

## Chapter VI

# Communicating with the Japanese under *Sakoku*: Dutch Letters of Complaint and Attempts to Learn Japanese

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Complaining has been called a favorite pastime of the Netherlands, despite the fact that Dutch people consistently score highly in international surveys regarding levels of happiness. Would these two facts imply inversely that taking away the Dutch right to complain would render them more miserable? This seems to have been what happened after merchants of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were ordered in 1641 by the Japanese authorities to move their factory from Hirado to the well-guarded, man-made island of Deshima in Nagasaki. This compulsory relocation of the Dutch from Hirado, where the factory had operated since 1609, was part of a series of measures taken in closing the country. These measures were initially aimed at isolating Roman Catholics from the Japanese population as a threat to the authority of the Tokugawa *shōgun* and placing foreign trade directly under shogunal control. Consequently, by 1639 the only foreign traders residing in Japan were Dutch and Chinese.

Then, from the 1670s onwards, especially after the establishment of new trade regulations in 1672, cases of Dutch and Chinese smuggling detrimental to the fiscal health of both the city of Nagasaki and the shogunate provided another incentive to increase the segregation that existed between the remaining foreigners and the Japanese people. For the Dutch, these measures worked to increasingly obstruct and confuse their direct paths to top Japanese authorities, rendering them almost totally incapable of voicing their wishes and issuing complaints. The resulting non-transparency of the whole Japanese decision-making network became a major source of frustration for the Dutch during their stay on Deshima.

This article will discuss several attempts that were made to clear up this lack of transparency and the troublesome ways in which the Dutch were forced to communicate with the Japanese, focusing on three seventeenth century letters of appeal sent directly by Dutch authorities to the rulers of Japan.<sup>1</sup> These letters, which were prompted by the new Japanese trade regulations, went so far as to threaten the abandonment of trade with Japan altogether. While the aim of all three

letters was identical, they differed in both form and method of delivery, and evoked varying responses. A detailed description of their background and fate in Japan will hopefully show clearly the different, sometimes conflicting, ways in which the Dutch and Japanese communicated during that time.

## 1. Historical Setting

### *A. Dutch Complaints: The Official Route*

Shortly after the Dutch removal to Deshima in 1641, many new regulations were implemented concerning both trade procedures and aspects of daily life. The Dutch were explicitly told to refrain from appealing any of these regulations,<sup>2</sup> although for once there was plenty to complain about, since overnight the carefree life enjoyed by all in Hirado had abruptly come to an end, and contact with the Japanese had been strictly limited to only persons officially approved by the shogunate authorities, including their language interpreters, whose position and composition underwent drastic changes.<sup>3</sup> In Hirado, a variety of Dutch, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese

<sup>1</sup> Similar letters exist for the eighteenth and nineteenth century, including the famous letter of 1844 by William II to the *shōgun*. They were all written to find out the real intentions of the Japanese authorities. See Matsukata Fuyuko, *Oranda fūsetsugaki to kinsei Nihon* [Dutch reporting of world news during the Tokugawa period, 1641–1859] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2007), 175–208 and Germain F. Meijlan, *Geschiedkundig overzicht van den handel der Europeanen op Japan* [Historical overview of European trade with Japan] (Batavia: Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1833), chap. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Aug. 11, 1641 (NFJ 55). An integral transcription and Japanese translation of the Hirado and Deshima *Dagregisters* 1633–1649 is contained in The Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo, ed., *Nihon kankei kaigai shiryō: Oranda shōkanchō nikki* (henceforth cited as *Oranda shōkanchō nikki*) [Historical documents in foreign languages relating to Japan: Diaries kept by the heads of the Dutch factory in Japan], original texts: vols. 1–11, Japanese translation: vols. 1–10 (Tokyo: The Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo, 1974–2007). For the general contents of the Deshima *Dagregisters* 1641–1660 see C. Viallé and L. Blussé, eds., *The Deshima Dagregisters*, vol. 11, 1641–1650 and vol. 12, 1650–1660, *Intercontinenta* 23, 25 (Leiden: Institute for the History of European Expansion, 2001, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> For a general review, see Katagiri Kazuo, *Oranda tsūji no kenkyū* [A study of the Japanese interpreters of Dutch] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985) and for the changing position of the interpreters throughout the *sakoku* period, see Matsui Yōko, “Nagasaki ni okeru Oranda tsūji-shoku no keisei katei: Orandago shiryō ni miru ‘ko-tsūji’ no seiritsu made [The formation of the Japanese interpreters of Dutch in Nagasaki until the development of so-called junior interpreters, as seen in Dutch sources],” *Nichiran gakkai kaishi* 21, no. 2 (1997): 1–20 and “Edo jidai Deshima ni okeru Nichiran kankei no ninaitetachi [The carriers of Japanese-Dutch relations on Deshima in the Edo period],” in *Yūrasia ni*

(some of whom were Christians) had served as regular or occasional interpreters and mediators,<sup>4</sup> all of whom had been hired directly by the Dutch. Some of them had even acted as representatives for the VOC, while pursuing their own mercantile affairs. They were regarded as “corporate communications” experts on Japanese etiquette, functioning to protect the Dutch from committing *faux pas* in their public relations efforts towards their hosts. This setup did not differ all that much from the situation in other non-European ports frequented by European merchants at the time.<sup>5</sup>

However, upon being moved to Nagasaki, the Dutch were forced, at least in their official communication channels, to make use of a select group of finely screened Japanese interpreters bound by oath to report any suspicious movements, refrain from discussing Christianity and abstain from any private contacts with them.<sup>6</sup> These professional interpreters (*Oranda tsūji*) were Nagasaki-based officials working under close surveillance of the governor (Nagasaki *bugyō*), and thus had to toe the Japanese line in all their dealings with the Dutch. It was solely through this frontline and lowest rank of a strictly prescribed chain of intermediary officials that the Dutch were forced to convey their wishes higher up that chain. Any attempt to bypass even one of its links was severely resisted and created much ill-will, and direct appeals to the top ranking officials or to the *shōgun* himself were, at least formally, out of the question. After all, such an action on the part of a Japanese subject<sup>7</sup> would have been a capital offense.

*okeru bunka no kōryū to tenpen* [Changes in cultural exchange in Eurasia], ed. Haneda Masashi, Report of the Institute for oriental culture Tokyo University (Tokyo: The Institute of Oriental Culture, The University of Tokyo, 2007), 147–161.

<sup>4</sup> Katō Ei'ichi, “Tsūji no shakaishi: Oranda tsūji izen [A social history of the interpreters: Before the formation of interpreters of Dutch],” *Narutaki kiyō* 3 (1993): 51–79; Katō Ei'ichi, “Hirado Oranda shōkan Nihonjin tsūji Sadakata Riemon kō [Sadakata Riemon, an interpreter at the Dutch trading post in Hirado]” and “Hirado Oranda shōkan no Nihonjin koyōsha ni tsuite [Japanese servants at the Dutch trading post in Hirado],” in *Bakuhansei kokka no seiritsu to taigai kankei* [The formation of a *bakuhan*-system state in the Edo period and its foreign relations] (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1998), 340–390 and 296–339.

