ONE

TRADE AND CULTURE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

"THE NUMBER OF PERSONS engaged in this study [of the West]," wrote Takano Chōei, "does not exceed one or two in 10,000,000."[1] This statement has about it the hyperbolic glumness of an expert who cannot imagine why others lack excitement for his own small area of concern. But the words suggest something truer of what was generally felt by those who developed enthusiasms for Europe in Edo-period Japan (1603–1868). Chōei was writing in 1839. The situation had fluctuated during the late eighteenth century, and the stock of Western things had risen to a peak in the 1780s; but predominantly the state of affairs remained little different, and certainly offered no cause for jubilation.

Chōei's discipline was called "Dutch studies," *Rangaku* (*gaku* meaning learning and *Ran* being short for *Oranda*). Holland was synecdoche for all of Europe on account of its prominence in East and South-East Asia. Throughout eighteenth-century Japan to talk of the West was to assert the ways of Holland. Those embarking on *Rangaku* had to contend with several factors, most immediately the difficulty of the language; this disincentive diminished from the 1760s with the emergence of a body of published and manuscript commentary in Japanese. Far more confounding and never to be surmounted, though, was the unremitting foreignness of Western matters at a more conceptual level. "Scholars of Holland" (*Rangaku-sha*) inevitably stood apart from the mainstream of academe, which was largely government-sponsored, hortative in tone, and geared to bringing forth good subjects and wise rulers. The materials they handled and the debates they joined were just too discrete from common concerns for ready integration, and the relevance needed proving.

Rangaku experts were amateurs. They might coincidentally be persons of consequence in other walks of life, and some held office, but few men, if any, were raised to positions of note on account of their understanding of Europe. Not until 1855 did the central administration, the shogunate, establish an institution to address *Rangaku* as such.[2] The first private school of Western studies had opened in 1789, the Shirandō ("the Hall of Holland in Shiba" – a part of Edo, modern Tokyo), run by a hereditary doctor called Ōtsuki Gentaku (and about whom we shall hear a good deal); but by the end of the century it had processed only thirty pupils.[3]

Although shunned by established organs, *Rangaku* was not sidelined altogether: it drew sustenance from popular life. The very aspects of its erudition that proved resistant to assimilation within normal educational curricula made Dutch studies immensely appealing to those

whose search was only for exotica or thrills. Startling new knowledge and intricate items of overseas make were capable of exerting strong pulls on the mind, once all obligation to defer to understandings rooted in the arcana of foreign settings had been merrily cast aside.

HOLLAND AS DISCOURSE

Historians have written about *Rangaku* scholars before now, and of the role they played in disseminating ideas of the West has received plentiful attention; a generally positivistic approach has been taken, with the underlying assumption that the best work lies in identifying those responsible for the forgotten groundwork that allowed Japan's spectacular modernisation in the nineteenth century.

The thrust of this book is different. Rather than bringing to light the lost archives of "pioneers", I propose to look at what "Holland" meant to the mind of the time and, as a willed construct, what it did. It is precisely the dilatory persons who ignored the overt challenge of *Rangaku* who provide our samples. The focus here is on those 9,999,998 who, according to Chōei, never sought in the West a comprehensive (or even partially coherent) alternative to the life they lived, but who consumed it none the less, for their own ends. Rather than turning *Rangaku* into the centre of eighteenth-century debate, we shall keep it in the margins but consider how, being there, it contributed to meaning and affected thought. In sum, *Rangaku* mutated from being a discourse of assessment of the foreign to a popularised resource operating piecemeal and adduced to answer questions having to do with the self. It is a premise of this book that "Holland" was internal to Japan and detached from the West. For sober *Rangaku* scholars trying to keep the discipline on track, this would not do: "Many know some facts," complained the prolific Shiba Kōkan, prominent for almost forty years from the 1770s, "but few understand the theories."[4] Yet those dilettanti who only really wanted easy tidbits, and lacked concern for categorical disquisitions on far-removed things, are precisely the ones who will absorb us. Imbibing their "Holland" – and this is the point – on their own terms, these people felt a change occur.

The Japanese abbreviation of Holland, *Ran*, is retained here to mean that local reading of the West which was built up from imported ideas and materials. *Rangaku* was an academic pursuit; *Ran*, a patina of foreignness, directed inwards. Our artifice of *Ran* was essentially vulgar. But I maintain it enjoyed vastly important currency throughout the late-eighteenth century.

Ran was a cluster of concepts, not a place. Any attachment to life in the Republic of the United Provinces was quite tangential. The Netherlands, in any case, was chronically unstable at the time: 1795 saw the United Provinces become the Batavian Republic; in 1805 it changed into the Batavian Commonwealth, in 1806 into the Kingdom of Holland, and after 1810 was made a *département* of the French Empire; in 1814 it became the Kingdom of the United Netherlands.[5] This epistemic flux gave free rein to Japan. Yet the realisation that outside the national borders were real people who surrounded themselves with strange and different effects grew, and the sense that persons in foreign lands fathomed lives infinitely unlike those at home, agitated and stirred the status quo.

I take a materialist stance. The argument here is principally for a new mentality culled from imported *things*. Trade was brisk for all that Holland alone among Western countries possessed a supply network in Japan. Import of European goods wavered and changed in type over time: what Europe was pushing into foreign markets in 1800 was not the same as it had been in 1700. But I hold that a steady flow of objects found its way into Japan, and that the range of items to be seen, at least by the people of the larger cities, was not small. It is necessary to stress this, for many still argue for an eighteenth-century Japan

closed to the outside world. The greatest conurbations all had their few *Rangaku* experts and their many lay enthusiasts fixated with a notional *Ran*. The latter fed off visible or purchasable artefacts. People in Edo, the shogunal seat, home to perhaps a million souls, and Osaka, the "nation's kitchen," Kyoto, the cultural heartland, and Nagoya, the shogunal collaterals' Western base, knew the look and feel of foreign goods. Nagasaki was the port of access for foreign vessels and the location of the Dutch trading station (or "Factory").

The Dutch Factory dealt with many mundane items – sugar, copper, cloth – and by these it earned its keep. But such were not the affairs that propelled Edo culture into new domains. That role was played by fringe imports: telescopes, microscopes, spectacles, prisms, kaleidoscopes, static-electricity generators, glasswares, glass panes, projectors, candelabra, clocks, toys, prints, peepshow boxes, scissors, penknives, wine, sweets, flora and fauna, and books. The bulk was known under the generic title of "strange devices" (*kiki*). Spreading far and wide, they were immensely appreciated. All cities saw the public display of objects, often at events where they could be handled or used, and strange devices were not necessarily the preserve of the rich. The custom of putting out oddities on show (*misemono*) long predated the arrival of much in the way of European manufacture, but by the mid-eighteenth century imports were making frequent appearances at exhibitions, and by its end may be said to have abounded.[6] Stalls were set up in vacant plots, behind a temple precinct, in a dry riverbed, or atop a dyke or embankment, and the rarities revealed for a fee by small-time impresarios. It is from the contents of such jerry-rigged huts and from the brushes of those who composed their advertising cant or wrote about what they had seen when they got home, not from academical treatises on heliocentricity, Dutch government, or European law, that what the West was, as we understand it here, is to be discerned. The length of queues at fairgrounds reveals how much "Holland" had to offer on a personal level.

The discourse of *Ran* was popular and detached; it brooked no priority in Holland's own interpretations of itself – indeed, it openly dismissed them. But even so, *Ran* was held in a grip of some firmness through the agency of the materiality of imports. "Holland" did not float quite free, but was moored to the objects encountered. Many *misemono* items were of a semi-technical nature, and this gave rise to a sense of certain innate qualities in all the things of *Ran*. Supreme was the notion of precision. The Dutch, it was said, were close-crafting and adept, and must needs be punctilious and nice to have made such wondrous fabrications. Many goods attested to an impulse to enhance vision. Optical devices were in great evidence, and the West came to be considered as a place where empirical sight was augmented or reformed, and where people used (and abused) their eyes.

THE DYNAMICS OF TRADE

The Factory in Nagasaki was run by the Dutch East India Company. In Japanese it was called *Konpanya* (from *Compannie*). By felicitous coincidence the suffix *-ya* denoted in Japanese a business enterprise, so the function of the foreign entity was easily explained. The Company's own acronym was VOC (*Vereenigde Oost Indische Compannie*), and for brevity that is used here.

