

## Chapter VII

# From the Threat of Roman Catholicism to the Shadow of Western Imperialism: Changing Trends in Dutch News Reports Issued to the Tokugawa *Bakufu*, 1690–1817

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### Introduction

When the Tokugawa *bakufu* (shogunate) ordered all Dutch residents of Japan to move from Hirado to Nagasaki in 1641, the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, hereafter the VOC) took on the task of gathering foreign news, especially about any Portuguese or Spanish plan of aggression against Japan. The *bakufu*, which was interested in obtaining news from the Dutch in order to assist in formulating its foreign policy, stressed that this was one of the most important conditions for continuing trade, and the Dutch complied in order to maintain their position as the only European nation trading with Japan. In 1666 the *bakufu* ordered the VOC to present its information in writing; and consequently, the Japanese interpreters of the Dutch language in Nagasaki began preparing *fūsetsugaki* (literally “report[s] of rumors”), based on interviews conducted with the *opperhoofd* (head of the Dutch factory) after Dutch ships arrived in Nagasaki.<sup>1</sup> The *opperhoofd* would sign these documents,<sup>2</sup> which were written in Japanese, and the Nagasaki-*bugyō* (magistrate[s]) would immediately forward them to the *bakufu* headquarters in Edo.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the primary information contained in the Dutch news reports concerned Roman Catholicism. By 1639, the *bakufu* had expelled all Portuguese and Spanish missionaries and traders from the country, fearing they would pollute Japan with their religion and attempt a military invasion. After it executed the principal members of a Portuguese mission sent from Macao in 1640 to request re-opening trade with Japan, the *bakufu* feared that the Iberian

<sup>1</sup> On the general outlines of *fūsetsugaki* from the 1640s to 1670s, 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), 35–103.

<sup>2</sup> After 1840 *fūsetsugaki* was called “*gewoon nieuws* (ordinary news)” by the Dutch.

powers would send a naval force seeking revenge and set up a system of guarding the Japanese coast line.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch news reports during that time were not reliable sources for events related to China, because the VOC did not have actual access there. Ronald Toby has described how the *bakufu* used multiple channels, namely Tsushima, the Ryūkyūs and Nagasaki-based “Chinese” merchants<sup>4</sup> and the “Dutch,”<sup>5</sup> to gather news about the Revolt of the Three Feudatories in southern China, and he has pointed out that the Dutch route provided some of the least reliable information.<sup>6</sup>

In the large amount of research that has examined how the *bakufu* responded to the rise of Western imperialism during the nineteenth century, there seems to be a consensus among historians that the greatest change in Japan’s foreign relations during that time was caused by the arrival near Edo of an American squadron under command of Matthew Perry in 1853. Others, looking more broadly at East Asia, have pointed to the Opium War as the first instance of “Western impact” in East Asia. The outbreak of the Opium War (1839) led to a change in the above-mentioned *fūsetsugaki* to formalization of *apart nieuws* (special news reports) prepared in the highest government echelons in Batavia, sent to Japan, and translated into a Japanese under the name *betsudan fūsetsugaki*.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, Fujita Satoru has argued that Japan’s foreign policy was getting frozen at the end of the eighteenth century under the idea that its isolationistic restrictions (*sakoku*) were a matter of legal precedents dating back to the period of the third *shōgun*, Tokugawa Iemitsu, and that this became the rationale for fending off Western encroachment from that time on.<sup>8</sup> Yokoyama Yoshinori has emphasized the importance of the decades around 1800 in considering Japan’s foreign relations, based on the classical understanding that the modernization of the world had begun

<sup>3</sup> Yamamoto Hirofumi, *Sakoku to kaikin no jidai* [The times of *sakoku* and *haijin*] (Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1995), 106–110. Matsuo Shin’ichi has criticized Yamamoto’s opinion, arguing that the *bakufu* had lost its fear of the Iberian powers during the 1640s. See Matsuo Shin’ichi, “Iemitsu seiken-ki no engan keibi taisei ni tsuite [On the system of the coastal defense during the reign of Tokugawa Iemitsu],” *Hakusan shigaku* 35 (1999): 83–104. This debate lies outside the scope of this paper, where it is sufficient to merely point out that the *bakufu* needed news about the Iberian powers in order to weigh potential threats.

<sup>4</sup> Merchants who sailed from Southeast Asian ports such as Cambodia, Tonkin (northern Vietnam) and Siam (Thailand) were all categorized in Japan as “Chinese” and in fact most of them were of Chinese descent.

<sup>5</sup> There were VOC personnel of Danish, German and Swedish origin, but they were all categorized as “Dutch” in Japan.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 142–161.

<sup>7</sup> Matsukata, 151–173.

