

REVIEWS

A World Elsewhere: Europe's Encounter With Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. DEREK MASSARELLA. Yale University Press, 1990, 442 pp.

This long, scholarly, very well researched and elegantly printed study is dedicated to a field that has been extremely attractive to historians and academics for many years. Professor Massarella focuses, as the subtitle indicates, on European contacts with Japan during the 16th and 17th centuries. Although the period explored is not new, the *approach* definitely is. The story, as the author explains in the Introduction (p. 4), "has never been told adequately or completely, that is within the larger context of the new relationship between Europe and the Indies, of the ambitions and policy of the East India Company and its Dutch rival..."

The basic pillars upon which the author is trying to reconstruct the story are: A narrative approach since he is attempting, in his own words, "a history not a pathology," a constant focusing on the lives and tidings of the Hirado Factory of the East India Company, and an emphasis on the roots of the overall cross-cultural contact which were based on a trading relationship.

This is, in a very brief outline, the setting and the target of the attempt.

What could be the reactions of a reader who is a layman but happens to have also succumbed to the fascination of these two centuries in Japanese history?

Obviously, the author addresses himself primarily to fellow

scholars, but without excluding, I suppose, learned readers at large. It is evident that there has been a laborious examination of material and sources. Even the 59 pages constituting the Notes Section make for commendable and most interesting reading. (Although, in my view, it would have done more justice to the author if he had expanded the bibliographical section, separating the original sources from other material. Also, it sometimes becomes difficult to trace a given source, if one has missed the first reference to it. Incidentally, there are some minor misprints, as for instance the name of Diego Pacheco which is spelt wrongly in Notes 124 and 125.)

The narrative approach is certainly the legitimate choice of the author. As such, there is no doubt that it provides us perhaps with the "definitive work on the early English in Japan," as it is described on the book's cover. It is continuous and extremely meticulous in detail, sometimes even difficult to follow because of an enormous amount of data. (Analysis has not been neglected, admits the author—p. 5—but the reader easily detects its subservience to narration.) This reviewer's preference, nevertheless, lies with authors like for instance G. Coedès who, in his monumental essay on the Indianized states of S.E. Asia, sets out "less to produce a history ... than to offer a synthesis showing how the various elements of the history are related."¹ Conceding of course that the two cases are not identical, so that Coedès's angle might also apply here I would venture the opinion that not every analytical or synthetical effort leads automatically to a less exciting "pathology."

Aside from these, one should commend the author for his continuous care to paint the Hirado portrait in the broader background of corresponding events in Europe at the time and the rivalries of other Europeans in the Far East, especially the Dutch.

Anyway, there are some more important points which now come to mind.

Going by the subtitle of the book, one might question the emphasis given to the English. Were the study dedicated exclusively to the English at Hirado, and were this accordingly reflected in the title or subtitle, we could hail it as a perfect success and this criticism would have been unnecessary. But "Europe's encounter with Japan" is much more general and this is not given sufficient balance in the book, despite numerous and useful references to the action of Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch, etc. Or rather, more accurately, the balance is somehow distorted because of the main and continuous focusing on the English. The whole story, in my view, cannot be told by concentrating on one nation and overemphasizing the trade relation, despite the latter's undeniable validity.

Related to the above is the author's rejection of the depth of the "Christian Century in Japan" (p. 35), although he draws extensively—and correctly—on one of the classic works on the period, namely Prof. Boxer's *The Christian Century in Japan*. Christianity indeed could not finally take root in Japan but the dimension of missionary activity and efforts cannot and should not be dismissed or downplayed in favour of the otherwise undeniable "trading relationship." (A whole book by Johannes Lau-

res, S.J., is one of the many dedicated to the rich history of the Church in Japan: *The Catholic Church in Japan*, Tokyo, 1954). Without attempting by this to justify frequent instances of missionary intolerance, I simply believe that the interaction in the religious field at the time was not of a secondary importance, independently of low levels of conversions.

Further on, when the author attempts a discussion of the *reasons* for the rejection of Christianity in Japan—in fact one of his more interesting chapters perhaps because the excessive "narrative" is here embellished and counter-balanced by some broader critical thoughts—he omits one of the main available sources: the overall literary work of one of Japan's most established writers, Shusaku Endo. In his numerous works, Endo tries to answer precisely these very questions and his well known *Silence*² is an internationally acclaimed milestone in the matter.