The VOC had been in Japan since 1609.[7] In its early days it had been in rivalry with Iberian traders who had arrived some four decades before in the trail of missionaries; the English East India Company was soon to appear as well. But fear of the unsettling effects of Catholicism (the Japanese authorities knew what had happened in Mexico) resulted in expulsion of the Spanish and Portuguese in 1639 – and apostasy or death

for local Christians. The English had withdrawn voluntarily sixteen years earlier, unable to turn a decent profit; their attempt to return in 1673 in a ship named *The Return* was thwarted when it was learned that Charles II had married a Catholic queen.[8] From 1639, for the next 229 years until 1868 when the shogunate finally fell, the Dutch operated alone. But the monopoly was not absolute, for European nations had wrestled concessions in China, and produce could arrive via transshipment in privately owned Cantonese junks or aboard bottoms of overseas Chinese from South-East Asia. Chinese trade with Japan was not subject to the same geopolitical limitations as that with Europe, and reputedly thirty or so Chinese vessels were to be seen docked in Nagasaki at any one time.[9]

Japan had been a major international trading nation until the mid-seventeenth century. Thereafter volume shrank dramatically: the VOC sent only two ships per annum. The disappearance of overseas ships was coupled with new restrictions on Japanese travelling abroad and the calling in of residents from the Japantowns dotted through maritime Asia. This was the policy of the Tokugawa family. They had assumed power after protracted and bloody civil wars and founded their shogunate in 1603. It held for fifteen generations. The Tokugawa were keen on trade but disposed to encourage it only in measures that they could keep under their control, directly or through intermediaries. The post-1630s clampdown is to be seen less as distaste for the exchange of goods *per se*, than as the result of a *faute de mieux* acceptance by the Tokugawa that the best way to guard the peace was by preserving mercantile receipts for themselves and not letting a free flow of goods dilute their authority and enrich the regional lords. The nation was terribly friable.

The Japanese archipelago was divided into some 280 domains (*han*) over which the shogun had a federalistic central control; but the *han* were semi-autonomous and ruled by hereditary lords or daimyo, some of uncertain loyalty. It was no more than prudent to deny them access to independent means of creating wealth.

Decades of intensive commerce around the turn of the sixteenth century had seriously depleted Japan's reserves of precious metal. This was significant, as silver had previously formed the bulk of exports. Trade with Japan began to be less appetising to the Western side. It was generally felt in Europe that expansion into continental Asia would be more rewarding than wasting energy on a prickly Japan. The aftermath of the collapse of the Ming dynasty in 1644 made it worthwhile to struggle on in the interim, but within a couple of generations normality was restored in China, and attention turned there again.

Much is usually made by historians of the liberalising activities of the eighth Tokugawa shogun, Yoshimune, who in 1716 attempted to counter general economic depression and the possible withdrawal of the VOC by introducing a series of measures known as the Kyōhō Reforms. Relaxation of import rules was part of the package, and the kinds of goods permitted to be imported were expanded. Western books and small-volume finished equipment, previously discouraged or actually banned, began to be welcomed.[10]

How genuinely different the Kyōhō Reforms made the overall situation remains unclear. The VOC continued to mutter for the rest of the century, and the new imports were not such as earned vast profits, though they made excellent sideline items. In 1735, the VOC board in Amsterdam, the "Gentlemen Seventeen," sent word to their Factory in Japan to "take measures to abandon this trade and strike camp there"; this was to be delayed only until commencement of direct sailings to China.[11] The outlay required to keep the Factory going seemed to have become unwarranted. As the Gentlemen put it in 1734, they would have to see if "a large part of the goods which we now have to pry loose from the

Japanese, could not be procured in the Chinese Realm."[12] They did not in fact pull out.

The first Japanese history of the Dutch Studies movement, published in 1817 and not to be accepted uncritically, has it that Yoshimune consciously initiated study of the West. The shogun perused a Western book, we read in this account by Sugita Genpaku, *The Origins of Rangaku* (*Rangaku kotohajime*), and was impressed. The volume was the Dutch translation of a natural history treatise by a Pole of Scottish descent, Johannis Jonstonus, entitled *Naeukeurige beschryving van der natuur der vier-voetige dieren* (*Natural History of Quadrupeds,* in the English version), and Yoshimune remarked the pictures were so accurate that the text must surely be of value too (Fig. 45); Yoshimune decreed that someone should learn the "horizontal language."[13] This smacks of myth, and it seems far more likely that Genpaku, himself a *Rangaku* expert but distinctly jaded by the time of writing, sought to dignify his career by appealing to a start to the field at orders from on high.

The Kyōhō Reforms were about practical study. But they failed to reap rewards. Yoshimune's retirement in 1745 in favour of his indolent son Ieshige marks the end of whatever official flirtation with *Rangaku* there might have been; a few isolated instances of interest by regional potentates continued, but generally they were not sustained.[14]

But the arrival of new kinds of goods after Kyōhō set the pattern of how the West appeared as provider of "strange devices." The conception that European works were primarily intended for practical application was there to stay. The items were "strange" in the jobs they did and the shapes they took; the countries of their fabrication were also entirely odd. But the devices were clever nonetheless.

The import of strange devices had a modest impact on the history of Japanese science. But failure to engage systematically with the problematics of the Western Enlightenment contrasted markedly with the enthusiasm for instruments once taken down from the philosopher's shelf and diffused among the populace. Functional aspects of devices were often subordinated to other roles – gaming or mere amusement. Metaphorical extrapolations were found in the objects procured which had little to do with the task for which they had originally been built, and the pieces served more as springboards for imagination. Imports were popularised; by popularisation I mean precisely this: the objects were uprooted from their intellectualised schema and recontextualised in another space, that provided locally. The objects were used to address concerns relevant to the new site; and often, rather than scientific or phenomenological, these were social or picaresque, and always primed by an immediate sense of strangeness. In the slang of the time, Japan had been overtaken by "Dutch love" (*Orandazuki*) or, in more extreme cases, "Hollandomania" (*Ranpeki*). A critical condition, perhaps, but one owing nothing to Western psychic categories.

The popularisation of *Ran* extended across every social level, comprising the unschooled as well as daimyos. The idea of an academic *couche* and a delirious commonality below is wrong. An example is to be seen in one of the chief ministers of state (*rōjū*) under the tenth shogun, Ieharu. Tanuma Okitsugu showed little inclination for the scholarly discipline of *Rangaku* but was obsessively keen on *Ran*. Okitsugu made moves towards trade liberalisations too, but they stemmed from a diametrically opposed sense of what was to be had from international contact to Yoshimune's. Okitsugu amassed imports until his forced resignation in 1786, and probably most were strange devices. Okitsugu's Hollandomania was projected by his political adversaries as yet another dimension to his famous venality:

> Between the four seas there was no one but quaked before this illustrious lord's dignity, and all day and all night people went in and out of his gateway as if it led to a bazaar, kneeling and bending and knocking their heads on the ground. He did everything he chose, inferior to none, and he bought up rare and valuable things irrespective of price. Not stopping at gold, silver, jewels, and precious stones, he stuffed his house with an exhaustive range of valuable items from abroad, too.[15]

These are the words of the disgruntled *Rangaku* expert Sugita Genpaku. Okitsugu was deposed when his son Okitomo was assassinated in the shogunal castle, to stop the chief minister (the VOC believed) from throwing the whole country open to unfettered world contact.[16]

Scholars like Genpaku might object to the levity with which tools that ought to be put to practical ends were stowed away as "treasures." But here is the root of an ambivalence that threads through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: though finely wrought and applied, the mechanics of Europe were put, in Japan, to non-functional uses. This is what *Ran* was all about – a science directed inwards. Because the pieces were so often of an optical nature – lens-based or glassy – they bore upon the gaze.

OBJECTS OF TRADE

The location of the VOC Factory in Nagasaki was convenient for sailing to China and Jakarta (Batavia), the capital of the Dutch East Indies. Nagasaki also has one of the finest natural harbours on earth, free from the buffets of typhoon and wave that made many ports unsafe. The VOC was lodged on the artificial island of Dejima, a stone's throw into the bay, a displacement that sheltered their costly merchandise from the ever-present danger of fire (Japanese architecture being at the time wooden, with cooking and heating at open hearths; Pl. 1).[17] Despite the benefits of this pleasant ordering of their business, the VOC was out on a limb as far as the Tokugawa political topography was concerned, and it knew it. Rulers in Indonesia, they did not see why they should be so restricted in the next country. As with the European concessions in Canton (which it resembled more closely than the colonised Indies), Dejima was deliberately removed from the body of the host nation. The foreign and the native were not supposed to fuse. Nagasaki was about as far from the shogunal capital, relatively speaking, as Skye is from London or Anchorage from Washington, and Edo was some six weeks' journey by normal transport (palanquin and coastal sloop); even the nearer conurbations of Kyoto, Osaka, and Nagoya were still at considerable distance.[18]

It is often deduced that Euro-Japanese encounter was crucially hobbled by the siting of the Factory and that genuine cross-semination was precluded. Certainly the VOC was voluble in complaint. But it is important to go a little further in the analysis. Unless the situation in Nagasaki is properly understood, the problematic that this book addresses, which requires a healthy influx of goods, will be misconstrued. I take the view that there is a subtext to the relentless tales of privation and maltreatment that run through the Dutch records sent back to Jakarta or Amsterdam. The ledgers of trade, I suggest, and the bills of lading, give no indication of the genuine volume or type of goods that were actually exchanged. In a word, distant Nagasaki was ideally suited to smuggling. This book begins with smuggled things.

Two forms of malpractice were routinely perpetrated. First, VOC officers might syphon off a percentage of the items from their regular commercial dealings and retail them back home independently; they then justified absence of the same by complaining that the Japanese had palmed them off with goods that were "rascally" and "trash" and that fell apart, or were packed so sloppily they broke *en route*.[19] Creative accounting, the bane of all the East India companies, could cover up disappearances in the stock. It was normal for on-site directors in Asia to accumulate fortunes at their masters' expense. The English East India Company's Japan

office, for example, had omitted to submit *any* audited books for three years, and massive fraud to the tune of £4,000 may have been a cause for the recalling home of the outfit (the leader, Richard Cocks, was arraigned for fraud, but he died on his way back to London[20]).

