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From the first Christian Missionaries to the Comic Opera *The Mikado*: Japan's Changing Image in the Eyes of Europe

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Constructing an image for a high-profile person, an interest group, a nationality or even a locality (for the purpose of tourism) is a large industry today. Images were also constructed for various purposes in historical times. This article explores how the image of Japan in Europe was changing according to the interests of those who wrote about the country.

The Christian Century

Japan's first recorded encounter with Europe took place in 1543 when a Chinese vessel carrying Portuguese traders arrived on Tangegashima, an island south of Kyushu, resulting in the introduction of firearms to Japan. Six years later saw the arrival of the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier (1506-1552) in near-by Kagoshima marking the beginning of the so-called Christian Century in Japan.[1]

"Judging by the people we have so far met, I would say that the Japanese are the best race yet discovered and I do not think you will find their match among the pagan nations" wrote Xavier[2] setting the tone for the many reports penned by the missionaries to inform the West about Japan. There were many aspects of Japanese life to be praised – such as orderliness, cleanliness and polite conduct – but for the missionaries the most significant was the importance the Japanese paid to religion, not just to obtain benefits in this life, but even more so to obtain salvation in the next. In his account of 16th century Japan, the Jesuit João Rodrigues (c. 1562-1633) speaks at length about the wonderful temples in Japan, the great respect paid to their priests and "the incredible severe

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1 Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549-1650*, University of California Press, 1951.

2 Michael Cooper, comp. and ann., *They came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543-1640*, University of California Press, 1965, p. 60.

penances …., fasting and abstinence …the wonderful eremitical lives led by numerous lay people". For Rodrigues this signified that the Japanese had been chosen by God above all other nations to be converted to the Christian faith.[3]

The success of the Japanese Jesuit mission seemingly confirmed this assumption. By 1583, only thirty-four years after Xavier's arrival, the inspector of the Jesuit missions in Asia, Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), could report that there were more than 150.000 Christians in Japan with numbers rising, worshipping in some 200 churches.[4] He was convinced that if the required funds could be obtained, within thirty years all or most of Japan would be converted to the Christian faith.[5]

The expenses of the Jesuit mission were wide-ranging including the upkeep of churches, boarding schools, hospitals, priests, brothers, distribution of alms to the poor and last not least expensive presents whenever they saw the need to call on men of importance to obtain concessions for their mission. In addition the establishment of new houses and colleges had to be funded. Even though Canon Law forbade the Jesuits to engage in trade, on account of the mission's dire financial needs, they had already in 1578 obtained a special exemption from Rome to act as middlemen in the Chinese-Japanese silk trade.[6]

The desperate financial situation hindering the mission from fully exploiting the Japanese potential for Christian conversion was attributed by the missionaries in Japan to the fact that the great distance from Europe resulted in a lack of knowledge about the true state of this country. In 1583 Valignano wrote that "until now there has not been in Europe a full and complete knowledge of the Japanese nation nor of the great things divine providence has wrought and daily deigns to perform in marvelous fashion through the religious of the Society [of Jesus] in this new Church."[7]

Valignano had attempted the previous year to remedy this lack of knowledge in a very practical way, namely by sending a delegation of four Japanese Christian boys of samurai ancestry via Portugal and Spain to Rome, so everybody could see that these people from the Vatican's furthest "New Church" were different from other Orientals and deserved special financial support. The so-called embassy which had the additional goal of demonstrating to the Japanese through the

3 Michael Cooper, ed., *João Rodrigues's Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*, London, 2001, pp. 126-127.

4 Michael Cooper, *The Japanese Mission to Europe, 1582-1590*, Folkestone, 2005, p. 6.

5 Derek Massarella, ed. & ann., J.F. Moran, trans., *Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth-Century Europe: A Dialogue Concerning the Mission of the Japanese Ambassadors to the Roman Curia (1590)*, London, 2012, p. 6.

6 Michael Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China*, Weatherhill, 1974, pp. 239-247. Massarella, *Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, p. 6.

7 Cooper, *Japanese Mission to Europe*, p.7.

Father Diogo de Mesquita and the four Japanese boys sent to Rome in European court dress. Louis Frois, *La Premiere Ambassade du Japon en Europe 1582-1592*, J.A. Abranches Pinto, Yoshitomo Okamoto, Henri Bernard S.J., ann. & eds., Tokyo, 1942, illustration following p. xxi. (Photo from the author's collection.)

production of a detailed record of the journey the richness of European civilization, has been discussed in Japanese and Western works and its progress need not concern us here.[8] Suffice it to say that the Japanese youths were much praised for their pious and decorous behavior and greatly honored and feted by nobles and the population at large.

However, the goal of making the religious fervor of the Japanese better known in Europe and by this means attracting finance for the mission overseas was apparently not achieved. For nearly forty years later, in 1620, Rodrigues in his account of Japan still bemoaned the fact that the great achievements of the mission were insufficiently known and that it was therefore lacking the appropriate financial backing.[9]

Already before setting out for Japan, Francis Xavier had instructed the Jesuit missions to be selective about the information they sent to Europe: "Let the letters be about the things of edification, and take care not to write matters which are not of edification. Remember that many people will read these letters, so let them be written in such wise that no one may be disedified."[10]

In spite of complaints that the success of the Japanese mission was not sufficiently known in

8 In addition to Cooper, *Japanese Mission to Europe see Massarella, Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth-Century Europe* and Louis Frois, *La Premiere Ambassade du Japon en Europe 1582-1592*, J.A. Abranches Pinto, Yoshitomo Okamoto, Henri Bernard S.J., ann. & eds., Tokyo, 1942.

9 Cooper, *Japanese Mission to Europe*, p. 213, footnote 13. To document this fact, Cooper refers to p. 6 of his work *João Rodrigues's Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan*. However, the ensuing paragraph of this document refers to events up to the year 1634. Since Rodrigues died in 1633, the final part of this document must have been added after his death.

Europe to guarantee the required funding, the edifying reports sent to Europe did produce results. One man in Portugal was so moved by what he heard about Japan that he decided to join the Jesuit order and donate his money to the foundation of an additional college in Japan.[11]

It is true that the Jesuits were impressed by many characteristics of the Japanese people – such as the intensity of their religious sentiments which they hoped to direct away from their gods towards Christianity – but the image painted of the success of the Japanese mission for publication in Europe was a far cry from reality. When Valignano arrived in Japan for his inspection of the mission, he complained to Rome "that the difference between the information that he had received about the mission before his arrival in Japan and the reality which he had found during his six-month stay in the country was as great as between black and white."[12]

Evidence that there were considerable problems running the mission in Japan is also contained in an annual report of the Nagasaki residence addressed to the Jesuit general Claudio Aquaviva written by Rodrigues in his capacity as recently appointed consultor to the rector of the residence. The report is dated 28 February 1598, just one year after the crucifixion of the twenty-six martyrs in Nagasaki, an event that was partially blamed on the rivalry between the Jesuits and recently arrived Franciscans, an indication that there were problems with the guidance of the missions.

