

A Forgotten Aesop: Shiba Kōkan, European Emblems, and Aesopian Fable Reception in Late Edo Japan¹

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By Way of Introduction

When Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century entered a period of rapid modernization and orientation towards the West, Aesopian fables became a prominent presence in didactic literature of the modern age, with several translations into Japanese from 1873 onwards. When Jesuit missionaries and the Portuguese were expelled from Japan in 1639, this marked the beginning of the suppression of European books in that country. The only title introduced by the Jesuits to survive in Japan was a collection of Aesop's fables.² Its contents were not seen as Christian by the authorities and therefore they were not potentially dangerous. Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, a number of Japanese editions of the fables were published. However, after the middle of the century, Aesop appeared to have faded from sight in Japan. In a sense, Aesop's fables bookend early modern Japan's image of a "closed country," and their appearance, disappearance, and subsequent reappearance seem to symbolize the bracketing of its isolation from European literature.

Between 1639 and 1854, Japan's contacts with the Western world, especially Europe, were limited to its contacts with its sole European trade partner, Holland, and to a lesser extent through mediation by Chinese traders. Bleak views of these contacts paint a history of missed opportunities. In such narratives both parties learned little from each other; or, worse, if they tried to learn, they misunderstood. This misunderstanding arose largely from the inability of both parties to frame *outside* of prevailing worldviews whatever was learned; no one was capable of "thinking outside the box." For Japan, this translates as the view that the study of Europe was framed within templates for studying Chinese classics, neo-Confucianism (or perhaps better "Zhu Xi learning," Jp. *shushigaku* 朱子学),

¹ This article is part of preparatory research for a monograph on mid- to late-Edo reception of European emblems in Japan, with the working title *Emblem as Episteme*.

² Elisonas, J.S.A., "Fables and Imitations: Kirishitan Literature in the Forest of Simple Letters," *Bulletin of Portuguese Japanese Studies* 4 (2002), pp. 9–36, esp. p. 12.

“national learning” (*kokugaku* 国学), martial studies (*beigaku* 兵学), et cetera; Europe could make sense only in East Asian terms, necessarily explained with existing concepts and terminology, and within institutional settings modeled after traditional fields of scholarship, the so-called “academies” (*juku* 塾).

More positive presentations of knowledge contacts between Japan and Europe in the Edo period, when Japan in the period 1639–1854 supposedly was a “closed country” (*sakoku* 鎖国) to the rest of the world and to Europe in particular, focus on a Japanese curiosity that embraced almost all things European. The larger narrative of this Japanese interest is that initially Japanese were primarily attracted to objects from Europe for their curiosity value, and that only in the last quarter of the eighteenth century did certain circles of Japanese intellectuals start to focus more systematically on what Japan might learn from Europe. ‘Europe’ in this period was represented by Holland, Japan’s sole Western trading partner, and the later eighteenth century saw the rise of a scholarly field termed “Dutch studies,” or “Hollandology” (*rangaku* 蘭学). One form the contacts between Europe and Japan took was through books, and European books, whether in the original or in Chinese translations, became the prime means through which Japanese would learn about the West. In 1720, in the context of what became known as the first wave of the Kyōhō 享保 Reforms of 1716–1722, shōgun Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗 (1684–1751) lifted the ban on the import of certain European books, in the expectation that Japan could access learning with practical applications. Histories of this field of “Hollandology” stress an emphasis on empirical studies, such as medicine, astronomy, natural sciences, and principles of perspective and techniques of copper etchings in the arts.

Aesop’s fables present a good model for rethinking these two dominant narratives. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Aesop was never completely absent from Japan. The fables both constitute a link between the Portuguese-Jesuit heritage and Dutch studies, and also demonstrate that there was an early modern Japanese interest in European discursive practices, however problematic its understanding may have been. A point of entry will be the painter and popular writer Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢 (1747–1818).

Beginnings

When in the very first year of the Meiji period Toyama Masakazu 外山正一 (1848–1900) returned from his studies in England, he brought with him a copy of a modern version of *Aesop’s Fables*, written by the reverend Thomas James and first published in London by John Murray in 1848. This was translated into Japanese by the English scholar and entrepreneur Watanabe On 渡部温 (1837–1898). Watanabe’s *Tsūzoku Isoppu monogatari* 通俗伊蘇普物語 (A Popularized Aesop’s Tales) was published in 1872 in a woodblock edition. Its illustrations were reworkings of the original illustrations by John Tenniel by, among others, the well-known painter Kawanabe Kyōsai 河鍋曉斎 (1831–1889). Inspired by Watanabe’s

translation, Kyōsai in 1873 began publishing a lavishly colored *nishiki-e* 錦絵 print series on the theme of “Among the tales of Aesop” (*Isoppu monogatari no uchi* 伊蘇普物語之内).³ Watanabe’s book quickly became a bestseller, with reprints set in type, and was used as a textbook in the new primary school system that was established in that very same year. Several versions of Aesop’s fables were to follow, creating an ‘Aesop boom’ and establishing the tales as one of the earliest Meiji absorptions of European literature. It is fairly safe to claim that Meiji’s interest in Western literature began large-scale with Aesop’s fables.

Few in Japan at the time realized that by 1872 Aesop’s fables had already been present in Japan for nearly three centuries. Today, it is fairly common knowledge that as part of their enterprise in Japan, the Jesuits established a printing center with a press that was brought to Kazusa 加津佐, Kyushu, in 1590, and which from 1592 onwards was located on the island of Amakusa 天草, not too far from Nagasaki, where the printing operation was conducted under the protection of its Christian daimyō.⁴ In 1593, the Jesuit mission press printed a Japanese translation of Aesop’s fables, type-set with Roman letters in a transcription system that the Jesuits had developed, titled *ESOPONO FABULAS*, “translated from the Latin to Japanese speech” (*Latinuo vaxite Nippon no cuchi to nasu mono nari*).⁵ In addition to its professed aim to introduce European moral ideas, an important goal of this publication seems to have been to help Europeans learn the Japanese language: “Not only is this [book] truly dependable when learning the Japanese language, but it can also be an instrument in teaching people the right way.” (*Core macotoni Nipponno cotoba qeicono tameni tayorito naru nominarazu, yoqi michiuo fitoni voxīye cataru tayoritomo narubeqi mono nari*).⁶ What this targeting of non-Japanese readers meant for the circulation of this early Japanese translation of the fables is an open question; in any case, the fables ultimately did reach a Japanese readership.

The Jesuit edition of Aesop’s fables was followed by a number of so-called *kana-zōshi* 仮名草子 editions in the first half of the seventeenth century, that is,

³ Sadamura Koto 定村来人, “Kawanabe Kyōsai ‘Isoppu monogatari no uchi’ no seisakunen ni tsuite: Isuraeru Gōrudoman korekushon-zō no jūyonzu kara wakaruru koto” 河鍋暁齋《伊蘇普物語之内》の制作年について：イスラエル・ゴールドマン・コレクション蔵の一四四から分かること, *Kyōsai: Kawanabe Kyōsai kenkyūshi* 暁齋：河鍋暁齋研究誌 115 (2015), pp. 226–230.

⁴ For this and more information treating the so-called Amakusa edition (*Amakusa-bon*) of 1593 and the 1659 illustrated Manji edition of early Japanese translations of Aesop’s fables, see Michael Watson, “A Slave’s Wit: Early Japanese Translations of the Life of Aesop,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* (4th series) 20 (2006), pp. 1–22; and Endō Jun’ichi 遠藤潤一, *Hoyaku nishu Isobo monogatari no gententeki kenkyū (seiben)* 邦訳二種伊曾保物語の原典的研究 (正編) (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 1983), pp. 113–470. On specifically the Jesuit edition, see also Pack Carnes, “‘Esopo no fabulas’: More Notes on Aesop in Sixteenth-Century Japan,” *Reinardus* 14 (2001), pp. 99–113.

⁵ Shima Shōzō 島正三, *Amakusa-bon Isobo monogatari nado no koto (boteiban)* 天草本伊曾保物語などのこと (補訂版) (Tokyo: Bunka Shobō Hakubunsha, 1984), p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

early Edo books printed mostly in *kana*, with limited use of *kanji*, targeting a non-specialist readership. However, these Japanese editions did not derive directly from the Jesuit translation. Rather, there seems to have been a Japanese proto-Aesop (*gen-Isobo monogatari* 原・伊曾保物語, assumed, 1580s) on which both the Jesuit edition and the Japanese editions based themselves. There are telling differences between the Jesuit translation and the Japanese popularizing editions, the most glaring of which is that the Jesuit version is written in colloquial speech (*keōgotai* 口語体) and usually has an explicit moral (“*xitagocoro*,” *shitagokoro* 下・心) at the end of a fable, while the *kanazōshi* (or so-called *kekuji* 国字, that is, printed with *kana* and *kanji*) editions adhere to a literary style of Japanese (*bungotai* 文語体). One assumption is that the *kanazōshi* editions more faithfully follow the proto-Aesop, which would have been written in *kana*.⁷ The best known of these editions, of which eleven different ones are extant, is what is presumably the last one, published in 1659 (Manji 万治 2) by a certain Itō San’emon 伊藤三右衛門, usually referred to as the *Manji e-iri-bon Isobo monogatari* 万治絵入本伊曾保物語, “Illustrated Edition of Aesop’s Tales from the Manji Period.” It would be this illustrated edition in particular that was to catch the attention of later Edo-period readers, among them Shiba Kōkan.

Since the fifteenth century, the Japanese had seen an increase in stories featuring animals rather than people. These stories, often in the form of *otogi-zōshi* 御伽草子 (“companion booklets”), songs, or comic plays, but also sometimes Buddhist parables, are nowadays referred to as *iruimono* 異類物, “pieces about other species.” These stories may have helped to pave the way for the success of Aesop’s animal fables.

It is important to realize that roughly half of *ESOPONO FABULAS* and *Isobo monogatari* is indeed “the tale of Aesop,” rather than “tales by Aesop,” in the sense that it deals with Aesop’s life. This was a standard feature of classical and medieval European editions of Aesop’s fables. In this way, Japanese readers were from the very first page confronted with a world outside Asia, filled with such enigmatic place names as Hirija (Phrygia) and Toroya (Troy), or such curious personal names as Shanto (Xanto).

How many readers interacted with Aesop is, as always, difficult to say. Back in 1978, Nakagawa Yoshio was quite sober about the possible success of the early seventeenth-century editions: he believed that they were little read and that the fables’ didactic form failed to reach an audience beyond a more elite readership. This may have had to do with the niche position that *keirishitan* (‘Christian,’ that is: European) texts occupied anyway.⁸ However, despite his activities in a near-mythical Europe, the figure of Aesop may very well have been a recognizable

⁷ Kobori Kei’ichirō 小堀桂一郎, *Isoppu gima: sono denshō to ben’yō* イソップ寓話：その伝承と変容 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1978), pp. 159–163.

