JAPAN & BELGIUM

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An Itinerary of Mutual Inspiration

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LANNOO

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› The room housing the Japanese book donation to the University of Louvain/Leuven in the university's Central Library.
Picture postcard dating from before the Second World War.
Photograph by Digitaal Labo KU Leuven. Standing on top of the shelves in the background is the vase donated by Crown Prince Hirohito.

INTRODUCTION

W.F. Vande Walle

When plans were made to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation concluded between Japan and Belgium in 1866, the Celebration Committee set up for the purpose of planning and managing the various celebration events, put forward the idea of publishing a book on the history of Japanese-Belgian relations.

Eleven years earlier, I had edited a book on the same subject, titled *Japan & Belgium: Four Centuries of Exchange*, which was published to mark Belgium's participation in the 2005 Aichi World's Fair. In order to mark Belgium's participation with something "more durable," Robert Gillet, commissioner-general of the Belgian pavilion in that fair, who in a former life had been an editor of art books, had espoused the idea, launched by the Belgian diplomat François Delahaut, to publish a book about the history of Belgian-Japanese relations. I was entrusted with its editorship, and thanks to the contribution of many, and the support of among others the Japan Foundation and the Belgian Ministry of Economic Affairs, the book saw the light of day as a superbly illustrated tome, which had the looks of an art book but dealt with history, admittedly also including art history. It garnered considerable success and turned out to be a long-seller, if not a bestseller, and is now out of print.

It was with this background in mind that I was entrusted with the editorship of the present book. One of the motivations to take on the job was the ambition to do justice in this sequel to various topics which had been left out or had insufficiently been dealt with in the first book. Although we have yet again not been able to include all relevant topics pertaining to the historical relationship between the two countries, we have in some cases ventured outside the glamorous bounds of international diplomacy and high culture, and shed light on a few topics which may at first sight be unexpected, unprepossessing or pedestrian, but are of vital importance to society. Perhaps to the surprise of some readers you will find contributions on the penal system as well as transfer of know-how in the field of agriculture and livestock.

Since the treaty belongs to the history of Belgium as an independent kingdom, the time frame within which we would select our topics automatically narrowed itself down to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in contrast to the first book, which had covered the entire span of the history of the Low Countries, the Spanish Netherlands, the Austrian Netherlands and Belgium. The title of the present book, *Japan & Belgium: An Itinerary of Mutual Inspiration*, echoes the title of the former book, and indicates the connection between the two publications.

This book is divided into six parts, which deal respectively with contacts and exchanges in the diplomatic field (first part), Belgian sources for some cases of institutional modernization in Japan (second part), Belgium's image and perception in Japan and the Belgian presence in that country (third part), influences and inspiration in the field of literature (fourth part), and in the fields of applied and decorative arts (fifth part), and finally, the transfer of know-how, including trade and investment in the post-war era (sixth part).

The book includes eighteen contributions of varying length by thirteen authors from Belgium or Japan. The direct occasion being the 150th anniversary of the bilateral treaty, it was only natural that the first part would open with a sizable article on this very topic. By pure coincidence the author, Dirk De Ruyver, happens to live in the Yokohama-Tokyo area, within a stone's throw of the spot in Yokohama where the Belgian legation was located in the 1885-1893 period, and walking distance from the place where Commodore Matthew Perry went ashore to sign the first US treaty with Japan in 1854. In his article, the longest in the book, the author clarifies the circumstances in which the treaty between Belgium and Japan came about, paying particular attention to the conditions prevailing in Yokohama at the time the foreign representatives came knocking at Japan's door pressing for treaty negotiations. The historical scene De Ruyver portrays is not unlike a play unfolding in Yokohama. It had been going on for a while when the Belgian envoy Auguste t' Kint de Roodenbeek entered the scene. The author describes what preceded t' Kint's arrival on the stage, and how the other actors in the play reacted when t' Kint suddenly made his appearance. Moreover, although the players on the scene did have some measure of freedom, there were others behind the scenes who had written the script. Who were they and why did they write the parts as they did? These last two questions were certainly important for Belgium and to some extent also for the four Great Powers that had already concluded treaties with Japan and were now dominating the diplomatic scene. The Belgian-Japanese treaty was the ninth treaty of amity signed by Japan. Had

