

Crisis, Continuity, and Change in Late 18th Century Japan

18世紀後期の日本における危機、継続、又は変化

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Abstract

In the late 18th century a combination of bad harvests, famine, financial downturns and the arrival of Russian ships at Japan's gates posed itself as a real crisis to the Tokugawa authorities. Ahead of these contemporaneous matters Rangaku scholars such as Kudô Heisuke (1734-1801) and Honda Toshiaki (1744-1821) had been proposing a more progressive approach suggesting commercial exchange with Russia (*kaikokuron*) and the development of a political economy, such as frontier region exploration. As the crisis unfolded however, other Japanese scholars of Rangaku such as Aoki Okikatsu (1762-1812) and Shizuki Tadao (1760-1806) became advocates of the strengthening of Japan's isolationist policy (*sakokuron*) and the bolstering of its maritime defences. At the same time, available knowledge on the matters of a deepening international crisis between France and Britain -as a result of the French and American Revolutions- came through the hands of the Nagasaki interpreters, and it can be assumed they have played a more active role, than until now has been accepted, in helping to shape the ideas of the aforementioned intellectuals, who frequented Nagasaki on several occasions. Against the backdrop of these domestic and international moments of crisis we can gain some significant insights into how Japan has dealt with change factors. Simultaneously, these responses provide us some unique understanding on the availability of information and the foreign ideological transition which took place in the late stage of the Edo era.

Keywords: Rangaku, international trade, Russia, Dutch interpreters

要旨

18世紀後半には、悪い収穫、飢饉、財政不振、ロシア船が日本の港に到着したことが、徳川幕府にとって真の危機となった。このような時代に先立ち、工藤平助（1734-1801）や本田利明（1744-1821）などの学者は、ロシアとの商業交流や政治経済の発展を示唆し（開国論）、より進歩的なアプローチを提案していたフロンティア領域探査として。しかし、危機が勃発したことから、日本の孤立政策（鎖国論）の強化と海洋防衛の強化のため、青木興勝（1762-1812）や志筑忠雄（1760-1806）などの日本の他の学者が明らかになった。同時に、フランスとアメリカの革命の結果、フランスと英国間の深刻な国際的危機の問題についての知識は、長崎の通訳の手に渡っており、より積極的に活動していると推測されます。長崎を何度も頻繁に訪れた知識人のアイデアを形作るのを助けています。これらの国内外の危機の瞬間を背景に、わ日本がどのように変化要因を処理したかについていくつかの重要な洞察を得ることができる。それと同時に、江戸時代後半に起こった情報の入手可能性や外国のイデオロギー移行についてのユニークな理解が得られます。

キーワード：蘭学、国際貿易、ロシア、阿蘭陀通詞

Introduction: The Concept of Economy in Tokugawa Thinking

The evolution of human history has been marred by extensive environmental, social, political, economic and cultural change. Likewise, throughout the history of Japan we find numerous examples where authorities and people had to face unexpected hardships and swung between crisis, continuity and change. Throughout the 18th century, and more specifically near its late boundaries, Japanese antiquity contains many of the aspects that we correlate with today's society: signs of climate change which had an influence on crops and harvests, foreign powers knocking on Japan's doors to open up the nation to more international trade and a country in economic despair. To get a general idea of the situation, we need to extend our gaze to what was understood by "economy" back in 18th century Japan.

Although the word *keizai* (経済), which in modern Japanese vernacular denotes "economy", was already in use during the Tokugawa era, its meaning was not quite the equivalent to what people in the 21st century understand as the state of a country in terms of production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money. Originating from Chinese Confucian thought, of which the Neo-Confucian doctrine of Chu Hsi (朱熹) remained prevalent throughout the entire Tokugawa period, the words *keikoku* (経国) or *keisei* (経世, i.e. administering the nation) and *saimin* (済民, i.e. easing the needs of the people) had often been used separately. It was not until 1729 when Dazai Shundai (太宰春台, 1680-1747) published his *Keizairoku* (経済録, *Treatise on the Political Economy*) that the term "*keizai*" itself became used. Dazai's treatise became one of the most popular and widely-read literary works on the subject of (political) economics until the modernization of Japan, and contrary to modern-day economics it covered a wide range of related fields such as criminal law, morality, political science, sociology, geography, and even education (Morris-Suzuki, 1989: 11; Najita, 1991: 610).

To govern the whole nation under heaven is *keizai*. It is the virtue of ruling society and relieving the sufferings of the people. *Kei* is wise statesmanship (*keirin*)... *Kei* literally means 'to control a thread'. The warp of a piece of material is called *kei* and the woof, *i*. When a weaving woman makes silk cloth, she first prepares the warp...and then she weaves in the woof. *Kei* is also 'management' [or 'construction'] (*keiei*)... When you construct a royal palace, you must first make a plan of the whole, and then you carry out the plan. This is *kei*.

Sai means the virtue of salvation (*saidō*). This may also be read *wataru*, and literally means 'to carry someone across a river to the farther bank'...