⁸ Nakagawa Yoshio 中川芳雄, “Kaidai” 解題, in *Kokatsunji-ban Isobo monogatari* 古活字版伊曾保物語 (Tokyo: Benseisha, 1976), pp. 235–253.

character to Japanese readers of the early seventeenth century. As Komine Kazuaki has pointed out, Aesop's quick wit and subservient position resonated with the image of the late medieval *otogishū* 御伽衆, or personal entertainer or conversationalist to a daimyō, not unlike the legendary sixteenth-century *rakugo* artist Sorori Shinzaemon 曾呂利新左衛門, who allegedly was an *otogishū* to the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537–1598).⁹ There are physical signs of reader interaction with the fables: Aesop is described as exceedingly ugly; this seems to have been a feature that some readers picked up on. The National Institute of Japanese Literature owns a copy of the 1659 illustrated edition in which a reader has consistently by hand in all illustrations added pock marks to Aesop's face to underline his ugliness, for example in a scene in which he is seated before the pharaoh of Egypt, who is visually rendered as a Chinese-style emperor (**Figure 1**).¹⁰

Late Edo Sightings of the Fables

After 1659, Aesop disappears from the Japanese radar, or so it seems, only to resurface in 1872 with Watanabe On's translation of Thomas James' version of the fables. This change appears to coincide with a drop, after the seventeenth century, in the popularity of the *kana-zōshi* genre in general. However, there is proof that belies such an apparent oversight of Aesop in the intervening two centuries. Aesop was not totally unread in mid- to late Edo Japan.

The best proof of Aesop's vitality throughout the early modern period is probably a curiously little-studied printed edition by what is surely one of late Edo's better-known popular authors. The successful *gesaku* 戯作 author Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水 (1790–1844) reworked sixteen fables from the Aesopian repertoire in his *E-iri kyōkun chikamichi* 絵入教訓ちかみち (var. 絵入教訓近道, An Illustrated Shortcut to Moral Teaching) of 1844 (Tenpō 天保 15).¹¹ The book came with illustrations by Utagawa Kunitaru 歌川国輝 I, drawing under the name of Sadashige 貞重 (dates unknown, active 1818–1860), and was published by the Edo-based publisher Chōjiya Heibei 丁子屋平兵衛 (dates unknown), who in the 1830s had been co-publisher of Kyokutei Bakin's 曲亭馬琴 (1767–1848) immensely popular *gesaku* series *Nansō satomi hakkenden* 南総里見八犬伝 (Biographies of Eight Dogs, 1814–1842). Shunsui's use of the fables raises the thorny issue of how in the early nineteenth century one could get her or his hands on *kana-zōshi* published some two centuries before, a point I will return to shortly. Of course, there existed lending libraries (*kashibon'ya* 貸本屋) that presumably

⁹ Komine Kazuaki 小峯和明, "Seiyō kara kita setsuwa: Isoppu to seijaden" 西洋から来た説話: イソップと聖者伝, in *Setsuwa no mori: tengu, tōzoku, igyō no doke* 説話の森: 天狗・盗賊・異形の道化 (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1991), pp. 256–280.

¹⁰ *Isobo monogatari* 伊曾保物語 2.2 ([Place unknown:] Itō San'emmon 伊藤三右衛門, Manji 2/1659). In the collections of the National Institute of Japanese Literature, call no. ナ4-985.

¹¹ Mutō Sadao 武藤禎夫, "Kaisetsu" 解説, in *Isobo monogatari: Manji e-iri-bon* 伊曾保物語: 万治絵入本 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000), pp. 323–325.

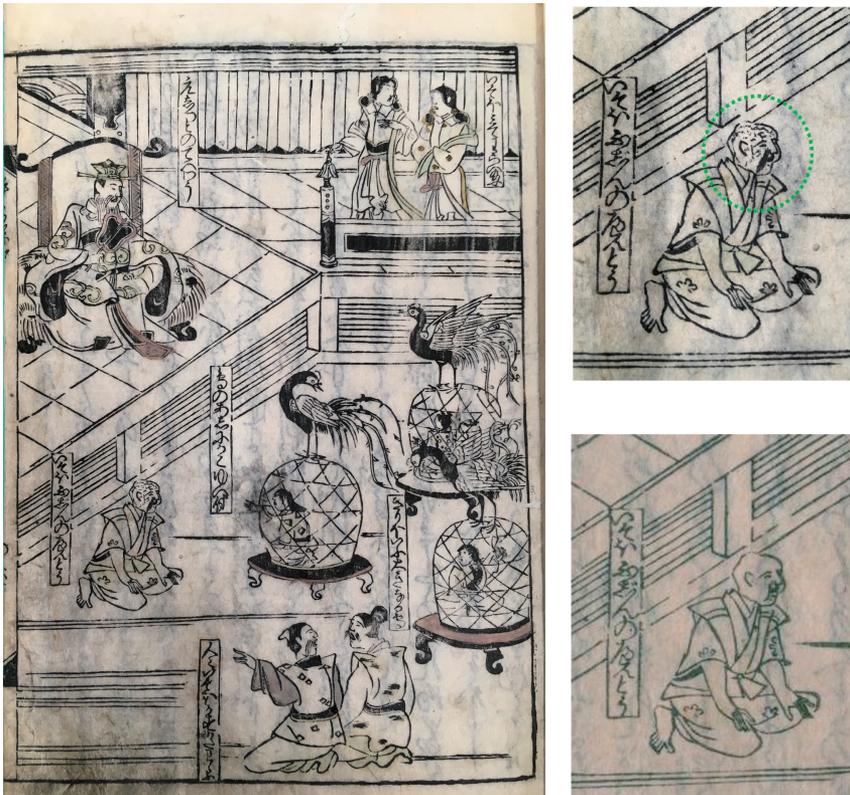


Figure 1. Left: Aesop before the Pharaoh of Egypt. Illustration from *Isobo monogatari* 伊曾保物語 2.2, pub. Itō San’emon 伊藤三右衛門, Manji 2/1659. (National Institute of Japanese Literature).
<https://doi.org/10.20730/200021086>

Figure 1a. Upper right: Aesop before the Pharaoh of Egypt. Detail from Figure 1. Note the added pockmarks on Aesop’s face.

Figure 1b. Lower right: Another copy of the same edition, showing the originally unmarked design. (National Diet Library).
<https://doi.org/10.11501/2532213>

also dealt in old titles, but one has to wonder how great of a chance there was that through such a channel one could read a two-hundred-year-old book that may not have been that widely read in the first half of the seventeenth century to begin with. Be that as it may, Shunsui obviously had access to a version of Aesop’s fables. Among others, he selected a fable that resonated throughout the Edo period (**Figure 2**):

The Parable of the Wolf and the Crane

Once, a wolf got a bone stuck in his throat, and while he was in pain a crane came flying to him. “Why are you in such pain?” he asked. The wolf shed tears and howled, “I have gotten a bone stuck in my throat, and it causes me great pain.



Figure 2. The wolf and the crane. Illustration by Utagawa Kuniteru 歌川国輝 I, in Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水, *E-iri kyōkun chikamichi* 絵入教訓ちかみち, pub. Chōjiya Heibei 丁子屋平兵衛, Tenpō 15/1844. From Mutō Sadao 武藤禎夫, *E-iri Isobo monogatari wo yomu* 絵入伊曾保物語を読む, p. 81 (see note 12).

There is no one who can help me but you. So, please pull out this bone!” Thus he begged, and the crane, feeling sorry for him, opened the wolf’s mouth and with his long beak pulled out the bone, and saved the wolf’s life. The crane said to the wolf, “From now on, we have a special bond and should be friends.” The wolf scowled, “How much of a favor have you done me, to say something like that? I was thinking of chewing off your head, but now I feel only sorry for you and am inclined to let you go. Be thankful for that!” The crane was in shock and flew away.

If you do a bad person a good deed, it can happen that he turns on you. However, to do good by people is your duty to the Lord of Heaven.¹²

¹² *E-iri kyōkun chikamichi* 5, in Mutō Sadao, *E-iri isobo monogatari wo yomu* 絵入伊曾保物語を読む (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1997), pp. 81–82; and Mutō, *Isobo monogatari: Manji e-iri-bon* (op. cit.), pp. 210–212. This is a reworking of *Isobo monogatari* 2.16, for which see *Kana-zōshi shū* 仮名草子集, vol. 90 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系, eds. Morita Takeshi 森田武, et al. (Iwanami Shoten, 1965), pp. 407–408. “Parable” here translates *tatōe* たとへ.

Shunsui adapted the seventeenth-century *kana-zōshi* text to more contemporary Japanese, omitting for example such early-Edo appellations as *goben* 御辺 for “you.” Intriguing are Utagawa Kuniteru’s anthropomorphic illustrations that furnish the emblematic animals with human bodies, which are a deviation from the more or less standardized iconography of the so-called *irumono* illustrated tales.

Incidentally, further indication that the illustrated *kana-zōshi* edition of 1659 did have an afterlife is provided by Lawrence E. Marceau’s identification of an Edo-period illustrated scroll that goes by the descriptive name *E-iri kansubon Isobo monogatari* 絵入卷子本伊曾保物語 (Illustrated scroll of Aesop’s tales, ca. 1670). The scroll contains scenes that undeniably trace back to illustrations of the Manji-period illustrated *kana-zōshi* edition of 1659.¹³

Based on references in his *Honkyō gaihen* 本教外篇 (Outer Chapters of Our Doctrine, 1806), a work that among others explores the Christian worldview with references to Matteo Ricci’s (1552–1610) writings, there are strong indications that Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) a few decades earlier had read a Sinitic version of the fables. Presumably he picked them up through Matteo Ricci’s *Jiren shipian* 畸人十篇 (Ten Chapters on Extraordinary Men, 1608), a collection of dialogues between the Jesuit Ricci and nine of his literati friends, held in the Chinese capital between 1595 and 1601, and published in early 1608. This compilation work reflects an interest by contemporary literati in Christian views on such issues as death, and was read in Japan as well, serving as an important source of information for Hirata’s *Honkyō gaihen*.¹⁴

Such examples ultimately all trace back to the Jesuit legacy, especially that of the Amakusa press. Yet, the European Aesopian legacy was emphatically not an exclusively southern European affair.

