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# Bypassing the Dutch Monopoly of Relations with Japan: Vasily Golovnin's Captivity (1811-1813)

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The turn of the nineteenth century saw an increasing encroachment of Russian explorations into and around isolationist Japan, culminating with the capture and imprisonment of Russian naval captain Vasily Golovnin in 1811. These Russian attempts to “open” Japan were a threat to the established contact between Japan and Europe through the Dutch base in Dejima at Nagasaki, which gave the Dutch a monopoly on relations and the transfer of knowledge between Japan and Europe. However, Russia's imperial designs in the North Pacific and the Napoleonic wars, which reduced Dutch power, threatened this monopoly, offering new perspectives on Japan and throwing political relations with the Japanese Shogunate (*Bakufu*) into turmoil. This paper compares Dutch and Russian approaches to contact with Japan at the turn of the nineteenth century and examines how actions such as Golovnin's imprisonment foreshadowed an end for Japanese isolationism and the Dutch monopoly on contact with the Shogunate.

**KEYWORDS** knowledge transmission; isolationism; incursions; embedding; Japan; Kuril Islands; Russia; Vasily Golovnin

Au début du dix-neuvième siècle on a vu un empiètement agrandissant d'explorations russes dans le Japon isolationniste et aux alentours de ce pays, culminant par la capture et l'emprisonnement du capitaine de marine russe Vasily Golovnin en 1811. Ces tentatives russes d'« ouvrir » le Japon menaçaient le contact déjà établi entre le Japon et l'Europe par la base hollandaise à Dejima à Nagasaki. Cette situation donnait aux

hollandais un monopole sur les relations et le transfert des connaissances entre le Japon et l'Europe. Cependant, les projets de la Russie impériale pour le Pacifique du Nord, aussi bien que les guerres de Napoléon qui ont réduit le pouvoir hollandais, ont menacé ce monopole, en offrant de nouvelles perspectives sur le Japon et en bouleversant les relations politiques avec le Shogunat (*Bakufu*) japonais. Cet essai comparera les approches hollandaises et russes au contact avec le Japon au début du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle et montrera comment des actions telles que l'emprisonnement de Golovnin ont laissé prévoir la fin de l'isolationnisme japonais et du monopole hollandais de contacts avec le Shogunat.

MOTS CLÉS la transmission des connaissances, l'isolationnisme, les incursions, l'incorporation, le Japon, les îles Kouriles, la Russie, Vasily Golovnin

A comienzos del siglo diecinueve se produjo una creciente intrusión de exploraciones rusas en el Japón aislacionista y sus alrededores, que culminó con la captura y encarcelamiento del capitán naval ruso Vasily Golovnin en 1811. Estos intentos rusos de “abrir” Japón eran una amenaza para el contacto ya establecido entre Japón y Europa a través de la base holandesa en Dejima en Nagasaki, que daba a los holandeses el monopolio de las relaciones y de la transferencia de conocimientos entre Japón y Europa. Sin embargo, las ambiciones imperiales de Rusia en el Pacífico Norte y las guerras napoleónicas que redujeron el poder holandés amenazaron este monopolio, ofreciendo nuevas perspectivas sobre Japón y causando confusión en las relaciones políticas con el shogunato japonés (*Bakufu*). Este artículo compara los enfoques holandés y ruso para contactar con Japón a principios del siglo XIX y examina cómo acciones como el encarcelamiento de Golovnin prefiguraron el final del aislacionismo holandés y japonés.

PALABRAS CLAVE transmisión del conocimiento, aislacionismo, incursión, inserción, Japón, islas Kuriles, Rusia, Vasily Golovnin

## Introduction

The Edo Period in Japanese history (1603–1867), marked by the rule of the Tokugawa dynasty, saw the almost complete isolation of Japan from the rest of the world. This drastic reaction against perceived European encroachment was translated into the removal of Europeans from Japan. However, the Japanese made an exemption from this expulsion, which would be vital for keeping one channel of communication open between Europe and Japan. Throughout this era, the Dutch retained a limited yet commercially viable link with Japan through the tiny, artificial island base of Dejima off Nagasaki.<sup>1</sup> This vital exception to Japan's

<sup>1</sup> Louis Cullen, “The Nagasaki Trade of the Tokugawa Era: Archives, Statistics, and Management,” *Japan Review* 31 (2017), pp. 69–104.

almost complete multilateral severance in external relations allowed the Dutch to have unparalleled access to Japanese culture and society, creating a knowledge network that they closely guarded.<sup>2</sup>

This monopoly with the Dutch was maintained until the forcible “opening of Japan” in 1852 by US Commodore Matthew Perry, which opened the door to the United States, followed by European empires. There were, however, many challenges to Dejima’s privileged position through the two centuries of its exclusivity. One of the most successful, though perhaps inadvertent, was that of Russian explorer Vasily Golovnin, captured by the Japanese in 1811 while mapping the Kuril Islands north of Japan and imprisoned for two and half years in Hokkaido.<sup>3</sup> Golovnin’s captivity marked the culmination of several decades of increased tension, as Russia attempted to open a diplomatic channel with Japan, threatening the exclusivity of Dejima’s relations with the Japanese regime (*Shogunate* or *Bakufu*).

There are many unique facets of Golovnin’s captivity in Japan that make his journey ripe for evaluating the turn of the nineteenth century as a period of intense disruption for the Dutch hold on relations with Japan. This in turn affected the Bakufu’s policy of isolation, which is mirrored in the decision to capture Golovnin, who was primarily on a cartographic mission before being lured ashore and captured by the local Japanese Matsumae clan.<sup>4</sup> Rather than completely isolationist, this behavior suggests Japanese attempts to better understand Russia directly rather than through the Dutch, as well as an acute awareness of Russia’s growing regional ambitions in the North Pacific. Russia’s aspirations in the region, driven by the expanding fur trade into Eastern Siberia and America, would soon clash with the Dutch attempt to maintain its monopoly of European relations with Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Golovnin’s imprisonment was a unique example of embedding within Japanese society, enabling him, through his diary, to make reflections on Japan despite being in breach of its policy of isolation. Golovnin’s memoirs provided a different perspective to those limited to the narrow aperture from Dejima. Unlike the records of many of those that were bound to the official confines of Dejima, his memoirs illuminated previously understudied regions in the north of Japan, such as Hokkaido. Furthermore, his captivity brought him into much more informal contact with Japanese culture and practices than the highly regulated window maintained at Dejima.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. De Jong, and Elmer Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks* (Leiden: BRILL, 2010); Tashiro Kazui and Susan Downing Videen, “Foreign Relations during the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, no. n2 (1982), pp. 283–306.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this article I have used the 1824 English translated version of Golovnin’s work: Vasilii Mikhailovitch Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan: During the Years 1811, 1812 and 1813* (London, H. Colburn and Company, 1824). The original Russian version can be found at Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin, *Zapiski flota Kapitana Golovnina o prikliucheniiakh ego v plenu u iapontsev v 1811, 1812 i 1813 godakh, s priobshcheniem zamechanii ego o iaponskom gosudarstve i narode* (St. Petersburg: Morskaiia tip., 1816).

<sup>4</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 74–75.

<sup>5</sup> John R. Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North, Furs and Frontiers in the Far North* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Golovnin's *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan* differed from "academic" sources published prior to it, which had tended to focus on certain aspects of Japanese society and nature. However, his memoir, which was quickly translated into several European languages, became a popular work in Europe due to the sparse number of travel diaries about Japan. Historian Barbara Maggs argues that works such as his were representative of a growing proliferation of travel memoirs of the Enlightenment, that highlighted distinctions between European and Asian cultures.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, they should often be seen as literary works, rather than simply historical fact, particularly in the case of "captivity narratives" that "exhibit a particularly strong relationship to the novel because of their specific characteristics: drama, suspense, conflict, resolution, and, in addition, the strong narrator-hero."<sup>7</sup> However, due to the lack of information on Japan in Europe, Golovnin's memoirs would become important readings for all future voyages to Japan, up to and including that of Commodore Perry.<sup>8</sup>

For many European readers, Golovnin's work would introduce them to a previously little known culture in a far-off land that had little bearing or consequence on European politics. Conversely, for the Japanese, Russia's incursions into the North Pacific and around Japan would foreshadow the growing challenges of maintaining its isolation, putting the country on high alert and an imminent war footing. The heightened sense of national emergency in Japan would undermine future attempts to explore Japan, both through acts of intrusion such as Golovnin's and through the official route in Dejima. Yet it would also rekindle a broader interest in Japan for studies from Europe that went beyond the Dutch monopoly.

