

Japanese Studies in the Netherlands

Cynthia Vialle¹

Japanese Studies in Leiden

It should come as no surprise, considering the long and unique ties between Japan and the Netherlands, that the first chair of Japanese in Europe was established at Leiden University. In 1855, Johann Joseph Hoffmann (1805–1878), a former opera singer who had read classics in Würzburg, became the first person to be appointed professor of Chinese and Japanese languages. After a chance meeting with Philip Franz von Siebold in a hotel in 1830, Hoffmann decided to abandon his career as a singer and followed Von Siebold to Leiden. Von Siebold's intention was to have Hoffmann translate Japanese sources for his *magnum opus*, *Nippon, Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan*, and with that in mind he taught him some rudimentary Japanese. Guo Chengzhang, Von Siebold's Chinese assistant who originally hailed from Guangzhou, instructed Hoffmann in Chinese, which paved the way for his study of Japanese. With the aid of a thesaurus, Chinese-Japanese and Japanese-Chinese dictionaries, encyclopaedias and dictionaries of synonyms, Hoffmann worked tirelessly to compose a grammar, *Japansche spraakleer* (published in Dutch and English in 1867), and a dictionary (published in 1875). His other publications covered a wide range of subjects. In 1846, Hoffmann was offered a chair in Chinese at King's College, London, but through the intervention of the Minister of Colonies, J. C. Baud, King Willem III appointed him translator of Japanese to the government, making it possible for Hoffmann to remain in the Netherlands. Nine years later Hoffmann was awarded the title of Professor and given the task at Leiden of educating young men to become translators of Japanese and Chinese for the Dutch government.

Because of the more than one million ethnic Chinese people living in the Netherlands East Indies, more importance was attached to the study of Chinese than to that of Japanese. Hence it took almost forty years after Hoffman's death before the next Professor of Japanese was appointed: Marinus Willem de Visser (1875–1930). De Visser read classics at Leiden and defended his thesis, *De Graecorum diis non referentibus*

1 Researcher of Leiden University.

speciem humanam [About the Non-anthropomorphic Gods of the Greeks], in 1900. His interest in ethnology led him to take up the study of Chinese, as the professor teaching ethnology at Leiden, J. J. M. de Groot, was a sinologue first. The study of Japanese became important for De Visser when he took up the post of student interpreter at the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo in 1904. Back home in the Netherlands in 1910, he was appointed Curator of the Department of China and Japan of the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden, where the important Japanese collections of Jan Cock Blomhoff, Johannes Frederik van Overmeer Fisscher and Philipp Franz von Siebold were kept. Seven years later De Visser was appointed Professor of Japanese Language and Literature. His inaugural lecture was titled “De invloed van China en Indië op de Japansche Taal en Literatuur” [The Influence of China and India on Japanese Language and Literature]. De Visser’s main interests focussed on Buddhism and folklore, on which subjects he published several major books and articles.

After De Visser’s early death in 1930, Johannes Rahder (1898–1988) succeeded him. Apart from Buddhism, Rahder had studied a number of languages—Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, and Japanese. In 1926, he defended his thesis on a text edition of the *Dasabhumikasutra* at the University of Utrecht. The same university appointed him Professor of Sanskrit, Avestic, Old Persian and the principles of Indo-Germanic linguistics in 1930. A year later Rahder moved to Leiden to fill the chair left vacant by De Visser’s demise.

While Rahder was away for a year as a visiting professor in Honolulu in 1937 and 1938, Wouter van der Poel (1883–1961), a former officer in the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, stepped in to give courses in Japanese. Van der Poel had studied Japanese with De Visser and had spent a few years in Japan. He remained as Lecturer after Rahder’s return until 1940, when German occupation forces closed the university, which was not opened again until September 1945. Rahder resigned in 1946 to join the University of Hawaii and a year later Yale University.

