

Scientific expeditions in Tokugawa Japan: Historical background and results of official ventures to foreign lands

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Abstract. This article discusses the problem of the research expeditions to foreign lands during the period of national seclusion in Japan. Each historical period has its specific geographical perspective. The geographical thinking in Tokugawa Japan was influenced by a policy of self-isolation. In the Tokugawa period, Japan was more interested in protecting the boundaries than expanding its geographical horizons. There were, nevertheless, several expeditionary ventures launched by the government.

This article presents the background of research expeditions dispatched by the shogunate and then moves to a discussion of the mechanism of these official expeditions and motivation behind them, as well as the nature of the political statements implied by the explorations and their results. The Japanese expeditions to the Pacific islands and northern region were mostly limited to scientific observation, mapping, and geographical survey, and the reasons for expeditionary ventures were security concerns rather than territorial expansion or the pursuit of economic interests. Although the links between the geographical exploration of the Tokugawa period and colonialism were weak, the expeditions had a considerable degree of political effect on the state policy of modern Japan.

Introduction

Geographical exploration is closely related to the political needs, social factors and ideological climate characterizing the society in which it originates. The discovery of new trade routes, religious aims, and commercial undertakings played a major part in the facilitation of future penetration and continued spread of political influence and figured openly in the ambitious projects in the great age of ocean navigation. The English, French, German, and Russian geographers saw their role not only as explorers, but also as bearers of enlightenment and civilization, and the formally scientific aspects of exploration, which would be based on careful observation and description, were often dimmed by political or economic motivations. It should be noted that military commanders were especially active in the undertakings by the government. On the other hand, adventurers who volunteered to sail to unknown lands were motivated by religious beliefs as much as by the desire for conquest, the need to find new sea routes, and the hunger for gold.

Seaborne exploration started in Europe well before Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) and Ferdinand Magellan (1480–1521) undertook their exploratory adventures. It centred in the Mediterranean, and the areas around the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, which were linked by maritime trade. In Asia, Arab seafarers plied the Indian Ocean, and the mariner Zheng He 郑和 (1371–1433) of Ming China ventured as far as the east African coast. Voyages on a global scale were, however, only started by the Portuguese in the early 16th century, and they were later joined by the Spaniards, Dutch, English, French, and Americans (Masuda 1996, 8).

When the Great Age of Navigation was well under way and Western colonial expansion was bringing about rapid changes in the Pacific, Japan in the years of Kan'ei 寛永 (1624–1644) adopted a policy of national seclusion. All Europeans except the Dutch were shut out from Japan in 1639, and a ban was imposed on foreign travel. Japan's closed-door policy during the Tokugawa period not only prevented foreigners from entering Japan but also made it nearly impossible for those Japanese who left the country to return home. Japan continued to maintain trade relations with Korea, China, Holland and Ryūkyū, however, and received official embassies from Korea.

By allowing Chinese and Dutch inbound ships to the single port of Nagasaki on a limited scale, the government attempted to monopolize foreign trade. At least three other domains were legally engaged in foreign transactions, however. Tsushima Domain continued to maintain close contacts with Korea, and, indeed, depended on Korea for its grain. Satsuma Domain exploited the extensive relations of the Ryūkyū Kingdom with China, Korea and Southeast Asia to its own interests, and the Matsumae clan received exclusive license to conduct business with the Ainu (Kim, Kurihara, Katō 1992, 15–6). It is, therefore, rightful to question the degree of isolation from the outside world during Tokugawa period, and it has been done on various occasions before. The political and diplomatic relations of Japan during this period were extensively discussed back in the 1970s and 1980s (see, for example, Toby 1977; Kazui 1982).

It could, however, be argued that after the initial threat of foreign intervention eventually subsided and the threat of Christianity was no longer an issue after the Catholic Spain and Portugal had lost their supremacy at sea to their Protestant rivals Holland and Britain, the ultimate goal of the seclusion policy, as almost always happens with closed countries throughout history, was not so much to avert the intrusion of alien influences as to stop Japan's own citizens from going abroad and acquiring knowledge about foreign countries. This is the principal reason why the construction of large ships adequate for ocean navigation was forbidden in Japan.

Despite these restrictions, the Japanese continued to practice coastal navigation, and since shipwrecks are an integral part of seafaring, it is only natural that quite a

few of the crews would drift abroad, even from a country as isolated as Tokugawa Japan was. Starting from the middle of the seventeenth century, increasing numbers of wrecked Japanese ships with surviving crews were washed ashore on mainland Asia, nearby islands, and Russian coasts.

By the late eighteenth century, the era exploration had come to an end in the Pacific region but traffic in the central Pacific stayed heavy or became even heavier because of the merchant ships sailing from America to the lucrative Canton market. Later, whales were discovered in the seas off the east coasts of Japan (Plummer 1985, 53). As a result, contact between Europeans and Japanese castaways increased, and more territory started to be covered by the survivors. But it was not until 1792 that the first Japanese castaways who witnessed Western countries were allowed to return to Japan.

Those Japanese who left the home islands, even if those incidents were of involuntary nature as in the cases of shipwrecks, were in technical violation of the seclusion policy. They were officially questioned upon their return to Japan and written reports were demanded on all those occasions. Nonetheless, by giving permission to some of the castaways to return to Japan from foreign countries and narrate their stories, the bakufu demonstrated that its limits of tolerance had been stretched but not exceeded.

In 1854 Japan concluded peace treaties with Holland, Russia, England and America and abolished all its restrictions on trade. As a result, the ban on foreign travel in Japan was also eased in 1866.

The history of Japanese navigation

The sea, as the lines of communications from and to the Japanese archipelago, has been travelled since ancient times, as reflected in the Emperor Jinmu's (神武天皇 Jinmu tennō) East conquest myth. During the Heian period, there were many ports and harbours along the seacoast of Japan and Lake Biwa, and the sea route was used for the transportation of goods, a fact recorded in *The Book of the Bureau of Taxation* (主税寮式 *Shuzeiryōshiki*). Later, Japanese embassies to Sui China (遣隋使) and to Tang China (遣唐使) were commissioned to the continent, and foreign travel became especially dynamic in the Middle Ages when merchants and dealers sailed off from the ports of Sakai 堺, Hakata 博多, and Bōnotsu 坊津.

