



## EUSKADI IN ASIA

Euskal Herria eta Asiaren arteko harremanak beti existitu dira. Francisco Xabier jesuita Japonia barrena sartu zen lehenetariko europarra izan zen. Urdaneta Filipinasen garapenean oso garrantzitsua izan zen, "tornaviaje" itsas bidea deskubrituz. Gaur egun hainbat gazte Txinara joan dira, euskal enpresek bertan irekitzen dituzten lantegiak kudeatzeko. Baina gaur eguneko harremanak arlo kulturalera ere zabaltzen dira, Japonian batez ere. Bertako hainbat unibertsitatetan euskal kultura eta euskarazko klaseak ematen dituzte eta sortu berri dute Euskal-Japoniar Elkarte, bi herrien arteko harremanak estutzeko asmoz.

**D**espite being on the other side of the world, Basques have also made their mark in Asia throughout history. Two Basque characters in particular made a name for themselves: St Francisco de Javier and Andrés de Urdaneta.

Andrés de Urdaneta from Gipuzkoa was a key figure for developing the economy and society in the Philippines. Urdaneta was born 500 years ago in the village of Ordizia in Gipuzkoa. This sailor, astronomer and humanist discovered "the tornaviaje", the name he gave to the route between the Philippines and the American continent through the Pacific Ocean. Another outcome of the relations between Basques and the people of the Philippines is the existence of a province with the name New Vizcaya, the only one in world. This route was fundamental for progress in the

Philippines, where he is considered a national hero. During 2008, 5th centenary of his birth, numerous events are being held both in the Philippines and in his birthplace. We should also mention the head of state visit that the president of the Philippines, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, made in Euskadi last December.

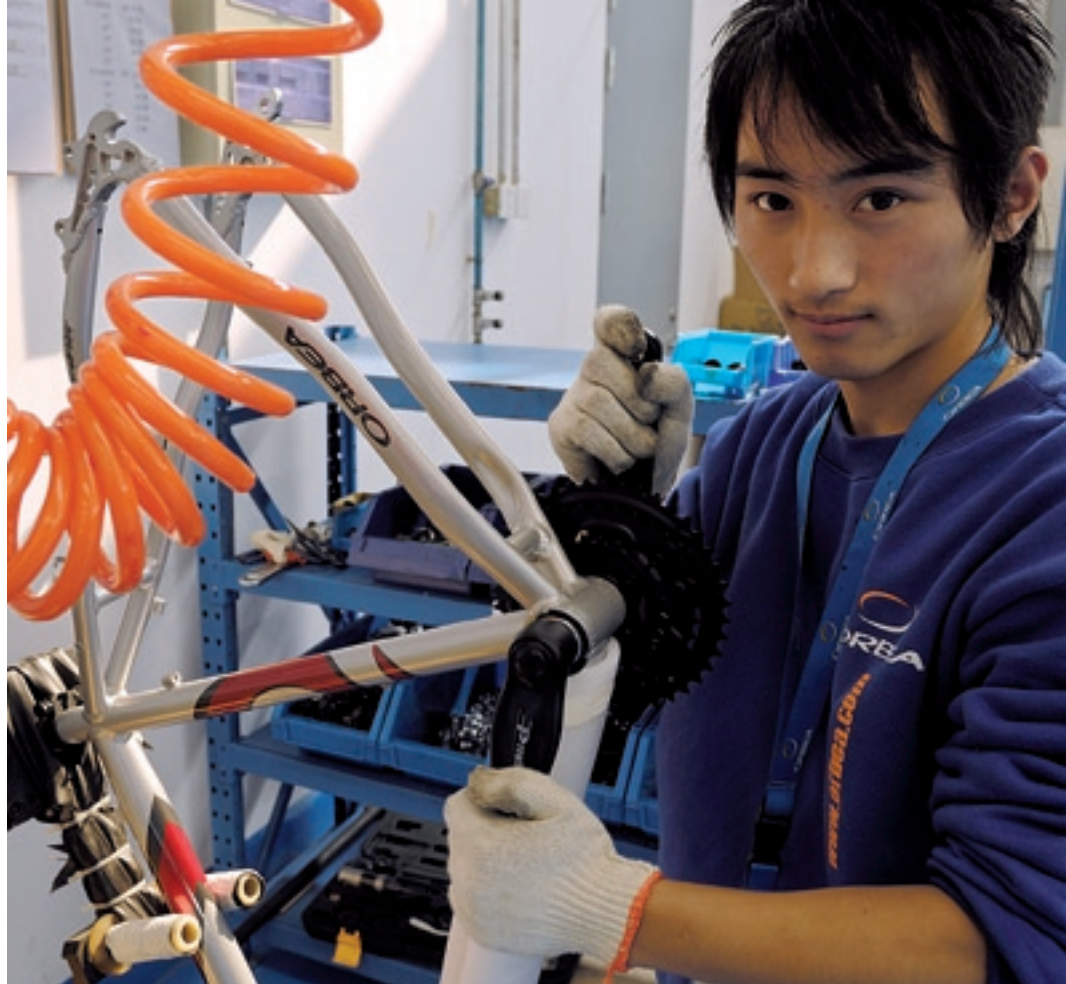
St Francisco de Javier also left his imprint in Asia. His friendship with St Ignacio de Loyola led to them jointly founding the Company of Jesus, religious congregation also known as "Jesuits."

