers considered to be important in their specific worldview.

2. Encyclopedias exist traditionally as knowledge containers and as means of knowledge organization, systematization, transmission and preservation, as the analysts Hans Jörg Sandkühler (2009:68), Michel Foucault (1969:65) and Firtz Machlup (1984:135) see them. The encyclopedic principle does not appear, in this perspective, as a compensation for the loss of a once-upon-a-time homogeneous world due to the advent of the pluralism, but rather as the renewal of *conditio humana*, adapting itself to current upheavals and turnovers.

3. Zygmunt Bauman (1993:26) and Mike Featherstone (1995:21) employ the term ‘encyclopedia’ as instruments of knowledge transfer, translation and transgression: thus, ‘encyclopedia’ is one of those cultural forms in which several possible worlds co-exist under the hegemony of pluralism, so that the apparently uncontrollable variety is reduced to a fascinating unity overcoming the domination of the individual.

4. A further knowledge paradigm appears in the context of [over]specialized knowledge, as Bauman (1993:34) puts it. Manuel Castells (1997:287) refers to encyclopedias as timely conceptions, while in Slavoj Žižek’s writings they are subject of gendered readings to reflect and enforce the male-female asymmetries (Žižek 1998:154). However, in the stress ratio between being represented and representing, as Joy Hendry (2000:61) puts it, encyclopedias appear as compound knowledge and

socialized form of knowledge on the marketed world of knowledge display and knowledge control.

5. Finally, within the manifold human universe, the 'encyclopedia' takes over the preservation of the concepts to create orientation from the past to the future. Indeed, the 'encyclopedia' does not simply reflect the present while perpetuating the past, but rather establishes the pillars for the morrow's worlds. Thus, complex relations of submission (*Unterwerfung*) and repression (*Unterdrückung*) in Foucault's parlance (Foucault 1969:78) as well as of knowledge inversion and subversion as Yoshimi Shun'ya (2006:83) refers them, emerge, simultaneously designating four paradigms of encyclopedic contents:

(ア) Firstly, there is the balance between self (identity) and other (alterity), as Judith Butler (1990:72) and Julia Kristeva (1974:142) point out in the textual analysis of literary forms.

(イ) Secondly, there is the evolution experienced by cultural assets in late-modern societies from ethics to aesthetics and from imagination to ideology, as to be dealt with in writings by Terry Eagleton (1990:65).

(ウ) Thirdly, there is the tension between text as discursive formation and image as non-discursive representation, as Kristeva (1974:227) refers in her analyses of contemporary cultural phenomena.

(エ) Fourthly, there is the narrative level of the printed materials and the meta-narrative level of the sources, institutions, authors, spatio-temporal contexts, readerships, as to be found in Geertz's, Kristeva's and Foucault's analytics of power relationships in times of cultural reproduction (Foucault 1969:132, Geertz 1973:43, Kristeva 1974:208).

Accordingly, the epistemic conditions necessary for the success of transculturality as mediated by encyclopedias, that is, the recognition of the diversity of cultures as well as the co-existence of apparently incommensurable cultures at both the macro-level of society and the micro-level of individual, presuppose addressing transculturality while sketching a conception of culture by way of an epistemological perspective through which transcultural understanding and action becomes possible. Basic premises in this endeavor are the following points (Sandkühler 2002:83):

(a) Pluralism is a fact of the modern world; there is no rationally sustainable way around it.

(b) This factual pluralism, perceived primarily as the expression of a plurality of ethical, social and political attitudes, is based on a dimension of freedom which realizes itself epistemologically and which must be investigated epistemologically.

(c) This freedom expresses itself in a diversity of cultures of knowledge such as, for example, art, philosophy and science which are equally legitimate. None of these cultures may claim superiority over others through recourse to hierarchical forms of rationality.

(d) Cultures of knowledge are molded by beliefs that compete with one another. This competition engenders the problem of relativism.

(e) Pluralism and relativism present philosophers with the task of formulating anew their claims to rationality.

In this train of thoughts, encyclopedias appear as practical manifestations of philosophy, taking into account the plurality of thoughts and ways of life, evolving into an epistemic democracy. They do it sincerely, objectively, as a constructive critique of any hegemonic claims of individual cultures of knowledge (see Sandkühler 2002:83). Thus, the current study offers, after a short survey on the encyclopedic situation in Japan until the release of *Wakan sansei zue* and *Kôsei shinpen*, detailed presentations of these two works which highlight the main characteristics of the genre in Edo-Japan (1603-1868). Crucial issues within the dynamically changing ideological and aesthetical orientation of the Japanese intellectuals' views of knowledge organization and taxonomic system(s) from Chinese models to Western standards emerge, anticipating – maybe subliminally – the forthcoming opening of the country by mid-1800. In this concern, an important departing point is marked by the words of the distinguished expert Sugimoto Tsutomu, Japanese linguist and specialist in *rangaku* (Netherlands studies) of international fame, as quoted below:

Japanese intellectuals in Edo-Japan belonged to the samurai class and as such didn't have to work in order to make a living. As there were hardly any wars, they also didn't have to fight to prove their status. Consequently, they had very much time to think and read, to write and see the future, envisaging their assumptions on the current on-goings. That's why both *Wakan sansei zue* and *Kôsei shinpen* appeared at knot moments in the history of Edo-Japan: they condensed in their pages the essence of past times and the longing of the present, while at the same time, announcing future incidents. They were not simple printed media usable

to gain information and to develop knowledge necessary for the everyday life, but profound manifestos to guide the masses in their search for own identity. It is important to understand this function of Japanese printed media *Wakan sansei zue* as well as *Kôsei shinpen* stand for in order to appreciate the real reasons why the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries belonged to such a culturally blossoming period for Japan and why the Meiji restoration took place, after all. (during an interview in March 2010)

Cognitive processes and statements about reality essentially depend upon whichever understanding of the relationship between knowledge and reality is preferred. These understandings are themselves parts of universal frameworks, namely of visions and representations of the world. The external world – things in themselves as well as their characteristics – offers no guarantee for the rightfulness of knowledge, as every specific bit of knowledge comes under certain determinate cultural and epistemic conditions. Such conditions are, for instance, schemata of perception and experience, descriptive schemata and contexts of symbolic forms, instrumental means of knowledge and cultural forms of action and behavior. Truths – encyclopedic or not – are therefore only contextually and-or indexically conditioned, provided, additionally, with the critical reservation typical for human endeavors (see Sandkühler 2002:90-91). Knowledge is not independent from intentional propositional attitudes, from beliefs, opinions and ideals; the objectivity of propositions is bound up with the subjectivity of the propositional attitude. Since knowledge and the plurality of knowledge have the status of contextual and perspectivist constructions, they are relative; they cannot be protected *a priori* from skeptical attacks, and their truth competes with the truth of others. In such

a culture of knowledge, reality does not exist as a finished world. Instead, phenomenal reality exists as the constant task of epistemic and practical design and reproduction (see Sandkühler 2002:95). This is what encyclopedias do: within such a culture of knowledge carrying a risk related to the relativisation of previously stable standards of knowledge and action, encyclopedias stabilize cultural relativism and ethno-pluralism which cannot provide a ground for the solution of the problems resulting from the tension between the universality of human needs, the particularity of cultures and the individuality of people's goals in life.

## **2. Between Eastern and Western knowledge paradigms**

Contrary to the prevalent opinion that encyclopedias are available in Japan only since its modernization and hasty import of Western civilization patterns, at a closer look, one can trace the origins of encyclopedia or encyclopedia-like works as far as back to the early Heian period (794-1185/1192), in the ninth century. Encyclopedic books had been imported from China at an early date, and encyclopedia-like works had been published in Japan for well over a thousand years before Japan's first modern encyclopedias were officially released after Japan's opening to the West, during the Meiji period (1868-1912)<sup>1</sup>.

The first proto-encyclopedia produced in Japan was the 1000-scroll *Hifuryaku* (秘府略, literally “Summary of the Palace Library”), compiled in 831 upon the emperor's orders by Shigeno no Sadanushi 滋野貞主 and others, of which only fragments survive today (Kornicki 2000:57). The first truly Japanese-style encyclopedia is said to be Minamoto no Shitagô's 源順 (911-983) 10-scroll work *Wamyô ruijushô* 倭名類聚抄 from 938, meaning literally *Lexicon of Japanese readings of words* or *Japanese*

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<sup>1</sup> Kornicki (2000:34)

names [for things] classified and annotated, begun in 934 at the request of Emperor Daigō's daughter. Written in ancient Japanese syllabary system *man'yōgana* (a system using *kanji* to represent Japanese pronunciation) and based on an ancient lexicographical collation system developed in Chinese dictionaries, the *Wamyō ruijushō* contains entries arranged by category and categorizes *kanji* vocabulary, primarily nouns, into 24 main headings (*bu* 部) divided into 128 subheadings (*rui* 類; see Sugimoto 1995:68). For instance, the *tenchi* (天地 "heaven and earth") heading includes eight semantic divisions, e.g., *seishuku* (星宿 "stars and constellations"), *un'u* (雲雨 "clouds and rain") and *fūsetsu* (風雪 "wind and snow"). It quotes over 290 sources, both Chinese (e.g., the *Shouwen Jiezi*) and Japanese (e.g., *Man'yōshū*). Each dictionary entry gives the Chinese character, Chinese pronunciations with either a homonym or *fanqie* spelling, definitions, and corresponding Japanese readings in ancient *man'yōgana*. The broadly inclusive *Wamyō ruijushō* dictionary was an antecedent for Japanese encyclopedia, until the present day providing linguists and historians with an invaluable record of the Japanese language over 1.000 years ago<sup>2</sup>.