Subsequent to Rahder’s resignation, Frits Vos (1918–2000) was appointed Lecturer in Japanese in 1946. Vos had studied Chinese and Japanese first at Leiden with Rahder and, after the closure of Leiden University by the German occupation forces, in Utrecht. He received private instruction in Korean during the German occupation and one year after his appointment as Lecturer in Japanese, he introduced courses in Korean Language and History. Vos’s academic career took a different course for some time at the outbreak of the Korean War. When the war broke out, Vos joined the Netherlands Detachment of the United Nations forces there as captain for special services from October 1950 to November 1951. Back in Leiden, Vos defended his doctoral thesis *A Study of the Ise Monogatari* in 1957. The following year he was appointed Professor of Japanese and

Korean Studies, a chair he held until his retirement in 1983. The title of his inaugural lecture was “Volken van één stam?: enige beschouwingen over de problemen van een Koreaans-Japanse cultuur-en taalverwantschap” [Peoples of one race?: some considerations on the problems of a cultural and linguistic affinity between Koreans and Japanese].

Vos’s successor as Professor of the Languages and Cultures of Japan and Korea in 1985 was his student Willem Jan Boot (1947–). Boot defended his doctoral thesis *The Adoption and Adaptation of Neo-Confucianism in Japan: The Role of Fujiwara Seika and Hayashi Razan* in 1983. His inaugural lecture was on the subject of the philologist as politician: “De filoloog als politicus.” In June 2012, close colleagues and former Ph.D. students presented Boot with a *Festschrift* on an important aspect of his work, reflected in its title, *Unchartered Waters: Intellectual Life in the Edo Period. Essays in Honour of W. J. Boot*. Boot will deliver his valedictory address on 21 December 2012.

The 1980s and 90s saw an expansion of the Center for Japanese and Korean Studies with the establishment of three more chairs, two for full professors (Modern Japanese History and Korean Language and Culture) and the third a personal chair (for Art History). The number of teaching staff and students also increased substantially.

The first of the new chairs, thanks to the growing interest in Asia’s modern history in general, was a chair for Modern Japanese History, established in 1987. Its first occupant was Kurt W. Radtke (1945–), from Tübingen (Germany). Radtke obtained his Ph.D. from Australia National University. He delivered his inaugural lecture in 1988 on “Japan en de droom van vrede” [Japan and the Dream of Peace]. In 1999, Radtke left Leiden for Waseda University.

A separate chair for Korean Language and Culture was established in 1994, with the appointment of Boudewijn C. A. Walraven (1947–) as its first full professor. Walraven, a student of Frits Vos, obtained his doctorate in 1985, having defended his thesis on *Muga: The Songs of Korean Shamanism*. His inaugural lecture was on Korean histories (“Koreaanse geschiedenissen”). Walraven has just retired, but a new professor of Korean Studies, Remco Breuker, a student of Walraven, was appointed in 2011, ensuring the continuation of Korean Studies at Leiden.

A personal chair was established in 1995 for Willem R. van Gulik (1944–), the former Director of the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde. A student of Vos, he obtained his doctorate at Leiden University in 1982 based on a thesis entitled *Irezumi: The Pattern of Dermatography in Japan*. His teaching commitment was the Art History and Material Culture of East Asia. In his inaugural lecture Van Gulik spoke on “Verwerkelijking van de verbeelding, Verbeelding van de werkelijkheid” [Realization of the Imagination, Representation of Reality]. Van Gulik retired in 2009.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw more professorial appointments. In 2002, Matthias F. M. Forrer (1948–), Curator of the Japanese Department of Leiden’s Museum of Ethnology, was appointed Special Professor of the Von Siebold Chair of the Material Culture of Pre-modern Japan, in particular graphic art. This special chair was funded by the Leids Ethnologisch Fonds for a fixed period of appointment. Forrer obtained his B.A. in Japanology at Leiden and his M.A. in Art History of East Asia at the University of Amsterdam. He defended his doctoral thesis, *Eirakuya Tōshirō, Publisher at Nagoya: A Contribution to the History of Publishing in 19th Century Japan*, at Leiden University in 1985. His inaugural lecture was entitled “Out- & Zeldzaamheden in en buiten Japan” [Antiquities and Rarities within and Outside of Japan]. The retirement of Van Gulik and the end of the fixed period of Forrer’s special chair means that at present there is no chair for Art History and Material Culture of Japan. Art History is still part of the curriculum, though, and is now taught by a lecturer who joined the institute last year.

