

**Between Texts, Beyond Words**  
Intertextuality and Translation  
edited by Nicoletta Pesaro

## **Translation During the Christian Century in Japan** Christian Keywords in Japanese

Aldo Tollini  
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Abstract** This essay presents examples of translation of keywords of the Christian doctrine translated by Jesuit missionaries during the so-called 'Christian century', when Europeans undertook the conversion of the Japanese, between the second half of the 16th century and the first part of the following. The purpose is to highlight the difficulties of translation between very distant and different cultures, and the strategies that were devised in order to overcome the problems.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 The Word for God. – 3 Anima. – 4 Other Keywords of Christianity. – 5 Considerations and Concluding Remarks.

**Keywords** Christian lexicon. Translation. Medieval Japan. Jesuit missionaries. Kirishitanban.

### **1 Introduction**

The cultural exchanges that took place during the first meeting between the European missionaries and the Japanese around the second half of the sixteenth century and the first part of the following, among many difficulties and mutual misunderstandings, find an interesting issue in the linguistic activity that intensively engaged some of the Jesuits missionaries in Japan.

Although the declared purpose of this activity, which led to the publication of dictionaries, vocabularies and grammars, was *ajuda para aprender esta lingua*, that is 'to provide materials for language learning' by the confrères who were to preach the Gospel, as written in the Introduction of *Nippō jisho*; in fact, the amount and the care employed testify to us, modern people, an intention that goes well beyond the didactic intent. The Europeans, bearers of the humanistic and Renaissance culture, brought to Japan the idea that language is not only a tool for communication, but also the vehicle of cultural transmission par excellence. In fact, the study of language in the European tradition of that time had become a subject of study of great interest, as is evident in the remarkable production in this field, which saw the first studies of grammar and vocabulary of both classical and vernacular languages.

Once in Japan, the missionaries began, from the early nineties of the sixteenth century, to devote themselves to translation, press activities, and the production of texts for the study of Japanese language, thanks above all to the enthusiasm of the Visitor Alessandro Valignano, the superior of the mission.

Some important dictionaries have been handed down to us besides the grammars of João Rodrigues (1561-1633) and Diego Collado (late 16th c.-early 17th c.):

1. *Dictionarium Latinum Lusitanicum, ac Iaponicum*, Amacusa, 1595 (in Latin letters). (From now on *Rahonichi*).<sup>1</sup>
2. *Vocabulario da lingoa de Iapam com a declaração em portugues*, Nagasaki, 1603-04 (in Latin letters) (From now on *Nippō jisho*).<sup>2</sup>
3. *Dictionarium sive thesauri linguae japonicae compendium*, Roma, 1632 (in Latin letters) (From now on *Raseinichi*).<sup>3</sup>

They are an important source of information that offers us incredible insights for the understanding of the cultural exchange between Europeans and Japanese that took place at that time, shedding light on the difficulties of mutual understanding, and also showing us the strategies implemented to give an adequate translation of the main terms of Japanese culture in European languages and of the Christian lexicon in Japanese.

We can witness two forms of linguistic and cultural operations: the first to be found in Japanese-to-Portuguese dictionaries, in particular in *Nippō jisho*. It is an attempt to express European culture in Japanese language. This is the mirror of the capacity and level of understanding of Japanese culture achieved by Europeans in the early sixteenth century. In other words, a reading of Japanese culture with the tools of one's own.

The other, which is found in dictionaries from European languages (Latin, Spanish and Portuguese) to Japanese, specifically *Rahonichi* and *Raseinichi*, is, instead, the testimony of the attempt by the Europeans to convey their own culture to the Japanese. The purpose is that of promoting the understanding of European culture among the Japanese.

---

1 *Dictionarivm Latino Lvsitanicvm, ac Iaponicvm*, Amacvsa, anno M.D.XCV (羅葡日辞典) (1595). Fukushima Kunimichi (ed.) (1979). *Rahonichi taiyaku jisho. Dictionarivm Latino Lvsitanicvm Ac Iaponicvm*. Tōkyō: Benseisha. Quotations are from this text. Also on Internet at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nncl.cu05758114;view=lup;seq=1> (2019-01-08).

