

# Aristotelianism, Platonism and Humanism in Japan's Christian Century

Ken'ichi Nejime

(Gakushuin Womes's College, Tokyo)

## Introduction

My presentation succinctly explores the presence of three intellectual currents, Platonism, Aristotelianism and humanism, in Japan's encounter with Renaissance Europe. Without a doubt, Christianity played a major role in this encounter. It was introduced to Japan soon after the beginning of the Council of Trent (1545). But the Church doctrines of the time were enriched by the tradition of philosophies, above all Aristotelianism since the Middle Ages, then Platonism whose revival was especially celebrated in Italy, and by the movement of Renaissance humanism.

In my story, two missionaries are important: Francisco Xavier (1506–52) from Spain, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) from Italy. They were Jesuits who studied at the European universities and came to Japan, and exerted a strong impact on the introduction of European educational system into the country. Xavier, soon after his arrival, searched for universities in order to establish a dialogue with local intellectuals and professors, following the Parisian Aristotelian Tradition. Valignano of the next generation established a curriculum for the newly founded Jesuit schools in Japan. He adopted a humanist method of education based on classical Latin letters. With these missionaries, three major intellectual currents of the Renaissance were introduced to Japan at almost the same time. My paper seeks to shed new light on the arrival of these currents and consider the meaning of their impact.

## 1. Xavier, Valignano and Contarini

Francisco Xavier of the Society of Jesus arrived in Japan in the summer of 1549. This marked the beginning of the country's Christian era, which lasted until the mid-seventeenth century. Xavier and his followers brought not only the teachings and

customs of the Church but also the major elements of the western intellectual world in general. In Paris, Xavier learned a particular type of theology which was heavily influenced by Aristotle's teachings.

In the summer of 1579, thirty years after Xavier's arrival, Alessandro Valignano, another Jesuit and a law graduate of Padua, came to Japan and founded a Jesuit college and seminary where the *studia humanitatis* was taught to local students. Japan's Christian Century, begun with Xavier, was accelerated by Valignano's arrival. The *studia humanitatis*, humanities, principally include five materials, grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy and so are clearly different from logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics<sup>1</sup>.

A block printing system had already developed in China, Korea and Japan, which surprised even Michel de Montaigne (1533–92). But Valignano coordinated the import of a printing press directly from Europe. It allowed the Jesuits to produce a considerable amount of printed titles, called “Kirishitanban (キリシタン版).” These books contributed to a wider and quicker diffusion of their teachings. In a letter, Valignano tells us: the Jesuits and their artisans were able to produce a book on Japanese grammar and dictionary. Its main body was compiled from 1590 to 1603, and its final product represents a comprehensive volume containing nearly 32,800 entries<sup>2</sup>. The Jesuits were also able to print other titles entirely typeset in Japanese, most of which were on the lives of saints and martyrs. As there was already a Jesuit printing press in India by 1556, it took 34 years so that European printing machine reached Japan.

Also a library was founded for the Jesuits in Japan. Besides books on religion and theology, it included many titles by pagan writers such as Cicero, Virgil, Caesar, Sallust, Horace and Martial<sup>3</sup>. It has to be remembered that the first publication of the Jesuit press in Rome was an expurgated edition of Martial's epigrams that appeared in 1559.

To understand intellectual life in Japan's Christian century, it is necessary to observe the mind of the Europeans of the time. To this end, I would like to refer to another graduate of Padua, Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542), and briefly explain his activi-

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letteres*, Roma 1969 (1956).

<sup>2</sup> About Valignano, see Josef Franz Schütte, S.J., *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan*. I. Band. Von der Ernennung zum Visitor bis zum ersten Abschied von Japan (1573–1582). I. Teil: Das Problem (1573–1580), Roma 1951. II. Teil: Die Lösung (1580–1582), Roma 1958. Ken'ichi Nejime, Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) between Padua and Japan, in *Bulletin of Gakushuin Women's College*, No.16, 2014, 43-52.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Jesus Lopez Gay, S.J., La primera biblioteca de los Jesuitas en el Japon (1556). Su contenido y su influencia, in *Monumenta Nipponica : studies on Japanese culture past and present*, Vol.1, no. 1 (Jan, 1938), 350-379.

ty and philosophy.