the conclusion of treaties by now become routine for the shogunate or not? How did the negotiations for the Belgian-Japanese treaty compare to the previous treaties entered into by Japan? In order to answer these questions it was crucial for the author to clarify the circumstances in which the treaties of amity had come about, from the first one down to 1866. While previous studies on the first diplomatic contacts between Japan and Belgium were written from a Belgian perspective, De Ruyver's contribution attempts to give more scope to the Japanese perspective, as well as including the reactions of other foreign representatives in Japan, thus giving an international perspective on the Belgian-Japanese treaty of 1866 in the small international cosmos which Yokohama was then.

Yutaka Yabuta's article analyses the way Belgium was perceived by the first Japanese envoys and students to visit the country in the wake of the Meiji Restoration, notably as they recorded their impressions and reflections in their reports. He makes an assessment of the official record of the Iwakura Mission (1871-1873), singling out Belgium, one of the countries toured by the mission, with a view to shedding light on the concept of the "small nation" as articulated in the early Meiji period. He compares the notion as it is framed in the Iwakura Mission's account with Sufu Kōhei's study of Belgium. Japan, unable to modernize at a single stroke to stand alongside "great powers" on the scale of France or Great Britain, needed to have a "model nation" for a gradualist modernization. In this sense, the "small nation" of Belgium was recognized as being one such "model nation" for Far Eastern, and similarly small, Japan. Belgium was indeed one of the leading nations in the fields of industry and commerce, and at the cutting edge of technological innovation. For countries embarking upon modernization and industrialization, Belgium could constitute an inspiring example. One would expect then that Japan, in the process of acquiring Western know-how, would turn to Belgium. One of the objectives of the articles contained in this book was therefore to explore the Belgian contributions to the modernization of Japan. In spite of the many interesting cases we have identified, we must also admit to a relative lack of Belgian interest in Japan in those days. There was clearly a lack of grasp of the real Japan. The image Belgians had of Japan did not correspond to contemporary economic or social reality. For example, Belgium was not sufficiently informed about the fast progress Japan was making in its modernization efforts. We may ask whether there were enough people with vision to see the tremendous future potential. Chances are that the Belgians tended to look at Japan as a developing country, just like any other of its kind, purveyor of artisanal and folkloristic items for the curio cabinets of the enlightened European bourgeoisie. Even Belgian diplomatic and consular circles could not always collect all relevant and necessary information. *Japon et Belgique: Revue publiée par La Société d'Etudes Belgo-Japonaise* (1906-1914) did offer interesting and useful information but its readership was too limited and its lifespan too short to foster a real Belgian expertise on Japan.

The first part concludes with an essay by David De Cooman on the Belgian leg of Crown Prince Hirohito's European tour of 1921. In order to appreciate the tour's significance against its historical background, he has not only drawn on official records by first-hand witnesses, but also tapped into sources and recorded observations discussing the deeper issues that were at stake in Japan's domestic politics.

The second part consists of an article on Leuven Central Prison as a model for the modern penal system in Meiji Japan by Keiji Shibai and Dimitri Vanoverbeke, and an article on the influence of the Belgian constitution on the Meiji constitution, by the latter author. In the early Meiji period several Japanese experts from the Ministry of Justice toured Europe to study penitentiary systems. They were especially impressed by the French and Belgian systems. Leuven Prison would eventually serve as the model for Miyagi Prison, the construction of which in 1879 marked a turning point in the history of penal institutions and policy in modern Japan. One of the experts from the Ministry of Justice was Inoue Kowashi, who would later become one of the architects of the Meiji constitution. In his article Dimitri Vanoverbeke explores the early stages of constitutionalism in Japan, making ample reference to the writings of various authors, including the aforementioned Sufu Kōhei and Inoue Kowashi. He clarifies the extent and depth to which the Belgian constitution was a source of inspiration for the Japanese constitution.