2 *Vocabulario Da Lingoa De Iapam, con adeclaração em Portugues, feito por Algvns Padres, E Irmaõs da Companhia de Iesv*, Nangasaqui, anno M.D.C.III (日葡辞書) (1603). In printed edition: Tsukimoto Masayuki (ed.) (2013). *Nippo jisho: kirishitanban: karā einban. Vocablario da lingoa de Iapam: Nagasaqui 1603-4*. Tōkyō: Bensei shuppan. Quotations are from this text.

3 *Dictionarivm sive Thesavri Lingvae Iaponicae Compendivm. Compositum, & Sacrae de Propaganda Fide Congregationi dicatum à Fratrem Didaco Collado Ord. Praedicatorum*, Romae anno 1632 (Latin and Spanish). Ōtsuka Mitsunobu (ed.), *Raseinichi jisho. Dictionarium siue thesauri linguae iaponicae compendium*. Tōkyō: Benseisha. Quotations are from this text. Also on Internet at: <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/2513086> (2019-01-08).

Here, I deal with the second: the effort that the missionaries exerted to explain or bend the European cultural terminology in the Japanese language. Since, however, the main purpose of the Jesuits was the evangelization of Japan, the presentation of Christian culture was particularly important and delicate, and the greatest efforts were made in this field.

Below, I will present an analysis of some of the most relevant and meaningful terms of Christianity translated into Japanese: this will help to understand the strategies that were employed to facilitate the process of cultural exchange, and the strategies implemented in order to avoid easy and sometimes unavoidable misunderstandings.

The sources that I use for this purpose are, in addition to the two dictionaries mentioned above, that is *Rahonichi*, *Raseinichi*, also some other texts in which the selected terminology occurs. This allows me to observe different approaches and strategies of translation, conditioned by contingent factors and even by an evolution that took place over time.

It goes without saying that the limits of this essay force me to leave out many words which are also interesting and meaningful. This essay is intended as an initial approach to the subject that I have chosen to deal with.

## 2 The Word for God

I want to begin with the most important and perhaps one of the most difficult words to be translated in Japanese: the word 'God'.

It is a well-known story that when Xavier<sup>4</sup> disembarked in Kyūshū in 1549, Anjirō,<sup>5</sup> who accompanied him to Japan, taught Xavier the word *Dainichi* (大日), that is the name of one of the Buddhas, that of the Shingon sect, to which Anjirō belonged. In the beginning, Xavier taking the word *Dainichi* for 'God', used it in his preaching. When, in the April of 1551, he went to Yamaguchi and there he used it, he was very welcome by the Shingon monks, however this fact made him suspicious. After realising the misunderstanding, he preferred to use the Latin word *Deus*.<sup>6</sup>

Soon some of the missionaries became aware that the use of Buddhist words involved the risk of letting the Japanese think that Christianity could be assimilated to a Buddhist sect. Balthasar Gago (1520-1583), a Portu-

4 Saint Francis Xavier, S.J. (1506-1552), a Spanish Catholic missionary, co-founder of the Society of Jesus.

5 Anjirō or Yajirō, a Japanese who after committing a murder in Japan fled to Portuguese Malacca where he met Francis Xavier and returned to Japan with him as an interpreter.

6 Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*, Brill, 2001, 9-11.

guesse missionary, was the first to present the problem of the translation of the Christian lexicon into Japanese.

In a letter of 23 September 1555,<sup>7</sup> he writes:

These Japanese have some words with which we have been preaching the truth for a long time, which they use in their sects, that they change because they want to treat the truth with words of deception and lies, giving them a misleading meaning.

In this way, to all the words that we teach them as ours to indicate new things for them – since we need new words – and that they recognize as prejudicial to them, they give a different meaning in respect to what we mean.

Thus, for example, for Cross, in their language they say Iumogi (*ju-monji* 十文字),<sup>8</sup> which is their letter in the form of a cross which means ‘ten’, and therefore to the careless people it seems that the Cross and their letter is the same thing.

Therefore, at every turn, every word must be explained, or we must change the word, and there are more than fifty of these words that can do damage, but by specifying the meaning of their words and that of ours, we see the difference that exists, and we see that their words are unsuitable for explaining the things of God, and this can lead to a better understanding. I say this so that those who are among the pagans listen well to the explanations and weigh well the words.

