

Internationalism. One is nevertheless compelled to ask what might have changed in the intervening period and how the JRCS could have become so tightly bound to Japanese government interests. Shimazu's description of the JRCS's actions in the Russo-Japanese War suggests that it might not have actually been so independent in the prewar period either. This is not to repeat the fallacy that Japan is an outlier in the history of humanitarianism. Rather, it puts the history of the JRCS in conversation with global scholarship that has connected official and unofficial humanitarian and human rights projects to imperial power, including the works of Neda Atanasoski and Julietta Hua.⁶

These questions aside, the author successfully demonstrates that many JRCS doctors, nurses, and officials had an abiding commitment to humanitarianism and internationalism. They pursued this even beyond the formal boundaries of the Japanese empire and often at great personal cost. Suzuki's text recovers these voices that might otherwise have been neglected in the historical record. *Humanitarian Internationalism* deals with a fascinating subject and offers valuable insight into the views of JRCS officials, doctors, and nurses. This is a useful book that adds to the English-language scholarship on Japanese humanitarianism and internationalism, public health, and human rights. It could be assigned in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses on modern Japan or Japanese international relations and in courses on health, medicine, or humanitarianism. The text also feels quite timely at a moment when attacks against civilians have unfortunately grown increasingly common throughout the world.

Green Star Japan: Esperanto and the International Language Question, 1880–1945. By Ian Rapley. University of Hawai'i Press, 2024. 200 pages. \$75.00, hardcover; \$30.00, paperback.

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Since its inception at the end of the nineteenth century, Esperanto has been a linguistic, ideological, and transnational project. The development of Esperanto and the idea of what the language could be accompanied the emergence of the modern world, with its telegraphs, trains, steamships, and

6. Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Julietta Hua, *Trafficking Women's Human Rights* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

growing international contacts. During this time of technological, political, social, and linguistic change, Esperantists debated the nature and purpose of the Esperantist project. Key topics in these discussions included whether Esperanto should serve as a global or auxiliary language and whether its primary purpose was political or practical. In Japan, too, many had high hopes for Esperanto “as the Latin of democracy” (p. 87), a language seen as a tool to promote peace, inclusion, and equality. However, others perceived it as a “dangerous” language (p. 101)—unpatriotic, subversive, and a threat to national unity.¹

Japanese interest in Esperanto grew alongside the development of modern nation-states and the rise of Japanese colonialism, which triggered intense debates about language reform. The conflict between democratic ideals and the realities of power and inequality created conditions that helped the rise and spread of Esperanto in Japan, but its history between 1880 and 1945 is not a linear or teleological development. The Esperanto movement underwent significant shifts in response to key historical events, including the establishment of the post–World War I global order and Japan’s imperial expansion. Rapley depicts two main waves of popularity within the Japanese Esperanto movement. The first began during the Meiji period and was linked to discussions about the challenges of the Japanese language as the country entered the modern age. The second wave emerged after World War I, gaining significant momentum in the 1920s, when Esperanto experienced increased practical use and the movement expanded nationwide, as well as into Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Islands, and colonial Korea and Taiwan.

Rapley’s book examines Esperanto as an open ideological movement that accommodated diverse ambitions, facilitating connections across multiple domains and movements throughout its history in Japan until 1945. The language and its ambitions were linked to art movements; national, imperial, and international politics; diplomacy; religion; and disability. Esperanto aimed to unite people worldwide, but achieving this required addressing existing inequalities, a challenge the Esperanto movement faced both in Japan and globally. The book highlights the impact of Esperanto and Esperantism on cross-cultural communication, language reform, national identity, and Japan’s engagement with the world. By discussing these topics, Rapley’s monograph on Esperanto in Japan until 1945 reflects broader themes of Japanese modernity and international relations, making the history of Esperanto in Japan “more than the history of failure; it is a history of Japan in the world” (p. 10).

1. See also Ulrich Lins, *Die gefährliche Sprache: Die Verfolgung der Esperantisten unter Hitler und Stalin* (Bleicher, 1988).

Rapley's book is not so much a language history as it is a history of Esperanto practitioners, proponents, and the respective dreams and ambitions that they sought to realize through the language. It is also a book about the setbacks of such dreams and the Esperanto movement as a whole. The author presents an original, detailed, and well-documented account of how Esperanto reflected and influenced the development of Japanese modernity up to 1945. The first chapter examines Esperanto's rapid rise in Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century, driven by the dynamics that followed the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. He traces its swift adoption through study circles, media, and national associations. Discussions on Esperanto were integral to Meiji-period debates on language issues and reform, with Esperanto positioned as a practical response to globalization and the need for cross-cultural communication and understanding. The second chapter examines Vasilii Eroshenko's connections with Japanese artists, writers, and activists during the Taishō period, with a focus on his role in the Esperanto movement. As a blind Russian intellectual, Eroshenko became an emblem of Esperantism, advocating for internationalism and inclusion, particularly for marginalized groups, including the blind and religious minorities. His time in Japan until his deportation in 1921 reveals tensions between the cosmopolitan ideals promoted by Esperantists and the government's distrust of ideas perceived as radical. Rapley shows that debates about Esperanto during this period reflect broader discussions on social reform in Taishō Japan.