Ivo B. Smits (1965–), a student of Boot, became Professor of Arts and Cultures of Japan in 2007. He defended his doctoral thesis, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: Chinese and Japanese Nature Poetry in Medieval Japan, ca. 1050–1150*, at Leiden University in 1994. The subject of Smits’s inaugural lecture was “Niet gezien: het klassieke Japan als andere cultuur” [Not Seen: Classical Japan as a Different Culture].

After Radtke’s departure for Waseda University in 1999, the chair of Modern Japanese History fell vacant. In 2001, Rikki Kersten (1960–), D.Phil. in Modern History from the University of Oxford (1993) was appointed Professor of Modern Japan Studies. One year later Kersten gave her inaugural lecture on “Defeat and the Intellectual Culture of Postwar Japan.” She left Leiden in 2006 to become Dean of the Faculty of Asian Studies of Australian National University.

Kersten’s successor was Christopher Goto-Jones (1974–). He studied at Cambridge, Oxford and Keiō University, and earned his doctorate from Oxford in 2002, having written a thesis on “Ideas at War: Nishida Kitarō and the Philosophical Context of the Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Goto-Jones delivered his inaugural lecture “What is Modern Japan Studies?: Towards a Constructive Critique of Epistemic Violence” in 2007. Three years later, he left the department to become the first Dean of Leiden University College in The Hague, founded in September 2010.

In early 2011, Katarzyna J. Cwiertka (1968–), who has an M.A. from Warsaw University (Poland) and another from Tsukuba University (Japan), was appointed to replace Goto-Jones. Cwiertka wrote her doctoral thesis for Leiden University on “The Making of Modern Culinary Tradition in Japan,” defending it in 1999. Her inaugural lecture, “The Wisdom of the Ordinary: A Prospect for Modern Japan Studies,” was delivered in November 2011.

Over the years several changes have been made to the name of the Japanese department and its placement within the faculty. At present it is called Japanese Studies or Japanstudies. The teaching programme is part of the School of Asian Studies (SAS), which comes under Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS) of the Faculty of Humanities. Courses offered in the Japanese Studies programmes cover a wide variety of fields: literature, linguistics, history (both modern and pre-modern), art history and material culture, philosophy, religion, politics and international relations, sociology, and anthropology.

From September 2012 a new one-year M.A. programme is running alongside the two-year programme. The latter has a maximum of 17 places and a compulsory stay of two semesters in Japan. The cost for these exchange students has become too much of a burden to bear and therefore a new one-year programme has been introduced in which the stay in Japan has been reduced to two months. The level of proficiency for this reduced programme is JLPT level 2, while that for the two-year programme is JLPT level 1.

Another recent development is the introduction of theme programmes. Teaching and research at Dutch universities tended to be based on the scholars' own interests, which mean there is little or no connection between the disciplines. Initiatives have recently been taken to create research profile areas with a strong multidisciplinary focus and Leiden's Faculty for Humanities has chosen to focus on Asian modernities and traditions; global interactions of people, cultures and power through the ages; and language diversity in the world, in all of which members of Japanese Studies also have a role.

Every year Japanese Studies draw about a hundred first year students and approximately 35 students get their degrees. In 2011, the number of first year students was 130. There are about 200 students overall for the three-year B.A. and two-year M.A. programmes. Japanese Studies remains a popular choice and continues to attract more students than Chinese Studies. The study of Japan appeals to the present generation of students because of their fascination with popular culture, in particular manga. There is a far stronger interest in modern Japan and this is reflected in teaching and research.

