4

Floating Pictures

The European Dimension to Japanese Art During the Eighteenth Century

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Although it is commonly thought that prior to the Meiji era (1868–1912) Japan was isolated from the larger world, this was not the case. The country (or perhaps "countries") had been fully integrated into the movement of people and goods that define the era of early European exploration. Japan was dismembered and in civil war, but that actually assisted trade in some ways. Japan was vigorously sought out on account of its vast capacity to mine and process silver. Some half of the world's silver came from Japan, and economic historians identify that metal as the world's first global commodity.[1] One important though little-known example is a portrait of Elizabeth I, today lost or perhaps never actually produced, but intended to show the queen standing before a world map. China was to one side, America to the other; Japan was directly above the queen's crown, in pride of place. This portrait was proposed by John Dee, best known as inventor of the expression "British empire."[2] However, as in the Americas, it was Iberian traders who were most persistent in their approaches to Japan. They brought with them their religion, and exchanged European wares not only for silver, but for conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. The missions were bloodily curtailed in 1614, largely due to the English.[3] Within a generation, there were virtually no Japanese Catholics left, nor any international Japanese traders. What would be termed the Christian Century, beginning about 1550, ended before 1650. This absence would, indeed, continue until the eve of the Meiji Period. But to say this is to miss a large part of the story. The purpose of this essay is to investigate more thoroughly the period between the putative "closing" and the putative "opening" of Japan, roughly 1630–1860, and to put this into an art-historical context which demonstrates that global connections continued to be important to the development of Japanese art in the eighteenth century.

Before considering the eighteenth century, however, we must look at what happened to the abundant material legacy of the preceding "Christian Century." Overtly devotional items would have been destroyed quietly at the end of this period, but many secular European objects survived in the collections of the elite, and also quite commonly in the streets. A crucial date that tends to pass unnoticed is 1657. I propose

this as the beginning of Japan's "long eighteenth century" in art-historical terms. This period came to a close not with the beginning of the Meiji era in 1868, but rather in the 1790s. During that time, although direct contact with Europe was less than it had been before, or would be later, there was plenty of interaction. The United (or Dutch) East India Company sent two large ships annually to Nagasaki. Company employees lived in Japan, sometimes for over a decade, engaged in business, and also interacted with locals socially, as we shall see. Early in that crucial year 1657, a group of Dutchmen were in Edo (modern Tokyo), capital of the shogunate that governed the reunited country. It is thanks to Zacharias Wagenaer that what unfolded next is known; there are Japanese accounts too, but none have such dramatic detail. Wagenaer was the most senior representative of the Company, and in town to offer presents to the shogun, the sixteen-year-old Tokugawa Ietsuna, and his entourage. He was happy that this time the gift was "substantially greater than in previous years."[4] Then a massive conflagration occurred. By the time it was over, Edo was gone. Though prone to fire, the destruction of 1657 was the worst that would ever occur in the shogun's city. From this came—or had to come—a new start in political and also cultural terms.

As the flames began to leap, Wagenaer and his fellows were visiting the home of Inoue Masashige, head of the shogunal intelligence office, in which context it was his role to take responsibility for foreigners. Masashige had used this position to acquire a vast array of imports, including European books and medical apparatus, a Western-style bed, paintings, mirrors, ceramics and tableware—although we will never know all that he possessed, as no inventory was made before his possessions were wiped out.[5] A worried servant came in and whispered something, at which Masashige hurried out. Wagenaer looked outside and saw thick black smoke. Another servant instructed him to return at once to the Dutch compound in the city, known as the Nagasaki House, to place their goods and presents out of harm's way. On his hurried path, Wagenaer saw "with horror and dread . . . this immense city ablaze, like once Troy." The shogun's castle then exploded, due to the gunpowder stored within. Mercifully, two storehouses were spared this onslaught, one containing the administration's gold and treasure, the other its calambac, or agarwood, which was used for medicine and perfume.[6]

Whatever the effects of the fire on human life, in art-historical terms the result was the destruction of material from Japan's "Christian century." For almost one hundred years, vast amounts of European goods from European and Asian trade routes flooded into Japan. The proscription of Christianity limited the flow of imports, but had not stopped it, and previously brought goods remained part of the fabric of elite and commoner life. Now all was gone.

In Edo the next year, 1658, a new head of Dutch operations, Johannes Boucheljon, met senior Japanese officials. He was given a special request. The Company was to bring a selection of European paintings and other rarities for the shogunal collection, since those that had been brought before had all been destroyed in the fire.[7] It is not generally realized that Edo Castle was filled with European paintings—or, rather, had been. As well as the shogunal request, Boucheljon received a commission from Masashige, who asked for "a beautiful map of the world" and "some paintings of battles by land and sea."[8] Naturally, anything with a Christian subject was no longer wanted. Depiction of contemporary battles could likely show the Dutch fighting the Roman Catholic nations. Masashige desired pictures to positioned Japan in the anti-Spanish camp, and as Japan has its own long tradition of war painting, the imports would also fit well with local expectations of display. Works produced around 1660 in Amsterdam would look very different from those produced around 1600 in Iberian lands.

