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Prisoners from Nambu: Reality and Make-Believe in
17th-Century Japanese Diplomacy (review)

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am aware of, devoted to a single pilgrimage circuit and is based on considerable archival skill. As such, it should be read by scholars or advanced graduate students with an interest in Tokugawa social history or religion, or anyone with an interest in religious pilgrimage. The fact that it is written in French will, unfortunately, limit its audience. I would encourage the author to publish additional articles in English so that her research gains the greater exposure it deserves.

Prisoners from Nambu: Reality and Make-Believe in 17th-Century Japanese Diplomacy. By Reinier H. Hesselink. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2002. xii, 215 pages. \$47.00, cloth; \$25.95, paper.

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Prisoners from Nambu is mainly a detailed narrative of the July 29, 1643, capture of ten Dutch crew members of the yacht *Breskens*, their lengthy period of house arrest in Edo, and the diplomatic maneuvering connected with this incident. Arrested in the northern domain of Nambu and quickly brought to Edo, the ten Dutchmen spent four uneasy months at the Nagasakiya (the Dutch residence) before being released on December 8. Using Japanese and Dutch primary sources, Reinier H. Hesselink has crafted a narrative that is a pleasure to read and sheds some useful light on the inner workings of Tokugawa Iemitsu's administration, certain details of Iemitsu's eradication campaign against Roman Catholicism, Iemitsu's xenophobia, and some of the practical details of interstate diplomacy in early Tokugawa Japan.

Hesselink succeeds masterfully in his main task of telling the story of the ten captured Dutchmen in a manner that "can evoke in the reader a feeling for the reality of the past" (p. 1). Drawing a distinction between "narrative history" and "analytical history," Hesselink seeks to uphold the value of the former, arguing that a narrow focus can convey to the reader an especially vivid sense of past reality. *Prisoners from Nambu* is not lacking in analysis, however, for crafting his narrative required Hesselink to engage in a comparative analysis of sources whose authors often had something to hide or obfuscate. For the most part, I found Hesselink's analysis of the *Breskens* affair and related matters to be reasonable and insightful. In some contexts, however, a rigid adherence to a narrow distinction between reality and make-believe limit the book's potential for shedding light on larger issues and for building constructively on the existing body of literature in

Tokugawa foreign relations. Nevertheless, *Prisoners from Nambu* is a work of solid scholarship and engaging writing that will appeal both to scholars of Japan and to advanced undergraduates.

The *Breskens* was one vessel of a two-ship expedition sent by the Dutch East India Company from Batavia to discover, explore, and map the “Unknown Coasts of Tartary, the Kingdom of Cathay, and the West Coast of America, as well as the Gold and Silver Islands” (p. 22). Owing to the nature of their mission, the crews were instructed to maintain careful records throughout the voyage. A severe storm separated the two vessels, and, on June 10, 1643, the *Breskens* entered the bay of Yamada in the domain of Nambu on the northeastern shore of Honshu. Seeking water, the ship’s crew received a warm welcome from the local inhabitants, who, in a festive atmosphere, traded and drank with the Dutch sailors and soldiers. The *Breskens* left the next morning. Unbeknownst to its crew or the local inhabitants around Yamada Bay, however, shogunal anxieties concerning possible Portuguese aggression were especially high at the time, piqued by specific sightings of suspicious foreign ships at various coastal locations. At the end of July, with many of its crew weakened by scurvy and bad weather, the *Breskens* returned to Yamada Bay, ostensibly to another warm welcome. This time, however, when Captain Hendrick Cornelisz Schaep and nine crew members went ashore, agents of the local *daimyō* captured the Dutchmen and sent them to Edo. The first visit of the *Breskens* had alarmed the *daimyō* of Nambu, who was aware of Iemitsu’s heightened concern about foreign ships and the possible infiltration of Catholic priests into Japan. Therefore, to allay any shogunal suspicions of laxness in dealing with Christians, domain officials were eager to seize some or all of the ship’s crew upon its return to their territory.

