

Japan and Its World

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It is a pleasure for us all to be asked to participate in this historic international conference on Japan Studies. It is historic precisely because it is international. Until our generation, Japan studies has been the preserve of Japanese scholars, and carried out in Japanese and in relative isolation. Japan has studied the rest of the world, but until recently that world studied Japan very little.

Japan today makes every effort to encourage that study, and our conference is made possible by the generous support of its new organizations. But that generosity would make little difference without a new awareness throughout the world that Japanese culture and civilization deserve and indeed demand serious attention as an important part of the world's cultural heritage. Japan's new international and economic importance does help to bring that to the world's attention, but it would matter very little without the deeper awareness of the content and quality of the Japanese experience. And so today, in most parts of the world, Japan studies has become a recognized field of scholarship. Japan is finally becoming an exporter of culture as well as goods, and if the report of the Advisory Committee established by Prime Minister Hosokawa in October 1993 finds a hearing our activities mark an early point, and not the culmination, of such activities.

Until very recently Japan has interested the rest of the world, particularly the developing world, as a source of technology, and of applied modernization, but not of culture. Those of us who come from the United States can appreciate that, for the American and the Japanese roles have in many ways been strangely similar. Each country was seen as derivative of other civilizations. The Western world began its acquaintance with China's ancient civilization and cultural values as a result of the Jesuit missions to China, but, partly because Japan expelled those same Jesuits, Japan's cultural classics had to wait until the nineteenth century for translation into Western languages, and then usually by amateur scholars. Japan did its best to restrict what Dutch merchants could learn of its culture, so that serious study had to wait until the nineteenth century. And so it is not surprising that the idea developed that Japan's was largely a deviant form of Chinese civilization. Japan's most important cultural neighbors, the Chinese, were usually happy to agree. Study of Japan could be useful for what it told about the application of Western institutions and technology, but not really for what it told about Japan itself. Japan in fact seemed curiously old-fashioned to one Chinese student who came in 1903 and found himself sitting on the floor as though he had returned to the T'ang

Dynasty. "Here we had crossed the seas and gone abroad to study in order to prepare for a future restoration", he wrote, "yet once in Japan the first thing we had to do was go back to antiquity."¹

Of course the United States too was seen as entirely derivative of its European origins, remarkable for its resources and its burgeoning technology, but not a source of culture on its own. Japan was at least old, and indigenous. Moreover it valued its own tradition, even in the process of modernization. Its new universities developed programs of history and literature, *kokushi* and *kokubun* from the first. In the United States programs in American civilization for the most part had to wait until the expansion of university curricula in postwar decades.

All this had a direct impact on the study of America in Japan, just as it did on the study of Japan in America. American studies in Japan had to develop in the shadow of English literature and Western history, and they experienced a slow and difficult growth even in postwar years despite support from the United States. So too with Japanese studies in the United States. Until World War II the progress of East Asian, or Far Eastern, studies was predominantly under the direction of specialists in Chinese studies who valued Japanese chiefly as an ancillary tool for the understanding of China. Not until the post war period, which produced the first cohort of American specialists on Japan, did this begin to change.

But of course there are other things that set Japan off from the Western, especially American, experience and that help to account for the slow growth of Japan studies in the non-Japanese world. The first is surely the isolating effect of Japan's language. And the second is the nature of Japan's self-imposed isolation during early modern times. It is the experience and consciousness of that isolation that I propose to discuss this afternoon.

We are all familiar with Watsuji Tetsurō's argument that *sakoku* was responsible for most of the problems that Japan experienced in modern times, that it made necessary a rush modernization under state control, and contributed to the consequent drive to compete and excel with its disastrous results in the Pacific War.

In the Meiji Period, Western scholarly fashions helped to focus attention on *sakoku*. Professor Leonard Blussé of Leiden has pointed out that German historical scholarship in history, taking its lead from Leopold von Ranke, concentrated on the importance of international relations to the development of the modern state, and that this helped to confirm Japanese preoccupation with seclusion and isolation. Meiji Japanese cultural and political history, eager to fit Japan into Western paradigms, constructed a scholarly and intellectual counterpart to the political desire to follow in the path of the West. The same Fukuzawa who showed such heavy dependence on Buckle and Guizot for his *Bummei ron no gairyaku* coined the phrase *datsu-a nyū ō*. For him and his generation the Edo period represented something to avoid in constructing the new Japan.

