

Shusaku Endo in France

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遠藤周作とフランス

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遠藤周作は1950年から1953年までフランスに留学しました。『フランスの大学生』は1953年に出版されましたが、この本はフランスに留学した経験に基づいて書かれています。遠藤は特に、フランス人が日本人に対して持つ固定観念にいらだちました。こうした固定観念は日本文学だけでなく、日本映画に対しても現れました。この作品は筆者の留学体験を基に、異国の文化に対応できないまま、そこで暮らさなければならぬことの問題を深く考察しています。

France no Daigakusei was published in July 1953, shortly after Endo returned from two and a half years as a foreign student studying 20th century French Christian novelists at Lyon University. In his afterword, dated May 1953, Endo states that the most important point he learned while studying in France was to realize that his guiding principle in literature would be to courageously record with obstinate curiosity the true nature of human beings. In an afterword written for a new edition of the book published in 1977, Endo admitted to feeling embarrassed about what he had written twenty years before, but was determined not to change anything or make excuses for his younger

self.

The first section of *France no Daigakusei* is comprised of what Endo calls *reportage*. In an early section of the book, Endo mentions that Japanese friends had written to him asking about what French students thought about Japan. He had to admit that ordinary French people, as well as his fellow students, had no particular interest in Japan at all. At Lyon University, there was one Japanese course offered in the Modern Languages department. Endo knew the lecturer and learned that there was only one student enrolled in the course, and she was there only to get units for her major in linguistics. The textbook for her class was a book used by Japanese elementary school first graders ⁽¹⁾.

Endo also mentions three priests of his acquaintance in Lyon who were eager to go to Japan to propagate the Catholic faith, having read St. Francis Xavier's letter of 1548 detailing the suitability of preaching Christianity to the Japanese. In this letter, written one year before he entered Japan, Francis Xavier mentioned a Portuguese merchant who had told him that "the whole nation in Japan surpasses others in its desire for knowledge," and that the Japanese were open-minded and willing to listen to reasonable arguments and proofs ⁽²⁾.

Endo talked to fellow students at Lyon University about the news coming out of the Far East: the Korean War, the war in Indochina, and General Douglas MacArthur's dual roles as head of both the American occupation of Japan and the Korean war effort. Endo noticed that French students were more concerned with the war in Indochina, where the French military was trying to put down the guerrilla war

for independence there. The French government was not drafting students because of the war's unpopularity in France, but students actively discussed the rights of the people in Indochina to have their own independent countries.

When a French newspaper used the title “sayonara, MacArthur” for an article about General MacArthur’s dismissal from his post in Japan by President Harry Truman, Endo tells us that the word “sayonara”, mispronounced as “shayonara” spread quickly around a nearby girl’s school as fashionable slang for a short while, but that was the only instance of local interest in Japan that he could think of⁽³⁾.

Endo was occasionally invited to visit French families for dinner in their homes, and he was appalled at their ignorance about Japan. The kindly French families would give him an opportunity to talk about Japan, but he would be taken aback when he was asked why Japan allows polygamy and binds the feet of the women, confusing old Chinese customs with those of Japan. Having heard that Japanese houses were made of paper and wood, they would ask Endo if there weren’t any buildings built of stone. As for well-educated French intellectuals, their ideas about Japan seemed to come from Pierre Loti’s 1887 novel *Madame Chrysantheme*, and Puccini’s 1904 opera *Madama Butterfly*. Sometimes the French family would bring out their Japanese-style china or lacquerware, which would often be decorated with pictures of Mount Fuji or geisha. The wife would grin at Endo and say “I decided to use these plates for you today,” but this use of common Japanese stereotypes would fill him with sadness and embarrassment⁽⁴⁾.

Why should Endo have been embarrassed to see scenes of Mount Fuji and geishas? These images came to France from Japan when European artists discovered Japanese wood-block prints in the 1860s. Pierre Loti's story of a western man meeting and then discarding a Japanese woman in Nagasaki was serialized in the *Le Figaro* newspaper in 1887, and published the following year to tremendous success. It was translated into other European languages, as well as into English and led to variations on the story by other novelists⁽⁵⁾.

Along with Puccini's opera, the story contributed artistic details in themes in *Japonisme*, Japanese-influenced French art, which played an important part in French Impressionism, which of course was familiar to all French people, through the paintings themselves, as well as commercial art and advertising.