Passing over the 13th century *Chiribukuro* (塵袋, literally "Rubbish Bag"), an 11-scroll book on the origins of things whose innovative question-and-answer format was much imitated throughout the medieval period, one comes to the Tokugawa period (1602-1868), when Japan closed itself to the Western world for more than 250 years. During this time, there were sustained efforts to create an own epistemological system as alternative to the imperialist-colonialist ethos from the outside, especially from the West (see Howland 1991:291). This system was

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<sup>2</sup> Sugimoto (1998:62)

basically founded upon the Confucian doctrine and took China as model. However, towards the end of the shogunal regime, as internal economical, political and social problems became uncontrollable, there was a paradigm shift from Chinese models to Western ones, especially transported by the so-called Dutch studies (*rangaku*). Two works played in this context a most important role.

### **2.1. *Wakan sansei zue*: the fascination of knowledge organization**

The first work to be taken into account is *Wakan sansai zue*: in the 17th century, the *Sancai Tuhui* (三才図会 *Sansai Zue* in Japanese, literally, *Illustrated book of the Three Powers*), a 14-part, 106-scroll illustrated encyclopedia published in Ming China in 1609, entered Japan. In 1712, emulating the *Sancai Tuhui*, Terajima Ryôan 寺島良安, a doctor from Ôsaka, published the above mentioned *Wakan Sansai Zue* (和漢三才図会, literally *Illustrated book of the three powers in Japan and China*), the first Japanese illustrated encyclopedia (Rémusat 1827:78). Written in classical Chinese which was the language of scholarship throughout East Asia at the time, the book featured illustrations of subjects in the three worlds of heaven, earth and man, respectively humanity. It reflected the outlook of its day with such fantastical entries as "The Country of the Immortals" (不死国 *fushi koku*) or "The Land of the Long-Legged People" (長脚国 *naga-ashi koku*) as well as several taxonomy systems of animals, plants and birds according to the Chinese model (Rémusat 1827:154). Its logical presentation, topical divisions and discussion of alternative explanations for the same phenomena, however, anticipated the modern encyclopedia genre. *Wakan sansai zue* describes and illustrates various activities of daily life, such as carpentry and fishing, as well as elements of the universe

(e.g., plants, animals, constellations etc.). Due to its historical value, reproductions of the *Wakan Sansai Zue* are still in print in Japan.

**Figure 1**

Subject headings in *Wakan sansei zue*

卷数	分類	Translation
1	天部	Sky
2	天文	28 lunar constellations
3	天象類	Celestial phenomena
4	時候類	Time divisions
5	曆占類	Astrological divisions of time
6	曆択日神	Astrological predictions about happy and unhappy days
7	人倫類	The states of the humans
8	人倫親族	Parental degrees
9	官位部	The Magistrats
10	人倫之用	Human actions
11	経絡部	Body lines
12	支体部	Body parts
13	異国人物	Descriptions of foreign countries
14	外夷人物	Foreign peoples
15	芸器	Liberal arts
16	芸能	Talents
17	嬉戯部	Games
18	樂器類	Musical instruments

19	神祭附仏供具	Sacrifices and the instruments used for the cult of Fo
20	兵器防備具	Defensive weapons
21	兵器征伐具	Offensive weapons
22	刑罰	Tortures
23	漁獵具	Instruments for fishing and hunting
24	百工具	Utensils employed by artisans
25	容飾具	Furniture and hygienic utensiles
26	服玩具	Ornaments and jewels
27	絹布類	Fabrics
28	衣服類	Clothes
29	冠帽類	Hair styles
30	履襪類	Shoes
31	庖厨具	Kitchen utensils
32	家飾類	Furniture
33	車駕類	Cars and chairs to carry
34	船橋類	Ships and bridges
35	農具類	Agricultural instruments
36	女工具	Female work
37	畜類	Domestic animals (1)
38	獸類	Four-legged animals
39	鼠類	Rats
40	寓類 怪類	Monkeys and fabulous animals
41	水禽類	Water birds

42	原禽類	Ground birds
43	林禽類	Forest birds
44	山禽類	Mountain birds
45	龍蛇部	Saurian reptiles and Ophidiens
46	介甲部	Chelonian Reptiles (1)
47	介貝部	Testaces (2)
48	魚類 河湖 有鱗魚	Fish with shells, rivers and lakes
49	魚類 紅海 有鱗魚	Fish with shells, great rivers and sea
50	魚類 河湖中 無鱗魚	Fish without shells, rivers and lakes
51	魚類 紅海中 無鱗魚	Fish without shells, great rivers and sea
52	卵生類	Insects born out of an egg (1)
53	化生類	Insects born through metamorphose
54	湿生類	Animals born in humidity
55	地部	The earth
56	山類	Mountains
57	水類	Water
58	火類	Fire
59	金類	Metals
60	玉石類	Precious stones
61	雜石類	Different species of stones and minerals

62	本中華 末河南	China's geography (I) Continuation: China's geography (II)
63	河西	Continuation: China's Geography (III)
64	地理 大日本国	Earth's description
65	地部	Japan's description
66	上野	Continuation: Japan's description
67	武蔵	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Musasi, Sagami and Itsu
68	越後	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Yetsugo, Sado, Yetsuchiu, Sinano
69	甲斐	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Kai, Suruga, Tôtômi and Migawa
70	能登	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Noto, Kawa, Yetsu-zen, Fida and Mino
71	若狭	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Wakasa, Aumi, Owari, Ize, Sima and Iga
72	山城	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefectures Yamashiro
73	大和	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefectures Yamato
74	摂津	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Tsunokuni
75	河内	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefecture Kawauchi

