

Intercultural Contact in the Age of St. Francis Xavier

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1. Introduction

The date of St. Francis Xavier's arrival was August 15, 1549.¹⁾ As is generally known, Xavier, an Apostle of the East, came to Japan as the first missionary of Christianity. However, it is also known that the Portuguese set foot on the island of Tanegashima, located some 40 kilometers from the southern tip of Kyushu, earlier than Xavier, around 1542 or 1543. From that date they traveled around several ports of Kyushu every year for the purpose of trade and commerce. In so far as it is imaginable that the personal religious activities of these traders led the Japanese to encounter Christianity before Xavier's arrival, Xavier was neither the first Westerner who had arrived in Japan nor the first who had brought about contact between Christianity and Japan.²⁾

Nevertheless, if it is still possible to say that Xavier was the first missionary who propagated Christianity in Japan, it is necessary to explain this point further. The ages during the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century, when Xavier came to Japan, belong to the period of the Great Navigations. In this period Westerners found new sea routes and enlarged European societies beyond Europe by trading and colonizing. The preaching of Christianity outside Europe, and occupation of territories by both Portugal and Spain were just two sides of the same coin. From this point of view the arrival of Xavier as a Portuguese Jesuit missionary was, as it were, only a result of the equation of Christianization with Europeanization.

Hence it is not difficult to imagine that Japanese magistrates at that time reacted to this equation and were offended by the absorption of Japanese society into the Western-oriented world system. The *Kirishitan* (early Japanese Christians before and during the Edo era, from the second half of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century) were oppressed in so far as the Japanese magistrates rejected this equation. In order not to be absorbed into the Western-oriented world system, and calling Westerners who came from India *Nanbanjin* (Southern Barbarians of the south) from the Japan-oriented view, the magistrates in these ages intended to keep their supremacy in the society as a policy. According to this policy they decided to exclude Christians from Japanese society. But if the reason for the exclusion was

only political, and due to a lack of sufficient understanding, it may have been outside their intention to deny the Christian faith itself.

Whichever viewpoint one takes, Western-oriented or Japan-oriented, Xavier's behavior could not have been purely religious, but must have been both holy and secular. Even if the aim of Xavier himself was purely religious and only concerned the salvation of human souls, the Christianity that Xavier brought in the age of the *Kirishitan* had two sides, both holy and secular. Christianity as a historical appearance of the western culture has to be distinguished from the essence of Christianity itself. So, what did Xavier bring in reality? In what way was Christianity understood in Japan at that time or rather in what way did Xavier understand it?

2. Demarcation and propagation of Christianity in Japan

When Xavier, who was sent on a mission to the East Indies by the Portuguese King Joan III, sailed out of Lisbon in 1541, he did not yet have a plan to be a missionary to Japan. He obtained information about Japan after he had reached the East Indies, perhaps at the end of 1547, according to a letter of his (Ep.59).³⁾

After having sailed out of Lisbon, Xavier reached India next year. There he engaged in missionary work for a while. In 1545 he arrived at Malacca. And finally he reached the Moluccas, the islands at the East end of the world. But there appeared also Spanish people who had come from Mexico. The Portuguese enlarged their dominion eastward, the Spanish, westward, and they encountered each other in this area of the Pacific Ocean. The Molucca Islands (also called the Spice Islands) were the terminus of the spice trade at that time. Muslims had entered this area in the previous century (about 1430). This being the case there were conflicts and complicated entwined elements when Xavier visited these islands.

In 1547, Xavier returned to Malacca. There he met Anjiro, a Japanese born in Kagoshima, accompanied by a Portuguese merchant. Having encountered Anjiro, Xavier at once went back to India. After having analyzed all the information about Japan, he himself decided to sail to Japan and in August 1549 he landed at Kagoshima with Anjiro. Xavier tried to have an audience with the Emperor as soon as possible, but he could not have a chance for a while. In January 1551 Xavier finally reached *Miyako*, where the court was, from Yamaguchi via *Setonaikai* (the Inland Sea of Japan) and a port city Sakai. But unexpectedly *Miyako* had been ruined, and the Emperor had lost his supremacy. About ten days later, Xavier left *Miyako* without accomplishing his purpose to obtain permission for the missionary work in Japan.

