Madam Marie Gimard Under the Ayuthaya of the Seventeenth Century*

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Few people realize that Madam Marie Gimard, known by the Thai people as Tao Thong Geep Mah,[1] was a Japanese woman. In order to discuss her eventful life, I must also mention her husband, Phaulcon, and the history of Christianity in Japan. Japanese people used to use the Portuguese word for Christians, "Cristao," because it was Portuguese culture and religion that was first introduced to Japan from the West. Japanese Christians were later suppressed by Hideyoshi and the early Tokugawa shôguns, for they viewed Christianity as a threat to political unity. As a result of ruthless persecution by the shôgunate government, only a few communities of secret Christians survived. Marie was born in Ayuthaya, and her mother was the daughter of a Japanese family of "hidden Christians." Marie was eighteen years old when she was married to Constance Phaulcon in 1682, so we can estimate that Marie was born in 1664, and that her mother was born around 1640. Let us look back on the history of Japan and of Christianity in Japan at that time.

It was through Christianity that the Japanese and the European people began to have personal contact with each other. Christianity was first introduced by the famous Jesuit missionary Saint Francis Xavier in 1549. It is no exaggeration to say that he was not only a great man of religion, but also a great politician. Before discussing Xavier's activities in Japan, I would first like to give some general historical background.

The introduction of Christianity was preceded by the arrival of the Portuguese people in 1543, whose ship drifted ashore on Tanegashima, an island south of Kyūshū. Soon more Portuguese commercial ships arrived in Kyûshû, the southern part of

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[1] ท้าวทองกีบม้า

Japan. People in Kyūshū may have learned about Christianity by seeing the Portuguese sailors praying, but it was formally evangelized when Xavier landed in Kagoshima, the southern tip of Kyūshū. Xavier, born in 1506, was the son of an aristocrat in the Kingdom of Navarre, which is now a part of Spain. When he was studying in Paris, he met Ignatius Loyola, and he formed the Jesuit Society with Loyola and five others in 1534.

Xavier started his evangelical mission in India and Southeast Asia. A young Japanese man that he met in Malacca made him interested in going to Japan. The young man's name was Anjirô (Yajirô in Japanese). Anjirô had committed murder in Japan, and had fled the country by boarding a Portuguese ship to Goa. The captain of the ship was a devout Christian, and he talked to Anjirô about God. Anjirô was so deeply moved by his words that he felt the need to repent for his sins. He became a student at a missionary school in Goa and became baptized. When Xavier met Anjirô at Malacca in 1547, he asked him if he could evangelize in Japan. Anjirô replied: "Japanese people go by reasons. They wouldn't change their religion unless they are fully convinced." With these words of Anjirô, Xavier decided to set out on his evangelical mission to Japan.

It was the most turbulent time of Japanese history when Xavier came to Japan, but he successfully accomplished his mission as a pioneer of Christian evangelists in Japan. Aside from evangelism, he contributed much to the political and economic development of Portugal. Although he died of sickness before fully accomplishing his goals, he left his followers valuable information about Japanese culture, Japanese value systems, and the way one should approach Japanese intellectuals and authorities. For over forty years following Xavier's arrival in Japan, Christianity was evangelized freely and actively, and the number of Japanese Christians had significantly increased. Trade with Portuguese ships were making good profit, and the evangelists who came on the ships included not only those from the Jesuit Society but also the Franciscans and missionaries from other sects, whose nationalities included Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian.

At this time, Japan was in a chaotic period of civil wars. In spite of the fragile and volatile political climate, Xavier managed to earn the support of *daimyô* (feudal lords) in his evangelical missions. Before Xavier died, he left his successors with much practical information on how to deal with feudal lords, making it possible for these followers to spread Christianity through Japan in just forty years.

