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Dutch influence on the reception and development of western-style expression in early modern Japan

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Abstract:

Japan and the Netherlands have maintained a special relationship for about 300 years since the adoption of the National Seclusion policy by the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867). Under the terms of the policy, Japan closed the door to foreigners except the Netherlands, China, and Korea until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. In particular, Dutch people provided the only window from which Japanese could see outside and meet modern European culture, and such circumstances created a very interesting and important academic area of historical study of Dutch-Japanese relations. Through the medium of the Dutch language, Japanese people studied Western sciences including medical and natural sciences, and general academic studies. In art history, Dutch art and culture introduced Western styles, and helped to establish realistic expression in Japan. It constitutes one of the most important issues in the history of modern Japanese paintings. Recently in Japan, more and more art historians are studying the Dutch influence on Japanese paintings. Their achievements include valuable bibliographies and exhibitions such as "Development of Western Realism in Japan", an exhibition organized by The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo in 1985. The authors will present an overview on activities in this field by Japanese researchers, including bibliography compilation, collections of materials, and art exhibitions.

Paper

1. The Start of Japan and Holland's Singular Cultural and Historical Relationship

In his work *Oranda kiko* ("Travels in Holland"), Ryotaro Shiba, a popular Japanese historical novelist who passed away in 1996, wrote, "If Japanese society, which had been isolated from the rest of the world, was a solitary black box, Nagasaki was like a pinhole, and Holland was the faint ray of light shining in." He also wrote, "It is one of the miracles in the history of civilization, even when taking into account the curiosity of the Japanese, that the dozen or so Dutch people 'confined' to the island of Dejima in Nagasaki exerted an influence on a society with a population of over 20 million (1)".

The history of Japan's relations with China, Korea and other Asian countries reaches back to ancient times, but the importation of guns from Portugal through Tanegashima in 1543 and the arrival of the Spanish Jesuit missionary, Francisco Xavier (1506-52) in 1549 were the initial contacts with the West that led to the rapid development of trade with the Namban (Southern Barbarian).

Folding screens called the Namban-byobu were produced in great number by artists of the Kano School from the end of the sixteenth through the seventeenth century. These screens were Japanese in style and technique. On the other hand, Church taught Western art techniques for the production of icons and other works of religious art which were necessary for the propagation of Christianity. But the Western-style of expression seen in the Edo period, the adoption of a realistic style of expression employing methods of perspective and shading, is in a different category from Namban-byobu and those religious works.

Contact with the Dutch happened by chance in 1600, the year of the Battle of Sekigahara, the outcome of which facilitated Ieyasu Tokugawa's establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate which ruled until 1867. The *Leifde*, one of a party of ships dispatched for exploration by the Dutch East India Company of Rotterdam, drifted ashore at Bungo-usuki and two members of the crew, Englishman William Adams (1564-1620) and Dutchman Jan Joosten (?-1623) were employed by Ieyasu to assist in the establishment of the Dutch factory at Hirado, Nagasaki.

The Tokugawa shogunate, under the rule of the third shogun Iemitsu (ruled 1623-51), controlled trade and prohibited the propagation of Christianity. The government enacted a strict policy of isolation from the rest of the world, maintaining trade with China, Manchuria, Korea, the Ryukyu islands and only one Western nation, Holland. The Dutch factory was moved from Hirado to Dejima in Nagasaki. The director of the Dutch East India Company's (Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie, VOC) factory in Japan, *Capitaō* (a name of Portuguese origin) was obliged to have an audience with the shogun in Edo and to submit a report on news of the world known as *Oranda fusetsugaki* (nieuws or novos). This was the only ray of light to pierce the black box which was the isolated nation of Japan.

2. The Eighth Shogun Yoshimune, Jonston, Dodonaeus and van Roijen

From 1633 onward, the Dutch factory directors were obliged to make an annual trip to Edo to pay respects to the government. Although the *Oranda fusetsugaki* was not publicly released, Japanese translators of Dutch were trained and organized. Above all, *Capitaō*'s 1300 kilometer and three-month journey from Nagasaki on the western tip to Edo, with a procession said to have been made up of over 300 people, gradually brought a ray of light from the outside world to Japan.