Prior to the Tokugawa self-imposed isolationism, trade with the Portuguese and Dutch flourished. Temporary passage was opened in the direction of the South Seas, and shipbuilding progressed. In the first 30 years of the Tokugawa period, up till 1639

when the isolationist measures were finally enacted, foreign trade, although no longer free, continued to flourish under government control. Vessels, called *goshuin* 御朱印, or Red Seal Ships after their official licence, were engaged in commerce in Southeast Asia, and Japanese towns thrived in Annam, Siam, Taiwan, Malaya and the Philippines trading Japanese produce, particularly swords and staff weapons, for goods such as deer hides, feathers, ivory, and incense woods. Thousands of masterless samurai (*rōnin* 浪人) with no prospect of earning their living in Japan left their homeland and found employment as bodyguards with the sovereigns of these countries.

The frequent exposure to and active participation in the events of East Asia by the various traders brought Japan closer to the outside world than ever before. In the process, the Japanese pioneer traders learned techniques of navigation and ways of dealing with foreigners while they obtained information about other countries and peoples (Ninomiya 1972, 51). The early ties thus established were short-lived, however.

After Japan was closed to foreign intercourse, any kind of overseas passage was strictly forbidden, and nobody, whether foreign or Japanese, could enter or leave Japan on penalty of death. Even though the bakufu prohibited further construction of large vessels with the capacity of five hundred *koku* of rice, especially those that could be used for military purposes, merchant junks, *bezaisen* (弁才船), of one thousand *koku* (called 千石船 *sengokubune* in this case) were allowed to be built in order to meet the needs of growing population since the Edo area was undergoing further urbanization and was gradually turning into a consumer society. During the second half of the Tokugawa period, the *sengokubune* were transporting large amounts of goods along the Japanese coasts and operating on busy schedules (Hashimoto, Sugisaki, Kuwashima 1992, 40). Secret foreign trade was also carried on by powerful daimyo remote from the centres of the Tokugawa regime and was tolerated.

Occasionally the bakufu would even sanction an expedition on the high seas, although the general attitude towards overseas exploration remained negative. The Tokugawa government did not foster the dissemination of popular geographical knowledge, and the contemporaneous knowledge of world geography, even of the best educated men of the time, was based on information brought to Japan by the Chinese and Dutch trade mission.

Up to medieval times, the Japanese perception of world geography was limited to the 'three countries' world-view, which was based on Buddhist concepts (Frei 1984, 56). In 1602, by order of the Chinese court in whose employ he was, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1611) drew *Mappa Mundi*, which was a revolutionary new map in Chinese cartography. Copies of Ricci's map were sent to various parts of China, to Macao, and almost immediately to Japan. It served as an important basis for

the making of Japan's first printed Ricci-style world map in 1645, which was meant for popular education.

Even after more accurate world maps had been introduced by the Dutch between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, Buddhist-oriented world maps along with Ricci-style ones continued to be produced. For almost 2 centuries, the influence of these two types of maps predominated in the advanced sections of Japanese mainstream cartography (ibid., 56–60).

According to the popular cartographical images of the period, the seas surrounding Japan were considered simply as the 'Great Sea', and little need was seen to divide, name, or explore them (Hishiyama and Nagaoka 2003, 6). This could be specified as the basic reason why the Japanese people were not tempted to venture either in pre-modern or medieval times upon the open seas eastward or northward, i.e. in the direction opposite mainland Asia, mostly China and Korea with whom they had a long-lasting relations in the area of trade, study, and diplomacy. Even the *wakō* 倭寇 pirates, who raided the coastal areas of East Asia and were especially active from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, would hardly sail off the beaten tracks in search of unknown lands, and even if certain uninhabited islands were accidentally discovered by the buccaneers, those visits went unrecorded.

Strictly speaking, only some of those Japanese sailors who were castaways in foreign lands after having suffered accidents aboard ships of inadequate construction visited areas outside the sphere of the state interests of Japan. Few of the castaways were fortunate enough to be allowed to return to their homeland, relate their travelling experiences, and thus provide fresh information on foreign countries. Furthermore, the narratives of the returnees were not given away to the public, and any act of their dissemination was considered illegal.

Japanese shipping and navigation were, however, not as underdeveloped during the Tokugawa period as it is commonly perceived but, as has already been mentioned above, rather submitted to the limited domestic needs since the only legal sea routes hugged the coastlines. Though the national isolation policy killed opportunities for Japanese mariners to use techniques of ocean navigation that were left behind mostly as a legacy of the Portuguese, knowledge about navigation instruments and methods of astronomical calculation continued to be handed down to new generations. The book *Genna kōkaisho* 元和航海書 (*The Genna Nautical Book*) came into being as a compilation of the navigational knowledge which its author, Ikeda Kōun 池田好運, had learned from Manoel Gonçalvez, a Portuguese ship captain, during their voyage to Manila in 1618 (Arima 1964, 352–3). The book contained the whole body of navigation techniques known to the Portuguese.

Some seventeenth-century Japanese maps, such as *Shōhō Nihon sōzu* 正保日本総図 (*Shōhō Map of Greater Japan*), crudely outlined a northern land formation, called

Ezochi 蝦夷地 (now Hokkaido). Although the description of Ezo is, for the most part, geographically inaccurate, the order of many of the place names is correct. It is therefore speculated that the Ezochi map is the product of some earlier exploration or circumnavigation of Hokkaido (Walker 2001, 3–5).

There were people in Tokugawa Japan who had never travelled beyond Japanese borders but dedicated themselves to accumulating knowledge, which would be necessary in case Japan no longer remained isolated from the outside world. Years before Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858) of the US Navy sailed into Japan in 1853 and long before the Japanese established a naval training centre in Nagasaki in 1855, Kume Tsūken 久米通賢 (1780–1841) went to Osaka and studied astronomy, navigation and shipbuilding under Hazama Shigetomi 間重富 (1756–1816), a well-known astronomer himself and inventor of surveying instruments. It was Shigetomi who carefully analyzed Russian maps brought to Japan by shipwrecked returnees and examined all the sea-routes.

Hayashi Shihei 林子平 (1738–1793), a geographer and a retainer of the Sendai han, advised the government to adopt Western military science and to re-educate the samurai. He also stressed the importance of exploring uninhabited islands around Japan that could have both political and strategic value. His ideas were inspired by Dutch colonial theories. In 1786 Shihei published his well-known work, *Sangoku tsūran zusetsu* 三国通覧図説 (*An Illustrated Survey of the Three Countries*), basically a survey of Korea, the Ryūkyū Islands, and Ezochi.¹

In spite of those individual projects, Japan, as a state, showed little interest in the Kuriles, Sakhalin, or Pacific islands. Ryūkyū to the south, on the other hand, produced a much greater attraction than Japan's neighbours in the north. It was not accidental, therefore, that the Ryūkyū Kingdom was forced to submit as a vassal-state to Japan as early as 1609 as a result of the conquest by the Satsuma Domain, which from that point on conducted trade with the archipelago authorized by the bakufu and maintained substantial overseas traffic.