The third part of the book is devoted to Japanese perceptions of Belgium and Belgians living in Japan, who helped to shape and influence some of those perceptions. The first article, by myself, is an exploration of some Belgian pictorial sources in the above-mentioned official report of the Iwakura Mission.

From Fumitaka Kurosawa's article on Japanese perceptions of Belgium in the Meiji and Taishō periods it becomes clear that with Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War, Japan attained a

ranking on a par with the European and North American great powers. At that point the paradigm of the small state, mentioned above, lost much of its attraction, and there was a marked decrease in the number of authors who refer to Belgium in the early twentieth century.

In his article Ryōju Sakurai deals with several topics: the location of the Belgian legation and consulates; the number of Belgians in Japan, where they lived and what they did; and the relative importance of the bilateral trade between the two countries. The figures adduced in this article seem to bear out a decrease in the relative importance of the mutual trade relations in the period from 1876 to 1938, thus confirming the view that Belgium underachieved in its commercial ties with Japan.

The last article in this part is my study on the linguistic and ethnographic contributions by the scholar-missionary Willem A. Grootaers. He was only one of many scholar-missionaries active in Japan, but his career is remarkable and exceptional in that his scholarship covered both linguistics and ethnography and that he spent major parts of his life respectively in pre-Communist China and in post-war Japan.

The fourth part opens with a translation of the first Japanese critical essay on Belgian literature (1895), written by Ueda Bin, setting the scene for the two following contributions. Sadafumi Muramatsu's study of the way Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* was transfused in Nagai Kafū's *The River Sumida* is the digest of a book-length in-depth study the author has published on the topic, while in my own study on the reception in Japan of Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* I have attempted to explain the enduring popularity of this philosophical fairy tale.

In the fifth part, two authors highlight the cross-cultural dimension of Art Nouveau. Yōko Takagi contributes an original study on how *katagami* (Japanese stencils) opened new avenues of creation to some Belgian artists, while Nathalie Vandeperre contributes an enlightening study on King Leopold II's orientalist architectural projects and the collections of Far Eastern art that were assembled as a complement to this orientalist dream. If the preceding chapters mainly deal with various aspects of high culture, Kazuko Iwamoto's Japanese perspective on Tintin takes us into the field of popular culture.

Further down the road of the popular, the sixth part invites the reader to explore two cases of exchange in lesser-known areas: the transfer of know-how in the fields of flax growing and chicken breeding, both studies by myself. In the final chapter Henri Delanghe analyses the characteristics of post-war trade and investment relations.

The history of Belgian-Japanese relations may be subdivided into several phases: the first from 1850 to 1895, which is the period of laying solid foundations. The next phase runs from 1895 to 1905, between the year of the victory in the Sino-Japanese War and the year of the victory in the Russo-Japanese War. In 1896 a new commercial treaty between Japan and Belgium was signed and a direct shipping line was opened between the two countries. Although victory in the Sino-Japanese War had boosted Japan's standing, it was nevertheless forced to bow to the Triple Intervention. The Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1905) marked a real watershed. The Japanese participation in the Liège World Exposition of 1905 bespoke the newly won self-confidence.

The relations between Japan and Belgium generally continued amicably throughout the remainder of the Meiji period (1868-1912) and the Taishō period (1912-1926). The Shōwa era (1926-1989) was much more turbulent and eventful. Emperor Hirohito reigned from Christmas Day 1926, when he ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, until his demise on 7 January 1989. This makes his reign one of the longest in human history, encompassing as it did both the pre-war and post-war periods. With the exception of the first few years, the first two decades of the Shōwa era were marked by conflict and strife, increasingly isolating Japan from the rest of the world. The Manchurian Incident in September 1931 triggered a chain of events which dragged Japan into the quagmire of a desperate war. These events did not fail to affect the relations between Japan and Belgium, although Belgian diplomacy did take a remarkably conciliatory stance in the controversies surrounding Japan's actions on the international scene. The absolute low point in Belgian-Japanese relations was the Pacific War (1941-1945), a time when Japan and Belgium found themselves in opposite camps. The upshot was the rupture of diplomatic and, to all intents and purposes, pretty much all relations between the two countries, which were only gradually restored after the surrender of Japan in August 1945.