Also, I cannot entirely share the author's view, in relation to Buddhism (p. 44), that it was a successful transplant solely because it was used by Japanese rulers "to justify their hold on power." Buddhism is permeated by an absolutely tolerant attitude towards preexisting creeds that made it a "successful transplant" wherever it spread in the vast spaces of Asia.³ Further on, I feel that, more generally, the Buddhist background in Tokugawa Japan should have merited a somehow more thorough analysis, in juxtaposition to missionary efforts. The brief remark (p. 36) about "deeply divided Buddhism" invites questioning, in light of rather differing opinions by Boxer,⁴ Saunders⁵, Sir Charles Eliot,⁶ etc.

In 1977 there appeared in Milan a thorough study on European penetration and the crisis in traditional societies in India, China and Japan which, unfortunately, I could not find men-

tioned in the present study's bibliographical notes. In *La Nascità del mondo moderno in Asia Orientale*,⁷ Giorgio Borsa successfully combines a narrative of events with an analysis of traditional structures which results in a fascinating panorama where the various elements are given due and balanced significance. I hasten to admit, of course, that the potential of bibliographical research in such a vast field is unlimited and therefore my remark is not directed as a criticism but simply as an offer of another angle.

One further issue where I would formulate some reservations is Sakoku, or the isolationist policy of Japan. The writer does mention it but rather *passim*, mainly at the very end of his text (p. 346) and leaving, rightly or wrongly, an impression that this policy regarded almost exclusively the Portuguese (p. 343) which is true only regarding the Order of 1639 but not the overall previous isolationist process (cf. the full text of the Sakoku, 1636, in Boxer⁸). The evolution of isolationist thinking, although known to the scholar of the field, may elude the general reader who is not so familiar with such intricate policies. An independent short chapter—or subchapter—might have been organically more appropriate, starting perhaps with Hideyoshi's 1587 Decree, which is rightly mentioned by the author elsewhere.

Moreover, he qualifies the Shimabara revolt (1637-1638) as "Christian" despite G. Sansom's clarification that it "was not primarily a religious uprising."⁹ Shimabara had indeed many Christian connotations but the episode is so much deeper as to need further discussion.

In general, Sakoku is a much more complex matter, with Exclusion Orders predating 1639, in 1625, 1633, 1635 etc., worthy, I believe, of a more lengthy review, since it was so crucial

to overall European-Japanese relations, at exactly the period under examination in the present volume, indeed "a major turning point for Japan" in the words of Professor John Whitney Hall.¹⁰

The frequent references to Siam are indeed very useful for the understanding of relations and especially trade at the time. But I am not so sure about the "immense influence" of the head of the Japanese *nihonmachi* in Ayudhya in the 1620's (Note 19, p. 395), something that is not stressed in sources more directly involved with Siam.¹¹ In addition, one might have welcomed even a brief reference to Phaulcon, Adam's counterpart in Siam.

There are also a few remarks of a secondary importance but worth mentioning in the context of such a serious study.

First, I am not sure if we can dismiss outright as "untenable" Sir George Sansom's opinion that the 16th century Europeans came to the East "in a spirit of determination to succeed that was stronger than the will of the Asiatic peoples to resist" (p. 4). Prof. Massarella himself admits (Note 12, p. 372) that this view is restated by Prof. Boxer (although countered by Prof. Chaudhuri). In other words there is no consensus, something natural since we are treading here on such delicate ground. Moreover, it seems to me that if we bear in mind the full context and read this sentence of Sansom¹² in the context of what follows on the next page of the same chapter about the qualities of three of the smallest "expansionist" European states of the 16th century, the previous assertion sounds less controversial and "untenable."

Finally, there are some remarks about dates. Prof. Massarella establishes it as a fact (p. 25) that the first Portuguese to reach the Japanese shores arrived in 1543. To the best of my knowledge, there is still uncertainty about the

precise year (1542 or 1543) and I may quote in this regard Sansom, Boxer, Toussaint, Borsa and even Prof. Massarella in his Note No. 69, on p. 376. This is not of course of a cataclysmic importance but it is one of the most well known chronological uncertainties regarding 16th century Japan.

The same goes for the date given for the sack of Ayudhya by the Burmese as 1768 (p. 63) while it is a fact that this happened in 1767, this year constituting one of the most well known landmarks of Siamese history.

