

A Brief List of Japanese Writings About the Ainu Lands and Russia Until 1799

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Abstract

In 1799, the Russian-American Company (RAC) was founded in Saint Petersburg for the development by Russian merchants and hunters of the Northern Pacific lands. In the same year, Japan's government made a strategic decision to include the *eastern Ainu lands* (*higashi ezochi*), and subsequently the *western and northern Ainu lands* (*nishi ezochi, kita ezochi*), into its direct control and to start their economic development. By this year, the Japanese had collected enough information about the Ainu and their lands, about the advance of Russians along the Kuril Islands in the southern direction, about the history of Russia, its emperors, and the Russian language. This article describes Japanese authors and their writings on the mentioned topics, which could not but influence the political decision-making of Japan's military government (*bakufu*).

Keywords: Russian-American Company, Ainu lands, Matsumae domain, Nishikawa Joken, Habuto Masayasu, Kudō Heisuke, Mogami Tokunai, Hayashi Shihei, Daikokuya Kōdayū.

The year of 1799 can be considered a milestone in relations between Russia and Japan in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In Russia, the Russian-American Company (RAC) was established this year at the initiative of Irkutsk merchants. On July 8, 1799, Emperor Paul I (1754–1801, reign 1796–1801) signed a decree to the Senate on the foundation

of the company and the privileges granted to it. The main board of the company was located in Saint Petersburg (decree of October 19, 1800), two offices – in Irkutsk and Yakutsk, trading posts – in Okhotsk, Petropavlovsk, and some other places. In 1806, the flag of the RAC was imperially approved: it contained white, blue, and red stripes with a double-headed black eagle and an inscription in the upper left corner “Ros. Am. Kom” [Aleksiev 1982, p. 112–116]. In the same 1799, the Japanese government came to the decision that it was necessary to move on to accelerated economic development of the “lands inhabited by barbarians,” in other words, the Ainu. The military government (*bakufu*), being concerned about the advance of the Russians along the Kuril Islands to the south, came to the conclusion that the local authorities, the clan of Matsumae (松前藩), were not able to resist Russian merchants and pioneers who actively developed these lands and drew local people into their sphere of influence.

One of those who set out this problem most prominently was Habuto Masayasu (羽太正養, 1752–1814), the head of *bakufu* colonial administration in the Ainu lands, i.e., Hokkaido, southern Kuril Islands, and the southern part of Sakhalin. In his essay *Records on the Luminous Rule [of the Barbarian Lands] by the Virtuous Sovereign* (*Kyūmei kōki* 休明光記, hereinafter *Records*) he described quite precisely the state of affairs in the territory given under the control of the Matsumae clan and set clearly the tasks:

The ruthless politics of the Matsumae clan had been going on for a long time. Lately Russians defiantly do good deeds and philanthropy, attracting the natives to their side, without resorting to military force. And although the order has recently been given to take all measures to strengthen the guard and to prevent the penetration of the Russians, but since the numerous islands are surrounded on all sides by the sea, it is impossible to build unassailable fortresses everywhere. We just need to show concern for the natives and bring them the virtue of the rule by the Japanese state. Having won the favor of the Ainu, we can achieve more and cut off the penetration of the Russians, as well as their trade routes, and, above all, we should prevent the supply of food [Habuto 1978, p. 37–38; Klimov 2021, p. 219–220].

The author of the *Records* needed information to come to such conclusions, and he did draw it from the written sources available by that time. In his essay, a considerable number of them is cited in a hidden form without indicating the authors and titles. It seems that Habuto was well acquainted with them. They were related to the development of the northern lands and relations with the Russians, who were trying to establish trade in this region. After being appointed to the high post of governor in the *eastern barbarian lands* (*higashi ezochi* 東蝦夷地), his duties included collecting all available information about the Ainu and Russians. So, we will try to briefly list in chronological order the main works written by Japanese intellectuals before the appointment of Habuto Masayasu to the high post in 1799, without claiming that it is complete.

The first mention of Russia at the end of the 17th century can be found in the work *Study of Trade Relations Between China and the Barbarians* (*Kai tsūshōkō* 華夷通商考, 1695) by astronomer Nishikawa Joken (西川女見, 1648–1724) [Shchepkin 2015, p. 298]. The information reported by the astronomer was far from reality. In the second half of the 18th century, with the active advancement of the Japanese in the northern direction, writings containing much more reliable information began to appear.

