

Application for the 1st UBIAS Intercontinental Academia

Kazuhisa Takeda
Waseda Institute for Advanced Study (WIAS)

On observing the characteristics of the 1st UBIAS Intercontinental Academia, I feel convinced that those characteristics are deeply linked to my research theme. My research concerns the historical evolution of Native American Christianization in South America under Spanish rule during the period spanning the 16th to 18th century, and it seeks to clarify the development of globalization since the “Discovery” of America in 1492, from the viewpoint of Christian expansion and its socio-cultural impact upon the indigenous South American peoples. I focus particularly on Jesuit mission history in the Río de la Plata region (that is, the region encompassing present-day southeast Paraguay, northeast Argentina, southern Brazil, and Uruguay). The Jesuits established 30 villages called “missions” or “reductions” in this region, and their purpose was to enable Christianity to permeate through the community life of the Jesuits and the Guaraní Indians.

In 1540, the Pope in Rome officially approved the Jesuits (who are also known as the Society of the Jesus), and large numbers of them were dispatched for missionary activities to nations all over the world. As they converted the local residents to Christianity, their indigenous cultures alternately merged and clashed with the externally introduced European-Christian culture, resulting in the birth of a culture that was both blended and new.

As regards the concept of time, which happens to be the main discussion topic of the 1st UBIAS Intercontinental Academia, a number of Native Americans did indeed realize this concept in their mode of thinking. However, their encounter with European-Christian culture served to disseminate among their peoples new and unfamiliar concepts associated with time, such as “liturgical concepts,” which were based on a Christian perception of theology and philosophy. The Guaraní Indian converts to Christianity had to participate in the divine office and recite Christian prayers at fixed hours in accordance with the requirements of the Roman Catholic Church, and even at midnight they were sometimes obliged to wake up and offer prayers at specific canonical hours. Since customs such as these were non-existent in Guaraní ancestral culture, one can well imagine the physical and psychological stress experienced by those inhabitants of the various Jesuit missions.

Furthermore, the Guaraní Indians were faced with an entirely different rhythm of time during their community life with the Jesuits. During the medieval and early modern period of Europe time gradually came to be

considered an object measurable by machinery, and hence a large public clock was set up in the city center that numerically informed the residents about time. The notion that time could be recognized by numbers was something strikingly new for the Guaraní, who were still in various ways immersed in the primitive living conditions that they had followed since time immemorial. An interesting fact is that the Guaraní Indians had no knowledge of numbers exceeding 20, when they encountered the Jesuits in the beginning of the 17th century.

Alfred W. Crosby pointed out the importance of research with reference to people's perception of time, in order to analyze the means of accepting the reality of the whole society (Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600*, Cambridge, 1997). Historical documents related to the mentality of indigenous people in the Americas are fragmentary, and this makes it difficult to deepen our research. Yet, discussions with specialists having knowledge in distinct academic areas could help in acquiring an innovative perspective in order to study the transformation of the concept of time, and its socio-cultural effects upon the Guaraní Indians who were transformed into Christian converts by the Jesuits.

As for my personal academic background, I declare that I have visited several countries since 1996, and as for Spanish speaking areas, I have acquired a great deal of experience through residing in Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Peru and Bolivia. In Argentina in particular I lived in Buenos Aires an entire year, namely the whole of 2010, and I lived in the city of Seville in Spain during the year 2012-2013. Both these sojourns were financially supported by the postdoctoral research fellowship program of the JSPS (Japan Society for the Promotion of Science). Concerning my use of English, I lived in the USA for six months in 2006 as a research fellow of John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, and I also spent a month in 2009 as an academic visitor at Oxford University. In August 2006 I participated as a speaker in the International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500-1825, held at Harvard University, where the topic was, "The Transit of Christianity, 1500-1825."