For our generation, however, Edo looks quite different. We have not, of course, been frustrated by its cruelties, restrictions, and conservatism the way the Meiji pioneers were. A longer perspective makes it possible to see how different things were at different periods in Edo. More particularly, the disasters that dominated Watsuji's consciousness are now a half

century behind us. The system that seemed moribund to young Fukuzawa looks more and more interesting to Haga Tōru, whose recent *Bummei to shite no Tokugawa Nihon* offers a fine illustration of these points. His colleague Kamigaito Kenichi's *'Sakoku' no hikaku bummeiron* gives a quite different estimate of the matter from Watsuji's.

Even more striking for me was a recent *zadankai* in which Professors Haga and Yamazaki Masakazu seemed inclined to think rather well of the whole system of seclusion of Edo times. They saw the system as a normal, or at least reasonable, response of an early modern state that was defining itself and its boundaries. The system saved Japan from possible Catholic conquest, and it did not really choke off intellectual curiosity and variety. In fact, Professor Yamazaki is quoted as saying that "the country was far more open to new currents during the *sakoku* period than it is now. . . both foreign goods and information flowed in abundantly." So poor old Watsuji! And even more, poor old Perry! He might as well have stayed home.

It is in this context that I have been thinking about, and propose to talk today about, "Japan and Its World".

Let me begin with a reminder that the borders of the bakuhan state of Edo times were unclear; in fact, they were deliberately fuzzy. My colleague David Howell has recently analyzed the border to the north. Southern Hokkaido was clearly part of the Tokugawa state. The Ainu, defeated in the Shakushain War in 1672, were reduced to economic dependency in a constricted homeland. But they were not allowed or encouraged to become Japanese. The function and legitimacy of the Matsumae domain depended upon its interaction with the "non-Japanese" Ainu and control over them. They performed a ritual audience with the Matsumae daimyo, the *uinam*, once a year. This was depicted as an ancient ceremony, but it was really constructed in Tokugawa times, and first performed for shogunal inspectors in the early seventeenth century. Mogami Tokunai wrote that on these occasions the Ainu involved were discouraged from speaking Japanese, or dressing like Japanese. Presumably it would have invalidated the Matsumae function for them to do so.²

Something similar was going on in the south. In its dealings with Ryūkyū, which it seized in 1609, the domain of Satsuma pretended that it was intermediary with a more or less independent country. This had commercial advantages, of course, since it enabled it to trade with China, but the elaborate charade that was arranged for Chinese missions to Ryūkyū and for Ryūkyū missions to Japan also emphasized the fact of its integrity as a non-Japanese border zone.

Trade and contact with Korea was more important still, and provided the legitimacy — and the income — for the domain of Tsushima. Professor Tashiro Kazui shows how important the Korean trade was. It frequently brought more goods than Nagasaki did, and special exemptions from the ban on exports of silver were made to keep it going. As many as one thousand Japanese resided at the *wakan*, or Japanese trading area in Pusan. There were twelve major Korean missions, the *tsūshinshi*, nine of which came to offer congratulations on the investment of a new shogun, that helped to show daimyo and commoners alike that, as Professor Toby puts it, the bakufu was an important regional power. These were large

missions; they involved three to five hundred people, and they were paraded to Edo, and often on to Nikkō. Studies of Amenomori Hoshū by Professor Kamigaito and Tjoa Miao-ling at Leiden show that the Koreans took these missions very seriously. The diary of a member of the mission of 1764 describes his audience with the Korean king, who interviewed several candidates and had them compose lines of Chinese poetry within a fixed time as though they were exchanging, and competing, with their Japanese hosts. Cultural credentials were as important as diplomatic credentials.

In each of these cases it was essential to emphasize particularity and keep the outsiders from getting too close to the Japanese. We see this also with the Dutch at Nagasaki, where it was probably easier. Examination of the marginalia to the Deshima Diaries (*Deshima nikki*), which are now being published at Leiden University, shows a number of cases in which Dutch representatives of the East India Company were told to leave Japan because their Japanese was becoming too good. The Edo regime had no interest in tolerating what are more recently called *hen na gaijin*.