<sup>5</sup> See Haneda Masashi, “Bandare Abbāsu no Higashi-Indo-gaisha shōkan to tsūyaku [The VOC trading post in Bandar Abbas and the interpreters],” in *Minato-machi ni ikiru* [Life in port cities], ed. Rekishi-gaku Kenkyūkai, *Minato-machi no sekai-shi* 3 (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 2006), 95–123.

<sup>6</sup> For the Japanese text of the oath, see Hayashi Fukusai, ed., *Tsūkō ichiran* [Compilation of reference materials on Japan's overseas relations] (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1912–1913; repr., Osaka: Seibundō, 1967), vol. 4, bk. 148, 181–182. For Engelbert Kaempfer's detailed description (bk. 4, chap. 6), see Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, ed., trans., and annot., *Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed by Engelbert Kaempfer* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 195–200.

<sup>7</sup> In Japanese, *jikiso* (direct petitioning). See Hiramatsu Yoshirō, *Kinsei keiji soshō-hō no kenkyū* [A study of criminal lawsuits in the Edo period] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1960), 33–64.

Officially, all Dutch requests, including complaints, first had to be transmitted to one of the two so-called “*nenban tsūji*” (interpreters for the Dutch appointed on a yearly rotation basis), whose task it was to forward what was said, more times than not in a diluted form, to the *bugyōsho* (governor’s office). In practice, requests were most frequently handed over to the *karō* (governor’s secretary), but some were discussed with the *otona* (head of Deshima ward) or the *nenban machidoshiyori* (on duty Nagasaki burgomaster), who often used that occasion to bargain over the contents before submittal to the governor. If the matter reached beyond the authority of the governor, he would report it to his colleague in Edo, who could pass it on to the senior councilors, the group who wielded the greatest amount of political power in the shogunate, but were completely shielded by thick layers of intermediary officials.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the Dutch were often quite correct in doubting how successful making such appeals would be, for only in rare cases did they reach the ears of the *shōgun*.

During the Hirado years, the *daimyō* (feudal lord) of Hirado had been relatively approachable and occasionally acted as a spokesman for the Dutch before the shogunate.<sup>9</sup> After 1641, such avenues were closed off, at least formally, but in practice, the function of spokesman was taken over in part by Inoue Chikugo-no-kami Masashige, one of the *ōmetsuke* (first inspectors-general) in charge of religious affairs (*shūmon aratame*), who was in direct contact with the senior councilors and the *shōgun*.<sup>10</sup> He had been the official in charge of the move from Hirado to Deshima and seems to have been personally interested in the fate of the Dutch. He and his successors employed personal Japanese interpreters fluent in Portuguese, a language which most Dutch could understand.<sup>11</sup> In general, filing complaints in

<sup>8</sup> Concerning the transmission of communications downwards, see Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Sakoku to kaikin no jidai* [Sakoku and the age of maritime prohibitions] (Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1995), 57–67.

<sup>9</sup> Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Kan’ei jidai* [The Kan’ei era] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1989), 28–30. On Sep. 22, 1639, the *opperhoofd* was also told explicitly to transmit requests to Edo via the lord of Hirado. See also the Hirado *Dagregisters* for Sep. 1633–Oct. 1641 (NFJ 53–55).

<sup>10</sup> Nagazumi Yōko, “Orandajin no hogosha to shite no Inoue Chikugo-no-kami Masashige [Chikugo-no-kami, the guardian of the Dutch],” *Nihon rekishi* 327 (Aug. 1975): 1–17; Leonard Blussé in his introduction to *The Deshima Dagregisters*, vol. 11, 1641–1650, vi–xi; Leonard Blussé, “The Grand Inquisitor Inoue Chikugo no kami Masashige, Spin Doctor of the Tokugawa *Bakufu*,” *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 7 (2003): 23–43.

<sup>11</sup> Nagazumi Yōko, “Foreign Intelligence and Its Interpreters,” in *Engelbert Kaempfer: Werk und Wirkung, Vorträge der Symposien in Lemgo (19.–22. 9. 1990) und in Tokyo (15.–18. 12. 1990)*, ed. Detlef Haberland (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), 30–38; and Katagiri Kazuo, “Oranda tsūji Nishi Kichibei oyako ni tsuite: Nanban/Oranda tsūji to igaku kenshū/kyōju [The Dutch interpreters, father and son Nishi Kichibei: Namban and Dutch

the proper way from below was both slow and hazardous, especially when they contained criticism of the intermediary links en route to the top, or when their form or substance ran counter to Japanese “shogunal” or “the Japanese way.”

### *B. The Unofficial Route*

In contrast to the official route (*omote* in Japanese, *buitenkant* in Dutch) described above, there was an unofficial way of handling things (*naishō*, or *binnenkant*), in which control over foreigners, and to a certain extent over the Japanese involved with them, was far looser than what the bureaucracy in Edo would have liked. Similarly, there were several unofficial means to seek redress more efficiently, such as sending letters of appeal directly or using secret intermediaries. Many of the lower level Dutch factory staff members or household servants, who did not have to rotate on a yearly basis, unlike the *opperhoofd* (factory head), became quite fluent in Japanese and were used as interpreters during such unofficial encounters. On the other hand, there were times when unconventional confidential communication was initiated by high ranking Japanese officials, who either doubted the reliability of the official interpreters and/or wanted more direct involvement in the internal affairs of Nagasaki.<sup>12</sup> In such cases, lower ranking Japanese interpreters would be employed. The *opperhoofd* himself would initiate discrete communication to either gather information or express his real intentions in an uncensored manner,<sup>13</sup> and knowledge of Japanese could obviously also be employed in the shadier transactions conducted with Japanese partners.

Thus, contact between the Dutch and the Japanese could be close; and in fact, such contact, including friendships, was much more intimately entwined than officially supposed. It was also not uncommon for the interpreters or burgomasters to side with the Dutch, because their livelihood depended largely on thriving trade with them.<sup>14</sup> This was also true to a certain degree for the governor of Nagasaki, who

interpreters and the learning and teaching of medicine],” in *Sakoku Nihon to kokusai kōryū* [Japan in the *sakoku* period and international relations], ed. Yanai Kenji (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1988), vol. 2, 197–217.

<sup>12</sup> For example, there was Namura Naosaburō, the trusted informer of *Opperhoofd* Isaac Titsingh, who was used in secret communications with the governor of Nagasaki, Kuze Tango-no-kami Hirokami. See Isabel Tanaka-van Daalen, “Titsingh no ‘fukushin no keiko-tsūji’ no nazo [The mystery of Titsingh’s trusted apprentice-interpreter],” *Nichiran gakkai tsūshin* 82 (1998): 1–4 and Isabel Tanaka-van Daalen, “The Shizuki Family of Nagasaki Interpreters in Dutch Sources,” *Journal of the Japan-Netherlands Institute* 9 (2008): 161–163.

<sup>13</sup> For example, in the case of Titsingh and Kuze Tango-no-kami cited in note 12.

<sup>14</sup> See the 1642 communications and the letter by Burgomaster Ebiya Shirōemon and Matsui, “Edo jidai Deshima ni okeru Nichiran kankei no ninaitetachi,” 155–157.

sometimes favored local interests over those of Edo and made decisions without reporting them to the capital.<sup>15</sup> Such internal political and historical developments should be kept in mind when discussing direct letters of appeal initiated by the Dutch.