76	和泉	Continuation: Japan's description Prefectures Izumi, Kinokuni and Awaji
77	丹波	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefectures Tanba, Tango, Tasima, Farima and Inaba
78	美作	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefectures Mimasaka, Fakki, Izumo, Oki, Bizen, Bit-siou and Bigo
79	阿波	Continuation: Japan's description: Prefectures Awa, Tosa, Sanuki, Iyo, Aki, Iwami, Suwo and Nagato
80	豊前	Continuation: Japan's description (final): Prefectures Buzen, Bungo, Chikuzen, Chikugo, Fiyoga, Figo, Ozumi, Satsuma, Fizen, Iki and Tsushima
81	家宅類	Houses and Habitats
82	香木類	Trees, particularly perfumed trees (1)
83	喬木類	Tall trees
84	灌木類	Small trees
85	寓木類	Parasite plants and those resembling to bamboo-trees
86	五果類	Five main species of fruits
87	山果類	Mountain fruits
88	夷果類	Foreign fruits
89	味果類	Tasty fruits or plants remarkable due to their taste

90	瓜果類	Fruits similar to melon
91	水果類	Water fruits
92	本山草類上卷 末山草類下卷	Mountain herbs: medicinal plants Mountain herbs, continuation
93	芳草類	Smelly herbs
94	本濕草類 末濕草類	Plants living in humidity Plants living in humidity, continuation
95	毒草類	Poisonous plants
96	蔓草類	Climbing plants
97	水草 藻類 苔類	Aquatic plants (1)
98	石草類	Rock plants
99	葷草類	Plants similar to garlic
100	瓜菜類	Cucurbitaceous plants (1)
101	芝茸類	Mushrooms
102	柔滑菜	Oleraceous plants
103	穀類	Cereal plants
104	菽豆類	Leguminous plants
105	造釀類	Alimentary preparations

In the introduction of his detailed analysis – until now, the only one in a Western language of *Wakan sansai zue* – Abel-Rémusat notes in 1827:

Dans l'examen préparatoire que j'ai dû faire des livres Chinois de la Bibliothèque du Roi avec l'intention d'en rédiger un catalogue complet et détaillé, ma première

attention s'est portée naturellement sur ces grandes collections où les Chinois rassemblent des traités sur toutes sortes d'objets et qui sont comme le résumé de toute leur littérature. Ces ouvrages me présentent beaucoup d'avantages, en ce qu'ils me fournissaient les moyens de prendre des notions générales des matières dont les, traités particuliers doivent ensuite m'offrir le développement. Il y a toujours, d'ailleurs, dans l'arrangement et la progression des idées, dans la manière de classe et de subordonner les unes aux autres les différentes branches des connoissances humaines, un moyen sur d'en mesurer l'étendue et d'en apprécier la valeur. L'encyclopédie d'une nation est, en réalité, le tableau le plus fidèle et le plus complet de ses lumières et de son génie<sup>3</sup>.

In this perspective, the stronger the arguments for a mono-logical taxonomy system seem to emerge, the clearer Diderot's thoughts on the encyclopedia arise and gain quasi-universal value:

Actually, an encyclopedia aims off to gain the scattered knowledge on the earth's surface, to expose the general system of this knowledge to humans and to deliver it to those coming after us, so that the work of the past centuries was not useless for the coming centuries; so that our grandchildren become not only more educated, but at the same time happier and more virtuous, and so that we do not die, without making out of ourselves worth of being human. (quoted in Dierse 1977:44)

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<sup>3</sup> Rémusat 1827:168)

Thus, the encyclopedia turns into the symbol of a developed scientific co-operation and into an instrument for unifying the sciences and fulfilling fraternity between the ‘new encyclopedists’ – that is, those leading intellectuals of each era striving for knowledge preservation and continuation. An encyclopedia in which the authors seek to bridge existing gaps and to connect different points of view on the same issue, while simultaneously, consciously struggling with the frustrating incompleteness of human knowledge, might be particularly destined for people in the process of confronting themselves with on-going inner developments and quests for authentic selves. Pluralism is an attitude, highlighting the fact that intellectual judgments and concepts are basically subject to an ever changing historical-cultural diversity<sup>4</sup>. This attitude arose, apparently, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the – social as well as individual – awareness became unavoidable that “all the number systems, the color-naming, the cosmogonies and technologies of different societies rest on basic principles as fundamentally different as those of various moral attitudes and social systems”<sup>5</sup>. However, as repeatedly observed, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘representation’ generally appeared to be widely unchallenged as a concept for indicating the state and function of the performances of consciousness and of action – of perception, thought, experience and cognition, of artistic practices and of technological models. Around 1850, ‘representation’ as concept increasingly became a problem in philosophy, the sciences and the arts: while the process of the concept’s problematisation might have been interpreted as a crisis of representation, the emergence and establishment of alternatives to ‘representation’ generated a paradigm shift. The question “what is the crisis of representation?” finds its answer in the problematisation of the concept

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<sup>4</sup> Sandkühler (2009:84)

<sup>5</sup> Toulmin (1978:65); also see Toulmin (1985:29)

‘representation’ as driven by the ever more strongly preferred assumption that under ‘representation’ no structure-preserving copy of reality can be grasped – and apprehended. Thus, the idea of representation as a copy of reality seems to be based on a realistic metaphysics of substance, on a metaphysical realist epistemology and on a corresponding theory of truth, so that this metaphysical vision rather evokes the crisis of representation than lead to pertinent solutions.

