

# THE DUTCH'S 'FLOATING LIFE' ON DESHIMA ISLAND: A GLOOMY SIDE OF DUTCH-JAPAN RELATIONSHIP DURING THE TOKUGAWA PERIODE, 1715-1790

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In order to extend its trading network and engagement in the 'intra-Asian trading network', the VOC sought to gain contact with Japan, which was known for its luxurious products as copper and silk. At that time, Tokugawa Ieyasu just emerged as the new Japanese ruler, whose regime introduced a controversial policy known as Sakoku to cut Japan completely off from the international relations to strengthen internal politics. As a result, Japan lost its diplomatic and economic relationship with other nations. The Dutch (represented by the VOC) – together with China and Korea - were the only exception as the Tokugawa regime granted them trading license and used them as window to see 'the outer world's' development. The VOC's officers had to pay costly this privilege, however, since they should follow Tokugawa's strict rules and control. They were allowed to settle and live only on a virtual island called Deshima, which was located on the bay of Nagasaki. Tokugawa regime provided all their needs, but restricted their movements and activities especially in accessing land and making contact with local inhabitants. Perusing the available printed historical sources to be combined with the recent literature, this paper describes the daily life of those VOC's Dutch officers living on the island, and seeks to analyze the importance of this 'odd relations' for political and economic relations of the two nations.*

**Keywords:** *the VOC, Dutch, Tokugawa Japan, Deshima,*

## **ABSTRAK**

Untuk memperluas jaringan perdagangan dan keterlibatannya dalam 'jaringan perdagangan Asia', VOC berusaha menjalin kontak dengan Jepang yang saat itu dikenal sebagai penghasil komoditas berharga berupa tembaga dan kain sutra. Pada saat yang sama, Tokugawa Ieyasu muncul sebagai penguasa baru Jepang, yang rejimnya kemudian mengeluarkan kebijakan kontroversial yang dikenal sebagai Sakoku, yaitu menutup Jepang dari dunia internasional untuk memperkuat situasi politik internal. Akibatnya hubungan diplomatik dan ekonomi Jepang dengan bangsa-bangsa dunia terputus total. Belanda (melalui VOC) – bersama dengan Cina dan Korea – merupakan pengecualian, karena Tokugawa memberikan mereka ijin dagang dan menjadikannya sebagai perantara untuk melihat perkembangan 'dunia luar'. Meskipun demikian, para pegawai VOC harus membayar mahal hak istimewa tersebut karena mereka harus mengikuti aturan dan pengawasan yang ketat dari rejim Tokugawa. Mereka hanya diperbolehkan hidup dan tinggal di sebuah pulau buatan bernama Deshima yang terletak di teluk Nagasaki. Rejim Tokugawa menyediakan semua kebutuhan hidup mereka, namun sangat membatasi ruang gerak dan aktivitas mereka, terutama untuk mengakses daratan dan berkomunikasi dengan penduduk setempat. Dengan menggunakan sumber-sumber primer tercetak dan menggabungkannya dengan literatur mutakhir, makalah ini mengungkapkan kehidupan sehari-hari para pegawai VOC-Belanda di pulau tersebut, dan menganalisa makna penting 'relasi yang aneh' tersebut bagi hubungan politik dan ekonomis kedua bangsa tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** VOC, Belanda, Tokugawa, Jepang, Deshima,

## **INTRODUCTION**

After established Batavia as its main headquarter, the VOC sought to expand its trading network to wider area of Asia in order

to get a deeper engagement in the dynamic of "intra-Asian trade network". One of its next destinations was Japan, a country known at that time for its luxurious products: copper and silk.

The Dutch made first contact with Japan in the early of 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the 'Liefde' (Charity or Love), one of the five ships from Rotterdam anchored in Japan on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1600. At that time, the *Sekigahara* battle, a long-bloody civil war had just ended, in which Tokugawa Ieyasu emerged as victorious leader and inaugurated the two and half centuries of his *Shogun* regime. It was reported that Tokugawa Ieyasu was impressed with the Dutch ship, with the skill of its crews and especially with the firearms it was carrying, which likely became the reason for granting them permission to settle and build a trading post in *Hirado*, just offshore of Nagasaki prefecture.<sup>1</sup> For Dutch historians, the permission the Dutch received was quite a privilege considering the fact that during the Tokugawa regime, Japan implemented the politic of *Sakoku* declaring herself as a 'closed country', to cut off from the rest of the world. The Dutch, who came under the flag of the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), was the only European to have such position while the other two foreign nations were China and Korea (Blussé 1986: 47; Henshall 2004: 58-59).

The Dutch VOC gained such privilege, however, with a quite expensive cost because all of its trading representatives should settle in a confinement, inside a small 'ghetto' known as *Deshima*, a virtual island in the bay of Nagasaki since 1641 until the end of Tokugawa regime in 1853. On this island, the Dutch lived under a tight control and strict rules of Tokugawa authorities, and they could not leave the island without official permission. As a result, the Dutch had a very limited contact with local inhabitants and other foreigners. Through this policy, Tokugawa administration created a tight control upon the Dutch activities in order to filter outside influence that might be harmful to Japanese society.

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<sup>1</sup> As of course, Tokugawa was also aware of the VOC's importance position as a global trading power with its vast network and influence, which at that time had already covered trading hubs in the Indian Oceans, South Africa and South East Asia. This was very much likely another reason for Tokugawa to choose the Dutch VOC as the only European to trade in his territory (Blussé 1986: 50).

Historical accounts have depicted that under such restricted surveillance the Dutch played a role as the only source of information for the Tokugawa, from whom the Japanese learned science, medicine and knowledge from outside world, especially from the West. Prominent historian, C.R. Boxer views this historical process as 'one of the most curious plots on the face of this planet for more than two hundred years' (Boxer 1936: 115).