Edo Confrontations with the Emblematic Aesopian World

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, animal fables from the Aesopian tradition increasingly reached European readers in the template of the emblem book. As a specific image-text combination, the emblem (Latin *emblemata*) has its origins in a work by the Paris-based lawyer Andrea Alciato (1492–1550), who in 1531 published the first edition of his *Emblematum liber* (aka *Emblemata*, “A book of emblems”). Alciato’s emblems may be thought of as highly intellectual

¹³ One eagerly awaits Lawrence Marceau’s forthcoming edition of this illustrated scroll (publication expected through Rinsen Shoten), on which he has given numerous lectures. See for example, Lawrence E. Marceau, “Reconsidering the *Isopo monogatari* Scrolls,” unpublished conference presentation, Meiji University, October 23, 2015.

¹⁴ Mutō Sadao, “Kaisetsu,” in *Isopo monogatari: Manji e-iri-bon* (op. cit.), p. 340; Devine, Richard, “Hirata Atsutane and Christian Sources,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 36:1 (1981), pp. 37–54. On Jesuit reworkings of Aesopian fables in China, see Sher-shiueh Li, “The Art of Misreading: An Analysis of the Jesuit ‘Fables’ in Late Ming China,” in Luo Xuanmin and He Yuanjin, eds., *Translating China* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009), pp. 71–94.

association games, in which the central image (*pictura*), as a rule accompanied by a heading (*inscriptio*, or *motto*), as well as an epigrammatic poem underneath (the *subscriptio*), functioned as a coded visualization of the moral message of the emblem as a whole. In Alciato's template, the combination of *motto* and *pictura* presented an enigma, for which the epigrammatic *subscriptio* pointed towards the solution. In the narrow, historical sense, an emblem is a specific combination of epigram and image that has been rightly called one of the most influential creations of the late Renaissance.¹⁵ The emblem quickly became quite a hit with readers and the template for many other emblem books. Between the mid-sixteenth century and the early eighteenth century, Europe was awash with the emblem genre. Estimates calculate that over two thousand titles, possibly representing over a million copies, of emblem books circulated in Europe.¹⁶ While Alciato wrote in Latin, quite soon, already later in the sixteenth century, Europe saw the rise of emblem books in vernacular languages. Aesopian animal fables became staple fare for the vernacular version of the genre. By the early eighteenth century, the emblem book had developed into a widely used didactic format, one that also propagated explicitly Christian values.

One highly attractive feature of the emblem was its use of images. Especially in the Low Countries, production was abundant and the books came with copper etchings of often unmatched quality. The pervasive presence of the emblem book and its high-quality images will have played a role in Dutch traders bringing the emblem to Japan. The first attested recognition of the genre by a Japanese that I can find is datable to 1779. In the second month of that year, shogun Tokugawa Ieharu 徳川家治 (1737–1786) received a translation of the captions (*subscriptiones*) of a set of copper-plate etchings that the delegation of the Dutch trading post at Dejima, Nagasaki, had presented him with on a previous occasion. The translator in question was the Edo-based Maeno Ryōtaku 前野良沢 (1723–1803), a samurai scholar from the Fukuoka domain in Kyushu, trained in medicine and above all in the budding field of Hollandology. He had spent time in Nagasaki to learn Dutch and to gain first-hand knowledge of Western sciences, especially medicine, an academic rite of passage known as a 'Nagasaki study sojourn' (*Nagasaki yūgaku* 長崎遊学). He was so dedicated to his

¹⁵ Ashworth, William B., Jr., "Natural History and the Emblematic Worldview," in David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman, eds., *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 303–333, esp. p. 310. See also Hessel Miedema, "The Term *Emblema* in Alciato," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968), pp. 234–250.

¹⁶ Porteman, K., *Inleiding tot de Nederlandse emblemataliteratuur* [Introduction to Dutch Emblem Literature] (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1977), p. 7; Manning, John, *The Emblem* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p. 16. Porteman refers to individual copies, not titles, when he mentions numbers possibly "in the seven digits." Estimates depend a great deal on what is, and is not, included in the genre definition of an emblem book.

Dutch studies that his lord supposed he “had gone Dutch” (*ranka* 蘭化).¹⁷ One result was Ryōtaku’s heavy involvement in the translation project that led to *Kaitai shinsbo* 解体新書 (A New Book of Anatomy, 1774), which had appeared five years earlier and would become the first major landmark of Hollandology.¹⁸ Quite likely it was Ryōtaku’s involvement in precisely this medical translation project that had put him on the shogunal radar in 1779. It is assumed that shogunal physician Katsuragawa Hoshū 桂川甫周 (1751–1809) had alerted the shogun to Ryōtaku’s prowess in reading “the horizontal script” (*yokomoji* 横文字), that is, the Dutch language.¹⁹ What exactly triggered the shogunal command is not quite clear; Ieharu’s reputation was one of a total lack of intellectual interests.²⁰

Ryōtaku was deeply unhappy with the shogun’s request. He felt not up to the translation assignment, but one could not refuse such a command. His unhappiness was more than simply the standard deprecation of one’s own talents. In this case it is not difficult to imagine the agony that he must have felt. Ryōtaku had noticed that the etchings’ captions were not in Dutch, but in Latin. Dutch scholars were trained in Dutch, and hardly knew the first thing about Latin. In the introduction to the translation that he eventually did produce, Ryōtaku elaborated on the difficulties presented by Latin as a language:²¹

¹⁷ Numata Jirō, *Western Learning: A Short History of the Study of Western Science in Early Modern Japan* (Tokyo: The Japan-Netherlands Institute, 1992), p. 82. Maeno seems to have agreed with his daimyō Okudaira Masaka, as he later adopted Ranka as his pen name.

¹⁸ For a treatment of the translation process of *Kaitai shinsbo*, see e.g. Numata, *Western Learning* (v.s.), pp. 51–79; Goodman, Grant K., *Japan: The Dutch Experience* (London: Athlone, 1986), pp. 82–85.

¹⁹ Torii Yumiko 鳥井裕美子, *Maeno Ryōtaku: shōgai ichijitsu no gotoku* 前野良沢：生涯一日のごとく (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2015), p. 139.

²⁰ For negative assessments by both Japanese and Dutch contemporaries of Ieharu’s intellectual, administrative, or other qualities, see Timon Screech, *The Shogun’s Painted Culture: Fear and Creativity in the Japanese States, 1760–1829* (Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 93.

²¹ For text, see *Seiyō gasan yakubun kō* 西洋画賛訳文稿 [A Translation of Captions to Images from the West], in *Maeno Ryōtaku shiryōshū* 前野良沢資料集, ed. Ōita Kenritsu Sentetsu Shiryōkan 大分県立先哲史料館, vol. 2 (Ōita-ken Kyōiku Iinkai, 2009), pp. 70–71. This is a transcription of the Seikadō 静嘉堂 (or Ōtsuki 大槻) manuscript in Maeno’s hand. Ryōtaku wrote the “Introduction” (*daigen* 題言) to his manuscript in Sinitic (*kanbun*); for a ‘Japanized’ (*kekikudashū*) version of Ryōtaku’s *kanbun* text, see Harada Hiroshi 原田裕司, “Maeno Ryōtaku *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* no ratengo genten” 前野良沢『西洋画賛訳文稿』のラテン語原典, (*Ōsaka Daigaku Gengo Bunkabu, Gengo Bunka Kenkyūka-ben*) *Gengo bunka kenkyū* (大阪大学言語文化部・言語文化研究科編) 言語文化研究 26 (2000), pp. 152–153. Donald Keene also alludes to Ryōtaku’s frustration over Latin; Keene, Donald, *The Japanese Discovery of Europe, 1720–1830* (Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 78.

For *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* generally, see also Harada Hiroshi “Maeno Ryōtaku *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* no ratengo genten,” pp. 149–178; Harada Hiroshi, “Maeno Ryōtaku *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* no ratengo genten (hoi)” 前野良沢『西洋画賛訳文稿』のラテン語原典 (補遺), (*Ōsaka Daigaku Gengo Bunkabu, Gengo Bunka Kenkyūka-ben*) *Gengo bunka kenkyū* (大阪大学言語文化部・言語文化研究科編) 言語文化研究 27 (2001), pp. 255–259; Isozaki Yasuhiko 磯崎康彦, *Edo jidai no ranga to ransho: kinsai nichiran hikaku bijutsushi (jōkan)* 江戸時代の蘭画と蘭書：近世日蘭比較美術史 (上巻) (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2004), pp. 366–367.

Our Lord ordered me,²² his servant, to translate the images with inscriptions from the West. I respectfully looked through them and found that they were made in France and that their texts make use of Latin. (I will explain about ‘France’ and ‘Latin’ below.)

Certainly, Latin is that from which the French language is derived. It is sophisticated and concise, yet its meaning is profound. This is why even people from France or Holland have no knowledge of it, unless they are learned men—not to mention us in Nagasaki! I have yet to hear of someone who understands it well. If I read through a normal Dutch book and I come across passages in this language, I always skip them because I cannot read them properly. Since there is no one who really understands this, I can only make sense of Latin books through Dutch translations and from time to time by this means I seek out their meaning. But even as I resent this and study alone, I am unable to properly probe its abstruseness.

Now one cannot refuse a command of one’s lord and so I made an effort to inquire after glosses and at last search for the meaning, but it comes as from a great distance and all of it is difficult to communicate.²³

For all his laments Ryōtaku managed to do quite a fair job. Given the circumstances, it is quite incredible that he got as much right as he did. He was aware of the existence of a Latin school in Batavia, and in fact managed to consult Latin dictionaries.²⁴

We know which text it was that the shogun ordered Ryōtaku to translate. A copy (although probably not the copy that Ryōtaku had access to) is in the Tokugawa Bijutsukan in Nagoya, labeled *Orandajin sesshō no zu* 阿蘭陀人殺生図 (Images of Dutchmen Slaughtering Living Beings). It is a book published two centuries earlier by the Flemish Jan Van der Straet, who operated under his Latinized name Stradanus (1523–1605). His *Venationes: ferarum, avium, piscium* (Hunts: Wild Beasts, Birds, and Fish, 1578) was reprinted several times and presumably it was a later edition that the Dutch delegation offered as a gift to the shogun. Given the success with Japanese audiences of European books with meticulous copper etchings, we may assume that the copper etchings were a major motivation for the Dutch in offering this particular set.

For all his groaning, Ryōtaku proved once again to be an admirable champion of textual analysis. He was very accurate in his assessment of the category of book to which *Hunts: Wild Beasts, Birds, and Fish* belonged:

²² Maeno Ryōtaku refers to himself here by his proper name (*na* 名), which was Yomisu 熹. As Harada Hiroshi points out, the manuscript mistakenly gives his name as Yorokobi 喜. Harada, “Maeno Ryōtaku *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* no ratengo genten” (op. cit.), p. 152.