Stealing need not have affected the substance of trade, but the second malpractice did: officers might import goods of their own, conveying them on VOC ships. This was the so-called private trade (*nukeni*). Rare cases, which fortunately allow a comparison of the Dutch and Japanese documents, reveal a failure to square that is almost comical: in 1711, for example, the Factory announced it had purchased 9,000 pieces of porcelain; but the Japanese records give a figure of 179,246 items sold; over 170,000 pieces evidently went missing.[21] The following year the VOC supposedly bought no porcelain at all, but the Japanese side logged a sale of 153,303 individual items and 5,580 crockery sets. Nicolaus de Graff, stationed in Jakarta at the beginning of the eighteenth century, wrote how he observed the Nagasaki ship unload, and when the seamen's personal chests were disembarked, it rose a full metre in the water.[22] So rife was abuse that in 1753 the VOC began to tax rather than attempting to ban the "fruits, barrels of sake and soya, porcelain and other trifles" brought back to Europe by "Japan-sailors."[23] "Trifles" brought out were paid for with "trifles" taken in. Charles Thunberg, physician to the VOC in 1775–6, estimated that during his tenure on Dejima the captain made a profit that "might amount to several thousand rixdollars," and his staff collectively about the same.[24]

Some rigour (though not much) had supposedly been introduced into the proceedings in 1772 when a VOC ship, *The Burgh*, had been abandoned before entering Nagasaki in a storm; not sinking as was expected, she drifted back and was discovered. The shogunate subjected the vessel to minute inspection – the first time they had had the opportunity to pick a ship apart in this way. "On discharge of the cargo," wrote Thunberg, "was found a great quantity of prohibited goods, which chiefly belonged to the Captain and the Chief."[25]

Economy with the truth is manifest on both sides, for as the entry into Nagasaki bay is long and winding, with the island of Takoboku-jima (Papenberg to the Dutch) lying near its mouth, there was an ideal place for pre-sale of goods before formal arrival. Vessels would heave to for a surreptitious striking of contracts. A simpler eventuality was to fling goods from the side of the ship in motion to be caught by local merchants tipped off and rowing beneath to pick them up.[26] This "and a hundred more artifices have been applied," wrote Thunberg; for example, "some years ago a parrot was found hid in the breeches of one of the petty officers of the ship"; and, on the Japanese end, "[smuggling] they have often endeavoured to do with so much art, as to hide smaller articles under their private parts, and in their hair."[27]

Thunberg, as a Swede, was freer to report than the Dutch among his fellows. As physician he was also less beholden to the Company than were its formally employed staff. Independently wealthy and in Japan more for experience than enrichment, Thunberg was not inclined to stoop to fraud. He was equivalently free from the need to hush it up. On his return to the West he published his memoirs, from which the above are taken, and they appeared in English in 1795 as *Travels in Europe, Africa and Asia performed between the years 1770 and 1779*. But for them, the real state of affairs in Nagasaki would scarcely be known.[28]

Once the military and bureaucratic class (samurai) were involved, an altogether higher level of probity was expected, but the Nagasaki administrators cannot but have been complicitous in what went on. The waterfront district that led to the factory on Dejima was known as Edo Ward, reminding people of the shogun's city, and hence who was (theoretically) in charge;

Nagasaki was indeed under direct rule from Edo to ensure that all proceeds were funneled back unimpaired, and the town had been carved out of the surrounding *han* as a government enclave. But if the system was designed to diminish monetary haemorrhage, it actually did the opposite, for, unlike most Japanese towns, Nagasaki had no resident daimyo and fewer than average samurai. Two pairs of magistrates (*bugyō*) rotated between there and Edo semi-annually, supposedly to lessen corruption, but conversely this ensured a degree of discombobulation in the administration that worked entirely in favour of privateering.[29]

The newly arrived captain would parade down the companionway for a ceremonial disembarkation and to greet his senior Japanese counterparts. As Thunberg recorded, he wore a formal blue coat,

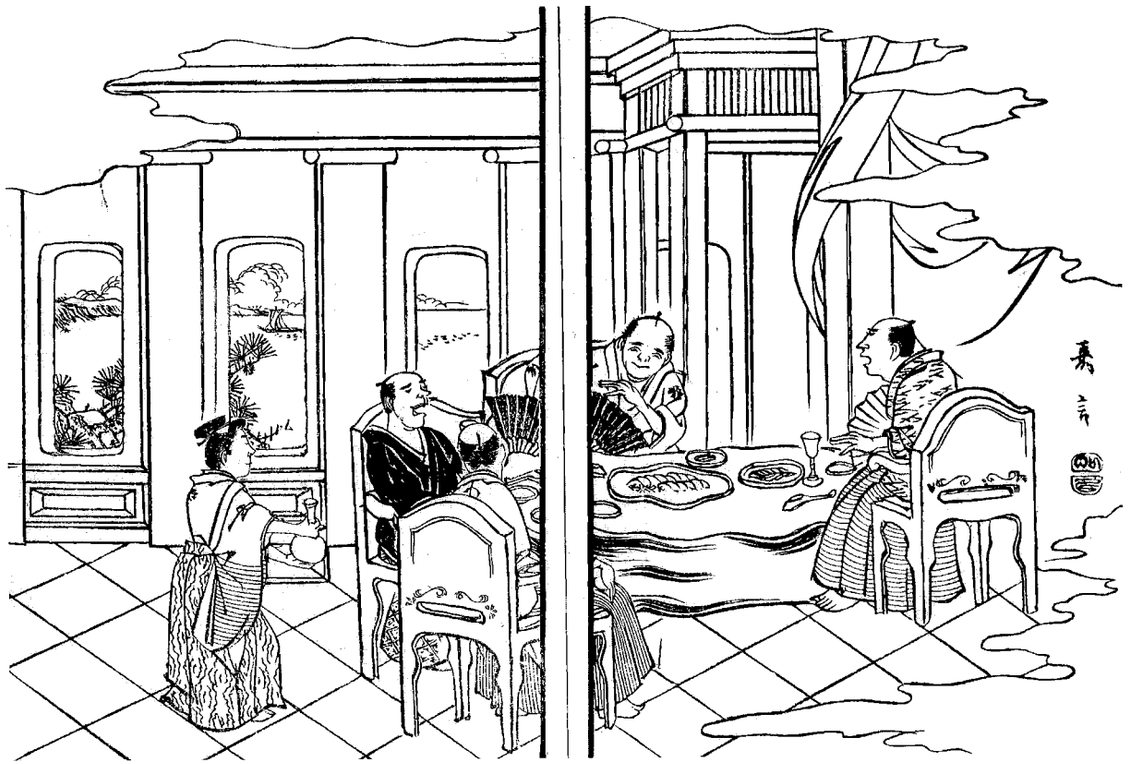
> trimmed with silver lace, and made very large and wide, and stuffed and furnished in front with a large cushion. This coat has for many years been used for the purpose of smuggling prohibited wares into the country . . . [the captain] was frequently so loaded as he went ashore, he was obliged to be supported by sailors, one under each arm.[30]

To match the jacket there were "large and capacious breeches in which he carried contraband ashore." The samurai official in the year of Thunberg's arrival was more astute than most, for the ruse was discovered and the captain humiliatingly stripped: "it was droll indeed to see the astonishment which the sudden reduction in the size of our bulky captain excited in the major part of the ignorant Japanese, who before had always imagined that all our captains were actually as fat and lusty as they appeared to be."

GOODS AND IDEAS

From the above information, anecdotal and haphazard though it is, we must aver that no amount of scrutiny of the ledgers will ever entirely indicate what came and left through Nagasaki. The scope of material exchange between Europe and Japan has accordingly been sorely underestimated. Yet I would not imply that encounter was through goods alone. Many of the finer imports, especially the smuggled kind, or those intended as gifts and bribes, were self-evidently intended for speculative ends, and it is entirely to be expected that they raised questions as to their intended use and purpose. To come across a microscope, a sextant, or an orrery was to wonder how they fitted into their original cultural worlds. Answers to such perplexities were sought at the door of the European residents on Dejima.