In his report Rodrigues does not mince words. The rector of the Nagasaki residence "cannot fulfill the obligation of his office very well and is somewhat remiss in seeing that the rules are obeyed, for he is ill and tired on account of his advanced age and many labors." Neither is the rector up to dealing with the trade generated by the Portuguese ship from Macau, an important source of finance for the Jesuits. Rodrigues asks that "men of the right age and talent" are sent, for also the other Superiors are too old, "inept for the government of the Society" and "regard these offices as theirs for life."[13]

Not just the European administrators are a problem, but also the Japanese brothers. They should be more thoroughly examined before being permitted to enter the Society "For unlike Europeans they do not possess natural talents and the ability to acquire virtue. They are by nature a weak and unstable people, and they are not deeply rooted in the things of our holy Faith" Rodrigues argues.

Rodrigues came to Japan in 1577 as a sixteen-year-old and was educated in the Society's

10 Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter*, p. 164, citing Pasio Nagasaki, 14.iii.1610 in *Japonica Sinica series*, Jesuit Archives, Rome, 14, f. 334v.

11 Ibid., p. 164.

12 Ibid., p. 164, citing Valignano, *Sumario de las Cosas de Japȯn*, J.L. Alvarez Taladriz, ed., *MN Monogaphs*, no. 9, Tokyo 1954, pp. 65-66.

13 Ibid., p. 168.

seminaries with Japanese boys of his age. He spoke native Japanese and more than any other European member of the mission was familiar with the mind-set of the local novices. He pointed out that the Jesuit fathers, impressed by the modesty and quiet behavior of the novices, and aware that the success of the mission was gauged by the numbers of Japanese entering the order, encouraged them to apply to join the Society at an early stage. Yet for Rodrigues it was obvious that his fellow Europeans were deceived by the demure behavior of the novices and failed to see their true nature; he considered them to have neither the talent to assist in the administration nor to delve deeply into religious matters, even judging them incapable of acquiring virtue. They refused to be restricted by the rules of the order, like the prohibition to smoke tobacco, and could not be restrained from leaving the order without proper dispensation nor be punished as religious apostates as they were in Europe.[14]

Rodrigues was not alone in his criticism of the converts. The concept of the commitment on joining a religious order vastly differed between Japan – where it was based on Buddhist monastic life with much larger personal freedom – and Christian Europe and caused one Italian Jesuit to state that the Japanese were not suited to enter the Society of Jesus and that it would take some fifty years before any Japanese would be ready to receive ordination.[15]

The image of the Japanese converts emerging from internal correspondence diverges considerably from that transmitted to the European public in the published letters and reports from Japan. However, when in 1614 the persecution of the Christians intensified, the question of whether the Japanese were capable to live up to the demands made on the members of the Society of Jesus became irrelevant. Many Japanese converts showed an incredible capacity to stay true to their faith under the most terrible torture and painful death.

Francis Xavier's directions to write only edifying reports continued even with the banishment of the Christians and the horrendous suffering of the many who died in the persecution. The persecution was not considered a failure of the mission in Japan as protestant writers, like Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), later claimed.[16] To the contrary, the blood shed by so many martyrs was interpreted as an indication of God's blessing. The Jesuit R.P. de Charlevoie in his *Histoire Du Japon* wrote in detail about those chosen by God to end their life as martyrs and saw the country ennobled by the soil drenched with the blood of so many who sacrificed their life for their faith.[17]

The 20th century Jesuit scholar J. F. Schütte estimated that as late as 1626 there were between 636.000 and 872,000 Christians in Japan.[18] The figure of over 400,000 Christians in 1613 before the

14 Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter*, pp. 171-173, 178.

15 Ibid., p. 177.

16 Engelbert Kaempfer, *Kaempfer's Japan*, ed., ann. & trans. B.M. Bodart-Bailey, Hawai'i University Press, 1999, pp. 180-182.

persecution began mentioned in the work of Reyer Gysbertsz (dates unknown) an employee of the VOC at Hirado at the time of the persecution, might be more realistic.[19] Regardless which figure is given credence and giving due consideration to the fact that there were many documented accounts of steadfastness under the most horrendous torture and the execution of large groups of Christians, it is obvious that by far the greater part of converts decided to publicly renounce their faith rather than sacrifice their life.

Gysbertsz wrote that the numbers of those who recanted were not known. However, when he previously visited Nagasaki in 1626, it was home to over 40.000 Christians. In 1629 there were none left: the governor of the city permitted none to leave, but with threats and examples of torture had managed to have all of them recant with only one case of bloodshed.[20] It is likely that many decided to follow their faith secretly. As churches were demolished in Nagasaki, Shinto shrines were erected by the authorities in their place. Traditionally it has been claimed that in some of these shrines the secret object of worship containing the spirit of the god of the shrine, the *goshintai* 御神体 or *mitamashiro* 御霊代, was in fact a sacred Christian object.[21] Also the secret Christians that revealed their faith when Christianity was again permitted in Japan some 250 years later, document

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17 R.P. de Charlevoie, *Histoire de l'Etablissment des Progrès et de la Décadence dans l'Empire du Japon: où l'on voit les différentes révolutions qui ont agité cette monarchie pendant plus d'un siècle*, Rouen : G. Behourt, 1715, p. 460.

18 Josephus Franciscus Schütte, *Introductio ad historiam Societatis Jesu in Japonia, 1549-1650*, Rome 1968, p. 426.

19 Under the title of *History of the Martyrs who have been killed, or endured fearful and insufferable torments, for the sake of the Roman Catholic Religion in Jappan* this work is usually appended to François Caron, Joost Schouten, *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam*, Here C.R. Boxer ed., reprinted from the English edition of 1663, Argonaut Press, London, 1935, p. 88. Gysbertsz reporting events of 1629 writes "sixteen years ago." As a Protestant working for the Dutch in Japan who were urging the Japanese to expel the Spanish and Portuguese, it is unlikely that the number of Christians stated was exaggerated. The figure of 400.000 Christians also appears in the report by Leonard Camps, head of the VOC at Hirado 1622-1623 titled "A short Relation of the Profits and Advantages which the Dutch-East-India Company in Iapan might acquire, in case they could compass the China Trade and Commerce" contained in *A True Description*, pp. 59-65, here p. 61.

20 Gysbertsz in Caron, *A True Description*, p. 88.

21 This applies especially to the Morisaki Shrine 森崎神社 in Nagasaki where I was informed by the head priest of the shrine of this fact when doing research for the translation of Kaempfer's work in the 1990's. See also Saito Yoshihisa 斎藤吉久、キリシタンを祈る「長崎くんち」の諏訪神社、http://www004.upp.so-net.ne.jp/saitohsy/nagasaki_suwa_jinja.html, consulted 12.12.2019.

that not all who officially recanted gave up their faith.

While the greater part of Japanese Christians publicly renounced their faith, there were still large numbers about whose martyrdom "edifying" reports could be written. Their imaginary conversations became the subject of the rich literature of Latin plays that was used for educational purposes in the schools of the Society of Jesus, with the first play about the Japanese martyrs being performed as early as 1607. As these plays were performed in Jesuit schools until the dissolution of the Order in 1773, it is estimated that they were studied and viewed by thousands of school children as well as the residents of the towns in which the schools were located and consequently had a significant impact on the European image of Japan.[22]

The Protestant Traders of the Dutch East India Company

For nearly a century after the arrival of the Europeans in Japan, the reports of the Jesuit order shaped the image of that country. But with the arrival of the English and the Dutch – or those employed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) who claimed to be Dutch – a new source of information appeared. As merchants competing with the Iberians for trading privileges in Japan and as Protestants critical of Catholic missionary activities, their viewpoint differed greatly. These new authors had no reason to "edify" the reader. To the contrary: then as now violence and sex increased the popularity of books. While previously the literature on Japan was distributed with the support of the church, now publications had to be financially viable. Just as today science fiction narratives of aliens in space are popular, in 17th century Europe the description of alien cultures in far off countries entertained the population. Moreover, for employees of large trading companies situated in Europe, it was only of advantage to document the violence and hardships under which they served their employer in distant Japan.