In 1781, Kudō Heisuke (工藤平助, 1734–1801) wrote a two-volume treatise *Akazeo fūsetsukō* 赤蝦夷風説考. A. V. Klimov translates the title as *Reflections on Rumors About Red Ezo* (closer, as it seems to us, to Japanese) [Klimov 2010, p. 110], while in a more detached academic translation it sounds like *Study of Information About the Red Barbarians* [Shchepkin 2015, p. 298]. Initially, the treatise was called *Study of Information About the Country of Kamchatka* (*Kamasasuka-koku fūsetsukō* 加模西葛杜加国風説考) [Ibid.]. There is also another date of its completion, 1783 [Nihon rekishi daijiten 1979, p. 38], since the common preface for two volumes was completed that year. During the same time, Kudō completed the first volume, while the second one was written in 1781. In 1784, the author of the treatise reported its main essence to the head of the financial department (*kanjō bugyō* 勘定奉行) Matsumoto Hidemochi (松本秀持, 1730–1797) and thus drew the

attention of the military government to the state of affairs in the Ainu lands, formally under the control of the Matsumae clan.

The Ainu began to call the Russians *fureshisamu* フレシサム (Japanese transcription of the Ainu word), or *red neighbors*. V. V. Shchepkin, referring to the *Ainu-Russian Dictionary* by M. M. Dobrotvorsky, cites the phrase *fureshisam* in Russian transcription *fure shisham* [Shchepkin 2015, p. 301]. This is where the term *red barbarians* came from. Kudō in his essay refers this name to the inhabitants of Kamchatka, which was under the control of Russia.

In the first volume, Kudō expresses the opinion that trade with Russia will make it possible to develop quickly and efficiently the northern islands inhabited by the Ainu. Kudō reported that there was intense illegal trade between the Russians and the Japanese and that the military government should put it under its control and benefit from it. In the second volume, Kudō gives an overview of the history and geography of Russia, its advance to the east, and writes about its interest in the Ainu as well, warning the authorities of the potential danger from its advance southward through the Kuril Islands. Apparently, he drew information from Dutch translators during his stay in Nagasaki and from vassals of the Matsumae clan.

V. V. Shchepkin supposes that his work “became the first detailed description of Russia in Japan, compiled on the basis of European books and oral evidence of the Japanese from the Matsumae domain” [Ibid., p. 300]. After completing the treatise, Kudō introduced it to the powerful senior counselor (*rōjū* 老中) Tanuma Okitsugu (田沼意次, 1719–1788). After reading the treatise, he ordered to dispatch an expedition to the *lands of the barbarians* at the end of 1784: ten people to the *eastern lands of the barbarians* and six people to the *western lands of the barbarians*. The expedition took place in 1785–1786, but because of the Kansei reforms (1787–1793) the counselor was removed from power and his orders were canceled. Matsudaira Sadanobu (松平定信 1759–1829), who succeeded Tanuma as a senior counselor, had no plans to develop the *lands of the barbarians* soon, so the expeditions were canceled on November 18, 1786 [Shchepkin 2014, p. 383].

In 1786, Mogami Tokunai (最上徳内, 1755–1836), together with other members of the expedition who found themselves out of work after the resignation of Tanuma Okitsugu, wrote a work entitled *Collected in Ezo* (*Ezo shūi* 蝦夷拾遺) (title is given according to: V. V. Shchepkin [Shchepkin 2017, p. 372]). In 1790, he also completed his own *Notes About Ezo* (*Ezo sōshi* 蝦夷草紙) (the title was initially translated by V. V. Shchepkin as *Notes About Ezo* [Ibid.], but later he began to call them *Ainu Notebooks* [Shchepkin 2021, p. 318]). Mogami, by order of the military government, visited the Ainu lands in 1785, 1786, and 1789. He recorded everything he had seen and heard in the two above-mentioned works, which contain valuable information about the Matsumae clan, Russians (*akahito* 赤人), Ainu, and the Ulchi people (*santan* 山旦). *Ezo sōshi* has another title, *Description of the Land and Customs of the Matsumae Domain* (*Matsumae fudoki* 松前風土記).