Contarini was a member of a noble Venetian family and became Cardinal in 1535<sup>4</sup>. When Pope Paul III (1534–49) recognized the Society of Jesus as an official religious order in 1540, Contarini played an important role behind this recognition. In 1541, he was sent to Regensburg in order to dispute with the German Protestants in response to the wish of Emperor Charles V. Although Contarini invented a doctrine of double justification by faith as a means of conciliation, the colloquy itself was a failure. The doctrine was not only strongly condemned by most Protestants and powerful Catholics, it was but also swiftly canceled in the Council of Trent. Contarini's proposition was, however, appreciated by important figures such as Girolamo Seripando (1493–1563), another cardinal and assiduous reader both of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), Florentine Platonist, and of Egidio da Viterbo (1472–1532), cabalist of the Curia when Seripando was young<sup>5</sup>.

Contarini was a humanist philosopher who learned the teachings of Aristotle from Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) at Padua. At that time, Padua was one of the most important centers of Europe for philosophy, medicine and law. It belonged to the Republic of Venice, which was the free and powerful, *serenissima* country. Pomponazzi argued the possibility of the death of the individual human soul from the Aristotelian point of view. Contarini objected to the master's theory and defended the article of faith of the Christian religion which had been decided at the fifth Lateran Council in 1513.

Some years before his death in 1542, Contarini was amazed by the news from the old Asia and the new America. He became an ambassador active in the Iberian Peninsula and made acquaintance of Christopher Columbus's son.

Let us remember that Contarini contributed much to idealize Venice by promoting its image as a free, perfect and peaceful society. His famous treatise, *On the Magistrates and Republic of Venice (De magistratibus et republica Venetorum)* emphasized its idealized image on the basis of the thorough understanding of the structure and function of the Republic.

Valignano's perception of Venice was most probably influenced by this image. With penetrating eyes, he compared Sakai, Japanese city-state of merchants near the impe-

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<sup>4</sup> About Contarini, see Elisabeth G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini. Venice, Rome, and Reform*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Kenichi Nejime, Gasparo Contarini(1483-1542) and the Philosophical, Theological Tendency toward the Council of Trento(1545-1563), in *Seiyoshi Ronso. Studies in Western History*, Vol.36, Dec.2014, 25-38 (in Japanese).

rial town of Kyoto, to the Republic of Venice. The image of his ideal city-republic is reverberated in his *Dialog on the Japanese Embassy's Mission to the Roman Curia (De missione legatorum Japoniensium ad Romanam curiam, rebusque in Europa, ac toto itinere animaduersis dialogus)*. This great work offers detailed descriptions of many cities and towns in the Italian peninsula visited by Martinho Hara and the other three Japanese boys. It is a rich source of political, social and cultural information.

## 2. Fabian Fucan

I would like to add two fine examples of the *studia humanitatis* of the Far East. Firstly, to my sense, Martinho Hara was the first Japanese humanist in the strict sense. In 1587, in Goa on the return from Europe, he wrote a Latin oration to thank his teacher, Valignano. This piece of work respected the European tradition of rhetoric and oration, citing the Tree Graces from Seneca's *De beneficiis*. For the first time in 1588, it was published there using the European printing press by Constantino Dourado, another Japanese visitor whose father was Portuguese. Hara and Dourado with others formed the embassy sent to Europe by Valignano<sup>6</sup>.

Hara is famous among us. So I would like to introduce less famous but more typical person of the age. Its name is Fabian Fucan (不干斎ハビアン 1565-1621). Fabian Fucan was probably born in 1565 in Kaga or Echu where a sect of Buddhism, *Ikkoshu* (一向宗), was firmly planted. Moving to Kyoto, he became a Zen bonze. In 1583 Fabian was baptized with his mother and went to a *seminario* in Osaka. In 1586 he entered the Society of Jesus as a *frater* or *irmão*, equivalent to a Japanese catechist (*dojuku*). Although Fabian was active in Jesuit missions for many years and studied Latin as a scholarly *dojuku*, he was never ordained as a priest (*padre*). In 1592 he was recorded in a list of residents of the Jesuit *collegio* in Amakusa as a "master of the Japanese language" with a little knowledge of Latin.

Fabian's language skills were, however, quite good. The Jesuits regarded him as a highly valuable member. Serving as an interpreter, Fabian wrote a simplified version of *The Tale of the Heike* (『平家物語』 *Nihonno Kotobato Historia*), which was a dialogue on the language and history of Japan between Umanojo (馬之丞) and Kengyo (檢校), typeset in Roman letters and published in 1592. He also participated in the par-

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<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Ken'ichi Nejime, *The Encounter between the Eastern Renaissance and the Western Renaissance : In Pursuit of the Historical World of the Namban and the Nejimes* (in Japanese. 『東西ルネサンスの邂逅—南蛮と欄寝氏の歴史的世界を求めて—南蛮と欄寝氏の歴史的世界を求めて』 東信堂、1998年).

tial translation of Aesop's *Fables*, published as *Esopo no Fabulas*.

