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Title

Dejima and Huis Ten Bosch – Two Dutch Cities in Japan

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9vv631q8>

Journal

TRANSIT, 5(1)

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Publication Date

2009

DOI

10.5070/T751009741

Peer reviewed

Hausutembosu (Huis ten Bosch)

by Bettina Brandt

Looking for traces of historical Dutch-Japanese trade relations in the Nagasaki area, Y and I stopped at Huis ten Bosch, a Dutch theme park in Sasebo that doubles as a waterfront resort-cum-residential area, drawing tourists as well as those interested in experiments in urban living. Most of the tourists come from Southeast Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Korea); tourists from other places are few and far between.

A local Japanese tycoon envisioned the park in the late eighties, at a time when a number of such ethno-themed parks—known in Japanese as *gaikoku mura* (foreign villages)—were being built. Period parks like *Edo Wonderland* in Hokkaido (tagline: “the essence of Japan”) are also popular *tema paku* destinations in Japan. There, tourists can visit the past and walk around in Edo-period costumes (and dress up like a samurai, wear a ninja costume, or perhaps dress up as a *yuujo*, 遊女, or “play woman”) for the day.



The Japanese theater troupe Lasenkan in Berlin

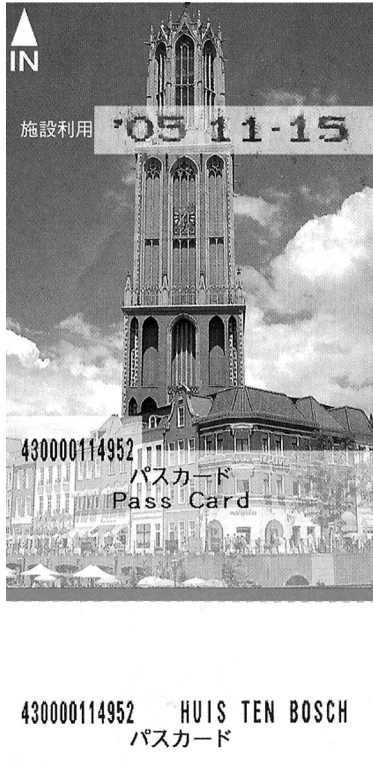
When Huis ten Bosch finally opened its doors to the public in the early 1990s, however, the recession was about to hit, and the park, one of the subsidiaries of the Huis ten Bosch Corporation, has been in receivership twice already. Three times the size of the Mall in Washington D. C., Huis ten Bosch is one of Asia's largest parks. One could call it a Japanese *polder*, Dutch for land that was reclaimed and drained. The tourist attraction on the island of Kyushu is named after Paleis Huis ten Bosch, the residence of Queen Beatrix in The Hague, the political capital of the Netherlands.

One of the earlier occupants of the original Huis ten Bosch, designed by architect Pieter Post in 1645, was Louis Napoléon Bonaparte (1778-1846) who temporarily took up residence there when his famous older brother appointed him "King of Holland." Initially, Louis (or Luigi as his Italian mother must have called him) was reluctant to take on this undesirable role, but once in place, the new king enthusiastically took Dutch lessons, conducted the affairs of the state in Dutch and, to the chagrin of his brother, actually stood up for the interests of the Dutch.

Louis called himself *Koning Lodewijk*, though certain historical sources insist that people heard him pronounce the royal title as *konijn*, thereby referring to himself as a "rabbit" instead of a "king." Four years later, his older brother removed Lodewijk from the Dutch throne again and annexed the Dutch kingdom to France. By then, the Dutch people were actually sad to see Lodewijk-Louis-Luigi go. When during his reign the high waters of the Rhine, unable to contain the vast amount of melting snow and ice, flooded the eastern part of the Netherlands, the concerned Frenchman had traveled to the area, met with those who suffered losses, ordered all that had collapsed to be fixed, and arranged for the construction of new dikes, sluices and windmills. In the second part of the nineteenth century, more than one-hundred-and-fifty local floods occurred in the Netherlands, a phenomenon probably linked to the tail end of what has

come to be called the Little Ice Age, depicted in paintings by Pieter Breugel the Elder or Hendrick Avercamp. It wasn't until the third year of *de Franse Tijd*—the period of French dominance in the Netherlands (1795-1815)—when a national agency was put in charge of water management, that the Dutch could rely on their government to “keep their feet dry” as *Rijkswaterstaat* promises its citizens today.

