

# Missionaries and Palimpsest

re-reading texts for re-constructing European missionary activities in India and Japan  
in the context of colonialism a first attempt of defining the project

Engelbert J ORISSEN

Kyoto University,  
Faculty of Integrated Human Studies  
Associate Professor

The research project which I am trying to verify can be divided in two main parts. The researches of the first part concentrate on the early Christian mission in Japan and are aiming at a reevaluation of texts which have been prepared for and used in the mission in Japan, without, however neglecting a broader context of the European expansion/colonialism and missionary activity. The second part is mainly comparative and starts, at the moment, from missionary activities in Southwest India (today's Kerala, Karnataka) and Japan. Both parts start from a scientific interest and point of view which may be called historical anthropological even if much of energy is going to be spent on literary analysis. The results which are hoped to be achieved should contribute to better understand the contacts and often collisions of different cultures in the premodern age, an understanding which is a prerequisite for any actual consideration about intercultural conditions and developments with or without 'post'.

## I

Even if they have been studied already and often on a high level, many of the texts which resulted from the missionary activities deserve to be reconsidered. That means for example that texts which, heretofore, have been regarded as historical documents can and must be 'X-rayed' in order to lay free their ideological background and intention. Others have to be seen as examples of edifying pious literature, where strategies common in fictional texts are mixed up, from an intentious to an unwilling level, with authentic information. Such a view will help to further reconstruct one aspect of European baroque, which, with restriction to this project, is here understood as an age of religious changes. Such an approach will at the same time lead to a new understanding of the

communities of Japanese Christians, kirishitan (キリシタン), which might result in a quite different image of what has been and sometimes still is called somewhat misleadingly the Christian Century<sup>\*1</sup>.

Methodologically I am thinking here of an approach which is influenced by the considerations of Peter Burke in his *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*<sup>\*2</sup>, and I am thinking here especially at his postulation for intensive studies or where he cites Clifford Geertz concept of "thick description" instead of general overviews. That means, the annual letters written by the Jesuits from Japan, and as well their reflection in the many historical works especially by Jesuits of the 16th and 17th century who did not come Japan, like Pietro Maffei, Daniele Bartoli, Jean Crasset, Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix etc. must be reread scrupulously with appropriate consideration of Japanese sources. Inside the corpus of Jesuit texts from Japan special attention will be paid, then, to the voluminous oeuvre by Alessandro Valignano (see as well below the relation between A. Valignano and R. de Nobili). Regarding method I am thinking as well of the recent study by Kaspar von Greyerz with the title *Religion und Kultur* (Religion and Culture)<sup>\*3</sup>. Even if von Greyerz's study deals exclusively with Europe, and there again almost only with England, the Netherlands and the German speaking countries, his approach can help when attempting to reconstruct the daily life in Japanese Christians groups and communities that is with a painfully detailed collection of informative mosaique stones from the missionary reports. Finally, as well a text like Carlo Ginzburg's *Il formaggio e i vermi*<sup>\*4</sup> (The cheese and the worms) may help to reconstruct the life of several Japanese Christians of that time. I think here as well of a new reading of the novel by Endo

Shusaku Silence (遠藤周作『沈黙』). Much more attention than has been paid up to today has to be given to what Serge Gruzinski calls the “colonization of the imaginary”<sup>\*5</sup>. What did the Christians, as single individuals or in the group really grasp of the information given to them by the missionaries. Of help can be here documents which have survived from the Hidden Christians (かくれキリストン). Reading e.g. Gruzinski’s explanation of the transposition of the figure of Jesus’ mother Mary into the world of some Indian tribes one cannot but think of the pictures of Mary in which elements of the goddess Kannon came mixed up<sup>\*6</sup>.

As one example for a text which, much more than a historical document, should be read as a piece of literature I would like to bring up the *Historia de Japam* (*History of Japan*) by Luis Frois, which was written approximately between 1583 and 1596. At the moment I have gathered a group of episodes in the text which can in each case be easily shown as piece of literature. This results from the fact that Frois, in a fascinating way, has treated his material/s intentionally in order to construct his own, or better his narrator’s, textual reality. Thus, his *Historia de Japam* appears as a piece of authentic facts mixed up to a intertextual cornucopia. This is achieved by technics and rhetoric manipulations traditionally known in fiction<sup>\*7</sup>. At the moment I am working out the larger frame inside of which these episode are to be put, a frame which, I am confident, will make appear Frois’s text as well as a novel. To illustrate this I cite here as one example Frois’ story of the conversion of Gracia Hosokawa. To find out in Frois narration a lot of citations from the *Bible* and texts of legends of saints with which Frois must have been familiar is, that should go without further need of discussion, quite easy. By this, Frois text can be very easily, and this is no wonder, be read as well as a document of 16th century’s edifying pious literature. What is already of more interest is, that Frois, while giving a quite exciting story of the conversion, is citing continuously one of his own letters from India, from 12 December 1557, in which he is relating the story of Meale Khan’s (he is Adil Khan’s ruler of Bijapur brother) daughter’s conversion. Giving at both relations only a second glance is enough to make it clear that the two episodes are almost completely exchangeable. These are not two episodes of two personal conversions, that is of two personalities who have taken their individual decision to be-