The previously unknown purchases were gained on phenomena through instruments, lenses, or pictures and this prompted people to ask why Westerners felt the need of such tools and how they understood the knowledge derived through them. Trade could not have been conducted without personal relationships being formed, and as the Dutch made friends with their overseers, or fell in with local women, ideas were necessarily broached and differences discussed, at whatever degree of elaboration. Suspicion on the part of the Nagasaki people was overcome with presents of cane sugar (previously unknown), while the upper echelons were regaled with stronger stuff: "they don't do much," wrote one leader of the Factory, "but a fast filling up with distiled waters, *vinho tinto* and Spanish wine."[31] At such moments a flavour of cultural otherness would be conveyed. Engelbert Kaempfer, like Thunberg a non–Dutch Factory doctor of independent means, recommended "a cordial and plentiful supply of European liquors" to lubricate social intercourse. The German doctor "went all about," as his biographer put it, "herborising and observing what was remarkable in nature and art," and he wrote a dissertation on Japanese medicine on his return to Europe.[32] Kaempfer was also able to secure enough information to write one of the first serious books to tackle Japan. Published posthu-



1. Anon., from Tachibana Nankei, *Hokusō sadan*, 1826. National Diet Library, Tokyo.

Nankei is entertained in Yoshio Kōsaku's Dutch Room in Nagasaki.

mously in 1727 as *The History of Japan together with a description of the Kingdom of Siam*, Kaempfer's writing was dedicated by its translator to Charles II. The book described, the King was told, "a valiant and invincible nation, a polite, industrious and virtuous people, enriched by a mutual commerce among themselves, possessed of a country on which nature hath lavish'd her most valuable treasures" – what Kaempfer himself called "populous and wealthy Nipon."[33] Japan was taken seriously, and it was worth spending the time on. Kaempfer's work was found cogent by contemporary Japanese readers, one of whom remarked, in 1804, that "someone who has not been to the Western part of the country [around Nagasaki] need only read what Kaempfer wrote about the subject to be fully informed."[34] In the course of all this he could hardly have avoided giving out a great deal about the West too, its institutions and its patterns of thought.

Some senior VOC members spoke a smattering of Japanese or knew written Chinese characters (enabling them to communicate with the Japanese on paper). Isaac Titsingh, leader of the Factory twice in 1780–4, could both read and write with a fluency applauded by Tachibana Nankei, the physician who first talked about the Buddhas' eyes.[35] Malay was the lingua franca of the China seas, and Dutch seamen spoke it, as

did many among the populace of Nagasaki.[36] Ideas could be verbally exchanged.

The more solid linguistic skills necessary for communication of complex thought were found among the five families of hereditary translators retained in Nagasaki by the shogunate to deal with the VOC (a similar number were employed to negotiate with the Chinese community). The Dutch translators were responsible for vetting imported books against unsuitable materials (especially Christian doctrine), and for keeping the shogunate abreast of Western political affairs.[37] Their reading was necessarily wide. They had samurai status and met and grilled the senior Europeans on a regular basis as equals. Occasionally translators devoted their leisure hours to diffusing what they had learned. The head mediator from 1778 until the end of the century was Yoshio Kōsaku, who had been Sugita Genpaku's old *Rangaku* teacher. A notably prolific scholar, Kōsaku is perhaps to be reckoned the most knowledgeable person about the West in his day; he penned thirty-nine works, mostly on European subjects, and ran a Dutch-style medical school that enrolled six hundred students.[38]

Kōsaku was a singular enthusiast for Western things, and those who made the trip to Nagasaki invariably solicited one of his heady talks of foreign lands, readily conducted in the Dutch-style house he had built: Kōsaku had a lie-down tub (Japanese baths being cuboid) and a flight of stairs up to the second floor with green-painted woodwork (Japanese stairs being more like ladders, and timber elements always bare; Pl. 5). The place was, wrote Nankei after a visit, "exactly like entering a real Dutch house," although, being used only to mats on the floor, he found sitting on the chairs "gruelling"; the illustrator of Nankei's travel journals drew a picture of the room and the harbour down below, incorporating swirling drapes that come right from the conventions of Western portraiture (Fig. 1).[39] Shiba Kōkan, down from Edo in 1788, spent a few nights sleeping in the Dutch rooms and was so delighted with the reception that Kōsaku laid on for him, including a trip to Dejima itself, that he extemporised a portrait in thanks, drafting it as a Western-style apotheosis with cloud-borne angels trumpeting and strumming above the book-bearing translator's head (Fig. 2).[40]

2. Shiba Kōkan, *Yoshio Kōsaku with Symbols*, hanging scroll, 1788. Private collection.

As many as one in five of the Nagasaki population may have been Chinese. Yet for all the internationalism of its demography the town was a rather cut-off sort of place.[41] The spread of ideas was better served by the annual trip made by the three senior members of the VOC to Edo

to offer their respects at the shogunal court.[42] The Dutch considered this ambassadorial in function and called it the *hofreis*. To the Tokugawa it was a tribute mission. The journey took the leader of the Factory (*opperhooft*), the physician, and scribe clean across the country, and the people of Kyoto, Osaka, and countless smaller towns along the way had a yearly opportunity to see living Westerners. Kōkan recorded meeting the entourage in Kyoto, crossing them by chance on his way back from Nagasaki, and he seems to have enjoyed fairly open chats.[43] The business pressure was off during the *hofreis*, and the Europeans used it as a moment to unwind. Osaka seems to have been the most appreciated, if Thunberg is to be believed, and he characterised it as a place where "an incessant round of amusements is to be had."[44]

Leaving Nagasaki shortly after New Year, the retinue and its baggage train arrived in Edo (if the timing went right) on the first day of the third month.[45] This was the beginning of spring by the lunar calendar and an appropriate juncture to congratulate the shogun on the fluorescence of his benevolent rule, in step as ever with the natural order. The great haiku (properly haikai) master Bashō put it:

> The Dutch leader too,
> Bends his knee –
> Spring time for my Lord.[46]

The third month was when the cherry blossoms appeared, long hailed as an aesthetic highpoint in the yearly cycle; hence another verse from Bashō's pen invoking also the sound of leather,

> The Dutchmen too
> Have come to view the blossoms.
> Horses' saddles.[47]

The burden of meaning of the *hofreis* was symbolic, and the Tokugawa used the event to bolster themselves in the eyes of their citizenry. Drawn inexorably to the beauty of the shogunal seat, the VOC is thought to have harboured longings to live under glorious Tokugawa sway.

The Dutch, for their part, did not miss an opportunity to argue out practical matters (usually fruitlessly), such as permission to send more ships. But there was not much onerous to the proceedings. As Thunberg put it, "Our whole business consisting in eating and drinking, or in reading and writing for our own amusement, in sleeping and dressing ourselves, and being carried about in norimons."[48] As economics, this was an empty event, but the loose diplomatic schedule of the fortnight's stay allowed for considerable socialising and intellectual interchange on various levels. The first meeting was in the castle, and the VOC was entitled to an audience with the shogun. Not all Tokugawa progeny were of an equally inquiring bent and some forewent the fatigue of a meeting altogether, but many had a genuine desire for clarification on all manner of subjects. As one hard-pressed leader remarked of Yoshimune's intensive question-and-answer sessions, "to satisfy the Emperor [shogun] one would have to be a *homo universalis*."[49] The VOC had to be circumspect in their responses, for blurting out inopportune nuggets on the situation in Europe might redound badly (the French, Dutch, and American Revolutions all took place during the period we consider here). Yet much was transmitted: in terms of this book's span, from the earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, to Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, the shogunal court was made aware of significant European events pretty much as they occurred.[50]

The leader of the Factory was the centre of attention. Occasional efforts were made to locate him at an appropriate point in the Tokugawa pecking order: some reckoned him equivalent to a *hatamoto*, or a high samurai in the shogun's direct employ (of which there were some six thousand). More often he was accepted as *sui generis* and given the title of "Kapitan," a designation that will be retained below (not the same as a ship's captain).[51] Some kapitans had intellectual clout. Titsingh, his biographer assessed, was "a man whose faculties are [*sic;* he was already dead] not wholly under the dominion of the plodding spirit of commerce," and he attracted a number of Japanese admirers.[52] But it was the Factory physician who was best equipped to answer queries on in-depth matters. As the doctor Thunberg said, "it is the physician of the embassy that is considered by the Japanese as learned; and consequently . . . they look up to him as an oracle."[53]

The Dutch were lodged outside the confines of the castle in an official residence kept exclusively for them called the Nagasaki-ya. The building was located right in the centre of the city, near Nihon-bashi. Admission was restricted, and this being Edo, rules were more strict than in Nagasaki; but the VOC was able to host a steady stream of visitors.[54] A Dutch official in 1740 had found the Nagasaki-ya "delapidated and depressing," although it was rebuilt in 1772 after a fire; by the time of *Ran* fixation, the structure was, Thunberg thought, "tolerably neat, though not such as expected for an embassy from so distant a part of the world."[55] At least the residence amounted to considerably better accommodation than Dejima, which Titsingh thought "extremely crazy." People could be comfortably received.[56]

The Dutch journals record lengthy and informed conversations with many people, and clearly access was nowhere nearly as difficult to contrive as was frequently pretended. Numerous *Rangaku* experts came, especially those of samurai class, although lower-status persons were welcomed too, such as Hiraga Gennai, something of a father to *Rangaku*, who abandoned his rank to pursue Dutch Studies unimpeded. Gennai met Kapitan Jan Crans in 1769, ten years before his untimely death deprived the field of one of its luminaries.[57] The artist Hokusai was invited to the Nagasaki-ya, though of modest rank, to undertake commissions for the kapitan and physician; he also made a drawing of the hostel in 1789, providing one of only two extant indications (neither very helpful) of its general architectural form (Figs. 3 and 4).[58] Yet Thunberg told of "a great personage" who, "came to us incognito, accompanied by only two of his gentlemen," and although "he stayed until late at night discoursing with us on different things . . . not only on the affairs of Japan but also on those of Europe," and proved to be "as curious and inquisitive as he was friendly and engaging," the Nicodemus-like manner of his approach suggests that over-close associations with foreigners were not recommended, particularly for government figures, and especially in Edo.[59]

As for the levels of conversational speech, there were those who regretted the absence of adequate language-learning tools.[60] Titsingh had probably picked up his knowledge of writing in China, for it would have been hard to learn in Japan, where few had protracted tenure. Thunberg wrote acidly that "a Japanese and Dutch vocabulary might, it is true, in the space of two centuries, have been thought of . . . had not incapacity in some and idleness in others laid insurmountable obstacles in the way."[61] And the Swede concluded that the whole opportunity for East–West understanding had been hopelessly vitiated by being entrusted to the Dutch, for whom he had no great love – "the tobacco-pipe has too great charms for them."