Exploratory ventures to the uninhabited islands of the Pacific

The official overseas explorations of the Tokugawa bakufu were not only scarce, but covered a very limited area outside the borders of Japan. One of the first attempts at a scientific expedition was effected in the Pacific region.

¹ Ezochi means *barbarian land*, and, as an ethno-geographic term, could refer collectively not only to present-day Hokkaidō, Sakhalin, and the Kuriles, but also to their inhabitants. The name *Ezo* is used alongside *Ezochi*, but as Morris-Suzuki has pointed out, it is a 'vaguely defined area' in Japanese (Morris-Suzuki 1999, 65).

The problems of the Pacific were being given increased attention by Western geographers and cartographers at the time and, since Japan adopted Western maps, the knowledge of the Pacific was likewise based on Western convention.

The territory in the Pacific region that had been receiving some degree of moderate attention in Japan ever since the pre-Tokugawa period was the Ogasawara Islands (also known as the Bonin Islands),² along with adjacent islands, likewise uninhabited at the time. Though this region was known to the Japanese, it was considered too peripheral and apparently insignificant for the most part of the Tokugawa period.

In the early nineteenth century, however, with the rise of the whaling industry in the north Pacific and with the expansion of Western commercial relations with East Asia, the Ogasawara (Bonin) Islands were deliberately sought out as a possible base for whalers and assumed international importance. The islands had also been explored by Commodore Perry, who considered the possibility of establishing trans-Pacific steamship lines on this strategically important point during and after his naval expedition to Japan in 1853–1854 and placed prospects on it as a site for whaling outposts and agricultural colonies (Tanaka 1998, 43). Japan finally became alarmed and attempted to forestall the emergence of a Western-power base at such close proximity to its seashore. It was at this point in the mid nineteenth century that many contradictory accounts of the history of the discovery of the Ogasawara Archipelago, with credit going to Japanese explorers, were hastily written in an attempt to justify Japan's claims to the land. Claims of such sort were not a novel practice in the process of colonization, and Japan was not the only player in this game in which other powers, such as the United States, England and Russia, also took part (Kublin 1953, 29, 34).

Japanese tradition has it that in October 1593 Ogasawara Sadayori 小笠原貞頼, a Japanese warrior and grandson of the lord of Fukushi 深志 Castle, Ogasawara Nagatoki 小笠原長時, participated in the Korean invasions under the orders of Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1536–1598). In reward for his services, Sadayori received permission from Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542–1616) upon his return to lead a voyage of exploration in the seas beyond the coastal limits of Japan with a promise that any uninhabited territory, should any be discovered, would be granted to him. Sailing south-southeast of Hachijōjima 八丈島, Sadayori reportedly sighted uninhabited islands, and returned with a collection of curiosities collected there. Ieyasu then related the whole story to Hideyoshi, who ordered that the newly discovered lands should come into possession of the samurai explorer and be named 'Ogasawara' in his honour.

² The archipelago was formally renamed *Ogasawara shotō* 小笠原諸島 in Japanese only upon the repossession of the group of islands by the Tokugawa government in 1862. Until then, the commonly used appellation was *Bunin-tō* 無人島 (Bonin Islands). Here I use the name *Ogasawara Islands* throughout in order to avoid confusion.

This story is considered a fabrication by many scholars, and Ogasawara Sadayori is dismissed as a fictitious character (see, for example, Kublin 1953, 30). Japanese historian Nakajima Tsugitarō 中嶋次太郎 (1890–1975) however claimed that he had discovered the name of Sadayori in the family records of the Hazu branch of the Ogasawara family 幡豆小笠原氏, who were active as seamen of the Tokugawa clan.³

What is certain, however, is that in the second month of 1670, a Japanese ship from Awa Province (Tokushima Prefecture, Shikoku) drifted ashore on one of uninhabited islands, later identified as Ogasawara. When its crew finally managed to return to Japan later that year, they made an official report known under the name of *Ashūsen Bunintō hyōryūki* 阿州船無人島漂流記 (*Account of the Drifting of the Vessel from Awa Province to Uninhabited Islands*), to the Shimoda magistrate 下田奉行所 and, therefore, became the first recorded case of castaways on Ogasawara. It appears that this report originated the term ‘Bunintō’ (manless island) which was corrupted to ‘Bonin’ by Westerners (Ninomiya 1972, 47).

Bakufu officials who learned about the incident were interested in the most detailed data about the geography, flora, and fauna of the islands that the returned castaways could provide. It may be assumed that the seas to the south of the Izu Islands 伊豆七島 were virtually unknown at that time (Yamashita 1992, 1: 194–6).

It was possibly this report that propelled the first government-sponsored expedition to explore the Ogasawara Islands in 1674. Orders were given by the Tokugawa government to construct at Nagasaki a vessel specifically designed for seafaring and modelled on the Chinese trading vessels that regularly came to Nagasaki. Next year the ship, called *Fukokuju-maru* 富国寿丸, was outfitted and dispatched, and on the first day of the fifth month of 1675, Captain Shimaya Ichizaemon 島谷市左衛門, along with thirty-two men (none of them, incidentally, bakufu officials), landed on the coast and proceeded to survey, chart and name the islands observed during the passage between Hachijōjima 八丈島 and the Ogasawara Archipelago. Names, based upon family relationships, were given to the individual ‘uninhabited islands’ of the group. The expedition also collected hundreds of samples of minerals, flora, and fauna and sailed into Shimoda on June 12. On Shimaya’s return to Japan, a detailed report on the observations of the expedition was drawn up for the bakufu, the crew was disbanded, and the bakufu did not show any intention to authorize another official voyage for a very long time (Kublin 1953, 31).

The expedition was performed in seeming contradiction to the policy of national seclusion. It is difficult to say what the reasons for the original interest of the Tokugawa

³ See display ‘Ogasawara Sadayori 小笠原貞頼’ at the Ogasawara Visitor Center.

bakufu in the Ogasawara Islands were. The archipelago did not pose any military threat at that moment, and after this mission was completed, it was further accepted as a territory of Japan. The basic motivations behind this oceanic exploration could have been scientific curiosity proved by actual extensive surveys, as well as a desire to appraise the economic possibilities of the islands or even the possibilities of colonization.

Although the expedition did not produce any substantial outcome, the Dutch, whose factory was located on Dejima 出島, learned about it from the inhabitants of Nagasaki and provided information for the earliest published account of the Ogasawara Islands to appear in Europe. It was included into the *History of Japan* by Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716), a German surgeon in the employ of the Dutch East India Company who served in Japan from 1690 to 1692. According to Kaempfer, the archipelago was called ‘bune shima’, ‘without people’, by the fishermen who sought shelter there in 1675 (Kaempfer 1906, 1:113).