## 2. Governor-General Van Diemen's Letter of 1642

### A. Content and Form

The first of the three letters to be discussed in this chapter was written by Anthonio van Diemen, governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, to the councilors of Japan and dated June 28, 1642.<sup>16</sup> Its purpose was, according to Pieter van Dam, a lawyer and author of a historical account of the VOC written between 1693 and 1701, “to show them their unreasonableness and their humiliating and despicable behavior in regard to the additional restrictions and regulations [of 1641] and to ask for an explanation of these peculiar and outrageous actions, stressing the continuing willingness of the Dutch to obey all the *shōgun*'s orders.”<sup>17</sup> The original letter was in fact more politely worded than Van Dam suggests, but still contained hints that there was the remote possibility that the Dutch would be forced to leave Japan altogether. The letter begins with a lengthy account of the recent state of affairs being experienced by the Dutch in Japan and recommendations for their improvement, followed by an explicit request by the governor-general to the councilors to convey the letter's content to the *shōgun* and to see to it that the Dutch be granted their former freedoms, including the right to practice their religion discretely. The letter also refers to the *gossinck* (*goshuin*), a trade permit sealed by *Shōgun* Tokugawa Ieyasu and guaranteeing the Dutch freedom to trade. The *gossinck* issued by Ieyasu and by his son Hidetada were to be cited over and over as the major proof to claim that the Dutch had been promised such freedoms by the founder of the shogunate

<sup>15</sup> For example, the identity of a cast-away ship in 1802 from Macao (the base of the Portuguese) was changed in the reports to Edo to a ship from Ambon. (Matsui, “Edo jidai Deshima ni okeru Nichiran kankei no ninaitetachi,” 156.)

<sup>16</sup> For the Japanese text and a comparison with the Dutch text, see Kanai Madoka, “Hantenman soshōjō-kō [On the letter by Van Diemen],” in Yanai, vol. 1, 355–394. (See also a.o. appendix 3 in *Nagasaki-shishi: Tsūkō-bōeki-hen Seiyō shokoku-bu* [History of Nagasaki City: Traffic and trade, related to Western countries], ed. Nagasaki Shiyakusho [Nagasaki: Nagasaki Shiyakusho, 1935], 98–119.) For the Dutch text, see Batavia's *Uitgaand Briefboek* (henceforth cited as BUB), VOC 866, fols. 371–380. See also appendix 4 to *Oranda shōkanchō nikki*, original texts of 1641/1642, vol. 6, 197–210.

<sup>17</sup> Pieter van Dam, *Beschrijvinge van de Oost-Indische Compagnie*, ed. F. W. Stapel, vol. 2, bk. 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1932), 374.

and his heir.<sup>18</sup>

The letter also states, “we were guarded on the Island [Deshima] and *not allowed to speak with anyone*,” an exaggeration that might be the source of the misunderstanding persistent even today that the Dutch were banned from learning Japanese.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese officials who dealt with the letter at the time also took issue with the statement, since, for example, among the five Dutchmen allowed to remain in Japan at the end of 1641, was a steward’s mate by the name of Hicke Essert, who was chosen to stay precisely because he was fairly proficient in Japanese.<sup>20</sup>

One copy of the Dutch text was made for reference, in case the *opperhoofd* would be questioned about its content, and a Portuguese translation was also done in Batavia to be shown to “trustworthy friends” in Japan enabling them to check the original Dutch-Japanese translation.<sup>21</sup> The translator was Josa Sōemon, a major Japanese trader based in Cambodia, who had connections with the Dutch in both Batavia and Japan.<sup>22</sup> The Japanese version is written on Japanese paper in a slightly archaic, official style and dated (according to the Japanese calendar) one day later than the Dutch original, presumably due to the time required for translating.<sup>23</sup> The translator has changed the composition and added several other adaptations in order to make the letter more palatable to Japanese officials.<sup>24</sup> This was accompanied by a letter of the same date for the governor of Nagasaki, containing a request for

<sup>18</sup> These trade passes are Nos. 1a and 1b in the NFJ archive in the microfilm version held in The Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo catalogued under *Verschillende oude stukken*. For its English text, see Bodart-Bailey, 229–231.

<sup>19</sup> Also cited by Van Dam, 372. Carl Peter Thunberg also states “The government permits no foreigners to learn their language, in order that by means of it they may not pick up any knowledge of the country (...)” (Timon Screech, intro. and annot., *Japan Extolled and Decried: Carl Peter Thunberg and the Shogun’s Realm, 1775–1796* [London and New York: Routledge, 2005], 91).

<sup>20</sup> *Deshima Dagregister*, Sep. 23, 1643 (NFJ 57).

<sup>21</sup> The accompanying June 28 letter by the governor-general to the *opperhoofd* is contained in the BUB, VOC 866, fols. 352–371 and in the *Affgaande [en ontfangen] brieven 1641–1642* (NFJ 279). See also appendix 3 to *Oranda shōkanchō nikki*, original texts of 1641/1642, vol. 6, 169–196.

<sup>22</sup> See Iwao Sei’ichi, *Nan’yō Nihonmachi no kenkyū* [The study of Japanese settlements in South-east Asia] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), 123.

<sup>23</sup> Still extant in triplicate in the National Archive in The Hague. For the original Japanese letters to the councilors, see NFJ 635 in the microfilm version catalogued under *Verschillende oude stukken*. The Dutch copy was filed in an account book from c.1720 (NFJ 1464).

<sup>24</sup> These facts have already been pointed out by the late professor Kanai (Kanai, “Hantenman soshōjō-kō,” 362–393), who painstakingly compared all the different versions; further analysis of the text will therefore be omitted here.

assistance in delivering the first letter.<sup>25</sup> The letters was placed in square sandalwood boxes, one wrapped in Dutch and the other in Chinese gold cloth.<sup>26</sup>

### *B. The Japanese Reactions*

Between August 25, when the letters arrived at Deshima, until October 27, when the *opperhoofd* stated at his farewell meeting at Gouvernements House that the Dutch had decided not to take the letter to the councilors in Edo, everyone involved were kept very busy checking and probing their contents and, it seems, trying to discourage the Dutch from delivering them. It was Burgomaster Ebiya Shirōemon and the official interpreters who acted as intermediaries between the Dutch and the governor, who was mostly disturbed about certain points in the letter bound for Edo concerning himself that would not be taken kindly at court.<sup>27</sup> The exceptional length of the letter was another problem. The Dutch were told that it would have been much better to have used the interpreters to make their requests to a *metsuke* (shogunal inspector) in Nagasaki, who would then have explained their meaning to the councilors in Edo. Such a procedure would have eliminated both fear of misunderstanding and breaches of etiquette. However, the main objection to forwarding the letter to the councilors was the request concerning religious practice, although the governor graciously allowed the Dutch to “practice in their hearts.”<sup>28</sup>

It is very likely that a copy was made of the Japanese version at the time when the originals were entrusted to the governor’s office for a day on August 28. Two days later, Shirōemon was sent to Deshima with a list of points to be clarified. The clarifications were to be sent to Edo, together with a copy of the letter, probably to be handed to the Nagasaki governor in residence there. The third point asks, “Why does the letter state that the Dutch are not allowed to speak with the Japanese when they are trading? This is contrary to fact.” The Dutch version reads “*not allowed to speak with anyone*,” and “*when they are trading*” was probably added by the interpreters. The *opperhoofd*’s clarification was a flat denial of the statement, in either form, saying, “...for how would mutes conduct trade? We only meant to say, that...no one is allowed to speak to us *freely*.” On September 5, the interpreters came to check a copy of the Japanese version with the Dutch original to further verify some points which had irked the governor. One was that the letter said the

<sup>25</sup> For the Dutch text, see BUB, VOC 866, fols. 381–382 or *Affgaande [en ontfangen] brieven 1641–1642* (NFJ 279). See also appendix 5 to *Oranda shōkanchō nikki*, original texts of 1641/1642, vol. 6, 211–213; for the Japanese transcription, see NFJ 634 or Kanai, *Nichiran kōshōshi no kenkyū*, 377–379.

