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## François Caron and his *Beschryvinghe van Iappan* – His Perception of the Japanese

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### Introduction

François Caron is probably one of the most remarkable men to have ever served at the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). Primarily through his successful enterprises for the VOC in Japan, he eventually became one of the most powerful figures in the East Indies as Director-General of the VOC. In Japan, he was able to distinguish himself from other Western representatives through his uncommon ability to fluently speak Japanese and to understand Japanese manners and customs. According to Boxer, these abilities contributed significantly to establish a positive trading relationship with the Japanese (Boxer, 1935, p.cxxiii). However, these attributes alone do not specify why Caron was such a successful entrepreneur in Japan. The Jesuits, for instance, had even greater knowledge about Japan and were nevertheless not held in a similar high esteem as Caron.

Although his linguistic and behavioural qualities contributed without doubt to this positive relationship, other aspects were also of considerable importance. The goals of the Westerners and Japanese in trading, for instance, and whether these objectives could be mutually profitable to both. The first and main goal of the VOC in Japan was obviously to gain profit by trading. The Japanese with their autarkic protectionist policies, however, were not as active in the area of international trade. Nonetheless, both countries were

able to establish a positive trading relationship during Caron's presence in Japan.

In his book; *Beschryvinghe van Iappan*,<sup>1</sup> Caron analyses the Japanese state and society. Originally intended as a report for the Governor-General of Batavia, his work was very succinct. However, in spite of the nature of the report, which required Caron to provide objective information, he becomes more personal when writing about Japanese trade. As such, the present chapter investigates the basis of this apparent subjectivity how Caron depicted the Japanese and why. Consequently, the chapter focuses more deeply on the linkage between Caron's vision of the Japanese 'Other' and how this was displayed in his work, especially in regards to the trading activities of the Japanese.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, it is necessary to introduce Caron and his writing, since he and his book *Beschryvinge van Japan* are the main guidelines for this research. Therefore, the first section of this chapter zooms in on the context in which this book was written. Moreover, this section contains a short biography of Caron's life and his book, as well as the publication history of his work. The second section investigates into more detail what the main trading aims of the Dutch were in Japan, and how these differed from those of the Japanese. It takes a closer look on the Dutch stance towards its competition in the Japanese Traffick (trade and, therefore, serves as a background to gain a better understanding what events on the national level could have potentially contributed to Caron's perception of the Japanese.

Building on this, The final section focuses on Caron's vision on the Japanese trade and investigates why he suddenly displayed a rather high degree of subjectivity in his report when writing on these matters. Furthermore this section demonstrates how his writing displays his view of the Japanese 'Other' and his own position in Japanese society.

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1 The full title of the 1662 edition is: *Rechte beschryvinghe van het machtigh koninkrijck van Iappan, besaende in verscheide vragen betreffende desselfs regering, coophandel, maniere van leven, strenge justitie, et cetera, voorgesteld door den heer Philip Lucas, Directeur Generael wegens den Nederlandsen Staet in India, ende door de heer François Caron, president over de Compagnie's ommeslagh in Iappan, benantwoort in den iare 1636*

2 The Other is a rather intricate concept which occurs when an individual meets a new society or other individual and that individual has to describe the other society. The Other is used as a mirror to reflect one's own society and is, therefore, intentionally or unintentionally created. As such, the concept of 'The Other' is inextricably linked with self-awareness and self-criticism. (Said, 1978, p.3)

## Caron's book

Caron's *Beschryvinghe van Iappan* was written in 1636. By then, Caron had already stayed in Japan for fifteen years. The Dutch first started to trade with the Japanese in 1609, after earlier attempts since 1600 had been made to open trade relations. The main goods of interest that the Japanese could offer the Dutch were gold and silver. In order to increase the efficiency of trading, the VOC established a trading-post at Hirado, some 100 km north of Nagasaki. This is also the place where Caron would first step foot on Japanese soil.

During Caron's stay of more than twenty years, he obviously gained a lot of knowledge about Japanese society and state structure. In 1636 Caron had a leading position at the VOC-trading-post at Hirado, Japan. His work included annual trips to the Shogunal court at Edo and, obviously, representing the VOC whenever necessary. That year, Philip Lucasz became the new VOC Director-General, the second highest position in the VOC ranks. Lucasz wanted to know as much as possible about the countries with whom the VOC was trading in Asia. Therefore, he sent Caron and all the other heads of trading-stations a set of questions which could help him determine the trading possibilities for the next years. These questions would become the chapter headings of the book that would appear first in 1645 (Boxer, 1935, p.174).