In contrast to this, of course, it was Japanese who were supposed to learn how to deal with the Ainu, with Ryūkyū, with Korea, and with the Dutch. By the time Isaac Titsingh, whose correspondence is now being published, headed the Deshima station in the eighteenth century, we find a number of exchanges between him and daimyo after he left Japan — but they are in Dutch, and not in Japanese. Some Japanese, like Amenomori Hōshū, extended themselves in the study of Korean while in residence at the Japanese station at Pusan. He apparently mastered not only standard Korean but regional dialects as well, and he compiled a sort of textbook of Korean. No wonder his name was revived in honor in connection with the visit of President Roh of Korea to Japan a few years ago. But I doubt that anybody in Edo times thought of helping the Koreans to learn Japanese.

In any event, the borders of Japan faded off at each point; Matsumae, Satsuma, and Tsushima were contact points with the non-Japanese world. But what was the nature of *sakoku*, and what view did it permit of that non-Japanese world? I would like to make two main points. The first is that the *sakoku* system was very far from static and unchanging. The second is that most Japanese and Western scholarship has focused on its application to the West and paid too little emphasis to trade and cultural relations with Korea and China.

Bakufu leaders credited most of their acts to the example and inspiration of Tokugawa Ieyasu, but he cannot really be blamed for seclusion. On the contrary, he did his best to reopen trade with Korea, he thought about formal relations with China, and he would have welcomed trade with Catholic Europe so long as it did not include Catholic missionaries. The problem, as Professor Kamigaito points out, was that it couldn't be done. The state diplomatic documents show that this was the case. Letters from the Spanish spoke of religion and said little or nothing about trade. The English king identified himself as "defender of the faith", but he did speak of commerce. Consequently the English in 1613 were given permission to come to "any port"; their efforts thereafter form the subject matter of Professor Derek

Massarella's recent book.³ On the other hand the Dutch, who arrived at Hirado in 1609, spoke only of trade and said nothing about Christianity. Not only that. Mauritz of Nassau wrote in 1610 confirming Japan's worst fears of Catholic imperialism. "The Society of Jesus", he warned, "under cover of the sanctity of religion, intends to convert the Japanese to its religion, split the kingdom of Japan, and lead the country to civil war." By implication: let us do your trading for you, for we can provide whatever it is you need, without incurring the danger of missionaries. To emphasize the point the Dutch sent useful gifts like lead and gunpowder, instead of playthings for the rich and aristocratic. It was not difficult to predict Ieyasu's preference between these overtures; a message sent to Spanish authorities in the Philippines warned that Japan had been a Divine Country from ages past, and that the shogun was not about to reverse the stand of earlier generations.

Ieyasu also tried hard to heal the broken relationship with East Asia, especially Korea. He had to be conscious of the enormous cost of the Korean disaster in lives and treasure. In any case he did his best to work out the Treaty of Kiyu in 1609 that reopened trade through Tsushima and the *wakan* at Pusan. The Koreans were understandably wary about reopening contact, of course, and specified that no Japanese were to go beyond the Pusan settlement, and certainly not as far as Seoul.

In China Ming authorities were less forgiving, and showed little interest in Japanese overtures for a resumption of direct trade. They argued that Japanese pirates were not to be trusted under any conditions. What doubt remained for them must have been resolved by the Satsuma invasion of Ryūkyū in 1609. This produced memorials to the Ming throne warning of the new danger. Since in addition the Chinese merchants most anxious to go to Japan were from southern China, an area farthest from Peking, it is not surprising that memorialists also argued for laws against the construction of ships large enough to sail to Japan.

As seen from Edo, then, East Asia was not a very friendly place. The Portuguese presence at Macao suggested a Portuguese tieup with the Ming. The Ming maintained a ban on commerce with Japan. The Koreans restricted Japanese to a slightly enlarged version of Deshima. One would not expect future shoguns to persevere in the idea of open relations with a number of countries. One might even argue that, with precedents like those mentioned, Japan's was not the first, but in a way the last, *sakoku* policy in East Asia.