Despite Japan's isolation from the rest of the world, in the eighteenth century Hakuseki Arai (1657-1725), a counselor to the seventh and eighth shoguns, wrote a book, *Seiyo kibun* ("Western

accounts"). It based on interviews with G. B. Sidotti, an Italian missionary who violated the prohibition and smuggled into Japan. The eighth shogun Yoshimune (ruled 1716-45) relaxed the prohibition on literature in 1720, permitting the import and reading of Western books except religious matter. Yoshimune was the most cultured ruler among the 15 consecutive Tokugawa shoguns. Yoshimune took two natural history picture books that Dutch factory director Hendrick Indijck had presented to the fourth shogun Ietsuna in 1663 from a half century of storage. Yoshimune proceeded to earnestly quiz the director of the Dutch factory, Joan Aouwer, about the book's content. This incident is said to have been the start of Yoshimune's interest in Western civilization. The books were Jans Jonston's *Nauwkeurige Beschryving van de Natur der Viervoetige Dieren* (Amsterdam, 1660) and Rembertus Dodonaeus' *Cruydt-Boeck* (Antwerp, 1644). Yoshimune also possessed an oil painting of flowers and birds by Wilien van Roijen, an Amsterdam-born painter who was active in the early half of the eighteenth century. The painting was commissioned in Holland for the shogun in 1722, arrived in Nagasaki in 1726, and then was presented to Yoshimune. The painting's whereabouts became unknown at the end of the Edo era.

The impact of Western books imported from Holland, especially books with numerous illustrations such as Jonston's and Dodonaeus' natural history books, and German copperplate maker, Johann Elias Ridinger's (1698-1767) etchings of horses from around the world, and van Roijen's oil painting had a great influence on the development of Japan's acquirement of Western art techniques, as will be explained later in this paper.

3. Rangaku Kotohajime ("The Beginnings of Dutch Learning") - The Book that Formed the Japanese Image of Holland

In 1945, prior to and following the end of the Second World War, Japanese education, culture and knowledge of the world drastically changed. But a story about a certain Dutch book could be found in Japanese historical studies textbooks of junior high school before and after the war. This story is the reason why most Japanese know more about Holland than just tulips and windmills, and it illustrates the way in which Holland contributed to Japan's modernization. The story comes from Genpaku Sugita's (1733-1817) memoirs, *Rangaku kotohajime* ("The Beginnings of Dutch Learning", 1815). Genpaku was a scholar of Dutch medicine who translated the Dutch medical anatomy text, *Ontleekundige Tafelen* (Anatomical Tables) into its Japanese version, *Kaitai shinsho* (1774). In Japan this text is generally called *Tahel Anatomia*. Originally titled *Anatomische Tabellen*, the text was written by Johann Adam Kulmus, a professor at Germany's Danzig University (the first edition was published in Danzig in 1722 and the third edition was published in Amsterdam in 1732). It was translated into Dutch by Gerardus DICTEN, a surgeon from Leiden, and published in 1734 in Amsterdam by Janssoons van Waesberge.

DICTEN's translation, published in 1734, journeyed on a Dutch merchant ship and made it's way via Nagasaki to Edo's Genpaku Sugita, Ryotaku Maeno (1723-1803), and Jun'an Nakagawa (1739-86) in early spring of 1771. The surprise Genpaku experienced when he brought the book to the dissection of an executed corpse on March 5 of that year was described in *Rangaku kotohajime*. "Ryotaku and I brought the Dutch book with us and compared it to the body. The book in no way differed from what we saw before us. If we could translate parts of this *Tahel Anatomia* we could gain a clear understanding of anatomy entirely and advance medicine beyond its present level."

There were difficulties to overcome in translating, as related in this passage, "When I first faced this *Tahel Anatomia*, it was like sailing out to open sea in a rudderless ship. It was boundless and I did not know in which direction to turn. I was as stumped as I could be." But after five years of effort, *Kaitai shinsho* was published in four volumes of text and one volume of illustrations in 1774.

The story of *Tahel Anatomia*, a vivid and dramatic depiction of the beginnings of Dutch studies, has been passed from generation to generation since that time. It is no exaggeration to say that the image of our Japanese predecessor who succeeded in interpretation of the Western text by diligent effort

was the spiritual foundation for the receipt of Western knowledge that was required for the modernization of Japan.

At the same time, the encounter with this medical text occurring in the closed country of Japan was more than just the beginning of the receipt of modern Western science. It was undoubtedly the first encounter with the world at large (2)).