Apart from some peculiar conditions the Dutch had lived through on this island, this period had been considered in literature as the most important period in the history of Dutch-Japan relation, when the two nations developed intense trading cooperation and exchanged large number of their respective cultural values. (See Sansom 1950; Huibert 1984; Goodman 2000; Rietbergen 2003 and Chaiklin 2003). In the context of commerce, as the only Western country being allowed to trade with Japan, the VOC merchants monopolized and accrued a large amount of profit from the export trade of copper and other precious commodities of Japan to Asian and European markets (Shimada 2002). These commodities were indispensable for the entire VOC's trading imperium in Asia. Remmelink, a Dutch historian, has argued that 'it was one of three pillars of the VOC's trade empire: precious metals from Japan, textiles from India, and spices from the Indies' (Remmelink 2004: xxiv). In the context of cultural exchange, the Dutch had a very important role in introducing and transferring Western technology and science to Japanese ruler and their society through *Rangaku* or Dutch studies system (Goodman 2000: 119-145).

This paper discusses the commercial activities of the Dutch merchants living in *Deshima* and their social cultural encounters with Japanese people of Nagasaki and from the surrounding areas. The main issue to be addressed is the daily life of the Dutch in the island of *Deshima*. How did the Dutch manage their daily life under a tight control of Tokugawa's Japan? Why did they accept such difficult situation and in what way did the cultural exchanges between

the Dutch and the Japanese take place in day-to-day basis? The first two questions cover the basic human needs of Dutch people ranging from such problems as entertainment, sex, consumption, social gathering, and many more. Meanwhile, the last question certainly aims to uncover the practice of *Rangaku* system throughout the period concerned. By addressing these questions, the paper sheds some lights on the history of Dutch – Japan relations in the eighteenth century. Basic information was taken from the following printed sources, namely *The Deshima Diaries, Marginalia 1700-1740* and *Deshima Diaries, Marginalia 1740-1800*,<sup>2</sup> which contain the logbook of daily activities of the Dutch and almost everything happened on this island.

## JAPAN UNDER TOKUGAWA: SOCIO-POLITICAL CONDITION

Historians had given different terms to characterize the Japan's Tokugawa period. Referring to its political nature, historians label the Tokugawa's period as 'the great peace' (Sansom 1963), 'an age of stability' (Cullen 2003: 95), or 'closed country' (Henshall 2004: 51).<sup>3</sup> According to Hayami, the two and half century of Tokugawa period (1600-1860s) consisted of at least the following important moments: the seventeenth century as a 'great transformation', nineteenth century as the busy 'transition', and the eighteenth century as a relatively quite, and static in every component of society (Hayami 1998: 131-132). The Tokugawa government successfully concentrated their energy to establish a strong administration and political control to an extent that it had created a long peaceful period during which Japan saw almost no international and domestic political upheavals at national level.

2 *The Deshima Register*. 11 Vols. (1640-1650; 1680-1800) (Leiden: The Center for the History of the European Expansion 1986-2001); *The Deshima Diaries, Marginalia 1700-1740* (Tokyo: The Japan-Netherlands Institute 1992); *The Deshima Diaries, Marginalia 1740-1800* (Tokyo: The Japan-Netherlands Institute 2004).

3 Henshall refers to the most famous term of *sakoku* political system, when the Tokugawa regime cut off the country from any international relations, and only with the Dutch as exception.

The political success of Tokugawa regime had a lot to do with its distinctive political system known as *bakufu* system. Under this *system*, the shogun had national authority and the *daimyo* – a samurai lord - had regional authority, the territorial unity under a feudal structure, which controlled an increasingly large bureaucracy to administer the mixture of centralized and decentralized authorities. The Tokugawa became more powerful during their first century of rule: land redistribution gave them nearly 7 million *koku*, control of the most important cities, and a land assessment system reaping great revenues. The Tokugawa also consolidated their control over the emperor, the court, all the *daimyo*, and the religious orders. A code of laws was established to regulate the *daimyo* houses. The code encompassed private conduct, marriage, dress, and types of weapons and numbers of troops allowed; required alternate year residence at Edo; prohibited the construction of ocean-going ships; prescribed Christianity; and stipulated the *bakufu* regulations as national law. The various regulations and levies strengthened the Tokugawa but also depleted the wealth of the *daimyo*, thus weakening their threat to the central administration, which was placed at Edo, nowadays Tokyo (Totman 1967: 14-15; Henshall 2004: 51).

This political system was constructed based on the existing social structure of Japanese society, which was known as *Shino-koshoi* system (a kind of caste system). The system divided hierarchically the citizenry into several groups. At the top of the hierarchy, but removed from political power, were the imperial court families at Kyoto. The real political power holders were the samurai, followed by peasants, artisans, merchants, and an underclass of untouchable society, consisted of religious leaders. Given that these professional warriors had no function in time of peace, the Tokugawa saw them as a threat to law and order. They were thus put under a close supervision of the *metsuke*, the secret police, and to facilitate this control they obliged to settle in the cities.

In descending hierarchical order, they consisted of farmers, who were organized into villagers, artisans, and merchants. Urban dwellers, often well-to-do merchants, were known as *chonin* (townspeople) and were confined to special districts. The individual had no legal rights in Tokugawa Japan. The family was the smallest legal entity, and the maintenance of family status and privileges was of great importance at all levels of society (Kootte 1986: 46).

