



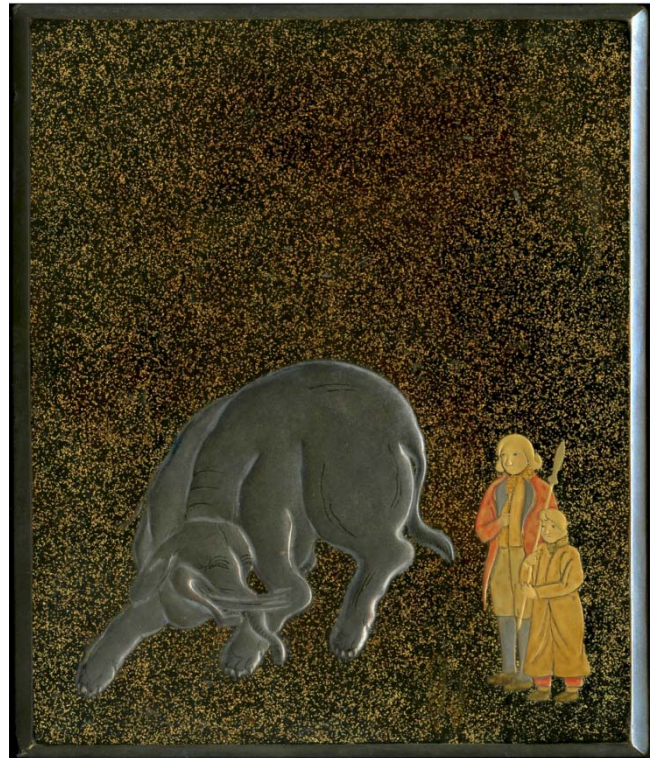
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Since the landing of the first Portuguese sailors at Tanegashima in 1543, the term *namban* (南蛮, Southern Barbarian) has been used to describe Europeans, although English and Dutch were also known as *kōmō* (紅毛, "Red Hair"). "Barbarian" does not necessarily have the connotation of "primitive" or "savage" (it is closer of the Greek etymology of the word, simply meaning foreign), even if it was following a Chinese usage, in which the surrounding "uncivilized" people in each of the four directions had their own term, southern barbarians being called *nanman*.

The arrival of the *namban-jin* stimulated an awareness of *namban-bunko* (南蛮文化, European culture) including sciences, medicine, astronomy and art, which were taught by Jesuit missionaries, but also led to the birth of an aesthetic in which the *namban-byōbu* (南蛮屏風, folding screen showing European merchant) occupied a primary position. These folding screens had as a favourite theme the arrival of Europeans in a Japanese port, showing their large sailing ships and a parade of Europeans in the city. Those parades gave the artist the opportunity to illustrate all kinds of "exotic" details, including lavish clothing, like the Portuguese *bombachas* (baggy breeches tied at the ankles) and dark eyeglasses. The Europeans were often depicted smoking pipes and being carried in palanquins, shaded with parasols held by servants from Africa and surrounded by acrobats and animals never seen before in the archipelago, such as falcons, Persian horses, greyhounds on leashes, leopards, camels and even elephants brought from Ceylon or India.



Suzuribako (writing box) cover. Lacquer, Edo Period

Although the *namban-byōbu* enthusiasm did not survive long after the persecution of Christians and the final expulsion of the Portuguese in 1639, *Namban* iconography discretely persisted in Japan during the Edo period and even through the Meiji era in a few recognizable motifs, including sailing ships, *namban-jin* in European attire or smoking pipes, black servants, and greyhounds or elephants. Although not widely popular, these motifs were cherished among the members of high society, who wished to have exotic interior decoration. Their rarity makes them highly praised by a few collectors today.

