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## **Japanese Encounters with Latin America and Iberian Catholicism (1549-1973) Some Proposals for Possible Directions of Research in Comparative Literature**

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### Prologue

On the 28<sup>th</sup> January 1614, the Japanese delegation on board of *San Juan Baptista* docked in Acapulco. The delegation, consisting of more than 100 Japanese members, was lead by Hasekura Rokuzaemon Tsunenaga (1571-1622), a vassal of the Lord, Date Masamune (1567-1636). The ship had set sail on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1613 from the port of Tsukinoura, and took nearly three months to cross the Pacific Ocean. Since Cortes’ conquer of Nuova Espana in 1519, almost one century had passed. On board was Luis Sotelo (1574-1624), a Franciscan priest from Seville, who accompanied the delegation. In Europe, he dictated his mission to an Italian archivist, Scipione Amati, who compiled the document *Historia del Regno de Voxu*. in 1615 (1).

In it, Luois Sotelo triumphantly reported that seventy-eight Japanese were baptized in Mexico City. However, the extant church records make no mention of such event, as Van C. Gessel remarks (2). It is also reported that the group of twenty or so Japanese sailed from Veracruz on 10 June 1614. One may presume that they passed Puebla in 1614 on their way to the Gulf of Mexico. They were probably the first Japanese countrymen to make the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. It was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1614 that they finally had an audience with the Pope Paul V in Vatican, but it produced little concrete result. The Tokugawa Shogunate, founded by Ieyasu (1543-1616), had promulgated in 1613, the year of Hasekura’s departure, the notorious Christian expulsion edict. The goals of the Hasekura mission had been entirely abandoned at home, while the delegation was abroad. On his way home Hasekura was ordered to stay in Manila for years and it was only in 1620 that the Japanese authorities allowed him to return home.

When Hasekura died two years later, in 1622, his diary seems to be confiscated and eventually destroyed; the loss of the first hand document makes it difficult to reconstruct the Japanese footsteps. It was also in 1622, that Luis Sotelo disguised himself and made his way back to Japan. The priest was arrested and executed. His martyrdom took place on the 25 August, 1624. Endo Shusaku (1923-1996), a Japanese Catholic writer, once nominee of the Nobel prize, was interested in this diplomatic mission and wrote a novel, *The Samurai* (1980, translated into English by Van C. Gessel in 1982)(3). The narrator in the novel, Velasco, is faithfully modeled after Luis Sotelo, and Endo tries to penetrate his psyche, while analyzing the mental and spiritual suffering of the Japanese. Endô is asking: why did all those who were involved in the mission have to suffer for the sake of Christianity? Was their suffering redeemed? Indeed, the writer’s life-long concern was the human sufferings in front of the passion of Jesus Christ. Recent studies in comparative literature re-examine Endo’s novels from the post-colonial viewpoints. Let us briefly discuss three issues which are relevant to elucidate the historical and cross-cultural range of Endo’s literary creation in a larger context (4).

### 1.

Christian encounter with Japan was a challenge to the notion of universality. Firstly, the encounter with the newly discovered Oriental language raised fundamental questions as for how to incorporate it into the pre-existing system of knowledge. It is well known that Saint Francois Xavier (1506-1552)’s letters from Japan lead Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) to believe that Japan was the Kingdom of Prester John; to this cabbalistic scholar, the Japanese language appeared as the key to solve the Christian mystery (5). Half a century later, in 1606, Joan Rodriguez (1561?-1639), Jesuit priest and famous interpret who stayed in Japan, compiled and published *Arte da lingoa de Iapam* in Nagasaki. The book was the first Grammar of the Japanese language ever written in European languages. How to describe grammatical structure of Japanese was far from self-evident. In this book, Rodriguez first regarded the particles of Japanese language (so-called te-ni-wo-ha) as equivalent

of inflexions in European languages. Following the standard model of Luiz Alvarez's Latin Grammar, Rodriguez tried to put the particles into the mould of declension or conjugation table of European languages. In the process, however, the Jesuit was faced with impossibility (he was facing the challenge of comparing the incomparable, to use Emmanuel Levinas's formulation, indicated by Professor Djelal Kadir) and forced to change his mind. He had to strive to invent a new grammatical category, in deviation from the Latin model, so as to recognize the particles as a particular function of the native language (6).