It is also the virtue of bringing relief (*kyūsai*), which may be read *sukuu*, and means 'to relieve people of their sufferings'. Moreover, it may be interpreted as meaning 'accomplishment' or 'bringing to fruition'.

Therefore, the term [*keizai*] has many meanings, but the essential point of those meanings is simply this: in short, to manage affairs and to bring these affairs to a successful conclusion. [...] (Quoted in translation, Dazai, 1972: 16; Morris-Suzuki, 1989: 11)

As one of the most pragmatic students of Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠, 1666-1728), Dazai Shundai had shifted his attention from the mere study of the Chinese classics to applying them to the change of times and appropriateness to the (political) economy of his time and day. In the addendum to this work, *Keizairoku shūi* (経済録拾遺, *Addendum to Treatise on the Political Economy*) written sometime around 1741-44, he advocates to step away from rice cultivation as the sole income for domains and the state. Instead he proposes for domain governments to actively participate in the market and domestic trade, purchasing locally produced goods at a fair trade price and exporting them to the markets of Osaka, Kyoto and Edo, while at the same time importing goods that are scarce within its own domain from others (Najita, 1991: 610-611, Roberts, 1998: 199). Indeed, although rice cultivation formed the backbone of the Tokugawa economy, we can see an increased output of agrarian produce such as sweet potatoes, tea, melons, cabbage, tobacco, etc. At the same time, natural resources for the craftspeople became an important source of income as well, such as cotton, wood (for paper production), and silk. Large scale trade of horses took place on the markets of the cities Sendai, Tsugaru, and Nanbu, while cattle was sold at Tennōji (Osaka). Fishery developed as a trade as well, leading to improved harbours, fishery villages, and the sale of salt. Pottery, ceramics (from Seto and Arita), lacquered items, and smelted ironworks were created at specialized ateliers and traded on the markets. Sake breweries were plenty in the area of Kansai (Itami and Nada-nowadays Kobe) (Vande Walle, 2014: 183-193).

At the beginning of the century, the Kyōhō Reforms (享保の改革, 1716-1736) had tried to rearrange the shogunate's declining finances. Despite the improvements in agricultural production and commercial activity, the central government was failing to get their hands on part of the profits made and a rise in taxes and levies was imposed. Due to unstable harvests, the price of rice and commodities fluctuated heavily depending on the success of the harvests. In an effort to stabilize prices and revive the economy, the shogunate decided to increase the number of gold and silver coins in circulation (the name of Ginza (銀座) still refers to the original location where silver was coined, minted and traded), while also adding six billion copper coins in 1736. Measures like these would likely cause hyperinflation in modern economies, but (most likely because the domestic market was relatively closed) they provided, at the least, a currency circulation stability for the following eight decades. To suffice the demand of ore, the mining industry took surge with bakufu-run gold mines (in Sado) and silver mines (in Ikuno, current day Hyōgo prefecture) while the copper mine in Besshi was run privately by Sumitomo and the copper was refined at the Sumitomo Copper Refinery in Osaka. Since the middle of the 17th century, copper had replaced silver as Japan's principal export item.

Copper bars or ingots called *saodō* (棹銅) ranged 60 to 100 cm in length and were exported to some extent by the Chinese but mainly by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in wooden boxes. The copper was used in Europe for cooking utensils and minted as coins by the VOC, which used its own currency—a testimony to the power and wealth of the world's first multinational.

Visionaries in the Wrong Era: Ideas on International Trade

Another of the main problems Japan was facing was the opening of the country to foreign trade. Isolationist policies had come into effect around the beginning of the Edo period, when the spread of Christianity started to cause division and tension throughout all classes in Japan. In the end, it resulted in Japan closing its doors to all Europeans, except the Dutch in 1639, also referred to as the “Closed Country Edicts” (鎖国令, *sakokurei*) (Hall, 1991: 5). The term for this seclusion policy during those days was initially known as *kaikin* (海禁, maritime prohibition of foreign voyages) and around the early 1850s it became known as *sakoku* (鎖国). This case is a beautiful example of a linguistic reversal, as Shizuki Tadao (志筑忠雄, 1760-1806) had translated a part of Engelbert Kaempfer's volume 3 of his *History of Japan*¹, titled “An Enquiry, whether it be conducive for the good of the Japanese Empire to keep it shut up as it now is, and not to suffer its inhabitants to have any Commerce with foreign nations, either at home or abroad” as written in his manuscript *Sakokuron* (鎖国論, *Essay on the Closed Country*) in 1802 (but only published in the early 1850s). When concepts of increased international trade at first appeared, the location of Ezo was most often mentioned (Goodman, 2012: 211).