There is no further documentation concerning the works requested for the shogunal collection, but we know more of those commissioned for Masashige, thanks to documentation about their arrival. It took five years for the request to travel to Europe, the works to be made, and then brought back. Just two paintings arrived, in 1663, both very fine, referred to as "large" and set "in heavy frames." They had cost 600 guilders the pair, which was a colossal price, and indicates that the Company was willing to make a very large outlay to satisfy this senior official. One work is described as the *Battle of Flanders*. This was a significant Hispano-Dutch military encounter in 1600, also known as the Battle of Nieuwpoort, at which the Dutch had been victorious. The Company had cleverly decided that the other work should pit their nation not against the old adversary, but against their newer one across that channel. This work was a naval encounter, referred to as a "sea battle between the Dutch and the English."[9] The title is vague, but it would surely have been a scene from the First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652 to 1654. No artists are named, and for the land battle it is hard to judge. It is exciting, though speculative, to suggest that the sea battle may have been by Willem van de Velde the Elder, the founder of that subcategory within Dutch maritime painting. This suggestion is more compelling by the price: according to the one record, van de Velde charged 325 guilders per picture.[10]

The arrival of the two paintings in Nagasaki, and their transmission to Edo should have prompted an interest in European art of an entirely new kind. But this was not to be. The Nagasaki governor (*bugyō*), Kurokawa Masanao, was delighted with the paintings, initially borrowing them to hang in his own mansion. Then Masanao had second thoughts. He noted the paintings showed "very sad scenes," including such things as "dead people and the burning of ships." The governor concluded that they could not be sent to Edo. Masashige, who had commissioned the paintings, it appears, had not intended to keep the works, but to present them to the shogun, Ietsuna. However, Masashige died during the five-year interim, which compounded the inauspiciousness of the works. They were rejected. The records state that they were shipped away in 1668, destination unspecified.

By this time, there were few people left who recalled the period of flourishing international encounter. With this false *démarche*, no second period was provoked. The shogun did not seem to come into possession of a new stock of European paintings, meaning other members of the elite did not feel the need to acquire them either. We thus start our period in the mid-seventeenth century with erasure and absence.

Although the Dutch were the sole official channel to Japan, European items might also come via other means. The year 1708 saw the arrival of a Neapolitan Jesuit, Giovanni Battista Sidotti. He smuggled himself into Japan on what was a blatant suicide mission (quite a suspect action, theologically speaking). Since he looked Italian and spoke no Japanese, Sidotti was quickly captured and taken to Edo. He was sequestered from the public, but housed comfortably in the so-called Christian Mansion (*Kirishitan yashiki*),

built to confine illegal priests, but not used before. Sidotti was interrogated by the great shogunal scholar, Arai Hakuseki, who found him a person of probity, and recommended his repatriation unharmed. However, return to Naples was not Sidotti's objective, and he embarked on a course of action that, in the end, got him martyred as he wished in 1714. Importantly, since he came by stealth, Sidotti could not have brought much baggage, he nevertheless apparently had a painting: a depiction of the Virgin Mary. It showed only the upper body, wearing a blue robe held closed with an unusual hand gesture that exposed the thumb. It was a throwback to something unseen in Japan for decades though in a novel style.

The Jesuit's arrival gave rise to many questions, and Hakuseki produced a large and much circulated book of all that he had been told. Sidotti had asserted that the body of the "Apostle to the Indies," Francis Xavier, who had founded the mission to Japan, had not rotted, but remained unblemished. When asked for their views, the Dutch merchants (who called Sidotti "Father Joan") dismissed Sidotti's claim as "Popish nonsense," and a full outlining of the issues raised "took up three hours of my time," as the Dutch leader remarked. Sidotti's Eucharistic items, "his crucifix and other symbols" were taken, inventoried, and "locked away in a warehouse designated for Christian relics."[11] Later, the Dutch would be asked about their own religious imagery, and they clarified that the Protestant Church made no use of it, provoking a shogunal investigator to expostulate, "How do you know there is a God?"[12]

The messages coming from Europe were inconsistent, but what they did make clear was that the old Roman Catholic countries did not operate using the same visual systems of the more recently arrived northern Protestants.

We can add that Sidotti's painting of the Virgin Mary (Figure 4.1) is extant, and so it can be traced. Clearly, it is a copy of a work by Carlo Dolce (d. 1686), the original now in the Borghese Gallery in Rome. The image was a key articulation of Jesuit Mariology of the period. It looked very unlike Iberian mission paintings of *c.* 1600. Other versions of the work exist, one in the Archbishop's Palace in Cusco, Peru; copies are also still displayed in most Christian churches in Iran.[13]

The shogun was now Ietsuna's brother, Tsunayoshi. In 1709, the year after Sidotti's arrival, he died heirless. After rapid succession by two nephews, direct succession came to an end. This was beneficial as it resulted in a concerted search by the authorities for a worthy replacement. The recent incumbents had not been impressive. Advisors settled on a cousin, Tokugawa Yoshimune, a person of intellect and experience. He was installed as new Shogun in 1716.

The next year, the Dutch decided to try again and sent some more oil paintings that articulated their own cultural norms. Of course, these were not religious works, and were intended precisely to show the opposite, a Dutch national orientation. Details are lacking, but there is the record of two works arriving, "one depicting a sea battle and the other depicting a landscape."[14] Fights against the Spanish, or perhaps the English, were still part of how the Dutch wished to be seen in Japan. But they also wanted more peaceful views, celebrating their country's verdant scenery.