Therefore, only when Philip Lucasz requested Caron to write a report about Japan based on thirty questions, Caron was more or less forced to produce a detailed analysis of Japan. Main aim of the report was to find out whether Japan was still an interesting trading partner or not, but the wide range of questions demonstrates that Lucasz was also much interested in Japan. Caron was of course very knowledgeable about Japan; on the one hand by own observation, and on the other hand through his Japanese wife, Japanese friends and business acquaintances. Therefore, he was definitely the right person to answer these questions.

However, it never was the intention of Caron to write and publish a book. In fact, when one observes the writing style of Caron, it can be even be argued that he saw the work as a nuisance rather than as a means to display his knowledge about Japan. This explains why someone who probably knew more about Japan than any other Dutchman – or perhaps any other European at that time – remains so concise in his answers.

## François Caron

François Caron (1600-1673) started his service of the VOC as a cook's mate and eventually became Director-General of the company at Batavia – the Dutch capital of the East Indies and present-day Jakarta – only ranked second to the Governor General, the highest position possible in the VOC. He was the son of Huguenot parents who fled France for their faith during the reign of Henri IV. His parents settled in Brussels and shortly after François was born, the family departed for the United Provinces.

There is not much known about his youth and the first fact that can be asserted was that he started his career serving the VOC as a cook's mate at the age of nineteen. He served on board a Dutch East Indiaman which arrived in Japan at the Dutch trading-post at Hirado in 1619. Although most historians argue that he deserted his ship in Hirado due to mistreatment by the captain, Boxer mentions that this was not necessarily the case and that he could also have been set to work on shore (Boxer, 1935, p.xvi). Nonetheless, he would then stay in Japan for over twenty years, becoming a translator in 1627 and steadily rising in the ranks of the VOC. He married a Japanese woman with whom he would have six children. In 1638-1639, two years after writing *Beschryvinghe van Iappan*, Caron became *opperhoofd* which was the leading role in the Dutch expedition in Japan. It the highest position, next to the President, who was Hendrik Hagenauer at that time.

According to Rietbergen (2003), Caron and Hagenauer were involved in a professional rivalry. Nonetheless, this did not hinder the Dutch enterprise in Japan and trade continued to flourish. Throughout this period, Caron's knowledge of the Japanese language and society continued to benefit the Dutch (p.94). However, the internal struggles were not the only difficulties Caron had to face; he was also involved in fierce competition with the Portuguese and Chinese who were also active in Japan. Eventually he succeeded in strengthening the Dutch position *vis à vis* the Portuguese and this resulted in an even more profitable situation. In 1641, however, the Japanese decided to take a more negative stance towards the VOC. Consequently, the trading-post had to be moved to the artificial island Deshima and the station at Hirado was destroyed. Furthermore, Caron was forced to leave the country and became Director-General in Batavia. In 1644, he became the governor of Formosa, which is present-day Taiwan, and stayed in Formosa for two years.

His relationship with the VOC deteriorated tremendously due to allegations of private trade for which he was forced to return to the Netherlands in 1651. He defended his case successfully and he resigned with honour from the VOC. Ten years later, however, he joined the French East Indies Company, leading to his banishment from the Netherlands. In service of the French East Indies Company, he drowned near Lisbon in 1673 (Boxer, 1935, p.ccxix).

## The publishing history

The story was first printed in a collection of voyage reports, named *Begin ende Voortgangh der Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, published and edited by Isaac Commelin at Amsterdam in 1645-6. As an independent story in book form, the *Beschryvinghe van Japan* first appeared in 1648, likewise at Amsterdam after which it was once again reprinted in 1649 and 1652, all by publisher Isaac Commelin. Throughout the text of these publications one can find several remarks made by Hendrik Hagenauer, amending parts of the text Caron had written. The book was also published and printed by Jan Jansz and Joost Hartgens in the period between 1648 and 1652 (Kapitza, 1990, p.13).

