

“As a young man. Ch'en Ping, having served a ceremonial feast with great even-handedness, declared. ‘if I were put in charge of the realm. I would do with the affairs of slate as with this flesh,’ I say likewise. if a wise man could be found who would devote to the improvement of all our lives the same ingenuity as this man here has lavished on his farts, we could expect great things from him. It is spirit, spirit infusing each and every action, that makes all the difference. whatever the field of endeavor. even farting. Oh, if only those who propose to save and transform our world. not to mention those supposedly engaged already in the humane arts - if only they would apply themselves with this kind of spirit, then there would be joyful noise all around us such as to drown out the most resounding of farts.

‘I have borrowed the more modest sounds made by this fartist in the hope of rousing from their dreamy lethargy all those dispirited. self-indulgent. unfinished men we see in our midst. - But perhaps my argument itself smells a bit suspicious to you, sir . . . You may be saying to yourself. better silent-but-deadly than this. Well. say what you will, I don't really give a shit.”

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## SEIYOGA DAN

[Discussion on Western Painting]<sup>1</sup>  
by Shiba Kōkan (1747?-1818)

*Translated by Thomas Looser*

### I

That which is called the West points to the territory west of China and Japan. Dividing the world longitudinally and calculating in a straight line from Japan, it is probably a distance of about 3,000 ri.<sup>2</sup> If one actually crossed by sea, the route would be over 10,000 ri. That distant territory is named Europe. It is one of the great continents of the world. and within it are thousands of countries the size of Japan. The region known as the Netherlands is made up of seven states, one of which is called Holland. The style of painting in these various western countries is common to all of them. and since Dutch ships bring these works to Japan, there are now quite a lot of them in the country. As a general term, these paintings are called Dutch paintings.

The method of painting in these various western countries is based on something called imaging reality [*shashin*]<sup>3</sup> (reproducing the true form of things [*shin outsusu*]), and it differs greatly from the painting methods of our country. For this reason people who paint in the Japanese or the Chinese styles think that western-style painting is very strange, and not something from which they should learn.

There are even people who, not understanding how to appreciate western painting, think it is not painting at all. but rather [just] something made by elaborate craftsmanship. This is foolish. Craftsmanship originally referred to fine, detailed technique. Even in Japanese or Chinese painting, detailed

<sup>1</sup> Published in 1799. This translation is based on the modern Japanese version in *Nihon no meicho* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 1971), vol. 22, and the original version as published in *Nihon shisō taikai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1976), vol. 64. All footnotes and notes in square brackets are the translator's,

<sup>2</sup> One ri equals 2.44 miles.

<sup>3</sup> *Shashin* is the term now used for photography. There is no single term with which to translate this, so I am relying on the awkward idea of “imaging” to convey the sort of mimetic reproduction that Shiba is talking about here.

paintings are all, in short, done meticulously, and there are some in which a person's body or beard hairs are painted one hair at a time. When hair is painted by western painting methods, the hairs are painted with [just] one brush stroke; but when one looks at the painting, neatly detailed hairs can be seen.

Western painting style is not punctilious about the power and feeling of each brush stroke the way Japanese and Chinese painting is. The brush was originally nothing more than a tool for making paintings, Nevertheless, [now in Japanese and Chinese painting] only the feeling of the brush stroke is expressed - for example, in painting a cow, rather than showing that it is a cow, the cow is indicated by just one brush of ink. This is exactly like a doctor using medicine to cure an illness: the medicine, in other words, is the ink, the doctor is the brush, and the illness is equivalent to the picture. It is as if the doctor (the brush), using good medicine (the ink), sets out to cure the illness - but without knowing where the illness (the painting) was originally from, or why it was created. Only the doctor's own mental attitude is asserted. The logic is the same for painting.

Rather than the feeling of the brush stroke, the main object of western painting is to capture the true state of things (the heart of creation [zōka no i]). In comparison, Japanese and Chinese painting is nothing more than simple amusement, and is worthless.