Furthermore, both in sciences (initially and above all, in the natural sciences like physiology and physics) and arts (above all, in neo-impressionistic painting) as well as in philosophy (above all, in Kant-oriented philosophical directions), the so-called ‘encyclopedic approach’ might inspire the development of alternative paradigms. Philosophers like Ernst Cassirer have succinctly formulated this paradigm shift: “We cannot seek the genuine ‘immediate’ in external things, but must seek it within ourselves.” (quoted in Dierse 1977:59) Such a paradigm shift might flourish as ‘constitution’ or ‘construction’ to replace the plain reformulation of the concept of ‘representation’ as differentiated from the image-concept. The consequences are manifold: the ‘truth’ of ‘reality’ becomes even more volatile, and ‘representation’ as ‘constitution’ or ‘construction’ is intensively confronted with perspectivism, pluralism and relativism. Cultures of knowledge change on these grounds, as do technical cultures of action. Simultaneously, historicity and cultural contextuality take priority as directions of thought and inquiry<sup>6</sup>. Acknowledging the necessity to combine through juxtaposition the incommensurability of knowledge with the relativism of human life as well as the insatiability of human curiosity with the pluralism of possible existential approaches becomes, thus, the task of the authentic encyclopedic work.

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<sup>6</sup> Sandkühler (2002:86-87)

## **2.2. *Kôsei shinpen*: from Confucianist worldview to Western taxonomy**

The second important work to be taken into consideration while regarding the paradigm shift from the system of Chinese knowledge to the Western-oriented cognitive patterns through means of encyclopedic writings is *Kôsei shinpen*. Translated between 1811-1844 by a group of *rangakusha*, namely representatives of the above-mentioned Dutch studies (*rangaku*), *Kôsei shinpen* (freely “Encyclopedia for Household Use”, literally “A New Book of Welfare”) is the Japanese version of the Dutch book *Algemeen Huishoudelijk-, Natuur, Zedekundig- en Konst- Woordenboek* which, in its turn, is the Dutch translation by Jacques Alexandre Chalmot in 1778, Leiden, of Noel Chomel’s *Dictionnaire oeconomique contenant les moyens d’augmenter et conserver son bien et mesme sa santé* (1709; Bésineau 1972:102).<sup>7</sup> The translation process of *Kôsei Shinpen* appears as part of the exchange which was at first limited to trade between the close Japan and the Netherlands; this trade exchange,

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<sup>7</sup> The full title of *Chomel’s Dictionnaire oeconomique* is as follows: „Dictionnaire oeconomique, contenant divers moyens d’augmenter son bien, & de conserver sa santé, avec plusieurs remèdes assurez & éprouvez pour un très-grand nombre de maladies, et de beaux secrets pour parvenir à une heureuse & longue vieillesse. Quantité de moyens pour élever, nourrir, guérir & faire profiter toutes sortes d’animaux domestiques, comme Brebis, Moutons, Boeufs, Chevaux, Mulets, Poules, Abeille, & Vers à Soye. Différens Filets pour la pêche de toutes sortes de Poissons, et pour la Chasse de toutes sortes d’Oiseaux & d’Animaux, &c. Une infinité de secrets découverts dans le Jardinage, la Botanique, l’Agriculture, les Terres, les Vignes, les Arbres ; comme aussi la connoissance des Plantes des Païs étrangers, & leurs qualitez spécifiques, &c. Les moyens de tirer tout l’avantage des Fabriques de Savon, d’Amidon ; de filer le Coton, de faire à peu de frais des Pierres artificielles, fort ressemblantes aux naturelles, de peindre en mignature sans sçavoir le dessein, & travailler Bayettes, ou Étoffes établies nouvellement en ce Royaume, pour l’usage de ce Païs, & pour l’Espagne, &c. Les moyens dont se servent les Marchands pour faire de gros établissemens, ceux par lesquels les Anglois et les Hollandois se sont enrichis en trafiquant des Chevaux, des Chèvres, des Brebis, &c. Tout ce que doivent faire les Artisans, Jardiniers, Vignerons, Marchands, Négocians, Banquiers, Commissionnaires, Magistrats, Officiers de Justice, Gentilhommes & autres d’une qualité, & d’un emploi plus relevé, pour s’enrichir, &c. Chacun pourra se convaincre de toutes ces véritez, en cherchant ce qui peut lui convenir, chaque chose étant rangée par ordre alphabétique, comme dans les Dictionnaires.”

