Study in Nagasaki by Rangaku Scholar Aoki Okikatsu from the Fukuoka Feudal Domain and His Awareness of Things Foreign

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This paper examines the study undertaken at Nagasaki by Aoki Okikatsu, a pioneering Rangaku scholar of the Fukuoka feudal domain, through the introduction of recently discovered historical materials called "Oranda Mondo" (Dutch Questions and Answers), and also investigates the type of influence that the experience of studying in Nagasaki had on Okikatsu's awareness of things foreign. Okikatsu's trip to Nagasaki to study there took place against the backdrop of a strong consciousness of contemporaneous matters on the part of the Fukuoka feudal domain, which was in charge of guarding Nagasaki and for which gaining an understanding of world geography and the international situation was indispensable. The Fukuoka domain was charged with stationing guards at the feudal lord's warehouses in Nagasaki and through taking on the task of Dutch translation they collected information about other countries. For Okikatsu, who was stationed at the feudal lord's warehouses as a purchasing official, this kind of environment was a huge factor in the advancement in his studies.

At that time in Nagasaki, the arrival of Russian ships posed a problem for the Nagasaki garrison, trade between Japan and Holland was being conducted using chartered American ships, and it was a period of great change in the international situation as it pertained to Japan, as exemplified by disturbances in Europe and Asia reported in Oranda Fusetsugaki (Reports from Holland). These changes in the international situation had a significant effect on Okikatsu's awareness about the outside, and gave rise to anti-foreign assertions regarding such issues as the harmful effects of foreign trade, the strengthening of Japan's "sakkoku" (isolationist) policy, and the bolstering of its sea defenses. Okikatsu's Rangaku, was not a genuine pursuit of national sciences, but rather was a study of world geography and the international situation considered necessary by the Fukuoka domain to assume their garrison duties in Nagasaki. Consequently, one major feature of the domain's Rangaku is its basis, which lay in a timely awareness of a deepening in an international crisis. This type of characteristic is similar to the cases of Shunsaku Ogata, a vaccination physician belonging to a branch domain called the Akitzuki domain, who went to Nagasaki at virtually the same time to study Rangaku, and Abe Ryuhei, Okikatsu's student.

Although it is generally said that Rangaku began with the fields of natural science such as medicine and botany, in the case of the Fukuoka domain a concerted effort to study Rangaku began with a study of world geography and the international situation. Under such circumstances, the position of the Fukuoka domain was one of being assigned the militaristic role of guarding Nagasaki, for which reason it became highly aware of the external threat without regard to social class. We may, therefore, interpret this as a regional characteristic that gave rise to the origin of Rangaku in the Fukuoka domain.