Japan under Tokugawa was also known as 'a closed country', because the *Sakoku* system dominated its foreign policy (also called as the policy of seclusion). The policy was formulated in 1630s, and included policy to remove the Western threat, symbolized by the political threat to shogun's authority presented by Christianity, and international policy to effectively close Japan off from the rest of the world (Goodman 2000: 2-3). Yet, that was not mean closing the door entirely to other countries. Japan during the period enjoyed his own world order in his relation with the kingdoms of Korea and Ryukyu, and saw merchants travel to his shores from China and Netherlands. There are two hypotheses among historians to explain why the *sakoku* system was introduced. Both assume that the Tokugawa government was aware of the superior military technology of Western countries. One hypothesis suggest that the Tokugawa government was concerned that a local lord might get help from a foreign country in order to topple the Tokugawa shogun; while the other maintains that the Tokugawa government was afraid of a direct threat from foreign countries, which had already invaded China and the Philippines.<sup>4</sup>

Some historians connected this political policy, as a Tokugawa's reaction, to the expansion of European trade influence and the propagation of Christianity, especially those run by the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries. For Tokugawa

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4 The *sakoku* system has been increasingly challenged by Western and Japanese scholars since the 1970s. They proposed to see Tokugawa foreign relation in 17<sup>th</sup> century as its effort to integrate Tokugawa diplomatic behavior into the structure of politics and polity in the domestic realm (Toby 1984).

regime, Westerner always presented problem. Their trade was beneficial, and they had some useful technology, but they were simply a big threat for the shogun's peace of mind. In particular, the challenge that their uncompromising God presented to the authority of the shogun was a major problem, not in theological terms, but in political ones (Henshall, 2004: 57). According to Henshall, though the regime did not concern overly with the theological distinction, Catholicism was seen as more of a threat than the newly emerged Protestantism. This, Henshall said, may have been because Catholics comprised the great majority of the Christians in Japan – and all the converted Japanese – or because they were outward and assertive in the expression of their faith than the Protestants. Most likely, however, it was largely because the *shogunate* aware of the vigorous empire building pursued by Catholics nations in the New World. Therefore, in any event, Christianity came to symbolize the Western's presence and threat to shogun's power and authority. It became focal point for the shogun to take action against that threat.<sup>5</sup>

Under Tokugawa regime religion was a serious matter, and they controlled it as part of state affairs. Various sects of Buddhism was continued to be tolerated as the popular religion, however official Tokugawa patronage was given to orthodox Confucianism with its firm foundation of discipline and obedience, as principles of social order. Meanwhile, Shinto was also allowed to develop as minority religion (together with Christianity), and was only developed as state religion after the collapse of Tokugawa. The official philosophy was the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (1130-1200), a leader of the Sung (960-1279) philosophical

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5 In this case, some historian found the reason why Tokugawa regime was enlightened with the arrival of the Dutch. The ruler had just started his campaign against Christianity (Catholics) due to the over-enthusiastic of Portuguese Jesuits threatening his authority, and knowledge of the 'red haired barbarians' as the Dutch came to be called, would prove useful to counter the influence of Christianity in Japan. The protestant Dutch, whose first objective was trade and not the propagation of the Christian faith, had arrived and established their credibility just in time (Fujita 1991: 20-25).

renaissance in China. This Chu Hsi brand of Confucianism had great appeal for the military rulers of Japan because it fitted the precepts of the ancient saga into a metaphysical framework. This Neo-Confucianism system seemed well suited in its application to authoritarian Tokugawa rule. It emphasized loyalty and orthodoxy and was essentially conservative in tenor. The regime hoped to derive from their official sponsorship of the Neo-Confucianism philosophy not only guiding principles by which they could rule the country but a historical and ethical justification for their own position. Once adopted, therefore, Neo-Confucianism provided both the form and the ideology for the maintenance and perpetuation of the *Bakuhau* politics and its samurai-dominated social organization (Goodman 2000: 4).

In economic field, during Tokugawa period, goods, money and services were simply exchanged between three social groups; the ruling warrior class (*samurai*), farmers, and merchants/artisans, circled respectively. Within each group, off course there were different social strata, for instance in the warrior class territorial lords (*daimyo*) and vassals, or in the farming group, landowners and tenants. It means that the main economic sectors at that time were agriculture, trade/commerce, and small industries such as precious metals mines. In Tokugawa Japan, said Hayami, about 80 percent of the population lived in rural areas, and agriculture commanded the biggest production. A marketing and trade system developed, and in the eighteenth century what historians called as ‘the Osaka-centered commerce system’ functioned effectively. The export trade also played an important role, and one of the important commodities of the time was copper, traded with and by the ships of VOC to Asian and Western markets (Ito 1986: 8).

## THE DUTCH AND JAPANESE ECONOMY

In her *Merchant in Asia*, Els Jacob states that the Dutch’s trade contact with Japan had a unique place within the Asian network of the VOC. The uniqueness of this contact lays on the

fact that Japan was only supplier of precious metal as an important commodity in the intra-Asian trade system. Meanwhile, the Dutch acquired this product in exchange for purely Asian products, such as raw silk from Bengal and cotton fabric and ray skin from Coromandel. As the only Western country with such privilege to trade and have limited contacts with Japan, the Dutch held a very profitable position. Since 1641 the Japanese authorities allowed them to build a trade post in *Deshima* – close to Nagasaki bay, and accordingly granted also permission to the VOC to export Japanese copper. Therefore, it could be said that the VOC merchants’ biggest interest in Japan laid on their precious metal products, especially copper. Owing to these contacts, said Jacob, the VOC had a commercial strength in Asia in the seventeenth century that no other European or indigenous competitor could match (Jacob 2006: 145-155).