²³ *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* (op. cit.), p. 70.

²⁴ For the existence in Japan of Latin dictionaries, see *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō*, pp. 89–91; Harada Hiroshi 原田裕司, “Maeno Ryōtaku no ratengo jiten to kinsei Nihon yunyū ratengogaku shoshi” 前野良沢のラテン語辞典と近世日本輸入ラテン語学書誌, *Nichiran gakkai kaishi* 日蘭学会会誌 26:1, no. 48 (2001), pp. 37–59; Torii, *Maeno Ryōtaku: shogai ichijitsu no gotoku* (op. cit.), pp. 143–144.

窃按此画大抵因羅甸所傳之譬喻寓言等以設之図者也 蓋將使童蒙因画図而自解文辭也 故其所攢撫在目前近小之事耶 彼方之画類類于此者多矣

I conclude that these pictures take their cue from parables and fables and the like that were transmitted in Latin and made into images. Essentially these things are aimed at children and youngsters and attempt to explain by themselves the words of the texts through pictures. Must its salient points therefore be something minute right in front of one's eyes? Of this type of picture from over there, there are many.²⁵

What is especially interesting is that Ryōtaku claimed that there were many texts from Europe that were firmly intertwined with images and which were supposed to somehow “by themselves” convey meaning. The message of this gift from the Dutch delegation, even if it may have been an unconscious one, was that emblematic images were a pivotal medium of European culture. It was also irritatingly clear to him that the proper way to decode these images was “right in front of one's eyes.” But, of course, you needed to know the key. Maeno Ryōtaku was well aware that this particular type of image-text relationship had a name:

羅甸之言名曰^{エムブレマ}奄弗烈瑪

In Latin these are called *emblema* (Jp. *emuburema*).²⁶

In other words, the Dutch had given the Shogun a book of emblems. At the end of his translation of Van der Straet's *Hunts: Wild Beasts, Birds, and Fish*, Ryōtaku explains in somewhat more detail what an *emblema* is.

奄弗烈瑪 是仏朗察ニテ称スル所ノ名ナリ コレヲ和蘭ノ語ニ翻訳スルハ「シンネベ_ユルド」ト云フナリ 私ニ按スルニ シンネ」トハ此ニ云意識ナリ「ベ_ユルド」トハ 此ニ云形ヲ図ニ造ルコトナリ 是則意趣ヲ形容スルト云フコトニシテ 無声ノ詩ト云フノ類ナリ

‘Emblem’: This is what one calls it in French. If one translates it into Dutch, it is called a ‘*zjinnebeeld*’ (Jp. *shinneberudo*). As I understand it, ‘*zjin*’ is awareness, and ‘*beeld*’ is to put an outward form into an image. Thus, it is to give visible form to an intention and [as such] it is a kind of silent poem.²⁷

Ryōtaku accurately identified the Dutch copper prints as allegorical pictures (*gūi* 寓意図) and assessed correctly that the Latin text accompanying these images had a didactic meaning.²⁸ It is also clear that for Ryōtaku, an ‘emblem’ hinged primarily, if not exclusively, on the image.

²⁵ *Seiyō gasan yakubunkō* (op. cit.), p. 71.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 88. This last designation, of emblems as a category (*taqui* 類) of “silent poem” (*musei no shi* 無声ノ詩), taps into a rhetoric of long standing in China.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 70–71.

A Dutch Aesop in Kanagawa

One intriguing case is presented by the existence of hand-copied pages from an early seventeenth-century Dutch reworking of a selection of Aesopian animal fables. *Vorstelijcke warande der dieren* (Royal Display of Animals, 1617) was the product of an entrepreneurial publisher, Dirck Pietersz. Pers (1581–1659), and the young poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). Pers had managed to get his hands on the copper etching plates of an earlier Flemish edition of a set of animal fables presented in the emblem template, which itself had been grafted onto an even earlier emblem book in French. One of the first European books to combine animal fables and emblems was *Les fables du très-ancien Ésope* (The Fables of the Very Ancient Aesop, 1542) published in Paris by the humanist Gilles Corrozet and based on Latin, humanist reworkings of Aesopian fables. This French book has the format that would become standard practice, elaborating on the Alciato template: each fable occupies two facing pages. On one page is an illustration with a caption on top and a *subscriptio* at the bottom, on the other page is the fable itself, with the moral, creating the subgenre of what has been called the ‘emblem fable.’²⁹

The Flemish artist Marcus Gheeraerts (*ca.* 1520–*ca.* 1590) used this French fable book for his own *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (The Truthful Fables of the Animals, 1567), published in Antwerp with his own copper etchings and with texts by Eduard de Dene. The pictures by Gheeraerts proved an incredible success. The Flemish painter and early art historian Karel van Mander (1548–1606) wrote of Gheeraerts’ book: “When in the year 1566 the Arts were at an impasse, he [Gheeraerts] made and etched the Book of Fables *Esopi*, which is a beautiful thing and well executed.”³⁰ Gheeraerts’ copper engravings were used again and again with different accompanying texts, starting with the *Esbatement moral des animaux* (Moral Entertainment by Animals, 1578). Eventually, the copper plates made their way to the northern Netherlands. Importantly, Gheeraerts’ book for the first time introduced a so-called ‘emblematic’ way of presenting (and reading) fable literature in Dutch. The method was, of course, borrowed from France, but it was new for a Flemish and Dutch public.

It was the complete set of Gheeraerts’ 118 copper etching plates that Pers got hold of, and would expand to a total of 125. This was a new era, when publishers began to play an important role in the literary field. They were the ones to start book projects and attract authors to work out their ideas. Pers contracted Vondel

²⁹ Geirnaert, Dirk, and Paul J. Smith, “The Sources of the Emblematic Fable Book *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567),” in John Manning, Karel Porteman, and Marc van Vaeck, eds., *The Emblem Tradition in the Low Countries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 23–38.

³⁰ Van Mander, Karel, *Het Schilder-boeck* (Haarlem, 1604), fol. 258a; Molkenboer, B. H., *De jonge Vondel* (Amsterdam: Parnassus, 1950), p. 356. Pers quotes this passage in the introduction to his 1617 *Warande der dieren*.



Veel ongelukkiger als dese laft-dragenden Ezel, is geweest die ellendige gevangen Keyfer *Palerianus*. Want als hij van den Koning van Perſen (*Sapor* geheeten) bekrigt gevangen, met ſtricken gebonden, ende in ſlavernije gebracht was, ſoo heeft hij als een arme Ezel zeer ſwaren arbeyt doen moeten, ende hem oock voor een voetſchamel laten gebruycken, als de Koning te peerd wilde zitten; ſis oock noch ellendigh geſlagen, ende armelijck geſpijft, tot dat hij in ſulcken Ezels arbeyt zijn leven ellendighlijck eyndighde. *SABELLICUS.*

Hier, hier, ghij Vreken hier, ſchout *d' Ezel* overladen
 Met bouten, hoenders, taert, gefoden, en gebraden.
 Saucijſſen, Haſen, Wijn, Capoenen, en Paſtey,
 En hij eet dijſtlen ſelf op ſchraele en dorre wey.
 „Zoo gaet het oock met u, verſchroockte gierge ſlaven:
 „In rijkdom zij dij arm, bekommert gaet ghij draven:
 „Hebt ſtadelijcken forgh, beſwaert met druck en klagh,
 „Vint geen geruſt gemoet, en woelt ſchier nagt en dagh:
 „Slurpt wey en water in, ſchroomt uwen buyck te vallen:
 „Een ander heeft u haef, der fleckerlijcken ſmullen. (braet.
 „Die 't goedt heeft, ſuygt de poot; die 't niet heeft, eet ge-
 „Dees loert op woeckers winit, en d'ander op verraet:
 „En altijd heeft hij vrees, verſmoort in ijdele ſorgen: (gen:
 „Komt ſtadigh broodt te kort, bekommert voor den mor-
 „Onthout zijn luſt het goet, en ſpaert'er uyt zijn mont;
 „Dat in het eynd verbract wort door de Kart' of Hondt.

Hh

Figure 3. Donkey carrying nourishment (*Spijsdragende Ezel*), emblem page with accompanying poem. Illustration by Marcus Gheeraerts, in Joost van den Vondel, *Vorstelijcke warande der dieren* (Amsterdam: Sander Wybrantsz., 1682), p. 116. [openlibrary.org. https://archive.org/details/vorstelijckewara00vond/page/n245](https://archive.org/details/vorstelijckewara00vond/page/n245)

for the publication of the *Royal Display of Animals* in 1617, for which Vondel wrote new texts for the independent facing pages that retold each fable in the form of a page-long poem. This particular emblem book of Aesopian animal fables would go through a number of reprints, especially in the eighteenth century (**Figure 3**).

Somehow, Vondel's book with Gheeraerts' etchings made its way to Japan. We do not know when it reached Japan, nor which edition it was. An assumption—but nothing more—is that a Dutch trader took a copy, or perhaps even loose printed sheets from this book, with him to Japan when, in the eighteenth century, Vondel's *Royal Display of Animals* became popular again. In that case, there would not be a particularly large time gap between the moment that the Dutch original was brought to Japan and the moment that a Japanese samurai patrician took notice of it.

A hand-copied set of six sheets (twelve pages) from the *Royal Display of Animals* was made by order of Maeda Naotada 前田直方 (1748–1823), the sixth daimyō in that line of the Kaga 加賀 domain, in 1791 (Kansei 寛政 3), eight years before Maeno Ryōtaku submitted his translations of the captions for Van der Straet's emblem series to the shogun. It now rests in the Maeda Tosanokami-ke Shiryōkan 前田土佐守家資料館 in Kanazawa, but its existence was not made public until

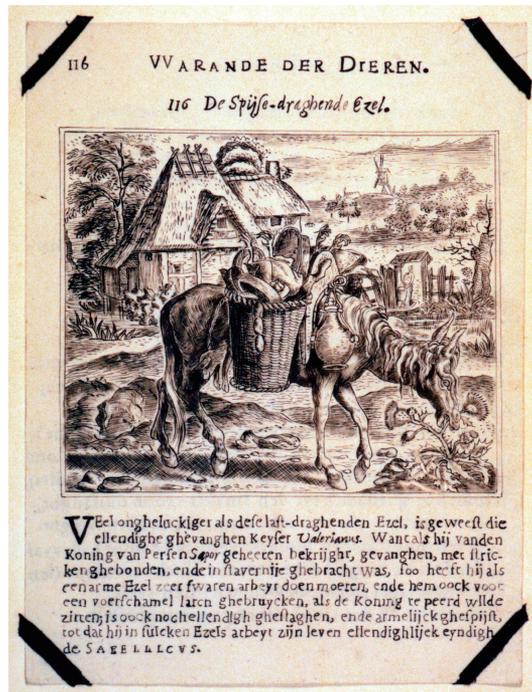


Figure 4. Donkey carrying nourishment (Spisdraghende Ezel). Hand-copied illustration by Yata Shijoken 矢田四如軒, text copied by Yamaguchi Tamenori 山口為範, after Joost van den Vondel, *Vorstelijke warande der dieren*. (Maeda Tosanokami-ke Shiryōkan).

