The artwork I have made for this exhibition is a pair of spectacles, borrowing a shape from Qing Dynasty China (Fig.1). It aims to express how Japanese people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries might have seen the world through the eyes of China as well as how I, as a Japanese glass artist living abroad, see the history of Chinese glass.

Fig. 1 Spectacles made in Qing Dynasty China. Collected by the British Museum.

Historically, Japan learnt immense amounts of knowledge in science, technology, literature and art from China. Up until the mid-sixteenth century when Portuguese missionaries and merchants started visiting, Japan did not have direct contact with European countries, but such knowledge filtered over from China. European glassware was brought by Portuguese and Dutch merchants to *Nagasaki* (長崎), who called "vidro (glass)" in Portuguese. However, Japan soon tightened its national seclusion policy, especially against fervent Catholics, and international commerce was cut off except for that with the Netherlands and Ming Dynasty China. Therefore, European-influenced "vidro-making" in Nagasaki developed through an amalgamation with Chinese knowledge. For the following two hundred years, Japan continued to trade in Nagasaki only with Qing Dynasty China and the Netherlands to a lesser extent (Fig. 2). Thus, China was always Japan's primary gateway to the world.

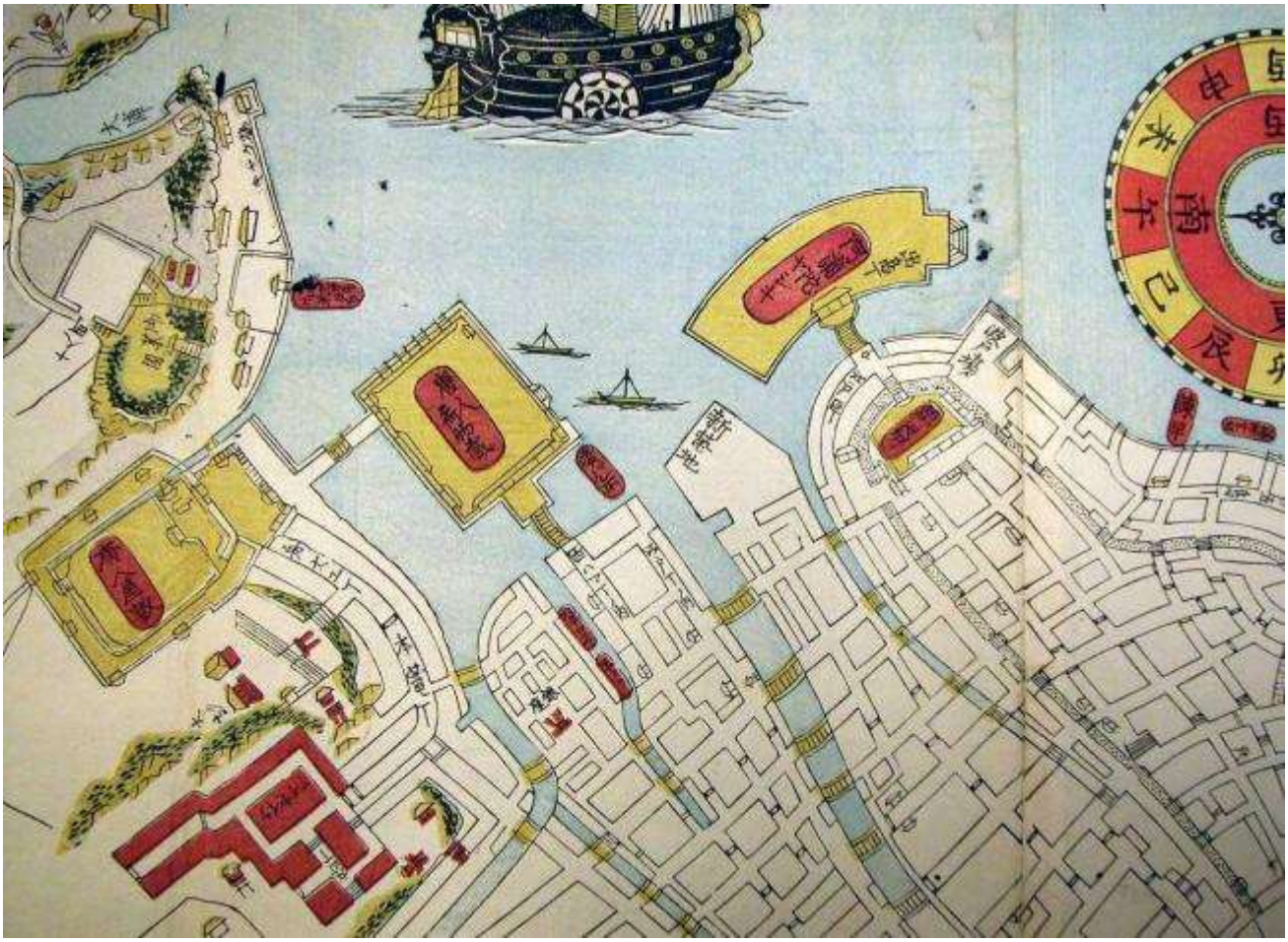

Fig. 2 "*Nagasaki kaigan no zu*" (長崎海岸之図) c.1800. Collected by the Library of Congress. Chinese warehouse (唐人荷物蔵) and Chinese settlement (唐人屋敷) are shown at the middle-left on the map. The fan-shape island at the top-middle is *Dejima* (出島), the island reserved solely for the Dutch (阿蘭陀) merchants.

Spectacles were introduced to Japan by European missionaries in the mid-sixteenth century. After international contact was restricted, they were still a commodity imported through limited trading. Eventually, Japanese-made spectacles became available, but the Chinese and Dutch spectacles were particularly prized as luxury items (Fig.3).

Fig. 3 A guide book of shopping and restaurants in Edo. "*Edo kaimono hitori annai*" (江戸買物独案内, 1824), showing Dutch and Chinese spectacles on sale. Collected by National Diet Library of Japan (国立国会図書館).

Spectacles are devices for seeing, and we can imagine that looking through these imported items was perhaps one way that people living in closed Japan might understand and conjure an image of the outside world. It is also evocative to me, having studied overseas for many years, that a Nagasaki merchant *Yahyōe Hamada* (浜田弥兵衛) travelled abroad and learnt spectacle-making. It is recorded in "*Nagasaki yawa sō*" (長崎夜話草), a commentary about foreign relations published in 1720, that he travelled across the world on a trading ship during the *Genna* era (元和年間 1615-1623), which was just before the travel ban introduced by the seclusion policy. The policy, announced in 1633, prohibited Japanese people returning home if they lived abroad for more than five years, and it was tightened further to ban all trans-border travel in 1635. This history makes me realise the surprising changes which have happened over time. Today, I have easier access to knowledge through publications and the internet, and travelling has become dramatically quicker due to the airplane.

In my work, the left lens is an imaginary view of Japanese people two hundred years ago, and the right lens is my perception of today. Both are depicted in the style of layered line-drawings. The use of slender glass lines is the chief characteristic of my glasswork, and it also resonates with the elaborate features of engraved Qing Dynasty snuff bottles (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 Glass snuff bottles made in Qing Dynasty China. Collected by V&A.

(March 2014)