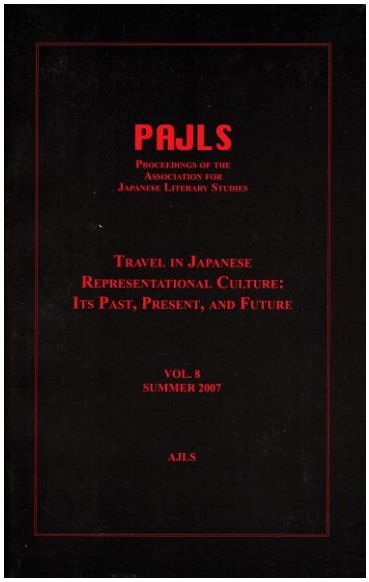
“The Role of Shipwrecked Japanese in Narrating the World outside Tokugawa Japan”

Dalia Švambaryté

Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies 8 (2007): 203–211.



PAJLS 8:
Travel in Japanese Representational Culture: Its Past, Present, and Future.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

THE ROLE OF SHIPWRECKED JAPANESE IN NARRATING THE WORLD OUTSIDE TOKUGAWA JAPAN
江戸時代の「漂流記」における海外のイメージの諸相

Dalia Švambarytė
Vilnius University

INTRODUCTION

The sea, as the lines of communications from and to Japanese Archipelago, has been developed from ancient times. However, any kind of overseas passage was strictly forbidden in the Years of Kan'ei 寛永 (1624–1644) when Japan adopted the policy of national seclusion. The sea voyage was limited to the domestic routes for commerce, which centered around Edo and Osaka, while the only people who had the privilege to eyewitness foreign countries at the time were sea drifters.

Japan's closed-country policy during the Tokugawa period not only prevented foreigners from entering Japan but also made it nearly impossible for those Japanese who left the country to return home. It was not until 1792 that the first castaways to Western countries were allowed to come back to Japan. Common practice had the returnees first interrogated by the magistrate's officials in Nagasaki and then by officials of their native feudal domains. Those returnees who had landed in Japan other places than Nagasaki were put through initial questionings by the local authorities. Each time records of the testimonies were taken. Finally, the former castaways either put their stories into writing themselves or, predominantly, were interviewed by the third party who later arranged their narratives into the so-called castaway accounts (漂流記 *hyōryūki*).

The *hyōryūki* fall into two categories of their own. The *kansenbon* 官撰本, or official reports, were ordered by the government and written down by prominent scholars who did heavy editing along the way. The *shisenbon* 私撰本, or personal reports, were produced by private individuals who took interest in the adventures of the sea drifters. A number of the *shisenbon* were illegal copies of the official records of the interrogations. Neither official nor personal reports were allowed official circulation, and the ban resulted in hand-to-hand distribution of secretly handwritten copies or, occasionally, their underground productions in woodblock print.

Sometimes the castaway narratives were given away to the public by the official editors themselves who harbored secret intentions of introducing the knowledge of the foreign countries to broader audience.

The *hyōryūki* were also an object of exchange at 'lending libraries' (貸本屋 *kashihon'ya*), as the extant catalogues indicate, that undoubtedly helped the accounts to acquire mass reader. Since there are many manuscripts (写本 *shahon*) of the castaway accounts stored in various libraries throughout Japan, it would be safe to imply that they were copied and read for over one hundred years before being mass-produced in late Meiji period.

In this paper I will deal with some aspects of the process of creating collective images of the foreign lands within the reports of sea drifters of the Tokugawa period. I will pay particular attention to the *hyōryūki* of earlier period, namely *Hokusa bunryaku* 北槎聞略 (1794) and *Kankai ibun* 環海異聞 (1804), as watershed texts in the production of castaway narratives that present special interest from the viewpoint of the narrator–compiler relationship.

