

# In Focus: The Enduring Cultural Exchanges between Holland and Japan

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WHEN THINKING about Japan, one of the cultural traditions that most often comes to mind is their tea ceremony. However, it may come as a surprise that the Japanese are now among the most enthusiastic coffee drinkers in the world. Tracing this surprising fact backwards, it is perhaps even more curious to discover that, already in the 17th century, coffee was being brewed and served in Deshima, the Dutch trading post located on a small fan-shaped island in the Bay of Nagasaki. This man-made island was originally created by the Japanese government in 1636 with the aim of isolating Portuguese traders, who had been active in Japan since their initial, accidental arrival in 1543.

Dutch traders arrived in a similarly accidental fashion on April 19th, 1600, when a Dutch galleon named *De Liefde* (Love or Charity) ran aground in Usuki Bay, Kyushu, the westernmost of Japan's four main islands (1).<sup>1</sup> This was the sole remaining ship of a fleet of five that had departed Rotterdam in 1598, and only a small number of the original crew remained alive by the time she beached in Japan.

Nonetheless, from this rather inauspicious beginning sprung more than two centuries of increasingly complex economic and cultural interaction between the Japanese and the Dutch. Among the few men, who did manage to scramble ashore from this ship, were Williams Adams (1564–1620), an English navigator, known in Japan as Anjin Miura, and Jan Joosten van Lodensteyn (1556–1623), a Dutch merchant and navigator.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, both of these men became valued advisors to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) on international affairs, and received the high-ranking samurai position of *hatamoto*, the shogun's direct retainer.

In 1609, Shogun Ieyasu granted a trading permit to the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), the Dutch East India Company founded in 1602, allowing access to Japanese ports and waters and giving permission to set up a trading post on the island of Hirado, thus effectively breaking the Portuguese monopoly (2a, 2b). However, the atmosphere of openness was short-lived. In 1621, Japanese subjects were forbidden to leave the country or board foreign vessels without special passes, and soon afterwards all departures from the country were forbidden as part of the *sakoku*, or “closure of the country” policies.

The British left in 1623, and the Portuguese and Spanish were expelled by 1639. However, the Dutch remained, and in 1641, the Dutch trading post was moved from Hirado to Deshima, where the Protestant Dutch found themselves in the unique (albeit restricted and controlled) position of being the only Westerners trading with Japan, a situation which would last well over 200 years (the VOC paid an annual rent for the privilege).<sup>3</sup>

Despite these restrictions and the obvious language barriers, the people and cultures of the Netherlands and



1 Monument of Jan Joosten van Loodesteyn, or “Yayosu” from Delft, and the galleon *De Liefde* located in the Yaesu district on the east side of Tokyo Station. Unveiled in 1989 to commemorate the arrival of the first Dutch ship in Japan and the opening of a Dutch trading post in Hirado in 1609

Japan interacted and influenced each other in an increasingly substantial fashion. It is the aim of this article to explore the areas in which mutual curiosity and fascination manifested themselves, and to demonstrate how this interest was reflected in art.

Deshima, a rather small island surrounded by a wall, was connected to the mainland by a single stone bridge. Its residents were not permitted to leave the island without express permission from Japanese officials. Nagasaki was under the direct jurisdiction of the shogunate. According to Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), the German scientist and physician employed by the VOC, who arrived in Deshima

<sup>1</sup>This is the very same ship featured in James Clavell's 1975 best-selling novel, *Shogun*, and in the recent 2024 *Shogun* series on FX. A wooden statue saved from *De Liefde* ended up in the Ryukoin Temple in Sano city. There it was known as “Kateki sama” and venerated as a mythical Chinese inventor of shipbuilding. In the early 20th century, it was thought the statue was associated with Christianity. In 1926, a Dutch researcher identified it as the stern ornament of *De Liefde* (originally known as *Erasmus*), depicting the Dutch humanist scholar, Erasmus (1466–1536). It was designated an Important Cultural Object and is on loan to the Tokyo National Museum.

<sup>2</sup>Jan Joosten was granted a mansion within the grounds of Edo Castle and married a Japanese woman. Since his name was difficult for the Japanese to pronounce, he was given the name Yayōsu (耶揚子), later corrupted into Yaesu (八重洲), meaning “many shoals”.

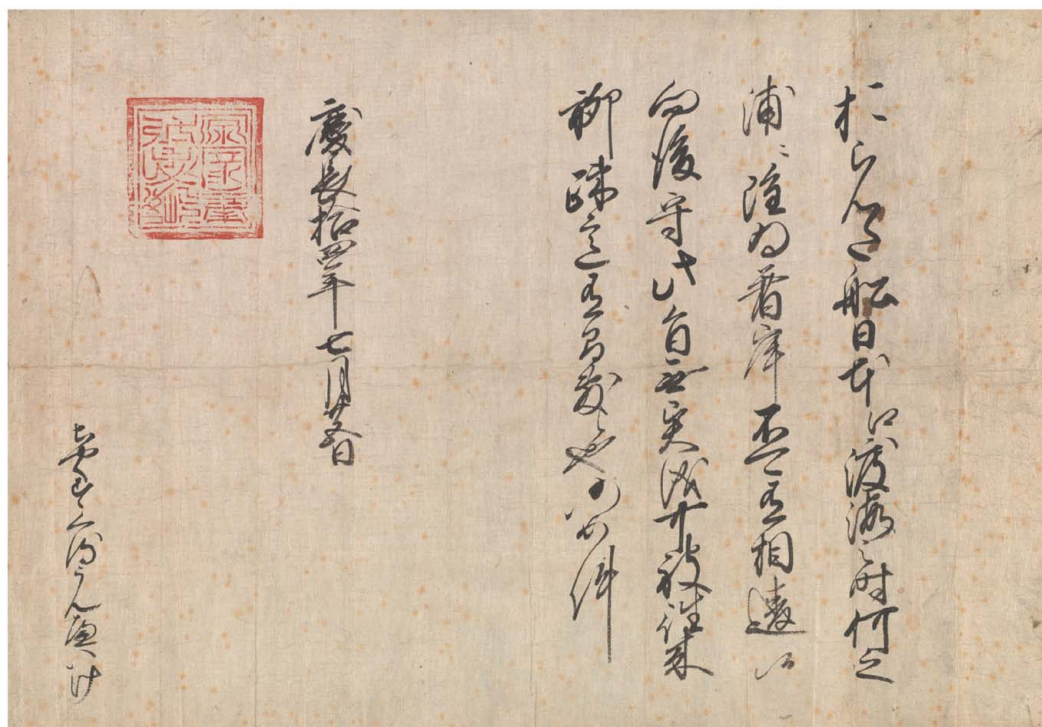
<sup>3</sup>The Dutch came to trade and, unlike the Portuguese and Spanish, were not interested in converting the Japanese to Christianity. On Deshima, Sunday was designated as a day of work and personnel, including the *opperhoofd*, were searched for forbidden (or religious) objects. The Christmas celebration was called a “Dutch party at Winter solstice”.