For some reason, the paintings were returned after eighteen months, in the summer of 1718, but the Shogun's interest clearly was piqued.[15] In 1722, Yoshimune placed the

Figure 4.1 After Carlo Dolce, *Virgin of the Thumb*, *c.* 1700. Color on panel, 24.5 × 19.6 cm. Photo: Tokyo National Museum.

only direct shogunal commission for paintings ever placed with the United East India Company, blithely informing the Dutch that he wanted works by "the best painter in Europe." Whether he made further specifications is not recorded. The Company took the demand seriously, although sending, commissioning and shipping back took four years. They spent 2,907 florins on five works, which is high, although not as high as it sounds, since the value of the guilder had dropped. These arrived at Nagasaki in 1726.

The name of the artist, or artists, is not recorded, but in about 1810 a careful copy of one of the works was made by the Edo artist Tani Bunchō; it is detailed enough to include at the base of the urn the signature and also the date: W. van Royen 1723 (Figure 4.2). Van Royen was then in his prime, working in Amsterdam, and if not quite the "best in Europe," he was widely respected. A later Japanese viewer would also give the

Figure 4.2 Tani Bunchō, *Still Life*, after Willem van Royen, *c.* 1810. Color on paper, 232.8 × 106 cm. Photo: Kobe City Museum.

measurement of this same painting from among the five, as 4 *shaku* by 1 *jō*, that is 120 × 300 cm, so it was extremely large.[16]

Whether the other four paintings were also by van Royen is unclear, as are their dimensions, nor do we have any information about van Royen's prices, or whether all five paintings were of the same cost. Some help comes from the Company's own records, which lists one painting as "flowers, fruit and fowl"; this is clearly the work that Bunchō reproduced. Two others are "peacock, parrots, ostrich and tiger with a view of the Rhine" and an "elephant, tiger, with a house and a waterfall," both of which sound quite typical of the strained life-form and landscape combinations that characterize Van Royen's production.

The two other titles do not match anything associated with Van Royen and were likely made by another hand. They were "two armies in battle and a castle being taken by storm" and "a deer, hare and rabbit hunt."[17] Having been approved in Nagasaki, the Dutch leader who took the paintings to Edo was Johannes de Hartog. He was questioned about the maker, and asked to confirm that they were by the "best painter in Holland"; he was also asked to name all the plants appearing in the works, during an interrogation that lasted from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., he said.[18] Yoshimune was unperturbed by dead people (or animals) and he retained the paintings on battle, hunt, and the "elephant, tiger, with a house and a waterfall," which could all be considered noble themes. But he wanted these fine European paintings to be more widely available, and to expose the populace to Western art. He therefore donated the two non-warrior themed works, the still life and view of the Rhine, to a much visited temple within the city, to be placed on open view. The site was one of Edo's newest precincts, Gohyaku rakan-ji (Temple of the Five-Hundred Arhats), which was run by a Chinese Buddhist school, meaning it was already a site of unfamiliar and exotic imagery and ritual.[19] Regrettably, however, since the paintings were shogunal gifts, protocol precluded passing judgment on them, even in praise. Nor was it thought proper to copy them—Bunchō's copy had been made on government request because the originals were starting to tarnish. There is only one other known copy, no more than a monochrome sketch, buried within the pages of a long book published in 1729 on the subject of "bird-and-flower" painting (*kachō-ga*).[20] This is useful because it also depicts Yoshimune's other gift, the "peacock, parrots, ostrich and tiger with a view of the Rhine."

In 1826, the regional ruler (*daimyō*) and polymath Matsura Seizan (who gave the dimensions quoted above) visited the temple. He had been there often as a child, but now had to note both pictures had been destroyed, some years before, when a storm had blown out the doors of the hall housing them.[21]

The Birth of "Western Studies" (*Rangaku*)

Yoshimune was a vigorous administrator, and initiated many reforms to a system, by then, over a century old. Of significance is that he clarified the shogunate's attitude toward foreign imports in general. Fear of being branded Christian had diminished, but people were still anxious that enthusiasm for imports might lead to accusations.[22]

The only real exceptions had been medicine, astronomy, or areas of obvious utility. Even here, there could be dangerous possibilities of overlap. Although it is earlier, before alarm about missionaries had died down, in 1668 the Dutch leader Daniel Six had a shock. He discovered an anatomical book that had been imported for presentation to the shogunate containing an illustration of the Crucifixion. Much intellectual endeavor in Europe, whether in Roman Catholic or Protestant nations, was rooted in Christian belief. Six was able to rip out the offending page, just in time, judging, "it might have led to the total ruin of the Company's trade in Japan."[23] Yoshimune's clarification was to declare that any domain of intellectual endeavor was acceptable for investigation, barring Christianity itself. The Dutch remained scrupulous not to risk their commerce, nor the lives of their partners, and pre-vetted imports, but much material now swarmed in.

It is said that Yoshimune was motivated to issue this clarification by a specific prompt. The resident Dutch physician was rightly taken by the Japanese as the most educated person in the Company's entourage. At this time the post was held by Willem Ketelaar, who spoke good Japanese. Records note that, in 1723, he was called in by the head shogunal doctor, Kurisaki Dōyū, to explain a lavishly illustrated zoological work, John (or Jan) Jonston's *Naeukeurige beschryving van der natuur der vier-voetige dieren* (*Natural History of Quadrupeds*). It was rather old, having been published in 1660, and, in fact, it had been brought to Nagasaki just three years later and presented, only to languish in the shogunal library. The two doctors now bonded, and since *dōyū* sounds rather like *dauw*, the Dutch for "dew," Dōyū adopted the sobriquet Tsuyu, which is the Japanese for dew.