however, gradually moved to the exchange of knowledge, as the cargo delivered by Dutch ships and imported by Japanese noblemen or shopkeepers sometimes included books in Dutch which allowed Japanese intellectuals during the Edo period to become acquainted with Western scientific knowledge – and to appropriate it. The contact between Japanese intellectuals with Dutch books would crystallize precisely into the so-called *rangaku* (Dutch studies), flourishing especially during the reign of the 8<sup>th</sup> shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684-1751, reign period 1716-1745)<sup>8</sup>. Tokugawa Yoshimune was interested in products from overseas as a means of encouraging new industries and domestic production; an important gesture was the relaxation, in 1720, of the Book Ban Order which allowed the import of non-Christian books and actively promoted the learning of foreign knowledge, such as having intellectual samurai learn the Dutch language<sup>9</sup>. Later on, as advocated by the astronomer Takahashi Kageyasu, the Shogunate government established in 1811 an official translation organization of Dutch books at Tenmondai in which Udagawa Yoan, Baba Sajûrô, Otsuki Gentaku, Aochi Rinso and others served; among other works translated, the translation of the Dutch version of N. M. Chomel's work as *Kôsei shinpen* was an important achievement<sup>10</sup>.

## **Figure 2**

From *Dictionnaire oeconomique* through *Algemeen Woordenboek* until *Kôsei shinpen*

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<sup>8</sup> Bésineau (1972:103)

<sup>9</sup> Sugimoto (1998:79-81)

<sup>10</sup> Bésineau (1972:105)



The title itself, namely *Kôsei shinpen*, reflects the spirit of the time oscillating between Chinese traditional models and Western innovations: *Kôsei* goes back to a line from *Shokyô/Shu Ching (The Book of Writings)*, attributed to Confucius, and refers to the construction possibilities of an harmonic life based on Confucianist virtues such as increasing efficiency, responsibility and loyalty, virtues strongly propagated by the official doctrine of the Tokugawa regime<sup>11</sup>. Contrarily, *Shinpen* has a very pragmatic meaning (‘new book’ or ‘new edition’) and reflects the translators’ consciousness of not translating Chomel’s original, but a new, revised edition of his work. *Kôsei Shinpen* as encyclopedic work is basically a truncated version of Chomel’s original, including entries resulting from a very realistic and practical approach. Christian or religious elements are

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<sup>11</sup> Bésineau (1972:104)

completely deleted, and most included entries refer to such concrete fields as biology, pharmacy, mineralogy, commerce, industry, nutrition or astronomy (Sugimoto 1998:68). Some translated entries are plainly wrong, mainly because of the non-existence of those issues in Japanese context (such as ‘albatross’), but remarkable is the effort to tackle unknown matters: translation appears as a means to cope with the unknown while incorporating it.

The main goal of this huge translation work, which lasted between 1811 and 1845, was precisely the spreading of Western-rooted knowledge among a broader audience and the popularization of scientific information on the West. As, at that time, encyclopedia-like works such as household-books or guidebooks to which *Kôsei Shinpen* belongs, existed in the stress ratio between entertainment, education, systematization of existing knowledge and information upon the outside world, *Kôsei Shinpen* deals with pragmatic issues while accessing knowledge and accumulating information (see Sugimoto 1998:21). As Bésineau notes in his study of *Kôsei Shinpen* from 1972:

Ainsi qu'on l'a montré l'histoire du *Dictionnaire* Chomel en japonais, ce grand ouvrage de traduction n'a finalement pas atteint le but que se proposaient l'administration du Bakufu et les traducteurs du Tenmondai, c'est-à-dire précisément la diffusion dans un large public des connaissances scientifiques de l'Occident à cette époque. Ce serait néanmoins une grande erreur que de minimiser la valeur intrinsèque de ce travail et l'importance qu'il eut dans l'histoire culturelle du Japon, dans les années décisives qui ont préparé la restauration Meiji. Car quelques soient les résultats immédiats obtenus, il reste que ce travail

considérable a exercé une influence étendue sur la vie intellectuelle des dernières années de l'ère de Edo. Cette traduction, étendue sur une très longue période, a été l'occasion pour nombre de savants et d'intellectuels japonais, d'étendre et d'approfondir leurs connaissances scientifiques et linguistiques, et cela sous le patronage du Bakufu lui-même. De plus ce même patronage du Bakufu, dans la société sémi-féodale du temps, contribua au prestige social et intellectuel des Rangakusha dont l'influence directe et indirecte sur la Restauration Meiji est suffisamment évidente<sup>12</sup>.

It is for sure no coincidence that in the decades to come, the group of translators who tackled the problematics of knowledge transfer and appropriation in *Kôsei Shinpen* at Tenmondai will form the core of the intellectuals and technocrats to ground the Imperial University of Tôkyô in 1877 which became in time a light-house of humanities research, in Asia as well as worldwide.