Endo was also disturbed at what he found in a French junior high school history and geography textbook. A photograph of the emperor holding a sword is shown at the time of his enthronement ceremony in 1928. Then the history of Japan's industrialization and invasion of China and Korea was described. It is not clear what Endo would have expected to see in a French school textbook about Japan, but Endo came to realize that most French people knew nothing more about Japan than what little they might have learned at school, and what they learned from popular culture, especially films. Endo mentions that old war movies were shown constantly in the local movie theaters. He mentions watching eight of these anti-Japanese movies and noting that each of them dealt with atrocities committed

by Japanese soldiers during the war. The Japanese soldiers were played by Chinese actors, wearing what appeared to be Chinese military uniforms, and spoke strange Japanese, while bowing very low in front of a photograph of the emperor. The Japanese soldiers' every act of violence elicited from the ladies in the movie theater cries of "Oh, how terrible!" When a Japanese soldier was shot dead in a river, Endo heard a round of applause ⁽⁶⁾.

After World War II, American film studios started exporting their films to France to meet the postwar demand for entertainment. Among the huge mass of films made in the early 1940s, were a large number of war movies showing the Japanese enemy as bloodthirsty savages and fanatical in giving their lives in suicide missions against American military forces in the battles of the South Pacific theater. Some American films dealt with the Japanese invasion of China and the islands of the South Pacific as well. For example, in the 1941 film *They Met in Bombay*, Clark Gable helps Chinese refugees escaping from the Japanese advance on Hong Kong. In the 1942 film *Prisoner of Japan*, Japanese soldiers occupying a South Pacific island murder a boy for no particular reason ⁽⁷⁾.

As Endo got to know his fellow students more intimately, they dropped their guard in talking about their negative image of Japanese. Polite French friends would first compliment Endo on the beauty of Japanese scenery, Mount Fuji, and Japanese hard work, but when Endo gave them an irritated look at this recitation of Japanese stereotypes, these fellow students would reveal what Endo took to be their true feelings about Japanese. Endo was informed on more

than one occasion that Japanese were violent fanatics, particularly in reference to the Japanese military use of one-man submarines and airplanes for suicide attacks, and would tie these actions to Japanese psychology.

The French public may not have been aware of American wartime propaganda documentaries produced by the American government, but American films drew on the attitudes portraying Japanese people as ready to willingly die for the emperor, and sometimes used official film footage of kamikaze airplane attacks on American ships.

Endo described a conversation that he had one evening with his university friends.

“Do you guys really think Japanese are fanatics?”

“Generally speaking, we do think so.”

“The war has been over for five years. Is there any reason such anti-Japanese movies should still be shown? Do you only learn about Japanese people from crude textbooks and anti-Japanese movies?”

“That is not our fault. Firstly, we do not learn anything from Japan. When it comes to art and philosophy, Japan might learn something from France!!”

“Hey, don’t make a joke. Japan has unique art that France can’t match.”

“Yeah, so why don’t you introduce it to France? Even we want to learn about the art of Japan, particularly contemporary

literature. We think there is surely something. However, Japan does not give us the opportunity at all. There is not even one volume of Japanese contemporary literature in the foreign literature series which Gabriel Marcel edits either. Japan only teaches us about Mount Fuji and kamikaze airplanes and nothing else, so it is impossible to learn anything else about Japan⁽⁸⁾.”

Gabriel Marcel was a popular writer and philosopher and known as a “Christian existentialist” and close friend of Francois Mauriac, whose Catholic novels Endo was studying. Marcel was particularly interested in man’s place in a universe where God seemed to be silent, a theme that Endo would develop in his own novels⁽⁹⁾.

Is it possible that there were no contemporary Japanese novels in French translation? The craze for *Japonisme* had brought translations of classical Japanese literature and poetry into print by Leon de Rosny (1837~1914), Judith Gautier (1845~1914), and Michel Revon (1867~1947)⁽¹⁰⁾.

Revon’s *Anthologie de la littérature japonaise des origines au XXe siècle*, published in 1910 and still currently in print, translates sections of the *Kojiki*, *Manyoshu*, *Heike Monogatari*, works by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, haiku by Basho, and much more⁽¹¹⁾.

Endo mentions the Cannes Film Festival, which started in 1947 and takes place each year in May, and was surprised that the French newspapers reported on it in great detail. Endo tells us that Japan sent a short film entitled *Ine no Issho*, which Endo describes as an excellent

cultural film, but not one that would draw the interest of a foreign audience. *Ine no isho* is a 21-minute documentary on rice planting, made in 1950 and directed by Ota Nikichi, which was Japan's entry at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival ⁽¹²⁾. Japan's *Jigokumon* would go on to win the first prize in 1954, but until this beautiful period film in color was released outside of Japan, the film studios of Japan had been reluctant to export their films. The studios had no confidence that Japanese films that didn't show stereotypical Japanese culture could be of any interest to foreign audiences. As film critic Mike Grost has pointed out, films like those of director Yasujiro Ozu were thought to be "too Japanese" for foreigners to appreciate or be interested in ⁽¹³⁾.

