Crossing Boundaries

Suzuki Bokushi
(1770-1842)
and the Rural Elite
of
Tokugawa Japan

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This thesis is presented for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University, 2008
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

__________________________________________
Takeshi Moriyama
ABSTRACT

This thesis centres on a member of the rural elite, Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842) of Echigo, and his social environment in Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868). Through a case study of the interaction between one individual’s life and his social conditions, the thesis participates in the ongoing scholarly reassessment of Tokugawa society, which had an apparently rigid political and social structure, yet many features that suggest a prototype of modernity. Bokushi’s life was multifaceted. He was a village administrator, landlord, pawnbroker, poet, painter, and great communicator, with a nation-wide correspondence network that crossed various social classes. His remote location and humble lifestyle notwithstanding, he was eventually able to publish a book about his region, Japan’s ‘snow country’. This thesis argues that Bokushi’s life epitomises both the potentiality and the restrictions of his historical moment for a well-placed member of the rural elite. An examination of Bokushi’s life and texts certainly challenges residual notions of the rigidity of social boundaries between the urban and the rural, between social statuses, and between cultural and intellectual communities. But Bokushi’s own actions and attitudes also show the force of conservative social values in provincial life. His activities were also still restrained by the external environment in terms of geographical remoteness, infrastructural limitation, political restrictions, cultural norms and the exigencies of human relationships. Bokushi’s life shows that in his day, Tokugawa social frameworks were being shaken and reshaped by people’s new attempts to cross conventional boundaries, within, however, a range of freedom that had both external and internal limits.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements i
Conventions iii
Abbreviations vi
Tables, Figures and Maps vii

**Introduction** 1

**Chapter 1** Beyond the Locality: Bokushi’s Life in a Rural Post-Town 56
- Bokushi’s Home Region 57
- The Rural Town of Shiozawa 73
- Bokushi’s Access to Information 83
- Bokushi’s Travels 95

**Chapter 2** The Farmer-Merchant: Bokushi’s Rural Business 115
- The Rural Economy in Uonuma 117
- Bokushi as Landlord 130
- Bokushi as Rural Pawnbroker 143
- Bokushi’s Business Values: the Merchant Code 155

**Chapter 3** The Household and Individual Lives: Bokushi’s Family Documents 169
- Formal Discourse and Private Voices in Bokushi’s Family History 171
- Marriage and the ‘Household’ 182
- Domestic Disputes 201
Chapter 4 Cultured Provincials: Bokushi in the Diffusion of the Arts

Bokushi’s Education 223
Bokushi and His Local Intellectual Environment 228
Meetings with Visiting Artists and Writers 233
Books in the Provinces 241
Haikai Poetry in the Uonuma Region 249
Bokushi’s Haikai Contests 259

Chapter 5 Correspondence and the Cultural Elite: Bokushi’s Communication Network

Bokushi’s Communication Network 275
Methods and Context of Bokushi’s Network-Building 287
Bokushi’s Use of the Mail System 304
Letter-Writing Habits – Bokushi, Bakin and Kyōzan 314
Contents of Letters – Bokushi and His Correspondents 318

Chapter 6 Publishing Hokuetsu Seppu: Bokushi and His Urban Collaborators

The Development of Bokushi’s Literary Interest in His Region 334
The Provincial Literati and Print Culture 341
Bokushi’s Negotiations with Urban Authors 348
Bokushi, Bakin and Kyōzan 356
Bokushi, the Edo Publishing World, and Hokuetsu Seppu 367

Conclusion 393

Appendix Rice Prices in Shiozawa, 1787-1853 405
Bibliography 408
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The illustration on the cover page of this thesis is taken from Suzuki Bokushi with Kyōzanjin Momoki (annotated by Okada Takematsu), \textit{Hokuetsu seppu} (Iwanami shoten, 1978), p. 229. The original was drawn by Suzuki Bokushi, the subject of this thesis. The person on the right is probably Bokushi himself, and on the left is one of his relatives. They are sitting in the drawing room of a rural elite family, looking at a fossil.
CONVENTIONS

This thesis uses the following conventions that have been widely adopted in recent studies of Japanese history in the English language.

Names
Japanese names are given according to Japanese custom, with surname first, except in the case of authors writing in English who choose to reverse the order.

In the case of literary figures, their pseudonyms are generally used once the full name with surname has been given. For example, Suzuki Bokushi is subsequently referred to as Bokushi, his pseudonym, although his surname is Suzuki and his actual given name is Gisōji. I have normally ignored alternative given names, such as those used in childhood and the official name of the household head.

Merchants are sometimes referred to by their tradename. For example, the Ōtsuka family was known in the community as the Takada-ya, its tradename, and so the head of the family is also referred to as Takada-ya.

Dates
Dates are given in numerals in order of: year in the Western calendar/Japanese month/Japanese date. For example, the 30th day of the 12th month in the 12th year of the Kansei era in the Japanese calendar is given as 1800/12/30. According to convention, I disregard the fact that the last part of the year in the Tokugawa-period calendar actually fell in the early part of the following year in the Gregorian calendar, as a date in the Tokugawa-period calendar was normally twenty to forty days behind the corresponding one in the Gregorian calendar.