The translation process of *Kôsei Shinpen* sets a final line to the first step of becoming aware that knowledge is power in the Japanese world (see Matsuda 2008:149). The ideological switch from Chinese models to be accelerated after the First Opium War (1839-1842) marked the increasing consciousness of the Tokugawa regime that the isolation politics couldn't last any longer and the success of the active play on the world stage could only be guaranteed by a profound understanding of and coping with the Western powers (see Watanabe 2008:27-28). Simultaneously, the efforts to systematize and thus, to control knowledge – own and other knowledge – as means to attain power increased and would reach a first climax in the

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<sup>12</sup> Bésineau (1972:103)

forthcoming Meiji period (Matsuda 2008:165). It was in the first half of its modernity, that is, from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 until the bitter defeat in 1945, that Japan attempted what one could call a gamble with power: in this time span, there is an intensive search for identity based on its own historical past, but taking into account the insinuating other.

Encyclopedic philosophy doesn't implement what is supposed to be acknowledged as being true and what is not: rather, encyclopedic knowledge is a circumstance, a way of thinking, a possibility to purchase knowledge and to receive orientation through that very knowledge. Basically, the philosophy is encyclopedic in its consideration for the universal and its attempt to systemize the universal within comprehensible frameworks. The question what does belong to the current circle of knowledge and what may be excluded becomes thus a mere rhetorical instrument to highlight the dialectical nature of knowledge and its situational position. While Japan's relationship to its "great others" – China during premodern age and the West since mid-19<sup>th</sup> century – was thoroughly an ambivalent one, its import of knowledge and technology was an unidirectional pursuit (Maeda 2009:32-35). Encyclopedias as blocks of condensed knowledge mediating the transfer process encompassed in their copying and translating practices the partially confusing citational endeavor, in which the composition of own entries overcomes the classical translational mechanism.

Later on, mainly during the "[Western] civilization and enlightenment" (文明開化 *bunmei kaika*) movement during the 1880s, the Westernizer Nishi Amane 西周 (1829-1897) compiled Japan's first modern encyclopedia, the *Hyakugaku renkan* (百学連環, literally *The Chain of Many Sciences* or *The Linked Circle of Hundred Sciences*), a special series of lectures delivered at Nishi's private academy, the Ikueisha, from late

1870 to early 1873. In this seminal work, Nishi attempted to present systematically the combined knowledge of the West, China and Japan, ordered according to Western categories, particularly patterned upon Auguste Comte's positivism and his "law of three stages" (theological, metaphysical, positive) and his "encyclopedic law" (systematic and hierarchical classification of all sciences). Furthermore, Nishi promoted the teachings of John Stuart Mill, that is, he rejected the deductive method traditionally used by Confucian scholars in favor of the Western inductive logic as a more scientific way of learning. Nishi was aware of the fact that simply internalizing the "powerful other" (the West) wouldn't lead to self-empowering, as the situation of the colonies had taught: he proposed the strategy of taking over that "powerful other" by adopting its inner mechanisms and by playing its own game on an equal level. Knowledge, more than technology, was the main means Nishi saw to acquire this goal (see Howland 2002:102). Subsequently, in *Hyakuichi-Shinron (New Theory of Hundred and One, 1874)*, he went so far as to reject Confucian ethics altogether as no longer appropriate for Japan, but was very careful not to reject Japanese heritage itself. In *Jinsei Sanpô Setsu (Theory of the Three Human Treasures, 1875)*, he urged the Japanese citizens to seek the goals of health, knowledge and wealth, instead of the Confucian subservience and frugality, and thereupon, in his lectures to the military, he emphasized Western-influenced discipline and obedience over Chinese prescribed seniority and hierarchy (see Howland 2002:119-127). Basically, Nishi saw as paramount for a nation to possess its own conceptualized and systematized knowledge; this discloses his awareness of the function of knowledge for a nation's emancipation from the status of being represented by other nations to the status of itself representing other

nations, as Joy Hendry puts it, a process that will reach its climax during the 1970s and 1980s.

### **3. Conclusion: emancipating the self**

It is common sense that we don't come from nowhere and we aren't heading towards nowhere. In the current world, philosophy takes this common knowledge into account when it presents reality both in its historical origin, its palpable present and its possible future. More precisely speaking: philosophy makes us understand that human existence, though transient and ephemeral, has a departure point, an established trajectory and a final destination. Philosophy is, as often noticed, the science of the universal. However, humans are generally interested in the individual and the particular, in the now and here. The ideas of universality and totality, therefore, lead towards dead-ends when 'the whole', as fascinating as it might be, suffocates the individual<sup>13</sup>:

Pourtant le texte de Borges va dans une autre direction; cette distorsion du classement qui nous empêche de le penser, ce tableau sans espace cohérent, Borges leur donne pour patrie mythique une région précise dont le nom seul constitue pour l'Occident une grande réserve d'utopies. La Chine, dans notre rêve, n'est-elle pas justement le lieu privilégié de l'*espace* ? Pour notre système imaginaire, la culture chinoise est la plus méticuleuse, la plus hiérarchisée, la plus sourde aux événements du temps, la plus attachée au pur déroulement de l'étendue; nous songeons à elle comme à une civilisation de digues et de barrages sous la face éternelle du ciel; nous la voyons répandue et figée sur toute la