2a

Trading pass (*handelspas*) issued in the name of Tokugawa Ieyasu with his red seal *goshuin* to Jacques Groenewegen Chakusu Kurûnbeike, 46.2 x 65.4 cm

"Dutch ships are allowed to travel to Japan, and they can disembark on any coast, without any reserve. From now on this regulation must be observed, and the Dutch left free to sail where they want throughout Japan. No offenses to them will be allowed, such as on previous occasions"—sealed and dated August 24th, 1609 (Keichô 14, 25th day of the 7th month). National Archives in The Hague.



in 1690, the maximum length of the island was 263 paces and the width 82 paces, an area comparable to that of the Dam in Amsterdam. It contained offices, warehouses, living quarters, and some gardens (3). On average around fifteen to twenty people stayed on the island, the *opperhoofd* or chief factor, the warehouse manager, the secretary, and doctor being the most important. Access to Deshima was limited to local officials and courtesans from Nagasaki's Maruyama entertainment district; Western women were not permitted.<sup>4</sup>

Kaempfer was the first Westerner to bring *Ginkgo* seeds back to Europe. He collected information on the practice of acupuncture and moxibustion, documented the cultivation, preparation, and serving of tea and provided descriptions of how miso and soy sauce are made from soybeans.<sup>5</sup>

Economic interactions soon began. To Japan the Dutch brought Chinese or Tonkin raw silk, silk fabric, sugar, pepper, sappan wood (red dye for textiles), deerskin, shark skin and medicines, with the principal aim of obtaining silver, gold and, later, copper. These commodities were, in turn, used to trade with Mughal India for spices, cotton and Coromandel chintz textiles, and with Qing (1644–1911) China for silk, porcelain and tea. Japan was, thus, an important link in the inter-Asia trade of the VOC. With respect to the trade goods sent to Europe, the first Dutch ship to return to Holland in 1610 with Japanese goods carried nine crates of Japanese lacquerware. The high-quality cabinets and coffers, though much admired for their aesthetic qualities, were expensive, but not profitable as trade goods. However, Japanese lacquerware did play a role in diplomacy.<sup>6</sup>

Among the earliest depictions of Deshima is a magnificently detailed version executed using various lacquer techniques, on the pair of large cabinets (1660–1670) in the royal collection in The Hague (4a).<sup>7</sup> Although not stipulated in Ieyasu's permit, by 1633, trade relations came with the expectation of an annual journey, the *Edo sanpu*, undertaken by the Dutch traders to pay their respects to the shogun in Edo (now Tokyo) and present gifts.<sup>8</sup> The *hofreis* or court journey, depicted on the door and side panels of the



2b Lacquer box with Togukawa clan symbol, or *mon*, and silk protective wrapping, Edo period (1615–1868), early 17th century, 51.7 x 24.7 x 7.2 cm. National Archives in The Hague

Lacquerware was durable, fireproof and waterproof and therefore used for storing important documents such as the trading pass.

cabinets, advances in a long procession along a seaside road, against a mountainous landscape dominated by Mt. Fuji with farmers working in their fields and structures, such as mansions and temples with pagoda. The Dutch are easily recognisable by their distinctive hats and buttoned garments. The chief factor is shown being carried in a palanquin, with the others riding on horseback, accompanied by officials from the Nagasaki magistrate's office and servants (4b). The impression of the journey to and from Edo





3 Bird's-eye view of Deshima's layout and structures. Copied from a woodblock print by Toshimaya Bunjiemon of 1780 and published in Isaac Titsingh's *Bijzonderheden over Japan* (1824/1825). National Library of The Netherlands, The Hague

The island was connected to the mainland by one bridge with a guardhouse. A second entrance to the island was the Watergate, which was built on the west side near the flagpole. In 2023, a new flagpole was installed on the same location to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Siebold's arrival in Japan.

is cleverly depicted by creating a mirror image on the two cabinets, with the figures travelling in the landscape either towards, or away from, Deshima, and the passing of time symbolised by flying geese (4c). These cabinets, with their imagery representing the VOC activities in Japan, must have been a special order from the VOC board of directors in Amsterdam. One powerful person, in particular, who may have been associated with the commission, is Joan Huydecoper (1591–1661), a wealthy citizen and mayor of Amsterdam, director of the VOC, patron of the arts and diplomat. Huydecoper was personally acquainted with Amalia van Solms (1602–1675), Princess of Orange, and was the godfather of one of her grandchildren. In all likelihood, this pair of exquisite lacquer cabinets was a gift for Amalia van Solms, to be the focal centrepiece of her extensive collection of Asian objects in her palace, Huis ten Bosch, in The Hague, thus promoting the status and prestige of the House of Orange-Nassau. It is possible that these examples were part of the large order in 1657 for 100 cabinets.

Several known lacquer dishes, featuring a coat of arms and likely modelled after a Dutch pewter dish, were privately commissioned by VOC employees. They are

<sup>4</sup>The arrival of *opperhoofd* Jan Cock Blomhoff with his wife, Titia Blomhoff-Bergsma, their infant son, Johannes, and a wet nurse in August, 1817 on the ship *Vrouw Agatha* caused a major stir. When the news reached the shogun, he ordered that the women had to leave. As Titia was the first Western woman staying in Japan, she became a very popular subject of *Nagasaki-e*, and was even depicted on ceramics.

<sup>5</sup>During his lifetime, Kaempfer published *Amoenitatum Exoticarum Politico-Physico-Medicarum* (*Exotic Novelties, Political, Physical, Medical*, Vol. 5, 1717); his comprehensive account of Japan, *The History of Japan*, based on his own observations while travelling to Edo in 1691 and 1692, was published posthumously in English by Sir Hans Sloane in 1727.

<sup>6</sup>In the second half of the 17th century, the kings of Britain, Denmark, France, Sweden and Saxony, as well as other aristocrats, had Dutch-imported lacquer works in their collections. In 1780, Marie-Antoinette inherited from her mother, Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria, the prized collection of fifty small Japanese lacquer boxes, which she displayed in her private sitting room in Versailles.

<sup>7</sup>I would like to thank Ine Castelijns, Head of Collections and Curator of Furniture at the Royal Household of the Netherlands, for facilitating a visit to Palace Huis ten Bosch to examine the pair of lacquer cabinets.

<sup>8</sup>In 1636, Francois Caron, senior merchant in Deshima, presented a magnificent "copper chandelier" to the third shogun, Iemitsu. It was installed at the newly built Toshogu shrine at Nikko, designed as a memorial to Togukawa Ieyasu. In 1640, the shogun was delighted to receive two bronze field guns, some copper candelabras, 500 wax candles and a telescope inlaid with gold.





4a One of a pair of cabinets depicting the *hofreis* from Deshima-Nagasaki to Edo, lacquer, *hinoki*, *taxus*, gilt copper, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1670, height 109 cm, width 117 cm, depth 73 cm. State of the Netherlands/The Royal Collection, The Hague

The front panels depict the procession of the Dutch traders on their journey to the court of the shogun in Edo. Mount Fuji is depicted in traditional style with the tripart cone in silver *maki-e*. The interior has thirty-seven drawers decorated with landscapes, birds, flowers and trees. The inside of the door panels is decorated with a rooster, chicken and chicks. This piece is distinguished by the use of complex and elaborate gold and silver *hiramaki-e* and *takamaki-e* on a black lacquer ground. A similar depiction can be found on a cabinet in the collection of Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon and a slightly smaller cabinet at Zebregs & Röell Fine Art and Antiques in Amsterdam, <https://zebregsröell.com/product/japanese-deshima-cabinet>.