The reigning shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, is well known for his xenophobia, particularly his fear of Roman Catholicism. The captured Dutchmen had been within their legal rights to stop at Yamada for supplies, but, unsure of the true identity of the ship and fearful of Edo, the local authorities erred on the side of caution. To make matters worse for the Dutchmen, a ship full of Portuguese Jesuits and their Japanese convert assistants had been seized elsewhere along the coast at approximately the same time as the arrest of the *Breskens* crew members. Both groups of prisoners arrived in Edo at about the same time, arousing great suspicion among Iemitsu and several of his advisers. In sharp contrast to the Portuguese prisoners, the Dutchmen suffered no physical abuse, but they did undergo extensive and repeated interrogations about their activities. In due course, Iemitsu and his officials became satisfied that indeed the Dutch sailors were no threat.

The next issue for Iemitsu was what spin to put on the act of arresting the sailors of a friendly country. One rhetorical strategy was to claim that

the sailors themselves were largely responsible for their predicament because they failed to identify themselves as Dutch and because they fired their guns while off the coast in alleged violation of Japanese law. The other spin that Iemitsu put on the matter was that local Japanese officials had actually rescued the Dutchmen after their shipmates abandoned them. In either case—benevolent pardon for alleged offenses or benevolent rescue—the *bakufu*'s justification of the arrest and subsequent interrogation led to a demand for an embassy of thanks from Holland. This demand put Dutch-Japanese trade at risk, for top East Asia Company officials would have rejected any serious request for an embassy from Holland to Japan for this purpose, and Iemitsu's insistence on just such an embassy had backed him into a corner. The solution was a fake embassy assembled in Batavia. It featured an embalmed ambassador who died of illness en route as the embassy planners had hoped, plenty of pageantry, and a Swedish artillery expert (posing as a Dutchman), much desired by Iemitsu for instruction in the use of mortars. Iemitsu and his officials knew the embassy was fake (and the Dutch authorities in Batavia knew that he would know), but they eventually accepted it. In short, make-believe in the form of an embassy operating under false pretenses preserved Dutch trade in Japan.

The ten Dutch prisoners and other Dutchmen visiting Edo such as the chief factor wrote of their observations of the inner workings of Iemitsu's court, and Hesselink uses these accounts to flesh out the relatively sparse Japanese accounts of the *Breskens* affair and its aftermath. In Hesselink's analysis, certain tensions within Iemitsu's inner circle of advisers come to light, such as police official and shogunal adviser Inoue Masashige's adroit attempts to promote Dutch interests while also staying within the good graces of a suspicious, xenophobic Iemitsu. Other actors in Iemitsu's inner circle come to the foreground from time to time, such as the anti-Dutch, pro-Chinese Baba Saburōzaemon, and Hotta Masanori, shogunal favorite and prominent interrogator of foreigners. Inoue and Baba profited monetarily and otherwise from their support of Dutch and Chinese interests respectively. Also, Inoue, Hotta, and several others who rose far and fast in Iemitsu's court were, in their youth, objects of the shogun's sexual desire. Some of these inner-court officials, most prominently Inoue, functioned partially to blunt the force of Iemitsu's xenophobia and preserve Japanese-Dutch relations. For example, it is almost certain that Inoue authorized a secret channel of communication whereby interpreters conveyed a letter from Captain Schaeep to Chief Factor Elserack informing the latter of all of the answers Schaeep and his men had given to Japanese interrogators so that Elserack's answers would match perfectly. Such maneuvering helped ensure no unpleasant surprises during Elserack's visit to Edo to secure the release of the prisoners.

Hesselink also provides a close look at the brutal effectiveness of

Iemitsu and his officials in combating Roman Catholicism. The Dutch group was able to witness the fate of the captured Portuguese priests at several stages of the long and arduous process that led to their apostasy. Through the eyes of the *Breskens* sailors and via other related sources, we see the details of a torture and brainwashing process that utterly broke down the faith of even those Jesuits determined to die for their beliefs (not letting them do so being a key part of the process). Through such details, Hesselink's work helps paint a more vivid picture of the workings of Iemitsu's administration.