Shinmura Izuru 新村出 (1876–1967) wrote about it in 1929.³¹ At the time, Shinmura identified the pages as “pages from a Dutch Aesop” (*ranbun Isobo monogatari dankan* 蘭文伊曾保物語断簡), but it is not certain that the Kaga samurai recognized the animal fable emblems as explicitly Aesopian. It is a curious set, apparently an attempt to create hand-produced facsimiles of pages from a printed European book, in which, somewhat uncharacteristically for Japan, both sides of the paper were used (more commonly one would use only one side of a sheet that was then folded in two).

The Vondel edition gives the emblem proper (that is, *motto/pictura/subscriptio*) under Arab numbering on the left-hand page, with Vondel’s accompanying poem on the facing right-hand page under Roman numbering. Individual sheets

³¹ Shinmura Izuru 新村出, “Eimo ranbun kohan e-iri Isoho monogatari no dankan” 影模蘭文古版絵入伊曾保物語の断簡, in *Bibliophilia/Shomotsu no shumi* 書物の趣味 4 (1929).

contain the emblem proper on one side, whereas the reverse side of that same page will show Vondel's poem for the *previous* emblem, which is unconnected to the image-text set on that same sheet of paper. An effort was made to reproduce the Dutch octavo size, resulting in a decidedly unusual format for Japanese books. The Kaga copy consists of the following six recto-verso sets: XVIII [Wolf and sheep]/19 [Shepherd and idol]; L [Fox and grapes]/51 [Monkey and cat]; LXI [Hedgehog and snake]/62 [Chameleon]; LXII [Chameleon]/63 [Bull and ram]; LXXIII [Lion and traveler]/74 [Lion, donkey, and fox]; and CXV [Tortoise and hare]/116 [Donkey carrying nourishment]. The Dutch printed texts were hand-copied by one Yamaguchi Tamenori 山口為範, about whom nothing is known. It has been suggested by Sugano Yō that he could have been a *rangaku* scholar or a doctor trained in Western medicine.³² The Gheeraerts' copper etchings were redrawn by hand by Yata Shijoken 矢田四如軒 ('real name' Yata Hirotsura 矢田広貫, or Rokurōbei 六郎兵衛, 1718–1794), who had been the senior house councilor (*karō* 家老) to the Maeda family and had trained in the Hasegawa 長谷川 school of painting (Figure 4).³³

Perhaps on occasion only separate sheets of Dutch books reached Japan. The Kaga copy of the *Royal Display of Animals* would suggest that, in Europe, it was standard practice to go to a bookseller, choose the best quality sheets available and have the total bound as a complete set. In other words, books were not sold as bound copies, but as loose sheets that were bound after the sale.³⁴ This practice resulted in left-over sheets at the book sellers' workplace. It is indeed very possible that someone bought such left-overs for sale in Japan. If that were the case, it would help explain why the set ordered by the Maeda lord of the Kaga domain is such a disconnected collection: we would be dealing with hand-drawn copies of six loose sheets, possibly originally printed together on a single larger sheet (as part of a quire), not a selection made from a bound copy.

Kōkan, Tairō, Saisuke

Sugano Yō has speculated that either the Kaga copy or the original *Royal Display of Animals* may have been seen outside the Kaga domain, specifically by the painter, science popularizer, and fringe Hollandologist Shiba Kōkan, but speculates

³² Sugano Yō, "Kansei san-nen ni mosha saretā ransho dōbutsu gūwashū no dōbanga" 寛政三年に模写された蘭書動物寓話集の銅版画, *Yamato bunka* 大和文化 77 (1986), p. 15.

³³ On the Kanagawa copy of *Warande der dieren*, see Shinmura Izuru, "Eimo ranbun kohan e-iri Isoho monogatari no dankan" (op. cit.), pp. 1–18; Sugano Yō 菅野陽, "Shiba Kōkan to Isoho monogatari" 司馬江漢と伊曾保物語, *Rangaku Shiryō Kenkyūkai kenkyū hōkoku* 蘭学資料研究会研究報告 308 (1976), pp. 1–12; Sugano Yō, "Edo-ki denrai no bijutsu kankei ransho nishu (ge)" 江戸期伝来の美術関係蘭書二種 (下), *Kobijutsu* 古美術 54 (1977), pp. 78–86; Sugano Yō, "Kansei san-nen ni mosha saretā ransho dōbutsu gūwashū no dōbanga" (op. cit.), pp. 13–27.

³⁴ Gaskell, Philip, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 146–147.

that *if* that was the case, one would have to wonder whether he would have recognized the emblems as explicitly Aesopian, or indeed been able to truly understand Vondel's poems.³⁵ It is nonetheless certain that by the early nineteenth century Kōkan had developed a special interest in Aesopian fable literature from Europe.

That Kōkan may indeed have seen the original *Royal Display of Animals* is not impossible. As Katsumori Noriko points out, the painter Ishikawa Tairō 石川大浪 (1762?–1817) had a great interest in European books, and among these his special predilection was for Dutch emblem books.³⁶ Several respected amateur painters with a samurai background had since the later eighteenth century developed a keen interest in producing “Dutch paintings” (*ranga* 蘭画).³⁷ Two such artists were the brothers Ishikawa Tairō and Mōkō 孟高 (1763?–1828?), members of a *batamoto* 旗本 family. Tairō had first studied with the Kanō school, but then turned to European book illustrations and copper etchings. These illustrations in European books became the major source for the two brothers' “Dutch paintings.” One of Tairō's paintings of a lion, signed “Tafelberg,”³⁸ is unmistakably copied from Vondel's *Royal Display of Animals*.³⁹ Emblem fable no. 10, “The Lion and the Mouse,” comes with a copper etching by Marcus Gheeraerts that depicts a roaring lion caught in a net, about to be freed by a mouse. Tairō mirrored the lion and removed the net (and got rid of the mouse), but otherwise his animal is the spitting image of Gheeraerts' version. It is less likely that someone had also imported the Antwerp 1567 edition of *The Truthful Fables of the Animals*, in addition to the 1617 edition (or early eighteenth-century reprint) of Vondel's *Royal Display of Animals* with the very same illustration. Tairō's model lion is not included in the Kaga copy, so it may well be that the entire Dutch edition (or yet a separate unbound sheet) was imported to Japan as well. Incidentally, we know that Tairō was in possession of a French edition of Aesop's fables as well, which presumably came with illustrations.⁴⁰ Be that as it may, the point is that a version of *Royal Display of Animals* circulated in Japan, outside the Kaga domain. This means that Kōkan, too, may have had access to a copy of *Royal Display of Animals*, as he moved in the same circles as did Tairō.

³⁵ Sugano, “Kansei san-nen ni mosha saretā ranshō dōbutsu gūwashū no dōbanga” (op. cit.), p. 15.

³⁶ Katsumori Noriko 勝盛典子, *Kinsei ikoku shumi bijutsu no shiteki kenkyū* 近世異国趣味美術の史的研究 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2011), pp. 118–119.

³⁷ See e.g. Hiroko Johnson, *Western Influences on Japanese Art: The Akita Ranga Art School and Foreign Books* (Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, 2005).

³⁸ Tairō, whose art name literally translates as “Big Wave,” styled himself “Tafelberg,” after Table Mountain on South Africa's cape, then a Dutch trading post, a mountain that in Sino-Japanese was called Tairōzan 大浪山, or “Mount Big Wave.” His younger brother Mōkō, who also painted in the Dutch style, termed himself “Leeuwenberg” (Mount Lion), after the adjacent mountain on the South Africa cape. For Tairō in general, see Screech, *The Shogun's Painted Culture* (op. cit.), p. 46; Katsumori, *Kinsei ikoku shumi bijutsu no shiteki kenkyū* (op. cit.), pp. 87–207.

³⁹ “Shishi no zu” 獅子図. In the collections of Kōbe Shiritsu Hakubutsukan 神戸市立博物館. See Katsumori, *Kinsei ikoku shumi bijutsu no shiteki kenkyū* (op. cit.), p. 48, ill. 2-3, ill. 12.

⁴⁰ Sugano, “Edo-ki denrai no bijutsu kankei ranshō nishu (ge)” (op. cit.), p. 84.

For Tairō, an important point of access to European book illustrations and copper etchings was his association with Yamamura Saisuke 山村才助 (1770–1807), a rising star at the Shirandō 芝蘭堂 academy of Hollandology in Edo.⁴¹ From a young age, Saisuke, a samurai from the Tsuchiura 土浦 domain, had been interested in geography. Through his maternal uncle Ichikawa Kansai 市河寛斎 (1749–1820), a Confucian scholar with a special interest in Sinitic poetry who had instructed him in Chinese studies, he was introduced in 1789 to the renowned Hollandologist Ōtsuki Gentaku 大槻玄沢 (1757–1827) at the latter’s newly established *rangaku* Shirandō academy in Edo. Ōtsuki in turn initiated Saisuke into the world of Hollandology and specifically the study of world geography. Saisuke turned out to be a prodigious student, and earned the nickname of being one of “the four heavenly kings” (*shitenno* 四天王, *i.e.* outstanding scholars) of Gentaku’s academy. His status within the Shirandō group is underscored by one of the trappings of its academic community-building events. Ever since late 1794 (Kansei 6), the Shirandō academy had celebrated “Dutch New Year” (*Oranda shōgatsu* おらんだ正月) on the first day of the solar calendar (January 1st). For a number of these celebrations, tongue-in-cheek “analogy ranking-lists” (*mitate banzuke*) were made that listed participants in the form of a playbill, etc. On the “Dutch scholars’ *sumō* wrestlers’ ranking list” (*rangakusha sumō mitate banzuke* 蘭学者相撲見立番付) made for the Shirandō’s “Dutch New Year” gathering of January 1, 1799 (Kansei 10, 1798), Saisuke is listed among the principal participants as *sekiwake* 関脇 (runner-up champion) for the west side. Listed as one of the *maegashira* 前頭 (Junior wrestler) for the same west side is Shiba Kōkan.⁴²

Among other texts, Saisuke compiled a fascinating but largely overlooked textbook that resulted from communal readings in the Shirandō academy, the *Seiyō zakkai* 西洋雑記 (Miscellaneous Notes on the West, 1801). It is a repository of information on ancient European history and world geography that reflects the collective knowledge of this Hollandology academy. Saisuke’s work on *Miscellaneous Notes on the West* and its 1804 sequel reflects both an acute awareness of the emblem genre and a foundational knowledge of Aesop’s fables. His entry “How Western pictures contain analogies” remarks that:

⁴¹ Katsumori, *Kinsei ikoku shumi bijutsu no shiteki kenkyū* (op. cit.), pp. 145–184.