The problem of translating the Christian lexicon into Japanese was very important and engaged the missionaries in Japan for a long time.<sup>9</sup> Let us consider, for example, the problematic phonetic similarity between Deus, a word that was also used, and Japanese *daiuso* (大嘘), which means ‘big lie’. A solution was to use the term *aruji* (主),<sup>10</sup> or rather its honorary form *on-aruji* that literally means ‘lord’, to indicate the Lord, although in the *Nippō jisho* we find for *aruji* simply: “Sehnor, ou sehnora, ou dono<sup>11</sup> da

---

7 ‘Carta do padre Baltazar Gago’, Hirado, 23 settembre 1555, in *Cartas que los Padres y Hermanos de la Compañia de Jesus, que andan en los Reynos de Japon escriuieron a los de la misma Compañia, desde el año del mil y quinientos y quarenta y nueve, hasta el de mil y quinientos y sesenta y uno*. En Alcalá, En la Casa de Juan Iñiguez de Lequerica. Año 1575, folio 116 e 117. The reform of ‘dangerous translations’ was approved by the Provincial, Father Melchior Nunez, when he visited Japan in the following year. The translation in English is of the Author.

8 *Iūmonji*: “Letra que significa dez. Item, figura de cruz” (*Nippō*, 146).

9 On this topic see: Schurhammer 1929 and Doi Tadao 1974.

10 It is a synonym of *nushi* (主), ‘owner, lord’.

11 *Dono* is the Japanese word for ‘owner’.

cousa” (Gentleman or lady, or a owner of something) (*Nippō*, 13) without any reference to the Lord God.

Analysing the contemporary dictionaries of that time, we find, instead, terms composed by *ten* 天, or ‘sky’, perhaps to highlight the difference between the Christian God imagined in Heaven, and the Japanese gods or *kami* who live instead in nature, and especially in the uncultivated mountains, or the buddhas, whose physical location is never specified.

On the other hand, ‘heaven’ 天 had a long philosophical and religious tradition in the Chinese language. To put it in an extremely synthetic way, Confucian thought identifies in the sky a regulating entity of human life and the model of virtue to refer to.

This conception, together with the related words, passed also to Japan where, in consequence, the reference to the ‘sky’ pointed to a celestial model of perfection and a sort of ‘regulator of the life of the universe’. This could lead one to think of a superior, superhuman power, perhaps the generator of life, which could be not so far in meaning from the conception of the Christian God.

In the *Rahonichi* of 1595 under the entry DEUS we find the following translations: *tentō* (天道), *tenxu* (天主) *tenson* (天尊), *tentei* (天帝) (*Rahonichi*, 206). In *Raseinichi*, this term is not present. In “Kotoba no yawarage”<sup>12</sup> of *Hidesu no dōshi* (ヒイデスの導師)<sup>13</sup> we find:

- *Tenmei* 天命。デウスのご内証 (*Tenmei*. Secret name for God);
- *Tentei* 天帝。天の帝王 (*Tentei*. King of the heaven);
- *Tentō* 天道。デウスの心 (*Tentō*. The heart of god).

And in “Kotoba no yawarage” in *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi*:<sup>14</sup>

- *Ten.mei*. Deos. Mandado de Dios.
- *Ten.tei*. Deos.
- *Ten-tō*. Idem.

In *Nippō jisho*, we also find the word *tentō* (天道): “*tenno michi*, Camiho, ou ordem & prouidencia do ceo. Commummente chamamos ja a Deos por esse nome. Postoque os gentios não parece que atinauão mais que com o primeiro sentido” (Way, or order and providence of the heaven. For the Heathens have never referred to this term except in the first meaning (that is that of ‘way’) (*Nippō*, 255).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Kotoba no yawarage’ was in general, an appendix to a text that listed the most important and difficult words and their explanation.

<sup>13</sup> Obara Satoru (ed.) (1995). *Fides no dōxi, Kirishitan bungaku sōsho*. Kyōbunkan, 382-3. *Fides no dōxi* means ‘Introduction to the faith’. Published in Amakusa in 1592.

<sup>14</sup> Yamamoto Masako (1976). *Kirishitanban rōmajibon, Kotoba no yawarage shū*. Jōchi daigaku kokubungakukai. *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi* means ‘Excerpts from the Acts of the Saints’. Published in Kazusa in 1591.

The same dictionary for *tenxu* (天主) says: “*Tenno nuxi. Senhor do ceo. Palavra dos liuros da igreja*” (Lord of the heaven. Word used in the texts of the church) (*Nippō*, 256), and for *tentei* (天帝): “*Tennomicado. Rey. Item, Deos*” (King, and also God) (*Nippō*, 255). Also the word *tenson* (天尊) is present: “*Palaura que corre na igreja por Deos, ou sehnor do ceo*” (Word largely used in the church for God, or Lord of the heaven) (*Nippō*, 255).