<sup>26</sup> *Register van de papieren* in BUB, VOC 866, fols. 382–384.

<sup>27</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Aug. 28 and 29, 1642 (NFJ 56).

<sup>28</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Aug. 30, 1642 (NFJ 56).

Dutch had never violated the *shōgun*'s orders, while requesting freedom of religion, which was against the *shōgun*'s will. In defense, the *opperhoofd* replied that that request was made merely to sound out the true intent of the order; and if it turned out that the order forbade all religious practice, the Dutch would obey it to the letter. These are only two examples of the kind of tiresome reasoning that plagued both sides. In any case, the reports written by the *opperhoofd* and a confidential letter from Shirōemon to the governor-general explaining Japanese custom and giving advice on how to proceed in the future convinced Batavia not to push the delivery of the letter any further.<sup>29</sup> Shirōemon had also recommended that the Dutch wait a few years and become more acquainted with Japanese ways before appealing the trade regulations anew. Refraining from practicing Christianity openly would be one of the most effective conditions in order for the Company to “grow into a thick trunk from which many sprigs will sprout for eternity.”

During their audience in Edo, where they ironically arrived on Christmas Eve, the Dutch made no direct reference to the governor-general's letter of appeal, but there are indications that Inoue, and maybe other officials in Edo, were familiar with its content,<sup>30</sup> although no original copies of the Japanese version had been brought to Edo by the *opperhoofd*. In the years following, several of the restrictions would be relaxed, partly due to the intervention of Inoue, but it remains problematic how much the 1642 letter had to do with the changes.

### 3. Governor-General Maetsuijcker's Letter of 1675

#### A. Content

The next direct letter of appeal on behalf of the Dutch residing in Japan was written on June 25, 1675, by Governor-General Joan Maetsuijcker in protest over yet another new set of trade regulations, known as *taxatiehandel*, or *shihō* (*kamotsu*) *shōbai*. It was addressed to the governor of Nagasaki expressing hope that trade would be restored to its former system.<sup>31</sup> The new system, which had been imposed

<sup>29</sup> For the 1642 letter from Shirōemon to A. van Diemen, see *Overgekomen Brieven 1643*, bk. 4, fols. 36–38. (VOC 1141) See also appendix 7 to *Oranda shōkanchō nikki*, original texts of 1642/1643, vol. 7, 229–232; for the letters of 1643 from Van Diemen to *Opperhoofd* A. Overtwater and to Shirōemon see BUB, VOC 867, fols. 201–205 and 208–212, or *Ontfangen en affgesondene brieven 1643* (NFJ 280). See also appendix 4, 211–216 and appendix 6 to *Oranda shōkanchō nikki*, original texts of 1642/1643, 221–226.

<sup>30</sup> *Deshima Dagregister*, Jan. 19, 1643 (NFJ 57).

<sup>31</sup> For the Dutch text, see the BUB, VOC 899, fols. 197–199, or the supplement to the letter by J. Maetsuijcker to M. Ca[e]sar, June 25, 1675, in *Aenkomende brieven 1674/1675* (NFJ 306). See also *Dagh-register Batavia 1675*, 156–157 and Van Dam, 454–456.

on Nagasaki by the shogunate in 1672 in order to stem the outflow of silver bullion from Japan, ordered that import prices be fixed by a few representatives selected from the merchants (many Nagasaki-based), who had been designated by the shogunate to conduct the Nagasaki trade (*gokasho shōnin*). Import goods were to be bought from the VOC at these fixed prices and then sold to the highest bidders among all the designated merchants. The difference between purchase price and auction price was to be shared among these merchants (according to their trade shares) and the residents of Nagasaki. The VOC responded to the system by reducing its cargoes in hope that import scarcity would help raise prices, but the Chinese did the opposite by increasing the volume of imports to maintain their profits.<sup>32</sup>

Maetsuijcker's letter goes on to claim "the persuasion that [the VOC] was being served badly and deceived by the Japanese interpreters."<sup>33</sup> The year 1672 had also been marked by several clashes between the *opperhoofd* and the interpreters over what the former considered unsatisfactory translating, but the *opperhoofd* decided not to file any complaints, because they "would have to be translated by the very culprits, who would do everything in their power to take revenge."<sup>34</sup> During the journey to Edo later that year, arguments over the distribution of gifts and their transport cost became so heated that one interpreter drew his sword and threatened one of the VOC servants, a sure sign that constant nagging on the part of the Dutch had taken its toll on Japanese nerves.<sup>35</sup> The "*quaat bedrijf*" (bad doings) of the interpreters mentioned in the letter include treating the *opperhoofden* disrespectfully, not being as helpful as before<sup>36</sup> and covering up misdemeanors

<sup>32</sup> This rendered the valuation system useless and in 1685 it was replaced by another new system, called *limitatiehandel*, or *jōdaka shōbai*, imposing a maximum price on imports into Japan. Profits for the city were now reaped from the taxes paid by the Japanese buyers of foreign products, as well as on the exchange rate of the *koban* gold coins for export. For the foreign traders, both systems meant a substantial loss of profit, and in both systems clandestine import became lucrative. Nagasaki Kenshi Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Nagasaki kenshi: Taigai kōshō-hen* [The history of the prefecture of Nagasaki: Volume of foreign diplomacy] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1985), 297–312; Nagazumi Yōko, "Nagasaki bugyō to shihō shōbai [The governor of Nagasaki and the taxation trade]," in Yanai, vol. 2, 1–27; Ōoka Kiyosuke, *Kiyō gundan* [Nagasaki miscellanea], ed. Nakamura Tadashi and Nakata Yasunao (Tokyo: Kondō Shuppan, 1974), 42–43, 75–76; "Nagasaki-ki [Records of Nagasaki]," in *Kinsei Nagasaki, Taigai kankei shiryō* [Historical sources on foreign relations in early modern Nagasaki], ed. Ōta Katsuya (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 2007), 458–460.

<sup>33</sup> *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia... 1675*, ed. J. A. van der Chijs (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1902), 128.

<sup>34</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Feb. 12, 1672 (NFJ 85).

<sup>35</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Apr. 6, 1672 (NFJ 85).