⁴² The Shirandō academy started celebrating “Dutch New Year” on Kansei 6 (1794).¹¹ (intercalary).¹¹ (January 1, 1795). Gentaku quite likely picked up this habit from the Nagasaki interpreter Yoshio Kōgyū 吉雄耕牛 (1724–1800), whose 1785 New Year’s banquet he had attended in Nagasaki. Some forty-four celebrations are known. For an elaborate analysis of the first celebration, see Reinier H. Hesselink, “A Dutch New Year at the Shirandō Academy: 1 January 1795,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 50:2 (1995), pp. 189–234. For Yamamura Saisuke as *nishi no sekiwake* and Shiba Kōkan as sixth *maegashira* for the same west side, see e.g. the copy of the *sumō mitate banzuke* collected by Matsudaira Naritami 松平斉民 (1814–1891) in volume 10 of his 17-volume scrapbook *Geikai yoha* 芸海余波. In the collections of Waseda University Library (call. no. i 05 01646). The mock bill was designed by *gesaku* author and amateur Hollandologist Morishima Chūryō 森島中良 (1754?–1810).

Western pictures are extremely exact and their utmost precision is well known to the world. Very often they create analogies in their pictures. For example, at the head of a book they draw a picture of the author; to the side they depict an “engel” [angel] (a heavenly creature with wings). The image of the angel playing a flute is as if you can hear from afar the sound of the flute played by this angel flying far-off, and implies that one can hear from afar the worth of the author’s voice.⁴³

Here, Saisuke puts the finger on a phenomenon that earlier Morishima Chūryō had identified as well: that a great number of European pictures were not ‘realistic,’ but in fact culturally coded, symbolic images that required an understanding of a European worldview in order to decode them. The example he refers to involves winged creatures. He knew well that an author’s portrait above which hovered putti indicated the eminence of the person depicted.⁴⁴

In 1804, Saisuke compiled a sequel (“Part 2”, or *niben* 二編) to *Miscellaneous Notes on the West*. This sequel exists only in a single manuscript copy and has never been made available in any textual edition. In its first volume, Saisuke has written up an entry that deals with the figure of Aesop, mentioning how he is known for his fables:

*About “Aesop’s Fables”*⁴⁵

There is a book in three volumes called *Aesop’s Fables* (*Isobo monogatari*). This is a translation of what originally was a Western book; it is not known who wrote it.

⁴³ “Seiyō zuga ni hiyu wo mōkuru setsu” 西洋図画に譬喩を設くる説, in *Seiyō zakkai* 西洋雑記 (Nihonbashi Kitajikkendana, Bun’enkaku, 1848), vol. 2, pp. 26r–28v. This *hanpon* edition of Yamamura Saisuke’s 1801 manuscript is accessible through Waseda University’s library website: http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/bunko08/bunko08_c0309/

⁴⁴ One example of such an author’s portrait that was well known to *rangaku* scholars of the time was a portrait of the physician Lorenz Heister (1683–1758) on the frontispiece of his *Heelkundige onderwijzingen* (Medical Instructions, trans. 1776; original *Chirurgie*, 1718). Interestingly the frontispiece also features a cartouche with the portrait of the Dutch translator and editor, the physician Hendrik Ulhoorn (ca. 1692–1746). Heister’s and Ulhoorn’s portraits, including the angels, were copied by Maki Bokusen 牧墨仙 (1775–1824) in a copper etching for the frontispiece (*tobira-e* 扉絵) of the Japanese translation of Heister’s book, *Yōka seisen zukai* 瘍科精選図解, by Shirandō scholar Koshimura Tokuki 越邑德基 (1784–1826). See Hashimoto Hiroko 橋本寛子, “Kitayama Kangan-hitsu ‘Heisteru-zō’ wo megutte” 北山寒巖筆《ヘイステル像》をめぐって, *Bijutsushi* 美術史 60:2 (2011), pp. 246–262, esp. p. 247 (ill. 2). In 1788, Shiba Kōkan painted a portrait of his Nagasaki host Yoshio Kōgyū 吉雄耕牛 (1724–1800) with putti above his head, actively applying his knowledge of this particular instance of European iconography.

⁴⁵ “Isoho monogatari no setsu” 伊曾保物語の説, in *Seiyō zakkai niben* 西洋雑記二編, vol. 1, pp. 3r–6v (unnumbered pages). This *Part Two* was never printed. The only copy of volume 1 that I know of is in the collection of the Seikadō Bunko 静嘉堂文庫, Tokyo (call no.: *hako* 97, *ka* 25 *ki*), containing volumes 1 and 2. Ayusawa Shintarō mentions that only two manuscript copies of *Seiyō zakkai niben* exist; Ayusawa Shintarō 鮎沢信太郎, *Yamamura Saisuke* 山村才助 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1959), pp. 107–108. Kagoshima University’s Tamasato Bunko 玉里文庫 has a copy that contains volumes 2 through 4 (call. no. *ten-no-bu* 181-1181).

At the end [of the book], it says that it was published in the third year of Manji [1660].⁴⁶ However, [the original] must have been written much earlier than that.

Aesop (Jp. *Isobo*) was a person born in a village called *Amonia* in *Troy* in the land of *Phrygia*. No one in the world was uglier than he, yet his wisdom was unchallenged. Then war broke out and his village was invaded by soldiers and he was taken captive and sold to a man called *Xanto* [Xanctus] in the place *Athens* (Jp. *Araerusu*).⁴⁷ [The book] records how he stayed in *Xanto*'s household and later travelled to such countries as *Egypt*, *Babylonia*, and *Greece* (Jp. *Gereshia*), an account of his life, and several tens of his didactic fables. This reminds me that there is a short biography of *Esope* in Buys' *Complete Book of Scholarship and Arts*.⁴⁸ "Esope" is in fact Aesop. (In the West, people are known by different names depending on the country. For example, someone who in France is called 'Louis' is called 'Ludovicus' in Latin and 'Lodewijk' in Dutch.)

His ugliness is also described in the *Fables of Aesop*, as well as the fact that he was a person from *Amorio* in the land of *Phrygië*.⁴⁹ (*Phrygië* is another name for *Phrygia*; see below for details. *Amorio* is another name for *Amonia*.) This reminds me that Matteo Ricci states: "Esope was an enlightened man from the past who unhappily was cut off from his homeland, taken prisoner, and enslaved in the house of Xanto."⁵⁰

Also, [the story that] when this *Xanto* came upon his [ugly] countenance, he ended up buying his ready wit, is also the same as in *Aesop's Fables (Isobo monogatari)*.⁵¹

However, none of the three books [of the Japanese *Isobo monogatari*] mention where he came from,⁵² nor is he mentioned in *The Complete History of the West* (Jp. *Seiyō zenshi* 西洋全史).⁵³ If you check this in an atlas, *Phrygia* and *Phrygië* are called *Phrygiën* (Jp. *Fureijiin*) in Dutch. (In Chinese this is *Hiriga* 非里雅 [Ch. Feiliya].) This

⁴⁶ Saisuke must be referring to the so-called "illustrated Manji edition" (*manji e-iri-bon*) of 1659 (Manji 2).

⁴⁷ *Isobo monogatari* (1.1) states that Aesop was first sold to "a man called Arishitesu in Ateeresu" (a corruption of "Athens"; Yamamura Saisuke gives "Araerusu"). *Xanto* (Jp. Shan[to]) is someone who visits the household, interrogates Aesop, and ends up buying him. *Isobo monogatari*, in vol. 90 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (op. cit.), pp. 361–363 (see note 12).

⁴⁸ Saisuke refers to Egbert Buys (?–1769), *Gakugei zensho* 学芸全書 (The Complete Book of Scholarship and Arts), that is, the ten-volume encyclopedia *Nieuw en volkomen woordenboek van konsten en wetenschappen* (New and Complete Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences, 1769–1778). For the entry "Esopus," see volume 3 (1771), pp. 705–706.

⁴⁹ Here, Saisuke is following the Dutch text in Buys' *New and Complete Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences*.

⁵⁰ 阨瑣伯氏は上古明士不幸本国被伐身為俘虜囿于藏德氏之家と。Saisuke quotes in Chinese from a text by, or ascribed to, Matteo Ricci (Jp. Ri Matō, Ch. Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552–1610), presumably his *Jiren shipian* (Ten Stories of Extraordinary Men, 1608), which contains references to Aesop's fables; see above.

⁵¹ Saisuke writes that *Xanto* "bought [Aesop's] tongue" (*shita wo kau* 舌を買ふ), which I take to be an elliptical way of saying that *Xanto* was intrigued by Aesop's wit, which in turn was the main reason for procuring Aesop as his slave.

⁵² This is an odd statement. The very first story in *Isobo monogatari* opens by emphatically placing Aesop's origins in Phrygia.

⁵³ Saisuke had read a *Seiyō zenshi* 西洋全史 (Complete History of the West) by "the Dutchman Gottfried" (*Oranda goddorido*). This is the Dutch translation of *Historische chronica* (Historical Chronicle, 1660) by the German Johan Ludwig Gottfried.

is the name of a country from the past; it lies in Asia Minor. This region is divided into two parts, Great and Little. These days, Great *Phrygië* is called G*** (Jp. *Zeruman*), and Little *Phrygië* is called S*** (Jp. *Sarukyumu*).⁵⁴ In the past, in this region there was a celebrated castle town called *Troy*. This was Priam's royal capital.

However, since the time of the 1870th year since the creation of the West (this coincides with [unidentifiable character] of the *mizunoto*-boar year, the first year of the reign of King Kang of the Zhou in China⁵⁵), they sent soldiers from Greece (Jp. *Gereshia*) and laid siege to it for ten years, and eventually took the castle town of *Troy* and destroyed it completely. Later, the great king Alexander united all countries and as *Troy* had been a famous castle town since antiquity, he ordered to have it rebuilt. This battle of *Troy* is most famous in the world; in several books from the West there are a great number of records saying “before the battle of *Troy*” and “after the battle.”