The shift in Rodriguez' methodology dramatically demonstrates the failed attempts at absorbing otherness by reducing into one's own familiar classificatory category. It also testifies to the moment when the putatively universal applicability of the Latin grammar to other languages revealed its limit. The *lingua franca* had to confront with incompatible grammar system. It was at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that Rodriguez's edition was rediscovered. The rediscovery certainly contributed to the reconstruction of phonetics and semantics of the Japanese language as they were at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, as Suzuki Tae has shown. However, the importance of Rodriguez grammar does not stop there. It is true that the newly discovered alien language was annexed to the Western territory of knowledge. But, like a Trojan horse, it began to sap the monolithic foundation of the Western epistemological paradigm and invalidated, partly at least, the norm of the Western science of language. This incident may be counted among the problematical paradigm splits (if not shift) in human intellectual and linguistic history. The Western superiority as the conquering/colonizing power was seriously put into question, at least on a symbolic level, by the indigestible gift (in the sense of Derridian "pharmakon") offered by the indigenous people, who were destined to-be-conquered/colonized.

## 2.

Secondly, spiritual dimension must also be taken into account in cultural confrontations in thought. In her recent doctor dissertation, Orii Yoshimi, who stayed in Salamanca, studies Luis de Granada (1504-1588)'s impact in Japan (7). Curiously enough, some of Luis de Granada's writings, including *Contemptus mundi* (1536) were received and read in contemporary Japan. *Guia de pecadores* (in Spanish), for example was translated as *Guia do Pecador* (singular in Portuguese) and published in movable wooden types in 1599. Previous studies on these Christian translations were mainly limited within the field of lexicology, historical-linguistics, Christian bibliography and missionary studies. The lack of general interest comes from the assumption that these translations have exercised only little and limited impact on the Japanese society, as the Christianity was forbidden shortly after the publication. Indeed, within one century after Francis Xavier's arrival to the archipelago in 1549, the Christianity was completely wiped away by violent persecution from the surface of history. According to Orii's hypothesis, however, the inter-religious dialogue initiated by the translation deserves more serious attention.

Let us mention just one aspect in Orii's demonstration. She points out the fact that the influential Sect of Pure Land, Jôdo-shinshû used to put only secondary importance on the notion of retribution and salvation. And it was not until the restoration movement which was initiated by Renyo (1415-1499), the 8<sup>th</sup> abbot of Honganji temple, during the Ônin civil war period of social turmoil that emphasis was once again laid on the Buddhist retribution. The passage to the Pure Land was promised as recompense for the fulfilled human ethical obligations. This teaching was widely welcomed by the population and the sect was developing its influence in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. According to Orii, this popularity of the Ikkô Sect served as a convenient seedbed for the reception of the Christian idea of redemption and heavenly salvation, which had been particularly elaborated in Luis de Granada's writings of *ascetismo*. It was Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), visitor of missions, who chose works by Luis de Granada as convenient textbooks to motivate the Japanese to the Christian conversion. Valignano is known to have formed a basic strategy for Catholic proselytizing in Japan, which is usually called "adaptationism." He tried to avoid cultural frictions by making compromise with Japanese customs.

It is not clear if Valignano was conscious of the affinity between these Christian ideas and that of the Rennyô Sect. Still the textual comparison proposed by Dr. Orii shows that crucial vocabularies of the Pure Land Sect were adapted so as to transmit Luis de Granada's idea into Japanese. Instead of exacerbating mutual incompatibility, compromises were searched for so as to propagate Christian belief. In this context, two terms deserve special attention. First, the term 'hôsha' usually designates the idea of "infinite thanks" that the human beings express to the mercy of the Buddha Amitabha. In the Japanese translation of Christian catechism, however, the same term gains additional dimension. Human beings express thanks to the Grace of God, and God in return rewards human beings for their devotion and service. The reciprocity or complementary relation

between human effort to self-salvation (jiriki) and Buddha's unconditional mercy (tarik) is attuned to the Christian notion of God's blessing through the notion of "hōsha." In addition, the notion of redemption of humanities through the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ and human adoration and praise for Jesus Christ are also crystallized around the same Buddhist term of "hōsha." The specific Buddhist term is thus "transfigured" as it were, in its contact with Christianity while facilitating Japanese access to the Christian ideas.