The violence of the Christian persecution provided plenty authentic material. One of the earliest descriptions was that of Reyer Gysbertsz, an employee of the VOC in Hirado, published in 1637 in Amsterdam with the title *The Tyranny and Cruelties of the Japanese*.[23] Being a relative brief work, it came to be attached to the most popular publication on Japan in the 17th century, namely *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan & Siam by François Caron & Joost*

22 Adrian Hsia, Ruprecht Wimmer, „Preface" in Adrian Hsia, Ruprecht Wimmer, eds., *Mission und Theater*, Regensburg 2005, p. 13. Ruprecht Wimmer, „Japan und China auf den Bühnen der Gesellschaft Jesu", Ibid., p. 18. I thank Professor Akihiko Watanabe for pointing out this valuable work to me.

23 Reyer Gysbertsz, *De Tyrannije ende Wreedtheden der Jappanen*, Amsterdam 1637. Boxer, "Introduction" in *A True Description*, p. 73. For Gysbertsz's residence in Japan see Engelbert Kaempfer, *Histoire naturelle, civile et ecclésiastique de l'Empire du Japon*, The Hague, 1729, pp. xxxii.

Schouten.

François Caron (1600-1673), a protestant Huguenot, arrived at the VOC's factory in Hirado in 1619 serving as a cook's mate on board a Dutch vessel. He found employment with the VOC and when he left Japan just over twenty years later he had risen to the position of head of the VOC's trading post in Japan. Though before his departure from Japan he had to agree to the demolition of the Company's storehouses at Hirado and accept the company's forced removal to the small fan-shaped island of Deshima in the harbor of Nagasaki, he had succeeded in establishing the VOC as the sole Western enterprise permitted to trade with Japan, skillfully weathering some of the most problematic government orders and negotiations with the Japanese authorities. His success was attributed to his outstanding Japanese language skills and sympathetic understanding of Japanese culture to the point where he was accused by his own countrymen of forgetting their interests and putting those of the Japanese first. Finally in 1647 he was appointed as Director-General at the company's Asian headquarters in Batavia, second in command to the Governor General, a validation of his talent and services rendered.[24]

Caron's relatively brief but very successful account of Japan began as a request in 1636 from the then Director-General in Batavia, Philips Lucasz (unknown -1641) to answer a list of thirty-one questions about the country. Caron was busy with what no doubt he considered much more important matters and made his answers as brief as possible without imagining that they would ever be published.[25]

Nevertheless, the work was extremely popular from the moment it appeared, at first even as unauthorized version by the author. In Holland ten editions in less than two decades were published and the work was translated into English, German, French and Latin, with all translations appearing in several editions within a decade.

In 1661 Caron was back in Holland and with all editions of his work sold out, his publisher asked him to correct and augment the text for a new authorized edition. Caron made minor corrections but refused to add to the text on the grounds that if he put down all he knew about Japan, it would fill a large volume and most of it would not be believed by the public. He did, however, make one change to the works appended to all editions of the book, namely omitting a letter from the mayor (*otona* 乙名) of Deshima, Ebiya Shiroyemon, instructing the Dutch to hide their religion and to abjure Christianity at least outwardly. For Caron, an ardent protestant with two sons studying theology at Leiden University, the image of the Dutch denying their faith for the sake of financial profit was not one he wanted transmitted to the world.[26]

Charles Boxer attributes the success of Caron's work to the fact that there was nothing much

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24 Boxer, "Introduction" in A *True Description*, pp. xvi, xcv, cxxiv.

25 Ibid., pp. cxxviii-cxxix.

else to read about Japan and "the gruesome stories and blood-curling tales which it contains and which then, no less than nowadays, made a strong appeal to the popular taste in literature."[27]

The Jesuits had attempted to portray the Japanese as no different from the Europeans, as people who in their devotion to Christianity might even serve as models in the West. The four Japanese boys sent to Rome, dressed in fashionable European clothing, skillfully playing the organ in churches they visited and exemplary in their Christian devotion were concrete proof of that message. To the contrary, the new descriptions of the Protestant traders were intent on highlighting the differences, the more shocking the better. While the persecution of the Christians supplied plenty of macabre material, neither Caron nor others left it at that. His reply to the question "What Crimes they punish most severely" is answered in detail, with gruesome examples, stretching over some 185 lines in the English translation titled *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan & Siam* (consulted in this essay), while the topics "What Churches they have" and "What Priests they entertain" are answered with three lines each. In contrast to the Jesuits who praised the religious devotion of the Japanese, Caron maintains that "This nation is neither very superstitious nor very devout; they seldom or never pray; and such are counted for religious, who go to Church once in a moneth."[28]

Caron had six children by his Japanese mistress and praised the sincerity and loyalty of Japanese women. Yet the stories presented as example of their conduct emphasize not gentleness and composure, but the cruelty of Japanese culture with tales of women committing suicide when they feel a sense of shame, or husbands inflicting death in the most macabre fashion when betrayed.[29]

Caron's report about Japan was not only widely disseminated on account of the many editions and translations of his work, but also because it was included in publications by authors who had never visited Japan. Works such as Bernhard Varenius's publication of 1649 and that of Arnoldus Montanus of 1670 simply collated published material on Japan. Varenius made no attempt to hide the fact that the publication was for commercial purposes. His publisher had refused to print his work on mathematics arguing that the readership would be too small to recoup the cost of printing, let alone make a profit. Varenius therefore decided "to do something easier". Having noticed that the descriptions of Japan were mainly in Portuguese and the "Belgian language", he decided to collate the information and translate it into Latin. The work was written in haste while Varenius was

26 Boxer, "Bibliography"and Appendix II, "The Caron Family", in *A True Description*, pp. 174 and 147 respectively.

27 Boxer, "Introduction" in *A True Description*, p. xxxix.

28 Caron, *A True Description*, pp. 37-42.

29 Ibid., pp. 37-39, p. 48.

studying medicine: not even the names of authors cited are consistently spelt in the same fashion and the emphasis is quite obviously on matters that would attract the greatest readership, namely the strange habits and conduct of the Japanese.[30]

Arnoldus Montanus's report similarly relied on what he could glean from published sources and then added illustrations which depicted pure fantasy, but no doubt helped with the sales. There were also shorter reports from travelers to Japan, such as that of the Swede Olof Ericksson Willman, who spent the year 1651-52 on Deshima as employee of the VOC and published a brief work on Japan in Wisingsborg in 1667.[31]

Further, the travel journal of Jürgen Andersen (ca. 1620-1679) was edited and published by Adam Olearius (1603-71) in 1669. Olearius had previously traveled to Persia and published a detailed description of his own journey in 1656.[32] Andersen met Caron in Japan, but the dates and location in his description of Japan do not add up. He claimed to have arrived in Hirado around 1646 when the VOC was already confined to the small island of Deshima in the harbor of Nagasaki. Since Andersen states that the Dutch were not resident in the city, but on a small island with a bridge of 36 paces connecting it to the city of Hirado, he, or perhaps his editor, seems to have failed to realize that the Dutch factory had moved to a different location. Moreover, he relates how Caron had to agree to demolish the solid buildings erected at Hirado at the command of the Japanese government twelve years before his own arrival – which would have been 1634 – while the incident happened in 1640.[33] Perhaps Olearius was given incoherent notes that he attempted to turn into something publishable. Whatever the reason, it suggests that also the "strange story" that apparently happened at Hirado on 15. September of Andersen's stay, might not be altogether correct and simply was added to enliven the work.