Also, this *Ateerusu* where Aesop was held captive is also known by the name *Ateenen* (Athens) or *Atona* 亜徳那 (Ch. *Yadena*)⁵⁶ which lies in Greece. If you consider all these points taken together, then we can assume that Aesop was someone [living] at the time of the battle for *Troy*, and that when *Troy* was destroyed, he was taken captive and imprisoned in *Athens*.

So, were these *Fables* something recorded by dictation from a Portuguese during the foundation of our country [that is, at the beginning of Tokugawa rule], or can it be that they were translated into our language by someone from that country who had been living in our country for a long time?

In the *Fables* there is a story of how two *samurai* tell Aesop about a dream. One says that in his dream he went up to heaven; the other tells how he went down to *inferno* (Jp. *inberuno*).⁵⁷ “*Inferno*” is a Portuguese word and means “hell.” In Latin it is *inferna* (Jp. *inberuna*); in Dutch it is *hel* (Jp. *beru*). This may serve as proof [that Aesop's fables reached Japan through Portuguese, not Dutch].

Also, in Dutch, fables (Jp. *biyu gūgen* 譬諭寓言) are called *fabel*; if you look up “*fabel*” in the dictionary compiled by Halma, you can see that it says that the *fabels* by Esope were translated by a *Phaedrus* (someone's name);⁵⁸ this goes to

⁵⁴ I have not yet been able to identify *zeruman* and *sarukyumu*. The names might be a distortion of respectively Gordium (Phrygia's capital) and Sakarya [River].

⁵⁵ King Kang (*Kang wang* 康王) was a mythical ruler of the Zhou dynasty, supposedly reigning 1020–996 BCE.

⁵⁶ This transcription of the place name Athens appears in Matteo Ricci's *Jiren shipian*, as does its variant *Yadena* 亜得納. Compare Li, “The Art of Misreading: An Analysis of the Jesuit ‘Fables’ in Late Ming China” (op. cit.), p. 76.

⁵⁷ Yamamura Saisuke is referring to story 1.16 in *Isobo monogatari*, which indeed gives “*inberuno*” んへる野 (in opposition to *tenchō* 天朝, “[court, or kingdom, of] heaven”). See *Isobo monogatari* 1.16, in vol. 90 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (op. cit.), p. 384. One wonders whether seventeenth-century Japanese readers would have readily understood this term. Saisuke also provides the entire text of *Isobo monogatari* 1.16 at the end of his section on Aesop.

⁵⁸ Indeed, both François Halma's Dutch-French dictionary and the Japanese ‘Haruma’ based on it give the example sentence, under the entry “*Fabel*”: “The fables of Aesop were translated by Phaedrus (Du. Fedrus)” (Jp. *esōpyusu no toraetaru shōsetsu mono wa hederyusu ga yaku-seri* エソーピュスの捕へたる小説物はヘテリユスが訳せり). See François Halma, *Woordenboek der Nederduitscheen Fransche taalen*, 2nd edn. (Amsterdam: W. van de Water, 1729), p. 710.

show that they have a good reputation in that country. (I have heard that a few years ago a Dutchman brought with him a biography of Aesop that was printed in the West. Someone got hold of it and said that all the images in the book were the same as recorded in *Isobo monogatari*. Where this book is now, I do not know.)

In a headnote, Yamamura Saisuke gives the complete text of *Isobo monogatari* 1.16, “How Aesop and two *samurai* discuss dreams” (*Isobo to ninin no saburai yume-monogatari no koto* いそほと二人の侍夢物語の事).

Among other things, this entry makes clear that within Hollandologists’ circles in Edo, not only were some of the early seventeenth-century *kana-zōshi* editions somehow available, but that these scholars fully realized that these Japanese translations were based on a ‘Portuguese’ version that likely predated the Dutch presence in Japan. In the case of scholars, academies constructed libraries of some form and such collections provided not only access to, but also awareness of, older texts.⁵⁹ Aesop’s tales, also in their early seventeenth-century Japanese incarnation as popular literature, were recognized to be a link between ‘Dutch’ knowledge and the access to European culture provided two centuries previously by Portuguese traders and the Jesuits. This was an insight shared by the so-called “Dutch interpreters” (*Oranda tsūji* 阿蘭陀通詞) in Nagasaki. The interpreters, whose primary function was to facilitate and help control interactions with the Dutch trading post on Dejima, came to represent an important knowledge hub for the different subfields of Hollandology; Nagasaki provided an essential training ground for anyone serious about ‘Dutch studies.’ When in 1799 the Mito scholar Tachihara Suiken 立原翠軒 (1744–1823) had a chance to debrief the interpreter Narabayashi Jūbei 榎林重兵衛 (1750–1801) on all sorts of information pertaining to Europe, he noted, “The book *Aesop’s Fables* (*Isobo monogatari*) is the Japanese translation of a book from the past called *Esopi* (Jp. *Isowobisu*). It is an old book.”⁶⁰

The observation that Aesop’s fables represented a very early presence of European literature in Japan was echoed by Shiba Kōkan. In his *Shunparō hikēki* 春波樓筆記 (Shunparō’s Jottings) of 1811, Kōkan related how several years earlier he had come across a copy of Aesop’s fables in the library of the lord of the Kishū 紀州 (aka Kii 紀伊) domain. Presumably the daimyō in question was Tokugawa Harutomi 徳川治宝 (1771–1853), the tenth lord of the Kishū domain during the period 1789–1824, who enjoyed a wide reputation for his interests in

⁵⁹ Kornicki, Peter, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 389. The size of such very specialized libraries is difficult to ascertain. For example, when it comes to books in Dutch, the Mitsukuri, a family of Western scholars, by 1866 appears to have had collected no more than fifty titles. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan*, p. 303.

⁶⁰ イソホものがたりと云書は、昔イソヲヒスと云書の和解なり、古書なり。Narabayashi *zatsuma* 榎林雑話, in *Kaibyō sosho* 海表叢書, vol. 2, in *Nanban komo shiryō* 南蛮紅毛史料, vol. 1, ed. Shinmura Izuru 新村出 (Kyoto: Kōseikaku, 1930), p. 32.

scholarship and painting. In the same *Shunparō's Jottings*, Kōkan notes that he was invited to lecture to this lord on astronomy, presumably at the daimyō's residence in Edo, which is where he must have seen Aesop's fables.⁶¹ His renown as a popularizer of Western knowledge, including astronomy, a field in which he had published a number of books, will have brought him to Harutomi's attention. Besides this, there was a family connection tying Kōkan to this particular domain; one of Kōkan's forefathers came from Kishū.⁶²

The encounter with this early version of Aesop's fables made a lasting impression on Kōkan, and would have a major impact on his ideas about the applicability in Japan of European didactic techniques and the echoes between Western and Japanese morality.

Aesop's Fables (Isobo monogatari) is the translation of a Western book. The original is [in the library] of the lord of the Kishū domain. I had a look at it myself: all [the stories in it] use analogies to teach morality. Here I will give one or two examples.⁶³

Kōkan proceeds to recount respectively the fable of the wolf and the crane (*Isobo monogatari* 2.16), the fable of the monkey and the man (2.39), and the fable of the preaching bird (3.31). Then he remarks, "This book is two hundred years old and it is all written in *kana* [=the Japanese syllabic script]," which strongly suggests he was looking at the *kana-zōshi* edition. After a digression, of the kind rather typical for him, which deals with the differences between the language of the early seventeenth century and that of late Edo, especially in forms of address, Kōkan considers the nature of the European original of the Aesopian fables.

This book is a Western book; [its genre] is called *zinnebeeld* (Jp. *shinnebēru* シンネペール, or emblem), that is, an analogy. It contains words that nowadays are difficult to understand for someone studying Dutch books. But we must realize that two hundred years ago there [already] were people occupied with Western Studies.

Animal Fables in a Japanese Emblem Book

Like Maeno Ryōtaku before him, Kōkan used the Dutch term *zinnebeeld*, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch term for emblem. Kōkan had hit

⁶¹ *Shunparō hikki* 春波楼筆記, in Asakura Haruhiko 朝倉治彦 et al., eds., *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* 司馬江漢全集 (Tokyo: Yasaka Shobō, 1992–1994), vol. 2, p. 94. See also Calvin L. French, *Shiba Kōkan: Artist, Innovator and Pioneer in the Westernization of Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1974), pp. 142–143. This particular copy of Aesop's fables in the collection of the Kii domain has yet to be identified.

⁶² This was why Shiba styled himself 'Kō-Kan' 江漢, after the two main rivers of that domain. See *Shunparō hikki*, in *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* (op. cit.), vol. 2, pp. 50–51.

⁶³ For this and the following quotations, see *Shunparō hikki*, *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 90–91.

upon the notion of emblem minimally as early as 1798, when he wrote his *Oranda zokuma* おらんだ俗話 (Anecdotes about Holland).⁶⁴ And like Ryōtaku, he did see a pivotal role for images that through analogy helped to convey a moral message. Nevertheless, Aesop's fables struck him immediately as 'emblematic,' or a form of *zinnebeeld*. That is to say, the emblematic was not exclusively visual. The combination of animal fables and their apparent connection with culturally coded images will have helped late-Edo Japanese to some extent to merge the concept of the European emblematic image and the moral analogies provided by Aesop's stories into the idea of *zinnebeeld* as analogy (Jp. *hiyu, tatoe*), with usually a visual element,⁶⁵ and to understand this as a dominant template in European discourse.

Around that same year 1811, when Kōkan was reminiscing about his encounter with Aesop's fables in the library of the daimyō of Kii, he painted a 132cm-long hanging scroll depicting a traveler, quoting the fable of the preaching bird from the early seventeenth-century *Isobo mongatari* (3.31) that he had also invoked in his *Shunparō's Jottings*.⁶⁶ Assuming that this scroll, like just about any other painting that Kōkan executed, was intended for sale, it goes to show that Kōkan was busy pushing his interests in Aesopian fables beyond a merely private fascination and was intent on extending the moral message-system Aesopian fables represented to help it reach a broader audience.