More energy was expended from the Japanese side. The year 1788 saw the publication of the first Japanese-Dutch dictionary, which appeared not in Nagasaki but Edo, and was entitled *A Lexicon of Primitive Words* (*Bango-sen*). The compiler was Morishima Chūryō, aged thirty-two, scion of an important samurai house and a former pupil of Gennai. The *Lexicon* works from Japanese to transliterated Dutch and was evi-

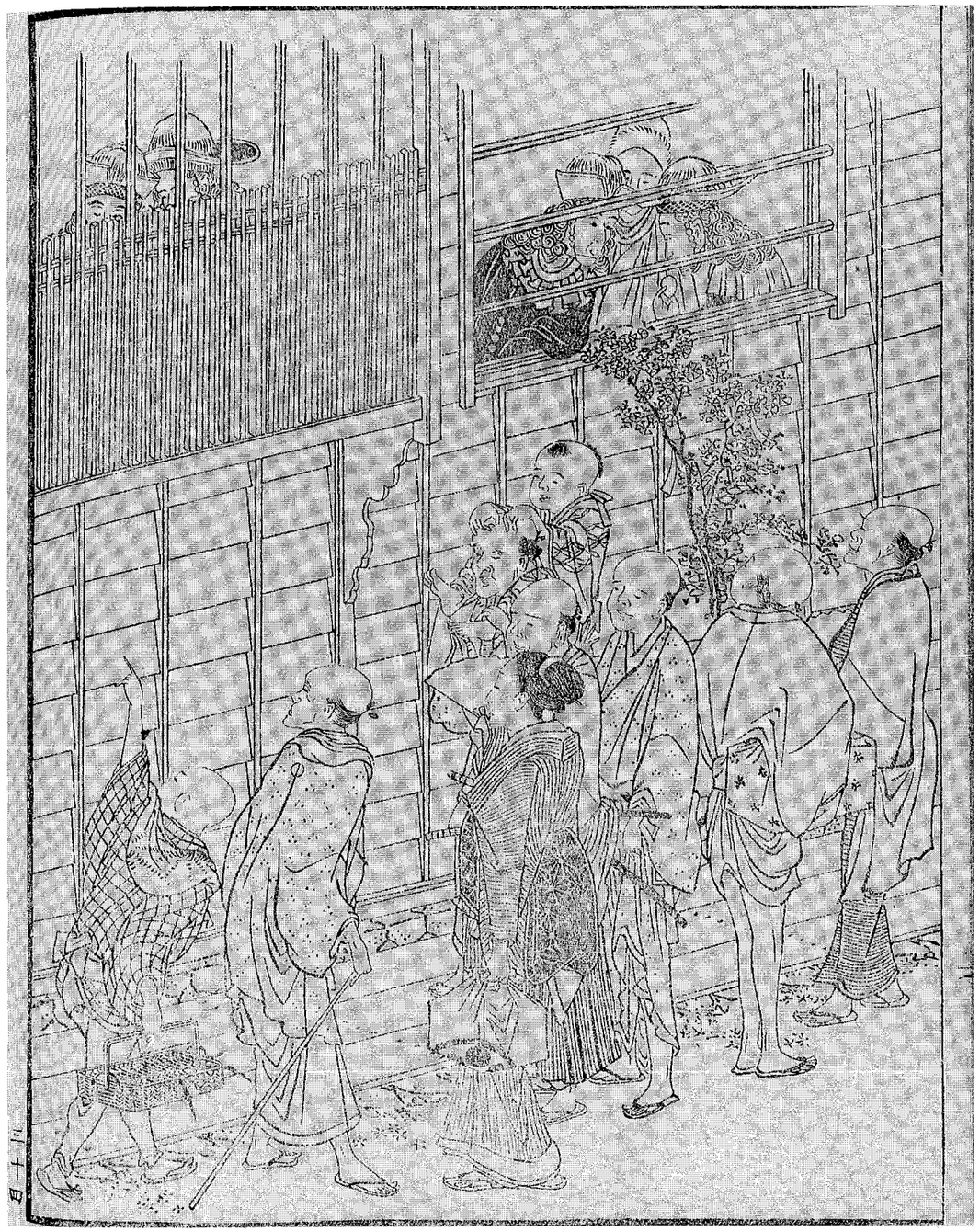
dently intended as an aid to speaking directly with Europeans for those not formally taught. It includes several hundred words in twenty sections for easy reference (plus place-name addendum) and was issued in a handy pocket-sized format.

Certain Japanese officials learned to speak Dutch with a degree of ease. One was Chūryō's older brother, Katsuragawa Hoshū. In 1783, following his father's death, Hoshū took the eminent position of private physician to the shogun (*oku-i*), a job that, like most at the time, was hereditary.[62] By virtue of his family connexions Hoshū had right of access to the Nagasaki-ya, and he used his privilege to the full, often bringing his mentor, Nakagawa Jun'an, with him. During the two weeks of Thunberg's residence, Hoshū frequented the hostel daily and proved "inexpressibly insinuating and fond of learning."[63] Much liked, Hoshū was capable of communicating directly in tolerable Dutch and was found "very young, good-natured, acute and lively." Like his brother, he became a prolific writer on the West, compiling works ranging from geographical and political studies to a guide to correct use of the microscope, and not neglecting his real subject, Dutch medicine.[64] Both Hoshū and Chūryō were unapologetic popularisers.

Thunberg and the soon-to-be shogun's doctor developed a deep attachment in the spring of 1776. The thirty-three-year-old Swede called his Japanese partner, his junior by eight years, "my much-beloved pupil," and after returning to Europe he "kept up intercourse . . . during a period of several years."[65] Beyond a testimony of close friendship, the bonds between the two men was of enormous significance, for Thunberg was a considerable cut above the ordinary ship's physician. He had studied at Upsala University, and worked there with the great Linnaeus on the binomial system of nomenclature (still the standard in species classification). Thunberg was a modern man of science, a botanist of distinction, and someone who commanded a hearing in the academies of Europe; he later assumed Linnaeus's chair. Hoshū, too, was a person of deep thought, and no less endowed with a brilliant mind than Thunberg. Their discussions in the Nagasaki-ya, though inadequately recorded, provided a one-step link from the world of *Rangaku* to the forefront of late eighteenth-century Western science.[66]

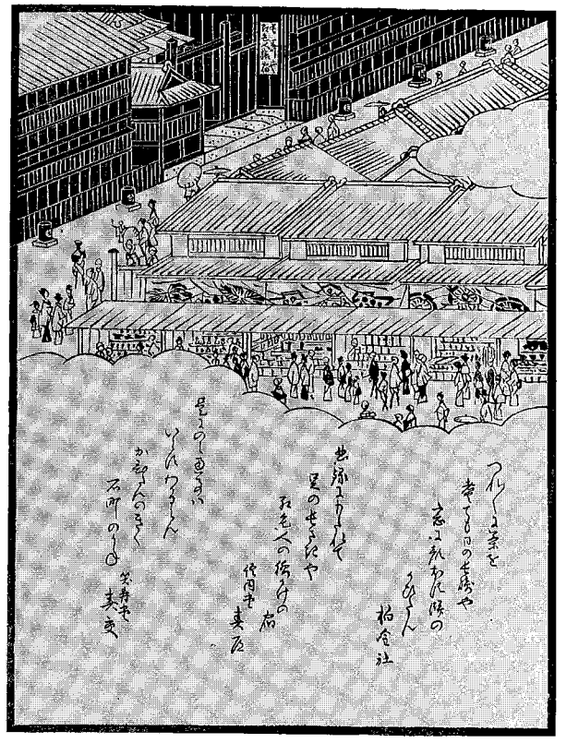
POPULAR RESPONSES

"At first," wrote Thunberg of his days in Edo, "we were visited by the learned and the great of the country; afterwards even merchants and others were numbered among our visitors."[67] These nameless "others" would no doubt have been members of the mercantile classes. In addition, lesser enthusiasts, who could neither force nor talk their way in, contented themselves with shouting or staring from outside (Fig. 3). The Nagasaki-ya was near one of the principal bridges over Edo's many waterways and was at a major urban node. The site was not prohibited; indeed, its prominence within the Edo cityscape was deliberate. A massive signboard announced the place as "The Nagasaki-ya: Official Travel Lodge of the Red-furred [*kōmō*] People," as can be seen in a depiction of the place by Utagawa Hiroshige, published in 1856 (Fig. 4). The hostel was a prop in the Tokugawa diplomatic pageant.[68] People scarcely needed encouragement to wander over and look, for they were unerringly agog at the springtime sight of the "red-furred" men and their exotic goods.[69] The throng raised such a hubbub the Dutch felt marooned indoors. As Thunberg wrote, "The view is towards the street, which was seldom free from boys, who constantly called out and made an uproar, as soon as they caught the least glimpse of us, nay, and sometimes climbed up the walls of the opposite houses in order to see us." [70] A love of novelty and an arrant rubber-necking were acknowledged features of the Edoite. But the showiness



3. Katsushika Hokusai, from Asakusa Shijin, *Kyōka azuma asobi*; 1799. British Museum.

The Nagasaki-ya, hostel for foreigners in Edo.