4b Detail of left door panel below the ornamental escutcheon plates at centre showing the chief factor, identified by the buttons on his coat, seated in a palanquin *norimon* carried by four bearers with a relief team of bearers walking alongside



4c Detail of the right side of the cabinet panel shows the Dutch trading post on Deshima. The island, where the Dutch flag flies is surrounded by small Japanese boats and three anchored three-masted *fluyt* or cargo ships flying Dutch flags. At bottom right a busy street bordered by shops leads up to the stone bridge

examples of personalising Japanese lacquer, the possession of which was a status symbol.<sup>9</sup> A large lacquer dish, with the coat of arms of the Valckenier family, depicts a version of the *hofreis* on the rim (5). From the late 18th century date, a number of exquisite lacquer panels, some commissioned by an *opperhoofd* in Deshima, bear historical scenes based on Dutch engravings (6).

Apart from commissioned lacquerware, some of the first Japanese objects the Dutch ordered were porcelain wares from the Arita kilns, located near Nagasaki, where porcelain had been manufactured since 1616. Bottles, their shape derived from a Dutch glass model, were among the earliest Japanese export wares to be shipped from Deshima to Batavia (Jakarta), the main administrative centre and warehouse of the VOC's trading network in Asia. The blue and white floral decoration often includes initials reflecting private orders by VOC personnel. For example, the initials "I.V.H" inside a wreath, found on a pair of bottles, stand for Joan van Hoorn, who was Governor-General in Batavia from 1704–1709 (7). By the middle of the 17th century, the Arita kilns were producing dishes, the design based on Chinese Wanli (1573–1620) "kraak" porcelain with the monogram "VOC" at centre. These were likely for use by company officers in the trading posts across Asia, and specifically by the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies in Batavia (8). The remains of this early form of corporate tableware dishes have been excavated at Deshima.





5 Dish with Valckenier coat of arms, lacquer, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1665–1690, diameter 53 cm. Rijksmuseum

The coat of arms, at centre, is surrounded by the court journey moving left towards Mt Fuji. Gillis Valckenier (1623–1680) was mayor of Amsterdam and director of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). His son Pieter Ranst Valckenier (1661–1704) was director of the Amsterdam Chamber of the VOC; a painting in the Leiden collection by Michiel van Musscher depicts him wearing a Japanese silk robe. His grandson, Adriaan Valckenier (1695–1751), served as Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies from 1737 to 1741.



6 Equestrian portrait of Willem V, Prince of Orange and Nassau, lacquer panel, Edo period (1615–1868), 1775–1800, lacquer on metal, wood, mother-of-pearl, glass, height 38 cm, width 31.5 cm, image height 35.5 cm. Rijksmuseum

Foreign shapes were produced based on models provided in wood, glass or metal. With coffee drinking becoming popular in Europe—the first coffee house opened in Amsterdam in 1663—a Dutch copper coffee pot was sent to the Arita kilns. It became the model for a series of conical shaped porcelain coffee pots, the majority decorated in underglaze blue, but some enamelled (9).<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy that the Dutch orders for porcelain, including tankards, jars for sake and soya sauce, barber's bowls and figurines, greatly stimulated the development of the fledgling Japanese porcelain industry (10, 11, 12).

The journey from Deshima by boat and overland following the famous Tokaido, or eastern sea route to Edo, provided the Dutch with glimpses of Japanese culture and its people, acquired in the course of stays at temples, visits to teahouses and the theatre.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the Japanese would have had a chance to observe the behaviour, customs and appearance of these *kōmō* (literally “red hair” barbarians). Utilising these observations, Japanese artists depicted the Dutch smoking pipes or accompanied by a dog on popular accessories such as combs, *inro* (traditional Japanese cases for holding small objects), *netsuke*, ceramics and in the so-called Nagasaki prints and paintings (13, 14).<sup>12</sup> The taste for “Dutch things” was widespread and represented the new and fashionable.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>In 2007, a beautiful lacquer bamboo document holder (diameter 9.5 cm, length 69 cm) was discovered in the Fries Museum, Netherlands. The *maki-e* gold decoration includes the initials “HVB” of Henrick van Buijtenhem (1656–1698), chief factor at Deshima between 1684–1693. It contained rare VOC documents relating to his four appointments signed by three Governor-Generals in Batavia.

<sup>10</sup>The Japanese word for coffee, *kōhī*, is derived from the Dutch word, *koffie*.

<sup>11</sup>In the VOC *dagregisters*, or Deshima Diaries, *opperhoofd* Romberg (1744–1793) records visiting the small theatre in Osaka on April 30th, 1789 and the large theatre on May 1st, 1789. On the way back from attending court in Edo, Siebold attended a *kabuki* performance in Osaka on June 12th, 1826. The programme of the play, *Imoseyama Onna Teikin*, with Siebold's notes is in the collection of the National Library in The Hague.

<sup>12</sup>The sheer amount of pipe fragments that have turned up in Deshima attest to the popularity of smoking among the Dutch traders.

<sup>13</sup>Western commodities were very popular among Edo and Osaka urbanites, who could browse and purchase “all manner of strange goods and rare objects, newly arrived from abroad” in local curio shops. Dutch glassware, such as telescopes, microscopes, but also wine glasses, were very popular. An Osaka woodblock-printed book, dated 1796, by Takehara Shunchosai (竹原春朝齋) includes a depiction of “Hikida's Foreign Goods Shop” in Osaka.

This lacquer panel, one of three known examples, was commissioned by Frederik Baron van Reede tot de Parkelaar (1757–1802), who served three times as *opperhoofd* at Deshima between 1786–1789, based on an engraving by Amsterdam artist, Reinier Vinkeles (1741–1816). On back inscription: “Willem de V Prins / van Orange en Nassau / Erfstadhouder der Verenigde Nederlanden etc.” and “Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense Je Maintiendrai”. The eyes of the horse are inlaid with glass. Several lacquer panels based on Dutch engravings were commissioned from the Sasaya workshop in Kyoto.





7 Pair of bottles with initials I.V.H, Edo period (1615–1868), early 18th century, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Arita ware, height 24 cm. Courtesy of Zebregs & Röell Fine Art and Antiques

These bottles with bulbous body and tapering neck are decorated, in imitation of early Ming (1368–1644) style, in underglaze blue with branches of flowering prunus and inside a wreath the initials I.V.H, standing for Joan van Hoorn (1653–1711). He was Director General and member of the Council of Dutch East India and in 1704 succeeded his father-in-law, Governor-General Willem van Outhoorn, to become the highest-ranking Dutch East India Company (VOC) official in Asia. Van Hoorn was prominent in experimenting with new products for the European market, such as tea, coffee, textiles and ceramics.

In one particular respect, these regular court journeys (once every four years after 1790) differed from those the Daimyo, the shogun's vassals, were required to make, because the Dutch merchant officials offered the shoguns access to a wider world and were regarded as a useful source of information on events outside Japan. The reports submitted by the merchants were written in Dutch and then translated by Japanese interpreters as *Holland Book of Rumours* (*Oranda fūsetsugaki* 阿蘭陀風説書). Initially, the Dutch were not allowed to learn Japanese and any communication with officials had to go through official Nagasaki interpreters, who could enter Deshima and accompanied the Dutch on their journey to the shogun.<sup>14</sup> While the complete court journey in spring could take up to three months, and was both costly and time consuming, the Dutch delegation must have welcomed the change from being sequestered on Deshima waiting for ships to arrive, usually in July or August with the south-west monsoon, bringing the new *opperhoofd*.