Ketelaar met "Tsuyu" again in Edo in 1725, and this time Yoshimune was also there. Someone of Ketelaar's status could not be brought into the Shogun's presence, as only the Dutch leaders were permitted this honor, so Yoshimune watched and listened from behind a lacquered screen that had been equipped with peeping-slits. His minions watched through another screen; one of these youths was later supplied with haemorrhoid cream by Ketelaar.[24]

It was the next year, 1726, that Jonston's book was brought to Yoshimune's own attention. Having perused it, he declared that if its pictures were as accurate as they seemed, the text must be worth reading, too. He accordingly commanded that the "horizontal script" should be learned.[25] He went on to establish what the Dutch would approvingly, if optimistically, refer to as a College of Interpreters (*tolken college*), to engage with a new field of learning that became known as Dutch (or European) Studies, *rangaku*. "*Ran*" from Oranda, the Japanese word for "Holland" and *gaku* meaning study.

Several families were given the hereditary task of residing in Nagasaki to promote Dutch materials and engage in translation and interpreting, as well as assisting the Company in mercantile matters and accompanying its officers in their regular trips to Edo. However, there was another dimension to their work, best termed outreach. Gifts to high-ranking officials were exceeded in quantity by more popular items that also needed interpretation. Paintings were expensive and hard to transport safely, while books, even if well-illustrated, had texts that were off-putting to most people. It is from about this time that European single-sheet prints began to have a significant impact. Japan had its own developed print making and marketing systems to which imports could be integrated. As explored in Carole Paul's essay in this volume, the mid-eighteenth century in Europe was the age of the Grand Tour and topographical views of the sights of Italy, called *vedute*, proliferated. Engraved and etched *vedute* prints arrived in Japan in considerable numbers in the eighteenth century. To Japanese viewers, they were striking and novel, and most surprising was the use of mathematical perspective, not seen for over a century. Since there was no word for this technique, the prints came to be known as "floating pictures" (*uki-e*); less often, they were "sunken pictures" (*kubomi-e*). The viewers felt the vista was surging off the page to encompass them, or conversely, that they were falling down into it. Imports were always expensive, so they were replicated by Japanese artists, who replaced the European city views with local ones. These made more sense to viewers. Only Edo had an advanced printing culture, so it was views of Edo that abounded in this hybrid artform. There was no prior history of printing Japanese topographical views, but suddenly they became a major genre.

The emergence of "floating pictures" of Edo sites can be very precisely dated. They were first marketed in 1739 at some point between the 20th and 25th of the 5th lunar month (i.e., mid-August).[26] The maker seems to have been a well-known Edo print master, Okumura Masanobu—at least he would proclaim himself "the originator of floating pictures." Masanobu continued to produce such works, although not exclusively, until his death in 1764, by which time other artists had entered the field (Figure 4.3).

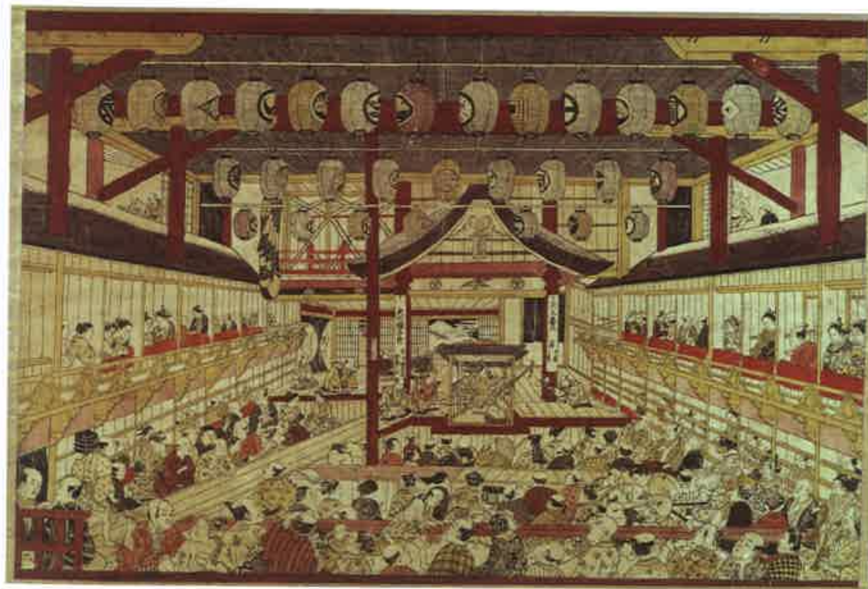

Figure 4.3 Okumura Masanobu, *First Kabuki Performance of the Year*, 1740. Color woodblock print on paper, 42.4 × 63 cm. Photo: Kobe City Museum.

