

## IN MEMORIAM

MICHAEL COOPER (1930–2018)

Michael Cooper, editor of *Monumenta Nipponica* from 1972 to 1997, died peacefully in Honolulu, Hawaii, on 31 March 2018 after a short illness. He was just a month short of his eighty-eighth birthday. In Japan, as he would undoubtedly point out were he writing this piece, this is a felicitous marker of longevity. Michael was born in London on 25 April 1930. He paid great attention to people's birthdays and to remembering them with a card. Perhaps as a gentle reproach to those less conscientious and kind about such matters than he, on occasion he remarked that his birthday could be easily recalled because it was the same as Oliver Cromwell's.

After completing his secondary education at the Jesuit school Beaumont College, Old Windsor, Michael entered the Society of Jesus in September 1948. He spent the next six years at Jesuit training centers in the United Kingdom and Spain. The time spent in Spain likely fostered the skills in Spanish and Portuguese that he later would put to use in his research on the Western encounter with Japan in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This stage of his education concluded with a year of philosophical studies at Manresa College, London, in 1953–1954.

The following year Michael was sent to Japan, where he embarked on two years' study of Japanese at the Jesuit language program in Taura, Yokosuka. The school's proximity to Kamakura encouraged exploration of that city's temples and other sites and led him to become, in the words of the blurb to his historical guidebook *Exploring Kamakura: A Guide for the Curious Traveler* (Weatherhill, 1979), a "confirmed Kamakura buff." The same blurb reports that the guidebook is based on "notes taken during his student days." Later he would often enjoy leading friends and visitors on personal tours to his favorite spots.

Michael spent two further years in Japan teaching English at Sophia University and working in the university's public relations office before going back to the UK in 1959 for four years of theological studies at Heythrop College, then located near Oxford. Presumably it was during this time that the general course of his subsequent academic path was set. He once mentioned that Pedro Arrupe, later superior general



In the classroom at Sophia (late 1950s). Sophia University Archives.

of the Society of Jesus and from 1958 to 1965 head of its Japan Province, instructed him to obtain a degree in anthropology with the idea that he would eventually return to Tokyo and take up the editorship of MN. In 1963 Michael entered the two-year program in social anthropology at the University of Oxford, at the time the usual preliminary step for pursuing an advanced degree there in the subject. Having obtained a diploma in social anthropology, he proceeded to the doctoral course and was awarded his doctorate in 1969.

Oxford was a center of the “cultural translation” approach to social anthropology associated with E. E. Evans-Pritchard, with whom Michael studied. Evans-Pritchard emphasized the importance of immersing oneself in the language and culture of the society that was the object of one’s research. Only in this way could one grasp what things meant in their original context and, on that basis, translate them accurately into the mode of understanding basic to one’s own language. Michael would adopt cultural translation as both a topic to investigate and a principle to apply.

The core of Michael’s dissertation was a translation from the Portuguese into English of the account of Japanese life and customs compiled by the Jesuit missionary João Rodrigues in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The research that Michael did for his dissertation was subsequently published in three forms. In 1973 he brought out a somewhat abridged version of Rodrigues’s lengthy work as *This Island of Japan: João Rodrigues’ Account of 16th-Century Japan* (Kodansha International). A complete annotated translation eventually appeared under a slightly revised title as *João Rodrigues’s Account of Sixteenth-Century Japan* (The Hakluyt Society, 2001). Michael produced in addition an extensive study of the chronicler’s diverse activities and the events in which he figured: *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China* (Weatherhill, 1974). The theme of cultural translation is central to these studies. Rodrigues, who was known as Tçuzzu (*tsūji* 通事), or “interpreter,” must have struck Michael as an anthropologist *avant la lettre*, so to speak. Presenting the interpreter’s activities and observations required Michael, in turn, to mediate between the sixteenth-century Portuguese Jesuit’s perception of contemporaneous Japanese society and evidence drawn from other sources, both of the time and later. These perspectives had, moreover, to be rendered into modern, accessible English.

Michael performed the same triangulation in other studies based on the rich store of writings by Jesuits and other Westerners about sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Japan. Already in 1965, before completing his dissertation, he published *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543–1640* (University of California Press), a topically organized selection of writings in English as well as ones translated from Portuguese, Spanish, and other European languages. Reprinted by the Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, in 1995 and often assigned in classes on premodern Japan in the United States and elsewhere, it is probably his most widely read work. In later years Michael turned the lens of cultural translation to a different facet of the Japanese encounter with sixteenth-century Europe, the mission of four Japanese youths to Rome organized by Alessandro Valignano in 1582. Utilizing the Latin and Portuguese accounts of the mission written

by Valignano and Luis Fróis, in *The Japanese Mission to Europe, 1582–1590: The Journey of Four Samurai Boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy* (Global Oriental, 2005), Michael brought to life the mission's perilous journey to Europe and back and its lavish reception at the papal and other European courts.