## Sakoku and the Dutch Monopoly

The basis for Japan's isolation, or *Sakoku* (closed/locked country), was established with the country's unification following over a century of civil war during the *Sengoku* period (1467–1615). The ruling political dynasty, the Tokugawa, aimed to mitigate the influx of Christian practice and gunpowder weaponry from European missionaries and merchants. Christianity and guns (*Tanegashima* or *Teppo*) had become ubiquitous during these internal conflicts but became prime symbols of asserting autonomy against the Bakufu after unification.<sup>9</sup> Following a Catholic rebellion in Shimabara in 1637 on Kyushu island, close to Nagasaki, the Bakufu implemented a more rigorous expulsion of Europeans and persecution of Christian converts.<sup>10</sup> The Sakoku edicts banned the entry of Europeans to Japan, particularly Catholic priests and Jesuits, as well as the exodus of Japanese subjects, on pain of

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Maggs, "Imprisoned! Two Russian Narratives of Travel and Captivity in Asia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: Filipp Efremov in Central Asia and Vasilii Golovnin in Japan," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 52, no. 3–4 (September 2010), p. 346.

<sup>7</sup> Maggs, "Imprisoned," pp. 331–33.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Rietbergen, "Japan: The Un-Knowable Other? Two Seventeenth Century European Models for Knowing Japan," *Lias* 29 (2002), pp. 63–80; Maggs, "Imprisoned," p. 345.

<sup>9</sup> Vapori, *Voices of Early Modern Japan*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Clements, *Christ's Samurai: The True Story of the Shimabara Rebellion* (London: Robinson, 2016).

death. Although foreign incursions were a concern, Sakoku's principal aims were to secure internal stability for the recently united Tokugawa Shogunate.<sup>11</sup> Rather than being based on xenophobia, Sakoku was an intensely political decision to avoid the empowerment of local *Daimyo* (local autonomous lords) and the Christianization of Japanese society.

While Sakoku led to the expulsion of European powers from Japan, an exception was made for the Dutch who, having faced an ultimatum to aid the Bakufu against the rebellion, sided against their Catholic antagonists, who they saw as furthering Iberian interests in Asia. The Bakufu rewarded their intervention with the maintenance of a small artificial island off the coast of Nagasaki called Dejima. It was a tiny outpost with the capacity to house only some 20 Europeans. To maintain constant surveillance, Dejima was separated from Nagasaki by a single bridge. Only Japanese with a trade permit and servants at Dejima and courtesans could cross.<sup>12</sup> While other European states had their connections and knowledge networks promptly severed, the Dutch retained a highly regulated window into Japanese affairs.

Dejima was but one of four sites through which Japan could conduct international commerce. The first was Dejima at Nagasaki for trade with China and the Dutch. The second was the north-Western island of Tsushima, which had trading rights with Korea. The third was trade through the Ryuku islands under the control of the Shimazu clan, who could trade with the Chinese. Finally, the Matsumae, an autonomous Japanese clan on Hokkaido, had exclusive rights to trade with the indigenous Ainu clans on the island as well on the Kuril Islands.<sup>13</sup> However, trade through these other portals was highly limited and Nagasaki was a more significant portal for international trade in the Edo period.<sup>14</sup> Though continually challenged from its inception to its end in 1853 by European attempts to enter Japan, this system never officially faltered within this period, excluding other European powers, giving the Dutch a monopoly on trade and transmission of knowledge between Europe and Japan.

## The *Rangaku*-Dejima Knowledge Network

Dejima proved to be of variable economic importance to the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, or VOC (Dutch East India Company), who traded useful Chinese products, such as silk and sugar, in exchange for silver.<sup>15</sup> The English themselves had pulled their factory from Japan in 1623, before the Sakoku edicts, due to a lack of commercial viability.<sup>16</sup> What initially proved to be a lucrative trade

<sup>11</sup> Conrad D Totman, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1600-1843* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Hendrik Doeff translation Annick M. Doeff, *Recollections of Japan* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Kazui and Videen, "Foreign Relations during the Edo Period."

<sup>14</sup> Louis Cullen, "The Nagasaki Trade of the Tokugawa Era: Archives, Statistics, and Management," *Japan Review* 31 (2017), pp. 71-72.

<sup>15</sup> Cullen, "The Nagasaki trade," p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> Grant Kohn Goodman, *Japan: The Dutch Experience* (London: Bloomsbury USA Academic, 2012), p. 12.

route, began to diminish in commercial value, as the Bakufu inflicted harsher rules on trade, in 1715 restricting the entry of Dutch ships to only two per year. Despite the drop in trade, the base continued to be an invaluable form of transmission of information for the Japanese, known as *Rangaku* (Dutch Learning). This was a scholarly tradition tolerated to varying degrees by the Bakufu that aimed to learn Western methods, and translate available Dutch works into Japanese.<sup>17</sup>

There was a limited variation in rangaku based on what interested Japanese scholars of the West (*Rangakusha*) and the Bakufu. The flow of information was carefully monitored, with Europeans initially discouraged from learning Japanese, meaning that a restricted number of Japanese interpreters would be trained through a guild in Nagasaki to conduct negotiations in Dutch.<sup>18</sup> One of the rare opportunities to exchange knowledge was the mandatory annual tributary marches to Edo to offer gifts to the Shogun and update the Shogun on world affairs.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, the Netherlands' exclusive bridge from Japan to Europe made it an invaluable part of a form of what might be termed a reverse rangaku, with Europeans learning about Japan. In contrast to the cloistered Japanese Shogunate, Dejima was connected to an intricate worldwide network through the VOC.<sup>20</sup> Although primarily a financial venture, the VOC offered a path for European naturalists and scholars to carry out research at different Dutch "factories" across the world, and relay their discoveries back to Europe.<sup>21</sup> This represented a knowledge network, reconstituting a framework that had once existed under the Jesuits and which had been destroyed by the Sakoku edicts. Dejima, with its unique vantage point into Japan, offered a new but controlled source of information for European scholars, albeit one that was more restricted than that established by the Jesuits prior to the Sakoku edicts.

The eighteenth century saw the simultaneous emergence of new intellectual cultures and networks in both Europe and Japan. Mass printing of books in Japan allowed the circulation of translated European texts to intellectual centers such as the capital in Edo. Rangaku was often pursued privately by Japanese scholars, many of whom joined scientific societies or salons called *bunjin*, which aided the transmission of European texts around Japan.<sup>22</sup> Concurrently, Europe would experience an acceleration in print culture, with many works being translated and distributed into other European languages soon after the publication of the original version.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Terrence Jackson, *Network of Knowledge: Western Science and the Tokugawa Information Revolution* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Huigen, Jong, and Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks*, p. 201; It has been suggested however that Dutch officials were often able to bypass this ban and learn some rudimentary Japanese, Cullen, "The Nagasaki Trade of the Tokugawa Era," p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Jan E. Veldman, "A Historical Vignette: Red-Hair Medicine," *ORL; Journal for Oto-Rhino-Laryngology and Its Related Specialties* 64, no. 2 (April 2002), p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> Huigen, Jong, and Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks*.

<sup>21</sup> Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. De Jong, and Elmer Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks* (BRILL, 2010), pp. 8–10.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, Chapter 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, p. 11.

