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Martha Chaiklin. *Cultural Commerce and Dutch Commercial Culture: The Influence of European Material Culture on Japan, 1700-1850.* Leiden: Research School, 2003. 275 pp. No price listed (paper), ISBN 978-90-5789-086-4.

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The Material Culture of Japanese-Dutch Relations

As Martha Chaiklin rightly points out in her introduction, historians of Edo period Japan (1603-1868) have traditionally seen contacts with Holland, maintained at the port of Nagasaki, as affecting first, the Japanese domestic economy via bulk imports, such as silk, which were brought to Japan on Dutch bottoms. In addition, scholars have explored in depth how intercourse with the Dutch East India Company (VOC) (and with Dutch government officials and envoys after the demise of the VOC in 1799) offered a source for new ideas and especially scientific knowledge which led to the birth of a distinctive intellectual movement of Dutch learning (*rangaku*). Based upon research of a nice variety of Dutch and Japanese sources, Chaiklin seeks to stake out a new middle ground between economic and intellectual history. Her approach is to utilize, as a "primary source," the variety of European manufactured goods used in daily life, which the Dutch imported into Japan. She sees these goods as together forming a material culture, which by introducing "something new" into an essentially closed state, helped Japanese to visualize new possibilities in the use and development of technology. Chailkin establishes a defined and specific focus for her study: only finished European objects (excluding textiles, which she defines as semi-finished) imported via the private trade, a subsection of the larger Japanese-Dutch commercial relationship, from 1700 to 1850.

In the first few chapters, Chailkin presents a valuable overview of how the private trade was conducted at Nagasaki, for one illustrating that while smuggling was endemic in trade with Chinese merchants at the port, Dutch officials usually did not attempt to smuggle manufactured goods, instead realizing they could garner more substantial profits by forging the trade records they would submit to their superiors in Batavia. We also learn that the Japanese practice of gift-giving, such as the requirement that the Dutch present goods to *bakufu* officials, helped to maintain demand and thus the private trade. Yet of more importance was the special-order system, through which the shogun in particular acquired a wide array of European manufactures. Chaiklin tells us that despite the restrictions inherent in the seclusion policy, the special-order system allowed Japanese to satisfy their constant desire for foreign knowledge, especially about technology. She identifies that same interest among commoners, who could obtain imported Dutch manufactures thanks to a healthy network of wholesalers that distributed imports especially in urban areas.

In her final three chapters, Chaiklin offers descriptions of the clocks, pocket watches, glass wares, and firearms imported into Japan by the Dutch. In these chapters the book really shines, providing fascinating insights into how for one, Japanese artisans did not simply copy imported clocks and other automata but rather, inspired by European examples, developed their own unique wares. Because of this advancement, she concludes that Japan could easily move to expand production and become an exporter of clocks and watches in the late nineteenth century. In the same vein, she tells us that imported glass created a culture of consumption that while maintaining demand for imported glass products, also stimulated domestic glass production.

Her final chapter, "Firearms: Rejection or Control?-" is especially well conceived as she uses her research to convincingly demonstrate that Japan did not "give up the gun," as Noel Perrin argued in his widely read book.[1] Chaiklin shows instead that the Dutch continued to bring guns and cannon, which were eagerly received by, for example, two prominent eighteenth-century leaders, Shogun Yoshimune and Matsudaira Sadanobu. Indeed, samurai and peasants alike continued to own guns. Japan lagged behind Western states in this technology not because of a fear of foreign things, but because a "moribund bureaucracy" stifled innovation while the general peace

of the age made the adoption of new firearms not especially necessary (pp. 170-172). In the book's conclusion, Chaiklin primarily summarizes the points offered in the previous chapters and makes only guarded conclusions. She states that Western influence on Japan was "substantial" and that "European manufactured goods played a vital role in awakening them [the Japanese] to a different world of possibilities" (p. 177).

Chaiklin certainly succeeds in one of her goals: to demonstrate that Dutch influence extended broadly in Japanese society, beyond merely the small school of Dutch learning. Yet she does not venture further and tell us if, because of the diffusion of European material culture, we should now make different assumptions about how Japanese viewed contacts with the outside world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Should we now see the Japanese as maintaining ties with the Dutch because of say, a strong "practical" mindset within Edo-period society, as Ellen Nakamura argued in her recent study of Western medicine and its applications in the nineteenth century?[2] Moreover, how might we reconceptualize, if at all, the seclusion policy that Chaiklin accepts as the defining framework of the Edo period? There is room for Chailkin to build upon her solid research and offer some defined "take home" messages for the reader about the century and a half of Japanese intercourse with the outside world that she studied in such detail.

We are all certainly aware of the expectations for publication in the academic world and perhaps such demands kept Chaiklin from expanding her work beyond its present format, which is apparently her unrevised doctoral dissertation in book form. This seems to explain her use of "dissertation" as opposed to "book" throughout the text and the limited index. As it stands, the book offers a valuable contribution to our understanding of Dutch-Japanese trade and its impact on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan, making it an important read for historians of the Edo period. Readers (including college undergraduates) lacking a background knowledge of early modern Japan, however, may find it more challenging because the book offers many details about European imports and trade but without defined, and therefore more accessible, conclusions for a wider audience.

Notes

[1]. Noel Perrin, *Giving Up the Gun: Japan's Reversion to the Sword, 1543-1879* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979).

[2]. Ellen Gardner Nakamura, *Practical Pursuits: Takano Chōei, Takahashi Keisaku, and Western Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005).

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