In all these works Michael kept his eye on the observer as well as the phenomena observed. In the introduction to *They Came to Japan* he remarked, "For myself, a most interesting feature of these early accounts is what they tell us not so much about the Japanese but about the European writers themselves" (p. xi). He clearly felt a bond with the intrepid sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuits. The biographical information about the author on the cover of *Rodrigues the Interpreter* (which we may assume Michael composed) notes parenthetically that he entered the Society of Jesus "some 368 years after Rodrigues himself did so." In *The Japanese Mission to Europe*, having expressed mild exasperation with the repetition in Fróis's account and its often (from the modern perspective) florid style, he hastened to add in a note, "These comments should not hide my admiration, even affection, for the elderly, sick, overworked and indefatigable chronicler, without whose valuable contribution our knowledge of Jesuit activity in Japan would be greatly diminished" (p. 243). But he did not hesitate to acknowledge that at times his protagonists could also show a narrow and prejudiced side. One of the most notable characteristics of his studies is surely the judicious, empathetic, and humane approach that he took to issues that at the time and later aroused volleys and countervolleys of attacks animated by partisan loyalties.

Upon finishing his dissertation at Oxford, Michael returned to Tokyo and Sophia. His involvement with MN (or "old Mother Mon," as he often would refer to it) can be traced from 1970, when his name appeared on the advisory board. In 1971 he was listed as editor with Edmund Skrzypczak as associate editor, and from 1973 he assumed sole editorial responsibility. As he put it in "Sixty Monumental Years," his inimitable account of MN's history from 1938 to 1998, he was the first (and, as it has turned out, only) "full-time, non-teaching editor" (MN 53:1, p. 8). He would continue to guide the journal for the next quarter century. "Sixty Monumental Years" modestly touches only lightly on the scale of his contribution during this span of time, but more cannot be done here than to add one or two specific points.

In short, Michael put the journal on a stable foundation; brought in new contributors, reviewers, and referees; and earned it an



In the MN office (late 1970s). Courtesy of Caryl Ann Callahan.

expanded readership. At the time of its creation, MN had been envisioned as a quarterly, but that aim had never been realized. The difficulties of the war years and the premature death of the first editor, Johannes Kraus, shortly after the war led to a hiatus, and after publication resumed in 1951 it continued to be at times erratic. Michael's advent as editor put an end to this uncertainty. From 1972 (volume 27), he succeeded in putting out four issues a year, and the regularity with which MN appeared for the next twenty-five years continues to awe his successors, albeit it was decided in 2008 to revert to the less intense schedule of two issues annually.

Michael worked also to secure the flow of submissions essential to sustaining a regular publication schedule. Tributes posted in various forums following his death recall how he reached out to younger researchers, encouraged them to submit pieces, and worked with them to turn sometimes raw, if promising, material into polished articles (often suggesting memorable titles in the process). Many of those once-young researchers who remember Michael and MN as helping them to get a start went on to become leading figures in the field of Japanese studies.

It should be remembered that Michael not only brought out four issues a year on time, with a full complement of articles and reviews, and did so more-or-less single-handedly. For most of his tenure as editor, he managed this without email and the other technological conveniences that we today take for granted. He typically would retype each article and review as he edited it so that he and the author could see it afresh. He was devoted to his IBM Selectric typewriter, with its revolving balls of different fonts that could be switched in and out. A formidably conscientious correspondent, he took delight in adding passages in Gothic type (and sometimes Old English spelling) to the letters and cards he hammered out. A rubber stamp of Snoopy (to whom he was equally devoted) and the bold signature "Michael," used without a surname even in messages to new acquaintances, added a further distinctive note.

Although Michael never completely abandoned the IBM Selectric, he did preside over the initial stage of MN's transition into the digital era. Authors were not asked to supply electronic copies of articles and reviews, but he began to use a computer in the editing process and eventually to send the printer an electronic file of the copy-edited version. The computer, which he initially viewed somewhat gingerly, was nicknamed "Aloysius the Demon Computer," and by the time he retired there was at least an "Aloysius the Demon Computer II," if not III. Computers eased some of the painstaking detail work that goes into editing, but they did not eliminate it. One of the shortcomings of word-processing programs up to the present century was the lack of a font with macrons that would hold true when a file was converted from one system to another. Michael took pride in MN's attractive macrons, created for the journal by its printer, Komiyama Printing Company, and to ensure their proper inclusion in the printed text he would type in strings of code before and after each macron as he copyedited.

As if putting out MN were not more than enough for an ordinary mortal, Michael continued until 1986 to edit and produce volumes for the *Monumenta Nipponica*

Monographs series as well. In addition, he edited *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* from 1980 to 1984 and served as the society's president from 1984 to 1987. Apart from such public services, he quietly offered friends assistance with their individual publication projects. I remain deeply grateful for a beautifully prepared index to a book of close to four hundred pages, and I am sure I am not the only such beneficiary. In the year after he



In Hawaii (2013). Courtesy of Toyoko McGovern.

stepped down as editor, when he was still in Tokyo, Michael continued to make himself available for whatever consultation might be wished. Unfailingly helpful, he was scrupulous about not imposing his own views, even if that must often have required biting his tongue. And assistance and support were hardly limited to editorial expertise. Descriptions of the innumerable personal kindnesses he extended over and beyond the norm figure in many of the tributes posted after his death.

Having steered MN safely into its sixtieth year, in 1998 Michael retired to Honolulu. He received permission to leave the Society of Jesus and began a new stage of life, shared with Toyoko McGovern, a long-standing friend. During the two decades of happiness and good health that he enjoyed in Hawaii, he was able to return to his own research and to welcome old friends and make new ones. The friends he has now left behind and his successors at MN mourn his loss while also celebrating his life and achievements.

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