The staff at Dejima was often multinational, which also contributed to the proliferation of knowledge across Europe. Most of the primary European works on Japan came from Dejima's resident physician or scientist (*oppermeester*), many of whom came from outside the Netherlands, although to the Japanese they were formally considered to be Dutch.<sup>24</sup> In 1649, Caspar Schamberger, a surgeon from Saxony, arrived in Dejima through the VOC and impressed the Shogun Tokugawa Iemetsu, attracting Japanese interest in Western medicine.<sup>25</sup> Books on medicine were soon allowed as a result of Schamberger's actions, but the prohibition on all other books (especially the Bible) remained strict throughout the seventeenth century. In turn, these firsthand accounts generated secondary accounts that combined their observations with prior histories from the Jesuits before their expulsion. One of the most comprehensive of these works was published by a French Jesuit Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, who wrote a history of the Catholic Church in Japan without setting foot there.<sup>26</sup>

Although the policy of Sakoku remained prohibitive, foreign doctors' access to the VOC proved to have a spillover effect, disseminating knowledge to the rest of Europe. In 1690, another German doctor with the VOC, Engelbert Kaempfer, landed in Japan and was allowed to access the yearly tributary march to Edo on two occasions thanks to his medical credentials.<sup>27</sup> Kaempfer presented many of his findings to Leiden University, where he was awarded a doctorate in Japanese studies. His book *De Beschryving van Japan* (History of Japan) was published posthumously in 1727. The book remains perhaps the most important book in the transmission of knowledge to Europe during the Edo Period, with twelve translations completed in ten years. The book was also consistently cited by European writers on Japan (as was Charlevoix) for the next two centuries (including in Golovnin's *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*).<sup>28</sup>

By the eighteenth century, despite the increasing prohibition in trade, there was an acceleration of interest among Japanese scholars for rangaku. In 1720, the Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune allowed a greater influx of books from the Netherlands (including Japanese translations) into Japan.<sup>29</sup> Whereas European interests in Japan ranged from botanical to anthropological, rangaku was strictly limited to European natural sciences, especially medicine and astronomy, a narrow focus that reflected Japanese concerns about importing European cultural and religious

<sup>24</sup> Von Siebold wasn't even fluent in Dutch, which was noticed by Japanese interpreters, for which he claimed somewhat ironically to be from a mountainous part of the Netherlands, James A. Compton and Gerard Thijssse, "The Remarkable P. F. B. Von Siebold, His Life in Europe and Japan," *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 30, no. 3 (2013), p. 280.

<sup>25</sup> Veldman, "A Historical Vignette," p. 159.

<sup>26</sup> P.F.X Charlevoix, *Histoire de l'établissement, Des Progres et de La Decadence Du Christianisme Dans l'Empire Du Japon*, vol. 1 (Jacques Joseph, 1715); Rotem Kowner, "The Skin as a Metaphor: Early European Racial Perspectives on Japan, 1548–1853," *Ethnohistory* 51 (2004), pp. 751–778: 761.

<sup>27</sup> David Mervart, "A Closed Country in the Open Seas," *History of European Ideas* 35, no. 3 (September 2009), p. 325.

<sup>28</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*.

<sup>29</sup> Annick Horiuchi, "When Science Develops Outside State Patronage: Dutch Studies in Japan at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *Early Science and Medicine* 8, no. 2 (2003), p. 148.



notions. The first of these translated works into Japanese was in 1774, Johann Adam Kulmus's *Anatomic Chart* (original from 1722), a book focusing on biology and human anatomy.<sup>30</sup> Previously, the Dutch had exported books and taught several Japanese scholars Dutch from Dejima, but the growing number of translations into Japanese allowed more books to reach larger intellectual circles in Japanese urban centers such as the capital, Edo.<sup>31</sup>

Another notable academic who operated through Dejima was Swedish botanist Carl Peter Thunberg, who arrived in Dejima in 1775.<sup>32</sup> Although Thunberg was kept in Dejima for most of his visit, he too made the journey to Edo to pay tribute to the Shogun. Moreover, some of his surgical skills allowed him greater contact with Japanese doctors.<sup>33</sup> Thunberg's notes on Japan were published in the book entitled *Travels in Europe, Africa and Asia made between the years 1770 and 1779*.<sup>34</sup> Although his study on Japanese society and ethnography was considerably less extensive than that of Kaempfer's, and had a focus on botany, it became almost as important due to the rarity of information on Japan.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the information that Dejima provided to European knowledge networks about Japan, its monopoly also controlled information outflows back to Europe. Cartography of Japan was particularly controlled, both by the Bakufu, who feared a divulgence in this strategic information, and the Dutch, who wanted to protect their monopolized ties with Japan. Thus, translation, reproduction, and mass distribution of maps of Japan, and Nagasaki harbor in particular were often prohibited.<sup>36</sup>

This competitiveness between the Dutch and other European states would become increasingly marked with the rise of Russian incursions in the latter half of the eighteenth century, culminating in Golovnin's expedition in 1811. As argued by Timon Screech in *The Shogun's Painted Culture* and by Terrence Jackson in *Network of Knowledge*, these incursions would lead to a hardening of the policy of Sakoku, but conversely also lead to renewed academic interest in Japan in rangaku.<sup>37</sup> However, the continual eroding of Dejima's unique and formal position as a portal into Japan, especially after Golovnin, marked a de-monopolization of the knowledge network, and a growing interest in other European cultures known as *Yōgaku*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Horiuchi, "When Science Develops Outside State Patronage," p. 159.

<sup>31</sup> Horiuchi, "When Science Develops Outside State Patronage," p. 159.

<sup>32</sup> N. Svedelius, *Carl Peter Thunberg (1743–1828)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 132.

<sup>33</sup> Svedelius, *Thunberg*, p. 132.

<sup>34</sup> C.H. Thunberg, *Travels in Europe, Africa and Asia Made between the Years 1770 and 1779* (London: Rivington, 1795).

<sup>35</sup> Shunzo Sakamaki, "Western Concepts of Japan and the Japanese, 1800–1854," *Pacific Historical Review* 6, no. 1 (March 1937), p. 4; Adam Johann von Krusenstern. Hoppner, *Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806* (London: Printed by C. Roworth for J. Murray, 1813), pp. 251–52. The first editions were first published in German in St. Petersburg and Berlin: Adam Johann von Krusenstern. *Reise um die Welt in den Jahren 1803, 1804, 1805, und 1806 auf Befehl Seiner Kaiserl* (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1811–12).

<sup>36</sup> David Wells, "Early Russian Travel Writing on Japan," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 38 (2004), p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Timon Screech, *The Shogun's Painted Culture: Fear and Creativity in the Japanese States, 1760–1829* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, p. 134.

## Early Russian Explorations

The aforementioned journeys into Japan in the late 1700s had been considered legitimate by the Bakufu as they had abode by the policy of *Sakoku* which thawed to some degree in the 1720s. Despite the limitations of *Sakoku*, a steady stream of Japanese copies was being translated by official Rangakusha. Whereas the early to mid-eighteenth century would be characterized by this steady but growing stream of information exchange, the turn of the century would see attempts from other European states to breach Japan's isolation, particularly from Russia.<sup>39</sup>

Russia had been uninvolved in the first era of contact between Europe and Japan in the sixteenth century, but had rapidly expanded its empire through Siberia to Kamchatka and up to Alaska and so into Japan's vicinity.<sup>40</sup> Empress Anna sent Danish explorers Vitus Bering and Martin Spanberg in 1739 to explore Japan via the Kuril Islands. A heavy storm left the explorers shipwrecked upon the coast of Japan, leading to first contact with Japanese officers. Instead of instigating the measures of *Sakoku*, which would have led to the violent repulsing of the Russian crew and burning of their ship, the explorers were resupplied and then sent on their way in the hopes they would not return to Japan.<sup>41</sup>

Conversely, Japanese castaways arriving in Russia became important transmitters of knowledge about Japan. The Russians detained two marooned Japanese fishermen in Kamchatka in 1729 and brought them on the arduous journey to St. Petersburg in 1736 where they founded a Japanese Studies Institute, a possible substitute to the Dutch monopoly. Unlike Dejima, where the Dutch went into Japan, albeit in a limited fashion, the Institute was reliant on washed-up Japanese sailors and was relocated eastwards to Irkutsk so that Japanese castaways would not need to travel the distance to St. Petersburg. The Institute offered a new knowledge network between Europe and Japan second to Dejima but had its limits. Besides the fact that the Institute was not in Japan, the Institute relied heavily on marooned sailors and fisherman, a relatively small and uneducated recruitment pool. There were some initial successes in the 1750s, with the creation of a Russian to *katakana* lexicon that helped decipher Japanese script. However, the reliance on castaways was a disadvantage. With Russia taking a more active approach to opening a diplomatic dialog with Japan, captured Japanese sailors were often returned in the hope of securing an agreement. Therefore, by the end of the eighteenth century, the school in Irkutsk was no longer comprised of those born in Japan, but their descendants and Russian pupils.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> David N. Wells, *Russian Views of Japan, 1792–1913: An Anthology of Travel Writing* (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> James Forsyth, *History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581–1990*, First Paperback Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> John Goodliffe, "Glynn Barratt Russia in Pacific Waters, 1715–1825 (A Survey of Russia's Naval Presence in the North and South Pacific)," *University of British Columbia Press* 36, no. 2 (December 1984), pp. 35–37.