Ezo (蝦夷) was the name used in Japan for historically referring to the islands north of Honshū, sometimes including Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands (until its name was changed to Hokkaidō in 1869). From 1583 to 1616 Kakizaki Yoshihiro (蛸崎慶広, 1548-1616; later also known as Matsumae Yoshihiro 松前慶広) served as the first daimyō of the Matsumae domain (松前藩). In 1590 he ventured down to Kyoto and pledged his allegiance to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who acknowledged his rights to rule the territory. At that time, most of the northern territory was under the control of two Ainu groups and the Kakizaki domain constituted only the southernmost tip of the island, where the Matsumae Castle eventually was built in 1606. After extending its control over the region during the following century and a half, an initial scare to the authorities occurred, when in 1777 a band of Russians approached the domain with a request for trade. The request was officially rejected but still some form of trade occurred as Russian goods could be found in the Osaka markets (Asao, 1991: 69, Tsuji, 1991: 465).

¹ Engelbert Kaempfer's *History of Japan* arrived in Japan in its Dutch translation as “De Beschryving van Japan, behelsende een Verhaal van den ouden en tegenwoordigen Staat en Regeering van dat Ryk, van deszelfs Tempels, Paleysen, Kasteelen en andere Gebouwen; van deszelfs Metalen, Mineralen, Boomen, Planten, Dieren, Vogelen en Visschen. Van de Tydrekening, en Opvolging van de Geestelyke en Wereldlyke Keyzers. Van de Oorsprondelyke Afstamming, Godsdiensten, Gewoonten en Handwerkselen der Inboorlingen, en van hunnen Koophandel met de Nederlanders en de Chineesen. Benevens eene Beschryving van het Koningryk Siam. In 't Hoogduytisch beschreven door Engelbert Kaempfer, M. D. Geneesheer van het Hollandsche Gezantschap na 't Hof van den Keyzer, Uyt het oorspronkelyk Hoogduytisch Handschrift, nooit te vooren gedrukt, in het Engelsch overgezet, door J. G. Scheuchzer, Lidt van de Koninklyke Maatschappy, en van die der Geneesheeren in London. Die daar by gevoegt heeft het Leven van den Schryver. Voorzien met kunstige Kopere Platen, onder het opzicht van den Ridder Hans Sloane uytgegeven, en uyt het Engelsch in 't Nederduytisch vertaalt. MDCCXXIX [= 1729]”

The Russian visit cannot have been completely unexpected. Under the reign of Catherine the Great (1729-1796) expansion of the Russian borders for military and trade purposes was part of the country's foreign policy. As a result of this Russian ships had ventured down to Kamchatka and the Kuril Islands for fur trapping and sought to sell their wares at nearby Matsumae. More frequent spotting of Russian vessels also had been forewarned by a very unlikely visitor under the name Count Maurice Benyovszky de Benyó et Urbanó, more commonly known as Maurice Benyovszky (Baron Moritz Aladar von Benyowsky or even Mauritius Augustus Count de Benyowsky). In Japanese literature, he is often referred to as Hanbengorō (はんべんごろう or はんべん五郎), a linguistic bastardization of the Dutch pronunciation of Baron Aladar von Bengoro (ファン・ベンゴロ), another alias used by him (cf. infra). The number of names under which the man is known should already suffice to explain the level of shrewd survival skills of this Hungarian born military officer, adventurer, and writer. After joining the Polish resistance movement, he was captured by Russian forces in the Ukraine. After numerous escape attempts he was transferred as a prisoner to Siberia, and later Kamchatka, where he arrived in September 1770. Together with prisoner companions, he planned his escape which was the beginning of a journey worthy of a Hollywood movie. With a stolen vessel they managed to reach Macao after calling port to the island of Simushir (Kuril Islands), Sakinohama and Ōshima island (Awa domain, Shikoku, 19 to 23 July, 1771), Amami-Ōshima (Ryūkyū islands), and Black Rock Bay (Formosa, current day Taiwan), before finally arriving in Macao on 22 September, 1771. Details about his entire voyage are extensively discussed in the recently published monograph *The Intriguing Life and Ignominious Death of Maurice Benyovszky* by Andrew Drummond, while Maurice Benyovszky's posthumously published *Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius Augustus Count de Benyowsky* (1790) proved to be an instant success (Drummond, 2017).

However, what matters most to us is the content of the last of the four letters, written in German, which he had passed on to the locals of Ōshima and which were addressed to the Dutch factory director in Nagasaki (at that time Daniel Armenault who was Opperhoofd (Chief Trader) at Dejima, residing from 17 November, 1770 to 9 November, 1771). The letter became known in Japan as "Benyowsky's Warning" and reads as follows:

"Highly Illustrious, High, and Wellborn Gentlemen, Officers of the Highly Esteemed Republic of Holland:

Unkind fate, which has for some time been driving me here and there on the sea, has brought me for a second time into Japanese waters. I have come ashore here in the hope that I might possibly meet with your high excellencies, and obtain your help. It has been a great misfortune for me not to have had the opportunity of speaking to you personally, for I have important information to disclose. I have deemed it necessary because of my general respect for your illustrious states to inform you in this letter of the fact that this year, in accordance with a Russian order, two galliots and a frigate from Kamchatka sailed

around Japan and set down all their findings in a plan, in which an attack on Matsma [Hokkaidō] and the neighboring islands lying under 41° 38' N. Lat. has been fixed for next year. For this purpose a fortress has been built on the Kurile island nearest to Kamchatka, and ammunition, artillery, and a magazine have been readied. If I could speak to you personally, I might reveal more than writing permits. Your high illustriousnesses may make such preparation as you please, but my advice, as an ardent well-wisher of your illustrious republic and co-religionist, would be that you have a cruiser ready if you can. With this I further commend myself and am as subscribed, your most obedient servant
Baron Aladar von Bengoro, Army Commander in Captivity

20 July 1771 on the island Usma

When I went ashore, I left there a map of Kamchatka which may be of use to you.
(Quoted in translation, Keene, 1969: 34)

As both Andrew Drummond and Donald Keene correctly point out, the Russians had no intention of invading northern Japan. We can only assume the reasons behind this letter from Benyovsky. Perhaps he plotted a small personal revenge on the Russians or he just wanted to pose as a friend of the Dutch, preventing any interceptions from them (Keene, 1969: 34, Drummond, 2017). As the letters were written in German, the Japanese first had to hand them over to Dutch factory officials for translation into Dutch. The letters arrived in Nagasaki about roughly a month after Benyovsky had left Japanese waters and not surprisingly caused quite a stir amongst the Dutch, who could not figure out which man would possibly be this “commander in the navy of Her Imperial Roman Majesty” (i.e. the Empress of Austria). Finally, Japanese translators set to the task of translating the letter from Dutch into Japanese. We may very likely assume that Yoshio Kōzaemon Kōgyū (吉雄幸左衛門耕牛, 1724-1800) was either directly or indirectly involved into the translation of the letter. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, by 1771 Yoshio had already five times served as chief translator (*oppertolk* or 大通詞) (in 1748 at age 24, in 1756, 1760, 1764, and 1768) and was about to start his sixth tour of duty in 1772. He also served as the interpreter during the yearly court journey to Edo (江戸番通詞) in 1749, 1752, 1757, 1761, 1765, and 1769. During these journeys, the Dutch chief trader would present a written report, called *Oranda fūsetsugaki* (阿蘭陀風説書) about the current affairs around the world (片桐, 2016: 380-383). Secondly, when we look at the prosographical group of intellectuals who for the many years following, discussed the contents of the letter and started to develop political, economic, as well as maritime defence theories, it is apparent that Yoshio played a key role in the dissemination of information. Despite the efforts of officials to maintain secrecy on the contents of the letters, it would have been difficult to prevent any leaks of their content via the interpreters involved in the translation, or even the Dutch themselves. Hirasawa Kyokuzan (平澤旭山, 1733-1791) left the oldest Japanese historical account of Benyovsky’s visit, being told about the event during a 1774 visit to Nagasaki, and 3 years later he decided to visit Ezo to follow up on the matter.

Hayashi Shihei (林子平, 1738-1793) made the same journey in the reverse order. Born into a samurai household, when Shihei was three years old, his father was found guilty of murder and his sister became a concubine of Date Munemura, daimyō of the domain of Sendai, while his brother also joined service on the domain. Shihei joined his brother in 1757. While in Edo, he came into contact with famous Dutch Studies scholars or *Rangakusha* (蘭学者) Ōtsuki Gentaku, Udagawa Genzui and Katsuragawa Hoshū via Kudō Heisuke, the Sendai physician active in Edo (cf. infra). After an expedition to Ezo in 1772, he makes three consecutive visits to Nagasaki in 1775 (at first to study Dutch horsemanship) 1777 and 1782 (Beerens, 2006: 65, 平松, 1999: 72). During his visits, he finds out about the (perceived) Russian invasive intentions and realizes that Japan's maritime defences and intellectual isolation are to its disadvantage. After initially publishing *Sangoku tsūran zusetsu* (三国通覧図説, *Illustrated Discussion of a Complete View of Three Countries*, 1785) in which he presents the geographical outlay of Korea, Loocho (the Ryūkyū Islands), Ezo and Bonin, alluding it may be useful for defence purposes, he goes one step further in his next work *Kaikoku heidan* (海国兵談, *Military Tales of a Sea-girt Country*). Although he completed the work in 1786, it was not published until 1791 (Goodman, 2012: 213). The work consisted of 16 chapters and it was in the final chapter some of the principles can be found that later became the basis for the national slogan during the Meiji period, namely *fukoku kyōhei* (富国強兵, Wealthy State, Powerful Armed Forces). Although he was later considered a visionary by many, at the time of its publication his work shocked its readers by its subversive tone and character, a direct criticism of the prevalent government and advocating a change in existing traditions. For these reasons, he was imprisoned in Edo by order of Matsudaira Sadanobu. Following his trial, he was moved back to Sendai and put under house arrest where he died of depression in 1793. (Goodman, 2012: 214-215) We can note here that his lack of direct connection to any domain or lord most likely allowed him to speak his opinion more frankly.