The islands themselves, whose existence was known in Izu and Edo throughout the Tokugawa period, were mostly referred to as the Tatsumi Munin-tō 辰巳無人島 (South–Southeast Deserted Islands). However, Hayashi Shihei’s 1785 volume *Sangoku tsūran zusetsu* includes a detailed description of ‘Uninhabited Islands’ (無人嶋 *Mujinjima*) and their map in a supplementary section and notes that they ‘are known as the Ogasawara Islands’ because ‘in ancient times, a certain Ogasawara (小笠原某) discovered these islands, brought home a map, and this is how they received their name’ (see ‘Mujintō 無人島’ in Hayashi 1785). Hayashi, therefore, lent credence to the legend of Ogasawara Sadayori. He also advocated that the Ogasawara Islands, along with other outlying areas, be annexed and colonized, considering it an economically profitable business (*ibid.*). It appears that he was prompted to include discussion about the Ogasawara Islands when he heard views on colonization from the Dutch during his studies in Nagasaki in 1777 (Tanaka 1998, 35).

Although most of the later visits to the Ogasawara Islands were of unintentional nature, usually by drifters whose junks were caught in the storms of the North Pacific, three times altogether—in 1675, 1702, and 1725—descendants of Ogasawara Sadayori, the self-declared discoverer of the islands, appealed to the Tokugawa government for permission to travel to the islands and assert rights of possession.

In 1727, rōnin Ogasawara Kunai Sadatō 小笠原宮内貞任 presented the bakufu a book written by an anonymous author and called *Tatsumi mujintō ki* 巽無人島記 (*Chronicle of Deserted Islands to the Southeast*), which gave details of the purported expedition by Ogasawara Sadayori. Sadatō claimed that Sadayori was his ancestor and proposed to the bakufu that another expedition should be sent to explore the islands. It is not clear what kind of exploration he hoped to accomplish, but the government

finally authorized a voyage. It was not until 1734, however, that Sadatō dispatched a ship from Osaka. The ship apparently did not reach the destination and was never heard from again afterwards, presumably lost at sea. Sadatō, then, petitioned again but the bakufu now ordered an official investigation into the legitimacy of his claims. The whole affair of Ogasawara Sadayori's discovery of Ogasawara was exposed as a fraud, and Sadatō was banished to a remote province (Kublin 1953, 33–4).⁴ Nevertheless, the legend was later revived to justify the territorial claims of Japan.

Until 1830, the Ogasawara Islands remained uninhabited and seemingly free from the interest of the Western powers and Japan. They were visited by European ships from time to time, but no one had ever taken the trouble to claim them officially for one sovereign power or another, except for the British captain Frederick W. Beechey whose ship *H.M.S. Blossom* sailed into the harbour on Ogasawara in 1827. Beechey considered taking possession of the uninhabited archipelago a mere matter of form, but he still annexed the islands and declared them to be the property of the British government by nailing a sheet of copper to a tree and then by bestowing names to the islands of the central and northern cluster (Kublin 1953, 43–4). This act of annexation was first challenged by Commodore Perry during and after his expedition to Japan, and, in 1861, by Japan herself.

In 1830, the Ogasawara Islands were at long last colonized by Europeans and Hawaiians. As early as 1840s, the Dutch government, which was aware of Japan's territorial claims concerning the Ogasawara Islands, became suspicious of Japan's policy of standing idly by while English and American colonists were taking over the territory. Therefore, in the fourth month of 1846, the Dutch factory at Dejima cautioned the Nagasaki magistrate's office that to abandon such a crucial base of operations midway between America and China would be disastrous in the future. The warning was forwarded to the government, but the bakufu took no action to colonize the archipelago and generally remained disinterested in this territory, which lay beyond the jurisdiction of the empire (Komatsu 2001, 198–9).

That the Tokugawa chose to focus their energies on internal problems rather than pursue vague overseas projects can be seen as a clear indication that during the 250-year-long 'Tokugawa peace' the perceived threat came from within Japan, not from the territories beyond its borders.

It was, however, common knowledge among the interpreters of Dutch in Nagasaki that Westerners had settled on the islands. As the nineteenth century progressed and the appearance of foreign ships in the waters surrounding Japan became more frequent, diplomatic tensions would increase each time a foreign ship appeared

⁴ Note, however, that Kunai Sadatō's name was misspelled as Miyauchi Sadahide in the article.

without warning in the ports of Nagasaki or Hokkaido. At this time among those who were engaged in ‘Dutch studies’, there appeared persons who were looking for a likely place to make contact with foreign countries, and the Ogasawara Islands seemed to be one of those (Tanaka 1998, 37).

It was not before Japan abandoned its policy of seclusion that the Tokugawa government finally decided to adopt a more active stance. When the bakufu dispatched the steamship *Kanrin-maru* 咸臨丸 as an escort for the first Japanese envoys to America in 1860, the mission was ordered by the naval magistrate to call at the Ogasawara Islands, either on the way to America or on the way back in order to investigate the state of the archipelago. The mission was never carried out, but in the last month of 1861, the *Kanrin-maru* 咸臨丸 was dispatched again, this time specifically to the Ogasawara Islands, with approximately ninety people on board.

This sudden change of attitude can be explained by the fact that the embassy sent by Japan to ratify the United States–Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce (1858) returned with the word that Euro-American natives were now inhabiting the islands; their arrival to Ogasawara followed the increased visits of whaling ships, and Commodore Perry’s earlier trip to the islands.

The crew of the *Kanrin-maru* conducted a survey of the islands, similar to that of Shimaya’s expedition nearly 200 years earlier, and left behind six administrators, who assisted in developing the islands, negotiating with the previously settled natives of European and American stock and facilitating the immigration of thirty-eight settlers from Hachijōjima the following year. However, because of political turbulence both at home and abroad,⁵ the Japanese colonists were forced to return to the mainland in 1863.

Only in 1876, after insinuations from foreign governments that Japan was ignoring the Ogasawara Islands, were they formally annexed and Foreign Minister Terajima Munenori 寺島宗則 (1832–1893) declared the archipelago to be under Japanese administration. Japan’s sovereignty over the territory was recognized by the Western powers.⁶

Scientific expeditions to Sakhalin and the Kuriles

The region to the north of Japan was a politically more sensitive issue than the uninhabited Ogasawara Islands, and the attitude of the bakufu is demonstrative of that

⁵ The bakufu became fearful of an attack on the Ogasawara Islands by British warships after the Richardson Affair (生麦事件 Namamugi Jiken) broke out in 1862, and the British demanded an apology.