<sup>42</sup> David N. Wells, *The Russian Discovery of Japan, 1670–1800*, 1st edition (Andover: Routledge, 2019), pp. 13–15.

In 1744, Russians began trapping for otter furs in the northern Kuril Islands while the Japanese started to expand into the southern Kurils. What began with the fur trade soon turned into the plunder of the local Ainu tribes, with one particularly violent raid in 1770. The Ainu responded by attacking Russian fur hunters.<sup>43</sup> Russian Empress Catherine II showed equal interest as her predecessors to Russo-Japanese contact, sending a Russian merchant Pavel Lebedev-Lastochkin in 1775 to the Kurils, leading to contact with Japanese officials in 1777. Lastochkin went to Hokkaido with a message of Russia's peaceful and commercial intentions toward Japan but was rejected together with the gifts he had presented to the Japanese the following year.<sup>44</sup>

The increasing activity of Russian sailors in the Kurils alarmed Japanese officials and had repercussions on the Dutch in Dejima. In 1790, the Bakufu reduced the annual number of ships to Dejima from 2 to a single ship, while the annual tributary march to Edo was cut to once every four years. Japanese Daimyo, who regularly appeared in Edo for the Dutch tributary march, in a bid to learn more about Europe, were increasingly curtailed from attending.<sup>45</sup> However, this was also partially due to the increasingly impoverished Dutch base's inability to furnish high-quality gifts for the Shogun.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, there was greater demand at Dejima for works on Russia, with Japanese Rangakusha translating multiple works on Russia from 1789 until 1793, from the history of Kamchatka to books on the Russian imperial line.<sup>47</sup>

While Sakoku became more strictly enforced, Japanese military scholar Hayashi Shihei believed that Japan should take a more proactive policy in countering the growing number of foreign incursions. Shihei, believing that the Kurils provided a springboard for a Russian invasion of Japan, traveled to Hokkaido to observe the state of its naval defenses. In his 1787 work, *Kaikoku Heidan* (Military Defense of a Maritime Nation), Shihei raised concerns of a possible maritime invasion of Japan, reminiscent of the thirteenth-century invasions by Mongol Yuan Dynasty China. He also attacked the policy of *Sakoku* for failing to maintain technological parity with external threats to Japan and argued that the Bakufu should replicate foreign military practices and technologies. The book was popular in Japan but was considered a threat by the Shogunate. In a series of reforms called the *Kansei* (prohibition of heterodoxies), the Shogunate clamped down both on Western rangaku and Shihei's challenge to Sakoku, prohibiting his works and putting Shihei under house arrest.<sup>48</sup> Shihei's arrest revealed a contradiction in policy, as the Bakufu sought to accelerate its accumulation of rangaku texts to face the potential threat of foreign incursions, as Shihei had advocated, but to limit their dissemination into Japanese society.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> George Alexander Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (November 1950), pp. 9–10.

<sup>44</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," p. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, p. 15.

<sup>46</sup> Goodman, *The Dutch Experience*, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> Goodman, *The Dutch Experience*, p. 80.

<sup>48</sup> Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 261–62.

<sup>49</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, pp. 242–43.

The Russians persisted in attempting entry into Japan through Lieutenant Adam Laxman. He arrived in the port of Nemuro in Hokkaido in 1792 and made contact with Japanese officials in 1793, requesting the establishment of trade.<sup>50</sup> The officials attempted to stall Laxman's trade mission to Edo in Hokkaido so that he would not arrive on the Japanese mainland.<sup>51</sup> The arrival of a Russian diplomatic mission seemed to confirm Shihei's fears of the advancing foreign presence from Hokkaido and the Kurils. However, he died in house arrest soon after learning of Laxman's arrival.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the Japanese officials gave Laxman free passage to Nagasaki in exchange for returning shipwrecked Japanese subjects and consideration of a trade agreement by the central government only if conducted at Nagasaki.<sup>53</sup> Satisfied, Laxman returned to Russia but did not immediately send an expedition to Japan to test the Japanese claim. Distracted by the political and revolutionary upheavals emanating from France, Japan proved to be little more than a side-show for the Russian government.<sup>54</sup>

These Russian expeditions had failed to make inroads into Japan but were already considered a threat to the Dutch monopoly on Japanese relations at Dejima. Both Japan and the Dutch acted with suspicion to Russia's increasingly regular expeditions to the Japanese periphery. The Bakufu began constructing new naval defenses in 1792, and in 1799 Hokkaido's administration came under increasing control by an official from the central government (*Bugyo*) rather than through the Matsumae clan.<sup>55</sup> The Dutch suspicion of growing European and especially Russian involvement in northern Japan led to the Dutch launching a smear campaign against the other European countries in a bid to retain their monopoly.<sup>56</sup>

## Dutch Control of Dejima during the Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802)

By the late eighteenth century, the Netherlands would enter a period of decline and calamity that would limit its ability to secure its monopoly on relations with Japan. Having lost a substantial number of its ships in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), the British had crippled the VOC's maritime capabilities.<sup>57</sup> In 1795, the Netherlands became a client state to France's new revolutionary government aligning itself against Britain and Russia.<sup>58</sup> The British, who had greatly expanded their empire eastwards, took advantage of the conflict to seize the Dutch

<sup>50</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Harry Emerson Wildes, "Russia's Attempts to Open Japan," *The Russian Review* 5, no. 1 (1945), p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p. 262.

<sup>53</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>54</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 16.

<sup>55</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," pp. 22-24; B. L. Walker, "The Early Modern Japanese State and Ainu Vaccinations: Redefining the Body Politic, 1799-1868," *Past & Present* 163, no. 1 (1999), p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Huijen, Jong, and Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies As Knowledge Networks*, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Paul E. Eckel, "Challenges to Dutch Monopoly of Japanese Trade During the Wars of Napoleon," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 1, no. 2 (February 1942), p. 173.

East Indies. Consequently, the VOC hired neutral American ships to continue trade with Japan.<sup>59</sup> In 1799, the VOC's charter finally expired, and it was disbanded, its colonies and merchants having been seized by the British.<sup>60</sup>

Even Dejima, supposedly the only place in the world flying the free Dutch flag, was not spared from the conflict, as British frigate HMS *Phaeton* flew that same standard to disguise its approach as she sailed into Nagasaki harbor in 1808. Under this guise, the *Phaeton* captured Dejima's leading Dutch representatives, demanding resupply at the risk of executing the Dutch hostages and after shelling the harbor, the Dutch and Japanese acquiesced. The Japanese were incensed by this action with the Bugyo of Nagasaki committing suicide for failing to repel the *Phaeton*.<sup>61</sup> The traditional European route into Japan had been effectively severed by the British. The *Phaeton* incident symbolized the Netherlands' rapid decline in power and their inability to maintain its monopoly of relations with Japan sent a clear signal to other powers, who were now prepared to force Japan out of its isolation.