Japan's remarkable recovery and emergence as an economic power in the post-war period naturally led to the full restoration of bilateral relations and their further development to an unprecedented level in many fields. In the background of this intensified relationship was Belgium's status as a host country for many international organizations, most notably the European institutions and NATO. While Belgium enjoyed brisk economic

growth and prosperity as a founding member of what was to become the European Union, Japan's spectacular growth catapulted the country to the status of economic world power, a development accompanied by commercial frictions with some major competitors in the international market. Belgium was one of the first European countries to benefit from direct Japanese investment. Notable in this respect is Honda Motor Corporation's investment in a production plant in Aalst as early as 1962, the first Japanese investment in Europe by any of Japan's major industrial companies. The post-war period is a long and peaceful one, but when studied in detail, may obviously be further subdivided in several phases.

The reader may notice that among the eighteen contributions there is a strong chronological bias towards the second half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. There are good reasons for this because this time-bracket constitutes a seminal phase in the history both of Belgium and Japan. Japan began to reap the fruits of its modernization in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The industrial take-off of the country can be situated in the 1890s. This is the time when the railway network was fully developed, the first successes in exports were recorded, and an efficient banking system was established. Also the protectionist policies which Japan would be criticized for in subsequent years date from this period. In the field of legislation we must mention the first constitution of 1889 and the first civil code of 1896. In the area of politics the cabinet system was adopted in 1885, and the first party cabinet was formed in 1898. In the field of international politics, the rise to regional power status was symbolically confirmed by the abolition of extraterritoriality for foreigners and the opening of the whole country in 1899, the treaty of alliance with Britain in 1902, and the annexations of Formosa (1895) and Korea (1910).

In European and Belgian history too this period is very important. The foundations of our present society were laid then, a society based on the use of petrol, electricity and chemical industry. Never before had daily life and the outlook of the earth been changed so dramatically as in the period 1880-1914. The 1880s saw the advent of the automobile, built by Siegfried Markus and Karl Benz. In 1884 the International Meridian Conference held in Washington, D.C., selected the Greenwich Meridian as an international standard for zero degrees longitude, forming the basis for the introduction of Standard Time in all developed countries. International standards were adopted and introduced in many areas. Inventions and innovations followed one after another at unprecedented speed, while the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the scientific management of Frederick Taylor (1856-1915), the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the relativity theory (1905 and 1915) of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and the quantum physics of Max Planck (1858-1947) and Niels Bohr (1885-1962) shaped a new way of viewing man and reality. These innovations had a profound impact on people's lifestyles, including the many ailments we nowadays associate with modern living.

In the political and social fields too, new times were afoot: the establishment of trade unions and socialist parties, the first social legislation, universal suffrage and in some countries even suffrage for women (New Zealand as the first in 1893; Finland in 1906). The elites failed to see the writing on the wall, however. The bourgeoisie was enjoying unprecedented prosperity and Europe's hegemony in the world was unchallenged. Western values seemed to have universal validity. The old monarchies of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia were still in power, the belief in a promising future was unquestioned. It was not until 1918 that Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* declared the demise of the Eurocentric view of history, and opened the eyes of his readers to a fundamentally different concept of modernity. Only after the First World War would the clamour for emancipation of labourers, women and colonial peoples grow insistent.