Caron revised the edition of 1661 himself, although little of the structure or content changed as compared to the earlier editions. Something which is quite odd, since the report itself had been relatively poorly structured. Nonetheless, he stated in the preface of the revised version of 1661 that this was genuinely his work, highlighting that the previous editions were published without his permission and knowledge. Furthermore, the remarks by Hendrik Hagenauer were all deleted from the text. Perhaps as a result of their previous quarrels, Caron stated that all these comments had been false (Boxer, 1935, p.174).

The revised version was published and printed by Johannes Tongerloo at the Hague entitled: '*Rechte Beschryving(h)e van het Machtigh Koninghrijck van Iappan*'. An important change *vis à vis* the previous versions by Commelin was also that Tongerloo, the publisher, added plates and a map on his own accord and stated that Caron designed them, although he did not. Tongerloo did this to clarify some of Caron's descriptions for the readers, by taking the plates and map from other books. However, these illustrations are quite valueless given their inaccuracy and it is likely that these illustrations were only incorporated to appeal to popular taste. It demonstrates that this version was published and printed to make profit. This version was reprinted three times in the next year and translated into German, French and English. The most well-known English translation was by Roger Manley which appeared in 1663. Other versions were also translated in Latin, Italian and Swedish next to the other languages already mentioned (Boxer, 1935, p.169).

The fact that Caron's book was read by such a large audience demonstrates that it attracted considerable attention. On the one hand, this is logical since literature on Japan was highly popular, but on the other hand it is a pity that the book itself contains so little information. Especially when one considers that Caron has lived in Japan for more than twenty years and he worked with the Japanese on a daily basis, a story of merely ninety small pages can be seen as rather disappointing. However, we should keep in mind that the content of the story was written nor to demonstrate his knowledge of Japan,

nor to convince others of his ideals or to sell as many books as possible. Indeed, it was written solely on the basis of the thirty questions posed by Director-General Lucasz. These questions were, in fact, even put in small notes at the sides of each chapter until it was decided to leave them out and use chapter headings in 1661 (Boxer, 1935, p.174).

For this analysis, I have read the English version of 1663, which also includes the travel account of Siam written by the Dutch VOC official Joost Schouten. Furthermore, I have read the Dutch version of 1652, published by Joost Hartgens in Amsterdam and the revised version of 1661. However, these three versions differ only to a very small extent. The English version has actually added several annotations to highlight what differed in this particular version from the original version printed in 1645-46.

## Where did Caron write about?

As mentioned previously, the book's structure has been based on thirty questions. The content of the book is very broad, in spite of its concise nature. The posed questions are generally straightforward since they touch upon all the issues that a high official who just arrived from Europe had to acquaint oneself with. These questions should, therefore, be regarded from two viewpoints. On the one hand, Lucasz wanted to know about future trading possibilities. On the other hand, he wanted to know about the specific context of each country in order to gain a better understanding of these countries. An outline of the book's content is discussed below. The content is covered in the order in which the chapters are placed in the book.

The first chapter covers the question how large Japan is, and whether it is in fact an island. The state's structure is discussed, the provinces and the lords of these provinces. Furthermore, this section also details the relative economic power of each province. The authority of the Shogun is explained in the third section, his palaces and his retinue in the fourth. Then, the military power of Japan is described on the basis of the number of soldiers and how the soldiers are armed. The sixth and seventh section deal with how much influence the lower ranked officials, vassals and councillors could potentially exert on the national level and the practicalities of a nobleman's life in Japan. The chapters after the seventh section zoom in on the everyday-life of the Japanese. This demonstrates that Lucasz had a broader interest in Japan and the other countries than was necessary in his position. The judicial order in Japan is discussed in the ninth section. The tenth section focuses on the question whether the Japanese punishments can be seen as harsh. Chapters eleven until fifteen zoom in on the role of religion in Japanese society. The role of

religion is described from a variety of viewpoints, such as the role of their priests and the Japanese attitude towards Christians. Moreover, he illustrates many more aspects of the every-day life of the Japanese. Caron describes the Japanese houses and how these are decorated, he describes how their children are raised and how their hospitality towards others is. Furthermore, he analyses how their conjugal state can best be seen and whether they are in fact an honest people, both individual and as a nation as a whole.