Another crucial term is "jinen." "Jinen" was employed as the opposite of the God's Providence, in the passage explaining that the universe and its creatures could not have been made by hazard or by accident but the creation should have been the work of divine Providence. In this context, the term "jinen" appears so as to transmit the idea of "acaso" (accident, hazard). But at the same time, the same Chinese characters are also used to designate the idea of "auto-genetic becoming," of the Nature. In this case, the same Chinese term may be pronounced as "shizen." "Jinen" as hazard may not necessarily be contradictory with God's Providence, but the "shizen" as the auto-genetic Nature of things inevitably falls into contradiction with the idea of God's Creation of the Universe. The ambiguity of the term "jinen/shizen" in the translation shows the ambivalence of the Japanese who had difficulty in understanding the notion of God-All-Mighty as-Creator of the Universe. The difficulty still remains today, preventing the majority of the Japanese from converting in Christianity (in sharp contrast from post-W.W.2 Koreans). Needless to say, Endō, as a Japanese writer, struggled with this difficulty throughout his life.

### 3.

During the period of Japan's first exposure to the Iberian West between 1549 and 1639, the Japanese experienced the conflict between universality and particularity. More than 300 years later, the same conflict was to be articulated in the most paradoxical way by one self-made scholar in linguistics who lived in the Japanese Brazilian immigrant community in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The question of universality of language and the question of the divine Providence –two previous problems we have treated- are combined in his thinking and lead him to a new theory about the origin of the Japanese language. Here is the third and the last case that I want to analyze briefly.

A Japanese Brazilian immigrant amateur scholar, Rokurō Kōyama (1886-1976), launched an audacious hypothesis that the Japanese language and the seemingly unrelated Amerindian language, Tupi, in fact sprang from a common source. "Ikō," for example, means "let's go" both in Japanese and in Tupi. In Tupi etymology that Kōyama proposes, "ikō" stems from the exclamation in finding out long-searched water. Strangely reminiscent of Christian "*vidi aquam*," (which Endō, if not Kōyama, mentions *en passant*) the claimed etymology suggests a foundational and "catholic" link in phonetic associations. What looked like a mere coincidence at first sight becomes a conviction that both Japan and Brazil was linguistically connected with each other by Polynesian language. Here, Kōyama's pan-Pacific vision appears.

Further, he is convinced that Tupi language, because of its primitive merit of conserving one proper meaning in each sound, can provide us with etymological key to decipher Japanese vocabulary. One typical case being "Kashiwara," which is explained as stemming from "koshiara" (the past) in Tupi, which is etymologically composed of 3 Tupi syllables meaning holding(ko)-light(shi)-sun(ara), thus designating Japanese ancestral Sun deity, the Goddess Amaterasu, to which the Kashiwara Shrine is actually dedicated (though in fact the Kashiwara Shrine is a modern invention and it is founded only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Nation-State building). Kōyama also sets up ad hoc rules of phonetic transformation so as to save and rectify the Tupi pronunciation from the putative phonetic corruption caused by Portuguese influences. By multiplying examples, through his compilation of Tupi-Japanese lexicon (1951), etymology (1970), and sound-semantic elucidation (1973), Kōyama comes to the conclusion that Tupi language takes the position of ur-Japanese, providing a "paleo-semantic" dimension for an archaeological excavation in search of the onto-phonetic origin of the Japanese language.

Though apparently eccentric, nationalistic and lacking in sound scholarship, Kōyama's intellectual endeavour is worth being investigated. And the underlining subconscious motivation of his research is easily to understand. The Japanese immigrants represented an ethnic minority which is linguistically isolated and socially alienated from the Portuguese speaking main Brazilian immigrant citizens. The establishment of the positive Japanese ethnic identity was badly needed. The Tupi-Japanese connection, which he claimed to have established, could allow the Japanese to take root in the Brazilian soil as legitimate and authentic settlers. It provided a relevant foundational narrative which could justify Japanese immigrants' presence in Brazil. Indeed, Tupi-Japanese common ancestry, if positively proved, could ethnically connect the Japanese to the Brazilian

natives. It could simultaneously rehabilitate the symbolic value of the marginalized vernacular Tupi language, and contribute to the consolidation of Japanese settlers' social recognition and civil status.

