Changing Japanese-Russian Images in the Edo Period

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INTRODUCTION

Castaways played an important role in the formation of mutual images between Japan and Russia, especially Daikokuya Kōdayū, the captain of the Shinshō-maru shipwrecked in 1783. Although some castaways made their way to Russia before Kōdayū, he was the first to return safely to Japan and bring back first-hand information about Russia. For Russia, Kōdayū's stay and the dispatch of a mission to Japan to convey the shipwrecked Japanese home was also an epochal event. It offered an opportunity to study the Japanese language, conduct negotiations with the Japanese and observe Japanese life-styles.

For most of the Edo period (1603–1867), when Russian-Japanese contacts began, the Tokugawa government or bakufu maintained only limited contact with foreign countries. Even the shogun and other ranking members of the regime could not travel overseas, so it may seem ironic that the pioneering role in opening communications with outside peoples fell to poor shipwrecked sailors who arrived on foreign shores by accident. Beginning in the 1630s, the bakufu strictly supervised relations with a limited number of foreign countries and established a monopoly over information about the outside world. In particular, contact existed with the Dutch and the Chinese in Nagasaki, with the Koreans in Tsushima, with the Ainu in Matsumae and with the Ryūkyū kingdom through the good offices of Satsuma. What makes the case of the castaways important is the fact that they crossed borders at a time when it was otherwise impossible to come into direct personal contact with foreign nationals. Through their writings, their artifacts, their body language and personal appearance, these men served as unique sources of information about the ‘other’.
This paper will trace the footprints of historical and cultural contacts between Japan and Russia and examine the mutual perceptions that resulted from those contacts, concentrating on Daikokuya Kōdayū whose role in Russian-Japanese relations can hardly be overestimated. Although the history of contacts between Japan and Russia in the Edo period is well known and some works on Japanese perceptions of Russia exist, the chapter draws attention to the importance of first-hand observation and visual sources in spreading information about unknown peoples and lands. It also demonstrates that in the eighteenth century, physical stature, clothing, hairstyles and gestures served as prime markers of ethnic identity. They acted as channels of information when the mouth was closed; communication between strangers depended instead upon eye contact and body language.

**JAPANESE IMAGES OF RUSSIA BEFORE KŌDAYU**

According to Kondō Juzō (Seisai), the term *Mosukobiia* (the name for Russia current in the early Edo period) was first introduced in Japan through *Records about Foreign Countries* (1623), a text on world geography compiled in kanbun by Julio Alleni, an Italian missionary in China in the late Ming period. It contained, for example, the following description:

>'Mosukobiia is a large country situated in the north-western part of Asia, it is also called Mosuko. It stretches from east to west for 15,000 ri (1 ri = 3.93 km), from south to north for 8,000 . . . Militarily it is very strong and it always absorbs surrounding lands.'

In other words, Russia was portrayed as an aggressive country with a strong military force.

The first Japanese printed map of the world coupled with illustrations of men and women who inhabited various countries was published in Nagasaki in 1645. The map achieved wide circulation within Japan, and showed the location of Russia, labelled *Mosukohiia* or *Mosukobiia*. It depicted representative men and women of this land dressed in what was thought to be typical costume (Pl. 1). This early map is good evidence of the development of a multicultural worldview among the Japanese. The peoples represented the known (and unknown) world and included Asians (Koreans, Chinese and various peoples from Southeast Asia), Europeans (the Dutch, Portuguese and English), peoples from India and from Russia, and also some real strangers, representing the land of the giants and the land of the dwarfs.

Nishikawa Joken's book on world geography published in 1695 was the first major description of foreign countries by a Japanese writer. His description of Russia was as follows: ‘Mosukobiia is situated 4,000 ri from Japan in the sea and it is well protected by guards. The people there resemble the Mugars. It is a warm country, and one may name amber, the five grains, silver and the leather of domestic animals among its products.’

Nishikawa’s text only mentioned the geographical location of Russia and its major products. Besides, the information was imprecise. Russia was called a warm country in defiance of its northern climate. Later, in a