One enthusiast for *rangaku* and for Western imagery was Shiba Kōkan. He wrote widely on the topic and printed and painted in the Western way. In 1799, Kokan explained:

> The Western pictorial manner operates on a highly theoretical level and no one should view works offhandedly. There is a correct way to look, and to this end pictures are framed and hung up. When viewing them, even if you only intend a quick glance, stand full-square in front. The Western picture will always show a division between sky and ground [the horizon line]; be sure to position this exactly at eye level, which, generally speaking, will entail viewing from a distance of about six *shaku* [approx. 180 cm]. If you observe this, things shown near at hand and things far off—the foreground and the rear-ground—will all be clearly distinguished and the picture will seem no different from reality itself.[27]

The "floating picture" was largely an ephemeral depiction of demotic spaces. Less than the city squares of palaces of European views, it was restaurants and theaters to which perspective was applied. Artists used the technique to capture places of fantasy, and enlarge them into something yet more extravagant.

It has been debated whether perspective arrived in Japan also by more formal means. Andrea Pozzo, painter of the Jesuit headquarter church in Rome, published *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* in 1693, and this was partially translated into Chinese by Nian Xiyao in 1729. Any educated Japanese could read Chinese. There is no concrete evidence to support the hypothesis, although it may be noted that Pozzo did, indeed, propose a perspective system for creating *false and illusory* conceits, both in churches and in theaters.[28]

In the 1760s, the Edo artist, Utagawa Toyoharu, began to make a name for himself by reproducing European images more directly. Views of Edo did not lose their appeal, but buyers now also sought European cityscapes, available at the cheap price of a domestic print. One example is Toyoharu's Grand Canal in Venice. Since he had little idea where the place really was, he entitled the work *Floating Picture: The Bell that Rings for 10,000 Leagues in the Dutch Port of Frankai* (Figure. 4.4).

It is clearly derived from work by Antonio Canaletto, whose views of Venice were popular across Europe. No Canaletto could have come to Japan except in printed form, and it is known that the British Consul to Venice, Joseph Smith, had a very lavish printed set produced in 1735. This probably did not come either, but the collection was reissued and pirated many times. That crosses adorn many of the buildings must have escaped the notice of the Japanese censors—or perhaps not, since this print exists today in only a few copies, so the run may have been confiscated and destroyed for daring to expose viewers to Christian imagery.

Edo was the center of rule, but not the capital. Today, that city is called Kyoto, although, in fact, that is not a proper name, and simply means "the capital." The Japanese capital was much visited, but it lacked a picture-publishing tradition. Western works were therefore emulated in paint. Maruyama Okyo began painting perspectives

Figure 4.4 Utagawa Toyoharu, *The Bell that Rings for 10,000 Leagues in the Dutch Port of Frankai* (properly, *Grand Canal, Venice*), c. 1760. Color woodblock print on paper, 26 × 38.7 cm. Kobe City Museum. Photo: TNM Image Archives.

showing the city's sites of note in a manner closer to the European model, centering on temples and tourist sites (Figure 4.5).

Okyo painted in the hatch marks of copperplate etching. Japanese prints were made with woodblocks, which allowed areas of black to be printed. But European works were copperplate etchings, where shadows could only be rendered by close-drawn lines. Okyo thus showed his vistas of the Japanese capital not just by using the foreign technique of perspective, but looking like imported etchings.

As a copper-producing country, it was not long before Japanese makers sought to replicate etchings, too. The technique is not necessarily better than woodblock (in many ways it is worse), but they had a more authentic imported feel. Shiba Kōkan was the first to succeed in this, in 1783, and he would identify himself as "the first maker in Japan."[29] He kept close to the imported subject matter, not showing theaters, much less bordellos, as "floating picture" makers sometimes had, and centering on Edo's river. Kōkan sometimes labeled his etchings in Dutch, suggesting he hoped for them to be exported: just as European scenes were being consumed in Japan, he hoped his Edo views would be consumed in the West. Kōkan made a trip to Nagasaki to seek further information from members of the Dutch Company. He was not a wealthy person, so he funded his trip by showing etchings of Edo to country people all along the way. It is not recorded whether on arrival he showed them to the Dutch, nor that the Dutch exported them, although had they arrived in Europe, these pictures would have caused a sensation (Figure 4.6).

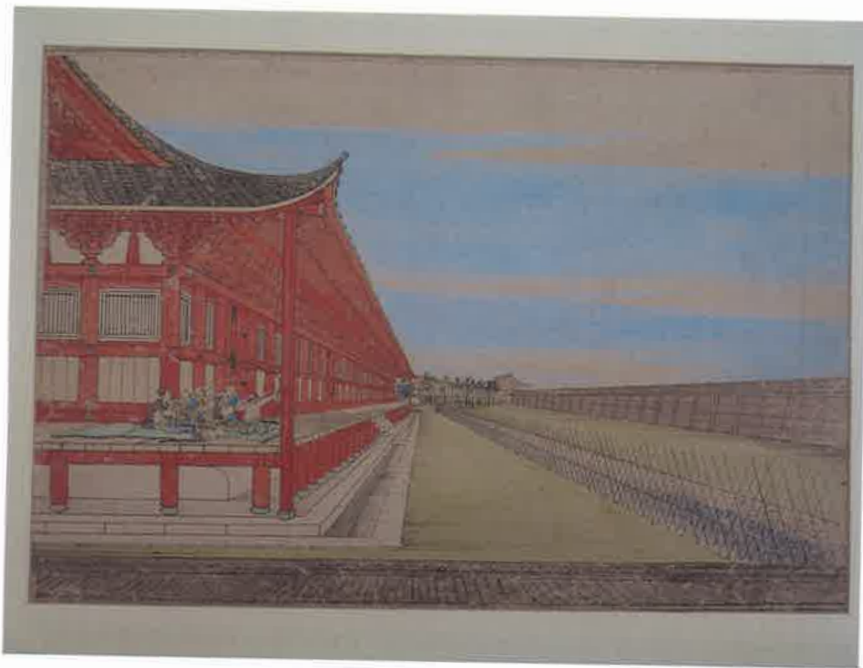

Figure 4.5 Maruyama Ōkyo, *Hall of Thirty-Three Bays (Sanjūsangen-dō), Kyoto, c.* 1770. Color on paper, 23.5 × 35.1 cm. Photo: Private Collection.