Japan, according to Shimada, had already gained recognition as a copper-exporting country in East Asia since the middle age, and until the mid-seventeenth century its copper exports were considerably influential in the world economy. This was the period of ‘the golden age of Japanese copper’. Copper was widely used as material for numerous utilities. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, copper both in Asia and in Europe was mostly converted into low-value coins used for small payments (called *doit*). In Asia, it was also used as material of some household utilities. Besides the VOC, Japanese copper was exported by Chinese junks from Nagasaki and by Japanese ships via the island of Tsushima. The ultimate market for Japanese copper was the world in general, but some particular traders had particular markets to supply. The VOC reshipped Japanese copper from Batavia and Malacca mainly to South Asia and Europe. Japanese copper exported by Chinese junks went mainly to mainland China with some to Southeast Asia while that which was exported through Tsushima Island went to Korea. However, among the markets in the intra-Asian trade system, South Asia was the most important recipient of Japanese copper, in terms of

the VOC's trade circle. Throughout the eighteenth century more than 80 percent of Japanese copper was traded by the VOC (Shimata 2006: 25).

Concerning the production of copper, Shimada depicted that the main mining regions were limited to a few areas in northeastern Japan and on the island of Shikoku. These areas produced more than 75 percent of the total output of Japanese copper throughout the eighteenth century. Another several productive mines were located in the *Mutsu* and *Dewa* regions, also in the northeastern Japan. Together they produced around 40 per cent of the total production in Japan. Most of those copper mines were run by the local domain (*han*), or by a family. In the island of Shikoku, for instances, the Sumitomo family managed the *Tatsakawa* and *Besshi* mines. These mines were two of the greatest in early modern Japan, and the Sumitomo family was one of the biggest business groups in Japan. However, the exploration of the mines should have a permission of the central authority. As a rule, all those raw copper had to be sent to Osaka for further refining, which was also run by the Sumitomo family. Refined-copper produced in Osaka was delivered to the VOC and Chinese merchant in Nagasaki for export. The Tokugawa's shogunate strictly monitored the refining process in Osaka and the distribution route of copper from the mines via Osaka to Nagasaki (Shimata 2006: 48-51).

Referring to trend in gross profit per unit, Shimada divided the copper trade between Japan and the Dutch in the eighteenth century into three periods: (1) 1700-1725: gross profit per unit stagnated from the beginning century until around 1725; (2) 1725-1760: gross profit per unit began to rise rapidly around 1760. During these thirty-five years the profit per unit in 1760 was approximately twice as high as that of 1725; (3) 1760-1790: after 1760 gross profit per unit gradually decreased. With a fluctuated size of the VOC's copper trade during the eighteenth century, Shimada came to the conclusion that the company enjoyed advantages from the intra-Asian trade system. One important factor in the success of this system was that

Japanese copper was a significant commodity in this trade network. This commodity also gave a significant contribution to the continuity of economic growth in the eighteenth century Japan. And last but not least, the commodity also had far-reaching economic consequences. It stimulated an international division of production across Asian region. On the basis of competition in term of comparative advantage in production, the VOC's Asian trade paved the way for Asian economic development and social change in the modern period (Shimada 2006: 168-171).

Besides exporting copper as main trading activity during the eighteenth century, the VOC also involved in exporting other commodities such as camphor, porcelain, pickles, lacquer and copperware. However, according to Nagazumi, Imari porcelain was the most important competitive export for the VOC; and in the context of private trade this was the highest commodity being traded in 1711. Nagazumi also highlighted the VOC's import trade in Japan in commodities like silk, textile, sugar, spice, sappanwood, and pepper. The most important import commodity for the VOC was sugar, but the only good 'monopolized' by the company was Bengal silk. It was the least profitable commodity because the competing domestic silk product had emerged in several regions of Japan, but the company had to bring these goods to meet the orders of the Nagasaki magistrate, who demanded that one third of import goods had to be silk (Nagazumi 1986: 150-151).

During this period, the presence of the VOC's trading post in *Deshima* had certain unexpected effect in expanding rather than restricting the profile of the Dutch. In the context of strict rules, the business was not as profitable as it had been at the end of the *Hirado* period when free trade was allowed. Goods had to be sold at fixed prices decided upon in advance. Maximum prices for import and export goods were set, and goods that were remained unsold had to be taken back. However, in spite of all these regulations, the VOC still made profits and continued to trade – mainly – silk for gold, silver, copper and camphor.

Also, lacquer work, porcelain and tea were bought and exported to Batavia or Europe. Contrary to what one might conclude, *Deshima* was a popular posting among the VOC's employees. One reason for this was that the Japanese authority, apart from official trade, gave permission for limited personal and private trading as well, a privilege which provided those employees with a handsome additional income sometimes reaching levels of more than 20 times their normal annual salary. The *Opperhoofd*, ship captain, whose salary was 1200 guilders a year, was recorded to have made profit as much as 30.000 guilders (Chaiklin 2003: 12-21).<sup>6</sup>

In the late of eighteenth century, in line with some political reasons, both in Japan and Europe, profit and trade on *Deshima* was deteriorated, and *Deshima* lost its key position within Asian trade system. The Japanese authorities set out new regulations on such affairs as the numbers of ships permitted and the exchange rate between silver and gold - initiatives that restricted profits for the Dutch traders. This was the era of the French Revolution and the loss of the once mighty Dutch command of the sea. After the collapse of the VOC in 1799, and then English occupation in 1811, the Dutch merchants in Japan did not seek to change the condition of private trade. Several figures of private merchants tried to keep remain the trade activities in Japan, and in the following decades they played a significant role to keep the relation trade between the Netherlands and Japan.