The final chapter, "Conclusion: Was Japan Isolated during the Edo Period?" contains several insightful points but is also burdened by a quest rigidly to distinguish reality from make-believe. The latter category is never defined explicitly but seems to include any degree of diplomatic fiction, especially on the part of the weaker party in a diplomatic exchange or relationship. And, implicit in Hesselink's analysis, the category of make-believe has little or no positive value. One result is that Hesselink characterizes the Japan-centered world order that Ronald Toby adumbrates in *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan*¹ as "a rather pathetic attempt on the part of early Tokugawa Japan to bully its weaker neighbors into the use of diplomatic language and behavior that would suffice as proof of Japan's centrality" and declares that "such paper realities . . . should not be taken at their face value" (p. 166). These statements follow on the heels of several pages discussing the prominent role of forgery and deception in East Asian diplomacy. In a similar vein, Hesselink dismisses Ryukyu-Chinese diplomacy in terms such as: "the fact remains that the so-called king of Ryukyu continued to send fake ambassadors to the Chinese court until the nineteenth century" (p. 15), and "the Ryukyu Islands were allowed to play out their tragicomedy of national independence for the benefit of their Chinese contacts" (p. 167). The main reason that Hesselink consigns Ryukyuan envoys, their ships full of trade goods and exchange students, the official correspondence from their "so-called king," and so forth to the category of "fake" is, apparently, because Ryukyu was not an independent state in the modern sense of the term. Instead, it was dominated by Satsuma, and Ryukyuan diplomats to China always concealed this fact.

As Hesselink's own work demonstrates, however, diplomacy necessarily involves posturing and pretense. It is certainly desirable to bear in mind the power relationships at work behind the facades of East Asian or any other diplomacy. But simply to consign the rhetoric ("paper realities") of East Asian diplomacy—expressed via official documents, protocol, gift giving, and various other forms of ritual and spectacle—to the realm of the make-believe does little to enhance our understanding of the complex *real-*

1. Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984, 1991).

ity of diplomatic practice. Because the foundations of East Asian diplomacy consisted of just such discursive practices (Ch. *li*, Jp. *rei*), such make-believe was inextricably connected with other forms of power such as economic wealth and military might. Indeed, Hesselink has provided a superb example of make-believe in the form of a fake Dutch embassy bringing about a significant economic and cultural effect: the continuation of Dutch trade in Japan.

Returning to the question of Japan's isolation, Hesselink points out that complete isolation was impossible and impractical "as Toby himself has convincingly argued. A *degree* of isolation, however, was rational and probably a necessary prerequisite for a Japan ruled by warriors" (p. 167) who knew that they had fallen behind the times in terms of technological prowess. In this context, Hesselink makes a convincing case for viewing places such as Tsushima and Ryukyu "as *buffers* that allowed Japan to officially ignore China while at the same time enabling it to keep an eye on developments on the continent" (p. 167). A few pages later he suggests that Holland buffered Japan from the rest of Europe. Toby, incidentally, is similarly concerned with distinguishing degrees of isolation: "For the concept of 'seclusion' or 'isolation' to have any utility as an analytical device . . . it must be defined. We must know, that is, the *limits* of isolation, the *degree* of isolation, and the full range of possibilities if offered."² Indeed, in their various ways, the works of Toby, Hesselink, as well as Japanese scholars such as Arano Yoshinori, Tanaka Takeo, Nishijina Sadao, Asao Naohiro, and Nagazumi Yōko rule out a simple yes or no answer to the question of Tokugawa Japan's isolation.

The Lens within the Heart: The Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan. By Timon Screech. Second Edition. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2002. xxiii, 305 pages. \$26.00, paper.

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The artist David Hockney has drawn much attention recently with his claims that from as early as the fifteenth century, many Western artists used optics (mirrors and lenses) to create drawings and paintings.¹ Such claims are not

2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

1. David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).