SUBJECTIVITY VS. OBJECTIVITY IN THE ACCOUNTS OF TRAVEL

Around the end of the seventeenth century, Japanese crew members from several wrecked ships were washed ashore on mainland Asia and nearby islands. By the late 18th century, however, contact between Europeans and Japanese castaways had increased, and wider geography started to be covered by the accounts of repatriated castaways.

The first castaways allowed to return to Japan from the Western (and Christian countries) were Daikokuya Kōdayū 大黒屋光太夫 (1751–1828), a native of Ise Province, and his two companions. After spending many years in Russia, they reached the present island of Hokkaido in 1792, as part of a mission headed by the Russian envoy Adam Laxman.

Another company of sea drifters, natives of the Sendai clan led by Tsudayū 津太夫 (1744–1814), were the first Japanese to circle the globe. They were shipwrecked on the Russian coast in 1793, and ten years later, on their way to Japan, joined the first round-the-world Russian expedition of Lieutenant Commander Adam Johan von Krusenstern (1770–1846). Their experiences both in Russia and aboard the Russian ship "Nadezhda", which crossed two oceans before arriving at Nagasaki, were documented in the *Kankai ibun* (The Strange Stories of a Tour Round the World) by Ōtsuki Gentaku 大槻玄沢 (1757–1827), a *rangakusha* and official physician of the Sendai Domain.

Travel writings are descriptions of encounters with the new, the other, and projections of it. Most of the territories visited by the Sendai castaways during their circumnavigating voyage were colonial spaces of the Western countries, and it would be natural to presume that they tended to see things through the eyes of the Westerners. Although the

Russians also visited many of the lands for the first time, they did their homework during the preparations for the expedition, and were not heading to the terra incognita as in the case of the Japanese sailors. In their travel accounts the Russians also tried to fit into the general trend of contemporary travel diaries and reflected, as a result, prejudices and opinions formed even before the travelers had left their own country.

Although the Japanese *hyōryūki* were of different nature than Western travel diaries and frequently functioned under the guise of documents which naturally supposes accuracy, some of the evidence presented, for example, in the *Kankai ibun* was also based on hearsay rather then direct observation. It is evident, when compared with the Russian travel reports, that while being physically aboard the "Nadezhda" the Japanese seamen did not necessarily disembark and have contact with the local people in the way the rest of the crew did, and some of the stories they only learned from the Russians later. Nevertheless, the castaway reports present the facts as the experience of castaways themselves.[1]

This does not mean that all the evidence was intentionally or unintentionally fabricated. The *Kankai ibun* is richly illustrated with drawings of everything the sailors actually saw in the course of their long voyage through all Russia and back from Kronstadt to Nagasaki. The devil-like figures of the Marquesans in the illustrations of *Kankai ibun* are, in fact, based on the immediate observations and comments of the Japanese, and, consequently, contrast sharply with the lavish descriptions of "extremely handsome" and "well made Nukahiwers" in the *Krusenstren's Voyage Round the World*.[2] It is obvious, then, that the images in the castaway account were inspired more by the real appearance of the locals seen through the eyes of the Japanese castaways than by prejudice, although the warning by the Russians about the "cruelties" of the natives undoubtedly had its effects on Tsudayū and other Japanese. On the other hand, the depiction of foreigners as devils had a long tradition in Japan, even before it became a politically closed country. What was, therefore, manifested in the formal expression of the *hyōryūki*, was more an influence of Japanese context than that of the foreign perspective. And agents of that influence were often the editors of the accounts.

---

[1] Ishikawa Eikichi石川榮吉. Nihonjin no Oseania hakken日本人のオセアニア発見. Heibonsha, 1992, pp. 65–66.

[2] Adam J. von Krusenstern. *Voyage Round the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, vol. 1, trans. Richard Belgrave Hoppner, N. Israel, Amsterdam & Da Capo Press, New York, 1968, pp. 152–154.

