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# A Culture In-Between: Materiality and Visuality in the Christian Mission in Japan in the Early Modern Age

## Introduction

This text will analyse the incorporation of elements of Japanese Buddhism into the “materiality”/“material culture” and “visuality”/“visual culture” of the Christian mission in Japan between c.1549 and c.1614.

The term “material culture” recognizes objects as essential components of interpretation, and with respect to the Christian mission in Japan, a particular kind of source with both tangible and intangible aspects. It also indicates that these material goods and images were not merely objects of contemplation and/or use, but also acted as mediators between the Mission and the Japanese community. Therefore, they are sources and evidence of complex, multifaceted social relationships and interactions.<sup>1</sup> Each object and image possesses a physical dimension that, much more than simply visual, binds inextricably with contexts of production, consumption, and reception. Furthermore, when considering cultures outside the frame of Western Europe, such as that of the Japanese, we must question modes of seeing, as well as the idea that the experience of seeing involves one sense only. Moreover, a number of scholars have already called the attention to the fact that the mere possibility of considering how “other cultures” besides the European, no matter how they are defined, privilege the visual, is an important question to examine when considering whether and how the “visual” is a legitimate analytic category for writing history.<sup>2</sup>

Recent studies on the quality or condition of being visual or visible, particularly the seminal work of Mieke Bal,<sup>3</sup> emphasize the indivisibility of the domains of visual and material culture from sense-based activities, namely looking/seeing, listening and reading. Indeed, they are mutually permeable, so that the acts of

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- 1 Yonan, “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies”. *West 86<sup>th</sup>: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*. vol. 18, no. 2 (Fall-Winter, 2011), pp.232–248, and Karen Harvey’s introduction to *History and material Culture. A student’s Guide to approaching alternative sources*. London: Routledge, 2009.
  - 2 Farago, “Seeing Across Time: Understanding visuality”. Dana Leibsohn, Jeanette Favrot Peterson (Ed.), *Seeing Across Cultures in the Early Modern World*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012, p.243.
  - 3 Bal, “Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture”. *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2003), pp.5–32.

listening and reading may inhere a visual dimension. Hence, considering *the object* of visual culture does not exclude literature, sound, and music. In light of the thematic focus of this text, there seems to be evidence worth exploring in this regard.

For studying the connexions between the Christian mission in Japan and the Buddhist sects, it is also important to consider the “impureness” of the act of seeing and its consequences, because it is “inherently framed, framing, interpreting, affect-laden, cognitive and intellectual”: not only looking/seeing but also other sense-based activities, namely listening and reading, also participate in this “impurity”.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, and because the visual experience is inevitably coloured by the constructs of the viewer’s culture, “It requires careful analysis of images, material objects, and broader cultural contexts of use to see processes of inscription, accommodation, resistance, reframing, and so on at work in the “event” of cultural interaction”, as Claire Farago claims.<sup>5</sup>

Certain primary sources are essential to the study of the visual and material culture of the Christian mission in early modern Japan. First of all, the coeval written texts – above all the letters, books, and dictionaries – of the European missionaries, mainly the Jesuits, whose relationship with Japan, exclusive for more than 40 years, made them the first to interact with the Buddhist sects. Secondly, the surviving material evidence, including paintings. These realms – the domain of the image and that of the text – have distinct codes and specific semantics that must be kept in mind.

Through the analysis of these different but interconnected sources, I will argue that the visual and material culture that came to be associated with the Christian mission in Japan testifies not merely to the circulation of people and things from one cultural and religious context to another, but above all to a complex process of reinterpretation and re-signification, in which objects and images gained a new meaning. Also, it will be possible to explore how this cultural transfer and exchange involved different individuals, who impacted the dissemination of knowledge and objects from one cultural zone to another, acting as translators and contributing to the creation of what can be classified as a heterogeneous cultural space.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Bal, op. cit., p.9.