Following the directions from the map that we had just bought at the *JR Huis ten Bosch Train Station*, Y and I walk across a bridge that spans a wide canal, and come face-to-face with what looks like an oversized replica of Amsterdam Central Station. I clearly must be mistaken, though, since according to the map this is the spot where our hotel should be located, and a train station would be a rather peculiar theme for any lodging place. Those who end up spending the night at *Amsterdam Centraal* typically don't get a lot of sleep: the place is too filthy and noisy for that, and not at all accommodating to the stranded. Whatever the façade of the building is supposed to represent, it is indeed the building where Y and I will be staying tonight. After we drop off our luggage and read in the hotel flyer about an *onsen* that is open late, we set out again to get a first glance of the park. Once inside, we decide not to go for any of the pink bicycles that you can rent at *fiets*. They look unwieldy, and it can't be very comfortable to explore the *tema paku* on one of those bikes. So we head down a canal (there are six kilometers worth of them in Huis ten Bosch) to see the park from that perspective. On the cruise boat that takes us to the *Binnenstad*, or the center of Huis ten Bosch, I notice a little girl who is looking at me. She is much more interested in the tall woman with her flying hair than in the mute swans that her family is pointing out to distract her. Though I can't actually hear what her grandmother is whispering in her ear, the little girl now casts her eyes down and fixes them on her feet that dangle above the boards of the deck.



Y and I get off at a replica of *De Dom*—the symbol of the city of Utrecht—a three-tiered gothic tower that was originally attached to a main cathedral until it was severed from the building by a tornado in 1674. At 112 meters, it's the highest church tower in the Netherlands. On Jan van Eyck's altarpiece *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* (painted in 1432 and currently in St. Baafskathedraal in Ghent, Belgium), the tower features in the background of the panel as the symbol of another imaginary city—the New Jerusalem. In Huis ten Bosch, *De Dom* is the visual center of the park. Next to it, not even the handful of windmills in the park are able to hold their own. Instead of having to climb 465 worn steps to the top of the original tower in Utrecht, Y and I simply take the elevator all the way up. From this height, the theme park resembles the Dutch miniature city of *Madurodam* that displays the architectural highlights of the Netherlands and is on the list of excursions for elementary schoolchildren. *Madurodam* is located in Scheveningen—a word that was apparently used as a shibboleth during the German occupation of the Netherlands to identify who was Dutch and who wasn't, definitely a difference, though not always a detectable one.

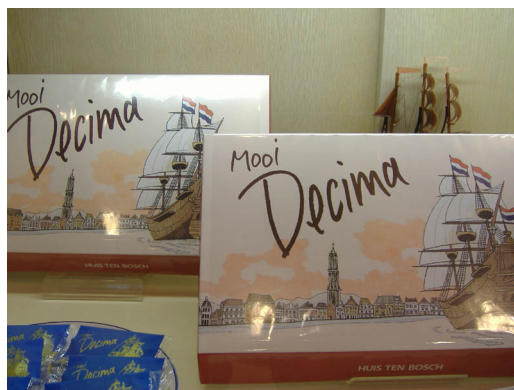
From the top of the tower, I can make out a couple of buildings that look familiar: the *stadhuis* of Gouda, the city gates of Delft, *Huis ten Bosch* itself, and *Kasteel Nijenrode*, for instance, set outside of Breukelen—the little Dutch town that lent its name to one of the boroughs of New York City. As I am pondering this view for the way it simultaneously seems to erase and reinforce Dutch culture without bringing its changing meaning into focus, a middle-aged man, standing right next to me on the observation deck, wearing shorts and sandals with

knee-highs, says loudly to his companion in a language that he assumes nobody around here understands: “Hier sieht es holländischer aus als in Holland und der größte Vorteil ist, dass es hier keine Holländer gibt!”

Huis ten Bosch is an eerie place indeed: there is hardly anybody here at all. But there are countless birds that have flocked to nest here, quite a colorful change from the loud and aggressive *karasu*, the ominous black crows that are an urban pest in Japan. As an ecological utopia, the theme park seems to be working just fine. There are also relatively few people who live in Huis ten Bosch (many of the houses in Wassenaar, the residential part of the park that is also an officially registered town, remain for sale), but those who do live there value the municipality, and stress its harmony between the natural and the urban environment.

Back down on the cobbled streets, we enter one of the sixty-odd retail establishments that Huis ten Bosch has to offer. Most of these have gabled facades made of red brick imported from the Netherlands. Plush clog slippers, rows of canal houses, endless windmills, kissing couples and other mass-produced delftware pale in comparison with all the Miffy merchandise on display. Miffy, known in Dutch as “nijntje” (a shortened form of the diminutive *konijntje*), and originally introduced in Japan as *Usako-chan*, is a famous little Dutch rabbit who likes to wear a dress. Consisting of just a couple of lines, the rabbit was designed by Dick Bruna, a children’s book author and illustrator from Utrecht. In Japan, Miffy seems just as popular as Hello Kitty, and the similarities between the two characters (the mouthless Hello Kitty, created at the height of second-wave feminism and the main character of another the Sanrio theme park) are striking.