4. The Illustrator of *Kaitai shinsho* - Naotake Odano, and Akita Ranga Painters

The pictures in the Dutch book in no way differed from what Genpaku and his colleagues witnessed at the dissection of the corpse. That startling accuracy was what inspired Genpaku and his associates to translate *Tahel Anatomia*. Genpaku also wrote, "Looking at this book, I can not make out even one letter or one line of the text, however, in seeing illustrations for Dutch books which are so different from Japanese and Chinese books, I was deeply moved by their exquisiteness and this gave me a feeling of spiritual freedom." Even though he could not yet understand the contents of the Western medical text, the realism of the anatomical illustrations led first to surprise and to admiration of its accuracy. This realistic expression was a technique that not only Genpaku and his followers but also Western-style painters of the post-Edo era longed to acquire.

Kaitai shinsho's volume of illustrations was wood block prints and the drafts of prints were produced by using *menso-fude*, a fine brush used for painting details, to trace the copperplate etchings of the original text. The illustration-work was made by 25-year old Naotake Odano (1749-80), from Akita clan in Kakunodate.

Naotake had been introduced to Western art techniques in Kakunodate by Gennai Hiraga (1728-79), a zoologist, novelist, playwright, metallurgist and painter of the portrait, *Seiyo fujin-zu* (Young European Woman). Gennai went to Nagasaki to learn Dutch studies and was familiar with the Western-style art through a copy of *Dodonaeus' Crudyt-Boeck* which he owned. He was invited to Kakunodate to help in the development of copper mines in the Akita clan's territory by Shozan Satake (1748-86), the daimyo (feudal lord) of the Akita clan that employed Naotake. Naotake went to Edo by order of the daimyo (Shozan) to learn Western-style painting and worked for the illustrations of *Kaitai shinsho* which was being translated by Gennai Hiraga's close friend Genpaku Sugita and company.

Shozan was also taken with Western-style painting and painted *Matsu ni karadori-zu* (Pine Tree with a Foreign Bird). He left Japan's first writings on the theory of Western-style painting, *Gaho koryo* ("The Art of Painting") and *Gazu rikai* ("Understanding paintings and figures"). Akita ranga (Western-style painting born in Akita clan) became a unique style in the history of Japanese art.

Takeshi Yoro, a scholar of anatomy, commented that Naotake Odano's copying of the anatomical charts was "creative imitation" (3)). There is no disputing that it was Naotake's anatomical illustrations which gave the *Kaitai shinsho* true lasting value as a translation of *Tahel Anatomia*. Erwin Panofsky used the example of Leonardo Da Vinci as a scholar of anatomy and an anatomical illustrator, to claim that the natural sciences were born from the studios of the Renaissance artists (4)). It can be also said that in Japan the new Western-style realistic expression of painting was born from the translation of the Dutch medical text, *Tahel Anatomia* in eighteenth century Edo.

The generation of artists after Naotake aspired to paint in the Western-style and often made copies of original paintings. Tairo Ishikawa (1765-1817), a painter connected to Genpaku, copied the van Roijen's painting of flowers and birds that was presented to Shogun Yoshimune and it was praised as having "a complexion true to the original" by Gentaku Ootsuki (1757-1827), a doctor of Western medicine. Tairo also painted Genpaku Sugita-zu (Portrait of Genpaku Sugita) in celebration of Genpaku's 80th year. The painting used a shading technique to evoke the dimension and depth of the room's interior. It can be recognized that the movement of the cultivation of Western-style painting

was carried on among scholars of Dutch learning in Edo.

5. Kokan Shiba: Japan's First Copperplate Etching Maker, Western-style Painter and Scholar of Natural Laws

Kokan Shiba (1747-1818) wrote in *Shumparo hikki* ("Notes by Shumparo"), the miscellaneous writings of his later years, "I ran about in pursuit of great desires called fame and fortune. I gained both fame and profit. I was lost in these two things for decades". He was an eccentric and complex person. Just like Kakunodate's Naotake Odano, he had his first contact with Western art through Gennai Hiraga. In his book on Western painting, *Seiyo gadan* ("Discussion of Western Painting", 1799), he wrote, "I have recently acquired some books from Holland, including Jonston's illustrated book. The illustrations of copperplate etching are very realistic in exact details." Kokan shared the same reaction as Genpaku Sugita's words, "I was deeply moved by their exquisiteness and this gave me a feeling of spiritual freedom."

In 1779, five years after the original publication of *Kaitai shinsho*, 33-year old Kokan decided to learn the art of Western-style painting. He studied Dutch language from Gentaku Ootsuki, a pupil of Ryotaku Maeno, a doctor of Western medicine. In 1783, Kokan completed Japan's first copperplate etching, *Mimeguri-zu* (View of Mimeguri), and announced to the public "In Japan I have produced this method."