## Russian Attempts to "Open" Japan

A decade after Laxman had seemingly secured Russian passage to Nagasaki, the Russians attempted to test the validity of these terms. In 1803, Nikolai Rezanov was sent on a circumnavigation to supply the small Russian colony of Fort Ross in California. Rezanov was a leading member of the newly chartered Russia-America company seeking to extend the fur trade deeper into North America. The Captain of the ship the *Juno*, Adam von Krusenstern, recorded much of the journey in his memoirs.<sup>62</sup> Rezanov had been granted plenipotentiary status and was ordered to stop in Nagasaki and make contact with Japan in an attempt to invoke the trade rights supposedly secured by Laxman for Russia, then to continue to California to resupply the Russian factory.<sup>63</sup> The Dutch had forewarned the Japanese of the Russian's arrival, and the Japanese, fearing invasion, had mobilized many soldiers around Nagasaki.<sup>64</sup>

Krusenstern's journal entry on Japan outlines the limited knowledge on Japan, blaming the Dutch for jealously guarding their diplomatic monopoly with Japan:

... by the opportunity we should have of acquiring some information on this little known country, upon which the only Europeans competent to impart any knowledge concerning it, have, during the last two hundred years, made a rule not to publish anything. Within this period, indeed, two travellers have published their remarks upon

<sup>59</sup> Karl Jack Bauer, *A Maritime History of the United States: The Role of America's Seas and Waterways* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> Kees Camfferman and Terence E. Cooke, "The Profits of the Dutch East India Company's Japan Trade," *Abacus* 40, no. 1 (2004), p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Noell Wilson, "Tokugawa Defense Redux: Organizational Failure in the 'Phaeton' Incident of 1808," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010), pp. 1-32; Eckel, "Challenges to Dutch Monopoly of Japanese Trade During the Wars of Napoleon," pp. 172-73.

<sup>62</sup> Their memoirs were later published and translated: Adam Johann von Krusenstern. Hoppner, *Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806* (London: Printed by C. Roworth for J. Murray, 1813).

<sup>63</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 294.

<sup>64</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," pp. 25-26.

Japan and although both of them, comparatively speaking, were but a short time in this country, their accounts are undoubtedly important, being the only ones since extirpation of the Christians, from which period the accounts of the Jesuits cease. They were, however, neither of them Dutch; so that Europe owes nothing to this nation, with respect to a knowledge of the Japanese empire [...] I cannot help attributing this reserve of the Dutch to a ridiculous, mean, and at all events a very useless policy, contrary to the spirit of a philosophical age [...].<sup>65</sup>

Krusentern's reference to the "two travellers" who had published on Japan were Kaempfer and Thunberg, neither of whom were Dutch, despite the Netherlands' apparent monopoly of relations, which made him suspect the Dutch of hoarding information on Japan. Furthermore, after the diplomatic proceedings with Rezanov, a British ship intercepted a Dutch merchantman carrying a letter which claimed that "The Dutch boasted of having succeeded in imbuing the Japanese with an irreconcilable hatred towards the Russians."<sup>66</sup>

Rezanov arrived in October but was not allowed to enter Nagasaki until December, having to wait a month and a half on board his ship. The initial meeting proved difficult due to the lack of Russian speakers in Japan, and one of the Russian sailors had to use his knowledge of Dutch to communicate their intentions.<sup>67</sup> Finally, Rezanov transmitted his demands to Edo in March 1805, but the Shogun's response reiterated Japan's commitment to isolation.<sup>68</sup> Rezanov was furious at this response and the treatment he endured and left Japan enraged by this refusal for Russian access.<sup>69</sup> He spent the winter in New Kamchatka and then proceeded to complete his mission to California. Rezanov's mission proved that the Japanese were highly reluctant to communicate with anyone apart from the Dutch. As well as a monopoly in trade and communication, the Dutch could influence Japanese opinion about other European states during their, albeit less frequent, tributary marches to the Shogun in Edo. Laxman for example, believed that Japan's lack of enthusiasm for open trade was based on the Dutch describing the Russians as a particularly "brutal" people.<sup>70</sup> The fact that the Netherlands and Russia were hostile to one another due to the wars in Europe meant that Rezanov's trade mission was likely doomed from the outset.

Japan's refusal to allow Russian access to Nagasaki darkened Rezanov's perception of the Japanese, and he began plotting his retribution. In 1806, while sailing to California on Russian-American company ships, he commissioned Lieutenant Khvostov and Midshipman Davydov to sail to the island of Sakhalin (north of Hokkaido), drive away any Japanese settlements, and to annex the island.<sup>71</sup> Like the Kuril Islands, remote Sakhalin had been largely unsettled by the imperial powers

<sup>65</sup> Krusenstern and Hoppner, *Voyage Round the World, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, & 1806*, pp. 251–52.

<sup>66</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 250.

<sup>67</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," p. 26.

<sup>68</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, Revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 488.

<sup>70</sup> Wells, *The Russian Discovery of Japan, 1670–1800*, p. 140.

<sup>71</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," p. 30.

until the nineteenth century. Then the Russians and Japanese became interested in it simultaneously. The Japanese were concerned by growing Russian incursions in the North West Pacific such as the explorations into the Kurils and Sakhalin in 1785.<sup>72</sup> In 1807, Rezanov, having completed his mission to America, landed back in Siberia, and shortly thereafter died of an illness.<sup>73</sup>

Khvostov and Davydov continued the task assigned to them and promptly attacked the Japanese outpost in Sakhalin, burning it down and capturing four Japanese officials.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, Khvostov declared the land under the control of Russia and gave to the local Ainu chieftain a ribbon showing Russia's control of the island.<sup>75</sup> The two officers then proceeded to the Kuril Islands, where they landed on Iturup island. Once there, the Japanese villages were torched and pillaged.<sup>76</sup> The Russians issued an ultimatum, threatening to wipe out Japan's northern presence if they did not grant trade rights to Russia.<sup>77</sup> They returned to Okhotsk (after pirating four Japanese ships) with their holds full of stolen Japanese wares, but were immediately arrested by the Russian Governor on their return to Kamchatka and kept in prison until they escaped to Europe in 1808.<sup>78</sup>

The trail of destruction left by Khvostov had largely gone unnoticed in Russia amid the Napoleonic Wars, but the Japanese (who had not been at war in almost two centuries) reacted with nationwide alarm at the attack.<sup>79</sup> As Golovnin stated in his book:

In consequence of the smallness of the territory of Japan, and its separation from the rest of the world, every communication with foreigners interests the whole country, and is regarded as a great and important event, which ought to be handed down to the latest posterity. The Japanese were therefore, of opinion, that not only Russia, but all Europe, must be informed of the attack of Chwostoff (Khvostov).<sup>80</sup>

To improve their knowledge of the seas between Russian and Japan, the Bakufu sent one of the defenders of the Russian raid on Urup, Mamiya Rinzo, to fully map Sakhalin in 1808 to prepare for any future incursion.<sup>81</sup> Despite the Bakufu having punished thinkers such as Shihei for promoting a more active policy against foreign incursions, the violence of the raids and the increasing Russian presence in the region revealed some malleability to Sakoku. Traditionally, Japanese subjects were liable for execution for leaving Japan, but the push to chart the islands north of Japan revealed a more preemptive approach to Sakoku in preparing for the eventuality of a Russian incursion.

<sup>72</sup> Jonah Asher, *Sakhalin Island: Shaping Modern Japanese-Russian Relations* (MA Webster University: Proquest, Umi Dissertation Publishing, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 17.

<sup>74</sup> Wildes, "Russia's Attempts to Open Japan," p. 76.

<sup>75</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 166–67.

<sup>76</sup> G. Patrick March, *Eastern Destiny: Russia in Asia and the North Pacific* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1996), p. 85.

<sup>77</sup> Wildes, "Russia's Attempts to Open Japan," pp. 76–77.

<sup>78</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 290–93.

<sup>79</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," p. 33.

<sup>80</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 157.

<sup>81</sup> Brett L. Walker, "Mamiya Rinzo and the Japanese Exploration of Sakhalin Island: Cartography and Empire," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 283–313.