Government funding for public universities such as Leiden is allotted on the basis of the number of students and successful graduates. This impacts on the size of teaching staff and time given to research. Ever decreasing funding by the government has seriously affected the hours allotted for staff research. It used to be 40 percent of one's appointment but has been lowered to 25 percent. The decreased government funding also means that there are less spots for Ph.D. students offered by the university, in this case Japanese Studies. One way to offer young graduates an opportunity to carry out

research in preparation for their doctorates is a place within a project financed by external funding. Japanese Studies has been successful in acquiring a number of prestigious projects funded by research grants from the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research), Toshiba International Foundation, and Japan Foundation. They include: *Asiascape: Contemporary East Asia Media Centre*; *Modern East Asia Research Centre (MEARC)*; *European Academic Network in Modern Japan Studies*; *Warrior Ethics in Japan—Bushidō as intellectual history*; *Beyond Utopia—New Politics, the Politics of Knowledge, and the Science Fictional Field of Japan*; *Early-modern Intellectual Confrontations with “Commercial Society”*; *In Search of the Japanese Family: Modernity, Social Change, and Women’s Lives in Contemporary Japan*; and *Sustaining Total War: Militarisation, Economic Mobilisation and Social Change in Japan and Korea (1931–1953)*.

The history of the relations between Japan and the Netherlands has been the subject of teaching and research at Leiden’s History Department. This is due to the work of Leonard Blussé (1946–). A Sinologist by training, he worked as a research assistant at the Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo of Kyoto University from 1972 to 1975. He defended his thesis *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia* at Leiden University in 1986. Blussé held various positions at institutes in Leiden before being appointed Extraordinary Professor of the History of European-Asian Relations on behalf of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW) in 1997. This was turned into a full professorship in 2001. Most of Blussé’s work is based on the rich source materials to be found in the archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), including those of the Dutch factories in Hirado and Nagasaki. In 1984, he initiated the *Deshima Diaries Project*, whose goal was to publish annotated English summaries of the official diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory on Dejima in order to improve the accessibility of Dutch archival sources on Japan for non-native Dutch scholars. Funding was supplied by the Leiden-based Isaac Alfred Ailion Foundation, which generously continued to support the project up to 2010. The downturn in the worldwide economic situation because of the banking crises also made its impact felt here. So far the *Deshima Diaries Project* has published the diaries of the eighteenth century and those of the period 1641–1670 and 1680–1700, with those of the years covering 1641–1670 and 1740–1800 having been carried out more comprehensively. The volume covering the decade of the 1670s is being prepared for publication.

The importance of the *Deshima diaries* and related VOC sources has been recognised by Japanese historians as well. Two scholars at the Shiryō Hensanjo of Tokyo University, Professor Matsui Yōko and Professor Matsukata Fuyuko, are working on the publications of transcriptions of the Dutch original manuscripts and Japanese translations

with extensive annotations. There has always been close collaboration between the Leiden project (the writer of this report), the Shiryō Hensanjo, and the now defunct Nichiran Gakkai in Tokyo (Ms. Isabel Tanaka-van Daalen).

Blussé has exerted influence on visiting Japanese students and scholars as well, aiding them in their research on diverse historical topics. In 2010, a group of former Japanese students and a few non-Japanese working on Japan presented him with a *Festschrift* entitled *Large and Broad: the Dutch Impact on Early Modern Asia. Essays in Honor of Leonard Blussé*, published by Tōyō Bunko. Nine of the twelve contributions were related to Japanese history. Headed by Professor Matsukata Fuyuko and Professor Frederik Cryns (Nichibunken), most members of the group, with the addition of a few younger ones, are continuing on the same road and are preparing a series of books on Japanese-Dutch relations in the Edo period (in Japanese), based on the use of primary sources. Aims of this new project are to give younger scholars an opportunity to present their research to a wider readership and to generate more interest in this field among the general Japanese public.