L. N. Kutakov (1919–2000) marks Mogami Tokunai [Kutakov 1988, p. 20–21] and notes that, during his visit to Iturup, Mogami met with three Russians. One of them, whose name was “Semyon Dorofeevich Ishuyo (Ituyosov), made a great impression on Mogami with his knowledge of the geography of the Kuriles and Kamchatka” [Ibid., p. 46]. K. E. Cherevko (1933–2020) suggested that Semyon Dorofeevich had the surname Izvozov (33 years old), and the other two were Ivan Sosnovsky (29 years old) and Nikita (28 years old) [Cherevko 1999, p. 108]. V. V. Shchepkin, referring to the inscriptions made in 1786 on wooden crosses from Iturup Island, suggests that the surname of the eldest Russian was not Izvozov, but Zuev [Shchepkin 2017, p. 158].

L. N. Kutakov translates the title of the work *Ezo sōshi* as *Draft Essay About Ezo* [Kutakov 1988, p. 47], referring to the work by D. M. Pozdneev *Materials on the History of Northern Japan* without specifying the volume: “Pozdneev, 1909, p. 178”. The fact is that this voluminous work, completed during Pozdneev’s record short stay in Japan (and demonstrating his unrealistically high level of the Old Japanese language and kambun), consists of two volumes with the second one divided into three parts. And indeed, in the first volume (just on the page 176, not 178), D. M. Pozdneev calls *Ezo sōshi* – *Draft Essays About Ezo*, but in

the second volume, in the third part, he gives a different, more accurate title *Various News About Ezo* [Pozdneev 1909, p. 59], much closer to the original. Apparently, giving his work to the press, D. M. Pozdneev did not make the final edit.

Hayashi Shihei (林子平, 1738–1793), an intellectual considered by some Japanese scholars to be a political thinker (*keiseika* 経世家), was born in Edo in 1738 as the second son of Okamura Gengobee (岡村源五兵衛), a *bakufu* retainer. After his father had lost his job due to a bloody incident and become a *rōnin*, Shihei and his older brother were taken in by the Hayashi family. His surname Okamura was changed to Hayashi. The elder brother entered the service for the Sendai domain, after which Shihei also moved there in 1757. For some time, he lived in the house of Kudō Heisuke, a physician of the Sendai domain. In 1764, having learned about the arrival of the Korean embassy in Edo, Shihei went to the shōgun's capital. After that he wrote a treatise called *Empty Conversations From Sendai* (*Sendai Kanwa* 仙台閑話).

The essay *Conversations about the Military Affairs of the Maritime State* (*Kaikoku Heidan* 海国兵談) in 16 volumes was printed from woodblocks in Edo in 1791. In 1792, the woodblocks were confiscated, and Hayashi was placed under house arrest in Sendai. It happened only a few weeks before the Russian mission headed by Adam Laxman (1766–1806?) arrived in Hokkaido. According to V. V. Shchepkin, Hayashi sought to convey to society and, above all, to the authorities, the following main idea: it is necessary to strengthen the country's defense against a potential external threat. Hayashi writes:

European countries and Russia see as their national policy the expansion of their own territories by capturing new lands, and their activity is only growing from year to year. There is no doubt that sooner or later our Japan will also become their target. They have such excellent navigational techniques that they are able to overcome any storm waves, as if it were an ordinary flat road. At the same time our country is surrounded on all four sides by the sea. After all, Nihombashi in Edo and the rivers of Russia and Holland are a single water flow, without any barriers. Therefore, if they want to sail here, they will sail when they please. And if we do not put our

hand in and do not organize defensive preparations, this can turn into a huge danger. It is necessary to reduce the ordinary expenses of the state, streamline military spendings and install artillery pieces in key places on the seacoast. Thus, within a few years, our coast will become impregnable and become our own Great Wall. After erecting such a Great Wall, even if the enemy sails to attack us, our troops will have time to prepare to repel the blow, and it will become easy to destroy enemy troops tired of long voyages. Thus, concerns about the defense of the country will largely subside. In addition, the northern and southern islands of our country are extremely important from a military point of view. If we realize and leave everything as it is, they will be captured by foreign states and become springboards for their aggressions. And it will be irreparable.