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Reservations apart, this very discussion testifies to the extremely interesting study of Prof. Massarella. The historic period he examines, with all the nations and policies involved, is fascinating reading, transferring us to "a world elsewhere"—or rather, using the Neapolitan Jesuit missionary Valignano's words, to "another world."¹³

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L'Empire Immobile, ou le Choc des Mondes. ALAIN PEYREFITTE. Paris: Fayard, 1989; 552 pp, illus., FF. 140.

This much-acclaimed blockbuster by a member of the Académie Française appeared, most opportunely, in July 1989, only a month after the events in Tiananmen Square. It is essentially the story of Lord Macartney's embassy to China in 1793; Peyrefitte's analysis of the perceived reasons for its failure is relevant in the present context. It is also interesting to compare this embassy with those of western states to Siam.

As Peyrefitte (no newcomer to Chinese studies) points out, there was some audacity in the enterprise. Britain, a country of some eight million, intent on a civilizing mission, declaring itself "the most powerful nation on earth" (notwithstanding the loss of its American colonies) and "master of the seas," sent to Peking a mission of five ships bearing some 700 persons, led by a Knight of the Bath, former ambassador to Russia, secretary for Ireland and governor of Madras, seconded by Sir George Stanton, doctor of medicine from Montpellier, doctor of law from Oxford, servant of the East India Company. The main objects of the embassy were to open China to commerce, obtain some territory near the areas of production of tea and silk and establish a permanent mission in the capital. Representing William Pitt the younger, the prime minister of George III, who closely followed the affairs of this embassy, they went to greet as equals the Chinese Manchu Emperor Qianlong, the Son of Heaven, a god on earth, already 82 and infatuated with his favourite for the last eighteen years, now his chief minister, Heshen, and ruling absolutely over 330 million subjects, one-third of humanity.

Although there had been several embassies before to China, from Portugal (five, the last in 1754), Holland (three, the last more than a century previously in 1686), and Russia (seven, the most recent in 1767), no other European country had made the effort to establish contact. This is hardly surprising; an embassy could approach the Son of Heaven only as an act of submission and envoys gave homage and bore tribute. In this context an embassy could be understood. As equals it was out of the question.

Like many missions, this was singularly ill-prepared linguistically. It started off with four Chinese priests recruited (interestingly by the cuckolded husband of Lady Hamilton, whose spouse was George III's minister in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) at the Collegium Sinicum in Naples. The medium of communication was Latin. Only one, a Manchu named Li (translated as Mr. Plumb by the young Thomas Stanton,

the twelve-year-old son of Macartney's second), stayed the course to the point where the Emperor was actually seen at Jehol (Chengde) in Mongolia, where the court spent the summer. No one attempted to learn Chinese except Thomas Stanton, who through this accomplishment, age and sex appeared to make an impression on the aging emperor. The residual Jesuits in Peking were too scared to interpret, afraid that their ignorance would be exposed, the French Revolution having cut off their access to astronomical almanachs.

It was also, needless to say, ill-prepared culturally. The British mission brought the latest scientific marvels from the Age of Reason as gifts. The Chinese saw these as tribute from outer barbarians, toys, not without interest (Qianlong himself went to visit them, secretly, in Peking) but nothing more than clever baubles. They included a planetarium, a globe, arms of all kinds, chronometers, Herschel telescopes, Wedgwood porcelain, stuffs, even a carriage to transport the sovereign (which an old eunuch dismissed, saying "Do you think the Great Emperor would permit a man to be seated above him and turn his back to him?"). There was no question of learning from these trifles.

Using a multitude of sources, including the still apparently unpublished account of Lord Macartney, Peyrefitte elaborates a tale of incomprehension, misunderstanding, and slights. Incomprehension and fear meant that the embassy was segregated from the people and the nobles, contact made impossible. Misunderstanding abounded. There was no way an embassy could be received except as a postulant from an inferior. Here a point little made by Peyrefitte arises; Qianlong was not only the temporal head of China, he was the spiritual head as well. Not in the sense that George III nominated his bishops, but he was as it were the Pope of Peking as well as its Emperor. There was nothing between him and heaven. Such a concept could scarcely be digested in the Age of Enlightenment. When "the ambassador of the Land of Red Heads *Ma-ga-er-ni* prostrated himself to earth before the Great Emperor"

(as one Portuguese Jesuit translated it for Chinese consumption), in a tent at Jehol at four in the morning on 14 September 1793, it was as a suppliant, in the company of tributary states from Burma and other parts of the outer empire.

