

Exhibition “Japan and the West—Intersection of Images”

Subcommittee on Exhibition
Committee for Exhibit

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in NDL Monthly Bulletin No. 620 (November 2012).

The National Diet Library (NDL) has collected large number of books on Japan in Western languages. The Tokyo Main Library of the NDL held an exhibition titled “Japan and the West—Intersection of Images” in 2012. It introduced various images born out of the contact between Japan and the Western world from the introduction of Christianity in the 16th century to the beginning of the 20th century.

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Part One

Introduction of Christianity

During the Age of Exploration, Portuguese and Spanish, mainly traders and missionaries, advanced into Asia and accumulated knowledge about this region. The Society of Jesus, in particular, kept a correspondence on their local activities, and thus a lot of precious information on Japan can be found in the related documents.

Copia di dve lettere scritte dal P. Organtino Bresciano della Compagnia di Giesv dal Meaco de Giapone. al moltor. in Christo P.N. il P. Clavdio Acqvaviva Preposito Generale <NDL call no.: WA41-7> is a compilation of letters by Gneccchi-Soldi Organtino (1530-1609), a missionary in Kyoto. He was pro-Japanese and on good terms with Japanese people. In the letter dated October 15, 1577, he

wrote highly of Japanese people: “I am learning many things from them every day,” “I have never seen a people more gifted.”

The following persecution against Christians, however, made a strong impression of Japanese brutality on the Westerners. *Histoire de l'église du Japon* is the work of Jean Crasset (1618-1692), a Jesuit. The illustration of the Shimabara Rebellion (Photo 1) depicts a gruesome scene of mass executions and torture including crucifixions and water-boardings.



<<Photo 1: Crasset, J. *Histoire de l'église du Japon*, Paris :
E. Michallet, 1689, 2v. 26cm <NDL call no.: WA41-29>>

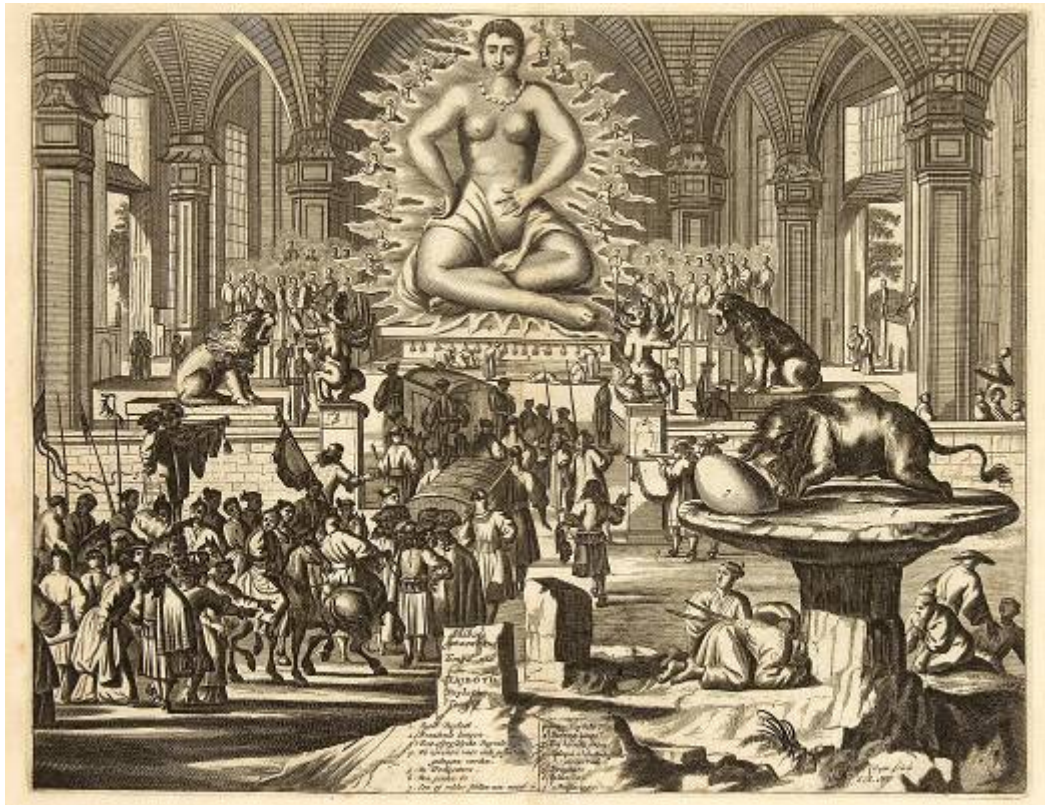
Period of National Isolation

In the 1630s, Japan adopted the “National Isolation” policy. The Netherlands, the only Western country with which Japan had trading relations, served as a gateway of Japanese information.