For the entry *Ten* (天) there is: “*Ceo. Item, Nos liuros he o mesmo que tentō. Ordem, ou reuolução, & gouerno do ceo, ou o gouernador do ceo*” (Heaven. Also, in the books is used in the same meaning of *tentō*. Order, or revolution and government of the heaven, or governor of the heaven). (*Nippō*, 254). There is also the term *tenmei* (天命), a very important word in Chinese culture, which is explained as: “*Mandado, ou ordem do ceo, ou de Deos. Tenmeiuo somuqu, Quebrar o mandamento de Deos, ou ir contra a vontade de Deos*” (Order of the heaven, or of God. *Tenmeiuo somuqu*, Go against the order of God, or against the will of God.) (*Nippō*, 255)

In the *Dictionary Divided for Periods: the Muromachi Period* (from now on *Muromachi Dictionary*)<sup>15</sup> at the entry *tenshu* we find (190): “1. 仏教語。諸天の主。特に須彌山頂に在る帝釈天をいう。2. キリシタンで、DEUS の訳語” (1. Buddhist term. Lord of all heavens. In particular, it is referred to Taishakuten<sup>16</sup> who abides on mount Sumeru. 2. In Christianity, it is the word for God).

In the same dictionary for *tentei* there is (197): “1. 天ヲ主宰する神。天の王者。特に、仏教では帝釈天、キリスト教では、DEUS をいう” (The god who governs the heaven. The king of the heaven. Especially in Buddhism Taishakuten. In Christianity is God). And for *tenson* (194) there is: “キリシタンで、DEUS の称” (In Christianity, it is the name for God). *Tentō* is not present.

In the various *kirishitanban*<sup>17</sup> we often find translations of the word God that do not coincide with those found in the Dictionaries mentioned above. For example, in *Dochiriina Kirishitan* of the year 1591, published in Amakusa,<sup>18</sup> *deus* (written in *hiragana* どうす) is used, or it is expressed with graphic symbols, and Lord is translated with *von aruji*, i.e. *on aruji* transcribed according to the pronunciation of the time. Although the word *deus* is widely used in the texts of popularization of Christian doctrine, surprisingly it does not appear in the dictionaries of the time.

15 *Muromachi jidai hen*. Vol. 2 of *Jidaibetsu kokugo daijiten*. Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1989.

16 Originally an Indian deity, Indra. In China and Japan it becomes a protector of Buddhism and defends both deities and humans against all that is evil.

17 *Kirishitanban* is a general term for the texts produced in Japan by the Christian missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

18 Ebisawa Arimichi et al. (eds) (1970). *Kirishitansho haiyasho*. Vol. 25 of *Nihon Shisō Taikei*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 13-81.

The words related to Christianity that we find in the texts for the dissemination of the Christian faith seem to be less subject to possible misunderstandings if compared with those present in the dictionaries, and therefore very often they are transliterations of original words of the European languages. In general, the translations in the dictionaries have rather a more intellectual and literary character, and are often translations, neologisms or loan words from the Sino-Japanese lexicon. In a sense, we could consider them as ‘official translations’ that possess less capacity to avoid misunderstandings.

### 3 Anima

Let us now turn the attention to another fundamental term of the Christian lexicon: soul (in Latin *anima*). In *Rahonichi* we find:

Anima, ae. Lus. Alma. Iap. *Vjō* (有情), *fijō* (非情) *no meicon* (命根) *to naru mono*. – Item, Espirito, vida: *inochi* (命), *xinmiō* (身命). (*Rahonichi*, 47)

That which serves as a basis for the life of ‘animate beings’ (*vjō*) and of ‘inanimate beings’ (*fijō*). Life (*inochi*), life of the body (*xinmiō*).<sup>19</sup>

In *Raseinichi*:

Anima sensitiva, alma sensitiva,<sup>20</sup> y como espíritus vitales, *tamāxi*. (*Raseinichi*, 10)

Sensitive soul, and like a vital spirit, *tamashii*.

*Tamashii* according to the *Muromachi Dictionary* is in English translation “that which is believed to reside in the body of living beings and man and that governs their life and spirit”.<sup>21</sup>

While in *Rahonichi* the aspect linked to vital functions is preferred, and the primary definition is given through a paraphrase, in *Raseinichi* the less elaborated translation refers to the spiritual aspect.