Blussé retired in June 2011 and as there is no one left in the History Department with linguistic skills in Japanese or expertise on the history of Japan, this may be the end of research on the historical relations between the Netherlands and Japan in the early modern period at Leiden.

Japanese Studies Taught Elsewhere in the Netherlands

Japanese studies have never been exclusively taught at Leiden University: in 1930 a special chair for Japanese Language and Literature was established at the University of Utrecht. Jan Lodewijk Pierson (1893–1979), a student of De Visser, was its first occupant. In 1929, Pierson had been the first doctoral student at Leiden to defend a thesis on a Japanese subject, the *Manyōshū*. Pierson resigned in 1933 after a conflict with the Board of Curators of Utrecht University, but continued his work on the translation of the *Manyōshū*, which he finished thirty years after his resignation.

The vacancy at Utrecht was filled by Carel Coenraad Krieger (1884–1970), also a student of De Visser. His thesis of 1940 was on the infiltration of European civilization in Japan during the eighteenth century. Krieger had served in the Royal Navy until 1927 and had subsequently been appointed Curator of the Department of China and Japan of the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden. He was appointed Lecturer in Japanese Language and Literature at Utrecht in 1933 and fifteen years later Associate Professor of the History of Art of the Far East and the Japanese Language. He held this chair until 1955, when teaching of Japanese Studies at the University of Utrecht ceased.

The University of Amsterdam also had a chair for the Art History of East Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1970, the Ministry of Education and Sciences gave the University of Amsterdam permission to establish a chair for the Archaeology and Art History of East Asia, but it was only in 1973 that a professor could be appointed. One of the reasons for establishing the chair in Amsterdam and not in Leiden was the proximity of the Rijksmuseum, which housed the best collection of Asian art in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the University of Amsterdam also had a chair for the Archaeology and Art History of South and Southeast Asia, held by Johanna E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw from 1959 to 1983. The new study at Amsterdam University was a so-called *kopstudie*, which meant that the student had to achieve a *kandidaats* (B.A. degree) in another field in the Faculty of Arts first before being allowed to enrol for the study of Art History of East Asia, leading to an M.A. degree.

Henri Albert van Oort (1916–2001), the only occupant of the chair from 1973 until his retirement in 1986, was not a Japanologist or Sinologist by training. He started out as a bank clerk in Singapore, where he became interested in Chinese art, then joined the Dutch army when World War II broke out and remained in the army after peace was declared, retiring with the rank of colonel. He took up the study of cultural anthropology at Leiden University and subsequently defended his doctoral dissertation, *The Porcelain of Hung-Hsien: A Study of the Socio-cultural Background and Some Characteristics of the Porcelain Produced at Chingtechén During the Imperial Reign of Yüan Shih-k'ai* (1916), supervised by Prof. W. R. B. Acker of the Leiden Department of Sinology, in 1970. Although Van Oort's background inclined him more towards the art history of China, his teaching appointment also included the art history of Japan and Korea, a huge task for one man with no staff. Many of his students came from Leiden with a *kandidaats* in Chinese or Japanese because Leiden University did not teach Asian art history at the time and there was considerable interest in this field. Two of Van Oort's students who wrote an M.A. thesis on a Japanese subject were Matthi Forrer (on prints) and the writer of this report (on lacquer). On Van Oort's retirement, the department was closed, not because of a lack of success, but because at that time the University of Amsterdam decided to focus more on European studies and did away with other departments teaching Asian studies as well.

At the present time Leiden University is the only university in the Netherlands where one can obtain a university degree in Japanese Studies. Japanese language skills are also taught at Zuyd Hogeschool, a school of higher professional education, in Maastricht. The Hogeschool's School of Oriental Languages and Communication has a four-year programme which trains students to achieve sufficient language skills to become interpreters and liaising officers for international companies, government in-

stitutions and non-profit organizations. The Center for Japanese Studies, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, also teaches courses on modern Japan. It does not confer a degree. Courses can be taken as a regional specialisation within a minor programme of non-Western studies.

