

**Orientalism and Sixteenth-century
European Representations of Japan
in Historical and Geographical
Resources**

Sonia Favi

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia

AIMS OF THE PAPER

- Providing an overview of the Sixteenth-century historical and geographical materials including accounts of Japan
- Illustrating how Japan was represented in the sources, in relation to the ideological and political context in which they were produced



Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978)

PAPER OVERVIEW

- Introducing remarks on Said's *Orientalism*
- Overview of the Sixteenth-century historical and geographical European materials that included accounts of Japan
- Analysis of the materials from a textual perspective

ORIENTALISM

Orientalism: “Way of coming to terms with the Orient [...] based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience”



“East”: intellectual product, part of a Western process of self-definition.

The “Orient”

- contributed to shaping Western ideas of the West
- mirrored European aspirations, and the dynamics of the political and economical relationships between Europe and the East

Said proceeded to concretely show the making of the process of Orientalism by analysing European representations of the Islamic world in the colonialist period.

He concluded that Western representations of the East :

1)implied an “ontological and epistemological distinction between "the Orient" and [...] "the Occident"” (in which the West was implicitly presented as superior).

2)invested the “Orient” with a timeless essentialism

Ho-fung Hung, *Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conceptions of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900* (2003)



Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century Sinophilism as opposed to Said's conclusions

Where does earlier sources about Japan stand?

OVERVIEW OF THE MATERIALS

Printed materials including accounts of Japan:

- “Historie” ↔ “Cronicae”, “Relationi”: “A form of writing codified by tradition and supposedly grounded in truth, reality, objectivity”. (Augustus Pallotta, *The New World and Italian Readers of the Spanish Historie in the Sixteenth Century*)
- Geographical works: Cosmographical descriptions

1. PUBLISHED REPORTS BY THE JESUIT MISSIONARIES STATIONED IN JAPAN

- Circulated in Europe since the 1550s.
- Published in the original Iberian languages or in Italian translation (and then translated into other European Vernacular languages)
- After the 1585 Japanese Embassy promoted by Alessandro Valignano, the publications steadily increased in number: by the end of the century, they were released yearly, and in numerous editions, and included in collections.

2. PAMPHLETS RELATED TO THE 1585 JAPANESE EMBASSY

About 80 titles in total.

Only some of them include descriptions of Japan.

The most complete one is the *Relationi della venuta de gli ambasciatori giaponesi à Roma, fino alla partita di Lisbona. Con vna descrizione del lor paese, e costumi, e con le accoglienze fatte loro da tutti i Prencipi Christiani, per doue sono passati.* by Guido Gualtieri.



3. HISTORIES FOCUSED ON THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN ASIA

- *Rerum a Societate Iesu in Oriente gestarum volumen, continens historiam iucundam lectu omnibus Christianis, praesertim ijs, quibus vera Religio est cordi. In qua videre possunt, quomodo nunquam Deus Ecclesiam suam deserat, & in locum deficientium a vera fide, innumeros alios in abditissimis etiam regionibus substituat.* Giovanni Pietro Maffei, 1571.

First attempt at an official history of the mission in Japan. It included:

- A Latin translation of a previously unpublished manuscript by the missionologist Manuel da Costa (*Historia do missions do Oriente até o anno de 1568*)
- A collection of letters sent by missionaries stationed in Japan, in Latin translation and abridged form. Titled *De Japonicis rebus epistolarum libri IV*.

- *Historiarvm Indicarvm Libri XVI. Selectarum item ex India Epistolarum eodem interprete Libri IV.* Giovanni Pietro Maffei, 1588

History of the Christian Missions in Asia, from 1410 up to 1573.

- It largely drew on an unpublished manuscript by Alessandro Valignano: *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*

- 4 of 16 volumes were centered on Japan

- The 1580 Venetian edition included a collection of letters similar to the one contained in Maffei's previous work (*Selectarum item ex India Epistolarum eodem interprete Libri IV*)

IO PETRI
MAFFEI

BERGOMATIS

E SOCIETATE IESV

HISTORIARVM

INDICARVM LIBRI XVI

SELECTARVM ITEM EX INDIA

Epistolarum eodem interprete Libri IIII

*Accesit Ignatij Loiole Vita postremo recognita. Et in Opera
singula copiosus Index.*

CVM PRIVILEGIO.