A long-time prolific publicist, by 1810 Kōkan had given up on commercial publication projects, deeming his Japanese readers too lethargic to bother with: "We Japanese do not like to investigate things."⁶⁷ He did not stop writing, however, but rather decided to no longer publish. Nonetheless, Aesop's fables eventually seduced him into reconsidering this position. While he seems to have been sharing his enthusiasm for Aesopian-style morality with his direct patrons in the later Bunka 文化 period (1804–1818), Kōkan embarked upon a book project that would become the active application in a Japanese context of his understanding of the dynamics of the European emblem, and the appeal of the Aesopian fable. At some point in the early 1810s, he began to collect, write, and edit an anthology of moral anecdotes culled from ancient Chinese sources as well as from the Aesopian tradition, and augmented these with fables of his own making, all of which he completed by the seventh month of 1814 (Bunka 11). This

⁶⁴ *Oranda zokuma* おらんだ俗話, in *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* (op. cit.), vol. 3, pp. 122–123.

⁶⁵ "Many [emblems] clarify [their message] through images." (*ōku wa gazu wo motte satosashimu* 多くハ画図を以て曉さしむ). In other words, not all 'emblems' do so. Ibid., p. 122.

⁶⁶ "*Isobo monogatari iwaku*" 伊曾保物語曰 (ca. 1811 [Bunka 8]). Private collection. See Naruse Fujio 成瀬不二雄, *Shiba Kōkan: shōgai to gagyō (sakuhin ben)* 司馬江漢：生涯と画業 (作品篇) (Yasaka Shobō, 1995), p. 303, no. 258. The *kakemono* 掛物 quotes *Isobo monogatari* 3.31, "A bird preaching to man" (*tori, hito ni kyōke wo suru koto*).

⁶⁷ *Waga Nihon no hito, kyūri wo konomazu* わが日本人、究理を好まず. *Shunparō hikki*, in *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* (op. cit.), vol. 2, p. 38.

was a manuscript that he carefully prepared for a return to the commercial print market.

In an undated letter, probably written somewhere between late 1812 and early 1814, and presumably addressed to one of his favorite correspondents, Yamyō (var. Yamane) Shume (var. Kazuma) 山領主馬 (aka Toshimasa 利昌, 1756–1823), Kōkan discusses his publication plans for the manuscript of what would become his *Kunmō gakaishū* 訓蒙画解集 (A Primer Explained with Pictures). This work is an illustrated collection of moral tales, many of them involving animals, in which Kōkan provides a broad array of didactic messages. In his letter, Kōkan hints at one of the salient features of his manuscript: that all tales are given in two versions, one in Sinitic, and one in Japanese. Basically, of such doubling in *A Primer Explained with Pictures* there exist two varieties. In one type of doubling, as hinted in the letter, the Japanese (or ‘*kana*’) version recaps the *kanbun* text; occasionally, Kōkan will add an explicit moral in Japanese. In a variant of this, Kōkan’s Japanese text is rather a commentary on, or at times even a reflection inspired by, the Sinitic text. For example, in reaction to the Sinitic “In *Huainanzǐ* it says: In the forest one should not sell brushwood; on the lake one should not vend fish. These are places where there is enough already,” the Japanese text fantasizes about a more active Japanese policy for international trade: “For our Japanese rice there are no routes to other countries. If we loaded it onto big ships and sold it to China, India, and Holland, we could make a fortune. The things we would bring back from those countries would be sugar, drugs, and the rest, all things absent in our own country. Japanese rice is the best in the world.”⁶⁸

In the undated letter Kōkan makes suitable use of this trove of didacticism that he was putting together. Assuming the addressee was indeed Yamyō Shume, the letter was on its way to the Saga domain in Kyushu, while Kōkan had just returned to Edo from a trip to Kyoto. The distance between these two points on the map justified some praise of letter writing.

後漢書蔡邕ノ伝 相見無期唯是書疏可以当面 国程路を隔て逢フ事かたし。
只書状を見れば、対面したるころぞする。

此様な事を六七十集、下に画をなし傍に国字ヲ以解し、訓蒙画解集と名、初は自序以テし写シ申候て上度候。後々々京へ遣、板行ニもなるべし。

In Cai Yong’s biography in *The Book of the Later Han* [it says]: *To see each other, there is no given moment. Only with a letter can one see face to face.* It is difficult to meet when long roads lie between. Only a letter gives the feeling that one is meeting face to face.⁶⁹

Of this type of thing [adage] I have collected sixty or seventy; beneath them I have drawn pictures, and to the side I have explained them in our country’s own

⁶⁸ *Kunmō gakaishū* 訓蒙画解集 12, in *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* (op. cit.), vol. 2, pp. 182, 301.

⁶⁹ This is an abbreviated version of *Kunmō gakaishū* 41. Cai Yong (132–192) was a talented scholar and advisor to the emperor under the Later Han dynasty.

script [*kana*, that is, in Japanese]. I have named this *A Primer Explained with Pictures* (*Kunmō gakaishū*). At the beginning I have copied out my own preface. In the near future I will send it to the capital [Kyoto] and must have it printed.⁷⁰

Indeed, the existing manuscript of this didactic tale collection, with its preface dated 1814, is a clean copy ready to be sent off to a publisher.⁷¹ Why Kōkan in the end never published his manuscript we do not know, but Kōkan died in 1818, and *Kunmō gakaishū*, his last book manuscript readied for the printer's, would not be published during his lifetime. Possibly, when Kōkan finished his preface, he decided he was not yet done, pressed on, and created yet more fables once his preface was written. In the end, Kōkan would collect 117 fables in his *A Primer Explained with Pictures*. Many of them were culled and adapted from ancient Chinese sources, for example twenty-six among them from the sixth-century *Wenxuan* 文選 (Selections of Refined Literature), and another six from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (second century BCE). In addition, Kōkan wrote quite a number of new fables himself. Five tales he took from Aesop's fables. Among them was the fable that three decades later would appeal so much to Tamenaga Shunsui as well (**Figure 5**):

[*Sinitic*] A wolf ate a man and got a bone stuck in his throat. He could no longer drink or eat. It so happened that there was a crane who crossed the wolf's path. The wolf called out to him and said, "There is a bone stuck in my throat. You, with your long beak, get it out for me!" The crane, cowed into obedience, proceeded to remove the bone. Upon which the wolf said, "I haven't had anything to eat for seven days. I'm starved. So, I guess I'll eat you."

[*Japanese*] A wolf had a bone stuck in his throat and could not eat for seven days. At that time, a crane came along. With your long beak get this bone out, he said. The crane was afraid and got the bone out. The wolf said, First I'll have to eat you. *This is what we call repaying kindness with contempt.*⁷²

Importantly, all Kōkan's moral tales come with an illustration. The reason is clear: this manuscript was to be a Japanese emblem book, and without images, the rhetorical force of the emblems would not be palpable. In his preface to *A Primer Explained with Pictures*, Kōkan frames his didactic ploy in the context of what he regards as the overwhelming scientific superiority of Europe. He returns to what is by then a worn trope of his, namely that people in Japan are stuck in an out-of-date and largely irrelevant understanding of the world and its

⁷⁰ Kanzaki Jun'ichi 神崎順一, "Shiba Kōkan *Kunmō gakaishū* wo meguru jihitsu shokan ni tsuite: Tenri toshokan shozō Nichi-Ō kōshō shiryō (5)" 司馬江漢『訓蒙画家集』をめぐる自筆書簡について: 天理図書館所蔵日欧交渉資料 (五), *Biburua (Biblia)* ビブリア 112 (1999), pp. 2–46, esp. pp. 34, 40. Kanzaki transcribes the text of the letter. Shume was a samurai of the Nabeshima 鍋島 clan of the Saga domain, Kyushu, whom Kōkan seems to have befriended when both lived in Edo.

⁷¹ Kōkan's manuscript is in the possession of the National Diet Library (call no.: WA21-23).

⁷² *Kunmō gakaishū* 106 (*fu* 14), in *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* (op. cit.), vol. 2, pp. 283, 327.

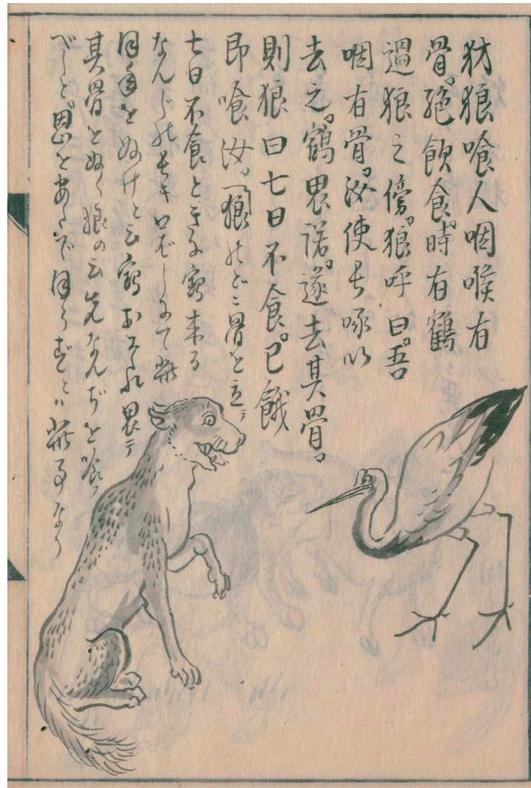


Figure 5. The wolf and the crane. Illustration by Shiba Kōkan 司馬江漢, in his *Kunmō gakaishū* 訓蒙画解集 (no. 106), MS dated Bunka 11/1814. (National Diet Library).
<https://doi.org/10.11501/2532348>

place in the universe, and that they are held back by their reluctance to engage with European learning. Then he comes to the point:

In the language of that country they talk about *zinnebeeld* (Jp. *shinnebēru*), which use analogy (*tatoe*) as a form of instruction; it is the same as the admonitions on virtue by wise men. For this reason, I now [have collected] here several tens of stories left to us by people from the past and I have unobtrusively added several stories at the end. Underneath I have made drawings and next to them I have explained them in Japanese (lit. “in *kana*”). As title I have chosen *A Primer, Explained with Pictures*.⁷³ Thinking that it might open the eyes of uninformed youth, I mention it here.⁷⁴

⁷³ Kōkan himself glosses 訓蒙 as “*kunmō*,” not “*kinmō*.”

⁷⁴ *Kunmō gakaishū*, “Preface,” in *Shiba Kōkan zenshū* (op. cit.), vol. 2, p. 170.

For Kōkan, the Dutch language not merely provided access to the sciences; rather, it connected science to deeper insights. In that sense, Aesopian fables were part and parcel of a Western knowledge system.

Conclusion

Aesop's fables were not completely forgotten in Japan between the mid-seventeenth century and the dawn of the Meiji era. However, it was especially in relation to a more sustained early modern interest in Europe that, after the late eighteenth century, the story of Aesop and his fables took on a new life as a form of image-centered literature capable of hinting that there was more of value to Europe than the hard sciences.