Finally, mention should also be made of the Nederlands Genootschap voor Japanse Studiën (NGJS, Netherlands Association for Japanese Studies) and *The Netherlands-Japan Review*, a new journal about Japan. The NGJS was founded in 1976. It is an association of scholars, whose members are active within the Netherlands in the field of Japanese studies in the broadest sense. A Japanological background is not required. One of the Association's aims is to stimulate interest in Japanese studies, including the historical relations between Japan and the Netherlands and *rangaku*, through organizing lectures and symposia and stimulating research on Japan through furthering publications. A fairly recent initiative of a group of Dutch scholars of Japan is the publication of a digital journal about Japan, *The Netherlands-Japan Review*. Although the quarterly journal is intended for the Dutch market, contributions are written in Dutch or English. It is aimed at a general readership but the contributions are based on scholarly research and on solid knowledge of the language, history, and society of Japan. The first edition debuted in Spring 2010.

Acknowledgement

Prof. Dr. Katarzyna Cwiertka, Professor of Modern Japan Studies, Chair of M.A. Japanese Studies, Leiden University, provided information on the present state of Japanese studies at Leiden, for which I express my thanks.

I have also used information from the following sources:

Duyvendak, J. J. L. "Levensbericht van Marinus Willem de Visser." *Handelingen van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden en Levensberichten harer afgestorven medeleden, 1930–1931*, pp. 164–73. The digitized version at www.dbnl.org.
<http://hum.leiden.edu/lias/research/sas/japanese.html> (last update: 25/3/2010).

<http://magazine.sieboldhuis.org/>

<http://www.ngjs.nl>.

<http://www.otcmaastricht.nl>: Zuyd Hogeschool, Faculteit International Business and Communication, School of Oriental Languages and Communication.

<http://www.rug.nl/let/onderwijs/onderwijscentra/japanstudies/index>: Center for Japanese Studies.

Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

Japanese Studies: Master of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, Universiteit Leiden.

Kern, H. "Levensbericht J. J. Hoffmann." *Jaarboek*. Amsterdam, 1878, pp. 1–20. The pdf version published by www.digitallibrary.nl.

Poorter, Erica de, ed. "Life and Publications of Frits Vos." In *As the Twig is Bent...: Essays in Honour of Frits Vos*, Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1990, pp. ix–xxvii.

Smits, Ivo. "Japanese Studies in the Netherlands." In Leonard Blussé, Willem Rummelink, and Ivo Smits. *Bridging the Divide. 400 Years The Netherlands-Japan*, Hotei Publishing, 2000, p. 241.

Talen en culturen van Japan: Bachelor of Arts, Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen, Universiteit Leiden.

Viallé, Cynthia and Christine van der Pijl-Ketel, eds. "Geschiedenis van de studierichting Kunstgeschiedenis van Oost-Azië." In *Aspecten van de moderne Chinese en Japanse kunst. Jubileumboek ter gelegenheid van het 10-jarig bestaan van de studierichting Kunstgeschiedenis en Archeologie van Oost-Azië aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam (1973–1983)*, Amsterdam: Vakgroep Kunstgeschiedenis van Oost-Azië, 1983, pp. 1–8.

Vos, Frits. "Mihatenu Yume—An Unfinished Dream: Japanese Studies until 1940." In Willem Otterspeer, ed. *Leiden Oriental Connections 1850–1940, Studies in the History of Leiden University 5*, Leiden: Brill, 1989, pp. 354–77.

Vos, Frits. "Japanese Studies in the Netherlands." *Japanese Studies in The Netherlands in an International Perspective*, Leiden: The Netherlands Association for Japanese Studies, 1999, pp. 31–35.