The Depiction on the Nanban Screen at the National Museum of Japanese History

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The Nanban screen at the National Museum of Japanese History depicts a Nanban ship entering a port, foreigners landing, shops selling imported items and Japanese goods, and the Nanban church across six panels. It is regarded that this screen was drawn in the early 17th century. It is postulated that this screen referred to the composition and figures on the right screen of the Nanban screens (a pair of six-panel screens) at the Kobe City Museum. However, this screen is a rare example of comparatively small screens (height: 87.6 cm) among the existing Nanban screens. As the condition of this screen is not very good, there is little scope for it to be the subject of study.

In this study, the information about this screen was gathered by comparing the depiction with the facsimile of this screen from the Meiji period, which is owned by the Tokyo National Museum. Besides the fine details, the relations between subjects in the other Nanban screens were examined; however, retouching and repair efforts on this screen have negatively influenced its appreciation value. The fine details and decorativeness indicate that this screen was originally produced as an artwork of the highest order. This paper points out the possibility that this screen was made smaller than the normal size (five *shaku*, approximately 150 cm) of most Nanban screens in the early 17th century, to make it fit into a private space.

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