<sup>36</sup> This refers to one Shizuki Magobei, who at that time was the only interpreter fluent in Dutch, who mediated in the purchase of copper and campher for the Company. It seems

committed by other Japanese on Deshima by not reporting them to the officials. Maetsuijcker concludes, “Is it not strange that we are well-treated and honored by eminent and distinguished gentlemen, but are vilified by low people, like the interpreters? Nowhere else in the Indies does such treatment befall us.” As one remedy to the situation, the governor-general proposed that several Dutchmen would be allowed to learn Japanese, “*as was the custom in Japan in former times,*” and allowed to act independently of the interpreters, who lacked full knowledge of Dutch. Only then would the Dutch be able to state their wishes comprehensively and learn the real intentions of the Japanese government, as long as no Dutchmen fluent in Japanese be ordered to leave the country as had been the case in 1669 and 1670.<sup>37</sup>

### B. Form

Given the 1642 experience, this letter was considerably shorter, and on the advice of former *opperhoofd* Johannes Camphuijs, the letter was sent in triplicate, in case the interpreters tried to conceal the original.<sup>38</sup> The accompanying Japanese translation<sup>39</sup> is written on colored Japanese paper, decorated with tulip-like flowers and gold sprinkles.<sup>40</sup> Its style which is predominated by the phonetic *hiragana* script is more typical for correspondence between women and very uncommon for bureaucrats. It takes the form of a petition, entitled *sojō* and begins with the phrase “*katajike naku*” (in all humility and deference). It is dated according to the Japanese calendar, as 28th day of the fifth month of the third year of Enpō

that he put his own business ahead of the VOC’s, and thus fell from favor. See Tanaka-van Daalen, “The Shizuki Family of Nagasaki Interpreters in Dutch Sources,” 157–160.

<sup>37</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Oct. 6, 1669, and Oct. 26 and 31, 1670 (NFJ 82, 83).

<sup>38</sup> Letter by J. Maetsuijcker to M. Ca[e]sar, June 25, 1675 in BUB, VOC 899, fol. 196. See also *Aenkomende brieven 1674/1675* (NFJ 306).

<sup>39</sup> The Japanese original in duplicate can be found in NFJ 636 in *Verschillende oude stukken*. For a Japanese transcription, see Kanai, *Nichiran kōshōshi no kenkyū*, 381–383. Also in “Nagasaki oyakusho-dome [Notes of the Nagasaki government house],” II, in Ōta, 89–91; *Tsūkō ichiran*, vol. 4, bk. 157, 297–299 (with illustration of the folded letter) and in the Kanai Toshiyuki, ed., *Zōho Nagasaki ryakushi* [The enlarged short history of Nagasaki], vol. 2, Nagasaki Sōsho 4 (Nagasaki: Nagasaki Shiyakusho, 1926), bk. 29, 409–411. (adapted transcription)

<sup>40</sup> There is an order made by the governor-general for “4 to 500 sheets of non-blurring Japanese paper, with flowers like on the paper from Surat, used for letters to kings and other dignitaries. The cheaper Japanese paper is for lesser dignitaries.” He also sent a specimen of Japanese paper, “*as received several years ago*” and of Surat paper to copy the flower pattern. (Letter by J. Camphuijs to H. van Buijtenhem, June 29, 1685, in BUB, VOC 912, fols. 416–417, or *Aangekomene brieven 1685* [NFJ 316].) See also note 61.

(July 20, 1675, by the Gregorian calendar), or one month after the letter departed Batavia for Japan on June 26.<sup>41</sup> The reason for the incorrect Japanese date is that an intercalary fourth month had been added to the calendar of that year to follow the regular fourth month. The 28th day of the intercalary month, or June 21, makes more sense, since the Dutch version is dated June 25, although the text must have been composed earlier, sometime shortly after June 11, when the council of the East Indies decided to write the letter and allow time to prepare the translation.<sup>42</sup> The translation, originally wrapped in red worsted cloth,<sup>43</sup> is simply signed “Joan Maetsuijker” and stamped in red wax with the VOC seal.

### C. The Japanese Responses

The letter was brought to Deshima by the interpreters on August 19, after having been checked and stamped by the governor of Nagasaki himself, who had kept the Japanese copy that had been addressed to him. The interpreters, who had heard independently of the arrival of the letter, asked the *opperhoofd* several times about its content, but for obvious reasons he did not deem it necessary to enlighten them.<sup>44</sup> On this occasion the governor in Nagasaki seems to have played a more active role in the letter’s handling. By September 17, the *opperhoofd* had already heard “from aside” that rumor had it that the governor did not understand its content, because of its feminine style, “thought to be [written by] *Juffrouw* (Miss) Zijmonsz.” Moreover, it had not been composed in the current Japanese fashion, probably referring to the predominance of *hiragana*. Consequently, the governor had had “friends of Batavia” explain the meaning to him. Word had it that a rewritten copy of the letter had already been sent to Edo, and according to Van Dam, it was delivered directly to the councilors.<sup>45</sup> However, there is no historical proof that the letter ever reached Edo, as no direct reference to it can be found in any contemporary Japanese record pertaining to the central government. A copy of the whole text was inserted in *Nagasaki oyakusho-dome* under the heading “appeal from the governor-general in Batavia concerning the trade system” and in the *Tsūkō ichiran*, with no explanatory remarks.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Dagh-register Batavia 1675*, 172.

<sup>42</sup> *Dagh-register Batavia 1675*, 156.

<sup>43</sup> *Register der papieren* in BUB, VOC 899, fol. 201.

<sup>44</sup> *Deshima Dagregister*, Aug. 25 and 29, 1675 (NFJ 88).

<sup>45</sup> Van Dam, 455. See also the letter by J. Maetsuijcker to J. Camphuijs, June 8, 1676, in BUB, VOC 900, fol. 131, or *Ontfangene brieven 1676* (NFJ 307).

<sup>46</sup> See note 39. The text in the *Tsūkō ichiran* is taken from the *Gaiban shokan* [Barbarian letters] by the *bakufu* official Kondō Jūzō, who probably saw the original at the Government House, when he was attached to the governor of Nagasaki in 1795.

On September 30, the governor paid a personal visit to Deshima with some questions for the *opperhoofd* about the letter. He asked whether there were any Dutchmen around who could speak Japanese, to which the *opperhoofd* answered that at the moment no such person was present, because all of those who could had been deported for that very reason. The *opperhoofd* would later note in his diary that he was unsure whether the interpreters had translated the last part of his reply. Then on November 5, during their farewell audience at the governor's offices, the Dutch were read an announcement explaining the reasons for the new trade system, "which had been established only to benefit Dutch and Chinese traders." The complaints about the interpreters were also acknowledged, and they were told that the year before, the very capable interpreter [Yokoyama] Yosōemon had been put in charge of their affairs, and they would be allowed in the future to bring a proficient Japanese speaker with them or to have someone learn the language there on Deshima. This person was free to act as their interpreter, working together with the Japanese interpreters. A Dutch translation of the announcement was sent to Batavia,<sup>47</sup> with a part added at the end, probably by the interpreters, in defense of the accusations made against them,<sup>48</sup> denying that they had committed the "*quaat bedrijf*" in question knowingly and claiming that they themselves had often been subjected to excessive behavior on the part of the Dutch. The section goes on to promise that care would be taken in the future, provided that the *opperhoofd* order his staff to do the same. The translation itself was addressed to the "Honorable [Governor-] General" and simply signed "Dutch interpreters," while its container was sealed by only interpreters and the guards on duty, which casts doubt on its official status.