It was the sad tale of a woman who had been raped in the absence of her husband. On the latter's return she refused to share his bed and asked that she may be permitted to serve a meal to his and her friends first. The meal, to which also the rapist and his friends were invited, was served

30 Bernhard Varenius, *Descriptio Regni Japoniae/Beschreibung des Japanischen Reiches*, Ernst-Christian Volkmann, trans., Iudicum Munich, 2000, pp. 39-40. Martin Schwind, „ Die wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Stellung der Descriptio Regni Japoniae", Ibid., pp. 23, 25-26.

31 The work has been translated by Catharina Blomberg as *The Journal of Olof Eriksson Willman: From His Voyage to the Dutch East Indies and Japan, 1648-1654*, Brill, 2013.

32 Adam Olearius, *Vermehrte Newe Beschreibung der Muscowitischen und Persischen Reyese, Schleswig, 1656. Jürgen Andersen und Volquard Iversen, Orientalische Reise-Beschreibungen*, Adam Olearius, ed., Schleswig, 1660, facsimile Tübingen 1980.

33 Andersen, p. 109. Fort the correct date of the demolition of the buildings see Boxer, "Introduction" in *A True Description*, p. lxii.

upstairs on top of the flat house (*oben auff dem platen Hause*). Towards the end of the meal she spoke about the rape pretending it had happened to someone else in the city of Sakai and when all concluded that the rapist and not the woman was guilty, announced that she herself had been the victim. She identified the rapist and asked her husband to take her life to wash away her shame. When the husband refused to kill her and assured her of his love, she jumped off the building and broke her neck, while the rapist went downstairs and cut his stomach at her side. According to Andersen, the woman was much praised as the most chaste of all women who would no doubt be blessed in her after-life.[34] What is suspicious about this story is not only that it is very much in the vein of other stories of Japan about sex, violence and death, but also the fact that Japanese houses did not have flat roofs where guests were entertained. The editor Olearius, however, had traveled in the Near East where houses were constructed in this fashion, and he might well have amplified the original tale or even added it altogether to pander to the taste of a wide readership.

While nothing new was being reported about Japan in the second half of the 17th century, attitudes in Europe towards foreign cultures and religions started to change. When the monopoly of the Christian church as sole means of salvation began to be challenged, the interest and appreciation of the cultures of non-Christian countries increased. In what is often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment, Japan became to be seen not merely as a heathen country that had great potential for becoming "civilized" by conversion to Christianity, but as one with a culture with aspects from which Europe could learn.

The Age of Reason or Enlightenment and the Image of Japan.

A representative figure of the Enlightenment was the German polymath and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). In the field of mathematics he fought intellectual duels with Isaac Newton (1643-1727). When it came to philosophy and religion he advocated a "Commerce of Light" with China.[35] He corresponded with the missionaries in China and engrossed himself in the material on Chinese thought they supplied him with. He praised the missionaries for their work in China not for converting the Chinese to Christianity but as "agents of exchange" and went as far as to admonish them "[I hope] you will remember the great business that has been given to you, promoting commerce between two such widely separate spheres. A commerce, I say of doctrine and mutual light."[36]

34 Andersen, pp. 10-11.

35 Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China, A Commerce of Light*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 118.

36 *Leibniz and China*, p. 125 (G.W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed.,vol. I, pp. 5, 484).

He wrote several tracts on China for powerful aristocrats in Europe to publicize his conviction that the Chinese worship of the "Spirit of Heaven" was comparable to that of the Christians of God. In his last work *The Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* written in 1716, the year of his death, he noted: … the Chinese no less than the Japanese (instructed doubtlessly by the Chinese) recognize no other God than a first principle … For me I find all this quite excellent and quite in accord with natural theology. … It is pure Christianity insofar as it renews the natural law inscribed in our hearts – except for what revelation and grace add to it to improve our nature."[37]

In late August of 1708, at a reception at the court of the Duke of Lippe for the bride of King Johann V of Portugal, Maria Anna (1683-1754), the daughter of Emperor Leopold I, Leibniz met someone who shared his view that the Christian god was also worshipped in other religions. The man he described in a letter to his friend Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717) as a learned physician who had been in the Far East and Persia and brought back good descriptions was Engelbert Kaempfer.[38] Kaempfer had served as physician at the Dutch East India Company's trading post at Nagasaki from 1690-92, and now was attempting to find time to publish the large amount of material he had collected during a decade of travel in the Near and Far East while he was at the same time employed by the Duke of Lippe as physician.

When Kaempfer met Leibniz in 1708, he was preparing his voluminous *Amoentiates Exoticae*, lit. "exotic tidbits" for publication which appeared in print in 1712. The volume of over 900 pages contained a collection of treatises about interesting aspects of the countries he had visited in the hope that publishers would ask him for more extensive manuscripts on the topics covered. With regard to Japan, one section of the volume dealt with the Japanese flora, and five essays on various subjects concerning Japan were included in the remaining four sections of the work.

Leibniz's statement that the Japanese, like the Chinese, worshipped one supreme god might well have been the result of his discussion with Kaempfer. Even more striking is that Kaempfer's statement in his *Amoenitates* that the Japanese were not atheists, but only worshiped the divine majesty in a different fashion, and in their worship often exceeded the Christians in their devotion, is close to Leibniz's interpretation of Chinese religiosity.[39]

Other intellectuals also shared the opinion that the god worshipped by the Christians was simarly worshipped in certain other religions. In the year Leibniz and Kaempfer met at Detmold,

37 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook, Henry Rosemont, Jr., trans., ann., Open Court Publishing Company, 1994, pp. 33, 104-105.

38 Letter to Nicolaas Witsen, 12 October, 1708, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover, Lbr 1007, fol. 52v.

39 See B.M. Bodart-Bailey, "Engelbert Kaempfer, the Witch Hunt and Japan", *Otsuma Journal of Comparative Culture*, vol. 16, March 2015, p. 48.

the French Oratorian priest Nicolas de Malebranch (1638-1715) published his *Dialogue between a Christian Philosopher and a Chinese Philosopher on the Existence and Nature of God* where, like Leibniz, he interpreted the Confucian *li* (principle or being) as a divine being.