In April 1551 he returned to Yamaguchi. In his letter (Ep.96), he reported that he spent two

months at Yamaguchi and about 500 people were baptized. In September Xavier came to *Bungo* (Oita city in Kyushu) in September. But the funds were exhausted. He left Japan for India in the middle of November that year.

Xavier stayed in Japan only two years and three months. The People who converted to Christianity were few (maybe one thousand). From then on Jesuit missionaries continued their work, and it is said that there were thirty or forty thousand Christians at its peak around 1600. Afterwards the shogunate issued a prohibition against Christianity (1613), and closed the country (1635,1639). After the Shimabara rebellion occurred (1637-1638), the age of hidden Christians (*Kakure-kirishitan*) began and continued until a French missionary Fr. Petitjean found them in 1865.

Xavier addressed the letter (Ep.96) referred to above to the Jesuits in Europe. It was deposited in 1552 just after Xavier had returned to India from his Japanese missionary work. He recalls everything about the days in Japan and also the fact that the Portuguese discovered Japan eight or nine years earlier. In this letter he wrote about the patronage of a Portuguese King as follows.

When we departed for Japan a King of Portugal, a Christian, gave orders for us to prepare more than 1000 cruzadoes as a financial aid to work in Japan for two years and a half.

Another letter (Ep.94) of Xavier from Kagoshima in November 1549, addressed to the director of Malacca⁴⁾ who had given Xavier (while on his way from India to Japan) 30 barrels of best spices (Ep.83) to cover travel expenses has similar contents.

Between Sakai and Miyako there is a distance of only two days. The port of Sakai is the richest in Japan. Almost all Japanese silver and gold are collected here. If God allows, let's build an office of a trading firm here at Sakai. It will make materially a great profit.

This director of Malacca was one of Vasco da Gama's sons. And in the letter (Ep.94)Xavier praised the discovery of a sea route to India by Vasco da Gama. According to Xavier it was only a mundane deed, however. In contrast, if the director makes use of this discovery to facilitate missionary work in the East, it must be meritorious before God.

Besides, Xavier added that missionary activity in Japan would bring the King of Portugal a great profit. It was the custom of the time to refer to a king's important part in religious activities. In fact, Xavier arrived in India to propagate Christianity under the patronage of Joan III, a king of Portugal. There were many students, including Xavier, whom the king aided to

learn philosophy and theology at the college of St. Barbara in the University of Paris. This relationship between two authorities, religious and secular, was a result of the so-called investiture controversy. After long disputes between popes and emperors the Papacy won a victory over the issue of lay investiture of bishops or abbots. The appointing power was confirmed to belong only to the Papacy. Feudal lords were prohibited to privatize churches in their fiefdoms as their properties. But they were approved to give patronage to the church instead. And their patronage was enlarged over the churches outside Europe after the ages of the Great Navigations.

During the period of the Great Navigations, Europeans expanded their own territories outside Europe, in the cause of which the Papacy approved to expand the patronage of Christian kings, practically of the two Iberian kingdoms, to all of the new world, which was outside Europe but potentially Christendom. The two Iberian kingdoms, Portugal and Spain, exclusively navigated, conquered, possessed, colonized and traded in the formerly unknown pagan world. It is needless to say that they were also responsible for sending missionaries of Christianity to the new world. So-called demarcation is a result of the sequence of historical events referred above.

Demarcation was the action of drawing a boundary line between the two areas into which the two Iberian kingdoms agreed to divide the entire pagan world for their possession. The two kingdoms concluded in 1494 the treaty of Tordesillas, which the Roman papacy approved in 1502, and the demarcation was finally fixed on a line of longitude about 2000 kilometers west of the Cape Verde Isles in the Atlantic. From then on Portugal possessed the area eastward of the line and Spain westward, but the eastern hemisphere was not in their mind at that time.