Despite rumors spread by Chinese arriving from Batavia about a Dutch person bound for Deshima who was proficient enough in Japanese to be used as an interpreter, no proof can be found in any VOC documents to verify its truth.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, the Dutch found that they had their hands full dealing with Yosōemon, their so-called "savior," who was given the Dutch nickname "*Brasman*" (guzzler) and had been caught short changing them on the costs of horses and porters during the journey to Edo that same year.<sup>50</sup> Upon the installation of the fifth *shōgun* in 1680, the Dutch discussed requesting a congratulatory envoy be sent from Batavia, but abandoned the idea, deciding that such an endeavor was not only expensive, but the person who would be dispatched would not be able to voice any complaint

<sup>47</sup> A copy of this announcement was sent back to Deshima for reference. See *Copij Translaat* of the 20th of the ninth month in *Ontfangene brieven 1676* (NFJ 307).

<sup>48</sup> For the Dutch text, see *Dagh-register Batavia 1675*, 337–338 and appendix 5 to Van Dam, 605–607 (abridged).

<sup>49</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, July 13, 1676 (NFJ 89).

<sup>50</sup> See Deshima *Dagregister* from Mar. 31, 1676 (NFJ 89).

about the taxation system.<sup>51</sup> During his visit to Edo in 1682, *Opperhoofd* Hendrick Canzius had already experienced how difficult it was to convey any critical remarks to the court, being told that parts of his address could not be translated, “because time did not permit.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the only solution to seeking redress was to send another direct letter of appeal.

#### *D. Juffrouw Zijmonsz*

If the casual remark in the Deshima Diary to the effect that the translation of the 1675 letter was Miss Zijmonsz is true, and there are many reasons to believe so, this would be a significant discovery, for Miss Zijmonsz is none other than Oharu, well-known as one of the authors of “*Jagatarabumi*” (Letters from Batavia),<sup>53</sup> a collection of missives sent to relatives in Japan by several women of mixed ethnic parentage, who had been expelled in 1639 as part of the *sakoku* policy, mostly together with their Japanese (Christian) mothers.<sup>54</sup> Oharu’s husband, Simon Simonsz van der Heijde(n), who was born in Hirado to a Japanese mother and Dutch father, became very successful after his arrival in Batavia, being quickly promoted to the position of *opperkoopman* (head merchant) and acting as an envoy for the VOC. He would become an independent Southeast Asian merchant.<sup>55</sup>

Although Oharu’s contribution to *Jagatarabumi* is not dated, it must have been between May 1672, when Simon died, and April 1697, the time of her own death,<sup>56</sup> considering that one of the extant copies is signed “Oharu, widow of Shinmonsu.”<sup>57</sup> During the Enpō period (1673–1680), only seven of the exiled women were still

<sup>51</sup> Van Dam, 446.

<sup>52</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Apr. 5, 1682 (NFJ 95).

<sup>53</sup> Iwao Sei’ichi, *Zoku Nan’yō Nihonmachi no kenkyū* [The study of Japanese settlements in South-east Asia continued] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987), 159–174. For publications in English, see Murakami Naojirō, “The Japanese at Batavia in the 17th Century,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 2, no. 2 (1939): 23–41; Iwao Sei’ichi, “Japanese Emigrants in Batavia during the 17th Century,” *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture* (Tōhō Gakkai [Tokyo]) 18 (1970): 1–25.

<sup>54</sup> Iwao, *Zoku Nan’yō Nihonmachi*, 9–22. Oharu was the daughter of an Italian pilot, Nicolaes Marino (on Portuguese ships) and a Japanese Christian, Maria from Nagasaki.

<sup>55</sup> Iwao, *Zoku Nan’yō Nihonmachi*, 167. The *Dagh-registers of Batavia* give ample proof of Simonsz’ activities within the VOC. See also Frederik de Haan, *Oud Batavia: Gedenkboek uitgegeven door het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen naar aanleiding van het driehonderdjarig bestaan der stad in 1919* (Batavia: G. Kolff & Co., 1922), vol. 1, 485–486. According to De Haan he was a full-blooded Japanese.

<sup>56</sup> Iwao, *Zoku Nan’yō Nihonmachi*, 187, 203–205. De Haan gives 1673 as his date of death.

<sup>57</sup> For the text of her Batavian letter, see Iwao, *Zoku Nan’yō Nihonmachi*, 161–166.

alive.<sup>58</sup> Except for a certain Murakami Buzaemon, headman of the Japanese in Batavia, Oharu was the only other Japanese who could have done the translation, considering her level of literacy and her VOC connections through her husband. Given the fact that Murakami supposedly died in 1674 or 1675,<sup>59</sup> Oharu seems to be the only qualified candidate left for the job come 1675. Furthermore, since her letter from Batavia is a copy, the translation of the 1675 letter would stand as the only extant record of her handwriting.

#### 4. Governor-General Speelman's Letter of 1683

##### A. Content and Form

The third letter of appeal to be discussed was written to the “illustrious emperor” of Japan on June 30, 1683, by Governor-General Cornelis Speelman, representing the other East Indies council members, again in protest over the taxation trade system of 1672.<sup>60</sup> The content is almost identical to Maetsuijker's 1675 letter, including the request to allow Dutchmen to act as interpreters, stating further that Dutch is a difficult language incapable of being fully mastered by any Japanese interpreter, thus leading to misunderstanding. It seems that the governor of Nagasaki's affirmative answer to the same request in 1675 was either forgotten or not sufficient for the Dutch. The originals were written on yellow gilt paper from Surat and sewn onto yellow damask.<sup>61</sup>

This time the Dutch original came in duplicate with a Chinese translation done in Batavia by the Consiqua,<sup>62</sup> written in block characters and a style that could be easily understood by anyone in Edo trained in classical Chinese, as the governor-general writes in his accompanying personal letter to the *opperhoofd*. The governor-general also suggests that the *opperhoofd* find an able and trustworthy

<sup>58</sup> *Tsūkō ichiran*, vol. 4, bk. 170, 171–172.

<sup>59</sup> Iwao, *Zoku Nan'yō Nihonmachi*, 187, 194.

<sup>60</sup> For the Dutch text, see the appendix to the secret letter by C. Speelman to A. Cleijer, June 30, 1683, in BUB, VOC 909, fols. 928–931, or *Ontfangene secrete schriftuuren 1683–1734* (NFJ 473). See also Van Dam, 477.

<sup>61</sup> *Register der papieren* in BUB, VOC 909, fols. 934, 935. This would be the expensive paper from Surat used for missives to high dignitaries and kings. See note 40.

<sup>62</sup> The Consiqua (顏二官) was the captain of the Chinese in Batavia from 1663 until his death in 1666. See Bernard Hoetink, *Chineesche officieren te Batavia onder de Compagnie*, Bijdragen voor Taal- land- en Volkenkunde 78 (The Hague: [Nijhoff], 1922): 22–27. The translation was probably made by his son Gantencqua, who by 1680 one of the Chinese leaders and well-known for his language abilities, including fluency in Dutch. He was used by the VOC as a scribe and representative. (Hoetink, 27)

person in Nagasaki to do a Japanese translation, and expresses the hope that the next journey to Edo might yield an opportunity to hand the Dutch letter directly to the *shōgun*, “who would be curious enough to want to know what was written in the letter and have it correctly translated.” The second Chinese original did not survive in the Deshima archive, but a portion of the text without date is inserted under 1683 in *Nagasaki jikki nendairoku*, which is a chronologically arranged compilation of records related to Nagasaki, put together by an interpreter who had access to both Japanese and Dutch documents.<sup>63</sup> The extant portion contains only the part protesting the trade system. “Illustrious emperor” is translated *Da Wang* 大王 (Great King), neither term being an appropriate indigenous salutation for the *shōgun*.<sup>64</sup>

### B. Arrival in Japan

The letter was unloaded and brought to Deshima on August 15, 1683, with much pomp and circumstance, resting on a silver plate, covered with gold cloth.<sup>65</sup> On the 24th the *opperhoofd* noted in his diary that the letter to the *shōgun* already seemed to have had an effect, since the porters were doing their work much better and with less hands than before it arrived. On November 5, just before departure of the ships, the governor of Nagasaki requested the letter for the *shōgun*, which was finally handed over after much protest. The governor then took the Chinese version

<sup>63</sup> Kyūshū Bunka-shi Kenkyūjo Shiryōshū Kankōkai, ed., *Nagasaki jikki nendairoku* [Nagasaki chronicles], Kyūshū bunka-shi kenkyūjo shiryōshū 3 (Fukuoka: Kyūshū Bunka-shi Kenkyūjo Shiryōshū Kankōkai, 1999), 107–108.