Then, just as we are about to leave the store without having purchased anything, two words written on a box of chocolates stare me in the face: MOOI DECIMA.



Photograph by Bettina Brandt

“Mooi” (“beautiful,” “handsome,” or “fine”) is a peculiar adjective to describe the very small island just outside of Nagasaki where the Dutch—the only Western trading partner of the Japanese during almost all of the Edo period—were put up until the arrival of Perry’s *kuro fune* (黒船) or the American black ships that would usher in the Meiji era. According to Engelbert Kaempfer, a doctor and botanist and the first German in the service of the Dutch East India Company to set foot on Dejima in 1690, the island was a mere 236 normal steps long and no more than 82 steps wide. That would be roughly the size of the *Dam Square*, the historical heart of the City of Amsterdam.

During the two-hundred-and-some years in which Dejima was home to the Dutch, there must have been no more than a couple thousand of them who lived on the island, never more than eight at a time. The Dutch brought along their servants from Batavia (now Indonesia), some of whom are portrayed playing musical instruments, or protecting their Dutch masters from the sun, on the *Nagasaki-e*, Japanese woodcuts from the first part of the nineteenth century that depict Dutch life in Dejima. Even today, as the key buildings on Dejima are being rebuilt and the island is promoted as an educational facility and a tourist attraction, “mooi Dejima” remains a contradiction in terms. But in Edo Japan, Dejima was already a tourist attraction, not just for the occasional visitor from Batavia (where the Dutch East India Company had its headquarters), but

especially for the Japanese who traveled to the island in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the foreigners from a far-away part of the world. For the Japanese in Edo Japan, *Oranda* was an imaginary place; a visit to Huis ten Bosch, by contrast, leaves little to the imagination. Dejima served as a sluiceway in which commodities were first held and then, after inspection, released into circulation, whereas today people travel to Huis ten Bosch to consume the theme park as location.

Next to the words “mooi Decima” on the box of chocolates, there is drawing of a three-masted, full-rigged Dutch sailing boat, reminiscent of *De Liefde*, the first Dutch ship that reached the shores of Japan on April 19th of the year 1600, when it ran aground near Oita. Of the two dozen men who initially survived the shipwreck, two made history: the English captain, William Adams (who was later given the Japanese name Miura Anjin when he became a foreign policy advisor to Tokugawa Ieyasu), and Jan Joosten van Lodensteyn, known in Japan as Yaesusan and commemorated with a plaque at Yaesu North, a Tokyo subway station, named after him.

A real-size replica of *De Liefde*, lit with underwater lights, is moored in the harbor of Huis ten Bosch. There, during the months of October and November, and again in April and May, you can watch the *Voyage De Liefde* laser show. At nearby *Horizon Adventure Plus*, you can “experience the violent floods from Holland’s history in a powerful sensory theater,” or so the flyer tells us. We forgo both pseudo-events and are heading back—we’ve had enough of Huis ten Bosch for one day—when a long-haired, white-bearded man walks up to us. The moment he starts talking he sounds strangely familiar, though I can understand only a little of what he is saying. Is this a Dutch man speaking Japanese? His name is Kees, and he works as a Santa Claus for the events division of the Huis ten Bosch Corporation. When we accept his invitation to join him for coffee, we meet one of his fellow Santas, also Dutch, and learn that both men used to

work in *Holland Village*, an earlier incarnation of Huis ten Bosch on the other side of Omura Bay, one as cheese-carrier, the other as coppersmith. Y wants to know the difference between a “Hollander” and a “Nederlander.” “Those words are synonyms for people who don’t live there,” says Kees, “but for the Dutch a ‘Hollander’ is somebody who lives ‘boven de rivieren’ (or north of the rivers that divide the country) whereas a ‘Nederlander’ is somebody who lives ‘beneden de rivieren,’ or south of the rivers,” i.e. the Rhine, Maas and Waal.

Before we go, the Dutch men share with us that they were rather down when *Holland Village* went out of business and they lost touch with two local rice farmers with whom they had enjoyed eating seafood at the fish restaurant in what they called the Village. The Dutch Santas are part of the ambient entertainment of Huis ten Bosch, and they tell us that they aren’t the only hired Dutch around. There are also some Dutch students completing practicums here who spend most of their time learning the Japanese language, but during the Royal Horse Parade they dress up as Dutch Royalty, or so we’re told.

Huis ten Bosch plays up the Dutch monarchy and shows considerably less interest in its older, more fervent Republican history. It was, after all, the Dutch States-General that first created the government merger known as the VOC, an East India Company that functioned as a political and economic weapon against the great colonial powers of the sixteenth century. Within decades of its creation, the VOC replaced the Portuguese as Japan’s only European trading partner.