<sup>8</sup> Fujita Satoru, *Kinsei kōki seijishi to taigai kankei* [Political history and foreign relations of the latter half of the Edo period] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2005), ii–iii. Fujita defines “*sakoku*” restrictions as *bakufu* officials did, namely; 1) prohibition on foreign travel by Japanese, 2) access granted only to Korea and the Ryūkyūs as “countries of official communication,” and 3) access granted only to China and the Netherlands as “countries of trade.” See Fujita, 4.

at the end of the eighteenth century with the Industrial Revolution in England and the French Revolution. Yokoyama argues that Japan began from the late eighteenth century to sense that something new was emerging in the world and made efforts to comprehend what changes were occurring in the West. As one illustration, he cites a shift in the main focus of *Rangaku* (Dutch learning) occurring around 1800 from medicine to broader fields of inquiry, including military science.<sup>9</sup>

However, considering the fact that not all of Europe was modernized by the first half of the nineteenth century, questions still remain about what changes were occurring in the eighteenth century. While there is informative research focusing on the subject of foreign trade, little has been done on the political side of Japan's foreign relations. This chapter will discuss this political side as shown by the changing focus of *fūsetsugaki* during the eighteenth century from the perceived threat of Roman Catholicism to the emerging influence of Western imperialism in Asia.

### “News from Siam,” 1690–1715

By 1685, the Portuguese and Spanish had lost all their power and influence in East Asia. In addition, the Qing Dynasty had quelled the Revolt of the Three Feudatories in 1681, and the Zheng 鄭 family had in 1683 surrendered its domination over Taiwan for the past twenty years. It was under such conditions that the Qing Dynasty resumed permitting Chinese commercial junks to sail to Japan, resulting in an enormous rush of Chinese traders into the port of Nagasaki. Therefore, it is easy to suppose that from 1685 onward, the East China Sea no longer posed any threat to either the Tokugawa *bakufu* nor the VOC<sup>10</sup>; that is, until the arrival of Russian ships in Japanese waters beginning at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

During this time, between 1690 and 1715, there exist some specific reports among the extant *fūsetsugaki* entitled “*Shamu fūsetsu* (news from Siam).” As to what it was that brought Siam into focus at that time, the king of Siam, Narai (r. 1656–1688), had taken a personal interest in not only foreign trade but also diplomacy, in an effort to attract as many foreign merchants to his realm as possible, resulting in Chinese, Malay, Indian and Persian merchants flocking to

<sup>9</sup> Yokoyama Yoshinori, “18–19 seiki tenkan-ki no Nihon to sekai [Japan and the world at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries],” in *Nihonshi kōza* [Studies in Japanese history], vol. 7, *Kinsei no kaitai* [The dismantling of pre modern society], ed. Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai and Nihonshi Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2005), 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Haneda Masashi, *Higashi Indo gaisha to Ajia no umi* [The East India Companies and the maritime Asia] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007), 342–343.

<sup>11</sup> Fujita, i.

Siamese ports. King Narai also greeted diplomatic envoys from England, Persia and Rome, and sent Siamese embassies to such prominent cities as Batavia, Beijing and Isfahan. Here, let us focus on Siam's relations with France at that time. It was in 1662 that members of the Paris Foreign Missions Society first arrived in Siam, and three years later King Narai permitted the Society to proselytize freely throughout his kingdom, except at his palace. The Society had hoped to convert the King to Roman Catholicism, although it faced the great challenge of Siamese kingship being deeply rooted in and empowered by Buddhist tenets. In order to gain access to the monarch, the Society tried to stimulate the King's interest through trade, science and royal embassies, by requesting the Compagnie des Indes Orientales (French East India Company, hereafter CIO) and King Louis XIV to support their activities in Siam. In 1680, the CIO opened a trading post at Ayutthaya, and twice during the 1680s Siamese royal envoys traveled to France and returned to Ayutthaya with French embassies dispatched by Louis XIV. Despite all of these efforts, the French missionaries failed to convert the King to their faith.

After the death of King Narai in July 1688 left the Siamese royal family without an heir, one of his most powerful officials assumed the throne in a "palace revolution" and, calling himself King Phetracha (r. 1688–1702), proceeded to expel most of the French troops stationed in Siam, and those who were left behind, being French and/or Roman Catholic, were persecuted. The VOC, which had first signed a treaty with Siam in 1664,<sup>12</sup> after it imposed a six-month blockade on the Chao Phraya River, shared the new king's hostility towards the French. Phetracha repeatedly told the Dutch that he considered them his only European ally, and the VOC continued to assist Siamese crown junks in overseas trade as a condition of the Dutch-Siamese treaty, although the King was becoming increasingly anti-European. Then his successor, Sūa (r. 1703–1709), refused to renew the treaty with the Dutch under its 1688 provisions; and the VOC decided to withdraw its personnel from Ayutthaya in 1705, although it chose to return to Siam that same year.<sup>13</sup>

Iioka Naoko has examined the Siamese crown junks that sailed to Japan beginning in the 1680s and has found that a total of eighty-nine junks arrived in Nagasaki between 1679 and 1728 (an average of two junks per year). Each vessel was owned by either the Siamese king or a prince, while the practical affairs of navigation and trade were handled by Chinese residents of Siam.<sup>14</sup> According to my own examination of the period, one or two VOC ships sailing out of Batavia would call at Siam between May and July every year on their way to Japan, and the

<sup>12</sup> The treaty allowed the Dutch to trade freely with anyone anywhere in Siam, and also granted the VOC exclusive rights to buy and export deerskin, ray skin and cow hide.

<sup>13</sup> Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, c. 1604–1765* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 111–179.