Unlike Western travel diaries, the Japanese accounts of sea drifters are by character testimonies deprived of intimacy. The degree of a third party's involvement is a relevant question in such a case. The editor was basically a co-author who used castaways as informants. During official testimonies the returnees were conscious of interrogators and reluctant to leak information but it was exactly this information that the scholars who compiled the castaway narratives were interested in. While the interrogators at the magistrates followed their duties of routine recording, the editors of *hyōryūki* encouraged the sailors to systematize things, facts and impressions, and then molded their narratives into a setup form.

The general model for castaway accounts was created by a physician and *rangakusha* Katsuragawa Hōshū 桂川甫周 (1751–1809), who covered the travel of Kōdayū in a book called *Hokusa bunryaku* (Brief Notes on the Northern Regions). This monumental work arguably stands as the most significant castaway account which had considerable influence on subsequent Japanese *hyōryūki*. Its influence is seen in the formation of an overall encyclopedic structure, a tendency toward hyper-realism, and the codification of particular themes.[3] These techniques overcame only minor alterations in later castaway accounts. The text also contains numerous illustrations, including a map of the sailor's route, Russian clothing, utensils, etc., and pioneers in shaping the visual images of foreign countries, which reappear in later *hyōryūki*.

IMAGES OF THE FOREIGN IN THE *KANKAI IBUN*

Many of the castaway accounts are accompanied by illustrations, in other words, narrativity of the *hyōryūki* is complimented with visuality, which was an important aspect of publications in the Tokugawa period and which tells us yet another story about popular imagination of the time.

Every image has its own social and historical background of formation. By tracing its genesis we can reveal strategies of conveying the message, which is related to social and political situation. Ziva Ben-Porat argues that "all literary presentations, of the self and the familiar as well as of the other and the unknown, depend on cognitive models and represent our knowledge structures."[4] The observation is especially

[3] *Hokusa bunryaku* which consists of twelve volumes not only depicts the activities of Kōdayū in the Aleutians where he first landed and later his life in Russia, but also covers variety of other topics including geography, history, industry, local customs, etc.

[4] Ziva Ben-Porat. "Recurring Misrepresentations: Images of Others and their Interpretations". In *Inter-Asian comparative literature*, eds. Kawamoto Koji,

pertinent to travel accounts since a travel destination is "usually perceived by travelers through its mythology, narratives, stories and biographies that surround the place."[5]

In the Japanese castaway accounts, the descriptive intermingles with the imaginative, and through the efforts of their editors, they properly participate in the common stock of literary codes and conventions of the Tokugawa period. The *Kankai ibun* is a characteristic work in the sense that its editor Ōtsuki Gentaku adopted the strategies put forward by the *Hokusa bunryaku* and, in establishing them as a model, contributed to the intertextual discourse within scholarly community of the Tokugawa period.

Contrary to Kōdayū who took home many drawings and notes, Tsudayū had only his memory to trust while narrating his travel experiences. The majority of sea-drifters were low literate, and their memory played an important role as the only reliable (and not always so) source.[6] Ōtsuki Gentaku, the editor of the *Kankai ibun* and a faithful follower of the *Hokusa bunryaku*, thought that pictorial images were essential in filling the gaps of the narrative and increasing the understanding of the subject under concern. He would invite artists to participate in the interview with the returnees and then have them draw the pictures of different foreign objects and foreign people.

What is notable about the images of foreigners in the earlier castaway accounts, is that the people are almost invariably introduced as couples of a man and a woman and are in this sense similar to The Map of the Myriad Countries (万国総図 *Bankoku sōzu*) dated 1645, which in its own turn is a copy of the world map that an Italian missionary, Matteo Ricci, had made in China at the end of the 16th century. The *Bankoku Sōzu* is sometimes called Map of the World and its People since it was often complimented with the depictions of "The World's People," based on various Dutch and Flemish sources. The nationalities are usually

---

Heh-Hsiang Yuan, Ohsawa Yoshihiro. Vol. 6 of The force of vision: proceedings of the XIIIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association = Actes du XIIIème Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée. Tokyo: Telecommunications Association, University of Tokyo Press, 1995, p. 369.