Because of the efforts of Xavier and other missionaries, many people in Japan converted to Christianity, even among feudal lords, such as Ohmura Sumitada, Arima Harunobu, Ohtomo Sôrin, and so on. By 1547, almost all the people under the domain of Lord Ohtomo had converted to Christianity and destroyed shrines and temples. For feudal lords, Christianity provided a way to absorb foreign culture, benefit from foreign trade, and acquire firearms from abroad. Many churches were built in Osaka, Nagasaki, and especially in Kyoto, which became a center for the missionaries. The Christian population in Kyoto rose from fifteen hundred to fifteen thousand.

At this time, the most powerful of all feudal lords was Oda Nobunaga. His great

ambition was to bring the entire country under his power, but two obstacles stood in his way. They were the peasant uprisings and the strong power of Hieizan, a very influential sect of Buddists in Japan. In order to work against the opposition, Nobunaga used and supported Christianity to import foreign culture and strengthen his power. Because of Nobunaga's policy, Western culture flourished during his reign. Nobunaga died in 1582; other supporters of Christianity such as Ohmura and Ohtomo also died shortly after. After Nobunaga's death, Toyotomi Hideyoshi seized power. At first, he followed a similar policy to Nobunaga's, but later he became anti-Christian. The suffering of Christians in Japan began: he issued an order to expel the Jesuits from the country, and confiscated their head office in Nagasaki. Hideyoshi felt threatened by the converting of so many feudal lords and their people to Christianity, and feared that Christianity would become an obstacle which would prevent order in the country. However, more missionaries managed to come to Japan, disguising themselves as merchants, because Hideyoshi did not ban free trade.

In 1596, the Spanish ship *Saint Felipe* drifted ashore in Japan. Seeing the cargo of the ship being confiscated by the Japanese authorities, one of the Spanish crew warned the Japanese of the strength of Spain and her vast colonial territories. When Hideyoshi heard this, he realized the grand plan of Spain and Portugal to invade and colonize Japan. Hideyoshi captured all Christians on board, and executed them in Nagasaki. Twentysix other Christians, including seventeen Japanese, were also martyred in Nagasaki.

Hideyoshi died in 1598; and Tokugawa Ieyasu[1] seized power after the battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Ieyasu also placed a ban on Christianity, while still permitting free overseas trade. The East India Company was established around this time, and many more foreign ships came to Japan. Despite the shôgunate's prohibition, many missionaries were secretly on board, including persons like Miura Anshin, or William Adams, in the movie *Shôgun*. In 1690, a Dutch trading post was opened in the Nagasaki port of Hirato, marking the official opening of trade between Japan and the Netherlands. At the same time, Japan concluded a friendship treaty with Siam, and four ships sailed every year between Nagasaki and Ayuthaya. The traffic between the Dutch trading post in Ayuthaya and the one in Hirato had increased, and soon after the Japanese trading post was opened in Ayuthaya.

In the meantime, the shôgunate's persecution of Christians in Japan became more and more severe. In 1614, over four hundred Jesuit Christians, including several feudal lords, were deported to Southeast Asia. In 1623, fifty Christians were burnt alive in Edo (now Tokyo), and three hundred and forty Christians were executed in Nagasaki four years later. Since 1622, the shôgunate had been using a test of faith to find Christians: people were asked to step on a plate which had a Christian symbol If they resisted, it proved that they were Christians, and then they were arrested. However, there were still a number of Christians who secretly prayed to the figure of Maria shaped as a female Buddha. Such people were called "hidden Christians."

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1 (1542—1616) Founder of Tokugawa Shogunate (Edo Bakufu) in Edo (Now Tokyo)

In order to assure the stability of their regime, the Tokugawa shôguns closed the country to eliminate all sources of possible challenge from the outside world. In 1636, overseas Japanese were prohibited from returning to Japan for fear that they might reintroduce the virus of Christianity, and Japanese ships were limited to smaller vessels unsuited for ocean voyages. Relations with the Western world were limited to trade with Holland through a small Dutch trading post in Nagasaki, where the trade was strictly supervised. Thus Japan entered into more than two centuries of self-imposed seclusion and the prohibition of Christianity. All trade with Siam was terminated until the friendship treaty was signed again in 1887 : and as we know, the celebration of the centennial of the restored Thai – Japan relationship was just held two years ago.