Furthermore in western painting methods, through the use of shading, the subject's lighting, texture, distance, and depth are expressed, and the true form of things is exactly reproduced. On the basis of this, western paintings are useful in the transmission of information and knowledge in the same way that writing is. In particular it is the shapes and forms of things that, no matter how much explained in writing, will not be understood: ultimately these cannot be conveyed except insofar as it is done by painting. For this reason, there are many western books in which things are explained through the use of pictures. Western painting, therefore, would never be used as a simple hobby or amusement, (in contrast to) the frivolous games that one finds in Chinese and Japanese painting, such as the one-stroke sketches done for entertainment at drinking parties. [Western painting] is truly a technique of real utility, and a tool for governance and education as well.

For example, there are a variety of descriptions of the

mermaid's bone<sup>4</sup> - a rare medicine - given in Dutch books. Captured off the Island of Amboina [Ambon]<sup>5</sup> in Indonesia,<sup>6</sup> and its living form sketched out by the islanders, an actual mermaid was then pickled and preserved in a medicinal liquid. Amboina was originally a dominion of Portugal, and later became a Dutch territory.

I saw the illustration and preserved specimen of this mermaid, but in the Dutch books its color and form are delineated in paint, and this is offset with explanatory sentences. The actual [mermaid] stored in the liquid has changed with the passing months and years, and it no longer shows the original form; ultimately, if it were not pictured, one could not know the true reality of the thing (this mermaid is described in detail in Otōsuki Gentaku's *Rokubutsu shinshi* (Tenmei year 4) (1786)). In this way, unless painting reflects true reality (shin), it is useless.

## II

Western painting is oil-based rather than glue [*nikawa*]-based. Accordingly, even if they get wet, the paintings will not be damaged. These are called oil paintings. It seems that in our [country of] Japan there are some people imitating this western method of painting, but there are many people who still don't understand the true nature of it. Last year I took a research trip to Nagasaki, and at that time a Dutchman by the name of Isaak Titsingh gave me a picture book, called *Konst Schild Boek*.<sup>7</sup> by looking at this book, my own western painting came together at last and now my brush paints just as I intend, unhindered. Whether mountains and water; flowers and birds; people: or animals, there is now nothing that I cannot paint.

If one thinks about it, painting a picture requires wide reading and extensive knowledge - at a different level from the rote memorization of written characters. As with birds, for

<sup>4</sup> Presumably a dugong - a sea mammal living in the area to which Shiba refers.

<sup>5</sup> Amboina is the principal town on the island of Ambon

<sup>6</sup> Shiba here uses *indo*, the Japanese term for India

<sup>7</sup> Shiba apparently means *Kunst Schilderen Boek*, faulty Dutch for "picture album".

example: from a large wild goose to a small sparrow, each is different - from the color and shape of its eyes, beaks, wings, and legs to its impression overall. This is true even of the pattern of its feathers: if one tried to express it in writing, it would be like trying to paint the [feathers] with the single color of black ink: the differences of complex coloring and form could not be depicted. Therefore, in the various countries of the West, painting (as a medium for the transmission of knowledge) is placed above writing, and highly valued. In other words, painting, along with letters, is a tool in the service of the state, not something done merely for amusement.

## III

Many people are under the impression that western painting consists of nothing more than *ukie*.<sup>8</sup> This is truly a laughable misunderstanding.

To repeat, this is because painting images reality [*sha-shin*]<sup>9</sup> - unless it reproduces true reality, it cannot be said to be a wonderful thing of real worth: as a picture it is incomplete. [By this method of] imaging reality, regardless of what one paints - mountains and water: flowers and birds: cattle and sheep: trees and stones: insects and bugs - each time one looks at them they seem fresh, and everything in the paintings is alive and jumping, as if one can see them moving. This cannot be done other than by the methods of the western style of painting.