But it was much more effective than the others. In the 1630s a ruthless and paranoid shogun, Iemitsu, responded to domestic insurrection at Shimabara. He was also aware of instability in the East Asian world order. Ming China and Korea were struggling with Manchu invaders. The picture in Europe also seemed confused. The long war of independence between Holland and Spain came to an end in 1648, and this left room for doubt about even friendly foreigners. Nor did word from Europe encourage ideas of freedom of religion. In 1648 the Treaty of Westphalia resolved the Protestant-Catholic standoff with a Latin formula that called for the acceptance of the ruler's faith by those under his governance: *cuius regio, eius religio*, as the treaty phrased it, left no room for individual decision.

What was special about the Japanese version of this was the ferocity of the persecution of

kirishitan. For that we probably have the character of Iemitsu to consider, together with the way inquisitors like Inoue, Chikugo no kami Masashige, were able to prey upon the depraved tastes of a cruel and jealous despot. Reinier Hesselink's study of the *Bresken* affair, which deserves early publication, provides abundant details of this, as does George Elison's earlier discussion in *Deus Destroyed*.⁴

The bakufu's obsession with domestic control was reinforced by its knowledge of the changes in Asia. It seemed wise to cut off Japanese traders from sources of contamination in East Asia, and finally to make them stay home altogether. Even "Chinese" ships from those areas were less welcome. Professor Kamiya Nobuyuki of Kyushu University discerns a "Macao-Luzon" line beyond which bakufu authorities tried to cut off all the trading relations the *shuin-sen* had carried on earlier. With the Manchu victory in China, however, intelligence gathered beyond that point also became less satisfactory, and after the Manchu government restricted trade to Canton in 1757 Japan's view of even East Asia gradually became narrower.

Despite this, fears of the outside world gradually lessened, and what seemed bizarre began to seem interesting. Interest in the West and its medical knowledge increased. In 1691 and 1692, just three centuries ago, Kaempfer found himself treated like someone from another planet, but by the time of Yoshimune a few decades later restrictions on the import of books were eased. Symbolically, Yoshimune ordered the bamboo blinds that had shielded his predecessors from the Dutch to be thrown open so that he could face them directly. By 1745 the Dutch diary notes that "Europeans have never been so close to the shogun" after they had been asked to write words in Dutch and slide them directly toward him. By then also, the diary notes that on the visit to Edo "all day long physicians and students visited us."

And then in the final stage of the *sakoku* system fears of outside danger brought new vigilance and caution. Even China, where Manchu imperialism had extended the historic borders of China, began to look dangerous. Hayashi Shihei warned of possible danger there. It was especially the Russian advance to the north, and knowledge of the revolutionary and then Napoleonic disorder in Western Europe, that combined to encourage a new fear of the outside world. Specialists in Western knowledge were now coopted by the government, and private investigation became more dangerous. In 1825, at the recommendation of Takahashi Kageyasu, the famous "don't think twice", *ni nen naku*, order for instant repulsion of Western ships, signalled a new paranoia. Professor Mitani Hiroshi's recent studies in the formation of bakufu policy in the 1840s show how hard it was to move away from this position.

The seclusion system, then, changed over time with perceptions of the international order. Despite the protestations of nineteenth century leaders that they were following tradition, seclusion was not central to Ieyasu's thought, nor was it particularly bizarre in the seventeenth century of state building and religious intolerance. It changed over time with Japanese perceptions of utility and international affairs, and it became rigid and self-defeating only at the end as the bakufu struggled with itself.

But more important than this is the fact that *sakoku* was aimed principally at the West. It is Western ethnocentricism to think of a country that has chosen to cut itself off from Westerners as though it was off from the world. Where Asia was concerned, the seclusion rules were much more a bamboo fence than they were a Berlin wall.

Bakufu trade policies were directed toward the acquisition of Chinese goods, and in this regard they were highly successful. Foreign trade and the Nagasaki system were so important to the bakufu that it subsidized domains that produced copper for export in order to keep them going. The "Dutch" trade was actually trade in Asian, chiefly Chinese, goods. And Chinese and Koreans brought more than the Dutch did. The Nagasaki trade, as Professor Ōba Osamu has put it, was really China trade.