## **DESHIMA: A MELANCHOLIC PICTURE OF THE DUTCH LIFE IN JAPAN**

As already mention before the Tokugawa government started their *Sakoku* politic in 1930s. The application of their policy regarding the foreigners in Japan can be summed up briefly in chronological order as follows: the requirement

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<sup>6</sup> According to Nagazumi, the private trade among VOC officers or servants had started since *the bakufu* implemented the *sadame-daka*, the limitation on the trade volume through Nagasaki, in 1685, when private trade was officially recognized by the Nagasaki magistrate's office (Nagazumi 1986: 148).

that permission be obtained from the *roju*, senior councilors, for Japanese ships to sail overseas (1633); the ban on Japanese people going abroad (1635); the concentration of the Portuguese trade only in *Deshima* in Nagasaki (1636); the ban on Portuguese trade (1639) after the Christian revolt in *Shimabara* and *Amakusa* in 1637-1638 and they completely expelled from *Deshima* in 1639. With *Deshima* vacant, the shogunate found ways to restrict the freedom of movement of the last westerner in Japan: the Dutch. In 1640 they found a good reason to confine the Dutch to *Deshima*. Head merchant Francois Caron had two warehouses built of stone to prevent loss by fire - a common threat in those days. And below the roof arch, following European custom, the words 'Anno 1640' were engraved to show the year of completion. The mentioning of the Christian date proved an insensitive mistake. The Dutch had to tear them down and move to *Deshima*. The Shogun's decree meant the Dutch left Hirado on 24 July 1641. From then on for more than 200 years the Dutch would be the only western country permitted to have contact with Japan and the Japanese.

## **The Morphology of *Deshima***

*Deshima* was an artificial land, built under the command of shogun in 1634 and located in the bay of Nagasaki to assemble all of Portuguese traders in one place. By keeping them apart like this the Tokugawa government wanted to control them in easier way. One study reported that the building process of the land was involving 25 prominent citizens of Nagasaki, and upon completion it became an integral part of Nagasaki. The island was constructed in the shape of a fan; local legend has it that when the shogun was asked to determine its form, he spread out his fan in reply. The land was then called *Deshima*, which literary meant a 'fore island' or 'projecting island' referring to its position before the town of Nagasaki. For local people, *Deshima* was usually referred to as 'the Dutch lodge' (*oranda heya*), 'the Dutch mansion' (*oranda yashiki*), or 'Deshima ward' (*Deshima-machi*). The supervision of the island

and, off course, the Dutch was fully responsible of the Nagasaki magistrate (Han-Liem 1986: 53; Hesselink 2000: 49).

Based on the report written by Engelbert Kaempfer, who arrived on Deshima in 1690 as the VOC's doctor, Goodman reveals that the foundation of the island was made of stone to rise it 0.5 fathom above the sea level. According to Goodman, both the east and west sides were 210 feet each in length. The north side closest to the town was 557 feet long, while the south side facing the harbor was 760 feet. The total area of the island was 3969 *tsubo* (around 15,700 square yards). The entire island was surrounded with a high board wooden fence with a double row of sharp stakes, completely enclosed the island. On the west side there was a landing gate, which was opened only at the time during the season when the Dutch ships were being unloaded or loaded. The island was connected to the mainland by a wooden drawbridge, by the end of it was built a strong guardhouse, which served as the entrance to the island to make sure that no unauthorized person entered or left the island (Goodman 2000: 19).

In order to have a permission from Tokugawa authority to stay in *Deshima*, the Dutch had to pay certain amount of money for rental payment. The rent price of the island was 55 *kame* of silver (1 *kame* = 8,27 lb) per year or 5,500 tails. In 1641 this amount was equivalent to 8,250 guilders, but by 1720s this had risen to 19,530 guilders, and in 1733 the rental price was reset at 2,750 tails. By paying the rent, the VOC could use all buildings and facilities on the island including residences, warehouses and several domiciles for Japanese officials such as the overseers, the interpreters, and the guards. But, the VOC could also built new building if they found it necessary at their own expense. All of the buildings also had to be furnished by the Dutch. Some that were built included a place for the sale of goods, two warehouses, a large kitchen, a house for deputies – appointed by the *bugyo* (local magistrate) to regulate trade, and quarter

for interpreters. Concerning the basic needs, Goodman has described that the Dutch had kept cows, sheep, pigs and chicken on one corner of the island. Water for cooking came in bamboo pipes from a river inside Nagasaki and had to be paid as a separate item. In addition to that regular fee, the Dutch were also expected to give a gift to *bakufu* (shogun) to maintenance their relationship once in a year (Goodman 2000: 19-20).

On this tiny island, the number of Dutch personnel consisted of only fifteen to twenty persons. During certain times, mainly the trade season when the ships from Batavia arrived, this number increased. However, there were seldom more than forty Dutchmen on the island, since most crewmembers were not allowed to step ashore. The VOC employees consisted of the following officers or servants: the *opperhoofd* or chief merchant, who held the rank of senior merchant (*opperkoopman*) and was in charge of the factory; a deputy (*secunde* or *pakhuismeester*); a bookkeeper (*boekhouder*); a scribe and a warehouse keeper (*pakhuismeester*), usually a junior merchant (*onderkoopman*); the store keeper (*dispencier*); the clerks (*klerken*); the butler (*bottelier*) in charge of the liquor supply; the cook (*kok*) and the smith (*smid*). Apart from the VOC personnel, there were some slaves brought from Bengal or Java, who were called 'black boys' (*koronbo*) by the Japanese because of their dark skin (Hesselink 2000: 48).