VIRTUTI SIC



REDIT INVIDIA.

VENETIIS, Apud Damianum Zenarium. 1589.



- *Historia de las misiones que hecho los religiosos de la Compania de Iesus, para predicar el sancto Evangelio en la India Oriental, y en los Reynos de la China y Iapon.* Luis de Guzmàn, 1601.

History of the missions in Asia, from Xavier's years up to the moment of publication.

More than half of the work is devoted to Japan.

(a full transcription of the work can be consulted online at <http://www.upf.edu/asia/projectes/che/s17/guzman.pdf>)

- *Historia de los islas del archipiélago Filipino y reinos de la Gran China, Tartaria, Cochín-China, Malaca, Siam, Cambodge y Japon*, Marcelo de Ribadeneira, 1601.

It included a narration of the settling of the first Franciscans in Japan and of the first Franciscan martyrdoms.

It didn't add much information about Japan itself.

(the work can be consulted online on <http://books.google.com>)

4. LAY HISTORIES

Substantial accounts of Japan began to appear in lay works in the last decades of the century:

- *Delle Historie del Mondo*. Mambrino Roseo, 1573. ((the work can be consulted online on <http://books.google.com>)

•)

- *Delle Historie del Mondo (1580-1596)*, Cesare Campana, 1598

((the work can be consulted online on

<http://books.google.com>)

)

5. LAY COSMOGRAPHIES

- *L'Universale fabrica del mondo*, Giovanni Lorenzo d'Anania, 1573

(the work can be consulted online on
<http://books.google.com>)

6. COLLECTIONS OF TRAVEL LITERATURE

- *Navigazioni et viaggi*, Giovanni Battista Ramusio, 1554
Included the Italian translation of five Jesuit letters on Japan, three by Francis Xavier, one by Francisco Perez and one by Giovanni d'Albera, all written between 1549 and 1550
(the work can be consulted online on <http://books.google.com>)
- *History of Travayle*, Richard Willes, 1577
Included a discussion “Of the Island Giapan”, based on Maffei’s 1571 work.
(the work can be consulted online on <http://books.google.com>)
- *The principal navigations, voyages and discoveries of the English nation, made by Sea or over land*, Richard Hakluyt, 1598 (extended edition. First published in 1590)
(the work can be consulted online on <http://books.google.com>)

RECURRING ELEMENTS IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF JAPAN

- Japan is rarely described for itself: the stress is put on the comparison between Japanese practices, manners and customs and European ones.
- Positive attitude from the part of the writers towards the object of representation.

➤ Maffei, 1571. Japanese as “governed by reason”.



Francis Xavier’s letter from Kagoshima from the 4th November 1549. Included in the *Diversi avisi particolari dall'indie di Portogallo riceuuti, dall'anno 1551. Sino al 1558* (Venice, 1558) and in Ramusio’s *Navigazioni*.

➤ Gualtieri, 1585. “[The Japanese were] so good in nature to be superior not only to the Indians, but to Europeans as well”.

➤ Guzman, 1601. Japanese population as the “first among all the Oriental people”.

JESUIT COSMOGRAPHY: JOSE' DE ACOSTA'S *PROCURANDA DE INDORUM SALUTE* (1577)

World civilizations as a hierarchy of evolutionary stages, where each population stood in accord to its possess of "Right Reason" (Thomas Aquinas).

The two fundamental discriminator for the possess of Right Reason were identified by Acosta as

- Literacy
- The capacity to build an organized society

➤ He placed the Chinese and Japanese populations at the highest level of society. He believed that such populations shared with Europe a common intellectual framework, where arguments favorable to Christianity could be presented and understood as true.

A NON-HISTORICIZED VIEW OF JAPAN

Both the religious and the lay sources share an almost complete lack of references to Japan's history before the sixteenth century.

They include accounts of contemporary events, and only very brief historical excursions (i.e. The annual letter of 1589, published in the *Lettere del Giapone, et della Cina de gl'anni M. D . LXXXIX & M. D. XC. Scritte al R.P. Generale della Compagnia di Giesv. Con Licentia de' Svperiori.*)

CONCLUSIONS

- The universalist attitude of Sixteenth-century sources on Japan partly contradicts Said's assumptions.
- However, the sources do represent Japan in a reductionist way, that mirrors European ambitions and ideas of self.