When we finally make it back to the hotel, Y calls Eriko, who lives in Wassenaar, to find out if she’d like to go with us to the *onsen*. Eriko can’t go, but she wants to know whether I have been told that in an *onsen* you don’t wear any clothes. Y laughs and explains that we have been in seven *onsen* already, and that I’m used to nude bathing from the Netherlands.

The next morning, before heading out to nearby Hirado—where at some point the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English each had a trading post before Dejima was constructed—we meet Eriko for breakfast. She serves us breads, cheeses and smoked eel from Omura Bay. It's been weeks since I held a fork and knife in my hand. They feel heavy and surprisingly cold.



No 029915

HUIS TEN BOSCH
ADMISSION TICKET

ハウステンボス入場券 (ワッセナー用)

有効期限 2006.3.31迄

2005 11 15

ハウステンボスワッセナー

WASSENAAR

非売品

(切り離し無効)

Dejima – A European City in Japan

by Yoko Tawada; translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky

B: Jacobus van den Broek

Y: Yuujo Fumi

B: I hear the waves and nothing more. Not yet anyhow. Soon I will hear footsteps. My sense of hearing has been honed as sharp as that of a prisoner attempting to hear the voices of the women strolling past behind the thick wall. I am not a prisoner. I am allowed to leave the house when I want. I am allowed to walk along the street, the only street in this city. After ninety-nine steps I reach the wall that marks the city's end. I turn around and walk in the opposite direction and soon I have reached the other wall.

Y: It is Inunokoku, Hour of the Dog.

B: In the distance I can hear a temple bell ringing.

Y: No one at all on the street. The land bridge that links the island Dejima with the mainland is as narrow as the neck of a woman.

B: Soon she will be standing before my eyes.

Y: On the mainland I would be escorted by a servant. But here I must carry my own paper lantern. The flame is flickering so wildly, though the wind is calm this evening.

B: Dejima, a fan spread out upon the ocean. The houses here are like images painted on a fan. Or are they real? I live in one of these houses. So if they are painted, then I too am nothing but an image.

Y: During the day there are peddlers and workmen. But after sunset only we, the yuujo, are permitted to enter this city.

B: Dejima is surrounded by salty water, this is the liquid wall that separates us from the outside world. There is no other walled city in Japan, my employer said to me. He and his men traveled for weeks last year to reach the capital and present the shogun with personal gifts. I had a fever and lay alone in Dejima.

Y: The sickle moon has just hidden behind a belt of clouds. I can't see anything anymore.

B: I can hear. Yes, I clearly hear the clattering of wooden sandals. It's Fumi.

Y: How sad that I never learned to write, even though my parents named me Fumi, letter. I would like to write them a letter saying that I am well. If they were to hear a rumor that I am often on duty in Dejima, they would worry about me, as many people still believe the Dutch are dangerous.

B: The first time I saw Fumi, I found it terribly embarrassing. I thought one had no need of speech when being visited by a yuujo. Quite the opposite is true. It is her profession to entertain her clients with words. The so-called criss-crossing of the pillows is only part of her task, if it is expected of her at all.

Y: My co-workers always used to tell me foreign men were like bears. Although they were good with children and polite to women during the day, at night one had to be prepared for anything.

B: They consider anyone who doesn't speak their language a wild boar.

Y: At first, of course, I didn't know what to do. To him my words were like a bird twittering. He enjoyed listening to me but did not respond.

B: Fumi frowned when I was unable to answer her question. Vertical lines appeared on her forehead. She tried one more time. But I understood less than nothing.

Y: Okuni wa Oranda no dochira?

B: I really didn't understand what she was saying and shook my head. Her eyes became sharp-edged, and the corners of her mouth pointed down.

Y: What should I do?

B: Fumi was not the first woman I saw on Dejima. As soon as we arrived, there was a reception with a great many yuujos. This was embarrassing for us, because we thought the yuujos were prostitutes. The representatives of the Japanese side were sitting with us. Usually it is important in business dealings to praise the women of the partner country. But we weren't sure what to say. A few of the women were squeezing an excruciating sound from their throats. Others were creeping along the floor like slugs, making circles with their hands like the feelers of a snail. They inclined their heads to one side like birds. By the time I realized we were witnessing a performance of music and dance, it was already over.

Y: After the first meeting with Yakkosan, I asked the sea to send us high waves to take him back to the Netherlands again.

B: Perhaps I will stay here forever. All this time, our red-white-and-blue flag was no longer being flown anywhere but Dejima. This might be the only Napoleon-free place left in the world.

Y: The sickle moon has hidden behind the clouds.

B: It gives me pleasure to remember my second meeting with Fumi. I requested her, and she came to me all alone.

Y: The second time I was with Yakkosan, he showed me a wonderful oil painting.