[5] Lolita Kuršataitė. "Commodification of Culture: Selling India". *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, 5 (2005), p. 23.

[6] Most of the returnees were commoners. There were, however, exceptions, when warriors happened to be onboard a wrecked ship and later, after having survived the ordeal of drifting, report their observations of foreign lands with pedantic detail, as in the case of Satsuma castaways (『薩州人唐国漂流記』*Sasshūjin Tōkoku hyōryūki*; 1774).

represented by male and female pairs dressed in some culturally distinctive clothing.

Images tend to be repetitive in any culture as there are certain conventions in producing them. The vogue in depiction of foreigners as male-female couples persisted throughout Tokugawa period although towards the end of the age costumes and faces of the couples on the world maps acquired certain Japaneseness, absent in earlier works, and Chinese style of mixing up images of foreign nationalities and fictional icons of monsters into one category was introduced as another line of representation of the outside world.

Kinya Tsuruta has observed that Japanese literary works typically present Westerners as "two-dimensional cardboard cutouts defined in simplistic and subjective terms, rather than as fully rounded human beings capable of subtle interaction with Japanese characters".[7] The saying is also applicable to non-Western nationalities that are depicted in the *Kankai ibun* and the castaway accounts of the Tokugawa period, as a whole. Thus, at the first glance, the inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) in the *Kankai ibun* do not differ much from, for example, the Guineans in the *Bankoku Sōzu* type of maps.

Another problem is that the *hyōryūki* were not printed but copied and recopied manually together with the illustrations which, however recognizable, inevitably got more or less distorted during the process. Side-by-side comparison underscores both the varying degree of copying prowess as well as the effect of third- and fourth-generation copying. The text of representation was not completely misread but the vulnerable quality of the image would easier betray its stereotypical function in the Japanese academic society.

THE ROLE OF THE RETURNEES IN THE INTERTEXTUAL SPACE OF EDO SOCIETY

It is important to examine how the castaway accounts, which would sometimes be assigned a textbook function, "translated" the unfamiliar to ordinary Japanese readers. However, it is even more important to consider how these images maintained function in the intellectual milieu of Tokugawa Japan who was dominated by the power of precedence, and expected its scholars to know the tradition and embrace it.

---

[7] Kinya Tsuruta. "Images of Westerners in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and Nakazato Tsuneko". In *Images of Westerners in Chinese and Japanese Literature*, ed. Hua Meng and Sukehiro Hirakawa. Vol. 10 of The proceedings of the xvth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association "*Literature as cultural memory*": Leiden, 16–22 August 1997. Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2000, p. 151.

Daikokuya Kōdayū, unlike Tsudayū, was a person of literacy and a possessor of many talents that were noticed and appreciated, first, by the Russians and, later, by the Japanese, in spite of the fact that for his violation of the Tokugawa shogunate's seclusion policy Kōdayū was sentenced to house arrest for life in Edo. These unusually harsh measures did not prevent him from being invited to the first celebration of the Dutch New Year in Edo, called *Oranda Shōgatsu* and held on 1 January 1795 by Ōtsuki Gentaku at his residence in Kyōbashi. A painting of this gathering by Ichikawa Gakusan 市川岳山 (1760–1847) shows friends, colleagues, and students of Ōtsuki sitting together, pictures of Hippocrates and a unicorn displayed on the wall,[8] and Western food and drink served on the table. Kōdayū is seated in front of the tokonoma alcove and holds a paper with Russian inscription.

It is notable that many passages of the *Kankai ibun*, which was completed nine years later, end with the remark "Daikokuya Kōdayū said (大光曰)". The references to Kōdayū indicate that he was a constant consultant to Gentaku as an authority on Russia, and readily provided the correct information each time Tsudayū would make a mistake or betray his ignorance that frustrated his editor.

On the other hand, the participation of Kōdayū at the *Oranda Shōgatsu*, proves that from the very beginning his role was bigger than just a consultant. Even if the exoticism of Kōdayū's situation played the main stage in opening the door for him to this higher echelon of Edo society, it would be impossible to imagine Tsudayū in such gathering of scholars, no matter how exotic his experience was. Gentaku considered Tsudayū's unprecedented travel only the irony of destiny always denying him the credit and ridiculing his efforts.