It was in 1492 that Christopher Columbus whom Isabella, a queen of Spain, supported, found a new sailing route across the Atlantic. Vasco da Gama who took an order from Manuel I, a king of Portugal, found a route to India around Africa in 1498. After these new sea routes both eastward and westward were found, it became an actual problem to draw a boundary line in the eastern hemisphere. In the sixteenth century — that is, in the age of Xavier — Japan was potentially possessed by Portugal. Under these circumstances Xavier and other Portuguese Jesuit missionaries first came to Japan exclusively. Afterwards, Spanish missionaries (Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians) arrived and began their work. It is easy to see there was a conflict in the background between the two Iberian kingdoms concerning the Demarcation in the eastern hemisphere. In other words, the Demarcation and Xavier's missionary work in Japan were closely related. Xavier brought Christianity to Japan, which

was potentially possessed by one of the two kingdoms of Iberia.

The Demarcation itself gradually became meaningless, because the two kingdoms declined soon afterwards. However, it must be noted that from the age of Xavier onwards, Westernization of the non-Western world (political and cultural domination of the world by the Westerner) remained the underlying tone, and things Western continued to be brought into Japanese society. It must also be noted that the Christianity brought by Westerners has been considered to be one of the Western things from the first. It is no longer called *Nanban* or *Nanban-torai* (things brought by southern barbarians). But as far as the equation of Christianity with a European religion retains the Western-oriented view, it is not possible to slough off another equation (Japan = the end of the world), which is kept in the above equation (Christianity = European religion). Or rather, if the Christianity propagated by Xavier was regarded as a European religion, so far as the equation mentioned above is accepted, favorably or unfavorably, urged by the hidden Western-oriented view, the other equation makes us place ourselves at the end of the world. It means that the fictitious idea of Europe depends on the idea of Japan as lying at the end of the world, if we unconsciously regard Christianity as an essentially European religion.

3. How was Christianity accepted?

Contact between Japan and the Western does not begin at the end of the Edo period or the Meiji period. The *Kirishitan* century that Xavier brought began before the Edo period. The contents of the contact were rather different before and after the Edo period. After the opening of Japan in the midst of the nineteenth century, the centuries of the *Kakure Kirishitan* (hidden Christians) were over, and the country was opened to the Western again. The things brought from the West after the Meiji Restoration (1868), at the age of civilization and enlightenment, were mainly western technologies and institutions. When Western learning was introduced into Japan in the Edo and the Meiji era, the relation between science and Christianity was ignored and only the practical character of the learning was evaluated. This view of Western learning in the nineteenth century was affected by the early view of Christianity produced as a result of the first contact with Europe before the Edo era. In those days Christianity was considered to be a false and unworthy religion.

Arai Hakuseki, a famous scholar who wrote *Seiyokibun* (1724-25),⁵⁾ was the first to have this view of Western civilization. The book named *Seiyokibun* is a report of Hakuseki's four investigations of Sidotti, an Italian missionary who infiltrated the island of Yakushima (an

island to the south of Kyushu, near Tanegashima) in 1708. In this report about the investigation of Sidotti, Hakuseki estimated him very wise for his geographical or astronomical knowledge, but very silly for his statements about Christianity, and besides for Hakuseki it was almost incredible that such a wise and a silly person could be one and the same.

Because Christianity was brought into Japan from India at that time, it was generally thought to be a kind of Buddhism, as the latter religion came from India. Hakuseki also regarded Christianity as such. In addition, according to the biography of Nishi Amane edited by Mori Ougai,⁶⁾ Nishi Amane wrote in his letter (1862) that *Yasokyo* (Christianity) is an epigone of Buddhism. At the end of the Edo era, Nishi Amane expressed the same view of Christianity as Hakuseki.