<sup>14</sup> Iioka Naoko, "Ayutaya kokuō no tainichi bōeki: Sakoku-ka no Nagasaki ni raikō-shita Shamu-sen no tokō keiro no kentō [Siamese crown trade with Japan, 1679–1728: Seen from the information about Siamese ships in *Kai hentai*]," *Nanpō bunka* 24 (1997): 65–100.

crown junks departing Siam would arrive in Nagasaki in July or August.<sup>15</sup> When a ship arrived, the Dutch *opperhoofd* in Nagasaki would receive letters from both the Governor-General in Batavia and from the Dutch *opperhoofd* in Ayutthaya. In October, he would send his replies to these letters with the VOC ship sailing back to Batavia. The reply addressed to Batavia was delivered within a month or so, while the letter for Siam would reach its addressee at the beginning of the next summer. Therefore, he also sent another reply directly to Siam with a crown junk, which would depart Nagasaki one or two months later than the Dutch ship. The *bakufu* forbade the Dutch from sending correspondence via junks, but every year the Dutch requested special permission from the Nagasaki magistrate and received it, on condition that the contents of the letter would be recorded by Japanese interpreters.<sup>16</sup> The interpreters did record it, but sometimes the content was different from what the *opperhoofd* had originally dictated.<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, the Governor-General in Batavia had also strictly forbidden the dispatch of letters from Japan via junks, except for specific orders for deerskin or trivial matters unrelated to the VOC's trading activities in Siam, information about which could be of competitive advantage to junk rivals.<sup>18</sup>

One of the duties of the *tōtsūji* (interpreters of the Chinese language in Japan)<sup>19</sup> was to interview captains of junks, not only from mainland China but also from Southeast Asia, and write *Tōsen fūsetsugaki* (Chinese news reports) in Japanese.<sup>20</sup> Concerning Siam, the report of 1689 mentions the events surrounding the above-mentioned "palace revolution"<sup>21</sup> and that of 1703 notes King Phetracha's accession

<sup>15</sup> This account is based on the correspondence between the Dutch trading posts in Nagasaki and Ayutthaya. NFJ 315–345. On the routes taken by VOC ships, see the pioneering study by Yao Keisuke, "Deshima shōkan raikō Oranda sen ni tsuite: 1641–1740 nen [Dutch ships which came to Nagasaki: 1641–1740]," *Yōgakushi kenkyū* 7 (1990): 32–53.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Cornelis van Outhoorn, *dagregister* 1692, NFJ 105, 14–15; Hendrick Dijkman, *dagregister* 1701, NFJ 113, 26; Abraham Douglas, *dagregister* 1702, NFJ 113, 45. The *opperhoofden* in Dutch trading posts kept official diaries (*dagregisters* in Dutch) to record what happened and to report it to Holland via Batavia. Each volume of such diaries has its specific title, but hereafter they are cited as "*dagregister*" in general, followed by its covering fiscal year.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Ferdinand de Groot, *dagregister* 1703, NFJ 114, 41; Gideon Tant, *dagregister* 1704, NFJ 115, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Hendrick Dijkman, Japan to Reinier Boom, Siam, Nov. 16, 1698, NFJ 330.

<sup>19</sup> Most of them were of Chinese origin, but they were categorized as "Japanese."

<sup>20</sup> Ishii Yoneo, "Introduction," in *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia: Translations from the Tōsen Fūsetsu-gaki, 1674–1723* (hereafter cited as *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*) (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998), 1–13. This work includes English translations of Chinese news reports published in Hayashi Harukatsu and Hayashi Nobuatsu, eds., *Kai hentai* [The great transformation in China], 3 vols. (Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1958–1959).

<sup>21</sup> Chinese news reports from the Siamese junks, Ship No. 46, July 18, 1689 and Ship No. 51, Aug. 20, 1689, in *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*, 47–51.

to the throne.<sup>22</sup> In most of the reports, however, Siam is described as enjoying peace, and it is very likely that information about Christian missionaries in Siam was never reported, but that is a matter beyond the purview of the present study.

News about Siam is also found in the Dutch *fūsetsugaki*, particularly in the report of 1673, which stated that the Zheng family had sent a letter to Siam in hopes of preventing it from trading with Japan.<sup>23</sup> The next mention of Siam is found in an official diary kept by the Dutch *opperhoofd* at Nagasaki, in which he notes that in 1683 two Japanese interpreters came to the Dutch factory to inquire about news from Siam and recorded that a regiment of Chinese troops, driven from southern China by a Qing Dynasty expeditionary force, had conquered, settled in and taken political control over Cambodia, forcing the Cambodian king to flee to points unknown. The interpreters also conveyed to the *opperhoofd* that the Nagasaki magistrate was greatly upset that this piece of news had not been reported earlier, in time to be included in the annual Dutch *fūsetsugaki*.<sup>24</sup> The magistrate had been informed of the Cambodian situation by the Chinese interpreters' investigation of the Siamese junks and wanted to verify the story from an independent source.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, from the following year on, the Dutch became more diligent in providing news from Siam immediately after the arrival of the Dutch ship.<sup>26</sup>

The year 1688 was not only significant in England because of the Glorious Revolution and in Siam because of the "palace revolution," but an important year for the present discussion, because 1) in December of the previous year, the Dutch had been informed that a Portuguese priest had secretly entered Japan,<sup>27</sup> 2) the Governor-General sent to the factory in Japan a Dutch translation of a letter from the English East India Company to the new king of Siam proposing mutual trade,<sup>28</sup> and 3) the Dutch *opperhoofd* in Japan wrote to Batavia in October of that year that the Nagasaki magistrates would be opposed to French or Portuguese priests travelling from Siam to China. He also related that the magistrates would be distressed upon hearing the news of "insidious" French and Portuguese plans in Siam or elsewhere,

<sup>22</sup> Chinese news report from the Siamese junk, Ship No. 69, Aug. 20, 1703, in *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*, 82–83.