4. Utagawa Hiroshige, from Tenmei Rōjin, *Kyōka Edo meisho zue*, 1856. Courtesy of Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, gift of Mrs Henry O. Taylor.

Edo streets, and at top centre, the VOC hostel with sign reading, 'Nagasaki-ya: Red-fur Travel Lodge'; three verses are inscribed below.

of the VOC visit translated into a general interest in *Ran* that carried down to genuinely common levels.

If some *Rangaku* experts devoted themselves to writing books the stringency of which was calculated to earn them space alongside scholars in more established fields, not all maintained acerbic relations with the milling populace who loved the "strange devices." Chūryō and Hoshū did not. Some of the more perceptive specialists recognised in a commoner audience their true constituency, and wrote with the townsperson in mind. Educated and possessing some spare cash, the urban classes were denied access to the decision-making processes of state, and they consumed with a vengeance. Hooking with the bait of novelty, *Rangaku* authors might seek to draw curious urbanites into an understanding of what were, after all, baffling and heterodox conceptions.

The Japanese language makes strong distinctions between spoken and written forms, and this can soon take high-flown prose beyond the ken even of those formally able to read. But it is a recurrent feature of a certain type of late-eighteenth-century *Rangaku* to stick close to the spoken vernacular and to shun the dense, sinicised prose of normal scholarship. Shiba Kōkan, for example, not an academic by training but a painter, had no truck with obscurantist phraseology and was scathing of those who employed the pseudo-Chinese (*kanbun*) textual style beloved of proper scholarship but which, he correctly estimated, "the young and the simple have a terrible job trying to understand, for the sentences just get too difficult to fathom."[71] He directed his criticisms towards samurai *Rangaku* writers like Sugita Genpaku, Nakagawa Jun'an, and a senior colleague, Maeno Ryōtaku, none of whom showed any interest in breadth of readership. Kōkan was determined that his own books on the West must be in a lucid prose permitting engagement by those not motivated to study hard.

Satake Yoshiatsu, "Hollandomaniac" daimyo of Akita, held similar views, despite his rank. Lord Satake wrote two treatises on Dutch painting after he had been introduced to the subject by Gennai in 1773. One is couched in the dignified pseudo-Chinese that his status demanded, but he simultaneously composed another version, covering almost identical ground and communicated in natural Japanese.[72]

Much of the popularised writing on the West can be shown to have gained considerable influ-

ence. A publication of 1765 entitled *Red-fur Talks*, or *Talks on Holland* (*Kōmō/Orandabanashi*), was among the first of this accessible breed, and it set the tone for readability. Little is known of Gotō Rishun, its author, except that he derived the bulk of his information from conversations with Hoshū and Chūryō's father, the then shogunal physician Katsuragawa Hosan. Rishun embedded a sense of person-to-person intimacy in the text of his book, and the short paragraphs with occasional illustrations guide the reader through a job-lot of Western matters, as a friendly (if somewhat rambling) speaker might.[73]

A recognised genre in middle-brow publications of the Edo period was the edited transcript of dialogues held between distinguished masters and their pupils (*mondo*). These proceeded by the adept asking questions, which were then answered, and they provided the commonality with aperçus into real scholarship. Some *Rangaku* writers took advantage of the mode; one of the most widely read results was by Ōtsuki Gentaku, founder of the Shirandō Dutch school in Edo and pupil of both Genpaku and Ryōtaku (whose names he synthesized to form his own, Gen-taku). Although a samurai held in high esteem by the shogunate, Gentaku favoured popularisation, and he permitted publication of exchanges he had had with a pupil called Arima Genchō, a samurai in the service of the Hollandomanic lord of Fukuchiyama, Kutsuki Masatsuna. Genchō put the work together in 1788, offering the reader his own rather wide-eyed questions followed by patient replies by the master. Clearly directed at a lay audience, the work's title might be paraphrased *Correcting Errors about the Dutch* (*Ransetsu benwaku*). Genchō died before the work was completed, and an even more casual alternative title was assigned to the final publication, *Bansui's Evenings Talks* (*Bansui yobanashi*) – Bansui being another of Gentaku's names. [74]

Morishima Chūryō similarly dedicated himself to exposing *Rangaku* to all. Ten years before his *Lexicon* came out, he had published the *Red-fur Miscellany* (*Kōmō zatsuwa*), a selection of information in the form of quick paragraphs to be rapidly interiorised and brought out impressively among friends. Topics were diverse enough to keep even the most fainthearted reader gripped, running from the geographical and maritime affairs of Europe and its neighbour the Ottoman Empire, to "strange devices" like microscopes, loud-hailers, or the newly invented hot-air balloon, and from these to burial customs and New Year's rituals, and then more venturesome matters, such as the extent of prostitution in the West and the criminalisation of gay relationships (a source of perplexity to Japanese writers, not least to Chūryō who, like his teacher Gennai, had a personal stake in the matter).[75]

THE MESHING OF *RAN* WITH THE POPULAR: THE CASE OF EDO

Popular aspects were probably fostered out of pessimism over *Rangaku*'s chances of integration into regular academic debate. For whatever reasons, this put Europe into a special position: the Tokugawa ideological machine mapped out much of how the experience of life was, or ought to be. The role of the shogunate was equated with heaven, adamantine and inconceivable to replace, while the people were the upbearing earth. There was no room for comparative sociology in Edo. This left *Ran* to slide about somewhere not quite definable in regular terms.

Edo, modern Tokyo, was the shogunal capital and one of the hugest cities in the world. It was there that life was kept on its tightest rein. Edo comprises the topographic focus of much of what is discussed in this book, and its flavour should be mentioned briefly. The 280-odd daimyo who ruled the country's states (*han*) had High Commissions (*hairyō-* or *kami-yashiki*) in Edo as well as two official mansions there apiece. The city was punctuated with nearly one

thousand official compounds and their associated stores and offices. The samurai and retainers who staffed the mansions were extremely numerous, and Edo was full of military hardware. When Shiba Kōkan took a painting student from the milder region of Kyoto, he remarked with amusement how flabbergasted the young man was by the rather choreographed bravura of the Edo street: "he thought," remarked Kōkan, "from all the daimyo and lesser lords with their swords and pikes that he was back in the times of civil war in ancient China!"[76] The populace, packed into the insalubrious corners of the city, forged its tools of self-fashioning and respect from a bricolage of elements melted down from the detritus of this ideological metalwork. *Ran* was so much pig iron.

The Tokugawa state was realistic enough to accept that pressures could be most rigorously placed on its citizenry if release was also allowed in small degree. The shogunate tolerated a fracturing of orthodoxies around the outer skirts of thought. The mental spaces of leisure activity are often billed as mere drollery, but they are more than that: beyond flight from life, or ludic reenactments of it, the Edo sense of play (*asobi*) was a full rescripting of experience. Ideas and manners not formulated by government dictate spun at the peripheries like orbs, but with gravitational pulls of their own. Neither revolutionary nor fully accepting, these lay athwart the division between contestation and compensation, unable to impinge on the centre, nor yet quite distant from it.

The classic of such demi-mondes was the Floating World (*ukiyo*). Ironically enough, this hub produced much of what modern taste finds most amenable in eighteenth-century culture, from the comic storybook to the celebrated Japanese woodblock print. But the Floating World was no orthodoxy in its own time; rather, it was a psychic habitat of alterity. The Floating World was associated with designated zones of relief, or pleasure districts (*yūkaku* or *kuruwa*), established just outside many cities. These were licensed by the government. Edo had the Yoshiwara, Osaka the Shinmachi, Nagasaki the Maruyama, and Kyoto the Shimabara.[77] At root they were brothel areas, but had prostitution been their only point, little would need to be said about them here. Actually, sex could be had more easily and cheaply elsewhere.[78] The Floating World was really a space where the normal strictures of living dislodged or melted away. It was a profoundly important constituent of the mentality of the Edo-period urban classes – whether the disenfranchised merchants unable to buy into power, or the frustrated samurai brought up on a cult of arms but working as paper-pushers. Far more of a forbidden fruit than sex was the opportunity to converse freely with people of another social level whose company one might enjoy, to flout directives on cut and quality of dress, or to over-spend in defiance of sumptuary laws. The Floating World was where alternatives became, for a moment, possible. And *Ran* streamed directly in.