Thus, with “Anima” they meant what sustains the life of beings, and also the ‘spiritual’ principle of man, according to what was current in contemporary European culture. Surprisingly, the Christian conception that the soul is created by God, is immortal and is responsible for life after death

19 All English translations were made by the Author.

20 Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of souls: nutritive soul, sensitive soul and rational soul.

21 *Muromachi jidai hen*. Vol. 2 of *Jidaibetsu kokugo daijiten*. Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1989, 1083-4..

is not found in the dictionaries. However, it is to be found in *Dochirina Kirishitan*<sup>22</sup> where we find:

Ninguen no cotouoba nanito funbet xerareqeruzo?

Ninguenua xiqixin bakari ni arazu, fatçuru coto naqi ANIMA uo motçu nari. Cono ANIMA ua xiqixin ni inochi uo ataye, tatoi xiqixin ua tçuchi faini naru to yütomo cono ANIMA ua vouaru cono naxi: tada jen aku ni xitagatte goxõ no curacu ni azzucaru mono nari. (10-11)

Q 'How can a human being distinguish (good from evil)?'

A 'The human being is not only composed of the physical body. He always has a SOUL. This SOUL gives life to the physical body, and for example, although the physical body returns (after death) to be earth and ashes, this SOUL has no end. Following good and evil sets the premises for the sufferings or bliss of life after death.'

And

... varera ga ANIMA ua tada ittai nite arinagara, mitçuno xeicon ari: fitoçuniua Memoria tote voboyetaru cotouo vomoi idasu xei, futaçuniua Entendimento tote jenacuuo vaqimaye funbet suru xei, mitçuniua Vontade tote yoqito vomô cotouo nozomi, axiqito vomô cotouo qirai monouo aisuru xei. Cacuno gotocu ANIMA ua ittai narito iyedomo mitçuno xei Potentia aru gotocu. (85-7)

... although the SOUL is one, it has three spiritual forces: the first is MEMORIA (memory) the ability to remember things, the second is ENTENDIMENTO (judgment) the ability to distinguish good from evil, the third is the VONTADE (will) which is the ability to tend to think about what is believed to be good and to despise the thought of what is bad. In this way, the SOUL though is only one, has three POTENTIA (powers).

---

22 Kojima Yukie (1966). *Kõhon, Dochirina kirishitan*. Fukui: Fukui-Kokugogaku-Gurûpu, 10-11, 85-7.



## 4 Other Keywords of Christianity

In *Rahonichi* we find the following translations:

**The Gospel** (Euangelum): *Qissō*, and in *Raseinichi*: *Qissō, von minori*.<sup>23</sup> The word *qissō* (today *kissō*) is interesting: in Japanese it is written 吉左右 and is formed by three characters meaning: 1. ‘good luck’ (吉), ‘left’ (左), ‘right’ (右). In other words: ‘Good luck (news) left and right (everywhere)’. Presently this word means ‘good news’, ‘happy news’, and is a synonym of *kippō* 吉報. As a matter of fact, *kissō* is the literal translation of *Evangelium* that comes from Greek and means *eu-* ‘good’, ‘felicitous’, and *aggelion* for ‘news’: the Gospel is the ‘good news’ of Jesus coming on the earth and bringing the message of salvation to men. One wonders if the Japanese could understand correctly the meaning of this translation...

**The Church** (Ecclesia) is: “1. *Ixxecaini fanyei xitaru Christãono cotouo yŭ*” (It is said Christianity that which flourish all over the world); “2. *tera*” (Buddhist temple).

**Grace** (Gratia) is: “*Vôxō, 2.a.von ataye, gouon*”. *Vôxō* is 応召 (today *ōshō*) that means ‘answer to a call’ (of a prayer, or of faith), while *von ataye* is: *von* (honorific prefix) plus 与え (today *atae*), that is ‘something given’; *gouon*: *gou* (honorific prefix) plus *on* 恩, that is ‘benefit’, ‘gratitude’. In any case the translation is based on the idea of ‘receiving a favour, or a bless’.

**Prayer** (Oratio) is: “*Monogatari, cotoba, dangui, cotouari. Qinen, tanomi, negai*”. *Monogatari* (物語) is ‘tale, story, narration’; *cotoba* (言葉) ‘words’; *dangui* (談義) ‘sermon, preaching’; *cotouari* (断り) ‘warning’; *Qinen* (祈念) ‘prayer’; *tanomi* (頼み) ‘request’; *negai* (願い) ‘request’, ‘wish’.