Consequently, for people who have knowledge of this technique of reproducing reality and are practicing it, previous Japanese and Chinese paintings look just like child's play: they are incomplete and, as pictures, useless. Because people have grown accustomed to seeing these inadequate paintings, when

<sup>8</sup> *Ukie*, literally "floating pictures", was a genre of prints briefly popular around the mid-eighteenth century. Utilizing what was considered western-style perspective as derived from newly acquired foreign books, these prints typically portrayed interior scenes in such a way as to seem to have almost three dimensions - quite unlike the basically flat perspectives of other print genres at that time. Though these prints were thought to be mere curiosities, the form of perspective and spatial representation in *ukie* apparently had a strong influence on the landscape prints (of Hokusai, Hiroshige, etc.) that appeared later.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. note 3, above.

they are shown the vividly exquisite works of western painting suddenly, they are disoriented. Saying that there's something strange about the paintings, and at a loss for other words, they might perhaps describe the paintings by a conventional term such as *ukie* but this must be said to be a glaring mistake.

## Iv

Western books have illustrations, and these illustrations are all copper-plate prints. These pictures are used in the same way as writing - this includes books on plants and so on. For unless shown in a diagram, one cannot know the true form of plants. Or in making an unusual apparatus, if the mode or form of its construction does not appear in a diagram, one will not be able to put it together.

Western painting is [based on] imaging, and for that reason uses what is called the three facet method [*sanmen no hō*],<sup>10</sup> which I will touch on later. By this method the lighting and shading of things is expressed. But adding the light and shade when using copper plates is technically very difficult. There is a table of plants executed by Rembertus Dodonaeus,<sup>11</sup> but because this was done before the current copper plate technique was contrived, the diagrams were extremely crude and did not resemble the real plants. Since most of my colleagues are studying Dutch to learn medical techniques, even among my colleagues in Dutch Learning [*rangaku*], some have occasionally made mistakes because they don't know anything about pictures and (simply) believed these.

But in other Dutch books, recently imported, starting with Jan Jonston's<sup>12</sup> table of living organisms, the diagrams are made with copper plates: they are exquisitely detailed, indeed approaching true reality. It is quite difficult to translate the accompanying explanatory writing into Japanese, but if one proceeds by looking at the diagrams and thinking hard, often the

<sup>10</sup> The modern version adds, "solid body painting" - *rittai gahō*.

<sup>11</sup> 1517-1585. Shiba had the first name wrong. The table is in a book titled *Cruydt boek*, published in 1644.

<sup>12</sup> 1603-1675. The book is *Nauwkeurige Beschrijving van de natuur der Viervoetige Dieren, Vissen en Bloedlooze Water Dieren, Vogelen, Kronkel-Dieren, Slagen en Draken*, published in 1660.

meaning of the words will come through. By this, too, one can see the superior utility of western painting methods. However, the sort of person who doesn't know anything about even Japanese and Chinese painting methods probably wouldn't understand the logic here at all.

I mentioned above the three facet method. This must be well understood. One facet [men] is pure white, the area lit by the direct rays of the sun. Another facet entails the dimming light - the parts where the sun shines obliquely. And the third facet is dark, as this shows the areas where sunlight is obscured in the shadows. As for engraving this lighting (into the copper plates), it is in the way that the lines are drawn - etching a line only once will make it pale, and twice will make it darker.

When I was young, I heard from Hiraga Gennai that some Dutchmen once loaded up ships with hundreds of their copper plate prints, and, trying to sell them off in Japan, showed them to the Japanese. But the thinking of people was shallow then, and they found the prints to be neither unusual nor technically remarkable: at length the Dutch went back [to Holland with their prints]. In any event, that was when the Japanese first came to know that in the West, pictures were made by forming copper into a plate and etching lines onto it. Yet since then much time has passed without anyone inquiring into the technique of how copper plates are etched. However, the copper plate printing method is described in a book by a Dutchman named Buijs.<sup>13</sup> A few years ago, together with Otsuki Gentaku, I translated this book, and in the third year of Tenmei (1763), using this book, [we] made the first copper plate print in Japan.

But the character of western craftsmen is different from that of Asians, and for us it is extremely difficult to master the refinement [of copper plate printing]. In addition to my own dull nature, I am over fifty years old, and my energy is deteriorating; so in connection [with the above translation], I am including an [explanation of] the methods for preparing copper plates in *On the Dutch Technique*.<sup>14</sup> and I hope that it will provide instruction to admirers [of copper plate printing], and will advance the technique.