come a Christian, which are told now in the text. But these are two most identical variations of one and the same pattern of one and the same conversion. Here, I mention only the figure of a certain Maria who appears in both stories as the ‘go-between’ the woman to be converted and the missionaries. Putting it into narratological terms, Meale Khan’s daughter and Gracia Hosokawa may, no must, be seen as a/the *figurant* of one and the same pious story of a conversion – so appropriate for a baroque public – here ornamented, this as well not untypically for baroque missionary literature, with certain exotic elements. With this, by the way, Frois styles himself as well unwillingly as a precursor of Danielo Bartoli, who, in fact, did later rely heavily on Frois’ relations, that is in Frois letters. What consequences such an interpretation will make necessary for the understanding of Frois’ oeuvre as a whole must be discussed at another place.<sup>\*8</sup>

Major attention in this context will be paid as well to the partly translation and the edition of the *Legenda Aurea* compiled by Jacopo da Voragine which was published in Japan under the title *Sanctos no gosaveo no uchi nvqigaqi*<sup>\*9</sup>. The Japanese edition is divided into two major parts, the first containing the tradition of the lives of the twelve apostles, the second one of nineteen saints of various ages. All chapters are abbreviated versions of the text as given by Jacopo da Voragine. In Jacopo da Voragine’s edition the lives of the apostles receive a special treatment, that is in quantity and in the *discours*, and they belong to the core of the message of the whole book. Now, that the whole bulk of the apostles’ life has been put into the Japanese edition may, thus, be regarded as something ‘inevitable’. More problematic is the question regarding the selection of the saints of the second part.

First, one may ask if and how these saints are related to India. Here, at once, the quite voluminous story of *Barlaam and Josophat* comes to mind. The story of, by Catholics regarded as a saint, Catherine cannot be read as the biography of a woman related to India, however one should remind that Goa was conquered by the Portuguese in 1510 on November 15, that is the day regarded by the Catholic church as the feast of Catherine. Very soon a chapel under her name was built in Goa, and the figure of Catherine continued to be of importance in the ideology, disguised as well in ‘pious’ legends and traditions, the construction of which was necessary in order to justify the brutal process and violent daily reality of colo-

nialism and the intolerant propaganda of faith by the missionaries<sup>\*10</sup>. This means, the method of selection of the saints in the second part might be seen in the context of creating a proper ideological background for the consolidation of an appropriate image of European expanding and colonizing and / or a ecclesia militans for what was understood by the missionaries as the Japanese mind, as this was done, by the way, as well in the texts written in the context of the boys' embassy to Europe in the Ten-sho era<sup>\*11</sup>. It goes without saying that in this context has to be read with great care as well the life of Thomas, one of the apostles, who is said to have gone to India. Francis Xavier, or better his figure, very soon, was arranged as the direct successor of Thomas, as well a means in order to justify the Portuguese unscrupulous advance in Asia in the name of the church.

Second it attracts attention that many of the so called saints in the second part are martyrs. It has to be asked if this fact is due to an interpretation of what, one time more, the Jesuits thought would be 'the Japanese mind'. Might it be even possible to see here a somewhat derailed attempt of accomadating martyrdom, junkyo (殉教) to the killing oneself after one's master death, junshi (殉死)?!

The most important aspect, however, must be the analyses of the cuts and arrangements of the text in the Japanese translation. In her study on the *Legenda Aurea* Reglinde Rhein has shown the development of the text of the lifes of saints from the text by Jean de Mailly to Jacopo de Voragine's appresentation. She comes to the conclusion that one of the most important developments achieved by Jacopo da Voragine is the arrangement of the whole text not as a compendium of single lifes but as a whole which can and must be understood in the context of eschatology and the history of salvation. The lifes of the saints are arranged in a manner, so Rhein, that they, their feasts, become to be visible in the course of the calendar of the church<sup>\*12</sup>. For me it is a challenge to find out the ideological 'red thread' running to the Japanese translation, and to undig the plot and making visible the *discours* of the whole.

