

JESUITS IN THE EASTERN WORLD
AS 'FORERUNNERS OF GLOBALIZATION'

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Firstly, I would like to clarify the term 'forerunners of globalization' which is the main argument of my essay. To do so I have to say that one of my research areas is Jesuit Neo-Latin Literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which give a context for my references to Jesuit missionaries as forerunners of globalization. The documents that I have been studying have led me to the Portuguese presence in Japan in particular, which was a subject of my lecture.

To understand these *forerunners of globalization*, we need to bear in mind the Jesuit missionary context during the first century of its existence. According to the anthropological vision of its founder, Ignatius of Loyola, and to his Spiritual Exercises, the mission of the Society of Jesus was to lead human beings to their destiny. Their apostolic mission was to save men and women as part of the mission of the Eternal King (Christ) which invited everyone in general and every single person in particular to conquer the world for God's glory.

The Society of Jesus, in accordance with its Constitutions, was from the beginning associated with Peter's successor, the Pope, and thus it propagated the faith under his direct guidance. The Jesuits' mission identified itself with the universal church and answered to its universal needs. I quote the Constitutions:

"[603] The Society realized that it had been created to be dispersed throughout the world, among its different regions and cultures; the Society of Jesus could not, therefore, stay confined to any particular place."

This is why, besides the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the Constitutions states that 'the Professed take the vow of special obedience to the Pope', to go wherever the Pontiff deems necessary. In the Society of Jesus there is a great ideal concerning the universal scope of the Jesuit call; such awareness is visible in devout literature, letters and documents. For example, in *Paciecidos*¹, a precious neo-Latin epic poem that extols the martyrdom of the provincial Francisco Pacheco in 1626 Nagasaki, the Master of Novices says the following words to the hero of the poem: "Think no more that you are the son of your country, Portugal, but rather that Pacheco is for the world and the world is for Pacheco"²

The universal scope of the mission, as old as Christianity, echoes Saint Paul's words 'I have become all things to all men'³. In another excerpt from the poem, when the hero is expelled from Japan and returns to

underground evangelization, he says that Japan, his land of mission, is his homeland.⁴ Thus the expelled missionaries envisage their expulsion as an exile from their homeland and wish to return to Japan. They do return, and live underground, protected by Japoniel, the Guardian Angel of Japan.

In its first hundred years of existence, the Society of Jesus was, as regards its apostolic mission, one of the historical driving forces of the first globalization process, on a worldwide scale. The Portuguese Province of the Society of Jesus was in charge of evangelizing Brazil, Africa, India, the Moluccas Islands, Japan and China and therefore needed the cooperation of other provinces to carry out this huge task. Spaniards, Italians, French often collaborated in this truly transnational mission. Thus, many foreign Jesuits studied abroad for one or two years at the High schools of the Society of Jesus, in Coimbra or Lisbon, in order to become acquainted with the Portuguese language, a necessary instrument for their mission. This was the case of the famous Italian Matteo Ricci, who studied at Coimbra (July 1577-March 1578).

The example of Francisco Pacheco's companions who were killed in Nagasaki in 1626, praised in the aforementioned poem, illustrates the transnational nature of the Jesuit mission in the Eastern world. Besides the Portuguese Francisco Pacheco, other missionaries were imprisoned and killed at the same time: Baptista Zola (1566-1626), an Italian, Baltasar Torres (1563-1626), a Spaniard, and Vicente Caun (1578-1626), a Korean, along with the five Japanese missionaries; Miguel Tozo, Gaspar Sadamatzu, João Kisacu, Pedro Rinxei and Paulo Xinsuc.

In 1614, when the expulsion of the missionaries was decreed, there were already 300,000 Christians; the 1603 catalogue mentions 280 'dojucos' (catechists), besides 140 missionaries who already included native Japanese priests.

When they embarked on their journey to the East, the first missionaries knew nothing about Hinduism, Buddhism or Asian culture in general. Their training rested on how Europe perceived the East, not on what the East really was. However, after a first encounter with Japan, the missionaries, namely St. Francis Xavier, soon understood that the 'type' of missionary effective in Europe was not the 'type' that would be effective in Japan. In Japan, a missionary should be cultivated, intelligent, acquainted with the local norms of courtesy and should not convey signs of poverty or humility. The Jesuits quickly realized that the success of their mission depended on their knowledge of the local language, culture, customs,

society, religion, and the *forma mentis* of the people they addressed. During the first years of adaptation, the Jesuits committed to learning the difficult local language, which they practiced even at home. Once they mastered the language, they needed to know the local religious beliefs, customs and social norms, in order to ensure that the missionaries were accepted.

As the Jesuits learned about the local culture, they learned how to read and write Japanese, first in manuscripts, then in books printed in Latin and also in local languages. In Japan specifically, printed works were instrumental in the Jesuits' mission between 1590 and 1614, the year that Christianity was banned.

The Jesuit missionaries were equipped not only with a solid humanistic culture but also with a sound rhetorical education; these were fundamental tools for their apostolic mission. Christianity took to the East more than just a religion: it took another language and civilization, the Latin civilization.