Because of this policy of seclusion, many Japanese Christians were expelled from their homeland, and fled to various places in Southeast Asia, such as Annam (now called Vietnam), Phnom Penh in Cambodia, Luzon in the Philippines, Batavia in Java, and Ayuthaya in Siam. This is how Madam Marie's ancestors came from Japan over to Ayuthaya. Her mother was born in Japan, and she was still a little girl when she left her country. She was described as "a girl with a pure and noble image." Marie's family were "hidden Christians" in Japan, holding a strong belief in Christ. Marie had received a very strict Christian education from her mother and grandmother.

Marie's husband, Phaulcon, was born in Greece, and moved to London when he was eleven. He was employed by the East India Company as a cabin boy on a trade ship to Southeast Asia. His diligence and talent made him an attaché at the British trading post in Ayuthaya, and he later seized an opportunity to serve at the Royal Palace in Ayuthaya. It was around this time that Phaulcon met Marie. Influenced by Marie, who was a pious Christian, Phaulcon was baptized. On May 2, 1682, they were married at a Portuguese church in Ayuthaya.

Phaulcon won the recognition and favor of King Narai of Siam, and was promoted to the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, and later became the Prime Minister. For his great achievements, King Narai awarded him a great mansion with a chapel and guesthouses, where Phaulcon entertained the French delegation to Siam. Phaulcon's success owed much to his wife, Marie. At the parties, she would serve cakes for which recipe had been passed down by her mother and grandmother, and some of them, such as fawy thawng,[1] thong jip,[2] and thong yot,[3] are still popular among the Thai people today. When the Portuguese came to Japan, they taught the Japanese how to make Portuguese cakes. Some of the Japanese cakes we eat today have strong influence from Portugal, Marie was taught by her mother to make such Portuguese-Japanese cakes, which she then taught Thai people to make. There are cakes in Kyôto and Kyûshû that resemble fawy thawng. As a devout Christian, Madam Marie contributed

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1 ฝอยทอง

2 ทองหยิบ

3 ทองหยอด

greatly to the Siam community through charity activities and the missionary school she founded. The strength of her religious belief can be seen in several holy paintings on the wall of the church inside the Phaulcon's residence, which she had commissioned from a painter in the Japanese town in Ayuthaya.

It is characteristic of Japanese women that after marriage they devote themselves to supporting their husbands, educating their children, and protecting their families. As a Japanese woman living in Thailand, I find that there is some similarity between my life now in Bangkok and that of Marie in the seventeenth century. At her husband's death, Madam Marie demonstrated strong qualities as a Japanese woman, as the wife of Phaulcon, and as a devout Christian. Phaulcon was arrested when a revolution took place in Siam. On May 18, 1688, Phaulcon was informed of the revolution while he was quietly having dinner with his family. Before he went out to the Palace to save the King, he shared his last prayer with Marie in the chapel. He said : "The final moment has come at last. Marie, thank you for the love have shown all these years. Your faith in Christ has opened my eyes, and made me realize what the true will of God is. I have been blinded by my ambitions. Now I am willing to devote my life to save the King." Marie replied, tightly holding the cross : "Hurry to the Palace for the King. Your position was given to you by the King, but it was also God's will. It is because of God's power that you are not afraid of death. Now, please hurry to your King who loved you so much. The glory of the Lord will shine upon your way."

Phaulcon was executed on June 5, 1688. Marie and her four-year-old son, George, were protected by the French Navy, and with the help of Minister Phra Wisut Sunthorn, they returned to Marie's mother and grandmother in the Japanese town in Ayuthaya. After peace returned to Ayuthaya, Marie was ordered to take charge of cooking and education in the Palace. She spent the rest of her life quietly in the Palace, teaching Siamese women how to make Portuguese- and Japanese-style cakes, and supervising the missionary school she founded.