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01 Toward a Globalized Japanese Studies: What We Need to Learn from Modern Catholic Japan

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A few years ago, I asked Marie Anichordoguy, my co-editor at *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, if she could discern any pattern, trend, paradigm, or the like in the field in recent years. I had already worked with her in editing the JJS for more than five years, not only editing the manuscripts that had been accepted for publication, but reading all submissions to the JJS, a number that of course far exceeds the number of articles we published. It seemed to me that the editorship of the JJS offered an unparalleled position from which to discern where the field of Japanese Studies, at least in the English language, was headed. But after several years of reading all these submissions, I was left a bit troubled that I could not discern any trend or pattern in the field. I thought that perhaps Marie, who had served as co-editor of the JJS a bit longer than I had, had noticed some pattern that had eluded me. But no, she agreed with me that there was no clear trend in Japanese Studies at present.

The field certainly has grown more diverse over recent years, although submissions to the JJS were still heavily tilted towards historical and literary scholarship. But even that fact does not allow us to conclude that Japanese Studies has shifted away from the social sciences. Rather, it is more likely that Japan experts in the social science fields are more inclined to publish in discipline-based journals rather than area studies journals like the JJS — although we got a good share of submissions from social scientists as well.

The failure to discern a pattern in the field of Japanese Studies arguably can be presented as proof of the growth and dynamism in the field. There are so many scholars working in so many subfields that the very diversity of topics, approaches, and methodologies can be seen as evidence of the scholarly maturity of Japanese Studies. Perhaps there is another possibility, a more troubling one that goes right to the heart of not only Japanese Studies but of Asian Studies in general.

I am indebted to the subject of my current research, Tanaka Kōtarō (1890–1974), law professor and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, for this other perspective. Tanaka published a powerful and controversial indictment of the Japanese intellectual world in 1932

called “An Exploration into Our Contemporary Intellectual Anarchy and Its Root Causes.”¹ That is right, the state of Japanese Studies today can be described as “anarchic,” for many of the same reasons that Tanaka found the general Japanese intellectual world of the 1930s to be anarchic. Tanaka attributed the cause of Japanese intellectual anarchy to modern secularism and its bias toward philosophical and moral relativism. As he put it, “Western social thought has been unnaturally ripped away from its indispensable basis in Christianity, and transplanted in Japan in an exotic fashion and has thus begun to develop in a deformed manner.”² This anti-Christian bias that Tanaka found at the root of modern Japanese intellectual life stemmed to a great measure from the popularity of Marxism and neo-Kantian relativism among social scientists in early twentieth century Japan.

At best, religion was acceptable if it could be limited to a subjective, emotional indulgence by eccentrics — something that would surely wither away in time with greater progress and scientific development. But a religion, that claimed already to have reconciled faith and reason and sought to bring that understanding of truth into social science, was seen as a threat to the relativism that informed much of modern intellectual thought. By referring to this situation as “anarchy,” Tanaka hoped to draw attention to the modern intellectual withdrawal from a governing standard of objective truth and its retreat instead to a world of subjective passions and diverse political programs that rejected any assertion of right order, such as was put forth by advocates of the Natural Law (of which Tanaka was one).

Similarly, the English language field of Japanese Studies can be seen as suffering from a double-effect of relativism: (1) in the first instance, scholars working in the field of Japanese Studies undoubtedly are influenced, directly or indirectly, by many of the Japanese intellectuals whose relativist bias Tanaka identified and criticized in the early 1930s; (2) in the second place, Japanese Studies as conducted in English has certainly not completely avoided the exoticism and moral escapism that Edward Said lambasted as “Orientalism” in his classic study of that name.³

While some area studies scholars have embraced the political aspects of Said’s critique that were useful in their agendas against Western cultural imperialism (falling back into the relativism mentioned above), they generally overlooked Said’s moral criticism of how Western men used the Orient for sexual fantasies and worse. Said noted that Orientalism creates the image of the Orient as a “place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in

1 Tanaka Kōtarō, “Gendai no shisō-teki anākī to sono gen’in no kentō,” *Kaizō* 14 (7), July 1932, pp. 2–28. pp. 2–28.

2 Tanaka Kōtarō, “Gendai no shisō-teki anākī to sono gen’in no kentō,” p. 5.

3 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books), 1979.