⁶ The Ogasawara Islands played an important role during the Pacific War and were thereafter administered by the U.S.A. from 1945 to 1968.

although it was only during the next stage of officially sanctioned expeditions that the Japanese turned attention towards their northern borderlands, including Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, which in due course were to become a matter of territorial disputes with Russia.⁷

There is evidence, however, that it was neither Russia nor Japan but China, which after having first reached Sakhalin in the thirteenth century, still claimed sovereignty over its northern part centuries later and exacted annual tribute, although this tribute was a profitable form of barter more than anything else as far as the Sakhalin natives were concerned (Keene 1969, 142). According to Mamiya Rinzō 間宮林蔵 (1775–1844), a shogunate official and celebrated explorer of the north, the Ainu paid tributary visits to Qing officials at Dalian, and received official titles on Ainu elders in return (Walker 2007, 301).

Japan does not have a land border and, as Tanaka observes, the Japanese people of the Tokugawa period ‘had but a faint awareness of territory as an international issue’ (Tanaka 1998, 31). Japanese parties visited the north starting at the end of the seventeenth century, but no real colonization could take place as long as it was not allowed for Japanese to circulate information about Japan abroad or even to teach the Japanese language to foreigners (Keene 1969, 120).

Russian interest in Japan was aroused around 1700 when news of Japan’s continuing progress towards the Kurile Islands and increasing domination in the region reached Moscow. In 1702, Peter the Great ordered the collection of information on Japan and the subjection of Kamchatka (Jansen 1989, 93). Quite a few Japanese sailors, who were cast ashore on Kamchatka by storms in the first decades of the eighteenth century, provided the Russians with the information about the region to the north of Ezo.

By the 1750s, the Japanese merchants who were pushing north from southern Hokkaido and trading with the Ainu established their first fishing and trading posts at the southern end of the Kurile Archipelago, in Kunashir (Kunashiri), and the first Russian traders and missionaries ventured into the northern Kurile Islands. The interaction between the Japanese and the Russians in the Kuriles could not be avoided, and some Japanese even had a little knowledge of the Russian language, learned from trappers in the region or perhaps in Kamchatka.

Although the geographical awareness of present Hokkaido was still not adequate in Japan, this advance southward of the Russians in the Kuriles awakened the bakufu

⁷ Brett L. Walker has stated that the notion of borderland, as a conceptual tool, peripheralizes Ezo, and ignores its role as the core of epistemological universe for its inhabitants (Walker 2001, 5–6). This paper, however, focuses on the effect of Japanese exploration upon the process of state formation, and here the terms *borderland* and *frontier* are used in this context.

to the threat they posed. At that time, the Japanese at Matsumae undertook trade with the Ainu from Iturup (Etorofu) and the Kunashir Islands, and they knew that the Ainu from the southern Kuriles carried out trade with the Ainu from the northern Kuriles. There were private parties of surveys that preceded official enterprises.

Kudō Heisuke 工藤平助 (1734–1800), a doctor, was informed of the alleged Russian invasion to Ezochi when he visited Nagasaki.⁸ He insisted that one of the solutions to this problem was to develop Hokkaidō and became one of its early pioneers. To support his thesis that Japan's northern frontier was being threatened, he made a special effort to learn as much as possible about conditions in the northern islands. Reports by castaways returning from Russia contained some of the information he sought, and Heisuke eventually presented his warnings in the book *Aka Ezo fūsetu kō* 赤蝦夷風説考 (*A Study of Red Ainu Reports*), completed in 1781.

The book was brought to the attention of Tanuma Okitsugu 田沼意次 (1719–1788), the bakufu's senior councillor and virtual dictator of Japan, who was impressed by it and even directed the Matsumae clan to submit a report on the situation in the north. The clan leaders responded in vague terms in order to conceal their military weakness, but Okitsugu remained unsatisfied and ordered that a small expedition be dispatched to the north. Two officially sanctioned parties were sent out, one to Sakhalin and the other to the Kuriles, with orders to proceed to the islands nearest those held by the Russians and to obtain firsthand information. The mission was accomplished in 1785–86, and it confirmed the rumours of Russian activity in the Kuriles, although it was also stated that the conditions of their lives in that desolate region were miserable (Keene 1969, 38).

Among the party was Mogami Tokunai 最上徳内 (1754–1836), an explorer under government employ, who travelled together with his superiors as far as Iturup to make survey charts and claimed he was 'the first Japanese ever to set foot there' (Keene 1969, 129). The party met Russians on Iturup and some communication ensued until the Russians were ordered to leave for Sakhalin. Tokunai then served as a shogunate official, and travelled extensively in the Matsumae Domain. In 1792, he ventured to Sakhalin along with several other officials. His mission was not to thoroughly map

⁸ Nagasaki officials got the information about the assumed intentions of Russia from Polish Count Maurycy August Beniowski (1746–1786), who had entered the ranks of the Polish confederates in their struggle against Russia, had been thrice captured and twice exiled before he managed to escape from his last place of exile in Kamchatka and sail with his fellow rebels to the Kurile Islands, Shikoku Island in Japan, the Ryūkyū Islands, and then Macao. He sent various documents to the Dutch factory in Nagasaki with information and a warning about the imminent invasion of the Dutch factory in Nagasaki by Russia with the request that they should be transmitted to the proper Japanese officials (Arima 1964, 358). Although without substance in fact, Beniowski's warnings resulted in a great deal of alarm among those who learned of them. I adopt the Polish spelling of Beniowski's name here, instead of prevalent Moritz August von Benyovsky.

the territory, but rather to document trade abuses ‘perpetrated by Japanese merchants on Sakhalin islanders’ (Walker 2007, 295). Still, he included some ethnographic information and maps in his writings.

Later, it was Hayashi Shihei who emphasized the danger coming from the Russians in his books. As an outspoken advocator of national defence and supporter of European military techniques and legal systems, he also stressed the need to prepare for naval warfare and coastal fortifications in his best-known treatise, *Kaikoku heidan* 海国兵談 (*Discussion of the Military Problems of a Maritime Nation*). In spite of being moved by Hayashi’s views, realizing the necessity for the study of Western military science, and nourishing the idea of Japan as a maritime state, the Chief Minister Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信 (1748–1829) maintained that a diversion of resources to the north would serve to impoverish the southern domains (Jansen 1989, 94), and after the book’s publication, Hayashi was ordered confined to his estate for criticizing official policies, and the woodblock prints of his works were destroyed (Arima 1964, 359).