<sup>64</sup> W. J. Boot, “Maxims of Foreign Policy,” in *Shifting Communities and Identity Formation in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Leonard Blussé and Felipe Fernandez-Armesto (Leiden: CNWS., 2003), 12–15; Nagazumi Yōko, *Kinsei shoki no gaikō* [Foreign policy in early modern Japan] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1990), 114–128; Suzuki Erimo, “Edo Bakufu shōgun no gaikō shōgō [Diplomatic titles of the *shōguns* in the Edo period],” *Rekishi no riron to kyōiku* 86 (Mar. 1993): 1–13; Tanaka Takeo, “Kanji bunkaken no naka no buke seiken: Gaikō monjo sakuseisha no keifu [Samurai political power in the cultural sphere dominated by written Chinese: Genealogies of the compilers of diplomatic documents],” *Shisō*, 796 (Oct. 1990): 5–29; Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991 [1984]).

<sup>65</sup> *Deshima Dagregister*, Aug. 15, 1683 (NFJ 96). For a transcription of this diary, see, Eva S. Kraft, ed., *Andreas Cleijer, Tagebuch des Kontors zu Nagasaki auf der Insel Deshima, 20. Oktober 1682–5 November 1683*, *Bonner Zeitschrift für Japanologie* 6 (Bonn: Bonn University, Japanology, 1985). For a detailed description of the presentation of this letter, see *Afgaande secrete brieven 1683–1734*, A. Cleijer to C. Speelman, Nov. 7, 1683 (NFJ 473); Van Dam, 478.

out of its container without breaking the seal and ordered that it be translated into Japanese by the local Chinese interpreters.<sup>66</sup> The Dutch original was handed back to the *opperhoofd*, who was kept busy the next day explaining the text to the interpreters. A new Japanese translation was made after checking the translations done by the Dutch and Chinese interpreters.<sup>67</sup> On November 21, according to one of the interpreters, five copies of the final Japanese translation were made, four by the same hand, for the councilors in Edo, and one on special, thick paper for the *shōgun*, leaving no doubt about its destination. On November 25, the new *opperhoofd* was told to check the translation of the discussion about the letter which had taken place on November 7 during the farewell audience for the preceding *opperhoofd*. This was to be used as a reference for the governor of Nagasaki if he had to go into detail when handing over the translations in Edo. Although the governor was annoyed about not having been informed about the letter beforehand, he promised to do his best to obtain a favorable reply. On January 9, the Dutch were told they could take an extra person along with them to Edo, and under the pretext that they could not spare any Dutchmen from guarding the Island, they chose a “colored” servant named Moses, who was quite fluent in Japanese and could be used to check on the interpreters.

### C. In Edo

By April 2, 1684, the day the Dutch arrived in Edo, they had already been informed by their interpreter, upon information received from the secretary of the governor of Nagasaki, that the letter had been forwarded to the councilors. Its content must have been revealed to the *shōgun*, since his inspectors (*metsuke*) had already been ordered to travel to Nagasaki on the 25th of the preceding month with an order to observe the trade procedures *in loco*.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the Dutch were still not convinced that the letter had been delivered, and so, prior to their audience with the *shōgun* on the 12th, they proceeded to engage in what can be described as a comical series of attempts at lobbying and probing persons ranging from the lord of

<sup>66</sup> *Afgaande secrete brieven 1683–1734*, A. Cleijer to C. Speelman, Nov. 7, 1683 (NFJ 473); Van Dam, 479.

<sup>67</sup> *Deshima Dagregister*, Apr. 3, 1684 (NFJ 97).

<sup>68</sup> Namely, Toda Matabei Naotake and Odagiri Kihei Naotoshi. According to *Tokugawa jikki*, they were officially appointed on Apr. 11 to inspect trade procedures in Nagasaki, after a special meeting at Court, that same day. See Kuroita Katsumi, ed., *Tokugawa jikki* [Tokugawa chronicles], vol. 5, Shintei zōho kokushi taiki 42 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1981), 508. See also Morinaga Taneo and Etchū Tetsuya, eds., *Kanpō nikki to hankachō* [The *Kanpō* diaries and the *hankachō*], Nagasaki Bunkensha Sōsho, 2nd ser., 5 (Nagasaki: Nagasaki Bunkensha, 1977), 269–270.

Hirado and the former and incumbent governors of Nagasaki, to a shogunal doctor, their cook and the interpreter employed by the commissioners for the foreigners (*ōmetsuke*). The interpreter of the Dutch, who had also been busy with his own ear to the ground, offered additional, rather remarkable, information. Some friends had told him that the former governors of Nagasaki had been interrogated by the councilors a month earlier about the taxation trade.<sup>69</sup> Several persons, including a senior member of the commissioners for the foreigners, were much opposed to the trade system, and rumor had it that the *shōgun* was also opposed to it.<sup>70</sup> On the 10th the interpreter heard that an anonymous letter addressed to the *shōgun* had been found lying on the ground in the inner palace with details about the trade system. By the day of the audience with the *shōgun*, many officials already had knowledge of the letter and some of them had even received copies from the *opperhoofd*.

After the audience formalities were concluded, all the Dutch were summoned by the *shōgun* for a closer look and questioning. Moses was asked, through the Japanese interpreters, to what religion he adhered and if there were people blacker than him. He replied that he was a Dutch Christian. To the question of whether there were persons among the Dutch who could speak Japanese, the answer was that the *opperhoofd* could understand a little and that Moses had remembered several orations, which he was asked to recite in a loud voice. The *shōgun* also wanted to know how many Japanese were still living in Batavia, which number came to only three to four women at the time.

During the rest of their stay in Edo, the Dutch tried to find out if the *shōgun* himself had been briefed about the letter. On the 16th they pressed for an answer, even threatening to hand over the second original letter openly during their farewell audience with the councilors. During this time, the governor of Nagasaki and the commissioners managed to be “indisposed” remarkably often. On the 18th the Dutch finally decided not to hand over the second copy of the letter, to prevent bad feelings and because they were certain that the councilors already knew enough and were optimistic about the outcome of inspector’s visit to Nagasaki. The following day during the farewell audience with the councilors, the Dutch were whisked away as quickly as possible, thus preventing the *opperhoofd* from referring to the letter and asking for assistance. They were told to await an answer after the shogunal inspectors had reported on what they had found in Nagasaki.