Fabian's value to Jesuit missions cannot be reduced to his linguistic ability and role as mediator. Because of his educational background, he was familiar with both European and East Asian systems of philosophy and religion. Various documents attest that Fabian was involved in their interreligious debates. His public appearance as a Christian advocate and opponent of Buddhism is reported in several occasions, including public disputations and funeral sermons. In this respect, he can be compared to typically rhetorical humanists of the Italian Renaissance.

Some accounts were of course fictions, as shown in a dispute of the *Nanbanji Kohaiki* (『南蛮寺興廢記』) between Fabian (Baian 梅庵) and Hakuo (白翁). But other accounts were genuine such as a notorious debate with the Neo-Confucianist Hayashi Razan (林羅山 1583-1657), who was to become the influential advisor to the Tokugawa government. According to Razan, in 1606 he and his brother Nobuzumi (信澄) met Fabian through the mediation of Matsunaga Teitoku (松永貞徳 1571-1654), all the disciples of Fujiwara Seika (藤原惺窩 1561-1619). They clashed over the earth's roundness and the Christian view of God and the creation.

In the same busy year, other events attracted public attention to Fabian. Sometimes he delivered a sermon on the anniversary, other times a oration at the funeral. Even in these occasions, Fabian fiercely attacked Buddhism for being unable to provide salvation. The annual letters of the Jesuits also recorded his debate with a Buddhist bonze from the sect *Nichiren* (日蓮宗) also in 1606. It addressed the immortality of the human soul and salvation, an important philosophical issue of the time in Europe.

Fabian today is remembered for his two seemingly contradictory writings: *Myotei Mondo* (『妙貞問答』 1605) and *Ha Daiusu* (『破提字子』 1620). The first treatise was set in a form of dialogue between Myoshu (妙秀) and Yutei (幽貞) in three books: 1) a refutation of Buddhism; 2) a refutation of Confucianism and Shinto; and 3) an apologetic on Christianity. The second treatise was written after Fabian abandoned Christianity. In its first part, he explains and refutes basic Christian doctrines in seven steps, comprising the Christian concept of God; the differentiation of *anima rationalis*, *sensitiva* and *vegetative*, Aristotelian terms; the fall of the human being; the role of Jesus as savior of mankind and the Ten Commandments. In its final part, he questions the value of Christianity, mainly with regard to the conduct of the missionaries and other Christians.

Why did Fabian abandon Christianity and the Society of Jesus? There are some

hints in the last chapter of his *Ha Daiusu*. There he blames the Jesuits for their arrogant behaviors toward the Japanese, especially for their refusal to allow local catechists into priesthood. Actually, Fabian was not among fifteen Japanese who were ordained as priests between 1601 and 1614.

Both *Myotei Mondo* and *Ha Daiusu* are the works written by a learned man who was educated in the Jesuit school and lived among Jesuit missionaries for almost 20 years. Before becoming a Christian *irmão*, he was a Zen bonze and learned the theological doctrines of the both camps in detail. The Jesuit education of local students was designed to replace Japanese religious ideas by the Christian views of the human being and its world. Being a Japanese and having once been a Buddhist bonze distanced Fabian from the missionaries and other seminarists. He was familiar with popular Japanese religion, which was a fusion of Buddhist and Neo-Confucian currents with Shinto's mythology.

Against the background of this syncretism, let us consider how these elements were reflected in Fabian's *Myotei Mondo* and *Ha Daiusu*. In the former work, Fabian the Christian explains and criticizes the characteristics of Shintoism, Confucianism and all sects of Buddhism. He tries to show that the ideas advanced in those currents are based on an unscientific worldview, especially on the Buddhist notion of *Syumisen* (須弥山). He insists that Asian religions and philosophies have no power to save the human being. Let us remember that this excellent work was a dialogue between two women with concrete names like Renaissance dialogues, not like medieval dialogues with abstract names such as anger and the mind.

In the latter work, Fabian the apostate does not simply replace his former Christian belief with Buddhism or other religious currents. Instead, he adopted a pluralistic view. His commitment to plurality is obvious in the way he contrasts the Christian idea of the creator God with Buddhist, Confucian and Shinto narratives of the world formation. He also opposes the Christian claim of universal truth with his pluralistic vision by emphasizing the coexistence of Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism<sup>7</sup>.