The Chinese had no headman and no formal authorization as the Dutch did, and they too experienced a gradual narrowing of freedom of movement, but they were far more numerous. The Chinese quarter in Nagasaki, the *tōjin yashiki* that was established in 1689, constituted an area that harbored thousands of people when the fleet was in; in its first year it housed 4,888 Chinese. This was in contrast to the modest Dutch presence on Deshima. The quarter occupied an area somewhat larger than seven acres, double that of Deshima. Both areas were surrounded by water. Deshima was an artificial island, the *tōjin yashiki* was surrounded by a moat. In the 1740s, when things were going badly for the Dutch, Deshima was patrolled by over 30 Japanese guards; the Chinese quarter was more closely administered by over three hundred officials, guards, and inspectors. Things were on a dramatically different scale, and the allocations for ships, and for export limits of copper, also bear this out.

It is the cultural role of the Chinese, at least prior to the development of *rangaku*, that provides the most striking contrast to that of the Dutch. We are all familiar with Kaempfer's famous account of the way he and his companions were obliged to humiliate themselves for several hours of silly pantomime to amuse the shogun. But Tsunayoshi, that same shogun, tried hard to be a serious student of the higher culture of China. He laughed at Kaempfer, but he treated visiting Chinese monks with the greatest deference. The Dutch were well-advised to keep their faith under wraps, and they sealed whatever religious books they brought with them while their vessels were in port, but the Chinese were permitted to build branches of their temples in Fukien and Chekiang. Three were established before the seclusion decrees, one to provide for the needs of provincials from Chekiang, Kiansu and Kiangsi; two more were for sailors from Fukien, Foochow, and Changchow-Ch'uanchow. In 1678 a fourth temple was established for men from Canton (Kwangchow). Priests and abbots came from China for a century and more to staff these temples. The "Nanking" temple served as the avenue of introduction for Chinese monks who moved on to central Japan to found the Ōbaku Rinzai temple of Mampukuji at Uji. The first abbot was Yin Yün (Ingen), who brought a revised ordination procedure. He was soon in touch with the Myōshinji abbot Ryōkei; he was invited to Kyoto for an audience with the retired emperor Go Mizunoō, and he enjoyed the patronage of Tokugawa Ietsuna. Until 1740 all Mampukuji abbots were from China; then they alternated with Japanese abbots for sixty years, and only after that were they all Japanese.

Ironically, though, it was Kaempfer, and Titsing and von Siebold after him, who managed, despite the restrictions under which they lived, to scrape together the information on life in Edo Japan that still serves to educate us; so far as I am aware the Chinese guests, with much better opportunities, did nothing of the sort. What would we give for Ingen's picture of the conversations, seminars, and banquets with his Japanese hosts!

Ingen and other Chinese Rinzai monks were honored guests at the court of Tsunayoshi. Tsunayoshi prided himself on his knowledge of the Chinese classics. He presided at some 240 seminars on the *I Ching*, and monks, officials, daimyo, and Confucian scholars were expected to be present. Tsunayoshi's chamberlain Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu organized groups for the study of spoken Chinese, and the court Confucianist Ogyū Sorai went to great effort to try to master spoken colloquial Chinese. Sorai's letters to these learned Chinese are full of almost cloying respect and flattery. In short, the contrast between the treatment of these Chinese prelates and the dragnet that was out for Catholic priests brings home the fact that although for a century and more the seclusion system tried to exclude Western thought and religion, during the same period the Japanese elite was struggling to master the Chinese cultural tradition. That same respect was extended to Chinese goods. The bakufu saw to it that the best of Chinese silks came into its own hands and that the best of Chinese books were available to its scholars.

Some of this same priority extended to Korean scholars, partly because they could help in the transmission of Chinese goods and thought. Amenomori Hōshū struggled to master Korean, but before that he went to Nagasaki to study spoken Chinese. Members of Korean missions to Japan exchanged more than poems, paintings, and calligraphy with their hosts. Japanese were keen to learn more of medicine as practiced by the Koreans. In response to this it became customary to include doctors with each mission, and question and answer sessions with the visiting physicians were held along their route of travel. The Korean trade was a principal source of silk thread. Korean potters brought knowledge of the clays and glazes that made possible Japanese production of the blue slipware porcelain pattern that frequently was known as "Chinese grass" — *karakusa*. Before long this ware made its way via the port of Imari to Deshima for transmission to Europe, and from there on to Delft, to Meissen, and to Worcester, where the kilns began to domesticate its glazes and sometimes its patterns. In some respects, in other words, "closed" Japan was a transmission point for international cultural and technological exchange. William Atwell's analysis of bullion flows has shown that same Japan was a major player in economic exchange as well.