European etchings were generally hand-colored, while Japanese woodblocks were printed in color using successive blocks. There was, however, no durable, printable blue. Only the highly fugitive indigo was used. Likely, Toyoharu's Venetian scene originally had a bright Italian sky, now reduced to a yellow smear. Along with perspective and shadows, it was the colors that most struck Japanese viewers, meaning the blues. As one wag put it in verse:

> In our fair land
> Fancy seeing
> Such a picture.
> Talk about shadows!
> Talk about colors![30]

It added up to a sense of visual realism—a notion that is not just a Eurocentric imposition, but was used by commenters at the time, as evinced in Kōkan's remarks above. The purpose of topographical prints was to give a powerful impression of being in the depicted place, often for the benefit of those who had never gone. Since Kōkan's works were also etchings, they were hand-painted, giving him access to a stable blue that his colleague could not use.

Figure 4.6 Shiba Kōkan, *Tweelandbruk (Ryōgoku Bridge)*, 1787. Hand-colored copperplate print on paper, 27.1 × 40.7 cm. Photo: British Museum, London (1949,1112,0.10).

A further strategy was used to enhance the sense of place. This was to reverse-print images. In Europe, such works were known as *vues d'optiques*, or "optical views"; in Japan they became known as "lens-and-mirror pictures," *megane-e*. The view was inverted because the print was made to be viewed in a mirror, which flipped right and left. As a further enhancing measure, the picture was also viewed through a lens, to remove unevenness in the paper. The lens inverted, so not only did the image have to be printed back-to-front, but also viewed upside down. The cityscape was at three removes from reality—seen in a picture, through a lens, reflected in a mirror—by which it *appeared* to be true. Both Kōkan and Okyo sometimes produced the very same vista both right-way around and reversed.

As in Europe, however enjoyable and enlightening a print might be, it did not have the same status as a painting. Kōkan set himself to rectify this, and expand beyond Yoshimune's two gift works. Kōkan was also fully aware that, as in Japan, too, Europe had a language of art, composed not only of theme and topic, but also of conventions, such as symbols and emblems. He wrote that: "most people believe Western pictures to be no more than 'floating pictures,' which is a risible opinion."[31] Kōkan stated that, while in Nagasaki, he had met the Dutch leader, Isaac Titsingh, who was one of the few university-educated traders to come to Japan. Kōkan says Titsingh gave him a copy of a key European painting manual of the period, Gérard de Lairesse's *Het Groot schilderboek* (translated into English as *The Art of Painting in All Its Branches*), published

in 1707.[32] Titsigh had intellectual exchange with many Japanese people, and he gave, and received books. But the pedigree Kōkan claimed is questionable, since Titsingh was not in Japan in 1788 and 1789, when Kōkan was in Nagasaki. Still, Kōkan certainly saw a copy of Lairesse, as did many other interested artists, and it was likely in Japan in more than one copy.[33]

The *Schilderboek* was part of an intent to challenge the dominance of Rembrandt, whom Lairesse deplored. Although they had once been friends (Rembrandt painted Lairesse's portrait), Lairesse came to feel the old master had introduced unpardonable coarseness into Dutch art. Lairesse's work was the opposite, full of airy spaces, mythical figures, and flying putti. Kōkan explained that "pictures from that country often contain winged people as well as other curious configurations, but these are pictorial devices; there are no winged people in fact."[34] Kōkan sometimes referred to devices as metaphors (*tatoe*), or, trying to retain the Dutch word for symbol, *sinebeeru*. The term he used for painting produced in this way, that is, Western in concept as well as technique, was called *ranga* (*ga* meaning picture). Another master, Kitayama Kangan, advertised his understanding by adopting the studio name Ban Deiki, refering to van Dyck, a painter who certainly used "pictorial devices." It is not recorded how Kangan learned of van Dyck, who is not otherwise mentioned in Japanese sources of the period.[35]

Kōkan's desire was for *ranga* to be more serious than "floating pictures." It was axiomatic in formal Japanese art that paintings include a depiction of the season, which then indicated to owners when the work should be displayed. All decent people rotated works seasonally to match the actual season outside. A work devoid of temporal content, as most Western pictures were, was hard to display. *Ranga* included seasons to be coherent for Japanese viewers.

However his paintings looked, there was one factor that Kōkan could not overcome. High-level painting, of the sort owned by the shogun, had to be produced by high-status artists, that is, masters with military (samurai) rank. Masanobu, Toyoharu, and Okyo were townspeople; but as they restricted their themes to public spaces and entertainments this did not matter. If *ranga* was to become elite painting, then it mattered greatly that Kōkan (and Kangan) were townsmen.