<sup>23</sup> "Oranda sanban-sen Shamu idashi-bune ni mōshikoshi-sōrō fūsetsu," in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei* [A collection of "world news" presented annually by the Dutch factory at Deshima to the Tokugawa bakufu: 1641–1857], ed. Hōsei Rangaku Kenkyūkai (hereafter cited as *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*), vol. 1 (Tokyo: The Japan-Netherlands Institute, 1976), 64.

<sup>24</sup> Andries Cleijer, *dagregister* 1683, NFJ 96, 356–357.

<sup>25</sup> Chinese news report from the Siamese junk, Ship No. 5, June 25, 1683, in *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*, 29–31.

<sup>26</sup> Constantin Ranst, *dagregister* 1684, NFJ 97, 223.

<sup>27</sup> Hendrick van Buijtenhem, *dagregister* 1668, NFJ 101, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Johannes Camphuijs, Batavia to Hendrick van Buijtenhem, Japan, May 7, 1688, NFJ 319.

but that, by contrast, high officials of the *bakufu* never asked any questions about European matters when he journeyed to Edo.<sup>29</sup> Then the *opperhoofd* wrote to his counterpart in Siam that the Nagasaki magistrate demanded news about everything going on there, especially about Catholic missionaries.<sup>30</sup>

In his reply, written in July 1689, the Governor-General asked why, during the annual Dutch journey to Edo, *bakufu* officials asked no questions about the situation in Holland or the other countries of Europe, including news of the Glorious Revolution and the outbreak of the Nine Years' War (1688–1697).<sup>31</sup> He gave orders to the *opperhoofd* to describe to the Japanese the “brutal”<sup>32</sup> actions of James II, the former Roman Catholic king of England, and of Louis XIV, in hopes that such information would shape Japanese policy more favorably towards the Dutch. That same year, the Dutch factory in Siam prepared a detailed report on the Siamese “palace revolution” of 1688, which was first sent to the Governor-General in Batavia, then forwarded to Nagasaki.<sup>33</sup> In order to satisfy Japanese curiosity, the Dutch chief in Nagasaki continued from 1689 until around 1710 to request from his colleague in Ayutthaya information about conditions in Siam, especially about the activities of French and Portuguese Catholics there.<sup>34</sup> The Dutch *opperhoofd* in Ayutthaya acquiesced, sometimes inquiring in his reports about the reactions of the

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Hendrick van Buijtenhem, Japan to Johannes Camphuijs, Batavia, Oct. 12, 1688, NFJ 319.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Cornelis van Outhoorn, Japan to Johannes Keijts, Siam, Nov. 26, 1688, NFJ 319.

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Johannes Camphuijs, Batavia to Cornelis van Outhoorn, Japan, July 1, 1689, NFJ 320.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Johannes Camphuijs, Batavia to Cornelis van Outhoorn, Japan, July 1, 1689, NFJ 320.

<sup>33</sup> “Verhaal van de voornaamste saken voorgevallen, omtrent de Francen, Engelsen etc. in het coninkrijk Siam, zedert den 9<sup>e</sup> julij des voorleden jaars 1688 tot den 6 july deses jaars 1689,” NFJ 332.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from Cornelis van Outhoorn, Japan to Pieter van den Hoorn, Siam, Oct. 31, 1689, NFJ 320; Letter from Hendrick van Buijtenhem, Japan to Pieter van den Hoorn, Siam, Nov. 8, 1691, NFJ 322; Letter from Hendrick van Buijtenhem, Japan to Thomas van Son, Siam, Oct. 18, 1693, NFJ 324; Letter from Gerrit de Heere, Japan to Thomas van Son, Siam, Nov. 6, 1694, NFJ 325; Letter from Hendrick Dijkman, Japan to Gideon Tant, Siam, Oct. 11, 1699, NFJ 330; Letter from Pieter de Vos, Japan to Gideon Tant, Siam, Dec. 31, 1699, NFJ 331; Letter from Pieter de Vos, Japan to Gideon Tant, Siam, Oct. 30, 1700, NFJ 331; Letter from Abraham Douglas, Japan to Gideon Tant, Siam, Dec. 25, 1701, NFJ 333; Letter from Ferdinand de Groot, Japan to Gideon Tant, Siam, Jan. 3, 1703, NFJ 334; Letter from Ferdinand de Groot, Japan to Aarnout Cleur, Siam, Oct. 29, 1703, NFJ 334; letter from Gideon Tant, Japan to Aarnout Cleur, Siam, Jan. 6, 1704, NFJ 335; Letter from Ferdinand de Groot, Japan to Aarnout Cleur, Siam, Jan. 8, 1705, NFJ 336; Letter from Ferdinand de Groot, Japan to Aarnout Cleur, Siam, Nov. 6, 1705, NFJ 336.

