

## REVIEW

Michael Cooper. *The Japanese Mission to Europe, 1582-1590: The Journey of Four Samurai Boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy*, Global Oriental, Folkestone, 2005, 262 pp., ISBN 1901903389.

IN 1585, three Japanese teenagers served as canopy bearers at the Coronation Mass of Pope Sixtus V. What were these Japanese teenagers doing there? Michael Cooper answers this question in *The Japanese Mission to Europe, 1582-1590: The Journey of Four Samurai Boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy*. This work provides a narrative of the first Japanese legation to Europe by Mancio Ito (1569-1612), Michael Chijawa (1567-1633), Martin Hara (1568-1639), and Julian Nakaura (1568-1633). Cooper states that this work is a 'paraphrase' of the work *La Première Ambassade du Japon en Europe* by Luis Fróis (1532-1597), a Jesuit who based his account upon the notes written by the Japanese boys and their companions during their trip, and does not provide any new insight for scholars (p. xi). However, this work is important in that it makes the story of these four individuals more accessible; before its publication, the legation had only been mentioned in no more than ten articles in English and was largely unknown or ignored by scholars.

The work is divided into seven parts chronicling the reasons for the journey, legs of the trip, and results of the legation sent to Europe. The first part is the nucleus of the work. Cooper first describes how the Jesuits came to Japan and were successful in their missionary efforts. After setting the stage, he then discusses how Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), head of the Japanese mission, was forced to deal with three major problems: lack of financial support for the mission, the high esteem which Japanese had for their culture that often led to the doubting of reports of European society and social organizations, and the threat to the continuation of the Jesuit monopoly over missionary work in Japan. Valignano believed that leading a legation to Europe would help gain favourable attention from various monarchs and ecclesiastical authorities and solve these problems. The legation was sent on behalf of three Christian daimyo, Ôtomo Sôrin (1530-1587) of Bungo, Ômura Sumitada (1533-1587) of Ômura, and Arima Harunobu (1567-1612) of Arima, who were represented by family members Mancio Ito and Michael Chijawa, with Martin Hara, and Julian Nakaura serving as companions. All four were pupils at a Jesuit school in Kyushu and because of their youth Valignano thought that they would be more likely to survive the trip. Valignano was also largely concerned with making sure that the legation was impressed with Europe to the extent of issuing the proviso that they 'should not be allowed to view or learn anything that could give a contrary impression' (p. 19). Throughout the entire eight-year trip these four representatives were under close supervision and were generally housed in Jesuit quarters.

Parts two through six give a detailed account of the trip, the highlights being a public reception by Pope Gregory XIII before his death, and their participation in the Coronation Mass of Pope Sixtus V. Many dukes, counts, cardinals, and archbishops called upon the Japanese party to visit them and learn about the guests. In reading these accounts one gets a sense of the reasons for these visits – the novelty of the Japanese – as the visitors seemed inspired more by curiosity than religious zeal. One factor that contributes to this conclusion is that the status of the boys seemed to be misunderstood. Some came to understand that the four Japanese were ‘princes’ or official envoys from Japan, though in reality they only represented three daimyo. Instead of small private meetings fitting for legations, as Valignano had planned, full-scale ceremonies and preparations were made, which were usually reserved for kings and ambassadors. This misunderstanding of the Japanese teenagers’ rank was not a result of maliciousness or intentional misrepresentation on the part of the Jesuits as far as Cooper is concerned; rather the Europeans bestowed this rank on the boys for reasons that Cooper does not explain. In Cooper’s defence, however, there does not seem to be an apparent answer other than the exaggeration of rank being a way to add to the novelty of the meetings.

Having described these audiences with some of the most powerful people in Europe, Cooper concludes the work in part seven asking the question: Was the legation a success? Europe was introduced to Japan and the fame of the envoy was known widely across Europe, which increased support for missionary work in Japan, but the financial problems of the mission were not solved, despite being promised funds. The Jesuit monopoly on missionary work to Japan was successful for a short time, but Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians would later enter Japan to begin their enterprises before the anti-Christian policies of the Tokugawa were implemented. As Cooper notes, the modern reader has over four centuries of hindsight and can see the long-term results, yet using twenty-first century criteria of ‘success’ for a sixteenth-century endeavour is ‘unfair’ (p. 163). Despite the fact that the reader does have the advantage of hindsight when looking at what Valignano proposed to do (which was a spur of the moment decision to begin with), one wonders if he did not take into consideration the bureaucratic and political landscape of sixteenth-century Europe. The legation did not accomplish its long-term goals and being two years or four hundred years removed from the event does not change this fact.

This work is an additional gem to the other works Cooper has published on Jesuit-Japanese relations during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. Readers may be concerned by the fact that Cooper himself is a Jesuit and that his insight may be slightly skewed to a pro-Jesuit view, particularly when one thinks objectively of the manner in which these four Japanese boys were paraded throughout Europe to gain support for a cause that they may or may not have understood. This does not seem to be an issue with the work, however, as Cooper is concerned with providing only an ‘introductory account’ and is paraphrasing a previous work (p. xii). However, in conjunction to this paraphrase Cooper relies on other scholarly and primary sources to help give more detail of events that are lacking in Fróis’ work. Cooper mentions that there are in existence a plethora of unpublished materials dealing with the Japanese legation in the archives of the cities

they visited in Europe. The work will hopefully arouse the curiosity of scholars to comb through these archives to give us more details regarding this little-known legation.

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