It was also important for the conceptualization and development of *ranga* that a group of military-class artists engaged with it. They hailed from the northern city of Kubota (modern Akita), where the young ruler (*daimyo*), Satake Yoshiatsu, was adventurous in his taste, and a fine amateur painter. Using his studio name of Shozan, Yoshiatsu produced the first Japanese treatise on Western art in 1778. Being a daimyo, and wishing to have *ranga* validated, he wrote in Chinese (*kanbun*); to use the vernacular demeaned both himself and the topic. However, since commoner Japanese could often not read Chinese, he rewrote his treatise in Japanese. This was a trick other elite writers used to ensure both honor and diffusion. Yoshitasu noted that:

> The utility of a picture is commensurate with its verisimilitude. . . . We make pictures of emperors tilling the soil to laud agriculture, and pictures of commanders in the thick of the fray to concentrate the mind on victory. If the image fails to look like the real thing, then how can it serve its purpose?[36]

Five years before, in 1773, Yoshitasu ordered a retainer, Odano Naotake, to go to Edo and devote himself to the *ranga* mode (Figure 4.7). On arrival, Naotake began to make the illustrations for an anatomical book, which would be the first fully translated Western book published in Japan since the time of the missions. Of course, the book was translated into Chinese, not Japanese. The original was by the German doctor Johann Kulmus, written in 1722 and imported in the Dutch translation of a decade later, *Ontleedkundige tafelen*. The title being hard to pronounce, it was known in Japanese as *Tāheru anatomia* (*Anatomical Plates*).[37] Published in Edo by a team of shogunal doctors and with illustrations copied by a military-class artist, the resulting book of 1774, *Kaitai shinsho* (*New Anatomical Atlas*), won much acclaim.

In 1785, the daimyo Yoshiatsu was able to gain access to the United East India Company's lodgings in Edo. This was not easily done, as the shogunate was wary of regional rulers forging links to the Dutch, international trade being a government monopoly. Yoshiatsu met the long-standing and well-informed Dutch chief, Caspar Romberg, and the encounter might have had significant implications for the understanding and transmission of European art to Japan. Tragically, Yoshiatsu fell ill and died within the week of this meeting, at the age of 37.[38] Foul play is possible. Akita *ranga* broke up, which may have allowed Kōkan to position himself as leader in the field. He turned *ranga* into something formal, but not necessarily elite, and wrote his many books entirely in Japanese.

Figure 4.7 Odano Naotake, *Shinobazu Pond*, c. 1773. Color on silk, 98.5 × 132.5 cm. Photo: Akita Museum of Modern Art, Yokote.

However, things had begun to change. A power grab in the shogunal council brought to the fore an anti-foreign element. In 1788, the Dutch arriving in Edo noted that the Japanese scholars who used to visit them (mostly shogunal physicians and astronomers) were absenting themselves. The next year, it was the same, and then in 1790 the Dutch received no visits of any kind. In Nagasaki, the chief interpreter at the College, Yoshio Kōsaku (who had written the preface to the translation of Kulmus) was arrested on charges of smuggling and was imprisoned; days later, his successor suffered the same fate.[39] Dutch visits to Edo had taken place almost annually since 1640, nearly 150 times, but in 1791, the shogunate cancelled them. War in Europe was sending the Company into decline, so it was pleased enough to forgo this expensive ritual, although by doing so, the lines of communication across cultures were cut. In 1799, the United East India Company went bankrupt. It held onto its facilities in Japan, running a rump organization, and pretending to the Japanese authorities that all was well. Year after year no ships got through. *Ran* dwindled as a concept and foreign goods disappeared. We thus close the period of international encounter.

The nineteenth century would see many transformations. The Russians came from the north. The Dutch state was taken over by France, and British ships came to Nagasaki, proposing themselves as interlocutors for the Japanese.[40] The outside world began to take on a new and more fearsome aspect. *Rangaku* and *ranga* did not disappear, but no simple line can be traced from their eighteenth-century heyday to the emergence of Japan, in the 1850s, as a modern nation-state.

Notes

1 See, inter alia, Dennis K. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, "Born with a 'Silver Spoon': The Origin of World Trade in 1571," *Journal of World History* 6 (1995): 201–21.
2 William Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 198–200.
3 Timon Screech, "The English and the Control of Christianity in the Early Edo Period," *Japan Forum* 24 (2012), 3–40.
4 Cynthia Viallé and Leonard Blussé, eds, *The Deshima Dagregisters: Their Original Tables of Contents*, 12 (Leiden: Intercontinenta, 1982–2010, hereafter, DDR), 287.
5 Timon Screech, "A 17th-Century Japanese Minister's Acquisition of Western Pictures: Inoue Masashige (1585–1661) and his European Objects," in *Transforming Knowledge Orders: Museums, Collections and Exhibitions*, edited by Larissa Förster (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 72–106.
6 DDR, vol. 12, 297.
7 Ibid.,343.
8 Ibid., vol. 13, 93–8.
9 Ibid., vol. 8, 93–8. I am grateful to Cynthia Viallé for additional information relating to this episode.
10 Michael Robinson, *The Paintings of the Willem van de Veldes: A Catalogue of the Paintings of the Elder and Younger van de Velde*, 2 vols. (Greenwich: National Maritime Museum, 1990), 72–4.