In case of Kōdayū, however, the roles of informant and editor eventually got mixed, and he was able to take the seat of a special guest at the residence of Ōtsuki Gentaku behind the same table as Katsuragawa Hoshū, the compiler of his own travel account. There was even more to that. Kōdayū knew his books and appreciated a precedent. Most of the maps of Japan he had drawn in Russia show Honshū and Kyūshū connected by land and are said to be based on Japanese maps in popular household encyclopedias called *Setsuyōshū* (節用集), a copy of which survived the drifting together with him. In this situation, Kōdayū's

[8] Both pictures are references to Ōtsuki Gentaku as a host of the evening. He was a physician by occupation, and he also translated Dutch texts for the *Ikkaku Sankō* 一角纂考, a monograph on the unicorn by Kimura Kenkadō 木村蒹葭堂 (1736–1802).

respect for conventional representation took preference over his own instincts as a seaman and made him a worthwhile member of the Tokugawa scholarship, in which the book-learned knowledge was valued more than raw experience of travel.

CONCLUSIONS

The initial court testimonies of the castaways developed into a kind of documentary genre which gave voice to ordinary people through the benefit of their compilers. Numerous *hyōryūki* were created for and smuggled to broader audience. Although the currency of the accounts of sea-drifters was, therefore, not restricted to the elite layers of Tokugawa society, the original message in most of the cases was intended for those who represented contemporary scholarship, and the texts themselves were embedded in and referring to a specific social cultural situation.

On the encountering with the unknown, the Japanese castaways paid attention to the signs of "otherness", while their editors configured those signs within familiar frameworks. The role of the compilers of the *hyōryūki* was dubious. They were interviewers who had to put into record the narratives of the castaways but they were also book-learned scholars, who laid special importance on the images already in circulation and demonstrated their knowledge by supplementing the *hyōryūki* with comments based on accurate as well as inaccurate information accumulated from outside. The *hyōryūki* would, therefore, easily become subject to stereotyping and follow accepted patterns not only in the organization of the narrative itself but also in presenting pictures of outside world.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Edo hyōryūki sōshū: Ishii Kendō korekushon 江戸漂流記総集：石井研堂これくしょん、ed. Yamashita Tsuneo 山下恒夫, vol. 6, Nihon Hyōronsha, 1992.

Ishikawa Eikichi 石川榮吉. *Nihonjin no Oseania hakken* 日本人のオセアニア発見. Heibonsha, 1992.

Kankai ibun: honbun to kenkyū. 環海異聞：本文と研究, ed. Sugimoto Tsutomu 杉本つとむ et al. Yasaka Shobō, 1986.

Katsuragawa Hoshū 桂川甫周. *Hokusa bunryaku* 北槎聞略, ed. Kamei Takayoshi 亀井高孝. Tōkyō: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1989.

Kobayashi Shigefumi 小林茂文. *Nipponjin ikoku hyōryūki* ニッポン人異国漂流記. Shōgakukan, 2000.

Krusenstern, Adam J. von. *Voyage Round the World in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806*, vol. 1, translated from the original German by

Richard Belgrave Hoppner. N. Israel, Amsterdam & Da Capo Press, New York, 1968.

Ninomiya, Kazuo Z. "A View of the Outside World during Tokugawa Japan: An Analysis of Reports of Travel by Castaways, 1636 to 1856". Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1972.

Plummer, Katherine. *The Shogun's Reluctant Ambassadors: Sea Drifters*. Tokyo: Lotus Press, 1985.

Webber, Bert. *Wrecked Japanese Junks Adrift in the North Pacific Ocean*. Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1984.

Yonemoto, Marcia. "Maps and Metaphors of the 'Small Eastern Sea' in Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868), *Geographical Review*, 89:2 (1999).