An Illustrated Review of the Three States (Sangoku tsūran zusetsu 三国通覧図説), where Hayashi expresses his concern about the defense capability of the northern and southern islands again, was written in 1786. Under “the three states” in the title he meant Korea, Ryukyu, and Ezo (Ainu lands). Hayashi pointed out that Russia, moving south from Kamchatka, could pose a real threat. In this regard, it is important for Japan to develop the islands inhabited by the Ainu and strengthen their defense capability. Hayashi criticized the policy of the Matsumae clan for being insolent to the Ainu.

After the Russian mission headed by Adam Laxman had visited Hokkaido in 1792–1793, the Japanese began to pay much more attention to Russia. In 1792, the return of Daikokuya Kōdayū (大黒屋光太夫, 1751–1828) from Russia, who arrived on a ship with Laxman’s mission, strengthened interest in Russia within Japanese society. Many books were published about the shipwrecked Japanese. Here are the most significant ones.

In 1792, two works were compiled:

1) *Records of What Was Heard About Russia (Rosia kibun 魯西亜記聞)* by Katō Kengo (加藤肩吾, 1762–1822), a physician of the Matsumae clan;

2) *Amazing Tales About the East (Tōhō chinwa 東方珍話)*, by Gotō Jūjirō (後藤十次郎, life dates unknown).

The following works were compiled in 1793:

1) *Hokusa ibun* (北槎異聞) by Sasamoto Ren/Chikudō (笹本廉/竹堂, 1743–1822);

2) *Records of the Supreme Audience [With the Shogun] of the Shipwrecked* (*Hyōmin goranki* 漂民御覽記) by Katsuragawa Hoshū (桂川甫周, 1751–1809);

3) *Brief News About Wanderings in Northern Waters* (*Hokusa ryakubun* 北槎略聞) by Yoshida Kōton (吉田篁墩, 1745–1798).

In 1794, the essay *Brief News About Wanderings in Northern Waters* (*Hokusa bunryaku* (or *monryaku*) 北槎聞略) was completed by Katsuragawa Hoshū (there is a Russian translation by V. M. Konstantinov: [Konstantinov 1978]). The last chapter of this work, entitled *Language*, is divided into the following sections: *Heavenly Phenomena; Geography; Time; Devils and Gods; People, Relations of People; Parts of the Human Body and Human Affairs; House, Buildings; Instruments, Utensils, Books, Paintings; Clothes; Food, Drinks; Herbs, Trees; Birds, Animals; Fish, Mollusks, Insects; Metals, Stones; Counting and Measures; Words and Expressions*. It is the first Japanese–Russian dictionary, consisting of 1261 entries [Ibid., p. 263–324]. The author of *Hokusa Bunryaku* objectively assessed its practical significance:

This chapter contains several hundred words that the shipwrecked have committed to memory. They are written in our letters and each word is given a translation that generally corresponds to the meaning. However, in Russian I hear only sounds, like the chirping of swallows or the murmur of water, the meaning is incomprehensible, like the lowing of cows or the voice of birds, and therefore I had to rely only on the memory and knowledge of the shipwrecked, and therefore inaccuracies are possible. The completeness of this dictionary should not be supposed. It was impossible to avoid mistakes in stress, in the difference between voiced and unvoiced sounds, but if we keep in mind that only an approximate rendering of words is given here, then this vocabulary may be suitable for giving a general idea of this unusual foreign language. That is why I have compiled a section on language, making it the last chapter in the book [Ibid., p. 263].

Ōhara Sakingo (大原左金吾, 1761?–1810), an intellectual and a writer, was born circa 1760 in the village of Ōhara, Iwai County, Mutsu Province (now Daitō City, Higashi Iwai County, Iwate Prefecture). He was invited to serve in the Matsumae clan. From 1795, Ōhara preached the need to master both civil and military knowledge (*bumbu* 文武), that is, the knowledge that was originally held by court aristocrats (*bun* 文) and representatives of military houses (*bu* 武). However, suspecting the eighth head of the clan, Matsumae Michihiro (松前道広, 1754–1832), of secret relations with the Russians, in 1796, Ōhara left Matsumae and wrote two treatises: *Unpretentious Conversations About the Northern Lands* (*Chihoku gūdan* 地北寓談), in which he expresses his opinion about the internal situation of the Matsumae clan, and *Warnings About the Danger Emanating From the Northern Lands* (*Hokuchi kigen* 北地危言), which refers to the topic of strengthening the defense of the northern territories. Both works were presented to the military government.