But what was the cause of the failure? In the hierarchical Confucian society of China, Qing or more recent, everything had to have precedent, the rituals had to be followed. There was quite simply no precedent for receiving anyone as an equal, nor was there cause. And, above all, the act of obeisance was the *kow-tow*, the three genuflections and the nine prostrations of the forehead to the floor before the emperor. This the British resolutely refused; how could they perform such an act of fealty, which they regarded as degrading and inhuman, before a foreign monarch which they would not perform before their own? Throughout the embassy, before their presentation at court, this was the central point of the discussions; all would be possible if this were done, nothing otherwise. The British agreed to bend the knee as with their own monarch, but that of course was not enough.

Peyrefitte makes this the prime reason for the failure of the mission. He may be right. But it was the excuse rather than anything else. Even had the *kow-tow* been performed, there is no assurance that the embassy would have great success; as Qianlong himself said, we have nothing to learn from you. The empire was sufficient unto itself. Except, of course in opium, which the East India Company willingly supplied, at what was to become vast profit for itself.

Here too arises the interesting parallel with modern times. To admit that the *kow-tow* had not been performed was altogether too humiliating, involved too much loss of face. So the story was passed about that it had indeed been performed. Qianlong said so himself in his haughty reply to George III's letter. His son Jiaqing (1760-1820), who was present at Jehol, later maintained that Macartney and his men had kowtowed. There is a slight ambiguity of wording in the Chinese and English texts, which

Peyrefitte investigates closely, but on balance it seems the author's assertion is right, it was not. Jiaqing maintained its performance in justification for demanding it of a future embassy (of which Thomas Stanton was second) but he was maintaining an official lie. The parallels with Tiananmen Square are interesting.

Peyrefitte draws on a vast array of texts to present his narrative. Apart from the various English sources, including both Stantons and even Macartney's valet, Anderson, as well as other contemporary western accounts, he also has had access to the imperial archives in Peking. These, marked in vermilion ink by the emperor himself, make fascinating reading, and Peyrefitte cleverly turns the memorials coming from the mandarins charged with reporting the departure of the embassy through the land by way of the Grand Canal into a kind of dialogue between ruler and servant.

GUO SHIXUN (military governor of Canton): The English, when they reach Macao, have to rent their dwellings from the Portuguese. They are as guests in relation to a host. That is why the envoy sought to be accorded a place where he could deposit their merchandise and which would be the equivalent of what Macao is for the Portuguese.

EMPEROR: Thai is absolutely impossible.

GUO SHIXUN: It is precisely in this that the cupidity and ruse of the English can be measured.

EMPEROR: Exactly. ...

GUO SHIXUN: If the Barbarians arriving in Guangdong wish to establish a domicile on land, they would wish to make use of the services of the traitors in the interior, who are capable of informing them.

EMPEROR: This matter must be particularly pursued. ...

At the same time Peyrefitte draws attention to the imperial lines of communication, which, though they covered vast distances, brought a ceaseless and rapid flow of information to the court and provided the emperor with details of all that was passing (and which his officials cared to relate) in his lands. The embassy was spied upon day and night throughout its stay, and everything was reported back. *Plus ça change.*

The embassy counted among its huge retinue two painters, William Alexander and Thomas Hickey, some of the delightful watercolours of the former being reprinted in this edition, as are five contemporary maps, all captioned in French, for the embassy was followed elsewhere. Stanton père had a French edition in 1798, which provided these maps; he was again translated, as was Barrow (Macartney's secretary) into French in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Huttner, young Thomas' tutor, published his account of the embassy in German in 1797 and this was also translated twice into French, in 1800 and 1804. Anderson was translated only two years after the appearance of his narrative in English in 1795.