It is presumed that knowledge of copperplate etching was based on a Dutch translation of French pastor, M. Noel Chomel's *Dictionnaire œconomique* which was owned by Gentaku Ootsuki. At that time Kokan's copperplate etchings were made as *megane-e* (perspective picture for peep-show) which were popular at the time, but soon after that he began the large oil paintings of foreign landscapes, and later, Japanese landscapes such as *Soshu kamakura shichigahama-zu* (Shinchi-gahama in Kamakura, 1796) and *Shunshu sattayama fuji enbo-zu* (Mt. Fuji from Satta Pass, early 19th century).

The paintings of scenes from foreign countries were works inspired by the *Emblem Book*, Johannes and Caspaares Luiken's *Occupations* (*Spiegel van HET MENSYLEK BEDRYF, Vertoond, in 100 Verbeedigen van Ambachten, Konsten, Hanteeringen en Bedryven: met Versen*, published in Amsterdam in 1694). These works are *Ikoku fukei jinbutsu-zu* (Scenes from a Foreign Country), *Seiyo taruzukuri-zu* (Cask-Making in the West) and *Ikoku kojo-zu* (Factory in a Foreign Country).

It is thought that Kokan produced these paintings of scenes of foreign countries between 1785 and 1800. During the same period he wrote *Oranda tsuhaku* ("Dutch Navigation") which was published in 1805. Kokan compiled all his foreign knowledge and presented it to the public in this work.

"Zeuxis' Grapes", which is now missing, was painted by Kokan in 1789. The painting is based on a story that appears in Plinius's *Historia Naturalis* in which the ancient Roman painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasios test their skills in making realistic paintings. This work, which is thought to be based on an illustration contained in Johann Ludwig Gottfried's *Histoorsch chronyck* (Amsterdam, 1660), is an homage to Zeuxis who drew grapes which looked real enough to deceive birds and is said to have been "in praise of realism (5)".

Another painting of great interest by Kokan is *Gashitsu-zu* (Atelier of a Painter, 1794) which can be seen as a reflection of Kokan as a scholar of natural laws who produced Japan's first copperplate world map. The painting depicts a room of Western-style architecture containing an easel, a copperplate press, a globe, a compass, glasses and maps. Although it may be somewhat of a stretch to say this painting is reminiscent of Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia*, the painting expresses a spiritual self-portrait of Kokan as a painter, geographer and scientist who absorbed knowledge from the West.

6. Akita Ranga and Kokan Shiba's Successors

Kokan Shiba learned the Western-style of painting through his contact with Gennai Hiraga as previously described. There are common points seen in Kokan's representative work *Kanryu suikin-zu* (Willow and Waterfall in Winter, 1789-92) and the Akita ranga, particularly Naotake Odano's *Shinobazuike-zu* (Shinobazu Pond) and *Sagi-zu* (Heron) and Shozan Satake's *Matsu ni karadori-zu* (Pine Tree with a Foreign Bird). In the foreground birds, flowers and trees are enlarged and the middle ground is empty. And the background is suddenly depicted from a bird's eye view. It is a style of composition which forces a direct contrast between the foreground and the background. The composition of the foreground resembles that of folding screens of the traditional Kano School style; the background invokes the landscape expression of Dutch copperplate etchings. In both theme and technique, the blending of Japanese and Western-styles is a distinctive feature and displays a novel originality (6)).

Recently uncovered historical documents prove that Kokan and Naotake had direct contact. The conventional explanation has been that Akita ranga was a style that developed by chance in one region of Japan, had no successors after Naotake's early death at the age of 33 and subsequently disappeared. But another theory contends that the unique composition style with distinctive enlarged foreground was carried on by Kokan and later influenced other artists. That is to say, the enlarged foreground composition of the Akita ranga was sustained by Kokan Shiba or perhaps Denzen Aodo, particularly in his work *Tameike-zu* (Pond), then was picked up by Edo Western-style painters and had an influence on the sharply contrasted foregrounds and backgrounds of ukiyo-e landscape wood block prints by Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849), Hiroshige Ando (1797-1858) and so on. Fujio Naruse, the premier scholar of Kokan, says, "In Hokusai and Hiroshige's landscape prints with enlarged foregrounds, the backgrounds are almost always painted, which style is rarely seen in traditional Japanese pictures. In Japanese painting the subject is frequently not shown in its entirety, but the Akita ranga paintings are practically the only earlier works that closely resemble the partial enlargement in the extreme foreground, that is found in the landscape prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige (7))."