Although the preface to the above mentioned *Kaikoku heidan* had been written by **Kudō Heisuke** (工藤平助, 1734-1801 or 1739-1800) also known as Kudō Shūan (工藤周庵) or Kudō Kyūkei (工藤球卿) the latter avoided the mistake of open criticism in his works (Goodman, 2012: 212). Both Keisuke and Shihei came into contact through their mutual connection to the domain of Sendai, as mentioned above. Born as the third son of the domain physician at Kishū, he was adopted at age 13 by Kudō Jōan, physician to the domain of Sendai. While mainly living in Edo, he continued his training as scholar, physician and fiscal administrator (出入司, a position unique to the domain of Sendai), hence developing an active interest in foreign developments and economics. From a young age he got involved with Dutch learning through its Edo scholars such as Aoki Kon'yō (青木昆陽), Nakagawa Jun'an (中川淳庵), and Noro Genjō (野呂元丈) (Goodman: 2012: 212, Beerens, 2006: 96-97). Although not mentioned in Hiramatsu Kenji's *Dictionary for Visiting Scholars to Nagasaki* (長崎遊学者事典), Goodman as well as Keene and Roberts (writing under her pseudonym Robert Liss) mention he ventured down to Nagasaki in 1780 where he met with Yoshio Kōgyū and Opperhoofd Isaac Titsingh,

who confided to him “that the Dutch considered the Japanese policies to be highly inept in that they had permitted the Russians to extend their grasp to one after another of the Kurile islands.” (Goodman, 2012: 212. Robert, 2009: 37. Keene, 1969: 37). Okada Toshihiro mentions that Kudō Heisuke became acquainted with Yoshio, most likely when Yoshio visited Edo during one of his court visit trips with the Dutch, and visited the House of Kudō on one of these occasions. It is during the An’ei period (安永 1772-1781) that Kudō became most involved in the Ezo discussions. (岡田, 2011: 105) In the work of Anna Beerens, the writer neatly sums up all the connections each of the *Rangakusha* have with one another, but sadly she never mentions Yoshio Kōgyū who in my opinion functioned as the lubricant between these connections.

In 1781 Kudō Heisuke finished volume 2 of his *AkaEzo fūsetsukō* (赤蝦夷風説考, *Treatise about Reports on the Red Ainu* (=Russians)), in which he writes about AkaEzo (=Kamchatka) as follows:

“The real name for the country of the red barbarians is *Kamusasuka*. After careful study I have stated that east of Holland there is a country called Russia. Its capital is Moscow. [...] This country grew powerful in the Kanbun Period [1661-72]. And in the Shōtoku Period [1711-15] it conquered a barbarous country, Kamchatka. What we call AkaEzo is called in Russia Kamchatka. Between Kamchatka and Ezo are islands. Chishima = Kuril Islands. Since the Kyōho period [1716-35] the Russians made invasions there and built fortresses. I hear that sometimes Russian exiles come in the neighbourhood of the provinces of Matsumae. Russia borders on Holland. From here to AkaEzo is a distance of 5000 *ri*. I saw a resemblance between the history of the people of Matsumae and that in the Dutch book, and that interested me very much. I combined my own views on this matter with those of my study and wrote this book in two volumes. [...] (Quoted in translation, Goodman, 2012: 212, quoted in Krieger, 1940: 76)

The only “Dutch book” Kudō could be referring to is beyond any doubt *Oude en nieuwe staat van ‘t Russische of Moskovische keizerryk* (*Old and New History of the Muscovite Empire of Russia*, Utrecht 1744), which had been translated into Japanese by Yoshio Kōgyū and further edited by Maeno Ryōtaku as *Roshia daitō ryakki: Teikihen* (魯西亜大統略記: 帝記篇) (NDL, 2009). Volume 1 of *AkaEzo fūsetsukō* was completed in 1783. Kudō was careful not to publish it in public, but presented it to highly ranked Bakufu officials only as it contained a far more detailed opinion on how to deal with the Russian danger. Kudō suggested a four-fold approach:

1. Japan must fortify its coastal defence;
2. Any kind of smuggling between Kamchatka, the Kurils and Matsumae must be halted;
3. Any trade with Russia must be done on an official basis in order to learn more about Russia;
4. The natural resources of Ezo should be surveyed, and if found, mined then traded with

Russia to develop the Ezo island (Goodman, 2012: 212-213).