Finally, Caron discusses the Japanese international policy regarding trade and international relations. An interesting fact regarding this last section is that these chapters are not more deeply covered than the other sections. This is somewhat odd since one would expect the report to be written from a trading or diplomatic perspective and hence it would be logical that a detailed analysis of these factors would follow. Furthermore, he did nothing to enhance the structure or readability of this section. Nonetheless, this last section is of special relevance to us, since it gives us a starting point on how to deduce what the differences are between the Dutch trading aims in Japan and the Japanese trading activities *vis à vis* the Westerners. Furthermore, he suddenly demonstrates a certain extent of subjectivity in this section which very well exemplifies his disposition towards the Japanese. Therefore, his writing style in this section, especially when compared with the remainder of his work, is the logical starting point from which research focused on Caron's portrayal of the Japanese and Westerners in the seventeenth century has to commence.

## Dissimilarities between Japanese and Dutch objectives as regards their 'Traffick'

How an individual perceives another society is inextricably linked with the manner in which his society and the foreign society are interrelated. The main aim of the VOC in Japan was to make profit via trade. The Dutch were particularly interested in Japanese silver and gold. However, trade with Japan was different than with other countries because Japan had virtually all resources and materials it needed, which was a complicating factor for the Dutch – and for all countries that wanted to trade with the Japanese for that matter. As such, the Japanese always had the initiative to which the Dutch had to react. This entailed that the Dutch had to import those goods that the Japanese wanted at a particular time (Van Opstall, 1983, p.8).

Another factor which made the situation even more complex for the Dutch was that Japan was also a desired trading partner of the Spaniards, Portuguese, the English and

Chinese. The English, however, already quickly abandoned Japan, making their short-lived presence not very relevant to our discussion. The Spaniards, Portuguese and Chinese on the other hand were already involved in trade with the Japanese for many years when the Dutch arrived. As a result, intense competition between the four countries followed to the favour of the Japanese.

The Dutch were well aware that most European products they could import were of lesser quality than was available in Japan (Ibid, p.8). The Japanese were mainly interested in luxury items on a random basis. Nonetheless, there was one good which was constantly demanded in Japan; high-quality silk. The silk trade, however, was completely dominated by the Portuguese and Chinese at that time, which made the competition particularly fierce for the Dutch. As such, the Dutch decided ambitiously in the 1620s to meet those Japanese demands by obtaining the monopoly position in the silk trade and, thus, eliminating all other competition. This was, obviously, easier said than done (Laver, 2008).

In order to effectively import silk, it was necessary to gain foothold in China since the silk of highest quality was produced in China. The Portuguese and Chinese dominated the silk trade at that time, and shipped massive amounts of silk from Macau and Manila to Japan. The Dutch were slightly hesitant at first on what course to follow to achieve their objectives. Eventually, the Governor-General Jan Pietersz Coen decided to take an aggressive approach, and, consequently, Dutch attacks on Macau and Manila followed in 1623. Moreover, the Governor-General allowed all Dutch cruisers to privateer all non-Dutch trade ships. Although Manila and Macau could not be conquered, the Dutch were able to install a blockade, making it extremely difficult for the Portuguese and Spaniards to export their goods to Japan. The Dutch also succeeded in establishing a settlement on the west coast of Formosa from which they hoped to import silk to Japan (Boxer, 1935, p.xli).

The relationship of the VOC with the other European countries was already hostile due to ongoing difficulties in Europe as a result of the Eighty Years' War. However, the VOC's relationship with the Chinese logically deteriorated immensely as well due to the VOC's aggressive actions. The Chinese trade suffered tremendously from the Dutch blockades and their piracy. The Dutch realised that in order to successfully establish a monopoly on the silk trade, it firstly needed to improve its relationship with the Chinese. As such, the VOC decided to adapt a milder policy towards the Chinese. Although it came with some success, the Chinese did not forget how they had suffered by the hands of the Dutch. Hence, rivalry between the two remained. In spite of the aggressiveness of the Dutch, the Portuguese and Chinese remained the main exporters of silk to Japan (Laver, 2008).