In the 18th century, one or two ships a year would arrive

9 Coffee pot, Edo period (1615–1868), 1650–1675, Arita ware, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration and silver mount, height 31.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The first coffee pots ordered from the Arita kilns had a conical shape, which copied a Dutch copper coffee pot. The porcelain models without feet received metal mounts and stands, often in Europe.



8 Kraak ware style dish for the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1660–1680, porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, Arita ware, height 5.4 cm, diameter 39.5 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art

By the 1660s, Dutch traders in Japan were ordering tens of thousands of pieces a year. The decoration on Japanese blue and white export porcelain of the 17th century closely followed Chinese models. The panelled border is typical of popular Kraak ware, but here the central scene incorporates the monogram of the Dutch East India Company. To date, no ceramics of this type have been found in shipwrecks.







10 Sake bottle with Dutch text, *Japanch Zaky*, Edo period (1615–1868), mid-19th century, Hasami ware, porcelain with cobalt blue underglaze, height 17.8 cm, diameter 11.4 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art

In Japan, these are known as Comprador bottles, a Portuguese word meaning merchant or broker, and were used to hold liquor and soya sauce to be exported.



11 Barber's bowl, design by the Amsterdam artist, Cornelis Pronk (1691–1759), Edo period (1615–1868), 18th century, porcelain with underglaze blue (Hizen ware), height 8.7 cm, diameter 30.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

This European shape was popular in the 17th and the 18th century and was usually made of pewter or brass, but also ceramic. This type of bowl was used by barbers for shaving and for blood-letting.



12 Gin jug in the shape of a Dutchman sitting astride a barrel, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1750, porcelain, underglaze blue, Arita ware, height 35.5 cm, length 19.1 cm, width 13.4 cm. Rijksmuseum

Humorous drinking vessels were popular in Europe in the early 18th century. They were made of Delft earthenware, as well as Japanese porcelain. The head is detachable and a European copper tap has been added.

from Holland via Batavia, and these had to be checked by the authorities before entering the bay of Nagasaki. The impressive Dutch ships (with multiple masts, Dutch flags and billowing sails), firing a salute on arrival, became a popular subject for paintings and prints by Japanese artists. However, it is rare to see a Dutch ship depicted on a screen against a gold leaf background, as in an 18th century two-panel screen showing a Dutch ship and a Chinese junk on wavy water (15).<sup>15</sup>

Like the Portuguese ships depicted on the earlier Nanban screens, the Dutch ship symbolised wealth and prosperity for the Nagasaki merchants. A rare copy of a large hand-coloured woodblock print, dated Kansei 2 (1790), depicts the *Schellak*, a large Dutch ship, which arrived in early August 1748 (16). The print shows various crew members climbing up rope ladders to furl the sails; the speed with which this was achieved fascinated the Japanese. An officer

<sup>14</sup>Factory members, such as Kaempfer, Thurnberg and von Siebold, published records of their court journeys. The first Dutch dictionaries were donated to the Interpreters' Guild in 1754. Based on François Halma's Dutch–French dictionary, the first Dutch–Japanese dictionary was compiled by Inamura Sanpaku (1759–1811) in 1796. A second dictionary was completed in 1815 by a group of Nagasaki interpreters under the supervision of Hendrik Doeff (1777–1835), *opperhoofd* from 1805 until 1817.

<sup>15</sup>The Chinese were the only other foreigners allowed to trade with Japan, and were equally restricted in a walled district, *Tōjin yashiki*, constructed in 1689 near Deshima.





- 13 Netsuke of Dutchman holding a rooster, 18th century, ivory, height 13 cm. Courtesy of Galerie Zucke, "Fine Netsuke and Sagemono", October 29th, 2021, Lot 3

This tall Dutchman has the classical appearance of an 18th century figure in the eyes of the Japanese: a curly wig, bulging eyes, a large, brimmed hat with a plume and a long coat and undercoat. He firmly holds a fighting cock under his arm. To pass time during the long waits between arrivals of Dutch ships, the Dutch organised cockfights—a tradition taken from Indonesia—as entertainment and as a betting opportunity.



- 15 Two-panel screen depicting a Dutch ship and a Chinese junk in choppy waters of Nagasaki Bay, Genkei-school Nagasaki, paper with gold leaf, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1759, screen 169.5 x 186 cm, image 153.3 x 168 cm. Rijksmuseum

The impressive Dutch ship, with a deer decorating the stern, represents a treasure ship (*takarabune*) bringing wealth and novelties from overseas and profits for the Nagasaki merchants. The arrival was spotted by telescopes from various viewpoints near the Bay of Nagasaki. In the 18th century, on average two ships arrived annually, diminishing to one in the last decade.



- 14 Nagasaki print, *Illustration of a Hollander, who came to the East* (*Oranda-jin azuma iri no zu*), text at left "Kapitan" or *opperhoofd*, hand-coloured woodblock print, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1700, 44.5 x 32 cm. Rijksmuseum

The "Hollander", holding a peach branch and a handkerchief, is the chief Dutch official, the *opperhoofd*. The artist has emphasised the strange physical features and clothes with multiple buttons. The boots with heels made the Japanese believe that Dutchmen were heel-less. *Nagasaki-e* were inexpensive and popular mementos for merchants and scholars travelling to Nagasaki, as the Japanese were endlessly curious about the foreign visitors. These prints also served as inspiration for craftsmen, who had no access to observe the Dutch in person.



stands at the stern holding a telescope. More than half of the print is reserved for text, including many Dutch words written in *katakana* (a system to write foreign words) by Hayashi Shihei (1738–1793), the military scholar, after his fact-finding visit to Nagasaki in 1777. This text provides information on the location of the Netherlands, its people, ship details, the crew (made up of high and low-class people), and the mention of slaves.<sup>16</sup> Other *Nagasaki-e* include words written in Dutch, such as *Hollander*, *schip* and *Nangazaki*, to add special interest. The horizontal Dutch writing was considered by the Japanese to be comical and was compared to “wild geese flap-flapping across the sky”.<sup>17</sup>

Telescopes were introduced to Japan in the early 17th century, and started to be made in Nagasaki by the end of that century. They were used for both astronomical study and popular amusement and are featured in a number of *ukiyo-e*, such as a rare print by Hokusai (1760–1849) entitled *Spying with a Telescope* (17), from the series, *Seven Fashionable Bad Habits*, and in various *surimono*. Kobayashi Issa (1763–1828) wrote the following *haiku* on Yushima Hill overlooking the Ueno and Asakusa districts of Edo:

三文が霞見にけり遠眼鏡  
*san mon ga kasumi minikeri toomegane*

For three copper coins  
 nothing but mist can be seen  
 through the telescope

(trans. Jan Walls)

The gifts brought to Edo by the Dutch on their first official encounter in 1609 consisted of silk, pepper and lead but, with the passing of time, the shogun and officials would draw up lists with specific requests to be brought the next year. The regular arrival of VOC ships in Nagasaki brought a wave of more Western objects, described by Kaempfer as the “most exquisite curiosities of nature and art”, such as books, globes, maps, telescopes, microscopes, clocks or animals, specifically horses and dogs, and exotic tropical birds, like cassowaries; this prompted Japanese scholars to explore a wider world of Western technology and medical science, and provided new amusements for the townspeople (18).<sup>18</sup> Ironically, this process slowly undermined the purpose of the isolationist edict aimed at restricting foreign influence.