## Golovnin's Captivity in Japan

In 1807, Czar Alexander commissioned a circumnavigation of the world to explore the Pacific and aid the Russian-American Company's economic ventures in America. Vasily Golovnin, a veteran naval officer with experience in the British Royal Navy, was assigned. Although Golovnin gained renown for his later captivity in Japan, he was detained twice during his voyage. While sailing past the Cape of Good Hope on the sloop *The Diana*, Golovnin was detained by the British, who were now at war with Russia following its defection to Napoleonic France after the 1807 treaty of Tilsit. In 1809, Golovnin escaped British detention in South Africa and, evading his pursuers, arrived in Kamchatka in 1810.<sup>82</sup>

Now in Kamchatka, Golovnin was assigned to sail to Baranof Island in Russian America to resupply colonists. When he returned in 1811, he received fresh orders from St. Petersburg to map the Kuril islands, particularly those to the south with a growing Japanese presence. Golovnin claimed that his mission was solely cartographic and he was not to spy on Japanese expansion into the Kurils.<sup>83</sup> Golovnin quickly made contact with the local Ainu tribes on Iturup (some of whom spoke basic Russian) and a Japanese officer who, though suspicious of their motives, permitted them to resupply on the island of Kunashir (the closest Kurilian island to Hokkaido).<sup>84</sup> The *Diana* set sail, taking an Ainu translator of Japanese and Russian on board whom the crew called Alexei Maximovitsch. When approaching the fortress on Kunashir, the Japanese opened fire on the *Diana*, but permitted a group of the Russians to land after some negotiation. Golovnin landed with two officers, midshipman Mur and pilot Khlebnikov, four sailors, and the Ainu translator Alexei.<sup>85</sup> However, the meeting was a trap, and they were captured and bound.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, the new commander of the ship, Lieutenant Rikord opened fire on the Japanese castle from the *Diana*, but then decided to return to Kamchatka to receive new orders.<sup>87</sup>

The decision to capture a Russian crew rather than attempt to ward them off was unusual for Sakoku. Initially enticed with tea and tobacco, the Japanese arrested Golovnin and his entourage after the castle commander alluded to retaliation for the actions of Khvostov in 1807, as well as Resanov's attempts to open up Japan.<sup>88</sup> Golovnin and his crew members were shipped to Hokkaido and kept imprisoned in the port of Matsumae (and then moved to a house in Hakodate) for having broken Sakoku, espionage and in retaliation for Khvostov's actions four years previously.<sup>89</sup> One of the running themes in Golovnin's memoirs is that the Japanese perceived him as a foreign combatant and that the Khvostov raids had been done with the blessing of the Russian government. The Japanese

<sup>82</sup> Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin, *Detained in Simon's Bay: The Story of the Detention of the Imperial Russian Sloop Diana from April 1808 to May 1809* (Friends of the South African Library, 1964).

<sup>83</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 20–27.

<sup>85</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 74.

<sup>87</sup> Lensen, "Early Russo-Japanese Relations," p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 73–74.

<sup>89</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 141, 170.



indecision over the status of Golovnin and his guilt or innocence certainly suggests that the raids of 1807 had a profound psychological effect on the Japanese, who probably believed that the Russians were extremely hostile to them. However, the fact that the Russian crew was not executed but generally treated well suggests a great deal of uncertainty on whether the Czar had sanctioned the Khvostov raids, and whether punishing Golovnin would result in Russian retribution.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps the most pertinent reason for the relatively positive treatment of Golovnin and his crew was that they were a crucial source of strategic information for the Japanese. They began their interrogation of Golovnin and his senior officers when they reached Hakodate. The nature of these questions went beyond military strategy and the threat posed by Russian expansion since it included questions about everyday life and society.<sup>91</sup> Rather than shy away from questions of European culture, which would have been in accordance with the focus of the early era of Sakoku, the line of questioning revealed an intention to learn every aspect of Russian society.

Conversely, Golovnin's internment put him at a unique advantage to learn about Japanese society. Though he did not have access to Edo, like Kaempfer and Thunberg, he was allowed, under guard, to walk the streets of Hakodate, soaking in many of the details of Japanese life. Furthermore, the Japanese could freely interrogate Golovnin and his crewmates (which they did thoroughly) on a country they had little knowledge of. The Shogunate sent two agents from Edo to further interrogate Golovnin. The first was Murakami Teisuke, a Dutch speaker who was tasked to learn Russian from Golovnin, prepare a statistical account of Russia and Europe, and draw the Russians' portraits.<sup>92</sup> Teisuke and Golovnin spent long periods of time formulating a Japanese/Russian dictionary and became the official interpreters between Japanese officials and the captured Russians.<sup>93</sup> Teisuke even endeavored to use the Russians to translate three works, texts on Russia's geography, Kamchatka, and the Anglo-Russian invasion of Holland in 1799.<sup>94</sup>

The study of Orthodox Christianity was of great interest to the Japanese, despite the draconian laws against Christianity in Japan.<sup>95</sup> The Japanese had tolerated the Protestant Dutch due to the fact they had not attempted to convert the Japanese in the same way that the Portuguese Jesuits had. Still, Orthodox Christianity was

<sup>90</sup> The Japanese authorities finally accepted that the raids on Sakhalin had not been sanctioned by the Russian Government: Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 204.

<sup>91</sup> Examples of such questions were: "What kind of dress does the Emperor of Russia wear - what does her wear on his head - what kind of birds are found in the neighbourhood of St. Petersburg - what would be the price in Russia of the clothes they were wearing - what number of cannon was planted around the imperial palace - what wool is made use of in Europe for manufacturing cloth - what quadrupeds, birds and fish are eaten in Russia - in what manner do Russians eat their food - what dress do they usually wear - what kind of horse does the Emperor usually ride - who accompanies him when he goes abroad - are the Russians partial to the Dutch - how many foreigners are there in Russia - what are the chief articles of trade in Petersburg - what are the dimensions in the length, breadth and height of the imperial palace - how many windows does it contain - how many times do the Russians go to church in one day - how many festivals do the Russians observe in the course of the year - do the Russians wear silk clothes - at what time of life do the Russian women begin and cease to bear children" Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 210-12.

<sup>92</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 244.

<sup>93</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 245-48.

<sup>94</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 263.

<sup>95</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 264.

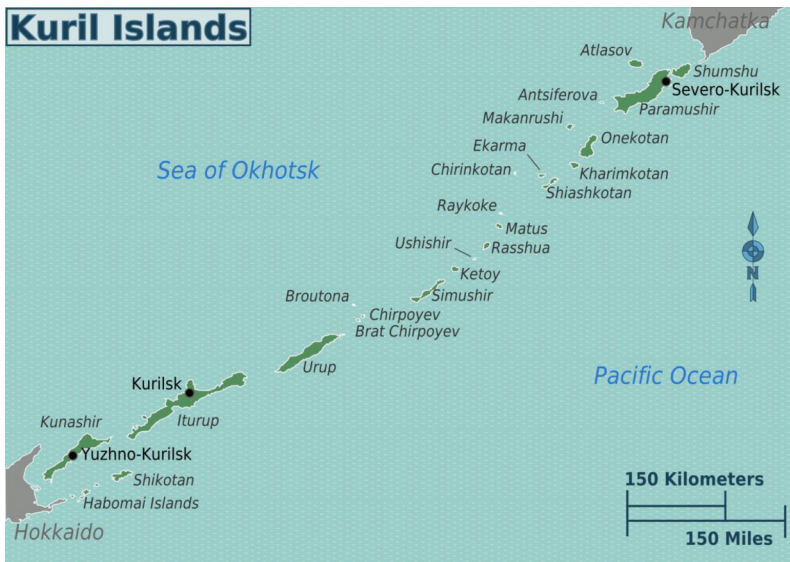


FIGURE 1 Map of the Kuril Islands. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurils\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kurils_map.png).

a novelty to Japan.<sup>96</sup> Finally, Teisuke confirmed that the Dutch had spread rumors that the Russians were in league with the British and that they designed plans to divide China and Japan between them.<sup>97</sup> Association with the British after the outrage of the Phaeton incident would likely have made the Japanese particularly distrustful of the Russians. Golovnin pleaded that:

... the false representations of that people originated in selfishness and jealousy, as they were afraid that the Japanese might consent to a commercial intercourse with England and Russia, whereby they would be deprived of the immense advantages they derived from fraudulent traffic and the sale of trifling articles at a most exorbitant price.<sup>98</sup>

The other individual to meet Golovnin was the explorer Mamiyo Rinzo, who had earlier mapped Sakhalin and had been wounded by Khvostov's raid on the island. Rinzo's connection with the Sakhalin raid and his experience as a navigator meant he was selected by the Bakufu to better understand Russian encroachment. Most of his questions aimed to understand European navigational devices and Russian naval operation in the North Pacific. According to Golovnin's *Memoirs*, Golovnin was less receptive to Rinzo than to Teisuke. The former seemed arrogant and his questions were akin to an interrogation, which contrasted with the latter's more general line of questioning.<sup>99</sup>

While Golovnin was in captivity, Petr Rikord, the new Captain of the *Diana* in 1812, prepared a rescue effort. Rikord anchored in Okhotsk, securing a letter from

<sup>96</sup> R. H. P. Mason and J. G. Caiger, *A History of Japan: Revised Edition*, (Rutland, Vt: Tuttle Publishing, 1997).