In the time of the eighth shogun, Yoshimune, the study of Chinese precedents extended to institutional patterns, with the study of Ming administrative law and the import of the Six Maxims of Shun-chih, the first Manchu emperor. Interestingly enough, it had been forwarded from Ryūkyū by Satsuma. Yoshimune saw that its political moralisms could have direct application to Japan. He ordered a simplified translation of a popular text containing the maxims for use in lower schools. There are records of daimyo who ordered village leaders to

explain its importance on the first day of every month, and the inspiration for such an imperial statement of civic morality took firm root. Its influence can be seen in the Meiji Period's equivalent, the Imperial Rescript on Education.⁵

The contact with China was large enough to have room for popular culture as well as high culture. We have the names of about 130 Chinese painters who came and stayed for a time. They were not the great artists of their day, of course; most of them were priests and merchants who were sufficiently skillful to make Japanese admire their work. Several of these men enjoyed enormous fame in Japan. Shen Nan-p'in, the best known, came in 1731 and again in 1733. After his return he continued to export his work to Japan, where about two hundred of his paintings survive. He and three others were known as the "four great teachers" who introduced late Ming and early Ch'ing styles of birds and flower painting. Theirs was a pleasant, bourgeoisie style that was easy to live with. It was popular with the urban residents of central China, and it quickly became popular with the townsmen in Japan. They also introduced Chinese "literati" painting, which found echo in Japanese *bunjinga* styles of Buson, Ike no Taiga, and late Tokugawa eclectics.

The shogun's interest extended to highly practical imports from China, in the hope of reducing what was becoming a serious trade imbalance. As Japanese mines ran out, restrictions were put on the export of bullion in 1685 and again in 1715 and at the end of the century. Both Dutch and Chinese were now sharply limited in the number of ships and copper they could export. New measures to control smuggling came into effect, and the inspection of books from China, instituted much earlier, grew in importance. But works of practical benefit increased in number, for the bakufu was now eager to produce things like sugar, silk, and pharmacology in Japan, items that had figured high on the list of imports. This brought with it the hiring of specialists from China to help in the search for comparable plants and soils in Japan. For some time, in other words, the cultural impact of the Chinese tradition continued to grow and spread throughout Japanese society despite the slackening of trade.

One sees other changes in Japan's international trade. As Japanese need for and interest in raw materials for war — gun powder, saltpeter — diminished the Dutch found themselves sending different kinds of goods to Nagasaki. Sugar was high among these, and it was one of the items whose domestic production Yoshimune tried to encourage. When the supply available to the Dutch dried up because of the destruction of sugar refining facilities in Java after a Chinese insurrection there in the eighteenth century, it endangered the arrangement with Deshima; the bakufu administrators provided less copper, and the Dutch threatened to break things off altogether. Significantly, they now knew they had the inhabitants of Nagasaki on their side, as the city lived for and on foreign trade. So did the men fortunate enough to be appointed to deal with the Dutch and Chinese at Nagasaki, for they were able to enhance their income many times through quiet speculation.

What needs to be stressed is that it was the Dutch, and not the Japanese, who threatened to break off trade. For the bakufu it had become an essential part of the system. As early as the 1690s Kaempfer had noted that Japan could get along without the system perfectly well,

but valued the information on world affairs that was contained in the reports that ship captains were required to submit. The *fūsetsugaki* might not always be accurate or adequate, but they were the regime's only avenue to information of that sort. By the second half of the eighteenth century, however, the diminishing production of copper posed problems for keeping things going. It is fascinating to see that copper producing domains like Akita were able to get bakufu subsidies to help them make up their quota of export copper, and that the bakufu did its best to prevent diversion of the dwindling supply to the internal market, where it could bring higher prices than it did in the fixed exchange at Nagasaki. "Import substitution", in the form of encouragement of domestic production to reduce imports, "managed trade" through price control, emphasizing outside markets at the expense of the domestic market, and "trade disputes" with the Dutch, are clearly not new phenomena in Japan. They have a considerable history.