Japanese people to them.<sup>35</sup> From 1690 until 1715, interpreters prepared documents concentrated on Siam, which were sometimes entitled “news from Siam.”<sup>36</sup>

In 1715, the *bakufu* issued an edict, called the *Shōtoku shinrei* (The new edicts of the Shōtoku period), which limited the Dutch to two ships annually and Siamese junks to one visit annually to Nagasaki. As a result, Dutch ships stopped traveling via Siam and instead sailed directly to Japan. Around the same time, the new king of Siam, Thaisa (r. 1709–1733), rejected all attempts by English, French, and Spanish traders to re-establish active relations with Siam.<sup>37</sup>

While East Asia had generally settled into peace during the decades around 1700, both Southeast Asia and Europe were facing political, economic and religious strife. The Dutch were clearly in the thick of such strife, and the Japanese in Nagasaki were watching through the “news from Siam.” In my opinion, this period should be viewed as the last phase of the *bakufu*'s concern over the threat of Roman Catholicism. Neither the *opperhoofd* in Nagasaki nor the Governor-General in Batavia ever found out why the top officials in Edo were no longer interested in Catholics residing in Siam, although the Nagasaki officials surely recognized the threat. Such detachment by the *bakufu* leadership from foreign affairs seems surprising, compared to earlier decades. Furthermore, the *shōgun* during this period, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (r. 1680–1709), was far more curious than the previous *shōgun* had been, as demonstrated by his numerous queries to the Dutch missions during their audiences at Edo. However, most of his queries had to do with trivial, personal concerns, such as how many children the *opperhoofd* had.<sup>38</sup> The attitude

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Pieter van den Hoorn, Siam to Cornelis van Outhoorn, Japan, July 6, 1689, NFJ 320; Letter from Johannes van Wagensvelt, Siam to Cornelis van Outhoorn, Japan, July 7, 1692, NFJ 322; Letter from Thomas van Son, Siam, to Hendrick van Buijtenhem, Japan, June 26, 1693, NFJ 324; Letter from Thomas van Son, Siam to Gerrit de Heere, Japan, July 1, 1694, NFJ 325; Letter from Thomas van Son, Siam to Hendrick Dijckman, Japan, July 4, 1695, NFJ 326; letter from Reinier Boom, Siam to Pieter de Vos, Japan, July 6, 1698, NFJ 329; Letter from Gideon Tant, Siam to Hendrick Dijckman, Japan, June 25, 1699, NFJ 330; Letter from Gideon Tant, Siam to Pieter de Vos, Japan, July 4, 1700, NFJ 331; Letter from Gideon Tant, Siam to Abraham Douglas, Japan, June 30, 1702, NFJ 333; Letter from Aarnout Cleur, Siam to Ferdinand de Groot, Japan, July 8, 1703, NFJ 334; Letter from Aarnout Cleur, Siam to Ferdinand de Groot, Japan, June 26, 1705, NFJ 336; Letter from Christoffel Woutersz, Siam to Hermanus Menssingh, Japan, June 29, 1706, NFJ 337; Letter from Aarnout Cleur, Siam to Hermanus Menssingh, Japan, June 22, 1708, NFJ 339; Letter from Aarnout Cleur, Siam to Jasper van Mansdale, Japan, July 3, 1709, NFJ 340.

<sup>36</sup> “Oranda niban-sen Shamu idashi fūsetsu,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 1, 151–152.

<sup>37</sup> Bhawan, 182.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Balthasar Sweers, *dagregister* 1690, NFJ 103, 112–114; Cornelis van Outhoorn, *dagregister* 1692, NFJ 105, 134–145.

of the top *bakufu* officials also changed compared to their predecessors, who had posed more rigorous questions to the Dutch *opperhoofd* when in Edo.

### “They Will Believe Everything”: Bengal and Ceylon, 1758–1766

During the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the English East India Company became embroiled with their French rivals in India, as well as with the last independent *nawab* (provincial governor) of Bengal, who had captured the English Fort William at Kolkata during June 1756. After the Battle of Plassey (Palashi) in West Bengal on June 23, 1757, the *opperhoofd* cited the events in India to explain why the VOC “was not able to” import enough silk from Bengal to Nagasaki to meet Japanese demand. In fact, the VOC wanted to stop importing silk from Bengal altogether because it was not profitable.<sup>39</sup>

On November 12, 1758, Herbert Vermeulen, the Dutch *opperhoofd* in Japan, wrote to Jacob Mossel, the Governor-General in Batavia:

Because of troubles in Bengal between the English and the [Bengali] natives, the Dutch could not obtain Bengali silk fabrics, which they use as gifts for the *shōgun* and for sale [in Japan]. This is because the Bengali market did not offer such items, since the weavers had fled, leading to the closing of the mills. Therefore, our silk purchasing there has mostly stopped. As a result, we were unable to obtain enough [silk] commodities to import to Japan... A certain report which had been secretly brought here gave us an opportunity to try to take advantage of that situation immediately. Although it was a [good enough] excuse to import such unprofitable Bengal silk fabrics for two or three years, we thought that it would be useful in getting permission to send three ships to Japan per year [instead of the usual two].