<sup>97</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 287.

<sup>98</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 288.

<sup>99</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 282–84.



FIGURE 2 Japanese scroll depicting Golovnin’s capture alongside six other crew members of the *Diana*, and the Kurile Alexei at the back. Note the exaggeration of the height of the captured Russians. “Oroshajin Ikedori no zu” (Capture of the Russians) kindly reproduced with the permission of Waseda University Library, Tokyo: 05 09315.

the Governor stating that Khvostov’s raid had not been sanctioned, took onboard seven Japanese subjects, six of them shipwrecked fishermen and the last one a prisoner from the Khvostov raids, to be used to exchange for Golovnin.<sup>100</sup> The Russian government, which was preoccupied with Napoleon’s invasion of Russia, could offer no help in this matter. Rikord returned to the castle at Kunashir where Golovnin had been captured and was fired on again by the garrison. Nevertheless, Rikord landed several Japanese hostages to try and negotiate with the Japanese, but one of them returned with a message that Golovnin had been put to death.<sup>101</sup>

The *Diana* left Kunashir but soon fell upon a Japanese merchant ship called the *Kansai Maru* navigated by Takadaya Kahei, a merchant from Matsumae who had gained significant wealth from his trade between the Japanese and the Ainu in the Kuriles.<sup>102</sup> Rikord released most of the sailors but kept four other Japanese sailors and one Kurile as hostages, representing the four other Russians and Alexei the Kurilian that the Japanese had captive. The Japanese responded by issuing an order that any Russian ship in Japanese waters, whether in distress or not, was to be burned and its crews put to the sword.<sup>103</sup> Upon hearing this news, the captured crew of the *Diana* began their escape.<sup>104</sup> Golovnin and three other Russians escaped during the night into the mountains to make their way to the coast and commandeer

<sup>100</sup> Lensen, “Early Russo-Japanese Relations,” p. 35.  
<sup>101</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 259.  
<sup>102</sup> Ann B. Irish, *Hokkaido: A History of Ethnic Transition and Development on Japan’s Northern Island*, 1st edition (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2009), p. 64.  
<sup>103</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, pp. 298–99.  
<sup>104</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 278.

a seaworthy boat. However, after a week, the attempt failed, and the Japanese recaptured them and threw them into cages.<sup>105</sup>

The captured Japanese sailors were brought back to Kamchatka to be held hostage, with two dying of scurvy.<sup>106</sup> The captured merchant Kahei proved to be a willing negotiator, and Rikord released his hostage to negotiate with the Japanese of Kunashir for a prisoner exchange. After some deliberations, including some Japanese questions about the letter the Governor of Okhotsk had sent that absolved Golovnin of the Khvostov raids, the *Diana* was allowed entry at Hakodate in October. There, Rikord finalized negotiations with the Japanese and Golovnin, with the Japanese releasing him on 6 October 1813.<sup>107</sup>

### Publication of a “*Captivity in Japan*”

Geopolitically, the Golovnin incident did not lead to many changes between Russia and Japan, and a lull in contact developed between the two countries.<sup>108</sup> Russia was perhaps too embroiled in war with France until 1815 to continue its ventures into the Pacific and make contact with the Japanese again. Indeed, no official contact was attempted with Japan until August 1853, forty years after Golovnin’s imprisonment. In 1816, Golovnin published his prison notebook as the first edition of *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan* in Russian.<sup>109</sup> Shortly thereafter, in 1817, he set out on another voyage to Alaska. He returned to St. Petersburg in 1819, ending his career as an explorer, and took several important administrative posts in the Russian navy.<sup>110</sup> *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan* was published in English in 1818, with publishing companies starting to translate the work into French and other languages afterward, expanding its popularity among European readers.<sup>111</sup> Golovnin’s memoirs had soon been widely translated, published, and distributed around Europe. The book was a bestseller in Europe, offering a rare window into Japanese society that was not offered by the Dutch academia and was the first Russian ethnographic study of the Japanese from inside Japan.<sup>112</sup> In Japan itself, the book was only translated into Japanese in 1825 (entitled *Sōyaku nihon kiji*) by order of the Shogunate when a Dutch copy arrived in Dejima.<sup>113</sup> Unlike the first two volumes

<sup>105</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 147.

<sup>107</sup> Lensen, “Early Russo-Japanese Relations,” p. 35.

<sup>108</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, p. 36.

<sup>109</sup> The original Russian version can be found at Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin, *Zapiski flota Kapitana Golovnina o prikliucheniakh ego v plenu u iapontsev v 1811, 1812 i 1813 godakh, s priobshcheniem zamechaniï ego o iaponskom gosudarstve i narode* (St. Petersburg: Morskaiia tip., 1816). For his voyage to Alaska following his captivity in Japan, see Vasilii Mikhailovich Golovnin, *Around the World on the Kamchatka, 1817–1819* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Historical Society, 1979).

<sup>110</sup> Kenneth N. Owens and Alton S. Donnelly, *The Wreck of the Sv. Nikolai* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Irish, *Hokkaido*, p. 64.

<sup>112</sup> J. Thomas Rimer, *A Hidden Fire: Russian and Japanese Cultural Encounters, 1868–1926* (Washington, D. C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995), p. 3; Hiroshi Kimura, *The Kurillian Knot: A History of Japanese-Russian Border Negotiations*, trans. Mark Ealey, 1st edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> Yoshiko Fukuyasu, “The History of Russian-to-Japanese Translators from the Edo Period Onwards” Ph. D. diss. (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2014), p. 15, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8df311zk>.

that focused on Golovnin's journey to Japan and subsequent captivity, the majority of the third volume consists of many details about Japan's geography, history, language, religion, government, laws, industry, military and foreign affairs. Golovnin used his observations in tandem with Kaempfer and Charlevoix's books which are often cited throughout his text, for example, in the footnotes of p.2-3:

Charlevoix states, that the Japanese are much prejudiced in favour of their own climate, and acknowledges that it must be very healthy, since the people are long-lived, the women very prolific, and diseases very uncommon. We know not what dependence to place upon Kaempfer's wonderful story of a village upon the side of a mountain [...].

However, in comparison with those academics who had been limited in their exposure to Japan by the policies of the Sakoku, Golovnin's perspective was unique. The confines of Dejima limited the potential for observations by previous scholars, such as Kaempfer and Thunberg. Golovnin and his crewmates in contrast were often given the liberty to walk the streets of Matsumae and Hakodate. Furthermore, his imprisonment for two and a half years gave him enough time to make careful observations about Japan. The exclusive nature of his book was not lost on Golovnin either, who used the Preface to accuse the Dutch of secrecy in their knowledge of Japan, explaining that his book was an attempt to scratch the surface of a hitherto unknown land.<sup>114</sup> However, Golovnin's observations had been made on the periphery of Japan, never venturing onto the main island of Honshu. Therefore, his perspective was unique, but was not necessarily representative of the cultural and political practices of central Japan.<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, the location of his captivity coupled with his exposure to Japan made his record of Japan the most distinctive compared to what had come before. Furthermore, Golovnin's memoirs marked the most extensive work on Japan published since that of Kaempfer's a century before and would become an authoritative work for future Western ventures to Japan.<sup>116</sup>

## Japanese Reactions

Following Golovnin's captivity, Russia would continue to expand into the North Pacific and the Kuril Islands, but would limit their attempts to enter Japan until the 1850s. The culmination of these Russian attempts to "open" Japan would have a profound effect on the Japanese outlook toward Sakoku and rangaku.

Like the banned works of Shihei in the 1790s, the fear of foreign incursions led to renewed debates over how to counter European intervention. Some intellectuals, such as Satō Nobuhiro, advocated aggressive Japanese expansion, occupying Russian ports in Kamchatka, as well as launching an assault on China and on Dutch holdings in Java.<sup>117</sup> Like Shihei's before him, Nobuhiro's proposals staked a radically different position to the official line permitted by Sakoku. Isolation as a policy had been pursued by the Tokugawa

<sup>114</sup> Golovnin, *Memoirs of a Captivity in Japan*, Preface.

