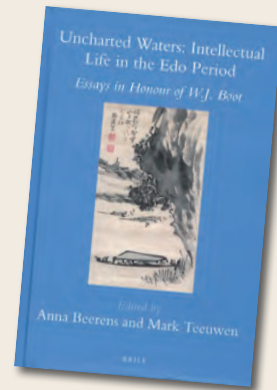


BOOK REVIEW

*Uncharted Waters:
Intellectual Life in the Edo Period
Essays in Honour of W.J. Boot*

Edited by Anna Beerens and Mark Teeuwen

Brill, 2012
259 pages. ISBN 978-9004216730



As those working in the field well know, publishers today tend to refuse conference volumes and festschrifts. Such books, they argue, don't sell and don't hang together to make an argument: they are bitty and work towards no common purpose. This little jewel of a collection proves the error of such views, and Brill is to be credited for taking it on. That said, they are charging almost \$150 for it, so they clearly also feel this festschrift is the nearest thing to a financial non-starter. If so, it is a pity. At least, libraries will buy it, and this book deserves to be widely read.

Scholars and students of the Edo Period will be acquainted with—or at least with the name of—‘Wim’ Boot. He has been an inspiration over many decades, not only in his home institution of Leiden University in the Netherlands, but across Europe, Japan and North America. Though I never personally studied with Professor Boot, I read his Ph.D. when it came out in 1983 (I was still an undergraduate). It was one of the reasons for my determining to try for a Ph.D. myself. From that initial statement on Neo-Confucianism (actually, not too “initial,” as he had already published several pieces), Professor Boot went on to cover a wide range of topics relating to Japanese intellectual history in the Edo period, though, as the title of this book makes clear, he and his students are interested in intellectual *life*: intellectual history is not, and should never be, they propose, deprived of its social meanings. Professor Boot’s inspirational qualities and generosity as a teacher—and his rigor too—are evinced in the eleven papers that make up this collection, coming from the desks of experts from many national and cultural backgrounds across the world.

The book begins with a slightly straw-man denial of the old notion of a static life of the mind on the Edo period. Throughout, there are a few moments when the authors do not seem quite clear about their audience. It is explained to us that Tokugawa Ieyasu was deified, and we are told who Maruyama Ōkyo was, though I doubt anyone who picks up this volume will need to be informed of such matters. Still, for the most part, readers are led by each essay directly into a pithy scholarly debate, which is articulated both for its own interest, and also as an avenue to understanding a wider issue or conundrum. The result is a set of pieces that very much hang together within their diversity. Being a collection of what Professor Boot’s students happen to be working on, this is somewhat random, and of course, not all is covered. As an art historian, I regret that visual matters are all but totally ignored, as if they had no role to play in the “intellectual life” of the Edo period.

The book's essays are grouped into three sections: firstly, discussions of informal social friendship circles ("Intellectual Networks"), of the type that have been much discussed recently; secondly, true academic debates in politics, history and poetics, and finally, and to be expected in a book emanating from the Netherlands, issues of Edo internationalism ("Western connections"), and *Rangaku*, with a focus on linguistic matters. In Rudolf Effert's clear exposition of the tangled history of Edo's great Japanese-Dutch dictionary, the *Haruma*, we finally have the matter of that key work straight. The set ends with a snippet from Thomas Harper's long-awaited historical novelization of the Akō Incident (the Forty-seven Rōnin), which promises much for the final book. There is then a list of Professor Boot's own extensive publications, though surprisingly, and perhaps unfortunately, there is no biographical sketch.

Although much is to be learned from all the sections, the core of the book comprises the six chapters that make up the central section, and which account for half the volume's length. These are headed "Legitimizing Tokugawa Rule," and deal with the specific issue of what we now call Tokugawa ideology, though with a net cast wide. With more time, this set might have grown into a book in its own right (though it would have been a pity to shed some of the other essays in the process), and we see here where Professor Boot's real academic succession lies. These central essays merit being discussed independently, though notable are Kiri Paramore's articulation of the stresses between Confucian notions of meritocratic government and feudalism, particularly in the reform of the Shōheizaka at the turn of the eighteenth century, and then Mark Teeuwen's analysis of the concept of *tentō* ("the Way of Heaven") as it appears in the oft-cited though not too often read *Seji kenbunroku* by Buyō Inshi. Marc Buijsters' retelling of the legends surrounding the Zōjōji's wonder-working image, the Black Icon, is also useful.

Reviewed by Timon Screech