After arrival in Edo, the VOC representatives would be housed at the *Nagasaki-ya*, the mandatory inn for the Dutch



16 Illustration of a ship from Holland—*Orandasen zusetsu*, Hayashi Shihei (1738–1793), Edo period (1615–1868), 1790, hand-coloured woodblock print, 102 x 54 cm. Courtesy of Inter-Antiquariaat Mefferdt & De Jonge, Amsterdam

The VOC ship *Schellak* (misspelled *Schillaak*), built in 1736 for the VOC Chamber of Zeeland in Middelburg, visited Deshima in 1738 and 1748, which means Hayashi did not personally see this ship, but reused an earlier existing image and added his own notes about the location of Holland in the north-west of the world, about 13,000 ri from Japan. “It has seven provinces and is governed by seventeen gentlemen. It is a cold country and the people have five characteristics: big noses, blue eyes, red hair, white skin and tall bodies. These days the Dutch arrive in Japan from Java, which was conquered by the Dutch. Their most important site is Batavia, which is similar to the settlement of the ‘red hairs’ in Deshima”. Hayashi was especially impressed with the size and strength of the Dutch ships, and provided technical descriptions about shipbuilding. Some woodblock designs were reprinted years after the original editions. After Hayashi voiced criticism of the Shogunate’s national isolation policy, he was placed under house arrest and his works were banned in May 1792.

<sup>16</sup>Only a few prints have survived by being mounted as a hanging scroll, such as in the collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore; another example from the Collection of James E. Fagan (1926–2011) was auctioned at Christie’s on December 19th, 2014.

<sup>17</sup>Nishiyama Soin (西山 宗因, 1605–1682), born in Higo province near Nagasaki, wrote a *haiku* on Dutch writing, implying he was familiar with it: *Oranda no moji ka yokotou amatsukari*, wild geese write a line / flap-flapping across the sky ... / comical Dutch script / trans. Peter Beilenson

<sup>18</sup>The Dutch sporadically brought exotic animal gifts throughout the Edo period, including two tiger cubs (1614), a cassowary (*hikudori* fire-eating bird) (1657), an ostrich (1658), and camels (1646, 1821). Research has confirmed the documented journey of a dodo, which in 1647 travelled alive from Mauritius to Japan.





17 *Spying with a Telescope*, from the series *Seven Fashionable Bad Habits* (*Fūryū nakute nanakuse*), Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1801–1802, woodblock print (*nishiki-e*), ink, colour and mica on paper, vertical *ōban*, 36.8 x 25.4 cm. Courtesy of Sebastian Izzard Asian Art

Two women from a samurai household—one peering through a telescope—are on an outing. The older woman, holding a parasol, appears amused by the unladylike behaviour. Signed “Kako”, this rare print (only three impressions appear to have survived) dates to a period when the artist was known for his depictions of elegant young women with elongated oval faces. *Misemono* (exhibits, shows) that charged spectators for looking through telescopes appeared in urban centres, and an increasing number of people owned telescopes for their own amusement.



18 *A Teenage Boy and Girl with a Viewer for an Optique Picture*, Suzuki Harunobu (1725–1770), Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1788, woodblock print, ink and colour on paper, 27.3 x 19.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

An elegantly dressed boy and girl have been viewing a special type of print designed to create a three-dimensional effect when seen through a viewer with a convex lens, known as *nozoki-karakuri* (peep box) or *Oranda megane* (Dutch glasses). Harunobu's print reflects the interest in the intriguing visual effects by this imported optical device. The square cartouche contains a famous poem on the Jewel River of Koya by the monk Kobo Daishi (774–835). The print on the floor visualises the poem:

*Wasurete mo  
kumi ya shitsuran  
tabibito no  
Takano no oku no  
Tamagawa no mizu.  
[Kii shū meisho]*

Forgetting the taboo  
against drinking from it,  
pilgrims scoop water  
from the Jewel River  
in the depths of Mount Kōya.  
[A famous site in Kii province]  
—Trans. John T. Carpenter



19 *Ehon Azuma asobi—Amusements of the Eastern Capital*, Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), Edo period (1615–1868), 1802, publisher: Tsutaya Juzaburo, coloured edition, Volume 3, 26 x 18 cm. National Diet Library

People of different ranks and age are standing in front of the *Nagasaki-ya*, the designated lodgings in Edo for the “Hollanders”, hoping to get a glimpse of them. The Dutch were not allowed to leave unaccompanied during their stay, but could entertain various visitors. Hokusai himself is the keen observer of this scene near Nihonbashi, but perhaps could not imagine he would visit the Dutch lodgings later, in May 1826.



(19).<sup>19</sup> Here they would wait, sometimes a couple of weeks, for the audience with the shogun during which they would present the approved gifts. The end of the stay in Edo was signalled by a second audience with the shogun, who would gift the standard thirty silk kimonos to the Dutch representatives. This reciprocal gift giving—an expression of an acceptance of the established order—had the unexpected consequence of becoming an influential aspect in stimulating cultural exchange between Japan and the Netherlands.

The VOC East India House held auctions of exotic items from Asia, and the Japanese curios shipped back to Holland proved to be extremely popular, inspiring new trends in the late 17th century. Wearing a silk kimono became a status symbol for statesmen, wealthy merchants and scientists (such as Anthonie van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723), the pioneer in microscopy), who had their portraits painted proudly wearing a kimono. In two of Vermeer's paintings (*The Geographer* and *The Astronomer*, 1668), the protagonists are dressed in kimonos. Rembrandt was also interested in various Japanese novelties, preferring after 1647 to print some of his most important etching editions on expensive Japanese *gampi* paper: its smooth surface created a rich, velvety effect. Rembrandt's cabinet of curiosities included a Japanese *zunari*-type helmet, illustrated in a sketch from circa 1658, and he painted his long-time partner, Hendrickje Stoffels, in a Japanese style kimono circa 1659. In turn,

samurai fashion in Japan was influenced by a felted woollen fabric produced in Leiden, known as “laken”, which was among the various items frequently requested in specific colours from Holland, and became a popular material for formal samurai surcoats. A beautiful example in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art belonged to a member of the powerful Maeda clan (20).

In the early 18th century, during the enlightened rule of Tokugawa Yoshimune (reigned 1716–1745), a major change took place: in order to promote the learning of foreign culture and technology, the ban on the import of Western books was repealed, except for Christian religious literature. At the forefront of this movement stood the hereditary families of Japanese-Dutch interpreters based in Nagasaki. The Dutch were no longer seen merely as eccentric beings, but had become respected for their knowledge of science and technology.

Japanese scholars were sent to Nagasaki to study the Dutch language and schools specialising in Dutch Studies opened in Edo. This sparked the development of what became known as *Rangaku* or “Dutch learning”: the study of Western scientific knowledge, geography, astronomy and medicine, which represented an important alternative to dominant intellectual practices from China.