The Tupi-Japanese common ancestry hypothesis was a conciliating narrative. Instead of building up a new counter-narrative to subvert dominant Brazilian social order, this fictional Tupi-Japanese identity might be able to allow the Japanese immigrants, symbolically at least, to take part in the hegemonic position in the Brazilian social hierarchy. For Kôyama, the investigation into Tupi-Japanese language was part of his contribution to the tupinology, in particular, and to the building of the Brazil, in general, as an ideal human community. It did not aim at ethnic separation but aspired to social integration which Kôyama advocated in praise of the Brazilian racial democracy.

He is stating as follows: "It seems to me that it is Brazil that is realizing the universal ideal of the equality of human beings because this country does not discriminate against any immigrant from any place in the world." (8). Hosokawa Shûhei, ethno-musicologist and migrant scholar, who stayed in Brazil in his younger years, and who helped rescuing Kôyama's writing from oblivion, remarks: "For Kôyama, it is only when people around the world "sense" the Tupi sound symbolism hidden in all the languages of the world that they will be able to communicate with each other. Like the Tupi of the past, the world will become truly peaceful." And Hosokawa concludes: "Far from being the quirk of a blind recluse or a linguistic absurdity, Kôyama's Tupi-Japanese-Brazilian world articulates the socio-political, affective, and ideological conditions of the Nikkei (Japanese-Brazilian) community. It is "true fantasy" embedded in the mythico-historical consciousness of a minority group."(9).

## Epilogue

These three cases of cross-cultural and trans-cultural contact bring me to my conclusion.

Yet, before concluding, let us have a brief glance at the American Natural History Museum in the City of New York. At the Entrance Hall, dedicated to the memory of President Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1918), there are series of huge mural paintings to which visitors do no longer pay much attention. On the right side (North wall) is the Panel commemorating the building of the Panama Canal. On the left side (South wall) is the panel representing the Treaty of Portsmouth, September 5, 1905. In front of the memorial hall, on the Western wall, flanked between south and north walls, are represented the scenes from Roosevelt's Exploration in Africa, 1910. The Biblical legacy, accounting for the origin of separation between the Semitic and the Hamitic, is one the top, reminding us of the logic for justifying the Black-African slavery. Many of the beasts, like African elephants or Nubian Lions, that the President hunted during his favourite safari are generously donated to the Museum. These trophies were stuffed (i.e. "naturalized" in French) and still welcoming the visitors to the Museum even nowadays, almost one hundred years after their "naturalization" to the American Museum of Natural History.

The painting which was commissioned to William Andrew Mackay (1878-1939), summarizes the typically American imperialistic world view at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. No less than the "game" that Mr. President shot in Africa, Panama Canal and Portsmouth Treaty were also part of the world "games" of which the President was an active and decisive player. In this representation of the memorable incidents in the career of Theodore Roosevelt, Japan and Central America are facing with each other as the entrance gate to Asia and South America, respectively. And both of the gates are put into the framework of the USA centric perspective. The juxtaposition of Japan and Central America can hardly be a mere coincidence, judging from the strategic and geo-political World view at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At the height of colonialism, The United State of America was taking the leading position to become a "master" of the so-called free-world.

In the ICLA Forum within the American Comparative Literature Association, Central America and Japan are summoned side by side in front of North America, more or less in the same manner as it was the case at the Roosevelt Memorial Hall. The similarity between the two may account for, to a certain degree, the expected role of the Japanese speakers, here in this panel in Pueblo. However it would be hardly justifiable if the power structure depicted in the painting almost 90 years ago were still present here in a duplicated form. Indeed, the mural paintings at the entrance of the American Natural History Museum epitomized the model of the imperial monopoly of knowledge.

Each of the three anecdotes which I briefly examined shows particular case of resistance to such universal claim to the hegemony of cultural domination (10). It was through the resistance to, and negotiation with, the globalizing and self-assertively universal value that vernacular cultures contribute to shape up and enrich configurations of the world histories. My anecdotes must be multiplied by other no less important and

crucial experiences, including the ones from the Meso-American geo-poetical events. Each of the configurations forms one particular elliptic orbit, an ellipse which is traced in a precarious gravity balance between the universal center and the local peripheries. Comparative Studies, which claim to be free from any hegemonic and centripetal world view, have yet to make fundamental and foundational contribution in elucidating these rich and elliptic loci of transpacific human experiences.