I would like to call Fabian, as it were, a palinodist in the Renaissance, for he recanted in the *Ha Daiusu* the theory which he had emphasized in the third part of *Myotei Mondo*. Finally Buddha, Confucius, native Japanese gods and the God seem him, so to speak, *impostores*, although more than three. He is near to an agnostic or a skeptic,

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<sup>7</sup> Although I read several Japanese studies upon Fucan Fabian, I greatly consulted and followed here Monika Schrimpf, The Pro- and Anti-Christian Writings of Fucan Fabian (1565-1621), in *Japanese Religions*, Vol.33 (1 and 2), pp., 35-54.

but never a fideist, for he was greatly a logical advocate. What did he accept as true? It was the natural that gratifies him and corresponds to his feeling. He was seeking for it as *explorator*, not as *transfuga*, although he was sometimes a Zen Buddhist, at other times a Christian.

### 3. The Immortality of Soul in Japan between Italian Aristotelianism and Platonism

According to João Rodrigues Tçuzu, famous Jesuit and skillful translator, not a few humanists were born in Japan<sup>8</sup>. Indeed Japan also had its position on the map of the Renaissance intellectual world, learning Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies with a humanist method. Now let us focus on the problem of the human soul's immortality in order to consider in more detail the relationship between Europe and Japan in the sixteenth century.

Generally speaking, faculties of theology were nonexistent in Italy. The situation was quite different at Paris and Oxford. Students in the faculty of arts at Padua did not learn the philosophy of Aristotle for theology but for medicine and law. Thus the teaching they received was extremely secular. That is why it was often called "secular Aristotelianism." The tradition continued among Italian university professors such as Cesare Cremonini until the first decades of the 17th century.

At the faculty of arts of Padua, the Averroistic doctrine of the unity of the intellect was in vogue. This doctrine did not acknowledge the immortality of the individual human soul. One highly influential bishop of Padua, Pietro Barozzi (1441-1507), was never content with this doctrine. In my view, he wanted to follow Marsilio Ficino, who emphasized individual immortality in his masterpiece, *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum* (1482). Thanks to the effort of Barozzi, Egidio da Viterbo, as I said before, and others, the human soul's immortality became the article of the faith at the fifth Lateran Council in 1513.

Here is its decree (I quote):

We decree that all those who cling to erroneous statements of this kind [that is to say, the rejection of the immortality of soul, of the resurrection of body and of the eternal rewards and eternal punishments], thus sowing heresies which are wholly condemned, should be avoided in every way and punished as detestable and odious heretics and infidels who are undermining the Catholic

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<sup>8</sup> Nejime, *The Encounter between the Eastern Renaissance and the Western Renaissance*, 205 (in Japanese).

faith. Moreover, we strictly enjoin each and every philosopher who teaches publicly in the universities or elsewhere, that when they explain or introduce to their audiences the principles or conclusions of philosophers, where these are known to deviate from the true faith—as in the assertion of the soul’s mortality or of there being only one soul or the eternity of the world and other topics of this kind—they are obliged to devote their every effort to clarify for their listeners the truth of the Christian religion, to teach it by convincing arguments…(Cumque verum vero minime contradicat, omnem assertionem veritati illuminatae fidei contrariam, omnino falsam esse definimus, et ut aliter dogmatizare non liceat, districtius inhibemus: omnesque huiusmodi erroris assertionibus inhaerentes, veluti damnatissimas haereses seminantes, per omnia, ut detestabiles et abominabiles haereticos et infidels, catholicam fidem labefactantes, vitandos et puniendos fore decernimus. Insuper omnibus et singulis philosophis in universitatibus studiorum generalium, et alibi publice legentibus, districte praecipiendo mandamus, ut cum philosophorum principia aut conclusions, in quibus a recta fide deviare noscuntur, auditoribus suis legerint, seu explanaverint, quale hoc de animae mortalitate aut unitate, et mundi aeternitate, ac alia huiusmodi, teneantur eisdem veritatem religionis christianae omni conatu manifestam facere, et persuadendo pro posse docere, ac omni studio huiusmodi philosophorum argumenta, cum omnia solubilia existant, pro viribus excludere atque resolvere.<sup>9</sup>).

Here the task of philosophers is clearly determined. The decree seems to have been influenced by the revival of Platonism in *Quattrocento* Florence, where Ficino lived and taught for a long time.