Chapter 3 reviews Esperanto's role in Japan's diplomacy and encounters with other countries, notably at the League of Nations. Although the league did not officially adopt Esperanto, this chapter illustrates how figures such as Nitobe Inazō, Fujisawa Chikao, and Yanagita Kunio promoted Esperanto to advance internationalism and linguistic justice. The fourth chapter examines Esperanto and cosmopolitan movements in the Tōhoku region in the early twentieth century. Challenging the view of Tōhoku as isolated or undeveloped, it highlights the active role of numerous Esperantists and associations in the region engaging in international exchanges. The fifth chapter examines how mainstream Esperantists in the 1930s sought to distance themselves from proletarian Esperanto groups and adapt to the rise of nationalism and international conflict, particularly in response to Japan's militarism. It details efforts to uphold universal language ideals amid increasing political pressures. Chapter 6 explores Esperanto in Japan during the 1930s and 1940s amid heightened nationalism and international conflict. Japanese Esperantists faced political challenges but adapted by developing new teaching methods and using radio to promote spoken Esperanto. Activities aligned with national interests included Patriotic Esperanto and citizen diplomacy. The book concludes

with a brief epilogue emphasizing the enduring appeal of Esperanto in Japan beyond 1945, shifting from aspirations for universal adoption to fostering community, cultural exchange, and personal connections. It argues that Japanese Esperantists built transnational networks and contributed to the global Esperanto movement, reflecting the changing nature of international engagement over time.

Taken together, the chapters of this book show how language plays a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world and our relationships within it and how an artificial language like Esperanto opens the door to what Monica Heller aptly calls “artificial languages as alternative worlds but of specific kinds.”² Like all artificial languages, Esperanto is a translation of a perceived problem into a new language. The crisis of the day was seen as a language crisis, or conversely, a new, specially designed language was viewed as the solution. Esperanto’s symbol, the green star, represents the hope that would guide its practitioners toward a better and more just future. Hence, Esperanto attracted those seeking to improve the world. For some, the language ideology of Esperantism was more appealing than the language itself. Modernity saw the development of language romanticism. Most crucially in this respect, a view emerged and spread worldwide according to which a language reveals the “folk character” of its speakers. This idea is reversed in the case of Esperanto. Esperanto invites its users to construct a worldview. In this sense, the movement remained a genuinely modernist project.

Rapley writes that Esperanto is free from “cultural baggage” (p. 100), a feature that makes it a language of desire. The desires associated with Esperanto in Japan included overcoming the limitations of nation, religion, disability, and social class, all of which the book discusses in detail. Esperanto played many roles for various groups in Japan. Rapley states that it was “a language, as a model, and . . . a cluster of ideas about international language” (p. 124). The Esperanto movement was simultaneously both bourgeois and proletarian. Many Japanese Esperantists viewed it as an apolitical tool, while socialists regarded it as an integral part of their internationalist ideology. Supporters of Esperanto as a global language were influenced by the romantic idea that language unites its speakers into a brotherhood of equals. The Esperanto movement in Japan was not exclusive. In contrast to efforts to replace Ainu and Ryukyuan languages with Japanese, Esperanto was never intended to replace any language (p. 123). The various perspectives on Esperanto’s role in Japan for

2. Monica Heller, “Dr. Esperanto, or Anthropology as Alternative Worlds,” *American Anthropologist* 119, no. 1 (2017): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12824>.

linguistic or disabled minorities offer a critical view of how Japan's modern language policies could have evolved. Modernity came to treat language as a zero-sum game. Nationals were encouraged to speak only their national language, leading to the endangerment of other languages used in a nation-state. The case of Esperanto shows that languages of wider communication, be that Esperanto or national languages, do not need to lead to the replacement of all other languages.

By examining a wealth of documents and publications by Japanese Esperantists, Rapley provides a detailed and thoroughly researched account of Esperanto, its proponents, and practitioners in Japan. Anyone interested in the arrival, spread, and development of Esperanto and Esperantism will find here a comprehensive work that discusses a wide range of complex issues and unravels the history of the language, its speakers, its advocates, and the related transnational political and ideological developments. *Green Star Japan* leaves little to be desired. Students of Japan's autochthonous language would welcome more information on Esperanto in Hokkaido and the Ryukyu Islands, and students of sociolinguistics would benefit from a more detailed analysis of the ideologies of communication, which this book touches upon only briefly. These topics and perspectives await further exploration in the future, and Rapley's book provides an excellent platform from which to depart.

In addition to specialists of Esperanto and Japan's linguistic modernity and diversity, readers interested in Japan's history of thought will also find this book informative and relevant. The history of Esperanto offers insight into how various individuals, groups, and institutions envisioned Japan's future in the world. *Green Star Japan* demonstrates how speaking Esperanto in Japan between 1880 and 1945 was about more than just facilitating communication. Speaking (and writing) Esperanto was intended to have a significant impact on the world. Those interested in Japan's intellectual history will find it narrated here from a fresh perspective, as the book highlights Japan's need to connect globally through transnational networks and to acquire and share knowledge both within and beyond its borders. This book is not a simple, chronological history of Esperanto, as its subject cannot be easily described in a straightforward and linear manner. It revisits certain periods multiple times, examining them from different viewpoints and with varying focus. The result is a multifaceted history that reveals two key themes: the diverse visions of Japan at the time and the role of language in relation to these visions. Finally, Rapley's writing is excellent, if not captivating, making the book a joy to read from start to finish.