The Dutch, however, also benefited from a stroke of luck. The Shogun wanted to secure his power and, consequently, aimed at removing all those factors which could potentially

harm his position. Since Christianity is based on the notion that Christians should firstly obey God and only then the Shogun, Christianity was one of those endangering factors. As a result, all Japanese Christians were gradually forced to leave the country. Due to their Christian background, the relationship of the Portuguese and Spaniards with the Japanese deteriorated tremendously. The Spaniards were expelled from Japan in 1624.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, this all was greatly welcomed by the Dutch, who had managed to avoid the fate of their fellow Europeans by stressing their Republican background and freedom of religion (Lach & Van Kley, 1993, p.1863).

Nonetheless, the situation remained very difficult for the Dutch; the Japanese were slowly installing more protectionist policies and, moreover, the Dutch had still not been able to obtain the monopoly on silk due to their still ongoing rivalry with the Chinese and Portuguese. Furthermore, the Portuguese never halted with their attempts to improve their own situation by harming the Dutch. In the 1630s, the situation aggravated again due to the constantly changing Japanese attitude towards foreigners. Although the Dutch had the best position of the foreign traders in theory, in practice the Dutch position was virtually similar to that of the Portuguese (Jansen, 2000, p.64).

Indeed, it seems as if the Japanese were attempting to create a system in which they would gain the advantages of foreign trade without having to hurt themselves. There is a logical explanation behind these Japanese actions. As is already mentioned, the Japanese society could potentially act as an autarky. There was no genuine need for them to trade because all goods and resources, with the exception of silk, were abundantly present. The only incentive to trade was to make profit. However, the actions of the Shogun and his officials also demonstrate that the making of profit was of minor importance if trading also entailed a threat to the Shogun's status. Furthermore, the Japanese relished in the fact that their precious metals were of vital importance for the Iberian countries, the VOC and the Chinese. Indeed, it offered the Japanese the opportunity to control the market. This notion is the main explanation behind the Japanese stance in international trade. It seems perhaps as if there was no genuine foreign Japanese policy in the early seventeenth century given its many competing trading partners and constantly changing attitude towards Westerners. However, their foreign policy is designed exactly to ensure what is mentioned earlier: completely focused on the internal stability and, as such, trying to be as inactive in the international domain as possible (Laver, 2011, p.31).

This is the background to which the book of François Caron has to be seen. It was written in 1635 and, therefore, in the middle of the events described above. It is without

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3 The Portuguese were only officially expelled in 1639

doubt that everything that was mentioned beforehand was experienced firsthand by Caron and that all these events have contributed to his depiction of all new societies he encountered, be it the Japanese but also the Chinese. Their place in Japanese society remains relatively underexposed in his book in spite of being an important actor in Japanese trade. Nonetheless, the Chinese play a vital role in serving as a mirror to which the Japanese could potentially be compared.

## Caron and the Japanese “Other”

As was already mentioned previously, Caron wrote intentionally in a highly concise manner. Given the book’s original purpose it seems, therefore, quite strange that one of the sections that was of vital importance for the VOC, namely the chapter regarding the Japanese trade, is arguably the most personal section of the entire book. Indeed, it is exactly this section wherein one would expect Caron to be as objective as possible given the section’s relevance. On the other hand, however, it is not that odd that he has difficulties to hold on to his neutral writing style. Since the trading section of the book comes closest to his professional career, it is perhaps even logical that he unintentionally displays his opinion about the issues described in this section.

The chapter’s name is “What domestick Trading, and Navigation”. Basically, it covers whether the Japanese can be regarded as proactive in trading such as the VOC, or that they never took the initiative towards establishing trade relations. Two remarks by Caron in this chapter are of special importance to us, since they provide great insights in how he depicted the Japanese ‘Other’.

Obviously, Caron was a diplomat. Indeed, he was even arguably the best diplomat of the VOC at that time (Boxer, 1935, p.cxxiii). This means that great care has to be taken when interpreting what he wrote, since diplomats, especially when on ‘hostile’ territory, tend to keep in mind that their words – in this case writings – could be accessible to everyone. Therefore, it is not enough to merely analyse the words he wrote down. Indeed, this paper also analyses why he has specifically written a section, in what writing style he wrote certain sentences and, perhaps even more importantly, what he has decided not to write down.

