The Acceptance of Rangaku and Changes in the Satsuma Feudal Domain

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This paper examines the situation surrounding the acceptance of Rangaku by the Satsuma feudal domain and the changes it underwent from the perspective of the Shuseikan Project, the site of the introduction of modern science and technology by the Satsuma feudal domain, which stood at the vanguard of modernization in Japan.

Rangaku in the Satsuma feudal domain was started by an interest in natural history during the Early Modern Period and the interest in Rangaku by Shimazu Shigehide, and gradually spread within the domain through invitations to Dutch translators and the employment of physicians who practiced Western medicine. Rangaku became important and spread rapidly during the time of Shimazu Nariakira when it became prominent in connection with the Shuseikan Project undertaken with great vigor by the domain. However, the acquisition of Rangaku learning by the domain's retainers was less than that of retainers from other regions who went to Edo or Osaka to study, partly because of the distance between the domain and these centers of activity as well as economic difficulties. Instead, outstanding Rangaku scholars from the huge urban centers of Osaka and Edo were employed by retainers who made effective use of the personal connections they formed with these Rangaku scholars. Still, travel to Nagasaki to study there was the exception.

The spread of Rangaku within the Satsuma feudal domain was driven by the domain's leadership. Therefore, viewed from the standpoint of regional Rangaku differences can be seen in the objectives, contents, scale and circumstances of its adoption by the Satsuma domain and other feudal domains during the same period. And it is not true that the benefits of this dissemination of Rangaku did not extend to every region within the domain. During the research undertaken for this paper it was possible to confirm examples of vaccinations, which in itself affirms the existence of regional Rangaku. This confirmation is found in records showing that the vaccination techniques of Maeda Kyosai, who received instruction in vaccination by the Dutch doctor Otto Mohnike in Nagasaki, was passed on to physicians working in Takaoka and Tanegashima, who then carried out vaccinations themselves.

Immediately after the Satsuma-Anglo War the Satsuma domain established the Kaiseijo academy for the purpose of acquiring Western studies that would accelerate modernization within the domain. At first, Rangaku was given precedence at the academy, but factors such as world trends and relations between the Satsuma domain and Britain after the Satsuma-Anglo War saw British studies steadily gain more and more importance. Then, the invitation issued by Satsuma to the British doctor William Willis in 1869 to establish a hospital and
medical school that accompanied the adoption by the Japanese state of German medicine resulted in the rapid adoption of British medicine. It was only after this that the region began to receive the full benefits of Western medicine.