Before Hakuseki, Hayashi Razan had written a book called *Haiyaso (Driving out Christianity, 1606)*,⁷⁾ and criticized the irrationality of Christianity. According to Razan's view that was based on Confucianism, a theory of creation is inconsistent because it insists on the existence of God as a creator of all beings but fails to explain the existence of a creator of God. Razan thought that if all things do not exist by themselves but are created, the case of God's existence is not exceptional. However, can the above inconsistency of the theory of creation be found in Christian thought itself? If not, it cannot be a criticism of Christianity itself to criticize the above inconsistency.

For example, Thomas Aquinas explains in his *Summa theologiae* (I, q.45, a.3, ad 1)⁸⁾ as follows: Creation signified actively means the divine action, which is God's essence, with a relation to the creature. But in God relation to the creature is not a real relation, but only a relation of reason, whereas the relation of the creature to God is a real relation. (Citation from the *Summa* edited by Peter J. Kreeft.)

According to Aquinas's explanation, the creature is caused to be by God, but the creature does not cause God to be a creator. (Nobody can be a parent without a child. When a child is born, parents who have not been parents really become parents. As it were, parents are also born. However, there is not a relation like this between God and the created world. God's creation has no dependence on the existence of the creatures. It depends only on his will. He is the cause of all existences, but he is not a constituent element of things.) Although the existence of the created world depends on the causality of God, it does not mean that God and the creatures have univocity of existence. To advocate transcendentality of the divine existence means to deny the univocity of existence between God and the creatures.

Western technologies and sciences brought into Japan in the latter half of the nineteenth

century (after the end of the Edo era) were technological civilizations easy to accept. On the other hand, what was brought into Japan but rejected in the middle of the sixteenth century was Christianity — a core part of the Western thought and culture. However, Xavier brought it as the Christianity of Europe. "No salvation outside the Church" was one of Xavier's teachings. It must be examined whether this exclusive understanding of Christianity itself excludes any other approach to the religion. Not only the attitude of recipients but also the things brought need to be examined.

4. What did Xavier bring?

Confucian scholars of the Edo era, Razan, Hakuseki, etc., criticized Christianity on the basis of information obtained through the book called *Dochirina Kirishitan* (*The teaching of Christianity*)⁹⁾ that the missionaries at that time brought. Fabian who is the author of *Myotei-mondo*¹⁰⁾ also discussed and tried to explain the doctrines of the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul based on the knowledge obtained through the same book. (Fukansai Fabian was born and bred in Japan. He was once a Zen monk, then became a Christian monk, wrote *Myotei-mondo* as an introduction to Christianity and took an active part as a preacher. After that he renounced Christianity, began to attack it and wrote an anti-Christian book named *Hadaius*. Razan's anti-Christian text *Haiyaso* was composed after he disputed with Fabian, who was still a Christian monk.) The name of *Dochirina Kirishitan* originally derives from the Latin words "Doctrina Christiana" (The teaching of Christianity).

Considering the situation that in the age of Xavier, owing to efforts of Francisco de Vitoria (1480-1566) who taught philosophy and theology at the universities of Paris and Salamanca, the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274) substituted for the *Sententiae* of Petrus Lombardus (c.1100-1160)¹¹⁾ came into wide use as a textbook of theology in various regions of Europe, *Dochirina Kirishitan*, used in Japan as an introductory textbook, was rather short. (The revival of Thomism in the 16th century was brought about by Thomas de Vio Cajetanus, 1468-1534, Franciscus de Sylvestris Ferrariensis, 1474-1528, and Pieter Crockaert, c.1470-1516, etc. After Thomas Aquinas died, Thomism was forgotten for two centuries between the 14th and 15th century.) It must have been an incomparatively simplified digest if we take into consideration the grandeur and elaborateness of *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas. It should not be said that a handy textbook would bring only a superficial understanding. However, there is a great distance between the introductory textbooks written in Japanese (*Dochirina Kirishitan* and *Myotei-mondo*) and the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas.

