INTRODUCTION

In 1868, the start of the Meiji Restoration brought about the end of the long period of Tokugawa rule in Japan. The newly established Meiji Government began performing various types of statistical surveys in an attempt to grasp the overall picture of the country’s situation. At that time, the government learned many things from German statistics. In this short note, I would like to examine the details of what Japan learned from the German statistics and clarify the effects German statistics had on demographic statistics in Japan. When looking at why it was German statistics that were chosen as a model, if we trace Japanese history back many centuries, we see that during Japan’s period of national isolation (1639–1854), the only Western country that was permitted to have relations with Japan was the Netherlands, more precisely the Dutch East India Company. Through trade with the Netherlands, medical and natural science documents were brought into Japan, and these books became the basis for the foundation of European-style sciences known as “Dutch Studies.”

In Nagasaki, the location of the Company at Deshima, lived families that worked as interpreters for many generations, so there were several people in the area that could understand Dutch. After the U.S. and Japan formed a treaty of amity in 1854, Japan began establishing diplomatic relationships with the U.S. and many countries of Europe, leading to increased opportunities for the Japanese people to come in contact with Westerners. An important thing to remember here is that the only European books that could be imported until that time were written in Dutch and limited to natural science and medicine. After Japan opened its doors, however, the range of available documents included English, French and German and was no longer limited to natural science and medical related documents. The Tokugawa Government had established an organization called “Office of Examination on Books by Dutch,” but this was changed to the “Office of Examination on Foreign Books” in 1856.

In 1862, the first students sent overseas by the Tokugawa Government left for the Netherlands. Considering the foreign language skills of the Japanese people at that time, there was really no other choice in destination. The Tokugawa Government worked enthusiastically to introduce modern technology and
knowledge from the West, and sent study groups abroad to learn as much as they could. On this point, the daimyo, territorial lords and members of the Imperial Court, the primary force behind the Meiji Restoration, formed a conservative coalition, and for this reason, the dissolution of the Tokugawa Government and the formation of a new government became known as the Meiji Restoration rather than the Meiji Revolution. The relationship between Japan and Europe prior to the Meiji Restoration is a very important premise for the theme covered in this paper.

KOJI SUGI AND EARLY POPULATION STATISTICS

“Koji Sugi” is one name that cannot be left out of a discussion of statisticians working in both the pre- and post-Meiji Restoration eras. Sugi was born in Nagasaki in 1828. In 1848, he entered the famous Dutch Studies School (Teki-juku) in Osaka. In 1850, he moved to Edo (now Tokyo), and in 1855, his outstanding ability in Dutch Studies led to his selection as a retainer for Masahiro Abe, one of the most passionately active supporters of foreign diplomacy in the Tokugawa Government at that time. Sugi worked at the “Office of Examination on Foreign Books,” which had been re-established under its new name by Abe, and was also a teacher at the School for Western Studies built by the Tokugawa Government (1864).

Sugi regularly lectured on Dutch newspapers. One day, a newspaper article about Bavarian educational statistics sparked in him a deep interest. In his age seventy years commemorative volume, Sugi states, “In 1855 or 1856, Bavarian educational statistical surveys included a study of literacy, a study which I felt needed to be implemented soon in Japan as well. Later, in 1860/1861, books on statistics arrived from the Netherlands. These books included information about population surveys, covering such statistics as births, deaths, marriages, divorces, population movement and crime statistics, and I carefully read these books with great interest. As students studying abroad returned to Japan and shared what they had learned about statistics, my interest in statistics grew even stronger.” (Paraphrased by this author.) This was right at the time when two students sent abroad by the Tokugawa Government to study (Amane Nishi (1829–1897) and Mamichi Tsuda (1829–1903)) had returned to Japan after studying statistics under Simon Visseling (1818–1888) at Leiden University.

These two students returned to Japan in 1865 and began teaching at the same school as Sugi. Sugi borrowedTsuda’s notebook from the Visseling lectures and translated the notes into Japanese (the translation was published in 1874). The next work on statistics to be translated into Japanese after the Visseling notes was “Elements de statistiques . . .” (Paris, 1856) by Alexandre C. Moreau de Jonnes (1778–1870) of France. This translation was published from 1874 to 1878. The translator was Gensho Mitsukuri (1846–1897), a scholar who had studied in France.

After 1875, various other statistics-related books from England were translated and published, helping to instill Japan’s scholastic world with knowledge about statistics.

With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Tokugawa Government, of which Sugi was a retainer, was given rule over Shizuoka, approximately 200 kilometers