The Navarran priest took off for Asia to spread his doctrine. His first stop was India, but he really became popular in Japan. This country had been described only a few years before and had been discovered thanks to Marco Polo. He was one of the first Westerners to explore these lands. In the land of the rising sun he visited the cities of

Kagosima, Hirado, Kyoto, Bungo and Yamaguchi. He won great popularity and became the western prototype among the Japanese.

**DESTINATION CHINA** Basque emigration currently choosing Asia as its destination is very different from the start of the last century to other continents. It is focused on China and linked to the Asian giant's economic recovery and our own. Basque residents in China are mainly young with management positions in Basque companies, who have gone over to manage production in this country.

Economic relations with the Asian country have really taken off in the last few years. From 2000 to 2007 Basque exports to China grew 480% and imports increased by 272%. Up to December 31st 2007, 83 Basque companies had set up in China. A little more than half (47) have their own



«Txinan bizi diren  
euskadun gehienak  
euskak enpresen  
kudeaketa lanetan  
diharduten gazteak dira»

production plants and the rest have commercial set-ups. We should also add the SPRI office, the Basque Government Promotion and Industrial Reconversion Society, which aims to make work easier for these companies.

The majority of these companies are located in cities such as Beijing, Jiangsu and Shanghai. Shanghai houses the only Euskal Etxea on the continent and the SPRI office.

Shangaiko Euskal Etxea opened in 2004 with 17 members. Today, the majority of the Basques living in this country are members, in addition to the majority of Basque companies. Among the events organized by this Basque centre, we should highlight the 'mus' Championships, the Korrika in favor of Euskara, in addition to typical lunches and dinners.

Jokin Laspiur is a Basque who has lived in China for the last four years and is a member of the Shanghai Euskal

Etxea. He is the director of the Mondragón Cooperative delegations in Shanghai and Shenzhen. Jokin did not think twice about going to China, "it was a pretty easy decision, as I'd been traveling to China frequently for the same work reasons for some time."

One of the things that Jokin would highlight about China is the speed that things are achieved: "it is a country which moves very fast and means we have to adapt to this situation quickly to not get left behind, so that teaches you to be much more flexible." Although there is always time to organize a few dinners in the Euskal Etxea. The major differences for Jokin are, without a doubt, the language and the culture. Despite this, he comments that "actually everyday life isn't that different, despite the great contrasts." But there can be no doubt that what he misses the most is "our landscapes and the cuisine, along with my family."