5 Farago, op. cit., p.244.

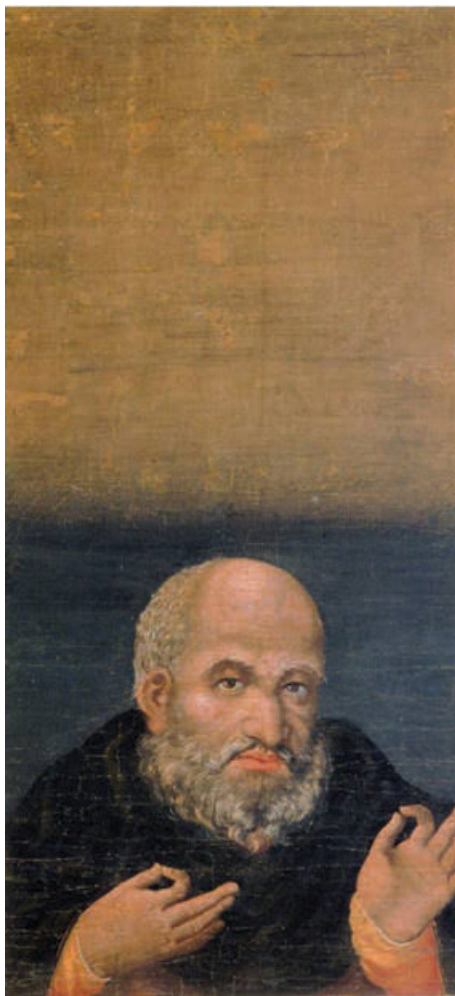
6 Herren; Ruesch; Sibille (Ed.), *Transcultural History. Theories, Methods, Sources*. Berlin; Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2012; Feuchter, “Cultural Transfers in dispute: An Introduction”. Jörg Feuchter, Friedhelm Hoffmann, Bee Yun (Ed.), *Cultural Transfers in Dispute: Representations in Asia, Europe and the Arab World since the Middle Ages*. Frankfurt / New York: Campus Verlag, 2011, pp.14–37.

## “Fathers and Brothers Are the Bonzes of the Christian Religion”

The Kobe City Museum (*Kobe Shiritsu Hakubutsukan*), whose collection of *Nanban art* is among the most important in the world,<sup>7</sup> holds a painting that although acknowledged by scholars as a Western-style painting of early modern Japan,<sup>8</sup> is still little known and not sufficiently discussed outside this field of study (Fig. 1).

This painting was found in Japan in the spring of 1975 and was reproduced for the first time the following year by Grace Vlam in her PhD dissertation, *Western-style Secular painting in Momoyama Japan*.<sup>9</sup> Presumably dating from the beginning

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- 7 The name of this museum reflects a complicated institutional history. From 1951 to 1965 it was known as the Kobe Municipal Art Museum (Ichiritsu Kobe bijutsukan), between 1965 and 1982 it included the word “Namban”, becoming the Kobe Municipal Namban Art Museum, and continued to function as a public art museum under this name until it was incorporated into the Kobe City Museum in 1982. In 1931, Hajime Ikenaga bought the collection of Tokutarō Nagami, an art collector and historian of Nagasaki, who in 1928 had published a book titled *Namban-bijutsushū*. The transfer of Ikenaga’s namban collection from his eponymous Ikenaga Art Museum (1940–1944) to the Kobe Municipal Art Museum led to the city museum’s name change to reflect the character of the collections. Kotani, *Studies in Jesuit Art in Japan*. Volume I, Dissertation presented to the Faculty of Princeton University in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Art and Archaeology, June 2010, pp.39–40.
  - 8 I draw special attention to the following works: Gutiérrez, “A Survey on Namban Art”. *Revista de Cultura*, no.17 (II Série). Lisboa: Instituto Cultural de Macau, Outubro/Dezembro 1993, pp.101–132; Hioki, “Visual Bilingualism and Mission Art: A Reconsideration of “Early Western-Style Painting” in Japan”. *Japan Review*, no. 23 (2011), pp.23–44; McCall “Early Jesuit Art in the Far East”. *Artibus Asiae*. vol. X/2; X/3; X/4; XI, 1/2. Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1947–1948, pp.121–137; 216–233; 283–301; 45–69; Okamoto, *The Namban Art of Japan*. New York; Tōkyō: Weatherhill; Heibonsha, 1972; *Pictorial Record of Kobe City Museum of Namban Art*. 5 Vols. Kobe: Kobe City Museum, 1968–1972; Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, *Namban bijutsu sō-mokuroku, yōfū-ga hen* 南蛮美術総目録 洋風画篇 (An Essay of Catalogue Raisonné of Namban art: Japanese early European-style painting). Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan kenkyū hōkoku 国立歴史民俗博物館研究報告 (Bulletin of the National Museum of Japanese History), vol. 75. Sakura, Chiba: National Museum of Japanese History, 1997. Sakamoto; Sugase; Naruse, *Namban bijutsu to yōfuga* (Namban Art and Western-Style painting). Genshoku Nihon no bijutsu (full-colour reproductions of Japanese art), vol. 25. Tōkyō: Shōgaku-kan, 1970; Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*. PhD dissertation in History of Art. University of Michigan, 1976.
  - 9 Vlam, op. cit., p.170 and following. Vlam refers to the fact that the painting belonged to Takamizawa Tadao (1899–1985), the author, together with Okamoto Yoshitomo