Sugita Genpaku (1733–1817), a physician, was one of the first Japanese scholars to learn Dutch in order to study Western medicine. He led a team to translate the Dutch version of *Anatomische Tabellen* by J.A. Kulmus, the German anatomist, which resulted in the illustrated publication, *Kaitai Shinsho* (*New Book of Anatomy*), in 1774. This was a milestone in the history of anatomy and medicine in Japan, and overthrew traditional Chinese concepts.

This interest was not always reciprocated; not all Dutch chief factors in Deshima had an interest in Japanese culture. However, Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812) was a diplomat, philosopher and scholar, in addition to being a merchant. He served three times as chief factor between 1779 and 1784, and deserves to be considered one of the first Dutch Japanologists. While in Edo for audiences with the shogun, he had informal contact with government officials and *Rangaku* scholars. Titsingh was fascinated by Japanese culture, history and tradition. He documented and collected informa-



<sup>19</sup>In the VOC *dagregisters*, or Deshima Diaries, *opperhoofd* Romberg records in Edo on March 26th, 1789 the incident of street urchins repeatedly throwing stones through the slatted blinds and paper windows of the *Nagasaki-ya*. After his complaints, two guards were posted outside and the stone throwing stopped. Blussé J.L. & Viallé C.R.M.K.L. (1996), *The Deshima Dagregisters*, Volume IX, 1780–1790. Leiden: IGEER.

- 20 Samurai winter surcoat (*jinbaori*) with Kaga-Maeda family crest, Edo period (1615–1868), 18th–early 19th century, wool plain-weave, full finish (*rasha*), wool appliqué with silk embroidery, length 98.43 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Provenance: Kagedo

The Maeda clan was the second most powerful clan after the Tokugawa. The Kaga domain's official yield was over one million *koku* (*hyakumangoku*). Their power base was centred in Kanazawa, where much of their wealth was spent on luxury items and cultural pursuits.



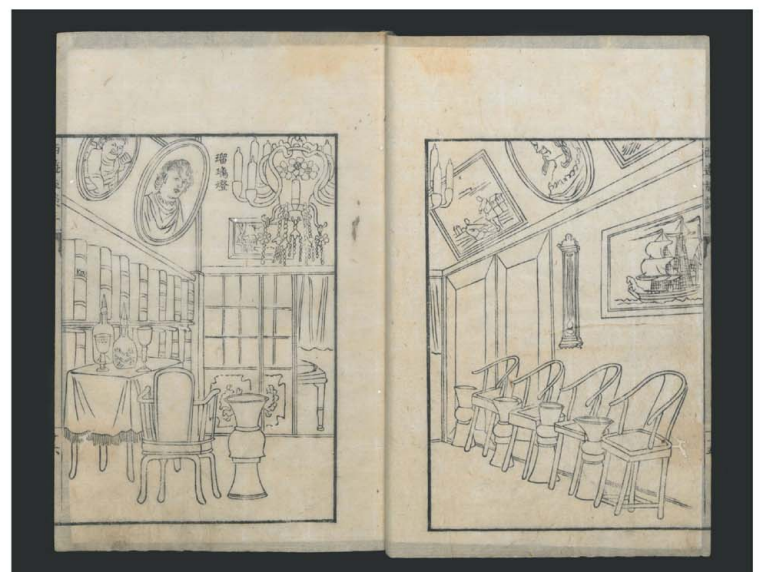


- 21 *Perspective Picture of the Sanjusangendo at Fukagawa in Edo (Uki-e O-Edo Fukagawa Sanjūsangendō no zu)*, Utagawa Toyoharu (1735–1814), Edo period (1615–1868), 1770–1780, publisher: Nishimuraya Yohachi (circa 1751–1869), Eijudō, colour woodcut, 25.2 x 38.9 cm. Boston Museum of Fine Arts. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection

This print of the annual archery contest at Sanjusangendo “Hall of the Thirty-three Bays” Temple in Kyoto, held each spring and attracting samurai from around the country, is an example of Toyoharu’s interest in the Western perspective. An earlier version of this image has Kyoto in the title.

tion with the intention of writing publications that would illustrate the sophistication of the Japanese people and their unique culture. His accounts of sake brewing and soy sauce production are among the earliest to be published in a Western language.

Japanese artists were significantly influenced by Western book illustrations, prints, especially optical prints, and paintings introducing Western art techniques. Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764) is credited as the first Japanese artist to create prints using one-point perspective (*uki-e*) in depicting interior space. Utagawa Toyoharu (1735–1814) was the first to apply this technique to depict outdoor scenes in a series of Dutch Perspective Pictures (*Oranda uki-e*) (21). Shiba Kōkan (1747–1818), the Edo-based artist and an ardent student of *Rangaku*, learned about oil painting and copperplate engraving by studying Dutch books. In 1783, he was the first to produce a copperplate etching. In Edo, he met Hendrik Caspar Romberg (1744–1793), the Dutch *opperhoofd*, which inspired him to make the journey to Nagasaki in 1788. There he was able to gain entrance to the guarded Dutch trading enclave (22). Shiba Kokan published his experiences in *Account of Journey to the West (Seiyūryōdan)*. His painting of three gentlemen doctors seated at a table, representing China and Holland (by extension the West) with Japan in the middle, is a visual statement of his admiration of the Dutch. The Western surgeon is holding a book of anatomy open to an illustration of a skeleton with a cane. The scene at top of the painting illustrates methods used by the three countries for extinguishing a



- 22 Illustration from *Account of a Journey to the West (Seiyūryōdan)*, Shiba Kōkan (1747–1818), Edo period (1615–1868), dated 1803, five volumes of woodblock printed books, ink on paper, 25.7 x 18.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

This illustration depicts a room of the Dutch *opperhoofd* in Deshima: a bookcase, table with glassware, paintings on the wall, chairs with spittoons and special attention for the glass chandelier. Women were not allowed on Deshima, but appear in paintings on the wall. The title of his publication is a reference to the legendary pilgrimage of the Tang dynasty Buddhist monk Xuanzang, who travelled to the “Western Regions” (Central Asia and India) to obtain Buddhist sutras.





23 *A Meeting of Japan, China and the West*, Edo period (1615–1868), late 18th–early 19th century, Shiba Kokan (1747–1818), ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 101.6 x 49.5 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art

The Western physician is likely a portrait of Lorenz Heister (1683–1758), the German anatomist, surgeon and botanist, who had a strong influence on Japanese scholars studying Western surgery after the Dutch version of his 1731 book was translated in 1792. For another painting of this physician, see <https://zebregrsoell.com/product/japanese-painting-lorenz-heister>.

pagoda fire; that of the West, using a pump, being technically the most advanced and effective. Devastating fires were a frequent occurrence in Japanese cities (23).

Watanabe Kazan (1793–1841), the samurai artist, painted a portrait of Takami Senseki (1785–1858), a top-ranking samurai official, in formal attire. Both men were scholars



24 *Portrait of Takami Senseki*, Watanabe Kazan (1793–1841), hanging scroll, colour on silk, 115.1 x 57.2 cm, Edo period (1615–1868), dated 1837 (Tenpo 8), Tokyo National Museum. National Treasure

Takami Senseki, a top-ranking samurai official of Koga domain, was posted in Edo where he met Watanabe Kazan, chief retainer of the Tahara clan. They exchanged information from Dutch news reports. Kazan had received the standard Confucian education for a samurai, but became a *rankagu* scholar and painted this portrait capturing the individuality of his teacher in a realistic manner.

of Dutch studies, the artist being a pupil of the man depicted, and they shared a close relationship because of their mutual concern for Japan's future. This painting in the Tokyo National Museum is recognised as Watanabe's masterpiece. His style incorporated principles of perspective and shading from Western art (24).