However, as in the case with the castaway accounts, when the ban on official circulation often resulted in hand-to-hand distribution, Hayashi’s books were to enjoy a large reading audience as manuscript copies and even printed editions of the *Sangoku Tsūran Zusetsu* leaked out to the public. The latter was also translated into Dutch by Isaac Titsingh, superintendent of the Dutch East India Company factory at Dejima, and made known to the Western world before the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Kondō Jūzō 近藤重蔵 (1771–1829), another foremost Japanese geographer, traveller and explorer of the Kunashir and Iturup islands, made four trips to the Japanese northern frontier and urged the bakufu to colonize the region. He also published a popular work, *Hen’yō bunkaizu kō* 辺要分界図考 (*Illustrated Treatise on the Frontier*) based on information gathered from Chinese and Korean sources, as well as accounts of sailors shipwrecked on the coast of Russia. Incidentally, the book not only contains geographical, historical, and cultural information about the unexplored northern regions, but also includes mention of the purported discovery of the Ogasawara Islands in 1593 (Kublin 1953, 35).

Although the warnings of the scholars were ignored at the official level, outwardly at least, some measures against the continuing Russian threat were implemented. Beginning in 1799, direct control over the Ezo region was assumed by the government, and a magistracy (奉行 *bugyō*) of Matsumae established in 1802. This step was largely prompted by the appearance of the ship *Providence*, captained by William Robert Broughton, a British naval officer, near the coast of Hokkaido in 1796. After having completed his survey of Vancouver earlier that year, Broughton voyaged to Asia, where he became the first Englishman to visit Korea and explore the coast of Hokkaido. He spent winter at Macau, where he purchased a small schooner, *Prince*

William Henry, and in 1797 continued the mission northwards, landing once again at Cape Etomo, the survey of which was left unaccomplished from the previous year.

The accident of a foreign ship arriving at territory under Japanese jurisdiction was investigated by both domain and government officials and became the pretext for the bakufu's more direct involvement in the affairs of the Ezo region (Iwasaki 2005, 270–1).⁹ The fears of the bakufu were also based on the geographical understanding that the land masses of Ezochi were closer to foreign borders than Ryūkyū or Korea, which were separated from the mainland of Japan by vast expanses of the sea. In spite of the actions of the central government, however, the territory was still considered by Matsudaira Sadanobu a buffer-zone, entrusted to Matsumae, while the 'land of Japan' stretched to the south from Tsugaru (Tanaka 1998, 52).¹⁰

During that transitory period of governmental control over the region of Ezo in the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were three incidents of Russians taking Japanese prisoner. Conversely, there is also one incident of Japanese taking Russians prisoner. Because these incidents occurred in Kunashir, Iturup and Sakhalin we can surmise that these regions were the target areas for Russian and Japanese struggles for influence.

In 1806 and 1807, two Russian naval officers, Nikolai A. Khvostov (1776–1809) and Gavriil Ivanovich Davydov (1764–1809), lead several punitive raids, burning and pillaging Japanese settlements on the islands of Iturup and Sakhalin after Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov (1764–1807), a special envoy of Russia, failed to carry out his mission to open trade relations with Japan.

These two incidents were the first invasions by Europeans in which Japanese resisted and were defeated, and they therefore were to influence in great measure the national policy of Japan. As a result, among other measures of defence, a translation division was established in the astronomical department of the government in order to encourage research work on books about Western military science, and studies were performed on Russian arms (Arima 1964, 359–60). It was also at this point that the Matsumae Domain submitted a proposal to the bakufu to begin trade talks with Russia on the periphery of Ezo in exchange for drawing the official border between the two countries (Iwasaki 2005, 277).

The proposal itself, which was caused by the financial stress of the domain placed in charge of the borderlands, was unprecedented in the context of the closed country policy and was not seriously considered even by the faction of pragmatists inside the

⁹ I should like to thank an anonymous peer reviewer for suggesting this source of reference.

¹⁰ The Tokugawa government continued to resist the pressure to expand into the islands adjacent to Ezo, and in 1821, the administration of Ezo and Sakhalin was transferred back to the Matsumae Domain.

bakufu. Growing consciousness of a new colonizing presence advancing southwards toward Japan encouraged the Japanese government to dispatch missions to explore and map the further reaches of the Ezo islands, however (Morris-Suzuki 1999, 66).

First of all, in 1808, two officials, Mamiya Rinzō and Matsuda Denjūrō 松田伝十郎 (1769–1843), were officially dispatched to explore Sakhalin and the region as far as the lower reaches of the Amur River. The surveyors were expected to determine the actual boundaries between Japan and the Russian Empire. The mission was sponsored by the Tokugawa shogun and his chief scientific adviser, the astronomer Takahashi Kageyasu 高橋景保 (1785–1829), who sought to map, with the best survey technologies available, the national boundaries between Japan, Russia, and what were still considered to be Chinese domains of the Qing Empire (Walker 2007, 284). Although the Japanese had been surveying the southern part of Sakhalin since the early seventeenth century and Mamiya himself was previously part of survey teams organized under the orders of the bakufu, Japanese geographers relied on European maps for knowledge of the rest of Sakhalin and, consequently, had no knowledge whether it was an island or a peninsula connected to the mainland of Asia (Keene 1969, 140 and 142).

Mamiya and Matsuda, journeying by foot and by small boat through Sakhalin, came to conclusion that Sakhalin was an island and not connected to the Asian continent, which was proven by Mamiya on his subsequent expeditions. Matsuda also left a wooden sign in the region of Cape Rakka which read that here was ‘the border of Great Japan’ (大日本国境) (Morris-Suzuki 1999, 68).

Mamiya Rinzō remained in the Ezo region until 1811. At one point, he took active part in organizing the defence against the attacks of Khvostov and Davydov on Iturup in 1807 (Keene 1969, 139). As Tessa Morris-Suzuki explains, he described his experiences in his works, where he classified and labelled the ‘tribes’ whom he met on his journey. He also gave detailed descriptions of their appearance and customs in a style remarkably similar to that of both European cartographers and the accounts of Japanese castaways (Morris-Suzuki 1999, 66). These accounts of Mamiya Rinzō remain of considerable ethnographic interest even today. None of the northern expeditions dispatched by the bakufu was given specific instructions to gather ethnographic data, however. Rather, the government was interested in geography and geology (Winkel 1999, 40–64). Mamiya’s scientific maps of Sakhalin proved not only instrumental in defending Japan’s sovereignty and regional interests, but also assisted with later Japanese claims in the North Pacific (Walker 2007, 284). Ethnography was, therefore, a sideline interest of explorers like Mamiya and Mogami, who learned to communicate with the Ainu in their language and wrote a description of their lifestyle.