The interesting thing is that there seems to have been very little connection, indeed an almost inverse relationship, between the volume and importance of trade and the cultural impact of outside civilizations. Trade with both China and Holland enjoyed its highest volume in the seventeenth century, and although the China cultural impact coincided with that, it continued to grow in the eighteenth century with literacy, education, and peace. When the Dutch trade was at its peak the Dutch East India Company representatives were treated like bizarre apparitions on their *sam̄pu* trips to Edo. But as ships of goods became less important, shipment of books became more important. Perhaps I sound like an academic eager to deprecate commerce. Whatever the case, the Deshima Diary for the 1740s and '50s has some interesting contrasts between the dreary standoff in arguments about copper, sugar and prices and the perceptible growth of interest in Dutch medicine and technology.

It began with Yoshimune's interest in the improvement of products, but for the most part it reflected a much wider interest in Western medicine, one that kept the Hollanders answering questions while they were in Edo. Before another century had passed elements of Dutch medicine were a standard part of the remedies advocated by even rural doctors, as Professor Tazaki Tetsurō has shown. Western medicine did not, of course, grow in isolated specialization, but rather in combination with earlier and Chinese teachings. In that sense Professor Yamazaki Masakazu's comment about the entry of new information and ideas, with which I began, finds justification.

This same pattern of eclecticism extended widely through Japanese culture. In painting, one finds an overlay of Western ideas of perspective and technique on earlier patterns. The best example, though somewhat extreme, is furnished by Shiba Kōkan. He began by using a Chinese pen name and doing birds and flowers in the Chinese manner, then modeled himself on Harunobu's prints of urban scenes and beauties, and finally moved on to Dutch painting and copper plate engraving and travelled to Nagasaki to see what he could learn. By the time he died in 1818, in other words, many Japanese were reorienting, or certainly broadening, themselves. Perhaps we can let Hirata Atsutane sum this up, with his statement in *Kodō taii* that "Japanese should study all the different kinds of learning — even though they may be

foreign — so that they can choose the good features of each and place them at the service of the country.”

These are familiar, but fascinating perspectives from which to consider the nature of the Japanese world view in early modern times. It is clear that during Edo years there were dramatic changes in Japan's world, as there were dramatic changes in Japan itself. The long interval of peace in Japan contrasted with an almost unbroken series of wars in the West. In the process dramatic changes in military technology made the weapons Japanese used as obsolete as the class structure of the people using them. Intellectual, political and economic transformation in America and Europe led to the participatory state with its citizen soldiers, while in Japan ordinary people took little interest in the activities of samurai. When English sailors landed at Shimonoseki in 1863 to spike the guns that had shelled them, local farmers obligingly lent them a hand, and at the siege of Wakamatsu in the Boshin War enterprising entrepreneurs were on hand to sell fruits to both sides during lulls in the shooting. In contrast, the explosion of national energy of revolutionary France led to the large scale slaughter of the Napoleonic wars.

The relative standing of the powers also changed dramatically. At the start of the Tokugawa period Holland was becoming one of Europe's great powers, with stations in all parts of the world, but by the time of Japan's opening it had been transformed into a small trading state which minded its own business almost as quietly as Tokugawa Japan did. Japanese students sent to Holland in the 1860s concluded with dismay that they had been studying the wrong Western language. Matsuki Kōan, the future Terashima Munenori, spoke for them in a letter home in 1862. “Many scholars in England and France raised their eyebrows when they heard that we read Dutch books”, he said; “even the Hollanders themselves all read their books in French or German. . . Beyond the borders there is literally no one who knows Dutch. I must honestly say that the country is so small and mean as to startle one. . . beside that, the factories are extremely small. .”⁶ He might, of course, have said the same things about Japan.