The Tokugawa-period calendar had intercalary months (urū zuki) such as urū ni gatsu (intercalary month after the 2nd month), in order to adjust the difference between the lunar calendar and the solar position. The example above would be given as ‘urū 2’ in this thesis.
Where appropriate, dates in the Gregorian calendar are given in addition to Japanese dates. I used the calendar conversion tool at http://maechan.net/kanreki for this purpose.

**Ages**
People’s ages are given in the Japanese traditional age-count system (*kazoe doshi*), following all the sources used in this thesis. According to this custom, people were considered to be aged one until the end of the year in which they were born, aged two in the second calendar year, and so forth, regardless of their own actual birthdays.

**Currency**
Prices and costs are normally given as they appear in the sources. Where appropriate, however, I convert the sum into an equivalent value of gold currency in *ryō*. The units of currency in the Tokugawa period were as follows:

- *kin* (gold): 1 *ryō* = 4 *bu* = 16 *shu*
- *gin* (silver): 1 *kan* (= 3.75 kg) = 1,000 *monme* (=10,000 *bu*)
- *zeni*: 1 *kan* (= 100 *hiki*) = 1,000 *mon*

Exchange rates among gold, silver and *zeni* fluctuated from time to time, and to some extent from place to place. I adopt the rate that is the closest possible in time and place. Generally speaking, around the period 1800-1830, one *ryō* in gold was worth sixty *monme* in silver, or about 6,000 *mon* in *zeni*.

**Koku for rice and landholding**
*Koku* was a unit of volume, measuring approximately 180 litres, and most significantly was used to measure rice production and trade as well as land value and tax. Under the Tokugawa regime, landholdings were measured in *koku* as well as area (one *tan* = 990 square metres) by recording the officially assessed productivity of the rice crop (*koku-daka*) of each piece of land, even vegetable fields and residential blocks. In this thesis, while one *koku* of rice means 180 litres of rice grain (which weighs approximately 150
kilograms) unless noted otherwise, one koku of land means a piece of land
with an official productivity equivalent to one koku of rice grain annually. As
explained in the thesis, there was, however, a considerable gap between
officially assessed productivity and actual productivity in rice (jiisshū) in the
region with which this thesis is concerned, as in other places.

Macrons
Macrons are used to indicate long vowels in Japanese such as in ‘Honshū’
and ‘Santō Kyōzan’. However, I follow a widely accepted custom in
historical studies of Japan in the English language in not giving macrons in
the following words: ‘Tokyo’, ‘Kyoto’, ‘Osaka’, ‘shogun’, ‘daimyo’ and
‘Shinto’. When these words appear in titles and publishers of Japanese
publications, however, I do include macrons.

Place of publication
All Japanese-language sources are published in Tokyo unless otherwise
stated.
ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBZ2</td>
<td><em>Suzuki Bokushi zenshū</em>, vol. 2 (<em>gekan shiryōhen</em>) (details as above).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLES, FIGURES AND MAPS

Tables

0.1. Texts collected in *Suzuki Bokushi zenshū*, two volumes  p. 48

1.1. Changes in rulers of Uonuma County (1363-1827) as recorded by Bokushi  p. 64

1.2. Bokushi’s travels beyond Uonuma County  p. 101

2.1. Average costs and profit of *chijimi* production for weavers in Shiozawa in 1857  p. 122

2.2. Shiozawa district’s trade with other provinces in 1832  p. 127

2.3. Basic demographic data for Shiozawa district (1755)  p. 128

2.4. Land acquisition and other changes in the property of the Suzuki family, 1761-1839  p. 132

2.5. Hypothetical calculation of Bokushi’s profit from his 80 *koku* of paddies, using a 1792 document produced for a lawsuit in Uonuma region  p. 135

3.1. Bokushi’s marriages  p. 184

4.1. Literary and artistic figures who visited the Suzuki family or their relatives/friends  p. 237

4.2. Bokushi’s *haikai* contest in 1800  p. 260

4.3. Geographical location of the poets whose verses were published in *Jippyō hokkushū* (1802)  p. 266

5.1. Number of poets in each province whose *haikai* cards were collected by Bokushi by ca 1832  p. 284

5.2. Bokushi’s contact with famous literati  p. 294

5.3. Correspondence between Bokushi (Shiozawa) and Bakin (Edo), 1818-34  p. 309

5.4. Correspondence between Bokushi (Shiozawa) and Kyōzan (Edo), 1829-34  p. 309

5.5. Number of letters exchanged between Bokushi and Bakin  p. 315

6.1. Bokushi’s negotiations with urban authors over the publication of ‘snow tales’  p. 350
6.2. Urban writers’ plans to publish with Bokushi  p. 371
6.3. The Development of the Kyōzan-Bokushi project to produce Hokuetsu seppu  p. 378