His suspicions about the relations of the Matsumae authorities with the Russians disagree with the facts, but the *bakufu* began to pay more attention to the naval defense of the islands inhabited by the Ainu. Along with other factors, of course, these two writings could induce the military government to decide in 1799 to take under direct control the *eastern Ainu lands* and then the rest of them. Ōhara spent his last years in Kyoto, writing his books; he died in 1810. In his work *Hokuchi kigen*, Ōhara says that a real threat to the security of Japan could arise if the “wild beasts – red barbarians” (*korō-no akaezo* 虎狼の赤夷, that is, Russians) unite their efforts with “changeable ezo” (that is, Ainu). The “red barbarians” (or “red Ainu”) have three advantages over the Japanese: they

- 1) easily tolerate cold;
- 2) eat meat, so they will not experience difficulties in obtaining food on the islands;
- 3) they can easily lure the Ainu to their side, who, seeing large ships, will easily go over to their side.

It should be noted that, at the same time, some works on the Russian language and the alphabet were written in Japan. In 1793, Tanabe Yasuzō (田辺安蔵, dates of life unknown) written a study entitled

Russian Language (*Roshiagorui* 魯西亜語類); in 1794, Morishima Chūryō (森島中良, 1756–1810) wrote the work *Outlandish Russian* (*Roshia kigo* 魯西亜奇語); in 1796, Minamoto Tamotsu (源有, dates of life unknown) compiled *Russian Writing System* (*Roshia Mojishū* 魯西亜文字集), in the same year, the book *Russian Dialect* (*Roshia Bengo* 魯西亜弁語) was prepared by another unknown author [Ikuta 2012, p. 99].

In addition, excerpts from Dutch works were translated into Japanese and information related to Russia was collected with the help of the Dutch. We can say that the discipline of “Russian studies” was born in the bosom of Dutch studies. Without pretending to complete the disclosure of this rather important topic, we will only mention such works as *Annals of Russia* (*Roshia hongī* 魯西亜本紀), *Summary of the Genealogy of the Russian Ruling House* (*Roshia taitō ryakki* 魯西亜大統略記), *Brief Annals of Russia* (*Roshia hongiryaku* 魯西亜本紀略), completed in 1793 by Maeno Ryōtaku (前野良沢, 1723–1803). Maeno used the work *Description of Russia* by the Dutch researcher Jan Reitz (1688–1772) [Shchepkin 2020, p. 379]. In 1795, Shizuki Tadao (志筑忠雄, 1760–1806) published the work *Supplement to the Records About Russia* (*Roshiashi Furoku* 魯西亜志付録) [Ikuta 2012, p. 99]. In 1793, Katsuragawa Hoshū compiled a *Description of Russia* (*Roshiashi* 魯西亜志) based on the Dutch translation of the *General Geography* by the German scientist Johann Hübner (1668–1731) [Shchepkin 2020, p. 379]. The full title of the textbook is *Kurtze Fragen aus der neuen und alten Geographie biss auf gegenwartige Zeit* (*Short Questions on Old and New Geography*, 1693).

The above list gives us a clear idea that Habuto Masayasu, with his high position in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the *bakufu*, had access to a considerable number of works related to the lands inhabited by the Ainu. Their authors were either doctors, specialists in “Dutch studies,” or officials who held low positions in the lower levels of government, while Habuto was a high-ranking dignitary, representing the military government in the Ainu lands. In other words, he was the local authority. Therefore, his work cannot but be of great interest to researchers.

Thus, even with an incomplete listing of the authors and titles of their works, we can conclude that the military government, having the information obtained from them, made quite a logical and strategic decision to gain a foothold in the lands of the Ainu and to begin active development of the new territories in order to prevent Russians from advancing there.

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