For this small group of powerless and isolated Dutchmen, the Tokugawa authority developed a 'special section' of bureaucracy to supervise all of their activities. The most important officials were the interpreters (*tsuji*), since they involved in almost every important moment in *Deshima*. Besides the official interpreters, there were several unofficial interpreters who offered their services as guide boys. There were also Japanese cooks who assisted the Dutch cook. Meanwhile, the daily necessities of the factory was supplied by a fixed number of hereditary suppliers, they were called marketers (*comprador* or *konpura*). From 1677 four Japanese physicians (*Japane meester*;



*Deshima naika*) were attached to the factory. The water supply was the responsibility of someone called ‘the waterman’ (*waterman*; *mizuya*), and someone who served as tailor (*snijder*, *shitateya*). There were also the porcelain makers (*tokiya*), the camphor suppliers, and the lacquer workers (*urushiya*). During the trading season, *Deshima* was crowded with a number of coolies (*hiyatoi*) supervised by a ‘coolie master’ (*koelimeester*; *hiyatoigashira*), who transported the merchandise and goods from *Deshima* to the city, after judged by the ‘expert’ (*kennisluijden*; *mekiki*). The island also had some guards, who always patrolled at night, drafted from the poorest inhabitants of Nagasaki and supervised by a ward elder. The total number of Japanese involved in running the Dutch factory was quite high. In 1708, for example, it was reported that 224 peoples with different kind of functions had a certain connection to *Deshima* (Hesselink 2000: 49).

### **From Trade to Love: the Social Life of the Dutch**

Trading, absolutely, was the most important activity for the Dutchmen in *Deshima*, where they could make direct and indirect contacts with different groups of Japanese community. The trading itself was a seasonal activity, which came on only in certain period, mostly in September-October. On the same month of the next year the account books of the previous year were closed. The ships from Batavia usually arrived in July and August, and then the cargo was offloaded, weighed, measured and inspected. The cargoes were then sold in September-October and the return shipment, consisting primarily of copper and camphor, and also some silver, porcelain, and lacquered goods, were weighed and loaded on board to the ships. They set sail from Nagasaki Bay for Formosa, Cambodia, or Batavia in October or November, but never late than December. During this trade season all the VOC’s officers were busy, when they would meet with many local people, traders, officers in charges, and coolies to trade or earn money (Hesselink 2000: 50).

After trading season was over, the resident *opperhoofd* would give his authority and all the Company’s properties to the incoming *opperhoofd* in front of all the Dutch personnel staying over in Japan. It was decided after 1640 by the Japanese government that the *opperhoofd* of *Deshima* would last for a period of one year. It was the time for the replacement of the *opperhoofd* by his successor, who had been appointed in Batavia. According to some historians, this arrangement was aimed at preventing the *opperhoofd* to become too friendly with the Japanese. The new officer then had to go to pay his compliments to the magistrate of Nagasaki. After that he had to go to Edo for annual visit to the shogun, as part of a diplomatic cooperation between the VOC and Japan, due to their exclusive trading cooperation. This was then recognized as the court journey (*hofreis*), when the Dutch presented a full boat of gifts, which was represented the respect of the Dutch to the *shogunate* but also in term of cultural exchange between the two nations (Chaiklin 2003: 39-42). The court journey usually took three months, started in February or March until May or June. While the *opperhoofd* was away, his deputy would supervise the repairs and maintenance of the building, and keep the official diary up to date. The court journey always occurred in the spring so that the *opperhoofd* could be back in time to manage the business activities, which were actually his most important task. For the rest, the Dutch in *Deshima* only received occasional visitors to have an informal meeting or to observe the condition of *Deshima*’s facilities (Effert & Forrer 2000: 18-19).

On top of the relation with the shogunates and local magistrates, another important local officer in term of trading was the officer of *Geldkamer* or *kaisho*. It was established in 1698, after the abolition of taxation trade system. This institution was essentially a government office that monopolized the trade of all merchandises imported by the Chinese junks and Dutch ships. It purchased all the Dutch living expenses and paid off the remainder in export products. In essence,

the *Geldkamer* took over the administration and accounting that the Dutch factory previously handled. There were many officials in this institution, appointed by the magistrate of Nagasaki. Among them were ward elders, the inspectors, the paymasters, the subordinate officials and the experts. They were all local officials appointed by the citizen of Nagasaki. It was said that in order to have a good trading agreement, the Dutch would also present gifts to those officers. However, at the end of the eighteenth century, gifts to *Geldkamer* officials and special order by shogun's official went through non-conventional trade routes that did not pass through the *Geldkamer*, and cracks began to appear in their control of trade. Some historians view that the rise of private trade went hand in hand with the demise of the *Geldkamer* (Keisuke 2000: 60; Nagazumi 1986: 152-54).<sup>7</sup>

In almost every occasion and important activities the Dutch would always need a help from the interpreters, who were called officially as 'Dutch interpreter' (*oranda tsuji*). Unlike during the years of *Hirado*, when there were some Dutchmen with proficiency in the Japanese language, including Jacques Specx and Francois Caron, each later appointed as *opperhoofd*. But on *Deshima* the Dutch were officially forbidden to study Japanese and had to depend on the Japanese interpreters. Dissatisfaction and discontent with the language abilities of the interpreters were repeatedly express throughout the *opperhoofd* official diaries of the later half of seventeenth century. The Dutchmen had complained about the inefficiency, dishonesty, rapacity and corruption of the Japanese interpreters. However, the Dutch had not alternative choice accept to keep use their services, otherwise their business could not run properly. In the early eighteenth century, the number of interpreters who worked in *Deshima* was 150 persons (123 according to Kaempfer) and 140 in the 1850s and 1860s (Goodman 2000: 33-34; Boxer 1936: 57-58).

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<sup>7</sup> The important meaning of the *Geldkammer* could be seen in the official diary written by *opperhoofd* of *Deshima* year after year.