The Toho Film Studio was one film company that decided to expand overseas in the 1950s by buying and operating their own movie theaters. They started in the United States with a theater each in Los Angeles, New York, and Honolulu. They showed period films like those of director Akira Kurosawa and were instrumental in introducing Japanese films to America. However, some film critics in Japan complained that Japanese films were being slanted toward overseas audiences by increasing the violence and bloodletting and deemphasizing the traditional Japanese themes of loyalty and quiet endurance ⁽¹⁴⁾.

Endo doesn't mention period films, but rather recommends two current films of 1950 that he wished Japan had sent to the Cannes Film Festival so that his French friends could see how ordinary Japanese people thought and felt. The films he mentions are *Akatsuki no Dasso* (*Escape at Dawn*) and *Mata au Hi made* (*Until We Meet*

Again). *Akatsuki no Dasso* was directed by Taniguchi Senkichi. Kurosawa Akira was involved in the early stages of the script, but his name was taken off the credits because the script had to be rewritten a number of times before the American occupation censors approved the final script. Ikebe Ryo plays a soldier captured by the Chinese while serving with the Japanese army in Manchuria. He escapes and goes back to his unit, but is treated with contempt by his fellow soldiers for letting himself get captured in the first place. The soldier starts a relationship with a prostitute played by Yamaguchi Yoshiko, who was also known as Ri Koran in earlier film roles and as Shirley Yamaguchi in later films. This film was an anti-war story, which may be why Endo thought it a good film.

The other film, *Mata au Hi made* was directed by Imai Tadashi, and became an instant hit in Japan. The story opens with the hero, played by Okada Eiji, describing how the war kept him apart from his fiancée. They meet during an air raid on Tokyo and the film portrays the couple as victims of the war, as she is killed in an air raid and he dies in battle ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Endo may not have been aware at this time that the Motion Picture Association of Japan had actually selected *Mata au Hi made* when the Cannes Film Festival asked for a Japanese film. Unfortunately, the studio responsible for the film did not have enough money to prepare a print of the film with French subtitles. Later, the Venice Film Festival invited Japan to send a film, but there was still no subtitled print of this film, so Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* was sent instead, and it won the top prize at the festival ⁽¹⁶⁾.

These films that Endo mentions are typical of postwar Japanese films which showed ordinary Japanese people as “mere victims of the times in which they live,” at the mercy of historical forces beyond their control. One reason why the producers of *Akatsuki no Dasso* had to rewrite its script a number of times was that the American occupation authorities objected to the characters showing only a passive hatred of war rather than opposing it actively, and concentrating on the suffering of the Japanese characters more than on the suffering of the Chinese ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The most popular of these post-war films depicted the Japanese children who suffered through the war in such productions as the 1952 film *Genbaku no Ko*, about the children who suffered in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima or *Himeyuri no To*, about student nurses who died in the American assault on Okinawa in the last months of World War II ⁽¹⁸⁾. Even if such films had been exported to France, it is unlikely that French audiences would have been sympathetic to Japanese victims of the war.

Endo wraps up this section of his reportage by pointing out that most French people feel that their country has the best culture in the world and that there is very little to learn from Japan. It should not be a surprise to anyone that many people feel their own nation and customs are the best in the world and that the rest of the world is full of strange people with their strange customs. Endo discovered, as many foreign students do, that there are many ways of looking at the world and life and that we should try to learn about, and if possible, understand other ways of thinking. We should also try to explain to

others, as Endo did with his fellow students and other French people he met, our own outlook and ways of thinking. Such person-to-person contact may well be the only way to broaden ties between people around the world.

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<https://archive.org/stream/lifelettersofstf01coleuoft#page/416/mode/2up/search/Japan> Retrieved December 30, 2013.
- (3) Endo, page 46.
- (4) Endo, page 47.
- (5) Reed, Christopher. *The Chrysantheme Papers*. University of Hawaii Press. 2010, page 1.
- (6) Endo, page 48.
- (7) King, James. *Under Foreign Eyes*. Zero Books: John Hunt Publishing. 2012, page 18.
- (8) Endo, page 49.
- (9) Barbari, Jack. Gabriel Marcel Biography.
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- (17) Hirano Kyoko. *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo*. Smithsonian Institution Press. 1992, page 91.
- (18) Standish, pages 189-190.