The work also contains a warning: failure to comply with these measures could result in the loss of Ezo to the Russians. When the complete work was presented to Tanuma Okitsugu in 1783, he commanded an immediate report from the Matsumae clan. When their answer was quite vague on the matters of smuggling and coastal defences, Tanuma was convinced to send a dispatch to investigate the situation up north. Reports from this 1785-86 mission were compiled in the *Ezo shūi* (蝦夷拾遺, *Ezo Miscellany*) by Aoshima Shunzō (青島俊蔵, 1751-1790) but depicted a much grimmer situation than the optimistic plan set out by Kudō. The desolate areas of the Kurils held no prospects for trade. Yet, as the report also suggested, the agricultural development of Ezo could render the shogunate substantial tax revenues of 5.83 million koku per year (Tsuji, 1991: 465, Keene, 1969: 38). By the time the report was completed, Tanuma was no longer in power and his successor Matsudaira Sadanobu believed that leaving Hokkaido uncultivated was the ideal defence against any foreign invasion. Matsudaira however, ordered all domains bordering the sea to improve their coastal fortifications. The arrival of Adam Kirillovich (Erikovich) Laxman at Nemuro in Ezo (October 1792) with an official request for diplomatic and commercial relations by order of Catherine the Great most likely gave extra substance to Matsudaira's needs.

Kudō was not the only protagonist of the *kaikokuron* (開国論) idea. **Honda Toshiaki** (本多利明, 1744-1821) was perhaps one of the most provocative thinkers within the field of political economics. Born in Echigo, he went to Edo at an early age to study *wasan* mathematics (和算) and astronomy. In 1798, he published both *Keisei Hisaku* (経世秘策, *Secret Proposals on Political Economy*) and *Seiiki Monogatari* (西域物語, *Tales of the West*). In the former, he proposed to lift the ban on foreign trade and a more aggressive policy of internal economic development, including settlements in Ezo (Duus, 1976: 53). In the latter work, he lauded the colonial tactics of Western powers and urged Japan to imitate these, claiming the territorial seclusion of Japan had become untenable. For this, he reasoned, Japan had to focus on the development of science and technology, similar to Western nations, and rid itself of Confucianism, Buddhism and Shintoism, which he labelled as mere superstitions. He even went as far to suggest *kana* was far more suitable than *kanji* for the rapid assimilation of scientific knowledge. Similar to Kudō, and perhaps in part, imitating him, he suggested four steps to achieve success: the production of explosives to speed up construction of ports and waterways; the smelting of iron and other metals and storage of these by the central government; setting up a centrally owned merchant fleet similar to the British East India Company or the Dutch VOC; and finally, as mentioned earlier, settlements of Ezo in the north (Goodman, 2012: 209, Najita, 1991: 649). Many of these ideas actually make sense from a modern economic point of view and we can only wonder whether the Tokugawa government would have been able to alter its future course had it rendered more attention to visionaries such as Kudō, Hayashi and Honda. Despite, or maybe because of the revolutionary character of their ideas –which were way ahead of their time- they remained isolated voices in the

desert at the time. It is not until much later (during the Meiji period) that works like these were rediscovered and reread.

A Shift in Foreign Policy Reasoning

The Great Tenmei famine (天明の大飢饉, *Tenmei no daikikin*) is considered to be the deadliest famine during the early modern period of Japan and was caused by a combination of bad weather and natural disasters. This calamity was unquestionably one of the factors which contributed to social changes which eventually led to the Kansei Reforms (寛政の革命, 1787-1793). The agricultural disaster was named after the Tenmei period (1781-1789), amid the rule of Emperor Kōkaku (光格天皇, 1771-1840). Starvation amongst the population lasted from 1782 to 1787 and it had a major influence on the government policy of Tanuma Okitsugu (田沼意次, 1719-1788), senior counsellor to Shōgun Tokugawa Ieharu (徳川家治, 1737-1786, in office 1760-1786). As Conrad Totman points out, crop failure and public hardship led to the fact that villagers increasingly started to target their accusations, claims, dissents, and violence at the wealthier classes, such as the landowners (Totman, 2005: 281-282).

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. The current difference in international trade policies between recent U.S. presidents could easily serve as a simple analogy to understand how drastic the shift in foreign policy must have felt after Tanuma Okitsugu's successor Matsudaira Sadanobu (松平定信, 1759-1829) took over as Chief Senior Councillor (老中首座, in office 1787-1793) at the end of the 18th century. Despite the corrupt image Tanuma carries in Japan, for roughly a quarter of a century he had sought to propel Japan into an economically more lucrative position through proactive commercial programs. Yet Matsudaira stagnated most of these programs and Hall claims that the latter hereby nullified any hope for economic and military recovery that could have fortified the country's stance against Western powers later in the 19th century (Hall, 1955: 57-60). Robert Hellyer takes a more moderate stance on the impact that the shift by Matsudaira had. He writes that Matsudaira did not interfere with any of the trade institutions and that business in Nagasaki continued as usual. However, Matsudaira did make his biggest impact by downsizing Edo's diplomatic contacts with Korea (Hellyer, 2009: 103). Things be as they may, it cannot be denied that the intrusions of Russia and its push for opening up the country for trade 'or else' marked a significant point in time where Japan started to realize Western imperialism and military actions were nigh. As Donald Keene puts it very well:

“Rangaku might have remained a purely academic discipline, the stepping-stone to greater knowledge of European science, had it not been to the threats to Japan's peaceful isolation that caused some Japanese to turn to Dutch learning for guidance as well as information. These men were interested not so much in Dutch medicine or astronomy as in discovering how the European example could help keep Japan safe from invasion by making the nation strong and economically sound.” (Keene, 1969: 31)

The monograph *Escape from Impasse: The Decision to Open Japan* by University of Tokyo Professor Mitani Hiroshi (translated by David Noble) explains that there was substantial disagreement on how to deal with these events. While some *Rangakusha* believed these to be passing moments of crisis, there were others who were profoundly concerned, their feelings of emergency prodding numerous (local) authorities to discussion and where possible to action. Even if it did not mark the beginnings of the very coastal fortifications itself, it marked at least the beginning of the discussions about them (三谷, 2013).

Aoki Okikatsu (青木興勝, 1762-1812) was a *Rangaku* scholar of the Fukuoka domain who wrote various works, including *Oranda Mondō* (阿蘭陀問答, *Questions to and Answers from the Dutch*, 1800), *Tōmon Jissaku* (答問十策, *Ten Strategies to Questions and Answers*, 1804) *Nankai Kibun* (南海紀聞, *Tales of the Southern Seas*) and *Waran kidan* (和蘭記談, *Dutch-Japanese Talks*). Okikatsu was a disciple of the famous Confucian teacher and physician Kamei Nanmei (亀井南冥, 1743-1814) of the Fukuoka domain, who wrote the ground breaking essay about the historical importance of the gold seal which was found in the same domain by a rice farmer in 1784 (Fogel, 2015: 47). The Fukuoka domain, together with the Saga domain, was also in charge of guarding Dejima. Although also not mentioned in Hiramatsu Kenji's *Dictionary for Visiting Scholars to Nagasaki* (長崎遊学者事典), Haraguchi Shigeki writes Kamei made the study journey to Nagasaki four times in the following years: 1759, 1761, 1768, and 1772. (原口, 2017: 127). In the early 1790s, Kamei was put under house arrest as a result of the Kansei Reforms' *Igaku no kin* (寛政異学の禁, Prohibition of heterodoxy), which tried to limit alternate (Confucian) schools of thought, and consequently his academy Kantōkan (甘棠館) in Fukuoka's western Tōjinmachi district was closed down and eventually destroyed by fire. Likewise, Yoshio Kōgyū was placed under house arrest in 1790 (until 1796) for failing to properly inform the Dejima Opperhoofd about the new trade restrictions that came into effect. Although the roundabouts of this so-called *goyakujiken* (誤訳事件, Translation Incident) are still shrouded in mystery, it was most likely a repressive measure authorized directly by Matsudaira Sadanobu (片桐, 2016: 191-202). As the government was running a large trade deficit, it had ordered imports (the main imports at that time were wool, textile, cotton, sugar, medicine, plants, books, watches, etc.) through Dutch ships to be halved by 1790 (hence restricting the port of call to Nagasaki by a maximum of one ship annually; the measure was slightly relaxed in 1798 to two ships per year). Simultaneously, the VOC was already dealing with financial difficulties stemming from political unrest in Europe. By the end of the 18th century, Europe was in a state of turmoil after the French Revolution (1789-1799) had occurred. In 1794, the Netherlands were overtaken by France and became an occupied vassal state of the Napoleonic Empire. As the Dutch found it impossible to maintain its network of trading facilities overseas, experiencing interruption of the flow of their merchandise from and to Europe, they decided to end all VOC operations on 31 December, 1799.

Before its untimely end of operations however, the VOC was already making use of chartered Danish, American, and other neutral countries' vessels to continue its operations. This was

a direct result of British naval forces blocking the trade route between the Netherlands and the Dutch colony of Batavia, while obstructing access to any continental ports during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). The British who had already been embroiled in strong rivalry with Holland over colonial expansion for decades, now considered any Dutch vessel as an enemy and subject to attack. As a consequence, a total of ten American ships, such as the *Massachusetts* (from Boston), the *Margaret* (from Old Salem), the *Samuel Smith* and the *Rebecca* (from Baltimore), the *Eliza* and the *Franklin* made port of call to Nagasaki, hoisting the American flag in international waters and replacing it with the Dutch flying colours before docking at the bay. Needless to say, Nagasaki officials noticed that the ships looked different and required an explanation (Vaporis, 2012: 109).