However, a few scholars agreeing that the god worshipped in certain other religions was the same as that of Christianity, did not have much of an impact on the general image of these foreign cultures. To the contrary, in 1723 Leibniz's student and friend Christian Wolff (1679–1754) was declared an enemy of Christianity and by order of the King of Prussia was given forty-eight hours to leave the University of Halle and Prussian territory because in his lectures he compared Confucian precepts with the Christian Ten Commandments.[40]

Engelbert Kaempfer edited and published his *Amoenitates Exoticae* himself and nobody could alter the text, but this was not the case with his much more detailed manuscript which he had called *Heutiges Japan* (To-day's Japan) for which he was unable to find a publisher before his death. The German manuscript was finally acquired by Hans Sloane (1660-1753) and under his direction translated into English by a young Swiss, J.G. Scheuchzer (1702-1729), and published in 1727. It became an immediate bestseller with a total of ten editions of translations and reprints appearing in the following ten years. It may well be said that Kaempfer's *The History of Japan*, as the work was called, largely shaped the image of Japan from the time of its publication to the beginning of the 20th century.

What readers did not realize was that this English translation, on which all other translations were based at the time, did not accurately reflect Kaempfer's manuscript. The image of Japan and the Japanese was given a negative slant.

Kaempfer's description of Japan had been too objective to be acceptable in England. Though the son of a vicar, Kaempfer had become disillusioned with his own culture and church from an early age. His birthplace Lemgo has gone down in history as the town that burned and executed the greatest number of women and men as witches in the shortest period of time. The persecution was at its height during Kaempfer's childhood and youth, during which two uncles by marriage, one the assistant vicar the other a school teacher and deacon in the church, were both executed. At the age of sixteen Kaempfer left Lemgo and for the next fourteen years moved further and further east to continue his studies first at schools and then at universities until he moved to Sweden and departed with a delegation of the Swedish king for Isfahan. He was not inclined to return with the delegation to Europe and managed to obtain a position as ship's surgeon with the VOC which finally in September 1690 brought him to Japan as resident doctor of the trading station on Deshima in the harbor of Nagasaki.

Kaempfer was not blind to the cruelties of the Japanese system, but he was evenhanded. When,

40 Hans Küng, *Does God Exist*, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1980, p. 593.

for instance, he learnt that even the slightest transgression against the shogun's laws resulted in death, he added that this system was cruel, but still not any worse than in his native country where money often influenced the judgement.[41]

Kaempfer's impartial description was not in tune with the general sentiments towards a heathen nation. Even in his dedication of his translation to the King, George II, the translator Scheuchzer felt the need to show that though Japan was a "mighty and powerful Empire" he did not hold it in esteem by declaring that this empire "unfolds the Rules and Maxims of a Government, where the mutual checks, jealousies and mistrusts of Persons invested with Power are thought the most effectual Means to oblige them to a faithful discharge of their respective duties."[42]

More consequential for the image of Japan was that the text was altered to account for the generally held negative bias towards non-Christian nations.

The alterations are most serious when dealing with religious subjects and the changes might have been made so as not to offend the public. I have discussed these in more detail elsewhere and will only give some brief examples. For instance, Kaempfer's admiration of the Confucian rules of ethics is much toned down and Kaempfer's likening them to the Christian Ten Commandments is omitted altogether. On the other hand, when Kaempfer made a critical remark such as pointing out the lack of theological concepts and scriptures in the religion of Shinto and the corresponding absence of religious scholarship among the priests, this is elaborated in the translation to such an extent that it departs considerably from the original manuscript.

The same process took place when in 1777-1779 finally a German version appeared under the editorship of Christian Wilhelm Dohm (1751-1820). Dohm decided that some 60 years after the manuscript was composed, the language had to be modernized. To show that he was faithful to the original text, he gives samples of the original and his modernized version. But even within these brief excerpts the change is obvious with, for instance, Kaempfer's *geistliche Lehre und Gottesdienst* (spiritual teaching and divine service) being turned into die *Religionslehren und den Goetzendienst* (the religious teachings and idol worship).[43]

Nevertheless, in the course of the enlightenment and resulting improved image of non-Christian cultures, Kaempfer's work played an important part.

In 1777, the year the first volume of Kaempfer's description of Japan appeared in German as *Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan* (*The History and Description of Japan*), there occurred in Germany the so-called *Fragmentenstreit*, 'the Battle of the *Fragments*', which has been referred to

41 For an elaboration of this topic see B.M. Bodart-Bailey, "Engelbert Kaempfer, the Witch Hunt and Japan".

42 Engelbert Kaempfer, *The History of Japan Together with a Description of the Kingdom of Siam*, J.G. Scheuchzer, trans., Glasgow, 1906, I:xxi.

43 B.M. Bodart-Bailey, "Kaempfer Restor'd", *Monumenta Nipponica*, 43:1, p. 18.

as the greatest shake-up of the church in Germany since Luther.[44] It was caused by the German playwright, philosopher and publicist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) employed as librarian of the famous Wolfenbüttel library by Duke Ferdinand of Braunschweig (1721–1792).

Lessing published what he claimed were anonymous documents found in the library challenging the church and the importance of the Bible. The details of the complex public arguments between Lessing and prominent members of the church that ended in Lessing being barred from publishing further, need not concern us here. What is interesting is that Lessing received the public support of his friend, the satirist Matthias Claudius (1740-1815) who using Kaempfer's description of his audience with the fifth Tokugawa shogun Tsunayoshi, published a fictional story of his own cousin taking him to a similar audience with Tsunayoshi. Here Lessing's plight was discussed in some detail and the shogun was delighted to hear of a philosopher challenging established beliefs, finally asking whether Lessing would not come to Japan.[45] It needs to be remembered that Kaempfer in both his *Amoenitates* and the work later published as *The History of Japan* described the fifth shogun as a learned ruler patronizing scholarship and the arts. Claudius took the unusual step of describing the de facto ruler of Japan as someone much interested in the progress of the enlightenment in Europe, as someone superior to those in power in Europe who were not.

But Claudius did not stop here. He referred to Kaempfer's work repeatedly. The most remarkable of these passages is perhaps his lengthy description of the pilgrimage to the shrine of Ise and the Jammabos (*yamabushi* 山伏- mountain priests) climbing Mount Fuji ringing the bells of their staff (*shakujô* 錫杖). He encouraged the reader to consult Kaempfer's work for further detail and finishes this account declaring:

"May God hear everybody who rings his bells on Mount Fuji, or touches the ground with his forehead at the lattice gate [of the shrine] of Ise. And I believe God will do this, for isn't he also the God of the Japanese? Of course, he is also the God of the Japanese."[46]

Not just Matthias Claudius in his literary journal *Wandsbecker Bothen* was creating a new positive image of Japan, but also Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) who began his lectures on physical geography in the summer of 1756. When lecturing about Japan, he relied largely on Kaempfer's

44 Hans Küng, „Religion im Prozeβ der Aufklärung" in Walter Jens und Hans Küng, *Dichtung und Religion*, Munich, 1985, p. 88.

45 Matthias Claudius, *Asmus omnia sua Secum portans oder Sämmtliche Werke des Wandsbecker Bothen*, III, Wandsbeck, 1777 in *Claudius Sämtliche Werke*, Emil Vollmer Verlag, 1958, pp. 138-139.