<sup>13</sup>Egbert Buijs, ? - 1769. The title of the book is *Nieuw en volkomen woordenboek van kunsten en wetenschappen*.

<sup>14</sup> Section 2 of *shunparō gafū*, which is no longer extant.

## V

The western method of painting is based on the mastery of principle [*ri o kiyomeru*], and similarly in the appreciation of these works it definitely would not do to look at them just as one pleases. There is a correct way to appreciate them. In Holland, probably for that reason pictures are all set in frames as wall hangings. Even when one wants to look at an unframed picture for the moment, the picture must first be placed directly in front of oneself. Then, since there is in the middle of pictures a boundary line between upper and lower [*tenchi*], top half and bottom half, one should, focusing one's line of vision on this boundary, view the picture from five or six *shaku*<sup>15</sup> away. If one does this, the distances and relations of precedence within the picture will not be missed. In the case of small paintings, the Dutch method is to look at them as if one were looking at a reflection in a mirror.

## VI

As part of governance in western countries, the portraits of wise men and saints, and of men of prestige, are reproduced in paintings for posterity. There are also many cases in which sketches [of such people] executed during their lifetime are made into copper plate prints. When one looks at these pictures, it seems exactly as if one is in the immediate presence of these people. In contrast to this, Japanese and Chinese portraits are not based on a method of reflecting true form; each is done according to the individual artist's own way. Each bust and portrait of a holy man that one looks at will differ depending on who the artist is. Unless the picture conveys truth [*shun*], it cannot be said to be a portrait of the holy man. In reproducing a flower, too, unless the picture resembles that flower, it cannot be said to be a picture of the flower.

Depicting the true form of things can never be done by Japanese and Chinese painting methods. For when drawing a sphere [by these methods], a [flat] circle is drawn and is then taken to be ball-shaped. The roundness and height at the center [of the globe] cannot be represented. And in cases such as drawing

<sup>15</sup> One *shaku* is slightly less than 12 inches.

a facial portrait from the front, the height of a person's nose cannot be drawn. Pictures, in essence [*horrai*], are not something composed of brush strokes. I will try to provide an account of the method for making western pictures in my "Commentary on Western Painting."<sup>16</sup>

## DEIRI GUNHŌKI

[A Military Chronicle Concerning a Quart-cl]  
Anonymous

Translated by Anne Walthall

This narrative tells the story of a dispute that broke out in 1784 between the headman and the villagers of Shimomuroga. Located high in the mountains of central Japan near Shiojiri at the head of the Kiso mountain range, the village fell under the jurisdiction of the Ueda domain, and it was to the magistrate of this domain that the peasants presented their petition accusing the headman of corrupt government. In the course of a year-long struggle some twenty of the peasants ended up in prison where one of them, Isonojō, died. After the dispute had been resolved, the peasants ostracized the headman's family until 1927. In that year the descendants of the people originally implicated in the dispute agreed to allow the former headman's family to participate in village affairs, they erected a new monument to Isonojō, and they had the rank of his posthumous name raised to the highest degree possible for a peasant. This chronicle of what happened was found by a local historian, Yokoyama Yoshio, in the possession of the Koyama family, who claim to be descendants of Isonojō. He published it in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

Well, in response to a request for the details of the quarrel, let me say that here in this village it began with a difference of opinion over village expenses and assessments.

Here there lived an evil, immoral youth named Shichizaemon. He embezzled everything he could from the villagers, then he petitioned the lord for an inspection of the government forest without caring that it would cause distress in the village, but also without realizing that it would cause his own ruin.

Once Shichizaemon had petitioned the lord for this inspection, officials came to the village immediately where they inspected the forest from the eighteenth day of the fifth month of

<sup>16</sup> Section 1 of *Shunparō gafū*, which is no longer extant.

<sup>1</sup> Yokoyama Tōshio, *Ueda han nōmin sōdōshi* (Ueda city: Ueda Chisagata Shiryō Kankōkai, 1968), 219-230.