If we can recognize the connection of composition style between the Akita ranga and ukiyo-e landscape prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige, it could be also said that the influence of Akita ranga spread and reached to Japonism, the influence of Japanese paintings of the late Edo era upon European paintings of the nineteenth century.

The following works are examples of the correlation between paintings of the East and West as seen in Japonism

James McNeill Whistler. *Nocturne: Blue and Gold, Old Battersea Bridge*. 1872/3. Tate Gallery, London.

Hiroshige Ando. *Kyobashi Takegashi (Riverside Bamboo Market at Kyobashi)* from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. 1856-1858. e.g. Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Claude Monet. *Le Bassin aux nymphéas (Water-Lily Pond)*. 1899. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

Hiroshige Ando. *Kameido Tenjin Keidai (Kameido Tenjin Shrine Grounds)* from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. 1856-1858. e.g. Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Vincent van Gogh. *Japonaiserie: Flowering Plum Tree (After Hiroshige)*. 1887. Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam.

Hiroshige Ando. *Kameido Umeyashiki (The Plum Tree Teahouse at Kameido)* from *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. 1856-1858. e.g. Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Vincent van Gogh. Sower with Setting Sun. 1888. Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam.

Hiroshige Ando. Semba from Kisokaido Rokujukyutugi (Sixty-nine Stations on the Kisokaido). c.1839. e.g. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

According to Mr. Naruse's theory, Akita ranga is the root of the relationship of mutual influence. Furthermore, it may be possible to see the 'Crossroads of Information and Culture', that is, the continuous flow sprang from the illustrations in the Tahl Anatomia which came from Holland.

7. In Conclusion - Later Development of the Western-style Expression in Early Modern Japan.

The well-spring of Akita ranga seemed to have suddenly appeared then disappeared during the Edo era, however, recent researches show that it had surprisingly broad lower reaches.

This assertion focuses on the distinctive style of composition, but it is the realistic expression in the illustrations of Dutch books that Genpaku Sugita, Naotake Odano and Kokan Shiba were amazed and aspired to learn.

That amazement continued to be passed along, as can be seen in a passage from the autobiography of Yuichi Takahashi (1828-94), the man who later became looked upon as the pioneer of Japanese Western-style painting. It was published in 1892, 25 years after the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate and Meiji restoration. Yuichi wrote, "During the Kaei era (1848-54) a friend showed me a Western print that was so completely true to nature. I had discovered a new interest and was inspired to study." In the same autobiography Yuichi wrote, "I had trouble finding a way to learn the techniques and in the passing days and nights I toiled and fretted." Shortly after, Yuichi discovered his predecessor in the study of Western-style painting, Kokan Shiba, and his book, *Seiyō gadan* ("Discussion of Western Painting"). In the period while he was writing autobiography, Yuichi painted Shiba Kokan-zu (Portrait of Kokan Shiba, 1887-91) and passed away shortly after completion of the painting.

Authors used previously written and published Japanese researches as references and followed their framework to prepare this paper concerning one aspect of the relationship between Japan and Holland as seen in the history of Japanese painting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We wish to present singular type of "crossroads" at Amsterdam Conference on the interesting theme of "On Crossroads of Information and Culture." While preparing this paper, we compiled a bibliography of resources and reference works and we will hand out it together with a list of works introduced at the presentation of this paper at the Conference.

Notes:

1. Ryotaro Shiba. *Oranda kiko*. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1994.
2. Ryotaro Shiba. *Tebori Nihon shi*. Tokyo: Bungei Syunjyusya, 1990.
3. Takeshi Yoro. *Edo no kaibo zu*, in *Edo no naka no kindai*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1996.
4. Erwin Panofsky. *Artist, Scientist, Genius: Notes on the "Renaissance-Dämmerung"*, in *The Renaissance: Six essays*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
5. Shuji Takashina. *Seiyō-ga jūyō ni okeru Nihon teki tokusei*. in *Nihon bijyutsu zenshu*, Vol.21.

Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991.

6. Fujio Naruse. Edo no yofu-ga. Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1977.; Hideo Miwa. Yofu hyogen no shajitsu to sono henyo. Nihon bijyutsu zensyu, Vol.21. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1991.
 7. Fujio Naruse. Akita ranga no eikyo. in Edo no naka no kindai. Chikuma Shobo, 1996.
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