Many of the figures that appear at the more popularising end of *Rangaku* were prominent in the licensed quarters too. An interest in "floating" and *Ran*, in many cases, went hand in hand in a way that cannot be coincidental. Katsuragawa Hoshū, for instance, was not only the shogun's diligent physician and a student of Dutch medicine, but a rake in Edo's Yoshiwara of such legendary proportions that he was reckoned among its "eighteen fashion kings" (*jūhachi daitsū*).[79] A step too far in 1785, during the unrest that preceded Tanuma Okitsugu's downfall, temporarily cost him his job. Hoshū's brother, Morishima Chūryō, did not lag behind in extravagant entertainment, and was on close terms with many spendthrift devotees of pleasure.[80] Hiraga Gennai was as well known in the Yoshiwara as at the Nagasaki-ya, and his case demonstrates how the escape represented by the Floating World was not, paradoxically, about brothels, for his sexual proclivities were exclusively for other men. Gennai is certainly the most famous of *Ran*-sybarites today, but their list was long in its own time, and many will appear below. Some experts actually wrote light works for Yoshiwara consumption as readily as they wrote their serious pieces, and it is not uncommon to find a sober scholar emerging from the pseudonym of a popular author. Gennai wrote puppet plays and popular fiction under the name of Fūrai Sanjin, as well as *Rangaku* treatises on mechanics and botany, and after his death Chūryō assumed the mantle, adding Fūrai Sanjin II to his other pen-names (Shinra Manzō, Manzōtei, and Tsukiji Zenkō).

Some writing from the Yoshiwara deals directly with *Ran* themes. A couple of instances may be mentioned here as a foretaste of what is to follow. A classic play of about 1748 told of revenge by a group of samurai after their master's disgrace (it was based on a real judicial quandary). This work, *A Syllabary: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (*Kanadehon chūshingura*), was parodied by Chūryō in a foreign setting and renamed *A Foreign Handbook: The Treasury of Overseas People* (*Karadehon tōjingura*). A cast of up-to-the-minute foreigners sport European "strange devices" from mirrors, loud-hailers, and telescopes to anatomical charts. Decked out equally oddly are mainland Asians, with their own rare effects.[81]

Maeno Manshichi was a samurai and a hereditary retainer to the daimyo of Ogasawara. In his Floating World manifestation he took the name Onitake, "Spook Knight" (probably in reference to his scarred appearance as he had lost his nose to syphilis).[82] In 1803, at the age of forty-three, Onitake spoofed the latest imported goods (hot-air balloons, static-electricity generators, diving bells) in *A Sino-Japano-Dutch Miscellany* (*Wakanran zatsuwa*); the lapidary title, if read fast, sounds like "I haven't a clue, it's all such as mess" (*wakaran zatsu wa*).

The name Hekizentei Kunenbō was taken by someone clearly of education, thought nothing is known for sure. Though a plausible cognomen, the name means "The Monk who Spent Nine Years Before a Wall," a reference to Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism; but the holy man, called Daruma in Japanese, was also used as a euphemism for low-grade prostitutes. Kunenbō had it both ways. In 1789, he parodied the great Ōtsuki Gentaku. Kunenbo wrote *A Short-Cut to Understanding the Teachings of Ōtsuki Chōchin* (*Hōtsuki Chōchin oshie no chikamichi*), but glossed the title to make it read, *A Short Cut to Understanding the Magic Lantern* – referring to another import from Europe. Gentaku was ripe for satire, for his *Rangaku* school in Shiba had opened that year and the manuscript of his *Correcting Errors about the Dutch* was recently completed. These three books will all be discussed in more detail below, but even brief mention demonstrates a cross-referencing of the Floating World and *Ran* that is more than a fortuity of personal predilection. They are proof presumptive (to be made positive, I hope, as we proceed) of an interconnectedness of the alternative culture of the pleasure districts and the consumed Japanese Holland.

The eighteenth-century entertainment areas were fashion-conscious and quick-paced. Any novelty was likely to be taken up. It was soon possible in the Yoshiwara, for example, to drink sake from a twisted-stem European wine glass, or even to quaff *vinho tinto*, to interlard one's conversation with "Dutch" words like *gorōto* (great), *uein* (wine), *furou* (woman) or *rōdo gekkuto* (an alcoholic flush) – all while being waited on by a woman wearing a kimono closed with a sash of imported stuff such as Dutch velvet or Indonesian batik (Figs. 5, 107).[83] The chance similarity of the word *Oranda*, sometimes abbreviated to *Oran*, with *oiran* meaning a top grade of prostitute, provided an unending source of laughs.[84] Perhaps some savoured the odd experience of luxurious Westernness vicariously by stopping at a brothel in the Yoshiwara called the Nagasaki-ya.[85] Through such jokes, Europe was

pivoted on a linguistic fulcrum that tilted between the removedness of *Ran* and that alterity to routine obligation symbolised by the women of the pleasure quarters.

Much European knowledge entered by means of the Roman alphabet, or "Dutch letters" (*Oranda moji*). This term sounded like the festival day on which prostitutes paraded through the streets of their quarter (*oiran no monbi*). A witticism was easily coined to project the sum of Western textuality into the floridity of holiday over-statement, flounce, and flourish, and to suggest that the readers of Western writing were embarking on, as it were, a significatory change that cast them loose from established restraints.[86] Unexpectedly shaped, Dutch letters looked quite alien to those used only to Asian scripts. As memorably put by Santō Kyōden, an Edo tobacconist and best-selling Floating World writer, the Roman alphabet resembled bovine blather: "cow flob – oh I see! they're Dutch letters."[87] A simile emerged in the 1780s whereby "looking like Dutch script" came to mean convoluted or confusing.[88] Shikitei Sanba, a townsman brought up in the midst of the Edo publishing world (he became Kyōden's literary rival) poked fun at the horizontality of Roman letters (Japanese, Chinese, and Korean being vertical) and ribaldly suggested, "there is a theory to the effect that they derive from the forms of wriggling earthworms."[89] It was indeed odd for logic to move over the page crosswise, for "going sideways" (*yoko-yuki*) was already common slang for "weird." European orthography meandered obliquely in a way that seemed internally wayward, even before a text was parsed or its contents examined.[90]

But this did not mean that Dutch letters were absurd. They did not nebulate off from all referents – quite the contrary. The Western languages were known to capture sense as Westerners understood it. *Ran* was a different but nonetheless plausible epistemic scheme. Nonplusment skulked in and out of the tents of scientific inquiry. Again, "Dutch" matters straddled absurdity, on the one hand and, on the other, a rich vein of sense, until they finally eased themselves into position astride, through the joint credentials of the Floating World and *Ran*. Thought, as evinced in Dutch sentences, as Sanba liked to say, "shuffled along like brothel patrons."[91]

QUESTIONS OF GENRE

The types of literature circulating in the Floating World are collectively called *gesaku*. The term is difficult to translate, but it largely refers to a textuality of comedy where the humour springs from a jostling together of discrete and noncongruent concerns.[92] It is the literature of "play" (*asobi*). As this book aspires to study the interchange between the West and Edo urban culture, *gesaku* writings will provide a large portion of our data. A realisation of the extent to which eighteenth-century fiction is permeated with *Ran* is, I believe, one of the contributions this book has to make.[93] Now is an appropriate occasion to introduce some principal genres and some of their notable exponents.

Senryu was the chief poetic form. They are made to mimic the brief 5-7-5 syllabic count of what are now known as haiku. They select as their thematic ground contemporary urban concerns – sights, shops, trends, and modes – frequently with a satirical edge. Senryu commonly start with a concrete fact of modern life and then spoof it, or rather, invert it by disconnecting the object discussed from the sphere of sense to which it normally adhered; the object is then inserted into another space. Whereas haiku work by linking pre-established elements into rule-bound strings, senryu deliberately jar with cultural oxymorons; the greatest haiku masters navigated voluminous directives and made their verses free, but composers of senryu started out as they ended, in clamorous caprice. To the Edo mind, normal human experience was deemed a coagulation of assorted spheres of sense, and adult maturity was precisely thought to lie in keeping the compartments separate. The involuntary jumble of elements found in senryu renders meaning precarious.[94]

When it came to spheres of sense, Holland and Japan were just about diametrically opposite. The arrival of Dutch things or European people in the Japanese realm constituted the kind of juxtaposition that made for ideal senryu. The two verses cited above (on the kapitan's obeisance and the Dutchmen's flower-viewing) are technically haiku, as the term senryu was not yet in use, but they point in the direction in which the senryu was to lead. The arrival of the VOC among those old icons of indigenous aesthetic awareness, the cherry blossoms, introduced a literary conflict that sparked a mental wince as two parts of a couple were wrongly married. An outlandish European genuflection before the shogun did much the same. Collisions were effective if they were witty but also if they raised serious problems.