These observations invite the historian to test concepts from the history of mentality like Eurocentrism or optimism about progress on the specific case of contemporary Belgian representations of Japan. Did the self-confident bourgeois consider this far-off land worthy of serious attention? In his self-complacency, did he consider Western culture as the one and only truth, and its adoption by all peoples as the necessary prerequisite for civilization and progress? Or were there already at that time, even before the First World War, signs of cultural relativism and recognition of Oriental civilizations as valuable in their own right? Was European world hegemony really believed to be unassailable, or were there already far-sighted minds who realized that this blind self-confidence was no longer justified? In order to pursue these questions and verify the existence of these notions Japan would quite naturally be a most adequate touchstone, since that country offers the experience of an attempt at alternative modernization.

Bilateral relations cannot be subsumed in the diplomatic and economic dimension. They were far from

limited to a one-directional exchange of Western goods, technology and capital from West to East. Japan made an impressive contribution in the area of artistic influence. The advent of abstract art would revolutionize the fine arts in the twentieth century, but the groundwork for this revolution was laid in the works of Symbolists and Art Nouveau artists, while the designs of Henry Van de Velde, Otto Wagner or Frank Lloyd Wright constituted one of the bases for *Bauhaus* and *Neue Sachlichkeit*, trends which fundamentally shaped the outlook of the entire twentieth century. Japanese influences were at work in the articulation of all these innovating trends. Japan has indeed often worked as a source of inspiration, today as in the past.

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Note on spelling, romanization and the use of Chinese characters and the Japanese syllabary (hiragana and katakana).

Belgium is a union of two main linguistic communities (besides a small German-speaking community), so as a rule federal institutions have an official Dutch and French name. However, in recent years they have also adopted an official English name, which we have generally used for the sake of convenience.

Names of Japanese persons are arranged in the order used in Japan, i.e. the family name precedes the given name. There are two exceptions to this rule: the names of Japanese authors of books or articles written in a Western language and the names of the Japanese contributors to this book are given in the "reversed order", with the personal name preceding the family name. Sometimes this leads to slight anomalies, such as when the name of a Japanese contributor of one article is mentioned in the text of another contribution. People unfamiliar with Japanese names are often at a loss as to which is the personal name and which the family name, and tend to pick the wrong one. My own feeling, in which I am not alone, is that it would be much wiser to follow the Japanese order consistently, but that means going against the tendency among many Japanese to subvert the order of their name in compliance with Western practice whenever they transcribe it into roman letters. The upshot of this tendency of compliance has at any rate been that we now come across both styles, and have to live with the ensuing confusion.

Japanese words are romanized in what is commonly called the modified Hepburn system, as used for example in the successive editions of *Kenkyūsha's Japanese English Dictionary*. For the benefit of readers who are less familiar with this system, we may add that, roughly speaking, vowels are pronounced as in Italian, and consonants as in English. When a word is represented in another romanization system, we have added the Hepburn transcription between brackets. Common Japanese words that have entered the English lexicon are not italicized. Chinese words are transliterated in *Hanyu pinyin*, reflecting present-day standard pronunciation, except in quotations, where the original transcription is respected, and except for those words that have an accepted spelling in the English language.

In most of the contributed articles one will come across Chinese characters inserted in the running text. We hope that the readers who are not familiar with these graphs (kanji), do not experience their presence as an unnecessary impediment to the smooth reading of the text. We have notably included them following the names of Japanese persons, lesser-known place names, titles of Japanese books, institutions, important concepts and notions, or typically Japanese phenomena. All graphs that are included in the list of the *Jōyō kanji* are consistently given in their simplified form. It is common practice in the field of Japanese studies to reproduce the kanji, and since this book is also intended as a work of reference, we assume that both the students of Japanese studies, and Japanese readers, would appreciate the original renderings of the aforesaid word categories.

› Mural in the "salon japonais" in the Chinese Pavilion, Laeken. Japanese embroidery, featuring two flying *apsaras* (celestial maidens), from the late Meiji period (early twentieth century), ordered by Alexandre Marcel, architect of the Japanese Tower in Laeken, from a Japanese workshop.