The specific parts of the chapter that are of relevance to us are quoted below after which they are individually analysed. Firstly, Caron describes in this chapter why the Chinese were no longer officially allowed to trade with the Japanese. According to him, this was the result of a Japanese raid in which a Chinese city was entirely destroyed. This incident, also known as the Ningbo-incident, took place in the sixteenth century. Enraged

by these events, the Chinese King decided to abolish all trade with the Japanese after the incident (Sakuma, 1988, p.198). Caron, however, makes an interesting remark in the following sentences why the Shogun still allowed the Chinese to trade with the Japanese:

“The Emperour of Iapan doth not at all obstruct their [the Chinese] traffick, permitting them to to enter and leave his Country when they please, Saying he will not reward evil for evil” (Caron, 1663, p.52)

Peter Rietbergen (2003) argues that Caron was either very naive or struck by a strange form of Japanese self-rationalisation in this section since the Shogun, evidently, continued to trade with the Chinese to gain profit and not out of such moral reasons. However, I find these Rietbergen’s assumptions too simplistic. The remarks prove that he neglects the context in which Caron wrote at that time by focusing solely on the writing and the argument itself. He does not argue *why* Caron decided to use this particular argument, something which can in fact be deduced from that very context.

Indeed, these remarks fail to include that Caron’s depiction of the Chinese could in fact possibly have contributed to an answer how Caron depicted the Japanese. The Japanese were not the only Other, as Rietbergen argues by making this assumption. Indeed, the Chinese themselves were also an Other to whom Caron could mirror the Japanese.

As is demonstrated in the previous section, the Sino-Dutch relationship was not as positive as the Dutch relationship with the Japanese at that time. One cannot deny that Caron’s argument is indeed naive when it is solely read without keeping the context in which the book was written in mind. However, the previous section has in fact proven that Caron and the other VOC members probably perceived the Chinese more negatively than the Japanese due to their longstanding rivalry. This can indirectly be found back in the text. By using the phrase “evil for evil” Caron displays his disagreement with the Chinese decision to halt all official trading activities with the Japanese. Indeed, when the rivalry between the Chinese and the Dutch in their trading activities with the Japanese is kept in mind, one can understand Caron’s subjectivity in this matter. This single remark does not demonstrate explicitly how Caron depicted the Chinese by itself. Nonetheless, by choosing the ‘vengeful’ Chinese as the mirror to which the Japanese had to be reflected as noble and forgiving, one can see that he was indeed very positive about the Japanese, especially *vis à vis* the Chinese. This remarkable aspect also returns in the very first chapter of the book, when Caron describes a relatively unknown people living north of Japan who were described as “*all over hairy and wearing their Beards long like the Chinesses*” and brutish (Caron, 1663, p.13). By arguing that this particular people are – just like the Chinese – all

over hairy and brutish, Caron uses this people and the Chinese as the benchmark to whom the 'civilised' Japanese have to be compared.

The second very interesting remark by Caron in this particular chapter where from his depiction of the Japanese can be deduced is made at the end of that story. Caron describes the protectionist Japanese foreign trading policy and that, subsequently, Japanese were not allowed to trade abroad on their own initiative. The reasons for this were, according to Caron, the following:

“that the Emperour of Iapan would neither offend nor be offended by any Stranger, which had already happened by the extortions of the Governours of Sian and Tayovan; and therefore none of his subjects should any more traffick or deal with Strangers out of their own Country: Another reason was, because he would have no arms transported out of his Empire ... But the chief cause of this inhibition is, least the natives of this Country, travelling into strange places, might be converted to the Christian religion” (Caron, 1663, p.52)

Caron is in this section much less critical about the Japanese than one ought to expect from a diplomat informing his superior. He does mention one of the primary causes for the Shogun's decision to forbid all Japanese trade abroad; namely the possibility that those Japanese abroad are exposed to Christianity. However, the other two reasons that he mentions in his report were nobler than the Shogun's actual motives.

As has already been mentioned in the previous section, the main motive behind the Shogun's action was his fear of external factors that could influence the country's structure and his own position. Christianity was indeed one of those external factors, but also the possibility of encountering other forms of government. This was something the Shogun desperately wanted to avoid as well. Siam, for instance, was at that time governed by an usurper.