Analogous to the senryu, though more root-and-branch in its approach, was the kyoka or "mad-verse," and its prose counterpart, kyobun, "mad-text." Kyoka was to the courtly poetic form of waka what senryu was to the humble haiku; it took the metrical elements of the older from (a prosody of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables in the case of kyoka) but wrought havoc with its proper generic base. Kyoka went further than senryu in not only bouncing spheres off each other but unlocking the hold that even the wording of the verse had, and twisting words into prongs that poked and teased but never quite grabbed sense. A kyoka goads at representation itself. There are degrees of confusion, of course, and not all verses cause the translator equal despair. A relatively straightforward example by Shōjūdō Shunkō takes the incomprehensibility of language itself as its theme and alludes to this by way of a reference to the VOC's annual visit; his verse was inscribed on Hiroshige's illustration of the Nagasaki-ya (Fig. 4),

> Here is one thing
> He understands
> Without interpreter:
> The kapitan hears
> The bell of Kokuchō.[95]

5. Kitao Shigemasa, *Beauties of the Eastern Quarter: O-naka and O-shima of Nakachō in Fukagawa*, colour woodblock print from the series *Tōzai nanboku bijin*; 1770s. National Museum, Tokyo.

O-naka wears a sash of European velvet, O-shima one of Indonesian batik.

6. Takehara Shunchōsai, from Akisato Ritō, *Settsu meisho zue*, 1796. SOAS, University of London.

Hikida's foreign goods shop, with sign reading 'all manner of strange goods and rare objects, newly arrived from abroad'.

Kokuchō was that part of Nihon-bashi where the "red-fur" lodge was sited. It also boasted one of Edo's many time-bells, this one donated by the shogun in the opening years of the seventeenth century.[96] Surely the kapitan can grasp the meaning of the bell at least, even if Japanese speech defeats him.

The bell allows a glance at clocks, among the commonest of imported "strange devices." But European clocks were inept at telling time in Japan as hours there were not measured in even lengths (six hours apiece were given to periods of light and dark so they would seldom all be of equal duration): the ticking Dutch timepiece and the booming Edo bell did not reckon elapse in any mutually comprehensible way. The fatuous invention of human schemes intended to grapple with abstractions such as time have in fact only spawned incommensurable assessments of what was originally a shared experience.[97]

In citing the bell, Shunkō further recalls the opening of the great medieval battle epic *The Tales of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*), familiar from the recitations of itinerant narrators. The *Heike* begins with the striking of the bell of the first Buddhist monastery, consecrated in far-off ancient India: "The bell of the Jetavana Vihara reverberates with the impermanence of all things," ran the evocative phrase.[98] The kapitan's bafflement at the Japanese tongue may be alleviated by his partial recognition of the sense of the bell, but that very bell informs the wiser

person that nothing can be known with certainty. All is vanity in Buddhism; not just power and glory, but every phenomenon corrodes. The noise of a temple bell dying away to nothing was a standard symbol of enlightenment (*satori*), a state of Buddhist awakening which, correctly defined, is precisely the recognition that no sense or logic is ever fixed, and that all existence is flux. From the reference to Europeans' hopeless attempts to knock at the door of Japanese language, Shunkō leads the reader towards a musing on the ultimate inauthenticity of utterance.

Kyoka and senryu rose to prominence in the later part of the eighteenth century. The first major anthology of senryu was the multi-volume *Willow Tub* (*Yanagi daru*), published from 1765. This was also the dawn of the age of *Rangaku*. Senryu, kyoka, and *Rangaku* are three sherds of the broken eighteenth-century consciousness.[99] A fourth may be added: kibyoshi, or "yellow covers" (books so-called for the garish hue of their jackets), and a genre of particular use in the present study. Kibyoshi are short pieces of prose fiction, some dozen or score of pages long, in which text and illustration are intermingled (like a modern comic), with neither the pictures nor the words attaining independent existence. Word and image unite to attack the plot in a sort of scissor action, approaching from opposite angles. Kibyoshi typically hurry the reader through a series of events that can barely be analysed as a story, for they deliberately avoid amounting to anything that constitutes normal sense. The books scatter across competing spheres, picking up random elements and joining them by chance clips of sound association, physical shape and so on, but never by narrative. A joining element (*shukō*) provides the means of movement through a book that is otherwise utterly resistant to placement. Kibyoshi are specious confluences, like a nervous system working with demented synapses.

Onitake, Kunenbō, Chūryō, Kyōden, and Sanba (all mentioned above) wrote kibyoshi often. The genre is said to have been invented in 1775 by Koikawa Harumachi. Harumachi's real name was Kurahashi Itaru, and he was a senior samurai; the following year he became High Commissioner in Edo (*rusui-yaku*) to his daimyo, the lord of Suruga-Ojima.[100] The convivial Harumachi was an associate of another writer, Hōseidō Kisanji (they sometimes co-authored). Kisanji's real name was Hirasawa Tsunemasa; he was also a High Commissioner, and for none other than the Hollandomaniac daimyo of Akita, Satake Yoshiatsu. Kisanji showered comedy in both kibyoshi and kyoka upon Lord Satake's Dutch inquiries, which far from causing offence, probably led to promotions.[101]

Harumachi and Kisanji were too important to meet merchant-class people anywhere other than in places of removal like the Yoshiwara, but once there, *Ran* provided a shared interest; both knew the lower-ranking circles of Kyōden (whose brother Kyōzan was also a fictionalist) and Kyōden's protégé (Kunenbō's friend), Takizawa Bakin. Kyōden, Sanba, and Bakin, together with a fourth writer, Jippensha Ikku, were to dominate kibyoshi, and, in the nineteenth century, the longer fictional genres of gokan and yomihon.

Kibyoshi were rapidly printed, cheap, and written virtually without ideograms so as to be readable by almost everyone. They are arguably the single largest source of information on the fashionable and popularised culture of the late eighteenth century. Being illustrated, they had an immediacy that propelled, with dartlike aim, matters of elite concern out into the heart of the populace. Kibyoshi illustrations are in woodblock, and many of the names of those who designed them will be familiar to enthusiasts of the Japanese print – or "pictures of the Floating World" (*ukiyo-e*), as they were generically called: the Torii school; Kitao Shigemasa and his followers, especially Masayoshi; Shunshō's pupil Shunchō; Utamaro and his pupil Tsukimaro; Chōki; Hokusai; and the Utagawa school artist Toyokuni. Many practitioners crossed media boundaries too, and Ikku and Hokusai wrote kibyoshi as well as illustrating them. Kubo Shunman, a samurai and print artist (famous for being left-handed) was also a kibyoshi writer under the name of Nandaka Shiran ("I'm clueless"); he had studied prints under Shigemasa and become close to his fellow pupil Kyōden who was equally famous as print-maker and writer, taking the art name Kitao Masanobu. Even Shigemasa tried his hand at fiction taking the name Hatake no Dojin Maimosuke ("Muddy man from the fields – a real potato"). It is further suggested that Harumachi the storywriter's and Utamaro the artist's successor were one and the same person (the two masters having anyway met as students of the celebrated iconographer of ghosts, Toriyama Sekien). Chūryō may also have studied under Utamaro. The figures indeed form a very intricate knot.[102]

LET US CONCLUDE this scene-setting chapter with two pictures. Both show imported-goods shops (Figs. 6 and 7). In 1796, the veteran gazetteer Akisato Ritō published a guidebook to Osaka and its environs entitled *Illustrated Famous Places in Settsu* (*Settsu meisho zue*); the images were provided by Takehara Shunchōsai and others. Ritō mentioned a shop in Fushimichō, near the centre of Osaka, kept by a certain Hikida, under the name of the Parasol Hall (Kōmori-dō). Most people called it simply Tōkōmō-ya, the "Continental and Red-fur Shop." An impressive array of goods greeted the passer-by: glasses and ceramics, pots and furniture, ostrich feathers, and a static-electricity generator. In a cloud-shaped space above the illustration is a kyoka written horizontally in the Roman script. It is glossed phonetically to be readable in Japanese too, and runs:

> In our fair land too,
> Outlandish nonsense –
> And a shop for it.

7. Kubo Shunman, *Murano's Glassware Shop*, monochrome woodblock print; c. 1790. Kobe City Museum. *A sign lists the specialities as telescopes and 'Dutch glass items'.*

> Hikida really pulls the custom in
> Foreignness before their very eyes.[103]

The sideways lettering conveys Japanese words. It can be rational after all. But the verse is so full of puns that it is belief in a distinction between sense and its opposite that in fact becomes disreputable. Yet all this, the writer stresses, can be bought if you go to Osaka where "outlandish nonsense," foreign sound and meaning, is rendered material on the Japanese street.

Edo had an import shop too. Murano's Glasswares run by Minoya Heiroku. Its appearance was set down in about 1790 by Kubo Shunman. The Murano-ya sold lenses and mirrors (plain

and decorated), microscopes and telescopes, glasses, boxes, and pictures; in short, it dealt in the full apparatus of supra-intuitive vision and its record. The shop offered a greatly intensified gaze, calibrated to break apart expectations. A man and woman pause, hesitating whether to buy or to forgo as they read the sign, "All Manner of Dutch Glassware."

This book is about *seeing* the foreign, purchasing it, taking it home, and depositing its claims, to turn new understandings thus reached onto the world around. The Japanese imperative to see was not the same as that familiar to the Western scientist. It was derived from the moral structure of Edo, a system badly cracking by the late eighteenth century. What was to be had through the instruments of vision was once called, by Sanba, the "Red-fur gaze."[104]