Detail information about the interpreters' activities from the official Dutch diaries, like *Deshima Diaries*, encouraged one to conclude that their duties were very complex and very important in connecting the Dutch to the Japanese 'world'. They were supposed to interpret and translate various documents related with economic, politic, culture and even academic and sciences, including medicine, botany, astronomy, geography and military. Recognition and credit should be given to the interpreters, who took care of miscellaneous daily affairs, received and conveyed foreign news and contributed to the transfer of new sciences and technology, but also to the initial stage of 'Dutch studies' (*Rangaku*) (Yumiko 2000: 117-118). During the rise of private trade in the eighteenth century, some of the interpreters had a side business to provide the Dutch demand on Japanese manufacture products through a mutually advantageous alliance with some porcelain makers (*tokiya*), the champor suppliers (*shonoya*), and the lacquer workers (*urushiya*).

However, after the trading seasons ended and all of trade matters finished, what kind activities the Dutch did in *Deshima*? In his account, Blomhoff reported that after finishing the court journey in May or June, the *opperhoofd* and all the VOC's officers should be ready to receive the occasional visits from the Nagasaki magistrate. On such occasion, the island was swept clean, and fresh sand was sprinkled on the streets. All Japanese officials connected with the island's organization would present. The magistrate was welcomed at the land gate by all the Dutchmen of the island, and the *opperhoofd* then led the magistrate on a tour of the island, showing him the garden and the pavilion, where the magistrate would watch the Dutch play billiard. Besides the Nagasaki magistrate, the Dutch also should be ready to welcome occasional visitors of other official government members (Effert & Forrer 2000: 17).

Outside those business affairs, time in *Deshima* was running really slow for the Dutch, and they had a plenty time for relaxation. They

would play sometimes billiard in the game-house in the garden. Sometimes they discussed the vague rumors they heard about the political development in the country and kept eye on the number Chinese junks loaded with merchandise. Sometimes they would also play music, singing a Dutch song and dancing the whole night while drinking a great deal of liquor, wine, beer and *sake*. They also passed the rest of the time smoking tobacco pipes, and if there was a suitable occasion they would slaughter a cow, pig or goat, to have variation in their diet.<sup>8</sup> In certain moment, the Dutch would have a quite big party and celebration in *Deshima*, such as on the New Year's Day of 1 January. On this occasion, as reported by Huibert, the *operhoofd* would receive present from the interpreters and congratulation from his compatriots and his servants. In return, he invited everyone to a party, which often lasted all day and sometimes went on until i night. The Dutch were also frequently invited to come to the Japanese celebration, such as *Matsoeri* party in Oktober, and lampion party held in August (Huibert 1984: 100-102).

The story of entertainment and pleasure activities of the Dutch in *Deshima*, can not be separated from the role of so-called *keesjes* of Maruyama. *Keesjes* was the Dutch way to say a Japanese word of *keisei*, which means 'beautiful women' or 'castle toppler', in reference to the legendary powers of an ancient Chinese beauty. The Dutch used the word *keesjes* to refer to courtesan girls or prostitute sent from the Maruyama brothels, Nagasaki (Smits 2000: 43). It was said that since moved to *Deshima* in 1641, the Dutch were forbidden to bring their wives and families with them to Japan, or to have relationship with Japanese women. As compensation, the Japanese government gave permission to two teahouses of Nagasaki, the Maruyama-cho and the Yorai-cho, to send their *yujos* or courtesans to the island. However, by the

<sup>8</sup> The two volumes of *The Deshima Diaries*, recorded a lot of the information about the Dutch habits to play billiards and music in welcoming occasional visitors and in spare time as well. The Japanese was reported really enthusiastic to watch the Dutch playing billiard and music.

later half of 18th century the Dutch were permitted to leave *Deshima* to visit Maruyama brothels, and it was reported that in 1722 there were 270 Dutchmen visited the brothels (Goodman 2000: 22).

The *yujos* of Maruyama were initially, around 1640s, only allowed to go to *Deshima* for an evening, and they had to leave the island in the following morning. In 1713, they were allowed a three days stay on the island and later even five days. Finally, they were allowed to extend their stay by just showing their faces to the gatekeeper on the third or fifth day. In *Deshima*, they stayed in the *yuja-beya* or *yujo* residence or with the Dutchman if a more or less permanent relationship had arisen. In this relationship, sometimes the *yujo* gave birth. If that the case then the child was allowed to stay with his/her parents until seventh year, after which the Japanese grandparents took it on as a rule, and look after his/her further upbringing and education (Kawabata 1986: 61). Those Dutch-Japanese mix-blood children in Nagasaki were considered to be Japanese, and at an early age they were subject to restriction similar to those imposed on other Japanese. But, in the later period the Dutch fathers were allowed to receive occasional visits from their children at certain specific periods and to provide their education and supports. Frequently the fathers were also required to purchase for their adult Japanese sons some office under the government at Nagasaki or somewhere (Goodman 2000: 23).

The good manner and cooperative attitude of the Dutch to the Tokugawa's policy did not make their life fully safe from the unexpected threat. Robbery, for example, could happen anytime, especially at night when most of servants fell asleep, and even worst that the criminals were from the Japanese patrol guards themselves. They tended to steal anything from the Dutch whenever they had the chance. For this, the Dutch created the internal guard and operated a watch night session. However, the nature posed a greater threat. *Deshima Diaries* recorded several disasters, mostly earthquakes, happened during

the eighteenth century, and the most disastrous one was the volcanic eruption in 1792, which cost a lot of lives and material. The man-mistake disasters, fire, also happened in 1798, which burn out 25 buildings and turned one-third of *Deshima* completely into ashes.