One cannot help wonder why Caron reasoned accordingly in this particular case. I argue there are three explanations which could possibly provide us with an answer why Caron gave these arguments. The first explanation is that Caron intentionally did not want to focus on the actual reasons for Japan's 'closed-border politics' in his report to the Dutch Director-General. In this case, he was well aware of the Japanese logic but wanted to emphasize the noble character of the Japanese. The second explanation lies more in the line of Rietbergen's argument; namely that Caron had indeed become so impressed by the Japanese and their society that he had succumbed to naivety. The third explanation, finally, is that Caron very well understood that it was possible that his report could fall in

Japanese hands and, therefore, he decided to follow the Japanese argument in order to uphold his diplomatic position within Japan.

It is very hard to determine which one of these three explanations is the most likely one. It is also very well possible that all three explanations are (partially) true. However, when one assumes that Caron wrote truthfully, these arguments provide us with a wealth of information about Caron's perception of the Japanese. Indeed, in spite of the inability to come a definite explanation, his arguments in this section contribute significantly to a better understanding of how Caron viewed the Japanese 'Other'.

Scholars, such as Boxer, all stress Caron's positive relationship with the Japanese. Of all Westerners at that time, Caron probably understood Japanese society best. The Japanese themselves also portrayed Caron in a very positive manner (Boxer, 1935, p.cxxiii). Caron's approval of the Japanese society can be found in some small sections throughout the book. In the chapter "Whether they be faithfull or false in their dealings", Caron writes for instance: "*this nation is very trusty and ... esteeming their honours above their lives and hopes*" (Caron, 1663, p.50). Furthermore, Caron greatly admires how Japanese children are brought up, especially when compared to the West. He writes that "*it is remarkable to see how orderly and how modestly little Children of seven or eight years old behave themselves ... far surpassing any I have yet seen of their times in our Country.*" (Caron, 1663, p.49).

These remarks make clear that Caron perceives the Japanese not as a weaker, lesser counterpart but as equal, or perhaps even superior, to Western society. Using these examples and arguments it is without doubt that Caron attempted to provide the Director-General with a very positive image of the Japanese. This explains his "naive" arguments, although I would not call them such. Since 1635, it had been well-known in Batavia what events had possibly acted as catalysts for the Shogun's decisions regarding the Japanese foreign policy (Rietbergen, 2003). Furthermore, there is a nucleus of truth in his argument that the Shogun decided to forbid his people from trading abroad because he wanted to "*neither offend nor be offended by any Stranger*" (Ibid, p.52). According to Totman (1993), the Shogun was very reluctant to allow Japanese to trade since each escalating event involving foreigners possibly posed a threat to his legitimacy (p.116).

Nonetheless, by using these specific 'noble' arguments in this section and leaving out the more 'harmful' arguments, Caron gives the impression that he is defending the Japanese point of view. Combined with the positive writing style in the remainder of the book and his own position in Japanese society, it can be concluded that Caron defined the Japanese 'Other' in a very positive manner.

## Conclusion

Caron set foot on Japanese soil in 1619 and was forced to leave in 1641. Hence, he had lived in Japan for over twenty years. He spoke Japanese fluently and was married to a Japanese woman. For his work, he had to deal with Japanese on a daily basis, and especially with Japanese traders.

Through this unique position in the Japanese society, he was undoubtedly able to acquire a vast amount of knowledge about Japan. These insights can all be found back in his book, *Beschryvinge van Iappan*, which can only be described as a positive analysis of Japan. The manner in which he describes Japan in his book shows us that he was a great admirer of the Japanese people and their society.

Indeed, even when Caron is more or less forced to name arguments that could work against the Japanese in the trading section, he remains relatively mild and uses arguments that put the Japanese in a more positive light. However, when one keeps the context of the book in mind, there exists an apparent logic behind his arguments. Therefore, it goes too far to call his arguments naive. Nonetheless, his arguments, especially in this section, still demonstrate that 'Othering' by Caron occurred, but not in the usual manner. 'Othering' normally serves as a means to demonstrate the superiority of the society of the – mostly – Western authors *vis à vis* the 'Other' society. Caron, however, does the opposite. Caron perceived the Japanese as equals when compared to Western Europe, perhaps even as superior in some issues.

This can be deduced from several of his descriptions in the book. Since the intention of the book – or better said, the report – was firstly to acquaint the Director-General with Japan from a trading perspective, one would expect Caron to be as objective as one could expect from an employee informing his superior. However, Caron fails to provide the Director-General with the correct arguments in the trading section, and replaces these arguments with ones that portray the Japanese more favourably.