Xavier and Valignano visited Japan after the the fifth Lateran Council. All over Japan where he could travel, Xavier managed to carry out a series of serious debates on a key issue: the immortality of the human soul. Not only Xavier but also later missionaries emphasized this doctrine. Indeed in Kagoshima Xavier once had a friendly discussion with a bonze of Zen, a Buddhist sect advocating the mortality of the human soul. The bonze told him that death is the end of every human being, and there

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<sup>9</sup> *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Norman P. Tanner S.J., Volume One, Nicaea I to Lateran V, Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press 1990, 605-606. Ken’ichi Nejime, The Immortality of the Soul and Japan : the Worldwide Problem of the Italian Renaissance, in *Bulletin of Gakushuin Women’s College*, No.17, 2015, 99-108, especially 102-103.

was no afterlife. Xavier was also surprised to observe the locals' misunderstanding of the Christian deity in Yamaguchi. They identified the immortal God of Christians Deus (Daiusu) with the Buddhist principal being, called Dainichi in Japanese. Xavier knew the situation and took the Dainichi as the "prime matter" (*prima materia*). To eliminate the propagation of this kind of misunderstanding, Xavier decided not to translate key terms of Christianity such as God, angel and soul any longer. Instead, he directly adopted Western terms in his evangelical mission in Japan. The doctrine of the human soul's immortality became a principal feature of his teaching.

Just like Xavier, Valignano acknowledged the value of Japanese culture and intellect while rejecting their religions, Buddhism and Shintoism. Against the attacks of Buddhists, Valignano was able to defend the immortality of the human soul on a solid philosophical basis in his *Catechismus Christianae fidei*.

Now let us turn to Pedro Gómez (1535-1600), the last but not least important Jesuit in Japan's Christian century. Gómez was a graduate of the University of Coimbra in Portugal and worked under Valignano. He taught at the Jesuit *collegium* of Nagasaki in the late decade of the sixteenth century. His masterpiece, *Compendium catholicae veritatis* together with *De sphaera* and *De anima*, was written as a textbook of the collegio.

In his teaching, Gómez amply defended the human soul's immortality while criticizing Buddhism. It was based on his interpretation that the religion of Buddha regarded the death of the human soul as being quite natural and inevitable. Just like Xavier and Valignano, Gómez wanted to teach local students the European scientific theories together with the Christian doctrine. Thus the human soul's immortality was always used as a major doctrine by the Jesuits in Japan. Defending the Western doctrine amply advanced in that era, European missionaries tried to impose it on the Japanese, both Christians (*kirisitan*) and non-Christians. The issue was the focal point of this rich and complex encounter between the West and the Far East.

## Conclusion

In lieu of the conclusion I would like to consider the thinking mode of the Renaissance man in the Christian Europe. In 1536, two decades after the Reformation, Aonio Paleario (c.1500-1570), Lutheran heretic (*eretico luterano*), printed the hexameter poem and defended the immortality against Lucretius, ancient Roman pagan philosopher and famous writer of the *De rerum natura libri VI*. Interestingly enough, only at this

point Paleario's position was never contrary to the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. The theory of immortality of the soul has a close relation with a Christian, whether one were a Protestant or a Catholic. It was only Catholics who came to Japan in early modern age. Defending the western theory established in the Renaissance, the missionary enforced both the Christianity's doctrine and the pagan Platonic theory on the Japanese people. It was an interesting occurrence of history and an important encounter between the West and the Far East<sup>10</sup>.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Postscript. This paper follows my discourses given at two cities in 2015.

- 1) RSA. The Renaissance Society of America. Annual Meeting. Berlin, Germany, 26-28 March 2015.
- 2) TGSW. Tsukuba Global Science Week. Tsukuba, Japan, 28-30 September 2015.

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<sup>10</sup> Ken'ichi Nejime, The Tradition of the University at Padua and the Problem of the Immortality of the Soul : The Religion and the Philosophical Thought in the Sixteenth-Century World, in *The Christian Church and the Popular Religion from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age*, edited by Takashi Jinno, Tokyo 2010, 17-22 (in Japanese except for the resume. 根占献一「パドヴァ大学の伝統と靈魂不滅の問題—16世紀世界における宗教と哲学思想」、『中近世ヨーロッパのキリスト教会と民衆宗教』、平成19年度～21年度科学研究費補助金(基盤研究B)研究成果報告書所収、研究代表者甚野尚志、17-23頁。)