Interest there certainly was. Europe in the eighteenth century was fascinated by China: Chinese porcelain, furniture, and silks were copied, Chinese clothes worn, Chinese tea drunk. *Chinoiserie* was the fashion of the time. But fascination did not imply understanding, and there was virtually no direct contact between the two civilizations, except through that tiny outlet in Macao and the miserable "factories" of the companies in Canton. The point is made several times that if anything the embassy failed because of mutual incomprehension; it was truly two juxtaposed worlds with virtually nothing in common. The valet Anderson noted, in the words of his ghost-writer, "We entered Peking like beggars, stayed as prisoners, and left like thieves." (Chapter 48, incorrectly attributed to Chapter 50 on the cover.) The aged Qianlong was suspicious of all novelty, and decided to get rid of the red-haired barbarians (whose diet of red meat made them expensive to maintain) as soon as possible, but to

do so discreetly and with as little contact with the population for fear of what might ensue. When the embassy was within reach of Canton, on its departure after taking the inland route to the south, the emperor, writing to the envoy of his perceived vassal, felt safe enough to reveal something of his real thoughts:

"As you did not know the customs of the Empire, you presented indecent demands. You expressed your intention of returning to bear tribute. Noting your respectful deference, We condescend to grant this favour. The date can be decided at your convenience. You will inform your sovereign that the Great Emperor is willing not to hold him to account for the errors he committed in relation to the celestial institutions, about which he was ignorant."

The sixth and final part of the book, chapters 81-88, do not, as Peyrefitte admits, add anything new, but bring the story of the result of this embassy to the end of the Qing dynasty, through the disintegration of the empire in the nineteenth century at the hands of the despised red-haired barbarians, to whose representative Qianlong had written on 22 September 1793, replying to George III's letter seeking trade and the establishment of a representative in Peking: "We, by the grace of Heaven, Emperor, order the King of England to take note of Our Will." He went on to say that the *kowtow* had been performed by his representative (the lie was thus in an official edict), and spoke of the "inflexible rules of the Celestial Empire" which could on no account be bent to suit the wishes of one king.

"Master of the World and of the four seas, We devote Ourselves only to the proper conduct of affairs of state. We accord no value to rare or costly objects. You offered to the Throne divers trifles. In consideration of your loyalty which these pres-

ents come from so far demonstrate, We have especially ordered the Tribunal of Tribute from Vassals to receive them. We have never attached any value to ingenious articles, and have not the least need of your manufactures".

The request for stationing a representative, apart from being of no advantage to his country, was of course "not in harmony with the rules of the Celestial Empire". Pride was indeed to come before a fall.

If one has one adverse criticism of this book, apart from an occasionally jerky style which these days even comes from the *plumes*, or more likely computers, of academicians, perhaps seeking to be too much *à la page*, it is the completely irrelevant references to what was going on in Paris as Macartney and his men did this or that. So what if Robespierre on 7 May instituted the cult of the Supreme Being when the envoy's vessels were off Madagascar on the return journey; there is simply no liaison between the two, other than a fortuity of dates. Apart from chauvinism, or pandering to one's public, it resembles the ridiculous commemorations of dates that some popular newspapers (and in an earlier age almanachs) indulge in.

But what lessons can be drawn of all this in the local context? In Siam there had been a reception of a foreign mission more than a century previously, when Chaumont in 1685 presented Louis XIV's letter (not without some difficulty) to King Narai in Ayutthaya. Though the discussions involving protocol before this event were protracted, and the agreement reached in fact broken, Narai, being in theory a tributary of China himself, had no pretensions about his superiority. Furthermore he was curious about the West, interested in what it offered, and maintained a kingdom open to all who wished to establish themselves in it, with well-defined quarters marked out in the capital for the different minorities and strangers. Though Chaumont's and subsequent embassies, La Loubère's a little

later, Crawford's, Burney's and Roberts' nearly a century and a half on, were largely unsuccessful, and misunderstandings there were, notably with Crawford, aplenty, there was not a complete gulf between the two sides, and most even produced small results (even Crawford's obtained indirect Siamese recognition of the British occupancy of Penang). The gifts offered were by no means dismissed. The early precedents, at a time when Europeans had perhaps a less marked feeling of their own superiority, allowed for much

smoother relations when the pressure was to come in the middle of the nineteenth century.

But in China, a country of fixed precedents, as the emperor himself declared, there were none for embassies considering themselves as emanating from rulers of equal rank. Mortals could only address the Son of Heaven as they would a god, and after having performed the *kowtow*. Macartney, profiting by the wind on leaving Portsmouth, had not bothered to stop at

Weymouth to salute his aimiable and already occasionally dotty monarch, in spite of being expected; he could not conceive the aging, deaf, bleary-eyed and hidebound bisexual emperor as a son of heaven. A culture clash indeed.

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