46 *Ibid*. p. 159, (My own translation of „Gott höre jeden, der auf dem Fusi klingelt, der vor der Gittertür zu Jisje seine Stirn auf die Erde legt! Und das tut auch Gott, glaub' ich, denn ist er nicht auch der Japaneser Gott? Freilich ist er auch der Japaneser Gott.")

work.[47] He praised the Japanese as “very well behaved, graceful and learned and in all the arts more polished than the Chinese”.[48] Kant also considered Japanese porcelain superior to that from China stating “Everybody knows, that the old Japanese porcelain is more valued than the Chinese and this is mainly on account of its milky-white color. Present-day porcelain has lost this beauty and it is believed that the art [of producing this color] has gone lost.”[49]

The Image of Japan Shaped by Imported Goods.

The image of Japan in Europe was not only shaped by books and lectures, but perhaps even more by the goods that Europeans came to value. Porcelain played an important part in this. Until the discovery of how to manufacture hard-paste porcelain in 1708 and the first production by the kilns of Meissen in Saxony in 1710, Europeans only knew how to manufacture the heavy and much more brittle stoneware. From the 15th century on, increasing quantities of porcelain were imported from China, but when by the middle of the 17th century most Chinese kilns were closed on account of civil disturbances, the VOC turned to Japan.

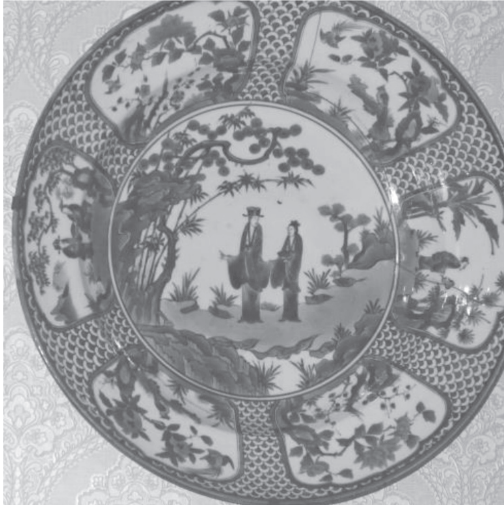
At first Japanese potters copied Chinese styles to please established customers, but soon they developed their own. It was the age of Louis XIV when the opulence of Versailles inspired nobles all over Europe and the large multi-colored plates and vases imported from Japan – that still today decorate many palaces – became highly valued objects. At the end of the 17th century, Chinese kilns recovered and since their goods were cheaper, the VOC imported from China again. But now these kilns imitated the Japanese wares, and so did Meissen and later manufacturers. Thus Japanese porcelain became famous as described by Kant in his lectures. The “Japanese Palace” at Dresden, originally built by August the Strong of Saxony (1670 -1733) to house his Japanese porcelain collection with roofs shaped to imitate those of Japan, further documents the appreciation of Japanese culture by the aristocracy of Europe.

Similarly famous was Japanese lacquer ware, especially Japanese lacquered chests which also still today decorate European palaces. They became so sought after that soon European imitations

47 Werner Stark, et al., *Kant's Lectures/Kants Vorlesungen*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2015, p. 10.

48 Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Kant und die Religionen des Ostens*, Holzner-Verlag, Kitzingen-Main, 1954, p. 112. (Own translation of “Sie sind sehr gesittet, fein und gelehrt und in allen Künsten besser poliert als die Chinesen…“).

49 Immanuel Kant, *Physische Geographie: Allgemeine Beschreibung des Landes*, 1816, Vol. II, part 1, p. 293. (Own translation of “Jedermann weiβ, daβ man das alte japonische Porzellan höher schätzet als das chinesische, und daβ es diesen Vorzug besonders wegen seiner milchweiβen Farbe verdient. Das heutige hat die alte Schönheit nicht mehr, und man glaubt, die Kunst sey verloren gegangen…“)



A Japanese plate in the Chinese style,
60 cm diameter, in the collection of Detmold castle, believed to have been brought back by Kaempfer from Japan. (Author's photo.)

A Japanese plate 47 cm diameter, in the collection of Detmold castle, believed to have been brought back by Kaempfer from Japan. The voluptuous decoration with birds, a landscape (left rim) cherry blossoms and chrysanthemums is geared towards European taste. (Author's photo.)

appeared.

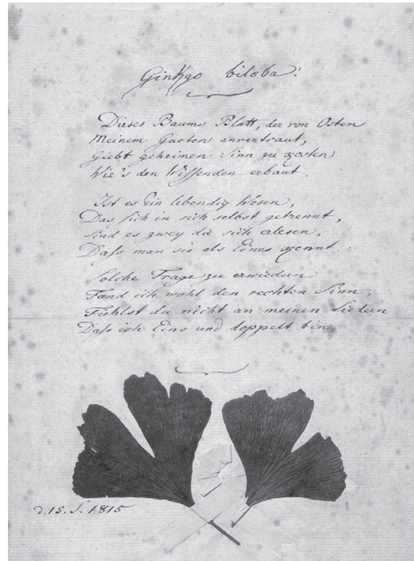
A product highly regarded by those who could afford it were also Japanese silk robes. At their annual audience with the shogun at Edo the VOC presented gifts to the shogun and important courtiers. In return they were rewarded with silken kimonos. On Engelbert Kaempfer's visit to Edo in 1691 the delegation was presented with thirty robes from the shogun plus a total of forty-four robes from high-ranking courtiers who had received gifts from the Dutch.[50] The Japanese robes were sold in Europe and we get a glimpse of how they might have been worn by the aristocracy when in the original stage directions for Mozart's *Magic Flute* it is stated that for his entrance in the first act, the prince appears in a Japanese robe.

Another item of beauty, Kant considered worth mentioning was Japan's flora. He stated: "The attractiveness and variety of the flowers resplendent on all hills, fields and forests are so magnificent that surely no other country can rival Japan in this respect."[51]

Japan's climate is fundamentally different from that of Europe in as much as rain falls mainly in the warm month of June, leading to rapid growth, while the winter months are sunny with an

50 *Kaempfer's Japan*, p. 368.

51 Kant, *Physische Geographie: Allgemeine Beschreibung des Landes*, p. 294. (Own translation of „Die Anmut und Manigfaltigkeit der Blumen womit alle Hügel, Felder und Waldungen prangen, ist so groβ, daβ Japon in diesem Stück schwerlich von einem Land übertroffen wird.“)



Ginkgo biloba.

Dieses Baums Blatt, der von Osten
Meinem Garten anvertraut,
Giebt geheimen Sinn zu kosten
Wie's den Wissenden erbaut.

Ist es Ein lebendig Wesen,
Das sich in sich selbst getrennt,
Sind es zwey die sich erlesen,
Daß man sie als Eines kennt.

Solche Frage zu erwiedern
Fand ich wohl den rechten Sinn,
Fühlst du nicht an meinen Liedern
Daß ich Eins und doppelt bin.

d. 15. S. 1815

http://kwanten.home.xs4all.nl/goethe.htm (consulted 12.12.2019).
Copy of the original of Goethe's poem with Ginkgo-leaves pasted on it by Goethe himself.
15, September 1815. Original (fair copy) in Goethe Museum, Düsseldorf (Germany).

early onset of blossoms and flowers. In Europe, nature is dormant during the long winter months and grey skies, sleet and snow have been the rule. Especially as Europe came into the grip of the so-called Little Ice Age, paintings like those of Bruegel depict scenes of stark black trees against a backdrop of a white blanket of snow. Even summers were cool and flowers in the fields small.