- 25 *View of Edo Bay from Nihonbashi*, attributed to Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), ink and colour on paper, Edo period (1615–1868), 1823–1829, 32.7 x 48.2 cm. National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

One of six unsigned Western-style paintings by Hokusai, described by von Siebold, depicting Nihonbashi with the castle of the shogun and the snow-covered Mount Fuji in the background. Matthi Forrer observed: "... even though Hokusai painted what looks like a rather traditional view of Nihonbashi, it is a most innovative painting. Here Hokusai really brings together all various Western elements, such as the typical Dutch division between sky and land, the Western-style cloud formations in the sky, the reflection in the water, and the obvious vanishing point with the houses along the Nihonbashi River receding in height in the distance. And again, looking more closely at details, the complete absence of lines in *sumi* ink that normally delineate all elements in Japanese paintings becomes clear. The Nihonbashi print in Hokusai's series of *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*—dates from only four years later."



- 26 *Bird's Eye View of The Trading Post at Deshima*, anonymous, scroll painting (detail), *makimono*, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1840, brush and ink on silk, 34 x 640 cm. Rijksmuseum

This painting gives a detailed visual impression of life on Deshima at the beginning of the 19th century, showing activities of the various inhabitants from the *opperhoofd* and other important Dutch to workers, servants from Indonesia and slaves. Various animals and birds are depicted, including the cassowary.

One of the physicians sent by the Dutch government during the late Edo period (the VOC had been formerly dissolved in 1799), was Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866). A German, he arrived in 1823 on Deshima with an assignment to collect information on Japan, including its social and political structures. After curing a prominent government official, von Siebold was allowed to open a small practice in Nagasaki and was permitted to make house calls on patients. He met scholars, who could speak and write in Dutch, and soon Siebold's house became a meeting place for lectures and discussions on Western science. Not allowed to receive payment for his house calls, he received gifts, which formed the basis of his extensive ethnographic collection of everyday household goods, woodblock prints, tools and handicrafts. As a naturalist, Siebold concentrated on collecting plants, seeds and animals. He commissioned local artists, such as Kawahara Keiga (1786–1860), who was allowed to join the court journey in 1826,

to create pictorial records of indigenous animals and plants, as well as ethnological observations of life in Japan.

Matthi Forrer, a Hokusai expert, wrote that during Siebold's stay in Edo, from April 10th to May 18th, 1826, he met many scientists (30), as well as some painters, such as Tani Bunchō (1763–1840), Katsushika Hokusai, his pupils, Totoya Hokkei (1780–1850) and Ōtsuka Dōan (1795–1855), who knew Dutch. Hokusai came to deliver the paintings, which Jan Cock Blomhoff (1817–1823), the previous *opperhoofd*, had commissioned during the court journey in 1822. Siebold's encounter with Hokusai resulted in six more paintings of views in and around Edo, as detailed in Siebold's draft catalogue of his collection of paintings, specifying that they were "painted in our manner, that is the European manner". These unsigned paintings in Western style are in the collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden (25).<sup>20</sup>

An impressive eight-panel folding screen by Kawahara



- 27 Illustration of *Hydrangea macrophylla* as *Hydrangea otaksa* in *Flora Japonica, Sectio Prima (Tafelband)*, 1870, Philipp Franz von Siebold and Joseph Gerhard Zuccarini

Kawahara worked with von Siebold, the physician and botanist, to provide detailed images of Japanese flora and fauna.



Keiga from circa 1836 shows a view of Deshima and the Bay of Nagasaki (29).<sup>21</sup> A few hand scrolls also exist showing close-ups of life on Deshima: such as the Dutch custom of lifting the hat when greeting someone; playing a game of billiards; and servants playing badminton (introduced by the Dutch from India during the 18th century) (26). Kusomoto Taki (楠本滝), Siebold's Japanese wife, gave birth to their daughter, Ine (1827–1903), who would become the first female Japanese physician of Western medicine and was appointed court physician to Empress Shōken. Siebold named the *Hydrangea macrophylla* as *Hydrangea otaksa* for his beloved Taki (27).

After the arrival of the U.S. Perry Expedition and the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854, the Japanese government turned to the Dutch for technical and military assistance. The Dutch government responded by sending the steamship *Soembing* to Japan as a training vessel, and, in 1855, she was handed over to the Japanese government by Commissioner Donker Curtius, the last *opperhoofd* of Deshima, in the name of King Willem III (28).

<sup>20</sup> See *Narutaki kiyō* (鳴滝紀要), no. 27, 2017, pp. 87–93. Matti Forrer has studied an important document kept in the Burg Brandenstein Siebold family archives: an early draft of the catalogue of the paintings that Siebold collected in Japan, totalling some 325, most belonging to what he calls the “Japanese school”, that is the Tosaha (土佐派, 128 pieces). The second largest group is identified by him as the “Chinese new school”, that is the Kanōha (狩野派, 78 pieces). Siebold identifies quite a few of these anonymous works in his collection. “[von] Siebold writes that there are ‘six landscape views of Edo and the surroundings painted by Hokusai in our style.’” The unsigned paintings in Western style are in the collection of National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden.

<sup>21</sup> The Dutch ship depicted is identified as the *Marij & Hillegonda*, a wooden frigate built in Rotterdam in 1834. This type of ship, with copper-clad hull, could cross the long distance to Asia relatively quickly. It left Rotterdam on 1 January 1836 and arrived in July at Nagasaki. During her four-month stay in Nagasaki, Kawahara studied and painted this ship in minute detail.

- 28 *King Willem III, Figures from Barbarian Countries*, Utagawa Yoshitsuya (1822–1866), Edo period (1615–1868), 1861, 35.2 x 23.6 cm. Publisher: Ebiya Rinnosuke (1832–1895), Nagasaki. Rijksmuseum

This print is a caricature of Willem III, King of the Netherlands (1817–1890), leaning on his sword. It is accompanied by a satirical poem by Kanagaki Robun (1829–1894), the author and journalist, at top left, which emphasises the superiority of Japan compared to the Netherlands and mocks the Dutch writing as *kanimoji*, horizontal marks left by crabs scuttling sideways. The print was loosely based on a portrait by Nicolaas Pieneman (1809–1890), presented by the last *opperhoofd* of Deshima, Jan Hendrik Donker Curtius (1813–1879), to the magistrate of Nagasaki on October 3rd, 1855.







29 Eight-panel folding screen, *View of Deshima in the Bay of Nagasaki*, Kawahara Keiga (1786–1860), Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1836. National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden

The panoramic view of Nagasaki Bay includes the Chinese settlement to the left of Deshima. The Dutch ship has been identified as the *Marij & Hildegonda*, which arrived in July 1836. Kawahara Keiga, the Nagasaki born artist, worked with permission from the Japanese government at the Dutch factory of Deshima from 1811 to 1842. At the request of successive directors, Kawahara precisely documented many aspects of life in Japan. This rare eight-panel screen was acquired in 2018 by the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. It had been in a private collection well over 100 years. <https://deshima.wereldmuseum.nl>.