B: When Fumi came for the second time, I was just looking at a picture. A colleague had given it to me that morning because he secretly wanted to sell me this picture that had mistakenly been sent from the Netherlands. I showed Fumi the picture, and her gaze was instantly riveted. The picture shows a woman holding a letter in both hands. She is seated on a chair, and beside her stands a man who is trying to look at the letter, while the woman is looking in our direction. In our direction! What a ridiculous thing to be saying! What would the woman in the picture say if she could see us, that is, me and Fumi!

Y: A light. How was it possible to paint a light? I would have thought that in a picture every corner would be brightly illuminated. But here there is light and shadow.

B: I, too, feel drawn to this picture. This room, this sense of being enclosed, protected and separate from the outside world.

Y: How modest the picture looks! Nothing in it appears greater or more splendid than it is. Nonetheless they look noble, especially the material of their clothing and tablecloth.

B: On the left there is a window through which daylight is streaming. Something peculiar is the red color of the jacket the woman is wearing. I looked at Fumi to see what she thought. She pointed to the painted letter in the picture. I said “letter,” and Fumi said:

Y: Fumi.

B: Ever since, I have known that the name “Fumi” means letter.

Y: The woman in the picture is staring at me – from the distance. She cannot know me at all. There is no foreign woman who knows me. There are only men on Dejima, and there are no foreigners anywhere else in the country.

B: Fumi went into the picture. Then she came out again and gazed at me questioningly.

Y: I have never before seen such a picture. I have seen many pictures, unusually many for a yuujo, because I know a painter.

B: Or is Fumi perhaps thinking of some other man?

Y: I no longer see him very often. If the painter were not so cowardly, he would visit me more. He fears the woman from whom I take orders.

B: Fumi, what is this here called?

Y: Koshikake. The furniture in the picture looks real. You could almost touch it.

B: I see a Dutch room reflected in Fumi's eyes and a strange thought occurs to me: that the world is only a reflection in our eyes. Outside our eyes there is no space. I must go into her eyes to enter the room.

Y: Who is this woman? Why is she wearing a white head covering?

B: I, in the room, the room, in Fumi's eyes, her eyes, in my eyes.

Y: The woman has received a letter, she appears not to be wearing makeup. Her lover is no doubt traveling in far-off lands.

B: My country exists only in the foreigners' eyes.

Y: Perhaps Yakkosan's room looks exactly like this one. In other words, this woman is...

B: That is my room. Strange. I don't know when a painter could have painted my room.

Y: All painters show us things we aren't permitted to see.

B: I know that Fumi's former lover – or should I say “sponsor” – was a painter. Perhaps he painted her portrait.

Y: The woman in the picture is surely his wife. I pointed to the woman who is sitting in the chair. Yakkosan then said:

B: “De frou.”

Y: “Jifuro.” Since then, I knew that his wife is called “Jifuro.” And this man who is visiting the woman in Yakkosan's absence is called:

B: “De man.”

Y: “Jiman.”

B: An oil painting is a good translator for us. The picture is helping us exchange words. To play our game, all we did was point to a thing and ask what it was called. What is that?

F: Kuchi.

B: And what is that?

F: Me.

B: Me.

F: My older colleagues used to tell me that the Dutch, unlike the Spanish, were not good at languages, but that isn't true. Yakkosan learns fast.

B: Fumi is happy when I repeat a word she has said. I know that the Jesuits from Spain who used to live in Dejima spoke Japanese well. They wanted to prevent the Japanese from learning their language well and seeing through the intentions of the missionaries.

Y: Orandajin.

B: We Dutch still get called “orandajin.” A Portuguese word for Dutch. It is an irony of history that it is a Portuguese word being used to label us! For they and the Spaniards were not necessarily our best friends. The Japanese threw the missionaries out of their country and entered into an exclusive agreement with us Dutchmen out of gratitude for our having warned them of the dangers of the missionaries: Don't you see what is going on in Southeast Asia? First

comes Christianity, then colonization! Close your borders to missionaries who want to sell you heaven and demand your souls in exchange! Heaven is made of air, after all. We, on the other hand, are honest merchants. We sell exclusively things that you can touch and measure. We ask only things from which a person can part. Money, for example.

Y: Orandajin.

B: We don't try to spy on our trade partners or convert them. We keep to Dejima just as we agreed.

Y: I fear only one thing: Having a child.

B: Fumi has gained a tiny bit of weight recently.

Y: A child between us would appear to be a divine messenger of the forbidden religion. Such children are most often put to death. Even my painter hid a child that had been born between a yuujo and an orandajin in his warehouse for a long time. It was a very beautiful child. The parents of the yuujo wanted to kill it, but the painter rescued the child, not only because he is humane, but because he wanted to paint portraits of the child. He sold these portraits for good money. When the painter was asked on occasion who the model for one of these pictures was, he would say it was purely a fantasy figure.