Europeans were therefore amazed at the lushness of Japan's flora. Even in the snow, blossoms appeared on the trees in the mountains and a little later azaleas and the large pink blossoms of camellias could be seen growing wild in the woods.[52] In the eyes of Europe, Japan became the wonderland of nature.

Books on Japanese gardens appeared early. Engelbert Kaempfer brought back a large collection of plants which he described in his *Flora Japonica* and after Kaempfer's death and the sale of his collection to England, drawings based on the collection were published again by the English naturalist Sir Joseph Banks (1743 – 1820). The Swedish botanist Carl von Linné (Carolus Linnaeus 1710-1778) could, thanks to Kaempfer, include Japanese plants in his *Systema Naturae*, his new classification of Fauna and Flora of 1735. In 1775, some 83 years after Kaempfer left Japan, Linné's student Carl Peter Thunberg arrived in Japan and with his publications added to the knowledge of the Japanese flora.

The fascination of Europeans with Japanese plants is well illustrated by a poem of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) in which he likened the shape of the leaf of the Ginkgo tree to

52 *Kaemper's Japan*, p. 67.

the physical separateness yet deeper unity of two lovers. The poem written to a former lover Marianne von Willemer (1784-1860) in September 1815 has two dried Ginkgo leaves attached below his writing.

The humidity of the Japanese climate made the colors of nature appear brighter than in the relatively dry summers of Europe as artists found out when Japanese woodblock prints reached them. Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother from Arles that the colors there were nearly as bright as in Japan and copied Japanese woodblock prints in oil.[53] It was not just the colors, but also the subjects and techniques of composition of Japanese woodblock prints that influenced the Impressionist School and liberated them from traditional modes of painting.

With the opening of Japan in the second half of the 19th century, the country soon became aware that Western admiration of Japanese artistic skills and products could improve Japan's image in the West and could, moreover, be turned to financial gain through the export of such objects. The first British representative resident in Japan Rutherford Alcock (1809-97) and others had already displayed their collections of Japanese items at the London International Exhibition on Industry and Art in 1862 while at the second International Exhibition in Paris of 1867 the Tokugawa shogunate and the Satsuma and Saga domains arranged displays including a tea store where three Japanese women could be seen smoking pipes.

The success of the two events persuaded the new Meiji government to participate for the first time officially in an international exposition, namely that at Vienna of 1873. The German natural scientist Gottfried Wagener (1831-1892), who taught physics and chemistry in Japan and became one of the founding fathers of the Tokyo Institute of Technology, was selected to create a display that would impress the Europeans. Finely crafted small items had been the main stay of earlier displays, but Wagener decided that to capture the attention of visitors, the Japanese exhibit had to rival those of the Europeans in size. Since the display of Japanese industrial products could not as yet compete with those of developed nations, he decided to show Japanese traditional culture on a grand scale. On over four thousand square meters he erected buildings including a five-story pagoda of some four meters height, a Shinto shrine, a music and dance hall as well as a Japanese garden complete with stone lanterns, a bridge, a model of the Great Buddha of Kamakura, a lantern four meters in diameter and the golden dolphins from the roof of Nagoya castle that dwarfed the visitor.

Wagener's expectations were met. Especially the Shinto shrine and the Japanese garden received a large amount of attention. The garden, including all stones and trees, was purchased by a British trading company at the end of the exposition and thousands of fans were sold out in the first week. The Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I and Empress Elisabeth visited the Japanese pavilions

53 Siegfried Wichmann, *Japonismus: Ostasien-Europa Begegnungen in der Kunst des 19. und 20.* Jahrhunderts, Herrsching, 1980, pp. 41-42.

and attended the opening ceremony of the arched bridge, while the court ladies gathered up the delicate wood shavings of the Japanese carpenters and carefully carried them home. Japonism became the rage and the sale of Japanese industrial art products helped to improve the foreign currency balance of the Japanese government.[54]

With the work of Japanese artisans receiving a large amount of attention at Vienna as well as at the following expositions in Philadelphia in 1875 and Paris two years later, the idea was conceived to erect a Japanese village in London's Knightsbridge, where artisans would live with their families; their work could be observed by the public and their goods readily sold. Fencers, wrestlers and other entertainers added to the attraction. The village was opened by Rutherford Alcock on January 10th, 1885 and was positively commented upon in the papers.[55] It was in fact such a success that Pemberton Willard, a Sydney actor, entrepreneur and theatre producer, decided to create his own Japanese village to tour Australia. With some 40 Japanese artisans, acrobats, jugglers and women to serve Japanese tea, he opened the village in Sydney in April 1886 and toured all Australian state capitals except Perth for fifteen months. His village was visited by the British governor and over 300.000 people.[56]

In a pamphlet to advertise the event, Willard called Japan "the latest and greatest curiosity in the history of civilization". He described Japan as a nation that in some aspects was equal or even surpassing the most skilled communities in Europe, but in others "so preposterously behind modern ideas, as to suggest a state of society to be found only [in] the middle or even dark ages."[57]

The image of Japan as "the greatest curiosity" and country of great skills, yet habits of the dark ages might have been how many foreigners who came to Japan after its opening perceived the nation, but it was also an image necessary to sell Japanese culture as popular entertainment.

Japanese Culture as Popular Entertainment

Japanese culture as popular entertainment was also an idea the dramatist William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911) hit upon when he and the composer Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) were informed on March 22nd, 1884 by their producer Richard D'Oyly Carte (1844-1901) that a new opera was required within the next six months under the terms of their contract. Gilbert's first

54 https://www.ndl.go.jp/exposition/e/s1/1873-2.html, consulted 20.12.2019.

55 Hugh Cortazzi, *Japan in Late Victorian London: The Japanese Native Village in Knightsbridge and 'The Mikado', 1885*, Sainsbury Institute, 2009, p. 13.

56 J.A.A. Stockwin, Keiko Tamura, eds., *Bridging Australia and Japan: The writings of David Sissons, historian and political scientist*, Volume 1, Canberra 2016, p. 58.

57 Pemberton Willard, *Japanese Village*, "Introduction", H. Solomon, Caxton, N.S.W.

Caricature of Sullivan (left) and Gilbert (right) by E.J. Wheeler
Punch, March 28, 1885.

proposal, a story revolving around a magic lozenge, did not find the approval of Sullivan who desired a more sophisticated subject for his music. But then, in May of that year, a Japanese sword Gilbert had fixed to the wall apparently caught his eye and the idea of using Japan as backdrop for the next opera, *The Mikado or Town of Titibu*, was born.

What or who provided Gilbert with the plot of the opera has been a question for speculation. Was it pure invention on Gilbert's part? Or had members of the Japanese village at Knightsbridge – which would have been under preparation while he composed the libretto – provided him with the material? Japanese officials and business men in London resented their emperor and culture being the subject of a comic opera and were unlikely contributors. Or was the informer perhaps the erstwhile Japanese official and journalist Fukuchi Gen'ichirô (1841-1906) who apparently asserted that the opera reflected a good understanding of samurai society and where a letter from Gilbert thanking him for his "invaluable help" exists? Or maybe Gilbert had himself studied the available

58 Gayden Wren, *A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert and Sullivan*, Oxford, 2001, p.163. Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado*, University of Minesota Press, 2010, p. 4. Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation 1850-80*, Macmillan, 1987, p. xix.

literature on Japan?[58]

The answer is in all probability that either Gilbert or a friend who advised him had studied a publication on Japan which at the time was also used as a reference by journalists such as Alexander Knox (1818-91), namely Engelbert Kaempfer's *The History of Japan*.[59] The underlying nature of the Mikado's plot, namely the story of a people who act with great politeness and decorum, yet take life with ease, comes straight from the pen of Kaempfer.