11 DDR, vol. 4, 67.
12 Ibid., vol. 5, 146.
13 Sakamoto Manabu, Sugase Masa, and Naruse Fujio, *Genshoku nihon no bijutsu*, 25 (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1970), 74–5. Gholamhossayn Abab, *Churches of Iran* (Esfahan: Rasenah Kaj, 1998), 66; of course, such churches are Armenian. Arai Hakuseki's book (referred to below), is *Seiyō kibun* (*c.* 1715), (Tokyo: Heibonsha, Tōyō Bunko, 1968).
14 DDR, vol. 4, 130. These were dispatched in January 1718, together with a ship model.
15 Ibid., 136.
16 Matsura Seizan, *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, Tōyō Bunko, 1978), 317.
17 Unpublished *Dagregister* entry for July 21, 1726. I am grateful to Reinier Hesselink for this reference.
18 DDR, vol. 5, 97.
19 For an assessment of the temple, see Timon Screech, "The Strangest Place in Edo: The Temple of the Five Hundred Arhats," *Monumenta Nipponica* 48 (1993): 408–28.
20 Fujiwara Zaiga (ill.), in Yamamoto Sekichûshi, *Gazu hyakkachō* (Kyoto: Izumioji Izuminojô, 1729), n.p.; for an illustration, see Screech, "The Strangest Place in Edo," 426.
21 See above, n. 16. Seizan's family name is often mis-romanised as Matsuura.
22 Federico Marcon, *The Knowledge of Nature and Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 2015), 115–39.
23 DDR, vol. 13, 281. The book is referred to as *Spiegel der annatomie*, which appears to be a description, not a title, since no such work is known to exist.
24 DDR, vol. 5, 20, 35–6, and 52–3. The Dutch refer to Kurisaki Dōyū as "Coeri Sakai-dono." Arai Hakuseki, *Taion-ki* (n.d.). Because I have not had access to the original, I have cited the reference in Shirahata. *Taion-ki* (undated) was published in Edo (Tokyo) no press named, in 1682.
25 See Yōzaburō Shirahata, "The Development of Japanese Botanical Interest and Dodonæus's Role: From Pharamacopoeia to Botany and Horticulture," in *Dodonaeus in Japan: Translation and the Scientific Mind in the Tokugawa Period*, edited by W. F. Vande Walle (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 263–80. Sugita Genpaku, *Rantō kotohajime*, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 95 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1964), 478. Genpaku does not state the name of the book or author, merely noting that the shogun viewed an imported work.
26 The date has been established by Kishi Fumikazu, *Edo no enkinhō* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1994), 4.
27 Shiba Kōkan, "*Seiyō gadan*," reprinted in *Yōgaku*, Vol. 2: edited by Numata Jirō, *Nihon shisō taikei*, vol. 65 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1976), 489–97.
28 For speculation about this matter, see Julian Lee, "Development of Japanese Landscape Prints: A Study of the Synthesis of Eastern and Western Art," PhD dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 1977, 224–6.
29 Kōkan inscribed this on a copperplate print in 1994. For a convenient reproduction, see Calvin French, *Shiba Kōkan: Artist, Innovator and Pioneer in the Westernization of Japan* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1974), 133.
30 The verse is by Hōseidō Kisanji, quoted (without source) in Haruko Iwasaki, "The World of Gesaku: Playful Writers of Late Eighteenth Century Japan," PhD dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1984), 124.
31 Kōkan, *Seiyō gadan*, 492.

32 Ibid., 493.
33 Isozaki Yasuhiko, *Rairesse no dai-kaiga hon to kinsei nihon yōfū gaka* (Tokyo: Yūzan-kaku, 1983).
34 Shiba Kōkan, *Saiyū nikki* (Tokyo: Tōyō Bunko, 1986), 117; Kōkan, *Seiyō gadan*, 116.
35 Ono Tadashige, *Edo no yōgakka* (Tokyo: Sansaisha, 1968), 73–5.
36 The two treatises are reproduced in, Sakazaki Tan (Shizuka), *Nihon garon taikan*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Aruzu, 1913), 100–1.
37 The Japanese version was produced by a team under Sugita Genpaku see Numata (ed.), *Nihon shisō taikei*, vol. 65, 207–360. Kulmus was considered out of date in Europe; see A. M. Luyendijk-Elshout, "Ontleedkundige (anatomy) as Underlying Principle of Western Medicine in Japan," in *Red-Hair Medicine: Dutch–Japanese Medical Relations*, edited by H. Beukers (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 27–31. Kulmus compiled three anatomical works in 1722, 1732, and 1741. Only the first one was translated into Dutch by Gerard Dikten in 1734.
38 DDR, vol. 8, 130, where Yoshiatsu is referred to as "Setaeki Akita."
39 Ibid., vol. 9, 124. Of course, as well as the possibility that they were removed from office for being too pro-Western, it is also possible that they were, indeed, involved in illegal activities, such as smuggling.
40 For the Russians, see George Lensen, *The Russia Push Towards Japan: Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697–1875* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959). For the British, see Timon Screech, "Thomas (Sir Stamford) Raffles & Dr. Donald Ainslie," in *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, edited by Hugh Cortazzi, vol. 10 (London: Global Oriental, 2016), 20–36.