These reasons are now certainly valid, and everything the Dutch want is entirely acceptable for people like the Japanese, who are living outside of all communications with other nations and would believe almost everything [told to them]... They find reasonable explanations included in such report. Namely, [the Japanese consider that] the Bengalis suffer these constraints only because they had allowed so many [European] nations, who now want to rule the Bengali, to enter their own country. [The Japanese suppose that] this would not have been the case if, by contrast, the Bengalis had welcomed only the Dutch. Of course we, the Dutch, do not contradict this opinion. The Japanese, now comparing their own safety which no foreign nations disturb,

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Jacob Mossel, Batavia, Dec. 31, 1759, in *GM*, vol. 13 (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2007), 385.

think that safety indeed depends on maintaining trade with us. Therefore, they increasingly try to maintain that [*sakoku*<sup>40</sup>] system.<sup>41</sup>

The intention of this letter to Batavia was to explain not only how diligently the VOC staff in Nagasaki was trying to explain to *bakufu* officials the reason why the Company was not able to import enough silk from Bengal to meet Japanese demands, but also boast how clever they had been in exploiting this difficult situation for the purpose of obtaining permission to send an additional ship the following year. The *bakufu* allowed the Dutch two ships per year, but in 1758, one of the ships, *Stadwijk*, was lost on its way to Japan. So, the *opperhoofd* requested permission for the third ship in the next year.

However, his explanation for the circumstances of Bengal had a greater impact beyond trade affairs. After hearing of the events in India, “the Japanese,” probably the officials in Nagasaki, had apparently come to the conclusion that the Bengalis were caught in their current predicament only because they had allowed European nations to dictate conditions to them, and were of the opinion that this would not have happened if the Bengalis had dealt exclusively with the Dutch. Therefore, it seems that the Japanese authorities had now adopted the rationale of keeping the VOC as its sole European trading partner,<sup>42</sup> not only to serve Japan in preventing any incursions from Roman Catholicism, but also to help maintain the kind of national sovereignty that Bengal had lost. Although not stated explicitly in the letter, it seems to offer the implication of definite Japanese awareness concerning the emergence of Western imperialism in South Asia, spearheaded by Great Britain. Now confronted by this new, secular Western challenge, the Japanese were showing confidence in their “*sakoku*” policy as an effective means to avoid trouble from abroad.

Despite such confidence, the Nagasaki officials failed to include the news about the Bengali situation in their annual reports to Edo,<sup>43</sup> indicating their underestimation of the matter as not important enough to report to Edo, depriving the top *bakufu* officials of their perhaps first chance to learn about the phenomenon

<sup>40</sup> Here the “system” refers only to Japan’s exclusive commercial relations with Holland among the European nations, not the whole system of Japan’s foreign relations, explained in note 8 above.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Herbert Vermeulen, Japan to Jacob Mossel, the Governor-General in Batavia, Nov. 12, 1758, NFJ 493. See also German F. Meijlan, *Geschiedkundig Overzicht van den Handel der Europezen op Japan* (Batavia: ’s Landsdrukkerij, 1833), 181–182.

<sup>42</sup> In the Japanese context, the VOC was not an equal partner, but more of a tributary, obliged to serve the *shōgun* by delivering news of the outside world and presenting annual gifts.

<sup>43</sup> “Oranda ichiban-sen no sendō mōshi ide sōrō kōjō no wage,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 26–27.

of Western imperialism. On the other hand, there is also a clear Dutch confidence exuded in the letter, in the belief that the Japanese would believe everything they were told by the staff of the Dutch factory, thus were quite easy to deceive. It was only in 1760 that annual *fūsetsugaki* from Nagasaki to Edo first mentioned the situation in Bengal, saying, “There was a conflict between the Bengalis and the English, who had long visited there to trade. The disorder continues, resulting in shortages of the products coming in from that region.”<sup>44</sup> Again in 1766, the *fūsetsugaki* sent to Edo referred to Bengal, saying, “The disturbance instigated by the English in Bengal during the past six years has ended in an English victory and the cession of Bengali land [to the English]. Peace now reigns there.”<sup>45</sup>

After the Burmese invasion of Ayutthaya in 1765–1766,<sup>46</sup> the annual *fūsetsugaki* sent to Edo was silent about the fall of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, but did report the victory of the Dutch East India Company over Kirti Sri Radja Simha, the king of Kandy in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).<sup>47</sup> The report for 1765 stated:

After the ship left for Japan last summer, it was reported to Batavia that the lord of Ceylon and the Dutch factory in that country had quarreled and engaged in armed battle. It was [also] reported last January that the battle ended in a decisive victory for the Dutch, and that the lord of Ceylon fled to the countryside, while the Dutch occupied the capital. Consequently, the Governor-General sent a high official to rule that country.<sup>48</sup>

In the next *fūsetsugaki* of 1766 we find,

It was reported that the lord of Ceylon, who had fled to the countryside, returned to his capital as in former times and made peace, and that Ceylon is once again at peace...<sup>49</sup>

As a result of the 1766 peace treaty with Ceylon, the VOC secured its “right to peel cinnamon freely in the king’s territories, and its territorial possessions were

<sup>44</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 32.

<sup>45</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Bhawan, 213–218.

<sup>47</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 41, 45–46. For more information on the troubles in Ceylon, Alicia Schrikker, “Een ongelijke strijd? De oorlog tussen de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie and de Koning van Kandy, 1760–1766,” in *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, ed. Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (Leiden: KITLV, 2002), 379–406.

<sup>48</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 41–42.