It was Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) who in his book *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan* named the present Strait of Tartary (a body of water which divides Sakhalin from mainland Asia and connects the Sea of Okhotsk on the north with the Sea of Japan on the south) ‘Mamia Strait’, a name still used by the Japanese today (*Mamiya kaikyō* 間宮海峡). Although later in his life, Mamiya, an established explorer by now, became a much disliked undercover agent for the Tokugawa bakufu, the Japanese name of the strait continues to stand as a testimony and a reminder of the history of Japanese geographical explorations in the Tokugawa period.

In 1811, a Russian surveying expedition commanded by Vasiliï Mikhailovich Golovnin (1776–1831) landed on Kunashir in order to negotiate for supplies but was seized by the Japanese, removed to Hakodate, and two years later exchanged for Takadaya Kahee 高田屋嘉兵 (1769–1827), a Japanese merchant that his command had kidnapped. When Golovnin was released, letters from the Russian governor of Siberia and the commander at Okhotsk expressed regrets for the violence of a few years earlier ‘in the land of Japan’ (日本地に於て乱妨仕候 in the contemporaneous Japanese translation) and the attacks ‘on the settlements of the Kurile islands in Japan’ (クリリツケ諸嶋なる日本領の村落) and urged the delineation of a frontier at Kunashir (Iwasaki 2005, 278). No action was taken by the bakufu with regard to the boundary, for the Russian letters were considered an actual recognition of Ezochi as the territory of Japan, and the major security concerns of the Japanese side were satisfied.

Official geographical explorations in the Ezo region continued, however, and went hand in hand with the ideas of colonization raised by the academic public, although never in actual fact supported by the government. Political economist Honda Toshiaki’s 本多利明 (1744–1820) concern was to win support for his desire to have a clearly defined frontier established between Japan and Russia and colonize northwards. He also advocated the sponsorship of merchant activities to the north and establishment of commercial relations with Russia, especially in places such as Iturup and Kunashir, where Japanese goods could be traded for Russian ones (Keene 1969, 108).

It was this rather vague boundary between Japan and Russia that provided good reason for Inō Tadataka 伊能忠敬 (1745–1818), a noted geographical surveyor, to map the coasts of one of the Kurile Islands nearest to Ezo after it was attacked by marauders from Siberia. Tadataka was operating under the order of the shogunate and maintained that maps would be necessary for planning the defence of the country and for a policy of colonization (Pye and Beasley 1951, passim).

Toshiaki, on the other hand, considered it essential for Japan to follow the example of England in the matter of colonization, and the first places to be colonized were the Ezo Islands because the people there were of the same race as the Japanese. If Japan

did not act at once, however, the territories would be gradually won over by Russia (Keene 1969, 115–7). Toshiaki was not alone in his desire for Ezo to be colonized or civilized. Other writers like Kudō Heisuke and Hayashi Shihei also favoured the idea. Toshiaki thought that from the Ezo the Japanese could easily extend their possessions up to Kamchatka, to Cape Thaddeus beyond, and across to the continent of North America. He has also marked southern territories, first of all the Ogasawara Islands, for Japanese expansion (Keene 1969, 89, 120–1). It is of note that Mogami Tokunai, who participated in the survey team dispatched by Tanuma Okitsugu back in 1785–86 and spent two years in the north, was Toshiaki's disciple.

Unlike Japanese undertakings, various research expeditions that the Russian government sent to explore eastern Siberia, the Kamchatka Peninsula, and Sakhalin over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century were well-equipped ventures involving military troops, geologists, botanists and ethnographers. The second Kamchatka expedition, which embarked in 1733 from St. Petersburg, was accompanied by draftsmen, surveyors, craftsmen, scribes, and Cossack troops. The expedition's researchers, all of German origin, collected material artefacts and recorded oral histories of the local people (Vermeulen 1999, 20). The Amour expeditions of the 1850s were backed by the wealth of the Russian-American Trading Company and by the authority of the newly created Russian Geographical Society (Morris-Suzuki 1999, 66–9). In accord with European colonial tradition, their aim was not to locate the limits of Russian rule, but rather to stake Russia's claim to the right to territorial expansion.

By that time, the Kurile Islands and Sakhalin had been explored by Japan, permanent fishery settlements had been constructed, and Japanese maps showed more sophisticated knowledge of the region (Walker 2001, 4). Only after the middle of the nineteenth century however, in response to growing foreign pressure, the Japanese government redefined the nation's boundaries. In 1855, upon the opening of the ports, the convention of Japan and Russia represented by Rear Admiral Evfimii Vasil'evich Putyatin (1803–1883) was signed that divided the Kuriles between the two countries, though leaving unresolved the boundary questions concerning Sakhalin.

In the same year, the bakufu assumed direct control over the region of Ezo for the second time and moved from the earlier policy of subjugation of the Ainu towards populating and colonizing Ezochi according to the Western pattern. When Russian scholar Fyodor Bogdanovich Schmidt (Friedrich Schmidt) and two assistants conducted exploration in the Russian Far East from 1860 to 1862, their activities were concentrated on the Pacific and involved geological reconnaissance on Sakhalin and the surveying and mapping of the Strait of Tartary and the coast southward to Vladivostok. However, exploration on Sakhalin was limited by the Japanese, who

would not allow the expedition to study the southern half of the island, which had by then become a sensitive territorial issue (Bassin 1983, 251).

The official Japanese expeditions to the region of Ezo outnumbered those dispatched to the Ogasawara Islands. This discrepancy can be explained by the different political situation in those territories, or at least the different perception of that situation by the bakufu. Ezo was facing the imminent threat of Russia's advance to the south, while the Ogasawara Archipelago was a handful of uninhabited islands far away from Japan without reliable means of getting there. By the middle of the Edo period the techniques of ocean navigation were half-forgotten, and the idea of crossing open seas to the deserted islands did not appeal to the government.

The Tokugawa government lacked awareness of territorial issues, and each of the territorial questions, including the negotiation of the national border on Sakhalin and repossession of the Ogasawara Islands, were carried over into the Meiji era for a final resolution.

Armchair travellers and explorers

Tokugawa Japan cultivated a culture of travel and pilgrimages on a huge scale. Although in spatial terms those trips never crossed the borders of the country, in the absence of actual adventure on the high seas, Japanese writers, artists, and mapmakers used the inventive power of the imagination to fill in the cognitive blank of geographical space (Yonemoto 1999, 170). In literary fiction and even popular cartography, the imagination could not be stopped from working, and the oceans beyond the actual reach of travellers were populated by exotic peoples. Places like the Land of Bird People and the Land of Creatures with Six legs and Four Wings were accepted as real ones and included into the Japanese world view along with less familiar societies such as Siam, Luzon, Java, and Holland as the realms of the 'outer barbarians' (外夷 *gai-i*) (Morris-Suzuki 1996, 83).