To express his gratitude, Shogun Iesada (reigned 1853–1858) arranged for a diplomatic gift representing the pinnacle of Japanese art and craftsmanship to be assembled, which included, among other objects, two complete suits of armour and ten pairs of folding screens, with different subjects on gold leaf produced by the chief court painters. After more than two centuries of trade relations, the first diplomatic treaty between the Netherlands and Japan was officially signed in January 1856.

Dutch military advisors taught the largely samurai students at the Nagasaki Naval Training Centre the art of modern navigation and steam warship technology. One of the students, Enomoto Takeaki (榎本 武揚, 1836–1908), completed his studies in the Netherlands, and was appointed admiral of the Tokugawa navy. He later held various ministerial positions during the Meiji period (1868–1912).

Modern Western-style medical training was initiated in 1857 by Pompe van Meerdervoort, a Dutch Navy doctor, at the Naval Academy in Nagasaki. His student base quickly expanded to over 133 students, including Kusomoto Ine, the daughter of von Siebold. He not only taught medicine, but also chemistry and photography. Among his photography students were Ueno Hikoma (1838–1904) and Uchida Kuichi (1844–1875), pioneer professional photographers. Uchida moved his studio from Osaka to Yokohama, and finally settled in Tokyo where he gained a reputation as a portrait photographer. The Imperial Household Agency chose Uchida to be the only photographer granted permission to photograph Emperor Meiji and Empress Shōken in 1872. This access, and the photograph which resulted from it, constituted firsts in the history of Japan, where the emperor was considered a living deity and was rarely seen in public. Nagasaki became the first city in Japan to have a Western-style hospital and medical school, which opened in 1861.<sup>22</sup>



30 *Dr Siebold age twenty-four*, Iwasaki Tsunemasa (1786–1842), woodblock print mounted as hanging scroll, Edo period (1615–1868), 1826, Bunsei 9th year. National Diet Library

Iwasaki Tsunemasa, a Japanese botanist, zoologist and entomologist, was a samurai in the service of the Tokugawa shogunate. He met Siebold (1796–1866) at Nagasaki-ya during his stay in Edo in 1826. The image of Siebold is accompanied by a detail of an eye and a description of his clothing.



Between 1600 and 1853, more than 650 ships of the Dutch East Indies Company and the Dutch State traded and visited Japan, putting the notion of “closed country” in a different perspective.<sup>23</sup> At first, the Dutch people, their ships, and trade goods, were merely observed and depicted as curiosities. By the 18th century, many imported items, such as novel lens-based devices, which were popular among the scholars and city dwellers of Nagasaki, Osaka and Edo, offered new perspectives on their surroundings and the natural world. The woodblock printing industry,

facilitating the fast, affordable and accessible circulation of information, played a key role in popularising Western ideas, including the concept of perspective in art. Long before Western artists were influenced by Japanese woodblock prints in the 19th century, Japanese artists had already observed and experimented with Western art concepts. Without leaving their country, Japanese people were stimulating their imaginations and exploring a wider world with maps and instruments that allowed them to look both closer and farther away. The Dutch language, which had been critical to access Western knowledge, was used for diplomatic relations in the late Edo period, but after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, it was surpassed by



31 *Hollanders-Orandajin (A Dutch Couple Strolling)*, Utagawa Yoshikazu (active circa 1850–1870), Publisher: Iseya Kanekichi (Iseken), Edo period (1615–1868), 1862, colour woodblock print, *Oban Tate-e*, 35.6 x 24.1 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art

The text on this print mentions that Holland is located across the sea from Japan, that the people have white skin, red hair, high noses and round eyes; they wear a great deal of clothing, much of it woven wool. Their writing being horizontal and their diet being a wide range of fowl and meat. The people are intelligent and superior to the rest of the world in the field of surgery.

32 *Hollanders-Orandajin*, Utagawa Yoshitora, *Yokohama-e*, Publisher: Yamajin, Edo period (1615–1868), 1862, 36.6 x 25.1 cm. Rijksmuseum

A Dutch couple strolling, the man depicted with a tall hat and a cane, the woman with a parasol. The hand scroll at top, titled “Barbarian Dictionary”, shows a row of Japanese words, such as “bed” and “sleeping”, with Dutch pronunciation in *katakana*.

<sup>22</sup> After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Dr Antoon F. Bauduin (1820–1885), was instrumental in the creation of Ueno Hill as a park in Tokyo. This area, formerly occupied by Kaneiji temple, had been selected as a site for a medical school and university hospital by the Tokyo City Government. Following Dr Bauduin’s recommendations, the Tokyo City Government designated Ueno and another four locations as city parks. Ueno Park opened as Japan’s first park in 1873.

<sup>23</sup> During the Napoleonic wars, in which the Netherlands was occupied by France, Dutch ships could not safely reach Japan and relied on “neutral” American and Danish ships. The Dutch East India Company chartered twelve American ships, among them the *Franklin* and the *Margaret* from Salem, reaching Nagasaki in 1799 and 1801. The ceramics and lacquer brought back were donated to the “cabinet of natural and artificial curiosities” of the East India Marine Society, which became The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, and are considered the earliest Japanese works to enter an American Institution.







33 *Camels brought over by the Hollanders*, Bunkindō (flourished circa 1790–1870), printer based in Nagasaki, Edo period (1615–1868), circa 1821, woodblock print, ink and stencil-printed colour on paper, horizontal *ō-ōban*, 31.4 x 44 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A Dutchman escorts the procession of male and female camels handled by two Arabian attendants. At upper left is the Dutch word *kameel*, with the Japanese pronunciation written in *katakana*. The text at upper right is a detailed account of the physical attributes of the animals. The camels, brought in 1821, were refused as gifts by the shogun. They toured Japan as a popular *misemono* show, were the subject of various prints, appeared on costumes of an Osaka *kabuki* fan club and were even depicted on ceramics. Animals that fitted into the accepted cultural norm, such as horses, dogs and songbirds, rather than exotic ones, were official gifts that were valued the most.

English, German and French.<sup>24</sup> The opening of Japan, and the designation of Yokohama as the primary port for commerce and settlement of foreigners, meant that Nagasaki lost its unique access to the outside world. On Deshima, the Dutch flag was lowered and the trading factory officially closed in 1859. Most of the Dutch officials moved to Yokohama, where *ukiyo-e* artists created numerous new woodblock designs of the various foreign residents and visitors (31, 32). Thus, the historic chapter of the Dutch trade monopoly and position as a “window on the world for Japan” was closed, but traces of Dutch words are still evident in Japanese, reminding us of that long exclusive relationship and influence (33). This year will mark the 425th anniversary of the first contact between the two countries. While trade may have been the original purpose of the relationship between the Netherlands and Japan, it can be seen that, over time, the focus of relations shifted to sharing knowledge.

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<sup>24</sup>The Treaty of Shimoda (下田条約, *Shimoda Jōyaku*), the first treaty between the Russian Empire and the Empire of Japan, was signed on February 7th, 1855, at the Chōraku-ji Temple in Shimoda. Besides the official Dutch-language version of the treaty, there was also a Chinese-language and a Japanese-language version.