



BIBLIOTECA UNIVERSITARIA DI GENOVA – PERCORSI TEMATICI

UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)

di A. Pisani

Schede autori Attività missionaria

Joao Rodrigues Girao

João Rodrigues (Sernancelhe, 1558, 1561 or 1562 - Macau, 1633 or 1634) known in Japan as João Rodrigues "Tçuzu" (interpreter)[1] was a Portuguese Jesuit priest who carried out missionary work in Japan, having distinguished himself in linguistic studies.[2] He wrote several books, including a Japanese grammar work entitled *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam* in 1604, and he is wrongly supposed to have been the main compiler of the *Nippo Jisho or Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam*, the first Japanese to Portuguese dictionary published in 1603[3] He was born in Portugal; when he was 15 years old he moved to Japan and enrolled in the Jesuit seminary.

Biography

João Rodrigues sailed from Portugal to India around 1574 when he was 14 years old.[4] Shortly after his arrival from Macau to Japan in 1577, he joined the novitiate in the Society of Jesus. He devoted himself to teaching grammar and Latin while learning the Japanese language. A few years later he completed his studies in theology in Nagasaki.

Once ordained priest in Macau in 1580 he returned to Japan, where he became a merchant, diplomat, politician and interpreter between the Japanese and foreign sailors. His fluency in eastern languages earned him a special relationship with key Japanese leaders during the civil war and the consolidation of the shogunate of Tokugawa Ieyasu. In this period he witnessed the expansion of the Portuguese presence and the arrival of the first English, William Adams.

During this period, he wrote his observations on Japanese life, including political events of the emergence of the shogunate and a detailed description of the tea ceremony. His writings reveal an open mind about the culture of his host country, including praise of the holiness of the Buddhist monks.

João Rodrigues was expelled from Japan in 1610 as result of an incident with the Portuguese ship "Madre de Deus". The ship had been involved in a conflict in Macau in 1609, in which Japanese sailors were killed. Upon returning to Nagasaki, the Japanese authorities tried to tackle and arrest the captain. In the melee that followed, the ship was burned and sank while trying to leave the port, and in retaliation for this incident Christian missionaries were expelled.

Returning to Macau, where he died in 1633 or 1634, he devoted himself to the research of the origins of the Christian communities established at the site since the thirteenth century.

In popular culture

The character of Martin Alvito in the James Clavell book *Shōgun* and the adapted TV miniseries *Shōgun* is loosely based on Rodrigues, while the protagonist figure is based on William Adams. He was portrayed in the miniseries by Damien Thomas. Clavell appears to have named the character Vasco Rodrigues to acknowledge João Rodrigues in a similar way as he gave Vasco Rodrigues' Japanese wife the name "Gracia" to honor Hosokawa Gracia (Hosokawa was the real name of the character "Mariko" in the book).

References

[1] Not to be mistaken for contemporary priest João "Girão" Rodrigues (1559-1629)



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[2] Cooper, Michael. Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China. New York: Weatherhill, 1973

[3] Whether Rodrigues involved in compilation is suspectable. For a recent discussion of the compiler of the dictionary, see p. 277 of Zwartjes, Otto. Portuguese Missionary Grammars in Asia, Africa and Brazil, 1550–1800. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

[4] Cooper 20–24, 33–34.

Cfr.:

Wikipedia.en

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