In the *Honchō zukan kōmoku* 本朝図鑑項目 (*Outline Map of Our Country*), published in 1687, considerable space is occupied by lands now considered to be fantastic or mythical, such as an entity labelled *Rasetsu koku* 羅刹国 (Country of the Rakshasas), or *Nyōninjima* 女人島 (Island of Women). This Island of Women was the fabled residence of the benevolent female deities (the *rakshasas* of the Lotus Sutra), later popularized in the fiction of Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693) (Yonemoto 2003, 33–5). 'Kari no michi', or 'Gandō' 雁道, a no-man's-land alluded to in the Chinese classics, was depicted to the north of Japan, although it is unclear to what degree late-seventeenth-century map readers considered them to be actual places (Yonemoto 2006, 37).

There were books written by those who never travelled abroad and could, therefore, add different dimension to the stories of outside world. Hiraga Gennai's 平賀源内 (1728–1779) *Fūryū Shidōken den* 風流志道軒伝 (*The tale of dashing Shidōken*; 1763) is an early example of fictional foreign travel. It is an imaginary novel where Gennai describes distant and fantastic lands, populated by giants (*taijinkoku* 大人国), long-legged people (*chōkyakukoku* 長脚国), or entirely by women.

Many parallels have been evoked between *Fūryū Shidōken den* and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), to the extent that theories of Gennai's possible acquaintance with the book of Swift have been proffered. It is, however, more likely that the source of Gennai's fantasy is of Chinese origin as provided by *Wakan sansai zue* 和漢三才図会 (*Japanese–Chinese Illustrated Assemblage of the Three Components of the Universe*), an illustrated Japanese encyclopaedia compiled by Terashima Ryōan 寺島良安 (dates unknown) and completed in 1712. This encyclopaedia is closely patterned on the 1607 Chinese work *Sancai tuihui* 三才图会 (*Illustrated Book of the Three Powers*), and its entries of geography include fictitious nations along with real ones (Mōri [s.d.], 3). Hiraga Gennai never believed that such lands existed and used their images exclusively in order to satirize certain aspects of Japanese society, since *Fūryū Shidōken den* does not explore geography but human passions. Gennai's imagination was however based on the grounds of traditional East Asian geographical beliefs, and his hero Asanoshin's 浅之進 flights by means of a magic fan, therefore, extend freely from the Land of Quack Doctors to Borneo to Holland.

However remote the possibility that Gennai was actually acquainted with *Gulliver's Travels*, it is not unfeasible that Swift's book could have reached Japan in ways similar to *Aesop's Fables*, which had first appeared in a Jesuit-sponsored translation of 1593, although it was no longer known in the eighteenth century when Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818) discovered a copy in the Lord of Kii's library. He translated a few of the fables into Chinese and made up others in Aesop's manner. The *Odyssey* was known to Hirazawa Kyokuzan 平沢旭山 (1733–1791), who heard the Polyphemus episode while he was in Nagasaki. He later related it as the actual experiences of a certain man, but he was not wholly inclined to trust the tale as a realistic account. According to Western atlases he had consulted, there was indeed a land of giants but no mention was made of their being cannibals. Hirazawa claimed to have also read various variants of that episode in books of travels and strange tales (Keene 1969, 73–5).

It is of note that the first translation of a European novel, completed in 1850, was the *Record of Wanderings* 'written by an Englishman, Robinson Crusoe' (Keene 1969, 75). However, interest in the narratives of castaways, fictitious as well as real and European as well as Japanese, vanished as soon as the ban on travelling abroad was finally lifted and it was no longer a forbidden domain.

Conclusions

Some degree of deviance is inevitable in all societies. Therefore, when we talk about the national seclusion policy in Japan during the Edo period, a critical sensitivity to the plurality of levels of isolation is required. Although the Great Age of Navigation in the West coincided with isolationist strategy of Japan, Japanese explorers did play a part in the world history of geographical exploration, but their role was limited both in area and scope, and sometimes based on sheer enthusiasm and private initiative.

Scientific expeditions bring new geographic understanding. However, the principal motivation standing behind the earliest European ventures on the high seas was commercial opportunities, as reflected in the sources of funding. While the actual capital requirements of the Japanese expeditions to the Ogasawara Islands and Ezochi were met entirely by the shogunate, financing strategies for the long-distance voyages from Europe were more diverse, and in many cases involved methods of traditional business organization (see, for example, Gelderblom and Jonker 2004).

Rather vague concept of the frontier in sea-encircled Japan influenced the Japanese perspective of foreign lands, and was probably another factor that made the urge for expeditions rather minor. The results of expeditions were descriptive information on the natural conditions of the explored region, and, in a few isolated cases, discussion of the ethnography of the native peoples.

Unlike the interaction between Western European maritime exploration and colonial conquest, the links between pre-Meiji geographical exploration and colonialism were rather weak. It was precisely in regard to the policy of preparing the grounds for territorial expansion by initial geographical explorations that the Western countries differed from Japan so conspicuously. Most of the Japanese expeditions to the north were carried out as a type of 'intelligence collection activity' with defence in mind (Medlicott 2003, 1), and the possibility of colonization was only ever considered in the case of uninhabited territories such as the Ogasawara Islands. Even scholars like Honda Toshiaki, who advocated Japanese expansion, often overrated the size and desirability of the territories in question. As a result, Japan never took the trouble to claim the Ogasawara Islands officially as a sovereign power, and if the Ogasawara family had indeed set foot on the soil of these uninhabited islands they only asserted their rights in order to become landlords on their own account. It was only after Japan was opened to the outside world that the Tokugawa government finally undertook measures of counter-colonizing Ogasawara and claiming territorial rights. These steps were performed as a direct result of encounters with Western countries and their policies.

The re-emergence of geographical interest in the Ogasawara Islands, as indicated by scientific surveys in 1860s, corresponded directly to the fact that this territory

threatened to become an issue of international dispute, as had previously been the case of the region of Ezo. But it was the foreign policy of the Meiji regime, whose practical goal was the promotion of national security, that stimulated the establishment of authority on the already explored territories of the Ogasawara Islands, Hokkaido, and the Kuriles. In 1869, as a result of its new policy, Japan incorporated the Land of the Ainu under the new name of Hokkaido and 10 years later unilaterally declared its control over the old Ryūkyū kingdom, which was to be designated Okinawa Prefecture.

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