Iñigo Mendiburu is another Basque living in China. He's been in Asia since 1989, when he received a grant to live in South Korea. This gave him the

chance to visit China. Since then, with a couple of years' break in between, he has always lived in Asia. He is currently a partner in iGeo Investment & Consulting, a consultancy and investment company specialized in supporting companies in internationalization processes related to China. The majority of his clients are from Euskadi.

Iñigo defines his life there in one word: intense. "Work in an international consultancy firm is very intense, frequently traveling around China and abroad. And on the other hand, the social life in a city like Shanghai is also very lively..."

Regarding the greatest differences between the two cultures, Iñigo recognizes that after 15 years he has lost his perspective a little. Although he clarifies that people are "much less direct, less focused on the target than on relationships, less legalist, in as much that they think more in the long term and about the family group as a broader aspect than about individuals." But for this Basque, despite

«Aurten Euskal-Japoniar  
Elkartea sortu da, japoniarrez  
Hihon Basuku Yukoukai eta 50  
bazkide baino gehiago ditu»

globalization, the differences continue to be large explaining why he believes: "It is necessary not only to get to know them, but to try and take it all on board as much as possible."

**JAPAN AND THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE** With another large country in Asia, Japan, there are different types of relationships, more specifically cultural. Despite the fact that St Francisco de Javier led the way, there are few Basques living or who have lived in this country. The majority of them are missionaries who have come to the land of the 'rising sun' to help and work alongside their congregations. This is why relations are basically cultural.

This very year the Euskal-Japoniar Elkarte/Basque-Japanese Society has emerged, in Japanese Nihon Basuku Yukoukai. Its main objective is to create a meeting place for fans of the Basque culture and forge links between the two populations. It already has more than 50 members, most of whom are Japanese.

Tomás Eceizabarrena is an 85 year old Jesuit who has been living in Japan for 60 years. This explains why, when he's asked where he comes from, he replies that he is "a fellow-countryman of St Francisco Javier." Tomás says that everyone knows the founder of the Company of Jesus in Japan, "his name appears in all the school text books because he was the first person to



teach Christ's doctrine here, in the 16th century." He arrived at the tender age of 24 and has lived there ever since. He was one of the first Jesuits to go to Japan after the war. A large part of his life has been dedicated to his work at the University and nowadays he is chaplain in the Jesuit Old People's home. He lives in a peaceful spot on the outskirts of Tokyo, but twice a week he visits the city centre to help out with University archiving. Merely getting to the center of a city with twelve million people is an odyssey, so when Tomás visits his native Donostia he thinks: "Where is everyone here?"

There can be no doubt that what strikes Tomás most has been the city's progress since he arrived up to the present day: "I've seen Tokyo almost completely destroyed, where the people had nothing to eat or wear, with poor huts as homes, growing little by little based on silent and constant work to create an enormous city in a few years."

Despite not being born Basque, Sho Hagio loves Basque culture and particularly its language, Euskara. He is linked to Euskal Herria by many things. Right now he is working at the Nagoya Institute of Technology, in the foreign action area. Although for more than 20

years he worked at the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, promoting scientific studies.

At university Sho discovered that the letters written by St Francisco Javier were written in Euskara. This made him wonder "What is Euskara? What is Basque?" At the time, a professor of his, Suzuko Tamura, started to give Euskara classes at the university and he signed up. After this first taste he visited Euskadi and signed up to several *euskaltegis*. Talking about this experience he says "you Basques made me grow up like just any other Basque." Nowadays he studies two basic aspects of our language. On the one hand, the relationship between language and personality and on the other hand the politics and linguistic rights.

The University of Woaseda in Tokyo is currently offering Euskara classes. What started off as a an individual initiative from professor Suzuko Tamura, nowadays receives help from HABE, Institute for Basque Culture, Language and Adult Literacy. The University of Kansas Gadai in Osaka offers courses on Basque culture and the University of Kobe has a joint work agreement with the University of the Basque Country for student and teacher exchanges.