## II

The early contacts between Japan and Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries were the result of the steady movement of European, mainly Portuguese, sailors, sol-

ders and fortune seekers to the East. The contacts on all fields have to be seen in the context of a vast net of interdependences involving all countries which the Portuguese touched on their way to Japan. This becomes evident when looking at the movement of commodities in the area between Japan, the Moluccas and Brazil as, for example, a look at A. J. R. Russell-Wood's study *The Portuguese empire, 14154-1808* can help to make evident<sup>\*13</sup>. As another example one may think of the exibition, documented in a catalogue under the same title, *Via Orientalis* from 1993, which was one attempt to show that there does not exist an exclusively Japanese Portuguese related "Nanban-Art", but that articles of everyday life, clothes etc., and object of arts, pictures etc., in this context have as well to be seen before the background of the many cultures the Portuguese witnessed in Africa, Arabia, South Asia, China<sup>\*14</sup>. It goes without saying that the missionary activities as well, even if there will appear special features of those in Japan and other counries and regions respectively, cannot be isolated. However, even if there have been always attempts at comparisons, like e.g. the, if more panoramic, overview by Andrew Ross in his *A Vision Betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742*<sup>\*15</sup>, a systematic study of the early mission in Japan in the context of contemporary activities in other parts of the world must still be further propelled.

Considering a comparison between the Catholic mission in Japan and India there will come up the figures of A. Valignano and Roberto de Nobili at the 'courts' of Nobunaga and Akbar when thinking of the social activities of the Jesuits. Regarding the linguistic activities of that order one might think of João Rodrigues and his Japanese grammars and of Thomas Stephens and his extensive study of the Konkani language. Here, however, I would like to draw attention, for a moment, to the presence of European in 16th and 17th centuries and their missionary activities in the former states of Cochin and Travancore, today's Indian state of Kerala and put them into the then contemporary events in Japan.

While the missionary activities of Francis Xavier and other missionaries in the Malabar region are quite well documented with regard to European sources there still remains to examine much more intensively how these activities have or to which degree they really have (not?) been documented in Indian texts. The documented linguistic contacts of European with the lan-

guage spoken in Kerala, Malayalam, begin with the list of more than one hundred Malayalam words, collected by one of the men accompanying Vasco da Gama.\*<sup>16</sup> Duarte Barbosa who was one of the first Portuguese living on the Malabar coast and becoming fluent in Malayalam has left a detailed report about the contemporary situation in South Asia.\*<sup>17</sup> His book has been constantly cited with regard to data belonging to the Portuguese presence and advance in Asia. A recent study about the classical dance drama kathakali in the region of Kerala shows that Duarte Barbosa's text can be studied with much gain as well with the goal of a better understanding of the society in Cochin / Travancore as seen by the European and of the interaction between Indian and European.\*<sup>18</sup>

At the moment there are the following aspects which I would like to investigate first. The missionary activities beginning in the 16th century are to be seen in a context with the long history of the so called Thomas Christians on the Malabar coast.\*<sup>19</sup> The doctrine underlying the activities of the missionaries from the 16th century onwards will thus have to be explained as a contrast to the belief of the Thomas Christians, and at the same time in relation to the developments in the Catholic church in a context of the Council of Trent. The missionary activities have to be seen at the same time as an arrangement (or non-arrangement) with the caste system on the Malabar coast.

These very aspects will, then, have to be seen in a contrastive comparison to the situation for the missionaries in Japan. I think here e.g. of the approach of the Jesuits to different strata of society in Japan and of what is mistakenly, because uncritically, often called their accommodation.

The comparative study of texts, finally shall not stop in the 17th century, it can and should be continued up to the missionary activities in India and, once again, in Japan in the 19th century, when grammars, dictionaries were prepared together with religious texts and translations in Japan and in Cochin / Travancore.

