



Dutch Discourses on Translating China

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With Chinese Studies not established until 1875 and few literary texts translated into Dutch, the early image of China in the Netherlands was represented mainly through texts written by merchants, diplomats and missionaries. From the first mention of 'China' in sixteenth-century Dutch literature until the early twentieth century the general perception in the Netherlands was that those who had travelled or lived in China for any period of time counted as China experts. The situation began to change in the early twentieth century when this notion was contested by an early Dutch sinologist, who pointed out the limitations of many Europeans who had visited China.

In this paper, I will explore works, some of which might be called cultural translation, written or translated into Dutch, which impart the author's knowledge of China including Chinese customs, history and geography etc, in a language familiar to the Dutch reader. Travel accounts by Dutch merchants to China, travel reports by embassies to the Chinese court, relay translations of literary texts, and Dutch translations of missionary writing in other European languages will reveal that there were several ways to introduce typical Chinese cultural phenomena to enable the reader to improve their understanding of China. Finally, I will investigate the reception of these texts in the Netherlands by analyzing the reviews of these literary relay translations and (translated) travel accounts.

My findings will indicate the requirements of writing on China and the criteria of a good text or translation, e.g. the importance of the author's personal visit to China. This will be revealing of Dutch discourses on translating China from the sixteenth till the early twentieth century, and also the construction of images of China in the Netherlands.