Europe.”⁴

Also, few scholars who do use Said for political purposes are aware of the fact that Said himself was a Christian. The latter point is not about Said’s personal piety (it appears he was not a regularly practicing Christian), but rather that Said’s background as a minority Christian Arab enabled his critical view on the sexual objectification and cultural homogenization carried out by Western men as they projected their fantasies onto the non-West. Today, in spite of Said’s criticism, there seems to be a renewal of this particular kind of moral Orientalism that looks to Japan for evidence of a sexual libertinism that might be contrasted with a supposedly more repressive (Christian) West.

And yet, as Said predicted, this sexualized Japan seems to offer little more than a commodification of the human person and a rather tired form of commercialization and consumption of the images it creates. And these images are increasingly circulating well-beyond “Japanese” or even “non-Western” cultures. Yet the net result is not a true globalist understanding of Japanese culture, but rather an effort to perpetuate moral relativism and the sexual attitudes of nineteenth century Orientalists as broadly as possible in the present.

All is not lost, however. Even as this kind of neo-Orientalizing is being conducted by some Japan Studies scholars today (who are now often joined by their Japanese colleagues who engage in a form of self-exoticizing of Japanese culture as they too embrace what they undoubtedly see as the latest trend imported from the West), there is a renaissance of interest in Christianity in Japanese culture that offers a promising countermeasure to this neo-Orientalism.⁵ Although even scholarship on Christianity in Japan also has been touched by the influences of this Orientalist exoticism and cultural relativism, we are beginning to see new approaches that challenge old shibboleths about the complete eradication of Christianity from Japan during the Edo period or the essential incommensurability of Christianity and Japanese culture.

An important and path-breaking work in this regard is the forthcoming study by William J. Farge that has discovered Baba Bunkō (1718?–1758) as a hidden Catholic who was a prolific social critic and was apparently executed for his faith at a time when Japanese Catholics were supposedly already wiped out or driven deeply underground.⁶ There was not supposed to be a Catholic influence on mid-Edo culture, but Baba suggests otherwise.

4 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 190.

5 Cf. Kiri Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Modern Japan* (Leiden: Routledge), 2009; Rebecca Suter, *Holy Ghosts: the Christian Century in Modern Japanese Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press), 2015.

6 William J. Farge, *A Christian Samurai: The Trials of Baba Bunkō* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2016).

The anthology that I edited, *Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture* was an effort to signal that Catholicism was not merely something from Japan's early modern period, but has continued to play a largely unsung role in shaping modern Japanese culture, politics and society.⁷ And I have been particularly fortunate during 2015 at the Nichibunken to participate in the collaborative research project headed by Associate Professor Nanyan Guo on the impact of Christian missionaries on modern Japanese language (see her paper at the end of this volume). The large number and wide range of disciplinary specializations of the scholars participating in Professor Guo's project signal that there is a vibrant international community of Japan scholars who recognize the importance of crossing cultural borders in the way that the study of Christian Japanese culture especially foregrounds.

Yet, while Japanese Protestants are well-represented in English language Japanese Studies, the study of Japanese Catholics lags behind what scholars working in the Japanese language have achieved. One can point to a wealth of recent publication in Japanese on Catholic Japanese culture: the five volume set of *Inoue Yōji chosaku senshū* (Nihon Kirisuto kyōdan Shuppanyoku, 2015); the nearly dozen articles by Yamanashi Atsushi published from 2010 to 2012 on various aspects of Catholicism in modern Japan; Wakamatsu Eisuke's many books but especially his *Yoshimitsu Yoshibiko (1904–1945): Shi to tenshi no keijijōgaku* (Iwanami Shoten, 2014); and similarly, Yamane Michihiro, the doyen of Japanese language work in Endō Shūsaku (1923–1996) Studies, who presents a consistently Catholic perspective in his work, something that contrasts with the English language scholarship on Endō's literature that is dominated by Protestant, if not non-Christian, perspectives.⁸

But the crowning jewel is undoubtedly the appearance of Iwashita Sōichi (1889–1940)'s *Shinkō no isan* as an Iwanami Bunko paperback in 2015. The republication of Fr. Iwashita's prewar essays on the Catholic faith in this cheap and widely available format suggests something of the reach of Catholic Japanese Studies in Japan today. In addition, I have found a warm reception for my work on Catholic Japanese whenever I address audiences in Japan (which are mostly composed of non-Christians). Yet, the interest in Catholic Japanese Studies in the West has been rather tepid.