Beschrijvinge van het machtigh Koninckrijcke Japan <NDL call no.: 貴-6426> was written by a staff member of the Dutch trading house in Japan, François Caron (1600-1673) in 1636, answering questions on Japan from the Director-General of the Dutch East India Company in Batavia. It created a mysterious image of Japan with many sensational topics including the pederasty of Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third Shogun; a scene of hara-kiri, suicide by disembowelment; and the Emperor's appearance with uncut nails and hair.

Later, Dutchmen resided in Japan and other Europeans employed by the Dutch advanced unbiased study of Japan and also had exchanges with Japanese scholars of Dutch studies. Nevertheless purely imaginary books continued to be published in the Western world.

The Calvinist preacher Arnoldus Montanus (1625?-1683), despite having never been to Japan, wrote a book on Japanese affairs *Atlas jappannensis* on the basis of reports and journals by earlier Dutch delegates and missionaries. Based on hearsay information, this book is full of misunderstandings and fanciful exotic illustrations. But after the publication of the first edition in 1669 in Amsterdam, it gained great popularity and was translated into German in the same year and into French and English the next year. The portrayals of Japan in *Gulliver's Travels* are based on it. Photo 2 (from the English edition) depicts a bizarre Great Buddha. In addition, there are eccentric pictures like a Buddhist statue of the Kannon, Bodhisattva of Compassion, that resembles a Western mermaid.



<<Photo 2: Montanus, A. *Atlas jappannensis*, London :
T. Johnson, 1670, 43cm <NDL call no.: WA41-1>>>

Some novels were set in Japan as a Wonderland: *Mirima, impératrice du Japon* <NDL call no.: WF1-14> by Nicholas Fromaget (?-1759), *Ma-gakou; histoire japonnoise* <NDL call no.: WF1-13> by M. de François Antoine Chevrier (1721-1762), *Mizirida: principessa di Firando* (Photo 3) by Barthélemy Marmont du Hautchamp (ca.1682-ca.1760), and others. "Mirima," the heroine of *Mirima*,

impératrice du Japon, is the consort of Cubosama (*lit.* ruler of Japan, the shogun) and of great beauty. She loves a young Buddhist priest “Omendono” but is coveted by “Mioxindono,” the senior vassal of her husband, and at the end commits hara-kiri in a Buddhist altar room. These kinds of novels set in far-off imaginary lands are said to be, in effect, thinly veiled social satires.



<<Photo 3: Marmont du Hautchamp, B. *Mizirida: principessa di Firando*,
Milano : SEA, 1950, 24cm <NDL call no.: KR164-B22>>>

Japanese view of the Western world

How, on the other hand, did Japanese people see the Western world? *Bankoku sōzu* (Photo 4) is a simplified version of the same title, which was the first world atlas published in Japan in 1645. Illustrated at the side of the map are men and women in ethnic costumes. “Titan,” “Lilliputian” and “Cannibal” are along with the real nationalities.



<<Photo 4: *Bankoku sōzu*, Kyoto : Hayashi Jizaemon,
1671, 39.5 × 55.3cm <NDL call no.: [WA46-2](#)>>>

Ehon'ikokuichiran is an illustrated book about the countries in the world. Along with the very real place names like America and Europe, imaginary countries appear in this picture book. The people of North America (vol. 4) called "Shitoban" can extend their necks to a great length and reach out their heads to devour filth (Photo 5), it says.

Because Japanese people at that time were strictly prohibited from foreign voyages, the outside world seemed to stimulate such wild imagination, as Japan did for Western people.



<<Photo 5: *Ehon'ikokuichiran*, Shunkōen Hanamaru auth., Okada Gyokusen illust., Naniwa : Matsumoto Hēshirō [et al.], 1799, 5v. 23cm <NDL call no.: 127-255>>>

Part Two

Opening the country: Japan appearing in western journalism

In the era when Japan finally opened its doors to the world, the pictorial newspaper was the main medium of the social trend in the West. Photo 6 is the first appearance of a Japanese in *Punch*. “Utopia reached in ten weeks.” “It is not at all improbable that the next Volume of *Punch* may be published at Nagasaki.” Along with these sensational comments, the article shared a joke of a Western lady who shaved off her eyebrows and blackened her teeth to be in fashion.

Photo 7 is taken from a pictorial newspaper featuring the Japanese embassy dispatched to the United States in 1860, in order to ratify the Japan-United States treaty of amity and commerce. The Japanese are depicted as small and dark-skinned.



<<Picture 6:
Punch, vol.35. London:
Punch Publications, 1858.
<NDL call no.: Z52-B57>>



<<Picture 7: *Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper*, vol. 10.
New York: Frank Leslie, 1860. <NDL call no.: Z92-435>>

Western visitors to Japan

People from various walks of life including missionaries, diplomats, government advisors, journalists, literary people, and travelers, visited Japan after its opening. They wrote many records of their experiences.

Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925), an American zoologist known for his excavation work at the Ōmori shell mound in Tokyo, authored "Japan day by day," describing what he saw in his daily life in Japan with his own line drawings. He reminisced about the Japanese people's childlike character, riding in a pleasant and novel *jinrikisha* (rickshaw) and other experiences.

Georges Ferdinand Bigot (1860-1927), a French artist, arrived in Japan to study Japanese art in January 1882. Working as a painting teacher or a correspondent of pictorial newspapers¹, he published books of etchings² and satirical journals. He produced biting lampoons of Japan with a certain amount of affection. On the cover of *Faits divers illustrés ou le Japon en 1897*, some half-naked Japanese in loincloths face to face with a westerner were illustrated (Photo 8). Photo 9 is also a famous Bigot cartoon: he shows a Japanese couple in stylish western dress going to the Rokumeikan (a dance hall symbolizing westernization) with their reflection in a mirror being a pair of monkeys, ridiculing their ill-fitting clothes.

1 *Graphic* <NDL call no. Z92-406>, etc.

2 *Album ma-ta* <NDL call no. KC314-A11>, etc.



<<Photo 8: Bigot, G. *Faits divers illustrés ou le Japon en 1897*.
[Tokyo], 1987, 23x31cm. <NDL call no.: W992-B1>>>



<<Photo 9: TÔBAÉ 1887. 1989, 28cm.
<NDL call no.: KC16-E509>>>

Japonism

After the Meiji era, Japanese art came to Western attention and had an influence on many artists through the World Exposition, evolving into Japonism. You can find numerous particular imitations: *Les trente-six vues de la Tour Eiffel* (Photo 10), a book of engravings by Henri Rivière (1864-1951) showing scenes in Paris, is a parody of *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai.



<<Photo 10: Rivière, H. *Les trente-six vues de la Tour Eiffel*.

Paris: Eugène Verneau, 1902. 24x30cm. <NDL call no.: KC314-B21>>>

Les petits japonais : la soirée de fleur dé thé, dessins japonais (Photo 11) by Paul Bilhaud (1854-1933) is a beautiful picture book printed on Japanese traditional paper. *Petit* seems to have been the image of the Japanese in those days.



<<Photo 11: Bilhaud, P.

Les petits japonais. Paris: J.Lévy. 25cm.

<NDL call no.: Y17-B13371>>>

Japonism produced many fantastic stories set in Japan. *Le Pasteur de carpes: la princesse Vatanabé* (Photo 12) by Charles Richard is a beautiful small book with a design of Mt. Fuji and a fan on its cover page and inside colored illustrations. *La princesse Vatanabé*, one of the two short stories contained in the book, is set in Nagasaki. There is a king of whom a witch predicted that he would have a baby only

to be taken away by the Sun. The king orders “Kyoto” carpenters to build a three-story pagoda in accordance with advice of his friend “Samurai.” The king locks up his princess “Watanabe (*Vatanabé*)” and she grows up without seeing the Sun.



<<Photo 12: Richard, c. *Le Pasteur de carpes: La princesse Vatanabé*. Paris:C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1885. 15cm. <NDL call no.: KR169-B8>>

La belle Sainara, comédie japonaise en un acte en vers (Photo 13) by Ernest d'Hervilly (1839-1911) is a drama. The lead character “Kami” loves Miss “Sainara,” but he is seduced by the suddenly appearing “Musumé.” “Kami” invokes the wrath of “Tai-Phoon” who is favoring “Musumé” and he ends up preparing himself to commit hara-kiri. Photo 14 depicts a performance of this drama.



<<Photo 13: Hervilly, E. *La belle Sainara, comédie japonaise en un acte en vers*. Paris: A. Lemerre, 1876. 20cm. <NDL call no.: 168-174>>



<<Photo 14: *L'illustration*. Paris: [Dubochet], 1877.38cm. <NDL call no.: Z55-D65>>

Yellow Peril and wars

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, with escalating conflict among colonial powers, there arose the concept of the Yellow Peril. Terror of the yellow race such as Japanese and Chinese

took hold in Western society, which viewed their growing national strength and increasing immigration as a threat. Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War was particularly recognized as a victory of the East over the West: the Japanese were increasingly depicted as cunning small yellow monkeys. Photo 15 illustrates a monkey (Japan) standing on a bear's (Russia) fur, planning the next invasion with a map. The positive images "petit" and "smart" changed into the negative "crafty shrimp."



<<Photo 15: Review of reviews. Vol. 31 (1905.6) London. <NDL call no. : Z55-A429>>>

Often illustrated during WWII were marching monkeys, stirring up anti-Japan sentiment. Images developed by terror or admiration for an alien people can sometimes inflame wars.