B: Supposedly the Spanish missionaries were already saying back then that we would go to hell. As a child I saw a picture of hell and still dream of it today: a city without streets, without buildings. There is no water, no light. But every living thing has a luminous body. I'm saying "living thing" because I don't know whether these creatures are human beings or animals. Apparently there was no sense of order in this world. Or perhaps there is order, a different sort.

The picture reminded me of a pictorial dictionary. But I didn't know the language in which this dictionary was written. For example there was a head that had green legs growing out of it. There was an animal with scales carrying a naked woman on its back. A man with four feet and downy wings. Or a lizard with the tail of a phoenix. A red hat. A knight whose face was sticking out of his rear end. A winged man with a mouse head. There was an air of feverish solemnity about it. I don't think I would have feared hell the way the Spaniards did.

Y: Kirishitan.

B: The Christians. At the time, the Spaniards were telling tales of an imaginary city in the clouds where there was no suffering. A lie. And some of their Japanese listeners were immediately gripped with enthusiasm and willingly leapt into the fire along with the Spaniards so as to reach this city above the clouds. I prefer Dejima. Heaven? No thanks.

Y: The beautiful boy died at the age of seven although the painter had cared for him well. Perhaps there really is a city above the clouds. And this city is always in need of lovely new inhabitants. "Junkyoo" is what the painter said when I asked him what it meant to die if one was going to heaven afterward. What does this word mean?

B: Martyrdom. Brutal. Trading in goods is humane by comparison, because merchants do not steal the souls of their trading partners, much less cast them into the fire. But the Spaniards never forgave us. Even today they tell people in Europe that we sold Maria in Japan and founded a Sodom on Dejima.

Y: One day my employer suddenly announced that several of us had to go to Dejima. And that I was exactly the right type for Dejima. She said this to me as I was just eating some dried dates.

B: Generally it is a form of punishment when a yuujo has to come here, one of my colleagues told me. In Fumi's case it was apparently because of the jealousy of her employer, who was in love with a certain painter who, however, took an interest in Fumi.

Y: I still put on a suffering face for my employer and co-workers when I have to go to Dejima.

B: Fumi likes to come here. This much I know.

Y: The only thing I don't like about Dejima is the food.

B: Today I will invite Fumi to share a delicious blood pudding.

Y: Let us hope there won't be any meals today.

B: Sometimes I dream of my wife: she is standing in the dark room at the window reading a letter from me that I sent to Batavia a long time ago.

Y: Did Yakkosan's wife always slaughter pigs for him and make sausages out of the blood?

B: No women are allowed to set foot on Dejima except for yuujos. Otherwise our wives would have come with us.

Y: Does he think of his wife often?

B: I think of my wife more and more often, though I miss her less and less. She has become an image in my mind. The arrangement of light and shadow in this picture is so perfect that she has been immortalized between them and can no longer move.

Y: But it is very dark on this part of the street. No light is coming from the houses.

B: Fumi is about to enter my house. Today I will point at the candlestick with my index finger and ask her what it is called. I will also point to the stars and ask her the same question. I've stopped asking her what the moon is called. Every time she gives me a different answer. I don't need so many words for a place you can't get to even in a well-constructed Dutch ship.

Y: Meanwhile I know almost as many Dutch words as there are stars in the sky tonight, but no one knows this except the painter. I've asked him not to tell anyone.

B: Fumi already knows so many words in my language. But she can't put them together, and I don't know how one teaches a thing like that.

Y: Not long ago a samurai came to see me. He knew that I understand Dutch.

B: Today I placed paper and pen at the ready on my desk. I am not an educated man like my employer. He is working on a new dictionary with the help of several Japanese scholars. Together they are adding Japanese words to a Dutch-French dictionary. This is important academic work. But I learned by chance that there are also so many meaningless words in it that I will never in my life be able to use. And since the words are arranged alphabetically, they'll surely never get beyond the letter "b." Once when my employer was out I had a look at this work. "Abc." How strange that the dictionary begins with the word "Abc." "Abeceling," that's what all of us are. Beginners. Hy is noch een abeceling, of nieuweling in de wetenschappen. Il est encore apprentif, il n'est que fort peu avancé dans la connoissance des choses. Kare wa mada gakumon ni hairibana de aru.

Y: The last time, Yakkosan said many words that sounded almost Japanese but were completely incomprehensible.

B: Aal. Een slag van visch. Sorte de poisson. Yes, Fumi and I like to eat eel. This is the only animal in the world that we both enjoy eating. But one day even Fumi will come to like blood pudding. One should never lose one's patience.

Y: The unknown samurai who visited me said he wanted me to help him translate an important book. The dictionary they had was thinner than I was. So there are more words in my body than in the dictionary.