Perceptions of China underwent comparably drastic change. While Japan was turned inward the Manchu emperors had embarked upon a program of imperial expansion that brought China its present borders in the northeast, west, and southwest. We sense echoes of this in Hayashi Shihei's alarm at the military muscle displayed by the great Manchu emperors. But by the early nineteenth century that perception had changed once more as a new and stronger England prepared its challenge. Satō Nobuhiro argued that a resurgent Japan might begin its rise by seizing the Manchu homeland in the north, and by bakumatsu times each Japanese mission that stopped at Chinese ports on its way home brought new stories of Chinese weakness and inefficiency. After the Western powers destroyed the Chinese international system, Japan's echo of that, with tributary races to the north and south, no longer made much sense.

As I noted earlier, there had been indications in the late eighteenth century — the

Tanuma years — that Japan might relax its restrictions and experiment with some new forms of international trade. If this had been done, Japan might not have found itself so seriously “behind” the West. In the 1870s the Iwakura ambassadors noted that, as Kume Kunitake put it in his chronicle of that great mission, the technological superiority of the West was of recent date. Moreover, it seemed to him that what really counted was the need for enterprise and drive, which could make up for natural disadvantages. By then China was no longer a model, but Holland still had something to say for itself. As he put it, “If people with the minds of the Dutch lived in the lands of China, one knows that hundreds of Hollands would be produced in the East. When we think about it, cannot the industrious efforts of Holland be compared to those of Japan?”⁷

There are other things to note about the reception Japanese missions received in the nineteenth century. The Western leaders they met were critical of Japan’s ban on Christianity, but in Protestant countries many were quick to agree that there might have been a problem about Catholics in early modern times. And they made no mention of proselytization in Japan. Far from it. Kume reported: “Even when we had audiences with emperors, kings, and queens, when we were entertained by foreign ministers, it was the words [commerce and industry] that always appeared in their speeches.” The same feature had commended the Dutch, rather than the Spanish, to Ieyasu centuries before.

But of course *sakoku* was not in fact relaxed in the Temmei years. Instead Matsudaira Sadanobu intensified it. He also coopted scholars of the West while he discouraged the diffusion of their scholarship, and he persuaded his contemporaries and successors that Japan’s intensified restrictions had their origins in the formative years of Tokugawa rule.

Today we are well aware that the openings provided in the *sakoku* system served Japan well in the nineteenth century transformation. From China and Chinese books came sure indications of the power of Western technology and the need to prepare measures to counteract it. Writings like Wei Yün’s *Hai-kuo tzu chih* first alerted the government, which had immediate access to them through the censorship system, and then the literate, through Japanese editions that were immediately accessible to all who could read Chinese, that Japan was in danger. Meanwhile the Dutch imports of guns, and books about guns and technology, prepared many more for the need to restructure Japan’s political economy to face the Western danger.

Indeed, Holland proved to have been an almost ideal bridge for the transmission of Western lore. Matsuki Kōan was quite correct in saying that Holland was no longer the great power it had been in the seventeenth century, and that the Dutch did much of their reading in other European languages. But that same phenomenon meant that in importing their books in Dutch, Japanese had had access to the wisdom of all of the West. As a result, once a Japanese government reversed its policy from banning foreign travel, to virtually order a generation to study abroad, those students were prepared by training and some by language to speed their country’s entry into the modern world.

Notes

- 1 Ching Mei-chiu, *Ryūmichi kaikō — Chūgoku anakisto no hansei* (tr. Ōtala Iwao and Hatano Tarō, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1966.)
- 2 David L. Howell, "Ainu Ethnicity and the Boundaries of the Early Modern Japanese State", *Past & Present* Number 142 (February 1994), pp. 69-93.
- 3 Derek Massarella, *A World Elsewhere: Europe's Encounter with Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990).
- 4 Reinier H. Hesselink, "The Prisoners from Nambu: The *Breskens* Affair in Historical and Historiographical Perspective" (Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1922), and George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.)
- 5 Discussed in Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 69-9.)
- 6 Quoted from *Ihi nyūkō roku* (Nihon shiseki kyōkai, Tokyo, 1931), pp. 244, 249-50, in Marius B. Jansen, "New Materials for the Intellectual History of Nineteenth Century Japan", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (20 : 3, 4,) December 1957, p. 595-96.
- 7 Quoted in Eugene Soviak, "On the Nature of Western Progress: The Journal of the Iwakura Embassy", in Donald H. Shively, ed., *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 17.