- \* 1 cf. Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan* (1951), California UP, Berkely, Los Angeles, London, 1974. An equivalent designation for the period of early Japanese-European contacts is used as well e.g. by a usually critical scholar as 高瀬弘一郎(Takase Koi-chiro) in his 『キリシタン時代の研究』(Studies about the Christian age) 岩波書店1977年 as in his 『キリシタン時代对外関係の研究』(Studies about the foreign relations in the Christian age) 吉川弘文館1994年.
- \* 2 Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge UP, 1987.
- \* 3 Kaspar von Greyerz, *Religion und Kultur. Europa 1500-1800*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000.
- \* 4 Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976.
- \* 5 I am conferring here to Serge Gruzinski, *La colonización del imaginario. Sociedades indígenas y occidentalización en el México español. Siglos XVI-XVIII*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993 (first in French, 1988).
- \* 6 cf. e.g. the recent documentation by Nakajyo Tadashi (中城忠) and Tanigawa Kenichi (谷川健一) *Sacred Paintings of Hidden Christians* (かくれキリストの聖画), 小学館1999年.
- \* 7 cf. Engelbert Jorissen, "Nanban-Mode und Sakoku", in Werner Schaumann, Hrsg., *Gewollt oder geworden? Planung, Zufall, natürliche Entwicklung in Japan*, iudicium, 1996, pp.221-241 (エンゲルベルト・ヨリッセン「南蛮モードと鎖国」, trasl. by H. Waldenberger, ibidem, pp.242-258); エンゲルベルト・ヨリッセン「細川ガラシア」, 『大阪人』vol.53 , 7 , 1999年 , pp.57-60.
- \* 8 For the report about Meale Khan's daughter cf. Frois letter dated on 12 December 1557, here cited from *Documenta Indica*, Ioseph Wicki S.I., ed. vol.III (1553-1557), Romae, MHSI, 1954, pp.732-750; for the relation of the parallel conversion of Gracia Hosokawa cf. Luis Frois, *Historia de Japam*, José Wicki, ed., Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional, vols. I-V, 1976-1984, vol. IV, pp.484-496.
- \* 9 SANCTOS NO GOSAGVIO NO VCHI NVQIGAQI, Cazzusa MDLXXXXI, 復製『サントスの御作業』解説 H. チーズリク他 , 勉誠社1976年.
- \* 10 A letter by Luis Frois from 1559 gives a fine example for the collaboration between soldiers and missionaries in India. Frois reports about a battle between Portuguese and Indian, the latter believing in the Islamic faith. On that occasion the Portuguese brutally had cut fifty to sixty "mouros" (Moors) off their head when defending a church, and he adds, that he himself had to fight with a gun in his hands, and still: "Dear brothers, I have mentioned this episode in order that you learn to know that in this part of the world as well the

- clericals have to use arms, if it is in the service of the Lord". *Documenta Indica*, Ioseph Wicki S.I., ed., vol. III (1553-1557), Romae, MHSI, 1954, p.710. This passage became later criticized by P. Polanco in the name of the General of the Jesuit Order and occasion to point at the necessity to censure letters from the missions before they were published. At another place I have interpreted Frois' behaviour in this episode as an voluntary act on his side to unmask the scandalous behaviour of such an unholy collaboration.
- \* 11 cf. Eduardo de Sande, *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Roman curiam ...* (1590), Facsim. ed., Tokyo, Otsuka Kogeisha, 1935.
- \* 12 Reglinde Rhein, *Die Legenda Aurea des Jacobus de Voragine*, Köln, Weimar, Böhlau, 1995.
- \* 13 A.J.R. Russell-Wood, *The Portuguese empire, 1415-1808: a world on the move* (1992), John Hopkins UP, 1998. Based mainly on secondary sources Russell-Wood's study still provides a synopsis with wide ranging information. With carefully critical remarks about the process of the European expansion, the book cannot, however, overcome a certain Europocentrism and continues, finally, to present Portuguese achievements.
- \* 14 「ポルトガルと南蛮文化」展 めざせ、東方の国々 *Via Orientalis*, eds. Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, Ezio Bassani, Sakamoto Mitsuru, Nihon hoso kyokai, NHK promotion, 1993.
- \* 15 Andrew Ross, *A Vision Betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742*, Edinburgh UP, 1994. In his book Ross discusses important aspects, as for example the often neglected problematical, and anti-jewish, attitude of Valignano towards the New Christians. The book is, however, based only on secondary sources.
- \* 16 cf. E.G. Ravenstein, ed., *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama. 1497-1499* (1898), Reprint, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, Madras, 1995, here, pp.105-108.
- \* 17 *The Book of Duarte Barbosa. An account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants, written by D.B., and completed about the year 1518 A.D.*, Mansel Longworth Dames, trsl. and ed., Hakluyt Society (1918), Nendeln / Liechtenstein, Kraus Reprint, 1969, vols. I-II.
- \* 18 Phillip B. Zarrilli, *kathakali dance drama. where gods and demons come to play*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, here especially pp.113ss.
- \* 19 cf. here e.g. Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas*, Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, B.I. Publications (without date).

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