B: I'm not going to write the words down alphabetically, I'll put them in the order in which they come to us. Just like with children.

Y: I said to the samurai: "Forgive me, I would do anything for you, anything you wish. But there is no shortage of proper translators who have been occupying themselves with Dutch for many generations now. Why are you asking me, who cannot even write Japanese?"

B: There are several renowned families of translators who have been occupying themselves with Dutch for generations. But among them I found no one who knew Dutch better than I do. One of them recently said to me that the language of a country that no one has ever seen and which therefore no one is certain exists cannot be learned. He would rather have been born into a family of tub makers than of translators. Then he would have gotten to know every corner of his product. Well, I guess a tub doesn't have corners, but the Japanese are not realists.

Y: The samurai said that the painter had told him about me. He said I was a dictionary made of flesh. In other words, that I was a piece of meat.

B: Fumi opens the door.

Y: Koto, koto.

B: And exchanges a few words with the caretaker.

Y: Hiso, hiso.

B: She's just taking off her wooden shoes. She goes into the hall.

Y: Sorosoro, sorosoro.

B: She walks without lifting her feet from the ground. The sliding door opens. Fumi!

Y: Obandesu.

B: With white socks whose big toes are sewn separately from the rest, she strides forward, rubbing the soles of her feet against the straw flooring, tatami.

Y: Susu, susu.

B: Unfortunately my tatami floor has become very rough. This isn't surprising, seeing as I walk on it with my shoes and slide my chairs back and forth. A translator once told me it was disadvantageous to place chairs on the straw mat. But I can't sit on the floor. I need a chair.

Y: If Yakkosan would only understand that I dislike sitting in a chair! My legs strike me as senseless when I let them dangle beneath the table. I cannot understand why the Dutch take the trouble to bring such uncomfortable things as chairs to Japan. But perhaps there is no firm, dry ground in Holland and the cities lie underwater with every flood. And so one always has to sit on a chair there to avoid getting one's rear end wet.

B: Any moment now, Fumi will appear before my eyes and say “Good evening, Yakkosan.” She calls me Yakkosan because she cannot pronounce the name “Jacobus.” It’s fine with me if different women call me by different names. But what does “Yakkosan” mean?

Y: Yakkosan!

B: Come here. How are you?

Y: Yoi oban de gozaimasu.

B: Unfortunately I don’t have a new picture to show you today, but to make up for that I’ve had a special supper prepared.

Y: Oh, it smells like food. How awful.

B: Why isn’t the food ready yet? (Rings the bell.)

Y: I don’t wish to eat, but this is an excellent opportunity for me. The painter asked me to tell him in detail how meals are served.

B: Where’s supper?

Y: The plates, the cutlery, the wine glasses. I must observe all of this carefully.

B: (To the servants in back) I must have supper on the table at once!

Y: The painter told me that slaughtering was of course an even more exciting motif for a picture than eating.

B: Do you like blood pudding?

Y: Yes, I would like to see a pig being slaughtered. I would like to tell the painter precisely how the slaughtering is done. He will be grateful and will do anything I ask. My greatest desire would be to have my portrait painted and sent to my parents.

B: Fumi, I am terribly sorry that my kitchen boys are gossiping too much today instead of cooking.

Y: The Dutch are said to slaughter the animals they bring alive from Jakarta here on Dejima. But no Japanese person has ever witnessed this.

B: We can have them bring us a bottle of wine for starters. Do you like wine?

Y: Yes, I'd at least like to see the room in which the pigs...

B: What are you doing, Fumi?

Y: This is a rare opportunity. I must put my theatrical ability to the test. My uncle was a traveling actor.

B: You are moving your nose. You are striking your throat with your hand as if it were a knife. Suicide? No, only men do things like that.

Y: I hope he will understand me. I at least want to see the animals, even if they aren't about to be slaughtered just yet.

B: Now you are crawling on the floor like some four-legged creature. The Buddhists believe that they are reborn as animals for the most part. Fumi, are you a Buddhist?

Y: No, I have no chance at all. He doesn't understand me.

B: What a delicate hand!

Y: Now he is holding me by the wrist and saying “tekubi,” as I taught him last time. Now he is caressing the back of my neck and saying “unaji.”

B: Unagi.

Y: No, not unagi, unaji. Unagi means eel. Let me show you how an eel moves.

B: That is an eel. Yes, eel is even in the new dictionary already, the one that will probably never be finished. Aal. Unagi! But a neck is much more important than an eel.

Y: But now I would like to speak about the pig, not the eel.

B: Fumi wants something from me, and I have no idea what. I shall seize Fumi’s word by the tail like an eel, and the eel is as slippery as a word...

Y: Let me try one more time.