Although his positive observations of the Japanese society in the remainder of the book could be very well true, his usage of "pro"-Japanese arguments in the trading section reasserts his positive stance towards the Japanese. Combining his positivity in the book with his 'noble' arguments in the trading section, it is only possible to conclude that positive 'Othering' occurred in his book.

Concluding, his book and his arguments therein, although certainly not naive, were, in fact, influenced by his image of the Japanese and the self-image of his own society. By doing so, he not only offers a description of Japan. He also presents his own view on the Japanese and their society. Subsequently, he shared his view on both the West and to a small extent the Chinese, as the mirror to whom the Japanese had to be compared.

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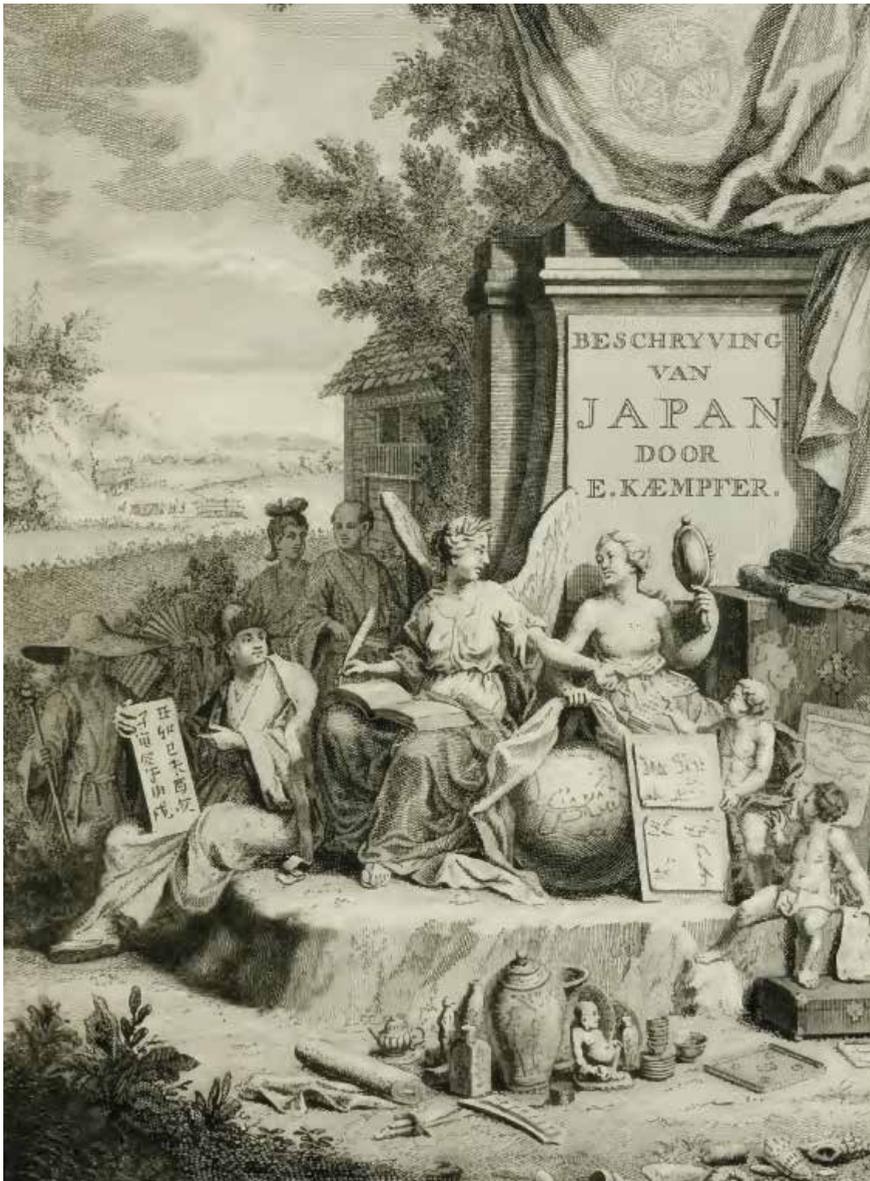
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