**Conscience** (Conscientia) is: “*Vaga xosano yoxi axiuo chiyeno ficari vomotte togamuru tocorono xosauo yŭ*” (it is called the behaviour that alerts us on what is good and bad in our actions, based on of the light of intelligence).

**Devil** (diabolus) is: “*Tengu, tenma*”. *Tengu* (天狗) (long-nosed goblin) is popular in Japanese tales; *tenma* (天魔), ‘evil spirit, demon’. Both terms are of Buddhist origin.

23 *Von minori* means: ‘fruit’ in honorary form.

**Paradise** (Paradisus) is: “*Sono. – qedamonono voro, vel buono iqesu. –Deus Adamuo voqitamaixi yorocobi iũmanno tocoro*”. *Sono* is 園, a general term for ‘garden’. *Qedamonono voro, vel buono iqesu*: corral where animals are kept, or ponds where fish are bred. *Deus Adamuo voqitamaixi yorocobi iũmanno tocoro*: the place full of pleasure where God placed Adam.

**Hell** (Infernus) is: “*Gigocu*”, that is *jigoku* 地獄, which is also a Buddhist term for the hell.

For **Sin** there are two entries:

1. **Peccatum**: “*Toga, ayamari*”. *Toga* (咎) is ‘error’, ‘mistake’, ‘fault’, and *ayamari* (誤り) is a synonym.
2. **Peccatus**: “*Tano tçumauro vocasu coto uo yũ. Togauo vocasu, vel ayamaru*”. In this case, a specific kind of sin is presented in the sentence *tano tçumauro vocasu*, which means, ‘have intercourse with the wife of somebody else’, that is the sin of adultery. The other two definitions are the same as for no. 1.

**Cross** (Crux) is: “*Varerauo xeme curuximuru fodono coto*” (That which is used in order to persecute and make us suffer).

**Piety** (Pietas) is: “*Tenxu (Deus), coqiõ, voyani taysuru (taisuru) vya-mai. – voya cõco (cõcõ), vel xinrui, coqiõuo vomõ taixet*” (Respect and devotion towards God, the fatherland and the parents. Devotion towards our parents, or love for the relatives and the fatherland).

**Love** (Amor) is: “*Taixet (大切), vomoi (思い)*”. Interestingly, the word for ‘love’ is not translated with common words like *ai* (愛), *koi* (恋), *suki* (好き), but with *taixet* (today *taisetsu*) whose meaning is ‘important’, or ‘urgent’. In other words, something that is pressing and well present in our mind. Probably this translation is due to the fact that the words for ‘love’ were not suited to express a lofty love, addressed to God, and the Jesuits preferred to use a ‘special’ word, with an implicit meaning for ‘love’.

## 5 Considerations and Concluding Remarks

Below, some considerations related to the translations seen above:

1. Translations rarely correspond to modern ones.
2. More generic terms are used than those used nowadays and more often they are common terms of everyday language. Besides, many *wago* are present, while today there are many more *kango* words.

3. Common words are often used, while modern nomenclature tend to use almost exclusively a very technical terminology with words often uncommon in everyday language.
4. Limited use of Buddhist lexicon.
5. Wide use of paraphrases.
6. Use of multiple synonyms for the same Latin term, perhaps due to the desire to convey the correct meaning.
7. Often translation in *Rahonichi* and *Raseinichi* do not correspond.
8. Generally, the translations present in *Raseinichi* are less accurate. *Rahonichi* has a more extended and more descriptive lexicon.
9. Sometimes translations have a very general character.
10. Lastly, it is well evident that cultural differences are responsible for ambiguous translations.

As for the translation strategies, we can summarise them in the following four variants:

1. Phonetic transcription of Western words by means of Japanese *kana* (*Dochiriina Kirishitan*).
2. Translation by the most similar indigenous term (*Raseinichi*, *Rahonichi*).
3. Paraphrase (*Raseinichi*, *Rahonichi*).
4. Use of a semantic shift (love → *taixet*).