Figures
1.1. Illustration of ‘post-station’ (eki) in Hokuetsu seppu  p. 81
1.2. Illustration of ‘town ward’ (shi chū) in Hokuetsu seppu  p. 81
1.3. Illustration of a peasant house in Hokuetsu seppu  p. 82
1.4. ‘Akiyama kikō’ – Bokushi’s 1829 manuscript  p. 111
4.1. An illustration in Kokkei tabigarasu, 1820  p. 239
4.2. A Suzuki household document containing a catalogue number entered by Bokushi  p. 245
4.3. A haigaku in Uonuma  p. 252
5.1. Bokushi’s collection of artwork by others  p. 276
5.2. Letters from Bakin and Kyōzan to Bokushi  p. 277
5.3. Bokushi’s record of the producers of his art collection, with marks identifying type of contact  p. 279
5.4. Geographical spread of Bokushi’s correspondents (provinces of residence)  p. 282
5.5. Number of letters in Bokushi’s letter-collection and their provinces or cities of origin, ca 1802  p. 283
5.6. Artistic collaborations between Bokushi’s pictures (ga) and famous writers’ poems (san)  p. 292
5.7. Ukiyo-e portraits of Ichikawa Danjūrō VII (by Utagawa Kunisada) and Hanaōgi of the Ōgi-ya (by Katsukawa Shunchō)  p. 296
5.8. Bokushi’s ‘surimono’ (one-page personal print)  p. 319
6.1. Hokuetsu seppu  p. 334
6.2. Landscape pictures by Koizumi Kimei and Bokushi  p. 338
6.3. ‘Bull-fighting in Echigo’  p. 345
6.4. ‘Shapes of Snowflakes’: an illustration in *Hokuetsu seppu* p. 377

6.5. Inside cover pages of the first print of Part I of *Hokuetsu seppu* in 1837 and of Part II in 1842 p. 385

6.6. Bokushi’s note on his copy of *Hokuetsu seppu* p. 388

Maps

0.1. Provinces (*kuni*) and locations in Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868) p. x

0.2. Echigo Province in the Tokugawa period p. xi

1.1. The rural post-town of Shiozawa p. 79
Map 0.1: Provinces (kuni) and locations in Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868)

| Province   | Aki | Higo | Kii | Shima | Awa (安房) | Hitachi | Kōzuke | Shimōsa | Awaji | Hizen | Mikawa | Shimotsuke | Awaji (阿波) | 64 | 37 | 10
|------------|-----|------|-----|-------|-----------|---------|--------|---------|-------|------|--------|-------------|-------------|---|----|-----
| Awa (安房) | 52  | 64   | 37  | 31    | 12        | 7       | 8      | 6       | 42    | 65   | 25     | 6            | 56           | 5   |    |     
| Awaji      | 42  | 45   | 46  | 6     | 50        | 61      | 23     | 54      | 49    | 29   | 13     | 13           | 6            | 1   |    |     
| Bingo      | 50  | 56   | 65  | 31    | 12        | 7       | 8      | 6       | 42    | 61   | 25     | 6            | 50           | 4   |    |     
| Bitchū    | 49  | 47   | 54  | 33    | 47        | 69      | 2      | 19      | 49    | 29   | 9      | 9            | 47           | 2   |    |     
| Bizen      | 47  | 69   | 65  | 33    | 47        | 69      | 2      | 19      | 49    | 29   | 9      | 9            | 47           | 2   |    |     
| Chikugo    | 63  | 58   | 54  | 33    | 63        | 51      | 2      | 38      | 56    | 61   | 23     | 23           | 63           | 3   |    |     
| Chikuzen   | 62  | 57   | 61  | 54    | 62        | 57      | 2      | 38      | 56    | 61   | 23     | 23           | 62           | 2   |    |     
| Dewa       | 3   | 20   | 29  | 36    | 3         | 20      | 20     | 20      | 20    | 20   | 20     | 20           | 3            | 4   |    |     
| Echigo     | 5   | 41   | 45  | 45    | 5         | 41      | 24     | 27      | 24    | 24   | 24     | 24           | 5            | 7   |    |     
| Echizen    | 22  | 48   | 46  | 36    | 22        | 48      | 48     | 36      | 22    | 48   | 48     | 48           | 22           | 3   |    |     
| Echū       | 17  | 21   | 15  | 36    | 17        | 21      | 15     | 36      | 17    | 21   | 15     | 15           | 17           | 1   |    |     
| Ezo-chi*   | 1   | 14   | 15  | 36    | 1         | 14      | 14     | 36      | 1     | 14   | 14     | 14           | 1            | 1   |    |     
| Harima     | 39  | 35   | 66  | 33    | 39        | 35      | 66     | 33      | 39    | 35   | 66     | 33           | 39           | 3   |    |     
| Hida       | 18  | 11   | 40  | 33    | 18        | 11      | 40     | 33      | 18    | 11   | 40     | 33           | 18           | 1   |    |     

*These areas were officially not 'provinces' (kuni).
Map 0.2: Echigo Province in the Tokugawa period