Those melancholic stories of *Deshima* started to change as time passed, and the Tokugawa authority introduced a little leeway to its strict rules for the Dutch. Concerning the religious matters, for instance, Tokugawa's regime considered the Dutch as trustworthy people so they could keep and practice their religions. The Dutch was allowed to conduct their religious activities as long as they were practiced inside the wall of *Deshima*. Besides, while in the eighteenth century no Dutch people were buried in the Japanese soil, now the government provided a cemetery lot for the Dutch located in the foot of Inasa Mountain, across *Deshima* on the other side of the bay, outside Nagasaki. The most important development was that in the early nineteenth century the Dutch was allowed to take their women to stay in *Deshima*. It was Titia Blomhoff, the wife of Jan Cock Blomhoff – the *opperhoofd* of *Deshima* was the first Dutch woman to stay in *Deshima* (Bersma 2000).

## CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the Dutch life in *Deshima* during the eighteenth century was actually far from comfortable and pleasant. Under a strict regulation and control of the Tokugawa, the social life of the Dutch in *Deshima* was very unique. They have to adjust their life to the Japanese policy and to the local condition. For some historians, the co-operative spirit of the Dutch and their acceptance to such

restrictive condition were actually emanated from their economic-minded strategy to retain trade profit that they accrued so far from Japan. Considering the political economic context of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, such kind of impression was quite understandable. However, this economic deterministic view ignores the other sides of the story in *Deshima* that the Dutch also had interested to know more about this unique Asian civilization. In this respect, the Dutch life in *Deshima* reflected not only the gloomy side of the two nation's relationship, but also the bright and more positive one as can be seen from the *Rangaku* system (Dutch studies).

Concerning the cultural exchange between the Dutch and Japanese, this paper notice that the cultural exchange indeed had taken place through a 'formal' way, through a wide range of relation between the Dutch and the Japanese authorities – the shogunate, the local magistrate and all of bureaucracy officials. However, it proceeded also through 'informal' process, which was reflected from the relations arose between the Dutch and all Japanese peoples working with *Deshima*. Since they involved in taking care of the Dutch miscellaneous daily affairs and needs, they had intense relations from which the cultural understanding and exchange taken place among them. For instances, the Japanese cooks worked to assist the Dutch cook, he would absorb information on the cuisine, the drinking, the food, and eating custom of the Dutch and on the other way around the Dutch cook started to know something about Japanese culture. So, the understanding process of their respective culture started through day-to-day contact among the Dutch and the Japanese.

Appendix 1.

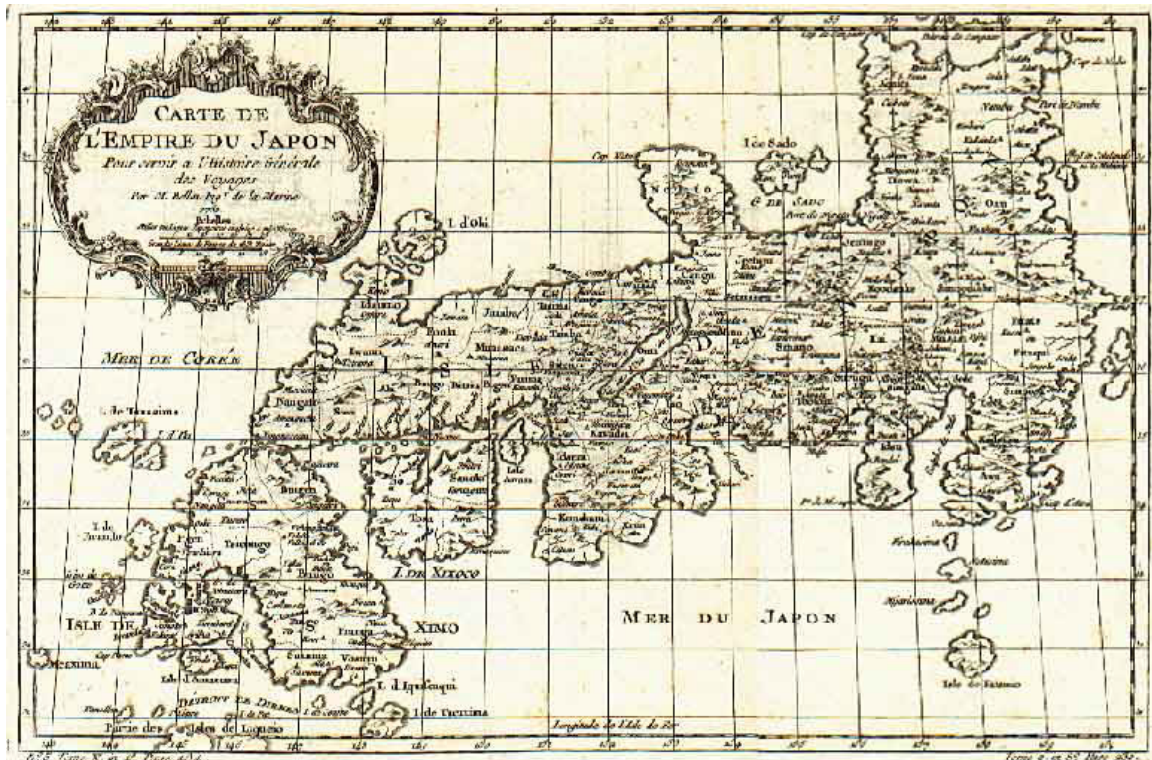
Deshima in 1761



Source: <http://www.oranda.or.jp/index/english/neth/relations.html#10>, downloaded on 7 October 2006.

Appendix 2.

Japan in 1750s



Source: <http://www.oranda.or.jp/index/english/neth/relations.html#10>, downloaded on 7 October 2006.

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