Now, in the epoch of internet and website (but we should know who are accessible to them), we are witnessing the Night of the Museum-era. The huge and gigantic archives accumulating world knowledge are no longer relevant. The epoch of Museum as the modern hegemonic institution is coming to its close. I am wondering if the Owl of Minerva takes its flight in the dusk of the evening; if the discipline of Comparative Literature, far from being the “master,” takes the role of “sur-veillance” in the *Night at the Museum of Welt Literatur* (11).

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- (1) This short text owes its birth to Dorothy Figueira’s paper “Merchants, Missionaries and Miscegenation,” read at the Department of Comparative Literature at the Komaba Campus of the University of Tokyo, in 2006. I thank Professor Figueira for putting her text at my disposal. Recently an international symposium is held in Colmar on the subject. *Les échanges entre le Japon et l’Europe lors de la diffusion du christianisme au Japon Durant le XVIe et le XVIIe siècle*, Centre européen des études japonaises à Alsace (CEEJA), du 16 au 18 mars 2007.
- (2) Van C. Gessel, « Postscript : Fact and Truth in The Samurai », in the book in the note (3).
- (3) 遠藤周作『侍』新潮社、1980. Shusaku Endo, *The Samurai, A Novel*, translated from the Japanese by Van C. Gessel, Harper & Row\ Kodansha International, 1982, pp.268-272. Professor Tatsushi Narita’s paper, “T.S. Eliot and Shusaku Endo: Transpacific Perspectives,” in the ACLA in Puebla 2007, was revealing in this aspect.
- (4) Cf. Kazue Nakamura, “On Hearthen Crosses: Christian Frontiers in the Writings of Agnes Sam, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Edgard Mittelhölzer, Witi Ihimaera, Albert Wendt, E.J. Pratt and Endô Shûsaku,” *Hikaku Bungaku Kenkyu, Studies of Comparative Literature*, No 88, 2006, pp.4-36 (in Japanese).
- (5) 長谷川光明「ギョーム・ポステル『世界の驚異』(1553)研究-東西インドの発見と万物復元-」東京都立大学人文科学研究院博士論文。2004. (Haesgawa Mitsuaki, *Études sur La Merveille du Monde par Guillaume Postel*, thèse, 2004).
- (6) Suzuki Tae, « Joan Rodriguez et Arte da lingua de Iapam: un regard sur la langue et la société japonaise du XVIe siècle », *La Rencontre du Japon et de l’Europe : Images d’une Découverte*, L’Université Marc Bloch à Strasbourg, CEEJA, 2005 (à paraître). Curiously, the particles enable the Japanese language to absorb any foreign vocabulary, without being subordinated to the grammatical rules that the imported foreign language tend to inflict upon it.
- (7) Orii Yoshimi, *Fray Luis de Granada y Japon : Comparative Studies of Hispanic and Japanese Culture in the Christian Literature* (en Japonais), Ph.D. dissertation, 2005. My thanks go to Ms. Orii for her information.
- (8) Kôyama Rokurô, *Tupi Ongo Niemu no Gogen: Imide Jinrui Ongo Kôsei Ichion Ichion wo Imi Kansei Kenkyû* (Investigation of meaning-sense of each syllable in the composition of human verbal language through original meaning of the Tupi Language: Nhem), vol.2, Sao Paulo: Private publication, 1973.
- (9) Shûhei Hosokawa, “”Speaking in the Tongue of the Antipode: Japanese Brazilian Fantasy on the Origin of Language,” in Jeffery Lesser, ed. *Searching for Home Abroad, Japanese Brazilians and Transnationalism*, Durham and London: Duke University, 2003, pp.21-45.
- (10) Cf. Shigemi Inaga, “Is Art History Globalizable?” in James Elkins ed. *Is Art History Global?*, New York & London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 249-279. This is part of my implicit response to David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- (11) The Hollywood film, *Night at the Museum* (2006) prompted by 20 % the museum attendance between Dec.22, 2006 and Jan.2, 2007 (*Museums New York*, “Asian Art Takes Over NYC,” Vol. 13, No.1, p.11). For the idea of “sur-veillance,” see, Roland Barthes, “Drame, poème, roman,” in *Tel Quel, Théorie d’ensemble*, Seuil, 1968, pp.34-35.