As regards the first type, there are very few phonetic transcriptions of Western words in the dictionaries, while we find a large quantity of them in many *kirishitanban* where the strategy of maintaining Latin terminology is very widespread. In particular, we find really many of them in *Dochiriina Kirishitan*, which is almost a sort of presentation of the fundamental Christian vocabulary. In this case, probably the translators preferred to use Latin words, rather than using terms of Buddhism, in order not to generate erroneous understandings. I think that the dictionaries literally embarked on the task of 'translating' the Christian lexicon into Japanese, while the *kirishitanban* had among their aims that of familiarising the Japanese with the original terminology of Christianity.

The second type concerns the use of similar indigenous terms, of which we find considerable quantity. They are often terms of the common language, such as *toga*, *ayamari* for sin, or *monogatari*, *cotoba*, *dangui*, *cotouari* for prayer and so on. This strategy has the advantage of being easily understandable for ordinary people, much more than abstruse technical terms. This type of vocabulary, very often uses *wago* words. However, also Buddhist terms are not rare: i.e. *tengu*, *tenma* for devil.

The third type regards paraphrases<sup>24</sup> of which there are quite a lot.

Generally, the paraphrase is used when there is no single word suitable in Japanese and therefore a sort of explanation is considered necessary. In some cases, to the paraphrase, a translation with a Japanese word follows to better define or delimit the concept.

The fourth type is a translation that use particular strategies, such as *taixet* (大切) for love.<sup>25</sup> In such cases, the difficulty of expressing the Christian concept of emotional sentiment towards God and neighbour is evident.

In conclusion, during the so-called Japanese 'Christian century', when European missionaries endeavoured to convert the Japanese to Christianity, they were confronted with the huge task of translating technical terms of Christianity into Japanese language. Two very different cultures came for the first time in contact and serious problems of understanding were to be solved. The Jesuits, who were learned people with a high level of instruction, tried to overcome the linguistic impasse by implementing sophisticated translation strategies.

Whether they were successful or not in this enterprise, to which they devoted so much effort and great competence, is a question that is debated today. In any case, their efforts remain an interesting example of a translational approach to distant cultures: they can teach us which were and still are the problems and the unavoidable difficulties inherent in cultural exchanges.

My essay is limited to the analysis of only a few words of a specialised lexicon, but through these few examples it wants to highlight some of the concrete problems that can arise when it comes to cultural exchanges, a field of study that today is at the centre of the debate on transcultural studies.

---

24 With 'paraphrase' here I mean the formulation of a concept through an explanatory sentence.

25 By the way, the modern term for love *ai* 愛 translates *caritas*.

---

**Bibliography**

- Boxer, Charles R. (1993). *The Christian Century in Japan*. 3rd ed. Manchester: Carcanet.
- Cooper, Michael (1974). *Rodrigues the Interpreter – An Early Jesuit in Japan and China*. New York: Weatherhill.
- Cooper, Michael (2005). *The Japanese Mission to Europe, 1582-1590. The Journey of Four Samurai Boys Through Portugal, Spain and Italy*. University of Michigan: Global Oriental.
- Ebisawa Arimichi et al. (eds) (1970). *Kirishitansho haiyasho*. Vol. 25 of *Nihon Shisō Taikei*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- Elison, George (1973). *Deus Destroyed; The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan*. Council of East Asian Studies. Harvard University: Harvard University Press.
- Higashibaba, Ikuo (2001). *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kojima Yukie (1966). *Kōhon, Dochirina kirishitan*. Fukui: Fukui-Kokugogaku-Gurūpu.
- Ruiz-de-Medina, Juan (1995). *Documentos del Japón, 1558-1562*. Roma: Instituto Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús.
- Schurhammer, George S.J. (1929). *Das Kirchliche Sprachproblem in der Japanischen Jesuitenmission des 16 und 17 Jahrhunderts*. Tokyo: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens.
- Schurhammer, Georg S.J. (1973-82). *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times, 1506-1552*, 4 vols. Roma: The Jesuit Historical Institute.
- Schütte, Franz Josef (1968). *Introductio ad historiam societatis Jesu in Japonia (1549-1650)*. Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu.
- Schütte, Franz Josef (1975). *Monumenta Historica Japoniae*, vol. 1. Roma: Monumenta historica societatis Jesu.
- Doi Tadao (1974). “16-7 seiki ni okeru Nihon Iezusukai fukyō jō no kyōkai yōgo no mondai”. *Kirishitan kenkyū*, 15. Kirishitan bunka kenkyūkai.
- Wicki, José SJ (ed.) (1976). *Fróis, Luís, SJ (1976-1984), Historia de Japam*, 5 vols. Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional.