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<sup>13</sup> Sandkühler (2002:97)

superficie d'un continent cerné de murailles. Son écriture même ne reproduit pas en lignes horizontales le vol fuyant de la voix; elle dresse en colonnes l'image immobile et encore reconnaissable des choses elles-mêmes. Si bien que l'encyclopédie chinoise citée par Borges et la taxinomie qu'elle propose conduisent à une pensée sans espace, à des mots et à des catégories sans feu ni lieu, mais qui reposent au fond sur un espace solennel, tout surchargé de figures complexes, de chemins enchevêtrés, de sites étranges, de secrets passages et de communications imprévues; il y aurait ainsi, à l'autre extrémité de la terre que nous habitons, une culture vouée tout entière à l'ordonnance de l'étendue, mais qui ne distribuerait la prolifération des êtres dans aucun des espaces où il nous est possible de nommer, de parler, de penser<sup>14</sup>.

In the scientific pursuit of encyclopedias, the dynamics of knowledge and power as well as the discursive construction of identity highlighting issues of transculturality and transnationality emerged stunningly obvious in Japanese encyclopedias, more than in their Western equivalents. Dialectic containers of knowledge, Japanese encyclopedias mediated a certain worldview as common understanding, based on flows of information transformed into blocks of knowledge and implemented as such, by an elite of technocrats, within a population obeying rules and regulations without questioning. While dealing with knowledge organization and translation, Japanese encyclopedias, apparently more intensively than their Western counterparts, enforce indeed specific existential outlooks on human experience and progress. Thus, they

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<sup>14</sup>Foucault (1966:9)

underline hidden interactions between knowledge and information in a trans-cultural context. Oscillating, in time, between original Chinese models and subsequent Western archetypes, they challenge such asymmetrical notions as identity and alterity, through new formulations of idea chains and their transformational nature: The emergence of knowledge as means of social power through educational implementation which metamorphoses into real – political as well as economic – power reveals encyclopedic practice in Japan’s case as one of the secret weapons in the course of its astonishingly fast modernization and its miraculous postwar resurrection.

While early encyclopedias – in the West, as well – usually followed systematic order principles, it was not until the so-called ‘Enlightenment encyclopedias’ that the alphabetical organization of the lemmata became paramount. This loss of a taxonomic order to govern knowledge organization was compensated, in a way, by philosophers’ attempt to moderate the inelastic structure of post-Enlightenment encyclopedic works through the juxtaposition of Francis Bacon’s systematization of sciences, and through deliberately arranged patterns, to be found perpetually within the single encyclopedic entries<sup>15</sup>. Still, the main advantage of the alphabetical order is its function as a signal, a request for independent thinking and a veto gesture against the arrogance of an intellectual authority represented by the systematics of the scholastic philosophy. Thus, the readership overcomes the restriction imposed by the system and chooses its way from A to Z, according to a seemingly objective over-principle: the alphabet. Hegel’s conceptual system of an ‘encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences’ opposes Francis Bacon’s vision of the

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<sup>15</sup> Blom (2004a:79), and (2004b:32)

encyclopedia as an expression of human welfare grounded on experience and rationality:

All people should consider what the goal of knowledge really is, and that the goal of knowledge itself neither the joy in the speculation nor the acquisition of the rule over others, nor the profit, nor the fame, nor the power or another of these unimportant reasons is, but the well-being and use of life for all humans. They should complete and channel this realization of knowledge in mercy and love<sup>16</sup>.

It is an open question if Hegel's hierarchical model, based on philosophical thinking and culminating in a worldview of philosophy as the measure of all things, still has a chance to survive in a pluralist world exploring the possibility of the dialectic equality of all symbolic forms, thus liberating them from their subordinated ranking. Furthermore, there is Friedrich Schlegel's thesis that "the encyclopedia exists virtually and by all means only in fragments", as knowledge is never finite and as the human thirst for enlarging his horizons and his perspectives is insatiable<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, in an analogue manner as fugitive information turns into crystallized knowledge, what is to a certain point in time known as culture, identity or art depends on the level of the disrupting forces from within or – better said – from above the society. After the important paradigm shift from Chinese classical models to Western innovative archetypes in the last third of the Tokugawa period, Japan struggled to remain intact, a cultural monolith, in the Asian region while trying to compete with Western powers in their own supremacy system<sup>18</sup>. Later on, at the turn of the millennium, it would change its definitional strategy from absorbing or

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<sup>16</sup> Collison (1966:121)

<sup>17</sup> Darnton (1979:76)

<sup>18</sup> Ôsumi (2008:23-26)

letting itself being absorbed in a system to challenging the existing system via its own development models and plans, all based, as in case of Meiji Restoration as well, on technocratic visions rather than on humanist ideals. The condensation of liquid information into solid knowledge through encyclopedias in late Tokugawa period would experience its climax during the 1970s and 1980s, with the subsequent uncontrollable dissipation of solid knowledge into liquid information – not coincidentally, a reflection of Japan’s historical trajectory.

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