#### *D. The Aftermath*

When the *opperhoofd* left Edo on the 23rd, he still did not know to whom the

<sup>69</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Apr. 4, 1684 (NFJ 97).

<sup>70</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, Apr. 8, 1684 (NFJ 97).

contents of the letter had been conveyed. It is most likely that the councilors knew about the letter long before the Dutch came to Edo, possibly through the governor of Nagasaki residing in Edo, who had brought the translations. This is supported by a report of a certain Jaits<sup>71</sup> in the Dutch entourage, who told the *opperhoofd* on April 16 about a conversation he had with a “councilor” (actually a *sobayōnin*/grand chamberlain) about the letter a few days before. The source told Jaits that he had known of its existence already during the Japanese eleventh month of the previous year. It is not clear, however, whether the dispatch of the inspectors to Nagasaki was the direct result of the letter. The main concern of the officials in Edo was the outflow of precious metal being caused by the large Chinese import volumes, which they had been aware of and concerned about before the letter arrived.<sup>72</sup> What is certain is that the inspectors’ report resulted in the abolition of the taxation trade system.<sup>73</sup>

Unaware of such an outcome and uncertain about whether his 1683 letter had been delivered, the governor-general in Batavia sent another letter of explanation for the *shōgun* to be handed over with the second original of 1683, if necessary.<sup>74</sup> He never did receive a direct reply, although he would insist on it for several years hence in his letters to the *opperhoofd*. Requests for an official Japanese-Dutch interpreter from the VOC side also fizzled out, due to the *opperhoofd*’s experience during the 1684 journey to Edo of bringing along a servant who spoke Japanese raising suspicion and thus limiting the freedom he normally enjoyed. Also, whenever the servant spoke in Japanese, the interpreters pretended not to understand him, although the *opperhoofd*, who understood some Japanese himself, knew better.<sup>75</sup> In a letter to the governor-general dated October 24, 1687, he voiced such doubts, stating that the Japanese interpreters would pose many obstacles to an official VOC interpreter, and would go as far as to have him banished from Japan. A person who concealed his knowledge of Japanese might be of better use, serving as a countercheck on the Japanese interpreters.<sup>76</sup> The *opperhoofd* persisted in his doubts in 1688, in reply to a letter from VOC directors in the Netherlands proposing to send promising young men to Deshima on a long term basis to learn

<sup>71</sup> Jaits had formerly been a coolie master, but, according to the *opperhoofd*, had risen in rank through his “gifted ear cleaning and massage” for Makino Bingo-no-kami Narisada before the latter’s promotion in 1682 to grand chamberlain.

<sup>72</sup> *Tsūkō ichiran*, vol. 4, bk. 158, 300.

<sup>73</sup> “Nagasaki oyakusho-dome,” II, in Ōta, 113.

<sup>74</sup> The 1685 letter is contained in BUB, VOC 912, C. Speelman to ‘den Keijzer...,’ June 30, 1685, fols. 420–421. See also letter by Speelman to the two *opperhoofden*, June 30, fols. 418–419.

<sup>75</sup> Deshima *Dagregister*, May 30, 1684 (NFJ 97).

<sup>76</sup> *Afgegane brieven 1687*, C. Ranst de Jonge to J. Camphuijs, Oct. 24, 1687 (NFJ 318).

how to speak, write or translate Japanese,<sup>77</sup> again also stressing the influence of the interpreters, which would never be overruled by the Nagasaki authorities. However, he concluded that he was willing to give it a try. At best, such persons could be used later on under cover in Nagasaki or Edo whenever necessary,<sup>78</sup> and that is exactly what happened in the years to come.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

Resorting to the use of direct letters of appeal indicates that the Dutch on Deshima felt an urgent need to inform the highest officials of their wishes without being censored and to extract from them their opinions and intentions towards Dutch affairs. This was the only means, since other direct paths to such persons had been officially blocked. Furthermore, were it not for elucidation provided by friendly interpreters and other officials willing to go beyond what was officially allowed—sometimes acting in secret, “from the side, or” the *binnenkant*—they would have been left completely in the dark. It goes without saying that the Japanese interpreters were presented with the hardest task, because they were the designated intermediaries between the Dutch and the Japanese authorities, and had to appease both parties. Their exasperation with Dutchmen who were constantly complaining and never ready to comply willingly with anything they were told, resonates clearly between the lines of the Deshima Diaries. Although the Dutch almost never received a direct answer from the addressees of their letters, their content was duly noted, causing a lot of activity behind the scenes, in line with the Japanese way of doing things.

The third letter to the *shōgun* discussed above was no doubt the most successful, after being partly adopted to the Japanese style after a learning experience through the first two missives. In this last case, the accompanying Chinese translation and a less aggressive attitude on the part of the Dutch presented the Japanese with a better opportunity to accept its delivery in their own terms. In that respect, after much trial and error and much exasperation for both sides, the governor-general

<sup>77</sup> *Aangecome brieven 1687: Extract uijt Generale Missive door Heeren Maijores...*, Oct. 25, 1686 (NFJ 318).

<sup>78</sup> *Afgegane brieven 1688*, H. van Buijtenhem to J. Camphuijs, Oct. 12, 1688 (NFJ 319).

<sup>79</sup> One example is the groom Hans Jürgen Keijser, who even received explicit instructions (kept secret from the interpreters) on how to serve the interests of the VOC during his six-month stay in Edo in 1729–1730. He had come to Japan for the first time in 1725 and had picked up proficiency in Japanese sufficient to converse with the influential persons he was sure to meet in Edo while teaching the Dutch-style horseback riding. (Deshima *Dagregister*, Sep. 3, 1729 [NFJ 139].) He stayed another four months in the capital during 1735.

proved correct in his observation that it was best “to avoid anything objectionable to this meticulous nation and conform to the Japanese ‘*maxime*’.”<sup>80</sup> However, such advice seems to have proven very difficult to follow in practice, given that mutual Dutch-Japanese frustration stands as a major theme in all the Deshima Diaries, and that Dutch letters of appeal kept on being sent.

As for learning and using Japanese themselves, the Dutch deemed it wiser to keep the practice under wraps, although language study was officially approved in reaction to the 1675 letter. As a result of what they had experienced during their four-decade long letter writing campaign, the Dutch concluded that it was best to feign compliance with Japanese custom, while going their own way. This is probably the most important lesson learned from the whole affair.

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<sup>80</sup> Letter by J. Camphuijs to C. van Outhoorn, July 1, 1689 in BUB, VOC 916, fol. 362 or *Aancomende brieven 1689* (NFJ 320).

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## Figures

- Fig. 1 Front of one version of the extant original Japanese translations of the letter of appeal from Governor-General Joan Maetsuijcker to the Governor of Nagasaki, dated 28th day of the fifth month [of 1675].  
Nationaal Archief, The Hague, NFJ 636.
- Fig. 2 Middle of the above letter.
- Fig. 3 End of the above letter.
- Fig. 4 Front of the other version of the extant original Japanese translations of the letter of appeal from Governor-General Joan Maetsuijcker to the Governor of Nagasaki, dated 28th day of the fifth month [of 1675].  
Nationaal Archief, The Hague, NFJ 636.
- Fig. 5 Middle of the above letter.
- Fig. 6 End of the above letter.