A very interesting document, the *rol do fato que o padre mestre Melchior levou pera o Japon o anno de 1554*, published in the *Documentos del Japon 1547-1557*, clearly illustrates what I have stated: as regards books, besides the 'classic' devotional books and books of worship, this document lists 'Plato's works, Aristotle's Ethics, Ptolemy (sic), the Ecclesiastical History, St. Augustine's Meditations, etc. These books were initially used by the Society of Jesus, but later served to train native Japanese Christians, especially those who became catechists, the 'dojucos', and those who joined the Order and even took vows.

Latin civilization in the East was not a mere phenomenon of influence but part of a complex, and sometimes intense, process of cultural dialogue.

In the printing press of the Japanese mission, the Jesuits published Japanese translations of catechetical and doctrinal works, and also grammars and dictionaries that constituted the first scientific approach to the study of Japanese.

They also published Latin texts by Cicero (between 1590-93), and in 1594 Father Manuel Álvares's famous grammar, in Amakusa. This grammar, a hallmark for the study of Latin within the extensive international Jesuit school network, was also used by young Japanese to study Latin. This edition contained verbal conjugations in Latin, Portuguese and Japanese and even used sentences written in Japanese in order to explain

the grammatical rules of Latin. There are also other works, such as the *Dictionarium latinum lusitanum ac niponicum* (1595) or the *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Japam* (1603). Both of them document the intersection of two very distinct cultures, the Latin and the Japanese.

A historical fact that shows the Jesuits as a driving force in this first globalization is the embassy of Japanese Christian princes to Rome. This journey, promoted and directed by the Jesuits, took place between 1582 and 1590 (in 1582 Rome, in 1585 India and in 1590 Japan). This embassy is described in a most interesting work, Father Duarte de Sande's *Dialogue De missione legatorum Iaponensium*.

Fortunately, thanks to Prof. Costa Ramalho's translation and study, which clarifies issues regarding its authorship, there is a Portuguese version of this work. As the distinguished Coimbra scholar wrote, this embassy intended to 'show Europe to the Japanese and conversely to reveal Japan to the Portuguese'⁵. Reading this text provides an extremely rich and inexhaustible source of information.

Duarte de Sande's work provides, among other aspects, information about the degree of knowledge that some young Japanese had of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and also of Latin languages. In fact, the young ambassadors not only composed Latin poems praising the Pope but even wrote speeches in Latin to recite before the Pontiff. In 1578 in Goa a speech in Latin was published: it was addressed to Father Valignano, and had been composed by one of those young ambassadors, Martinho de Hara.

Throughout the the 80s, when the above embassy took place, the Jesuit presence in China quietly prepared the process of adapting Christianity for the East. In Japan, however, 30 years earlier, there were documents that registered the process of adapting Christianity to the Japanese East.

Such is the case of a Latin letter from Melchior Nunes Barreto to Diego Lainez, who in 1556 had succeeded the founder Ignatius of Loyola as General of the Society of Jesus. This letter, unknown before 1995, shows the Jesuit's interest in the religions and civilizations of China and Japan. It also reveals the difficulties of communication felt by the missionaries when dealing with the linguistic nature of oriental thought and theology.

Among the reflections that Melchior Barreto shares with the General of the Society, he refers to the problems raised by the fact that there were doctrinal aspects common to the Japanese 'bonzos' and the

Christians. I quote:

"The bonzos publicly teach that the source of all things, which they call *Fotoque*, is the same as the rational soul, which they call *tamaxe*; besides, they say that there are paradise and geena, and other such things equivalent to our dogmas. Thus the Japanese, at the beginning of conversions on a large scale, persuaded our brothers that they had in common with us the same doctrine of *Xaqua* and *Amida*, (these are the names given to the inventors of their errors)."⁶

The similarities perceived by the bonzos as authentic were, after all, a hindrance to the assimilation of Christianity. In fact, the missionaries needed to distinguish the reality of their own religion from the reality of Buddhism. The author of the quoted letter perceived the usage of the local language as a hindrance to the communication of a new reality that ought to be strictly perceived as Christian.

Just as the Christians of the Roman Empire had rejected some Latin terms considered as too suggestive of pagan realities, while creating new words, adapting Hellenistic and Hebrew terms to signify a new reality, the missionaries in Japan banned the Japanese terms they initially used, because the 'heart' — as they would say — of those terms was completely different from the one they wished to signify. I quote:

"Our brothers understood that the Japanese, due to the corruption of names, created false concepts in all things divine explained to them by us in the Japanese language. Moreover, even if they acquired great knowledge of spiritual matters, either in speeches or in disputes, they incurred in old errors. Therefore, because the Japanese brothers' perception of the inner meaning of words was wrong, our Jesuit brothers rejected all those words as poison to the Catholic faith.⁷ So, instead of 'fotoque' they say 'god', instead of 'tamaxe' they say 'soul' or 'spirit'. And even when they say or write everything in Japanese, they teach the spiritual and divine realities in Portuguese or in Latin, and avoid Japanese terms as if they were a pernicious plague. In fact, they teach our prayers and the Apostles' Creed in Latin, not in Japanese, and explain everything, paraphrasing in Japanese. Thus these matters become more comprehensible. Words in Latin, however, are inviolably respected as sacred."⁸

These missionaries were able to come to those conclusions only

because they studied Buddhism, not only to support dialogical disputes with the bonzos, using a Zen Buddhist methodology known as Zenmondô (questions and answers), but to find the best way to transmit Christianity and to build true Christian communities in Japan. Later on, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the training of the *dojucos*, mostly done at the High schools and the Seminary of the Society of Jesus (Arima), involved the study of Latin and of Japanese religions, in order to dispute the latter.⁹ The catechisms written by these missionaries, sometimes with the collaboration of Japanese individuals who were acquainted with local religions, are invaluable documents for the study of religions in the Far East, specially Buddhism.