<sup>49</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 43.

expanded” and “the Dutch would never again be forced to perform degrading rituals before the king.”<sup>50</sup> The Dutch attitude towards the king of Kandy had totally changed from that shown during the seventeenth century. Instead of negotiation, they now used force to obtain not only trade concessions, but also territorial possessions in Ceylon. This piece of news may have represented the first reference to Western imperialism made to leaders of the *bakufu*. However, no mention of the Ceylon affair appears in either the diaries kept at the Nagasaki Dutch factory or the correspondence between Batavia and Nagasaki during this period in time; and there is no evidence of how the *bakufu* responded. The *opperhoofd* probably chose not to report it for fear that the Japanese would become suspicious of the Dutch, or maybe both the Dutch chief and *bakufu* officials considered the incident as proof that Dutch power was dominant in Asia, although the Netherlands was, in fact, losing its military and naval edge in India.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, the mid-eighteenth century can be regarded as the “golden age” of Dutch news reporting due to the symbiotic relationship that had developed between the VOC and Japanese officials. The Dutch thought they held an effective monopoly on news from the outside world, because other potential news sources—namely, junks from Southeast Asia—were calling at Nagasaki in far fewer numbers. The Dutch recognized that it was quite easy to deceive the Japanese. The Governor-General in Batavia did not order the *opperhoofden* to report detailed information about the outside world to Japan, nor did the Tokugawa leadership demand such information from Nagasaki officials. During the eighteenth century, the encroachment of Western imperialism was still largely confined to South Asia, which was a region far beyond Japan’s traditional range of international vision. Because officials overseeing the other three of the “four gates”<sup>52</sup> into Japan were gathering news primarily about China, the *bakufu* had no alternative source of news about other parts of the world beyond the Dutch. Consequently, *bakufu* leaders perceived no threats and believed that East Asia was at peace; and, ironically, the *fūsetsugaki* sent from Nagasaki to Edo in this period became rather dull for lack of information.

<sup>50</sup> Alicia Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780–1815: Expansion and Reform* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 39.

<sup>51</sup> Frank Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de 18e eeuw* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto/repro-Holland, 2005), 139.

<sup>52</sup> The “four gates” consisted of Nagasaki for the Dutch and the Chinese, Tsushima for the kingdom of Korea, Satsuma for the kingdom of Ryūkyū and Matsumae for the Ainu. The most comprehensive work on the “four gates” is Katō Ei’ichi, Kitajima Manji, and Fukaya Katsumi, eds., *Bakuhān-sei kokka to iiki, ikoku* [The Tokugawa state and its surrounding regions] (Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1989).

### The French Revolution and the Napoleonic War, 1794–1817

As early as 1937, Itazawa Takeo, a historian of *Rangaku* and the pioneer in the research on *fūsetsugaki*,<sup>53</sup> first noticed that the annual Dutch reports sent following the outbreak of the French Revolution were being manipulated, although most of the information that was reported was reliable.<sup>54</sup> The first report of the French Revolution appeared in 1794.

Subjects of the French kingdom illegally grouped together, killed the king and the prince, and caused disturbances throughout the country. It was reported that troops from the surrounding countries, including Holland, rushed into France and battled [the rebels]...<sup>55</sup>

The *fūsetsugaki* of 1809 dated July 30 stated:

A brother of the French king, Louis Napoleon, was adopted into the royal family in Holland and took the throne...<sup>56</sup>

The 1817 *fūsetsugaki* reported:

Louis Napoleon, a brother of the French king, who had been adopted into the royal family in Holland and enthroned there, has died. Therefore, a relation of the previous king, the Prince of Orange, ascended the throne, and the government [of the Netherlands] has returned to the state [of peace] thirty years ago.<sup>57</sup>

All of this information was clearly manipulated, for it was Napoleon Bonaparte who had invested his younger brother Louis on the throne of Holland in 1806, then four years later stripped Louis of the throne and incorporated Holland into the French Empire. Then, after Napoleon fell from power, the eldest son of the former *stadthouder* (stadtholder), Willem V, assumed the throne as King Willem I in 1815.

<sup>53</sup> Itazawa Takeo, *Oranda fūsetsugaki no kenkyū* [A study of Dutch news reports] (Nara: Nihon Kobunka Kenkyūjo, 1937). Itazawa also headed the research activities of the Hōsei Rangaku Kenkyūkai until his death in 1962.

<sup>54</sup> Itazawa Takeo, *Nichiran bunka kōshōshi no kenkyū* [A study on cultural exchanges between Japan and the Netherlands] (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1959), 193–195.

<sup>55</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 94.

<sup>56</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 127.

<sup>57</sup> “Fūsetsugaki,” in *Oranda fūsetsugaki shūsei*, vol. 2, 140.

Hendrik Doeff, who served as *opperhoofd* of the Dutch factory in Nagasaki for an irregularly long term, from 1803 to 1817, due to the fact that no successor for his post was able to travel to Japan, was witness to the arrival in Nagasaki harbor of the Russian envoy, Nikolai Rezanov, in 1804 and of the British frigate *Phaeton* in 1808.<sup>58</sup> What is significant for the discussion here is that during that time Nagasaki officials were gathering intelligence about the outside world from sources other than Dutch ships, which at that time were few and far between. Of course, the Nagasaki officials did not believe what the English or the Russians told them at face value; and Doeff was subject to rigorous inquiries by the interpreters in the name of the Nagasaki magistrates on such topics as where the Prince of Orange was presently residing. While managing to answer the numerous questions directed at him,<sup>59</sup> Doeff had also realized that rivals to the Dutch monopoly on information had emerged and decided to inform *bakufu* officials that, for example, the Prince of Orange was residing in England as an exile and that the United States had become an independent state. However, it would be foolish to conclude that the Nagasaki officials innocently believed what Doeff told them. On the other hand, we should also be aware that the *bakufu* leaders had limited comprehension of what they were hearing about events happening in the outside world, for they were just beginning to learn about Western imperialism, which of course was still nascent in the eighteenth century.