Discussing the government of Nagasaki, the town likely to have been the model for Titibu, Kaempfer introduces the three governors of the city. One of them is Yamaoka Tsushima no Kami, who "previously served as marshal or chief constable, ridding Edo of thieves. He and his colleagues personally eliminated more than one thousand thieves, which earned him his post in this administration" Kaempfer explained and described him as "very humble, righteous and benevolent, especially as regards his poorer subjects." The previous year Yamaoka had distributed all his incidental benefits to the poor with some receiving large sums. However, Kaempfer continued, "he is, nevertheless, still so much accustomed to the practices of his former position that he executes the servants of his mansion without much ado for the slightest act of dishonesty."[60] This was the epitome of otherness for the London audience and likely to catch their attention.

Yet this brief description of Kaempfer only provided the necessary credentials that this opera was indeed about Japan, for it was not. It was a parody of British society which otherwise would not pass the censorship of the English stage with its strict laws prohibiting the explicit satire of prominent figures.[61] The audience is given a hint of this when in the very first chorus the nobles declare that they are the gentlemen that "figure in lively paint" "on many a vase and jar – on many a screen and fan".[62] Parallel to Lewis Carroll's 1865 popular novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, where playing cards and animals act like humans, Gilbert breathes life into the figures depicted on Japanese artifacts. It was a simple device to obscure the fact that these objects and animals from another world were parodies of very real people.

Satire requires an intimate knowledge of the local gossip to connect the characters on stage with those being caricatured, a knowledge that is lost as time passes. But even though the details of who exactly is being lampooned are difficult to reconstruct, it is quite obvious that the habits of the British upper classes are being made fun of. There is the aristocrat who deigns not to speak to

59 For Knox see Yokoyama, pp. 3-4.

60 *Kaempfer's Japan*, p. 149.

61 Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody*, New York, 2012, p. 369.
Kaempfer's Japan, p. 149.

62 W.S. Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas: Being the Complete Text of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas as Originally Produced in the Years 1875-1896*, London, 1927, p. 315.

untitled “people.” The “three little maids” that graduated presumably from an upper class British boarding school and must now be married off to appropriate husbands to gain some status in life. Again Ko-ko’s song “I’ve got a little list/ Of society offenders who might well be underground,/And who never would be missed …” makes it clear that not people in far-off Japan but those known to the audience are being lambasted by ending the song with the words “What’s his name, and also You-know-who – the task of filling up the blanks I’d rather leave to *you*.”[63]

Much of the dialogue concerns the interpretation of the law, satirizing the double speak of the legal profession, of men who with clever arguments manage to turn a wrong into a right and vice versa. Gilbert had previously practiced as a barrister, though with limited success and was not only qualified but no doubt also motivated to lambast his former colleagues.[64]

Queen Victoria thought the plot “rather silly” which of course it was, especially if she suspected that also she as the monarch was subject to parody. The aging Katisha’s recitative “Alone, and yet alive!” reflected the way Victoria saw her early widowhood. Further, Katisha’s words on the education of her husband might well have echoed the gossip about Victoria’s marital relationship with her German consort Albert who had a mind of his own. Finally, Katisha’s decision to end her loneliness by marrying a man below her station could be seen as parody of the monarch’s relationship with her servant John Brown.[65]

But not only Gilbert’s libretto referred to the behavior of the British, also Sullivan’s music picked up the tunes of English folk-songs and marches save for the entrance of the Mikado.[66]

Gilbert not only wrote the librettos of the Savoy operas, but was also in charge of their production. His vitality and attention to the smallest detail was legendary.[67] In case of the *The Mikado* he was fortunate to have a group of Japanese and their products at his doorstep as the Japanese village at Knightsbridge had opened some three months before the opening night of the opera on March 14th, 1885. Under his strict supervision the scenery, costumes and props as well as the movement of the actors were made as authentic Japanese as possible, obscuring the fact that the opera’s dialogue was mostly lampooning British society rather than that of Japan.

The absurd situation of a stage with genuine Japanese props and actors trained to imitate Japanese movement presenting a dialogue that caricatured British upper class society against a background of popular English tunes assured the great success of the work as a comical opera and turned it into the most lucrative production of the D’Oyly Carte performances. Yet while the

63 On this point see Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan*, p. 369.

64 Hesketh Pearson, *Gilbert and Sullivan: A Biography*, London, reprint 1947, pp. 23-27.

65 On Katisha see Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas*, pp. 366-370.

66 Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, p. 39.

67 Pearson, *Gilbert and Sullivan*, p. 144.

audience is captivated by a dialogue that makes fun of unpleasant aspects of their own society, these aspects are also attributed to the culture the actors physically portray. Consequently it has been pointed out that "For countless people who had never been to Japan, never met anyone of Japanese descent, or never seen or heard anything of Japanese culture (as well as for many who had done all of those things), *The Mikado* served as the basis of knowledge of what "Japanese" meant."[68] With great success all over Europe and also in the US and Australia, the opera came to amuse Western audiences but created the image of a childish and absurd people, inferior to the West with regard to Japan.

Conclusion

Historians feel on safe ground if they can consult primary source material: that is the writings of someone who witnessed an event or at least heard about it not long after. However, creating a record or writing a report is not infrequently done for a purpose and hence is colored with images serving this purpose.

It has been argued above that in the case of Japan, the image was frequently constructed with financial considerations in mind. The Jesuit missionaries subscribed to an optimistic image of the suitability of the Japanese for Christian conversion to obtain funding for their activities, while the reports of the protestant traders detailed the violent nature of Japanese society to sell their publications. Matters were somewhat different for the scholars of the Enlightenment where Japan as a "heathen country" served as an alternative model in challenging the monopoly of Christian teaching. There were also the artists and artisans to whom Japanese works showed a way to break free from the traditional limits imposed on their output.

Soon the "otherness" of the Japanese and their products was recognized as a commercial opportunity resulting in large-scale imports of Japanese goods and displays of the people and their craft in world exhibitions and pop-up Japanese villages. As a country of craftsmanship frequently exceeding that of Europe, Japan's image in the West rose. When Gilbert and Sullivan made use of the popularity of all things Japanese to mask their caricature of British upper class society in front of the authorities, they succeeded in producing a block-buster comic opera, namely *The Mikado*, but the popular image of Japan declined to that of a nation ruled by absurdity.

68 Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*, p. viii.

最初のキリシタン宣教師からイギリスのコミックオペラミカドまで：ヨーロッパ人の視点からの移り変わる日本人のイメージ

Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey

著名な人物、利益団体、国籍あるいは場所のポジティブなイメージ作りのことは大切な近代産業である。過去の時代にもさまざまな目的のためにイメージを作った。この記事には過去の著者の目的によるヨーロッパ人の視点からの移り変わる日本人のイメージを検討する。