Thanks to these documents, we may then say that, after an initial phase when evangelization was carried out primarily in the local language, although Latin remained the language of worship, the first missionaries questioned the assimilation of Christianity by the Japanese and consequently their Christian identity. Thus they turned away from Japanese designations of fundamental concepts in the Christian faith, adopting a bilingual evangelization, or rather trilingual, using Latin, Portuguese and Japanese.

In spite of the catastrophic end to the initially promising Christian evangelisation of Japan, Latin and European culture left behind some traces. Later on when French missionaries arrived in Japan in the nineteenth century (17 March 1865) they encountered in Kyushu Island a community that would come to be known as 'Hidden Christians', a Christian community that had survived for two hundred years with neither missionaries nor books, nor sacraments. These Christians informed the new missionaries, as descendants of the seventeenth century missionaries, of three aspects: recognition of the authority of Rome, devotion to the Virgin Mary and celibacy. Interestingly, a linguistic analysis of their prayers uncovered Latin vestiges.¹⁰

The mission of the Society of Jesus, rooted in Christianity's universal scope, and also in the universal mindset inherited from Greek and Roman cultures in Europe, turned its missionaries into citizens of a global *cosmopolis*. Nonetheless, in the course of building a global identity, the Jesuits would not and could not overlook the local cultures.

¹ Pereira, Bartolomeu, *Paciecidos libri XII*, Coimbra, 1640. About this poem see "The Paciecidos by Bartolomeu Pereira S. J. — an epic interpretation of evangelisation and martyrdom in 17th century Japan", *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japanese Studies* (June /December 2005, 10/11) 61-95.

² "Non patriae, aut Lysiae genitum te crede, Pacecum/ Sed mundo deberi omni, mundumque Paceco", Cfr. *Paciecidos*, VII, 173-174.

³ Cfr 1 Cor, 9, 22.

⁴ "Hic domus, hic patria est..." Cfr. *Paciecidos*, II, 317.

⁵ Ramalho, A.C., "A Europa aos olhos dos Príncipes do Japão" Latineuropa: Latim e cultura neolatina no processo de construção da identidade europeia, Soares, Miranda, Urbano coord(s), Coimbra, 2007, 269-279.

⁶ Bonzi enim publice edocent esse primum rerum omnium principium quod illi nuncupant fotoque esse itidem animam rationalem, quam dicunt tamaxe; necnon esse paradisum ac gehenam et alia id genus multa instar nostrorum dogmatum. Unde fratribus nostris in exordio conversionis saepenumero inculcabant gypones se a suo Xaqua et Amida (sic enim uocant inuentores suorum errorum) eandem fere doctrinam cum nostris habere comunem. Cfr. *Documentos del Japón 1558-1562*, ed. Ruiz-de-Medina, Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu vol. 148, Roma, 1995, 109.

⁷ Cum enim socii nostri uiderent gypones ex huiusmodi nominum corruptela, in omnibus diuinis idiomate gyponico illis explicandis, falsos accipere conceptus, et quantumlibet de spiritualibus docerentur-partim concionibus ac disputationibus, partim libris quos eorum lingua composuerunt-semper regredi in pristinos errores, propterea quod falsum intellectum formarent iuxta interiore uocabulorum significationem, omnia illa uocabula ueluti toxica fidei catholicae respuerunt. Cfr. *Ibidem* p 110.

⁸ Et pro fotoque deum, pro tamaxe animam seu spiritum uocant. Et etiam dum japonice loquuntur uel scribunt omniaque illa nomina rerum spiritualium et diuinarum lusitano uel latino idiomate edocentes, sua ipsorum tanquam damnosam pestem euitant. Quippe orationes nostras ac symbolum apostolicum latina dictione, non japonica, docentes, ac omnia japonice -paraphrastica elocutione- explicantes, faciunt ut res intelligatur; latina tamen uocabula, tanquam sacra, inuiolabiliter obseruentur. Cfr. *Ibidem* p 111.

⁹ Lopez-Gay, J. "Métodos misioneros en el Japón del siglo XVII", *A Companhia de Jesus e a Missão no Oriente*, Brotéria, Fundação do Oriente, Lisboa, 2000, 103-116, cfr. p 115.

¹⁰ Cfr. Mezzardi, Vismara, *La Chiesa tra Rinascimento e iluminismo*, Roma, Città nuova editrice, 2006, 47.