THE FIRST TREATY BETWEEN BELGIUM AND JAPAN (1866)

Dirk De Ruyver

JAPAN & BELGIUM
An Itinerary of Mutual Inspiration

Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, USN (*c.*1856–1858).
Photograph by Mathew Brady (1823–1896).
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA.

THE FIRST TREATY BETWEEN BELGIUM AND JAPAN (1866)

The Treaty of Kanagawa (1854)

On 31 March 1854, Japan and the United States signed a treaty.[1] This treaty ended an era of over 200 years during which Japan had banned all foreigners from its soil, with the exception of the Chinese and the Dutch, who were limited to the City of Nagasaki. The Dutch found themselves on a fan-shaped islet in the Bay of Nagasaki, called Deshima, bound by rules that were mostly imposed upon them unilaterally by the Japanese authorities.[2]

The Americans deplored the way the Japanese treated the Dutch. They considered Deshima to be a mere prison. The American envoy negotiating the treaty with Japan, Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, was expected to deliver a better deal for his country.[3]

The United States had several reasons to press Japan for a treaty. By the 1850s, the US had expanded its economic development from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.[4] A major driving force in this movement of expansion was the steam engine. It had given birth to railways, an ideal means of transport in a vast country like the US. It also gave rise to steamships, which enabled the Americans to explore the Pacific. Whaling was bringing more and more American vessels into the vicinity of Japan.[5] However, shipwrecked Americans found themselves badly treated in Japan, where foreigners were forbidden.[6] The American press had published appalling stories from shipwrecked American sailors who had succeeded in returning to the US after having endured hardship and harsh treatment in Japan. There was pressure on the US government to do something about this.[7]

In 1844 the United States had concluded a treaty with China that focused on trade between the two countries and introduced foreign settlements in five Chinese cities.[8] Ships leaving from America for China passed Japan without being able to provision themselves there. For European countries, Japan was at the far end of the Asian continent, but for the Americans, Japan was the first country met when sailing into Asia. If the United States wanted its trade with China to blossom, Japan had to open up. Perry's primary goal was to open Japan, not so much in the first instance for its internal market or for free trade as such, but for the supplies Japan could provide to American vessels passing by, including daily necessities, coal, wood, and so forth.[9]

The 1854 treaty between the US and Japan secured just that. The ports of Shimoda and Hakodate were opened, enabling American whaling ships and trading vessels to take on supplies. Shipwrecked Americans were ensured humane treatment while awaiting repatriation. Instead of rules unilaterally imposed by the Japanese authorities, as in Deshima, the American treaty secured important rights for American citizens, which could not be unilaterally altered by the Japanese. Great Britain succeeded in concluding a similar treaty on 14 October 1855.[10]

On 22 October 1854, the governor of Nagasaki handed a dispatch to the Dutch at Deshima, in which the Japanese authorities confirmed that the Treaty of Kanagawa was also applicable to them. Henceforth, Dutch vessels were allowed to receive supplies or repairs at Shimoda and Hakodate.[11]

The Dutch, who had tried in vain to induce Japan to negotiate a treaty with them in 1844,[12] reached a temporary agreement with the Japanese government on 9 November 1855.[13] This agreement was transformed into a formal treaty on 30 January 1856.[14] It contained 28 articles, considerably more than the treaties with the Americans (12 articles) or the British (7). That the 1856 treaty with the Dutch contained far more practical stipulations was a natural outcome of the 250 years of contact between the Dutch and the Japanese. Article 2 ensured the right of extraterritoriality for Dutch citizens in Japan.[15]

Russia concluded a treaty with Japan on 7 February 1856.[16] It contained the basic elements of extraterritoriality for both Russian nationals in Japan and Japanese nationals in Russia, stating in article 8:

> Both a Russian in Japan and a Japanese in Russia are always free and will not be submitted to any oppression. Whoever commits a crime, can be arrested, but will be judged only in accordance with the laws of his own country.[17]

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