B: She is demonstrating a person being killed. No, not a person, a pig. Oh, I see, no doubt she is feeling pity for the pig. Fumi, don’t worry, the pig is already dead.

Y: There must be a room somewhere in the back of the house where the pigs are slaughtered.

B: Fumi! Where are you going? You aren’t allowed to go back there! Fumi!

Y: It is dark here. Simply dark. Nothing else. Completely dark.

B: Fumi, can you see me, or what do you see? You fainted.

Y: Oh, I don’t feel well. There are many tiny umbrellas twirling deep inside my ears.

B: Where were you going? You suddenly ran out back.

Y: I want to see a pig.

B: What? You want to see a doctor? Unfortunately there is only a single doctor on Dejima these days. And what a doctor! I have no desire to speak to this young German. My tongue tastes as bitter as medicine the moment I think of him.

Y: Perhaps I can tell the painter about something I didn't see. For example: "A pig lay tied up upon a low table."

B: Fumi, your eyes are gleaming so strangely. Do you have a fever?

Y: "A Dutchman plunges his knife into the throat of the pig. The blood flows out. He catches the red liquid in a large tub. He is so skillful that not a single drop lands on his clothing."

B: What did you say?

Y: The painter told me there is a rumor that the Dutch sometimes cut into the skin of a sick person so that the bad blood will leave the body. The painter wanted to know if this was true. For medical treatment is also a motif that is very much in demand among his customers.

B: Oh, Fumi, are you really feeling so poorly? Do I have to call the doctor, the German? Maybe I should say "Mountain Dutchman" instead. In fact, he has no business being in Japan at all, he isn't Dutch. But he took the liberty of coming, since he is an employee of the East India Company. Such a grand sense of Europeanness, which unfortunately I don't share with him. He certainly has no talent for languages. When he arrived, the Japanese translators were immediately suspicious because his Dutch had many wrong endings and distorted vowels. My

colleague then quickly explained that it was because he was a speaker of High German and not from the lowlands. The Japanese at once began calling him “the High German,” which they translated as “Yamaoranda,” i.e. “Mountain Dutchman,” imagining a region in Holland in which numerous mountains shoot up into the sky. The people there speak differently, just as in the mountains in Japan. This explanation satisfied the Japanese. They revere the mountains. I, on the other hand, hate them because they block my view.

Y: Aa, kurushii, kurushii.

B: Should I go and fetch the Mountain Dutchman?

Y: Yamaoranda-san wo yonde kudasa na.

B: I love the ocean, not the mountains. But now I must go and ask the Yamaoranda for help.

Y: Oh, I feel terribly unwell, as if I were in a small boat.

B: The arrogance and ambition of the mountain-dwellers! That is the mountain mentality. Do they not notice that the air becomes thinner the higher one climbs?

Y: Oh, I cannot catch my breath!

B: There are burials beneath the earth and burials at sea, so in the end one goes either into earth or water. But where is a person who is constantly climbing higher and higher trying to go?

Y: I hope the doctor will arrive soon. I must at least see his knife so I can tell the painter about it.

B: A Mountain Dutchman! A Holland with high mountains in the background: such a thing can be found only in the paintings of a Dutch painter who studied art in Italy and then was unable to part with the Alps. He will carry his Alps around on his back all his life until his back is bent.

Y: Aa, kurushii, kurushii, iki ga kurushii!

B: Fumi, wait! I'm calling the doctor!

Y: Hayaku! Hayaku!

B: The young doctor wants to conquer this country, but not like the Spaniards, who wished to achieve this by means of people's souls, but rather by means of knowledge. He wants to take his knowledge of the foreign country home with him without paying for it and then sell it to his countrymen: a sort of theft.

Y: I have already heard tell of a doctor who lives in Dejima and sometimes teaches young Japanese doctors on the mainland. He is very popular. Perhaps he is the one Yakkosan has gone to fetch.

B: The Mountain Dutchman is placing our mercantile tradition at risk by secretly collecting forbidden things. Maps, for instance. Does he think I haven't noticed? It is not without reason that the samurais have forbidden us to buy maps.

Y: Why is the doctor taking so long?

B: There is the servant. What? The doctor is out? Why is he always permitted to go out, and why is this privilege not granted me?

Y: The samurai who visited me told me that he and his friends had bought an atlas from the Dutchmen, an atlas of the human body. This book was quite different from the Chinese atlas that has been known to us for a long time now. This atlas shows not the points on the body but the intestines that resemble blood pudding.

B: If something happens to Fumi, it will be his fault.

Y: Open the skin. Go into the body. Cut it open and look inside. No skin is taboo any longer. A knife is a telescope.

B: Fumi! Fumi! She's fainted again.

Y: The blood cannot flow backward. A body becomes a park. As if it had been made by human beings. Is a human body made by human beings?