To summarize this phase, first, it was a time in which the Dutch stationed at Nagasaki had compelling reasons to manipulate the world news of which they were aware, because the Netherlands, and also Batavia, were under foreign occupation for a time. They therefore had to pretend that the Netherlands and the Dutch empire were still healthy and strong, in order to maintain their trading privileges in Japan. Secondly, because the Dutch were not able to maintain their monopoly as a source

<sup>58</sup> For more details on these incidents, see Nikolai Rezanov, *Nihon taizai nikki, 1804–1805* [The diary during my stay in Japan, 1804–1805], trans. Ōshima Mikio (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000) and Miyachi Masato, “Napoleon sensō to Fēton-gō jiken [The Napoleonic war and the *Phaeton* incident],” in *Bakumatsu ishin-ki no shakai-teki seiji-shi kenkyū* [A socio-political history of the bakumatsu period] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999). According to Rezanov’s diary, the interpreters in Nagasaki hoped and expected that the *bakufu* might permit the Russians to trade at Nagasaki. Rezanov, 327–331. It is nearly impossible to confirm Rezanov’s observation, since it is difficult to believe that the Japanese and the Russian could communicate with each other due to insurmountable linguistic differences and the fact that the matter would have been too sensitive to be included in Japanese sources. There is the possibility, however, that people in Nagasaki, which was suffering from a lack of benefits from trade at that time, hoped for a flourishing Russo-Japanese trade to supplement the diminished Dutch-Japanese trade.

<sup>59</sup> The Japan-Netherlands Institute, ed., *Nagasaki Oranda Shōkan nikki* [Diaries kept at the Dutch Factory in Nagasaki during the early 19th century], vol. 4, *Secret Accounts, anno 1800–1810* (Tokyo: The Japan-Netherlands Institute, 1992), 247–287.

of world news for the Japanese, it became more and more difficult for them to manipulate what the Japanese heard. Finally, the Dutch and the *bakufu* had become primarily concerned about the modernizing powers in Europe, especially the British Empire and gave very little notice to the Iberian states, whose power and influence had waned on the current world scene.

## Conclusion

During the period under discussion in this chapter, between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth century, the focus of Dutch news reports, or *fūsetsugaki*, to the *bakufu* changed from concerns about the threat posed by Roman Catholicism (and its propagator states on the Iberian Peninsula) to the rising tide of Western imperialism in Asia. For *bakufu* officials, the initial interest in Dutch news reporting had been to help prevent any threats from Roman Catholicism, and for the Dutch, the goal was to expel mainly Portuguese and Spanish merchants, but also the Popish French East India Company, from involvement in Japanese foreign trade. While Dutch news reports were continuing along these lines, “news from Siam” between the 1690s and 1710s emerged largely by coincidence. At that stage, the Dutch news sources had rivals, such as Chinese junks active in the China Seas, who could provide news of the wider world to the *bakufu*. Moreover, Siam represented the westernmost extreme of the *bakufu*'s concern about the outside world. While Nagasaki officials were still watching Southeast Asia with interest, the *shōgun* and his high officials in Edo seemed to have come to the conclusion that the menace of any incursions from Roman Catholicism by way of the Iberian Powers had largely disappeared and thus lost interest in current international affairs. It was during that time, in 1691, that Engelbert Kaempfer, who served at the Dutch factory in Nagasaki and traveled to Edo, observed that “the whole [Japanese] Empire is shut up to all commerce and communication with foreign nations.”<sup>60</sup> The “*sakoku*” system was taking shape, although no Japanese observer was conscious of it.

The mid-eighteenth century found the Dutch in a position of having no equals in reporting external news to the *bakufu*, mainly because Chinese junks from Southeast Asia no longer sailed to Japan. The Dutch monopolized information channels concerning events happening to the west of China, including not only Southeast Asia, but also India and Persia. However, during this time the main stage of competition was South Asia, which was located outside of the traditional range of Japanese intelligence gathering and interest. The Tokugawa regime was enjoying

<sup>60</sup> Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan: Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam, 1690–92*, vol. 1, trans. John Gasper Scheuchzer (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1906), xxx.

a temporary calm, and was closing its mind to foreign affairs.

When the French Revolution and the Napoleonic War broke out, the Dutch in Nagasaki found themselves in trouble. Having little access to outside information about such events, the Nagasaki factory was forced to manipulate the information in order to maintain the Dutch position in Japan. They had to compete against the British and the Russians not only in trade but also in intelligence. On the other hand, the *bakufu* was becoming more and more aware that its established news sources were no longer sufficient in dealing with the new foreign powers that were emerging in the neighboring regions. Although Western imperialism was not yet visible in East Asia, *bakufu* leaders were becoming conscious of its approaching shadow.

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