<sup>115</sup> Irish, *Hokkaido*.

<sup>116</sup> Maggs, "Imprisoned," p. 343.

<sup>117</sup> G. Daniels and C. Tsuzuki, eds., *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000: Social and Cultural Perspectives*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2002), p. 18.

not just out of fear of foreign encroachment but also to promote internal stability, fearing that local Daimyo would be empowered through foreign contact. Rather than pursue Nobuhiro's ambitious expansionist vision, the aftermath of Golovnin's captivity would see new laws that renewed the Bakufu's commitment to Sakoku. This culminated in 1825 with the *Ikokusen Uchiharairai* (Edict to Repel Foreign Vessels), repelling foreign ships and killing castaways rather than aiding them.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, the suspicions raised by Golovnin's journey imperiled the work of scholars in Dejima, whose unique insight into Japanese society had already been eroded through European incursions. Perhaps one of the most renowned records of Japan prior to its opening in 1853 was by the German doctor Franz von Siebold in 1823.<sup>119</sup> In a peculiar role reversal for someone going through Dejima, Siebold's experience of Japan was heavily shaped by Vasily Golovnin's events the decade before. Although Siebold's establishment of a medical school in Nagasaki was a continuation of Dejima's legacy of medical knowledge exchange with Japan, Siebold quickly found his journey cut short when he was allowed to participate in the tributary march to Edo in 1826.<sup>120</sup>

While at the Shogun's court, he made the acquaintance and soon the friendship of the Shogun's court astronomer and cartographer, Takahashi Kageyasu. Already under suspicion for his German ancestry, Siebold acquired detailed maps of Japan from Kageyasu. Much of the North of Japan had been charted by Mamiya Rinzo and Ino Tadaka, another cartographer who had made maps of Japan between 1801 and 1818.<sup>121</sup> These maps were of strategic importance to the Japanese due to their precision and study of Hokkaido and the Kurils, areas which had become of considerable strategic importance to Japan since the Japanese believed that the Russians would use Kamchatka and the Kurils as launchpads for future incursions into Japan.<sup>122</sup>

Siebold sent the maps to Europe, but the leaking of knowledge to Siebold as well as his non-Dutch origins finally caught up with him. In 1828, Japanese cartographer Mamiyo Rinzo, having spied on Siebold, discovered his possession of the maps as well as a Kimono with the Tokugawa emblem upon it.<sup>123</sup> The government seized Kageyasu and several of his students, accusing Siebold of being a Russian spy and stealing an official item with the Shogun's emblem. The Bakufu tortured Kageyasu and his associates to pressure them to reveal information they had divulged to Siebold; Kageyasu died during the interrogation. Siebold was held prisoner and expelled on the next chartered ship out of Dejima in 1829, sent out along with a large collection of (nonsensitive) information about Japan on board.<sup>124</sup> Despite his expulsion, Siebold found a ready audience in Europe for information on Japan, their appetite whetted by Golovnin's memoirs. Siebold would publish

<sup>118</sup> Vaporis, *Voices of Early Modern Japan*, pp. 115–17.

<sup>119</sup> Arnulf Thiede et al., "The Life and Times of Philipp Franz von Siebold," *Surgery Today* 39, no. 4 (2009), p. 276.

<sup>120</sup> Thiede et al., "Philipp Franz von Siebold," p. 277.

<sup>121</sup> Thiede et al., "Philipp Franz von Siebold," p. 278.

<sup>122</sup> Florence Ogawa, "Ino Tadataka, les premiers pas de la géographie moderne au Japon," *Ebisu - Etudes Japonaises* 16, no. 1 (1997), pp. 95–119.

<sup>123</sup> Compton and Thijssse, "The Remarkable P. F. B. Von Siebold," p. 285.

<sup>124</sup> Compton and Thijssse, p. 278; Marius B. Jansen, "Rangaku and Westernization," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 1984), p. 54.

extensively on Japanese botany and horticulture as well as Japanese manners and customs.<sup>125</sup> For his renowned work in Japan, the King of the Netherlands appointed him as an advisor on Japanese Affairs.<sup>126</sup> Unlike his predecessors such as Thunberg and Kaempfer, who operated when Sakoku had been slightly relaxed, Siebold's voyage was plagued by the memories of many Russian incursions that still haunted the Shogunate.

The Bakufu's expulsion of Siebold revealed the Bakufu's heightened commitments to Sakoku, yet these foreign incursions did not impede Japanese interest in rangaku. New rangaku schools would open, especially in the northern Japanese domain at Sendai, that specialized in Western medicine.<sup>127</sup> However, the pursuit of rangaku was also evolving, broadening to a wider interest in European learning (yōgaku), through the translation of English, French, and Russian texts, which was officially endorsed by the Bakufu through their Office for the Investigation of Barbarian Texts (Bansho shirabesho).<sup>128</sup>

Golovnin was an influential antecedent. His captivity had been instrumental to the translation of the Russian lexicon into Japanese by rangaku interpreters such as Baba Sajūrō.<sup>129</sup> Russian medical works were also translated, including a book on vaccination that was translated in 1820.<sup>130</sup> But the increasing European presence, both by Russia, but later through Britain's defeat of China in the Opium War (1839–1842) would see the traditional Japanese pursuits of European medicine and astronomy increasingly superseded by renewed interest in Western military practice.<sup>131</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite his expulsion, Siebold's extensive publications and presentations on Japan would mark one of the last major European records of Japan under Sakoku, and a final high point in Dejima's utility as a portal into Japan. Following Commodore Perry's forced opening of Japan in 1853 and the Treaty of Kanagawa with Japan, allowing the access of the United States and most European states into Japan, Dejima as the sole point of contact between Europe and Japan was rendered obsolete and it was dismantled in 1858. However, its functions would be continued through the establishment of a naval training school in 1855, as the beleaguered Bakufu sought the rapid modernization of the Japanese navy to counter the growing dominance of Western powers, which Sakoku could no longer hold at bay.<sup>132</sup>

Perry's entry into Yokohama ended the 200-year Dutch monopoly on European relations with Japan, but it was a position that had been steadily eroded from the late eighteenth century onwards. The decline of Dutch power in the eighteenth

<sup>125</sup> Compton and Thijsse, "The Remarkable P. F. B. Von Siebold," pp. 287–91.

<sup>126</sup> Thiede et al., "The Life and Times of Philipp Franz von Siebold," p. 279.

<sup>127</sup> Goodman, *The Dutch Experience*, p. 160.

<sup>128</sup> Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, pp. 153–54.

<sup>129</sup> This text was called *Orosbia-go shōsei*, Dmitry Streltsov and Nobuo Shimotomai, *A History of Russo-Japanese Relations: Over Two Centuries of Cooperation and Competition* (Leiden; Boston: BRILL, 2019), p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> S. Mishima, *The History of Ophthalmology in Japan* (Oostende: Wayenborgh Publishing, 2004), p. 222.

<sup>131</sup> Jackson, *Network of Knowledge*, pp. 100, 134.

<sup>132</sup> David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), p. 5.

century, culminating in its subjugation by France, as well as the growing expansionary pressure from Russia, had made it near impossible to maintain the exclusion of other European powers from Japan. Golovnin had, perhaps inadvertently, landed at a time of particular fear of European intervention, considerably aggravated by violent acts such as those committed by HMS Phaeton and the Russian attacks on Sakhalin. The decision to capture and imprison Golovnin and his crew rather than drive them away, thus creating an opportunity to learn from Golovnin and his captured crew, revealed flexibility in the policy of Sakoku, that was willing to adapt and learn from Russia's northern incursions.

Prior to 1853, Golovnin's inadvertent foray into Japan had been one of the most significant tests to Japanese isolationism. Yet it had provided a learning experience for the Japanese, whose knowledge of other European cultures had been limited by Sakoku and the strict control over rangaku. This contact revealed a considerable amount about Russian culture rather than Sakoku's traditional focus on Western medicine and astronomy. Conversely, Golovnin's memoirs sparked great interest across Europe in Japanese society. Being the only outsider to write such an exposé of Japan without having passed through Dejima was a unique feat and one that foreshadowed the beginning of a new era of Western interest in Japan.

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