It is in this context that we must situate the *Oranda Mondō* (阿蘭陀問答). Although Matsumoto Eiji seems to have trouble to place the year, it is safe to say that this “interrogation” between Aoki Okikatsu and Leendert Geenemans, who was working as an assistant on Dejima, took place somewhere between 24 November, 1798 and 23 November, 1799. The interpreter on duty this time was again Yoshio Kōgyū (at that time age 75, one year before his death on 16 August, 1800) most likely a direct result of his existing ties with Aoki’s mentor and teacher Kamei. After questions about Geenemans’ place of birth (Rostock) and places he had visited as a merchant (England, Ireland, California), Aoki wanted to find out more about the American Revolution, as he mentions a meeting with Stewart, captain of the *Eliza*, perhaps explaining his interest in America. The next questions (4-6) are mainly focused on geographical issues, such as South America and Australia (referred to as “New Holland” or *Shin Oranda* 新阿蘭陀). Questions 7 to 9 focus on Russia and its political situation after the death of Catherine the Great, the Russian-Turkish wars and trade relationships between Russia and China. Similar information about the geopolitical situation can also be found in the *Oranda fūsetsugaki*, which proves that Japan’s ruling elite was quite aware about what was going on in the world, despite its isolationist policies. For example, the first mention about the French Revolution in the Dutch Reports occurs 5 years after the actual events took place. The extensive questioning about matters pertaining to Russia could be attributed to the visit by Laxman (cf. supra). Matsumoto also notes how Geenemans carefully hides information about the turmoil in Europe after the French Revolution, or the fact that Batavia had become a French vassal state (松本, 2004: 240-48).

In *Tōmon Jissaku* (答問十策), which basically covers possible ways to deal with the current affairs based on the information he gained from the interrogation of Geenemans, Aoki gives the Japanese readers a stern warning of what was likely to come ahead:

“[...] the primitive [i.e. European] people pass their time in roaming the countries of the world in ships, assessing the condition of each place, and planning their naval assaults; where attempts to land are frustrated and booty cannot be seized, they just reduce everything to dust and ashes – this is what they consider the rightful function of their navies to be.” (Quoted in translation, Screech, 2000: 228)

Finally, the common connection of Yoshio Kōgyū brings us back to **Shizuki Tadao** (志筑忠雄, 1760-1806), whose house in Nagasaki happened to be right next door to the veteran interpreter. Similar to Kōgyū, Tadao hailed from a long generation of interpreters. As an adopted child, he was lined up to become the eight generation interpreter of the Shizuki family. Kōgyū being 36 years the elder of Shizuki, it is not surprising to think acted as his mentor and teacher. Due to an illness, Tadao was forced to retire as an interpreter in 1777 (coincidentally one year after the famous *Kaitai Shinsho* (解体新書, *New Text on Anatomy*) was published and of which Kōgyū was asked to write the preface by Sugita Genpaku). Sponsored by the income of his biological father, a wealthy Nagasaki trader, Tadao was able to dedicate the remainder of his life to the study of astronomy, physics, mathematics (and, later, ballistics) under the tutorage of Motoki Ryōei (本木良永, 1735-1794, also known as Motoki Yoshinaga), his neighbour to the right in Nagasaki (as the three homes of Yoshio, Shizuki and Motoki were literally lined up adjacently on the same street in front of the Dejima island, right next to each other). While in 1792 Motoki completed a first systematic explanation of the heliocentric system by Copernicus, Tadao himself worked on the translation of Johan Lulof's *Inleidinge tot de waare natuur-en sterrekunde* (Leiden, 1741. *Introduction to the True Natural Science and Astronomy*) between 1798 and 1802. Going well beyond Motoki's explanation of heliocentrism, he still tried to reconcile the ground breaking Western scientific ideas with Confucian intellectual thought of egocentricity (perhaps as to avoid repercussions of the *Igaku no kin*). Despite their efforts, both scholars remained virtually unknown in their own days and the importance of their accomplishments was only realized by modern day researchers (Goodman, 2012: 104-106. Vande Walle, 2001: 134). In this sense, his translation of Kaempfer's *History of Japan* is a somewhat odd topic for a man who devoted himself to the study of science. As we mentioned earlier on, his manuscript *Sakokuron* (鎖国論, *Essay on the Closed Country*) described Kaempfer's observations on the exclusionistic and isolationist nature of Japan's foreign policy, to which Tadao's translator's notes add that this policy was the most plausible measure to safeguard the country against foreigners, with their barbaric customs and violent nature, trying to disturb its customs and plunder its fortunes (三谷, 2003: 20-22). Similar to Aoki Okikatsu, Tadao must have been a primary witness to the Russian and American vessels that landed in Nagasaki at the turn of the century. Interestingly, he interprets the menace by Russia from the north as a positive tension, avoiding Japan from becoming overly complacent, while at the same time pointing out that these threats could function to strengthen a feeling of unity and nationalism. If anything, the main purpose of his translation was perhaps to inform the readers they ought to consider themselves lucky to be born Japanese, members of a splendid nation with its wonderful nature and abundant bounty, wise teachings, and traditions. (三谷, 2003: 20-22)

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- Disclaimer: This article was originally intended to be published in the 50周年記念論集 in the spring of 2019 –which still awaits publication. Modifications to the original article were made to conform to the Japan University of Economics in-house journal standards, but did not alter the author's original findings and conclusions.