Why the difference? Here I think we have to recognize the influences of Orientalism that tend to make Western scholars of Japanese Studies both uncomfortable with the presence

7 Kevin M. Doak, ed., *Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

8 For example, contrast Yamane Michihiro, *Endō Shūsaku no "Fukai kawa" o yomu* (Tokyo: Chōbunsha, 2010), with Mark Dennis and Darren J. N. Middleton, eds., *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Classic Novel* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

of Christians in Japanese culture and with the uncompromising universal truth claims that Catholicism in particular raises. In the first place, we have to honestly admit that Western scholars of Japanese Studies are not representative of their own societies' attitudes toward Christianity; by their very professional choice of Japanese Studies a good many Western scholars have run toward Japan from the very Orientalist impulses that Said exposed — to escape from the moral frameworks of their homelands that might oppose their own personal pleasures. Such escapism, however, is more than a matter of personal moral choice. Collectively, it builds in a certain bias toward particularism and relativism in the field of Japanese Studies that is open to every cultural phenomena one can discover in Japanese history and society except for those aspects of Japanese cultural history that speak of something larger, something more global, something that the West might even share with Japan (strangely, with the exception of Marxism, however marginal it is in Japanese Studies).

Of course there are various approaches that might yield a more global Japanese Studies. But certainly attention to the contributions made by Japanese Catholics to their culture is one very important area for promoting a more globalized Japanese Studies. In contrast to Protestantism and Marxism, Catholicism was not introduced to Japan only at the end of the nineteenth century with the wholesale modern transformation of Japanese culture. It established roots in Japan hundreds of years earlier, simultaneous with many “traditional” features of Japanese culture that were shaped in the Azuchi-Momoyama and early Edo periods. Certainly, more scholarly attention to the Catholic disciples around Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) who shaped the development of tea ceremony, is needed, as are studies on the “Catholic stone lanterns” created by Furuta Oribe (1544–1615) that were subsequently dispersed around the country.

But a study of Japanese Catholics that begins and ends with the *kirishitan* risks a kind of familiar Protestant historical narrative that sees all this as the “superstitions” of the pre-modern era that were modernized and rationalized with the Meiji period. This is the trap that has stunted the growth of a truly globalized Japanese Studies that might escape the dominant modernist biases of Western historiography. Rather than positing a radical break between the Tokugawa period and the Meiji era, a historical perspective that captures the continuities in Japanese society and culture from at least the Azuchi-Momoyama period to the present holds considerable promise in laying the ground for a more global understanding of Japanese culture.

One means of correcting the biases of modernist historiography is to increase the English language scholarship on Catholic Japanese after the Meiji Period. Japanese scholars have already demonstrated the existence of a Catholic renaissance after 1925 through the contri-

butions to modern Japanese intellectual and cultural life from Fr. Iwashita Sōichi, Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko and Tanaka Kōtarō, among others. Western missionaries like Fr. Sauveur Candau, M.E.P. were not irrelevant, but they were very much secondary influences in a movement that was largely driven by Japanese Catholics themselves. Recognizing the Japanese Catholic impetus behind this cultural renaissance is an important step toward realizing the globalized Japanese culture that these men were enhancing in early twentieth century Japan.

At a time when theologians pursue misleading models of an “inculturation” that presumes an incompatibility between Catholicism and Japanese culture, and cultural studies scholars reflect the same bias by simply ignoring or deriding the impact of Catholicism on modern Japanese culture as “foreign,” we should be exploring the history of Catholicism in modern Japan both as a means of closing the gap between English language and Japanese language scholarship in Japanese Studies as well as a means of overcoming the stubborn influences of Orientalism in our field. Anything less is merely to remain passively in the prison house of Orientalism that promises liberation from the West only to enclose one in a narrower view of what Japan is, was, and could yet be.