Besides the artlessness of the arguments, the poverty of Christology in the former should be pointed out. These features are also found in the catechism, which Xavier had used, called *Dochirina* of 29 articles.

Before the age of Xavier, medieval theologians established a new method of teaching Christian theology. Up to the twelfth century theologians lectured on the Holy Scripture according to the order of the books in it. But a new systematic theology is not restricted to the texts or order of the Holy Scripture. A systematic theology began with the *Sententiae* of Petrus Lombardus in the twelfth century. Lombardus put all traditional teachings of theology together according to the two principles, things and signs, adopted from Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*.¹²⁾ In the first three books of the *Sententiae* he treated of things, the contents of which are the theory of the Trinity, creation, Christ and virtues. In the fourth book, signs were treated, the content of which is a theory of sacraments. Lombard's *Sententiae* became new textbooks of theology substituted for the Holy Scripture and brought a new teaching method. According to this transition, the naming of a professor of theology changed. *Magister in sacra theologia* (Professor of theology) was introduced instead of the old name of professor of theology, *magister in sacra pagina* (Professor of the Holy Scripture). When Thomas Aquinas began his academic career at the faculty of theology in the University of Paris, he became a lecturer on Lombard's *Sententiae* first. (There is another opinion that Aquinas' first lecture was reading Holy Scripture and commenting on it verse by verse.)

Afterwards Aquinas wrote his *Summa* with a different idea about the subject of theology from that of Lombardus. According to the opinion of Aquinas, the subject of theology is no other than God. But all other things are contained in this subject, because God is the cause of the existence of all things. Aquinas' *Summa* has three parts. In the first part, he treats of God and the procession of creatures from God; in the second part, of the advance of the rational creature towards God; and in the third part, of Christ, who as man is our way to God. Besides, Aquinas thought that the Sacred Doctrine treated in his *Summa* as theology, and the Holy Scripture that is in itself a sacred teaching of Christ, are just the same. The reason is that the Christology of the third part of the *Summa* is thought to be the main and most important part. The other two parts are, as it were, peripheral. Aristotle's philosophy is also considered to be included in the Holy Scripture, for, as far as philosophy is a product of human reason, and human reason works under the light of God's revelation, the philosophy of Aristotle exists in the Thomistic theory of God treated in his *Summa*.¹³⁾

However, for example, Fabian who was born in 1565 and became a member of the Jesuits in

1586 did not have a chance to learn Christian theology through Aquinas' grand and elaborate system. It is easy to imagine. For Xavier himself, who brought Christianity into Japan, learned theology at the college of St. Barbara in the University of Paris but perhaps within a short period for becoming a priest. Needless to say, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the Italian Renaissance movement of the fourteenth century spread out all over the West, and Thomistic theory was forgotten. Moreover, on account of a logical theology, which William of Occam (c.1280-c.1349) proposed as a new way, Aquinas' metaphysical theology was kept at a distance as an old way. And yet in the sixteenth century, Francisco de Vitoria, with the aid of Thomistic theory, discovered the basic thought against absolutizing a state power. He is often regarded as the Father of International Law. It is known that he was critical of the Spanish methods of colonization in America. (It is also known that Grotius, 1583-1645, was dependent on him in some points.) He had broken down a system of the Demarcation theoretically. In other words, what Xavier brought from Europe to Japan convinced that it was best, was only a small portion of the intellectual situation of those days. It signifies that the intercultural contact in Japan as the end of the world had been very limited.

The philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas, known through his grand and elaborate arguments in his *Summa*, was an intellectual product of the West in the thirteenth century. At that time, the whole philosophy of Aristotle and his highly completed theology were brought into the world of Western thought accompanied by Islamic commentators on Aristotelian thought. And then, as is commonly known, a problem of how to conciliate traditional Christian theology and Aristotle's new philosophical theology arose and called for immediate solution. As a result, Thomistic interpretation of Aristotelian thought was established. Aquinas excluded the widely spread Averroism that regarded the eternity of the world and the unity of the human intellect as necessary conclusions of Aristotelian thought. The confrontation between Aquinas and Averroes could be related to religious belief. But it was really spiritual and no secular power backs them up.

In this respect, the case of Xavier in the sixteenth century is definitely different. (We should not overlook the fact that Xavier once tried to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Loyola and other members in the 1530s. It was cancelled because of the disquieting Middle East situation. They changed direction from Jerusalem to Rome to meet the Pope.) As noted above, "No salvation outside the Church" was one of Xavier's teachings. This idea can be traced back to the age of Cyprianus in the third century. It is repeated and confirmed in the Church documents.¹⁴⁾ Xavier taught that baptism is the only means to the salvation of the soul. But

Aquinas is different in this respect, too. He thought the other way — that God's infinite mercy is not closed for salvation.

5. Conclusion

Christianity in Europe can be interpreted in various ways. It was understood differently in a different age. Nevertheless, regarding a form of Christianity, which was only a portion of European culture of a definite age, as something surpassing other cultures of the non-European world, Xavier forced it on the Japanese, didn't he? This view of Christianity is incompatible with the principle of mutual coexistence of diverse cultures. Concerning intercultural contact in the age of St. Francis Xavier, it is necessary to reconsider the difference between the Christianity which Xavier brought or rather the Christian civilization at that time and Christianity itself in order to discuss how Christianity was treated in Japan. It should have been an old theme, discussed from the age of Xavier, to deny the equation of Christianization with Europeanization both politically and intellectually.

Notes

- 1) Francisco de Xavier (1506-1552) was born in Navarre, Spanish-Basque. In 1525 he entered the college of St. Barbara in the University of Paris. In 1534, with Ignatius Loyola and five others, he took vows in the church of Montmartre at Paris to follow Christ in poverty and chastity, and to evangelize the heathen. They were ordained priests at Venice in 1537. The Society of Jesus was formally approved by Pope Paulo III in 1540. In 1542 at the invitation of Joan III of Portugal, Xavier left Lisbon to evangelize the East Indies. He arrived in Japan in 1549 and left in 1551. He died in 1552 on the way to China.
- 2) Kishino, H., *Xavier to Nihon*, Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1998; id., *Seiojin no Nihon Hakken*, Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1989.
- 3) Kawano, S.(tr.), *Letters of St. Francis Xavier*, Heibonsha, 1985; G. Schurhammar S.J. et J. Wicki S.J., *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta*. Tomus I, II, Monumenta. Historica Soc. Jesu. Romae, 1944-45.
- 4) As a colonial policy of Portugal in the sixteenth century, the Director of Malacca was administratively under the jurisdiction of the Viceroy of India.
- 5) Arai Hakuseki, *Seiyokibun*, ed. by Miyazaki, M., Heibonsha, 1982.
- 6) Mori Ougai, *Nishi Amane Den*, Iwanami Shoten, 1987.
- 7) Hayashi Razan, *Haiyaso*, Iwanami Shoten, 1982.
- 8) Thomas Aq., *Summa theologiae*, Leonina 1888-1906.
- 9) Cieslik, H., Doi, T., Ohtsuka, M. (ed.), *Dochirina Kirishitan*, Iwanami Shoten, 1982.
- 10) Fabian, *Myotei-mondo*, ed. by Ebisawa, A., Iwanami Shoten, 1982.
- 11) Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae in IV libros distinctae*, Grottaferrata, 1971-1981.
- 12) Augustinus, *De doctrina christiana*, CSEL 32, 1962.
- 13) Mizuta, H., "Thomism and the Bible", in *Medieval Studies* 41, 1999.
- 14) Denzinger, H.(ed.), *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, Herder, (ed.36 emendata) 1976