**Fig. 1.** Portrait of a Master (Vice-Provincial Pedro Gómez?). Japan, early seventeenth century (?). Colour on paper, H. 78.7 × W. 36.8 cm © Kobe City Museum

of the seventeenth century, it presents the format of a hanging scroll measuring 78.7 cm in height × 36.8 cm in length and portrays a male figure wearing a dark cloak and looking directly at the observer.<sup>10</sup> Standing out against a plain background of dark grey, his form occupies the entire lower half of the composition. We only see the bust, and our attention immediately goes to his face and hands, both illuminated by the use of brighter pigments in contrast to the deep tones of the foreground. The technical quality, particularly noticeable in the modulation of his hands and head, is remarkable.

Because of his simple cloak and distinctly positioned hands he has been identified as a religious figure, although in different terms, such as ‘Portrait of a Teacher’,<sup>11</sup> “A Hermit”,<sup>12</sup> “Portrait of Saint Paul”<sup>13</sup> or “A Master”.<sup>14</sup> His singular facial features support the argument that this is a portrait and not a mere depiction, and suggest that the subject is of European origin and a certain age, as his hair and beard are grey. The image becomes even more intriguing because this aged man holds his hands in a position of a *mudra* that has been identified as the *Seppō-(no)-in* (説法印), or more precisely the *Tenbōrin-(no)-in* (転法輪印). Both these *mudras* are associated with the preaching and exposition of the Buddhist Law and the teaching of the faithful. The circle formed by the thumb and index fingers is a complete form without beginning or end (the sign of the Dharma Wheel) and conveys the idea that the Buddhist Law is eternal and perfect. Adapted to the aims of the Mission in Japan, this sign can be translated as the equivalent to the eternal authority and perfection of the Christian dogma.<sup>15</sup>

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of the book *Namban Byōbu* (Namban Screens), published in Tōkyō in 1970, among other works. He was also the person who in the 1930s acquired from a small castle belonging to the *daimyō* of Sakai, Ōsaka, a pair of *namban* folding screens attributed to Kanō Domi now in the collection of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (National Art Museum), Lisbon (Inv.1638 and 1639 Mov.). About the purchase of the *Namban* screens see Sousa, “The namban collection at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga. The contribution of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto”. *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies*, vol. 12 (2006), pp.57–77.

- 10 For technical information about this painting see Kobe City Museum’s website: <https://www.kobecitymuseum.jp/collection/detail?heritage=367505>
- 11 Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, p.170.
- 12 *The Namban Art of Japan. Paintings and screens*. Ōsaka: The National Museum of Art, 1986, Cat.69.
- 13 *Namban Arts Selection. Kobe City Museum*. Kobe: Kobe City Museum, 1998, Cat.19. This identification is based on some physical features similar to the one we can observe in another painting depicting St. Peter that will be referred to in this text.
- 14 Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, op. cit., Cat.39, pp.230–233.
- 15 See Vlam, op. cit., p.170 and ff; Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, op. cit., Cat.39, pp.230–233. I call attention to the fact that the *mudra* known in Japanese as *seppō-in* is formed by joining the thumb and the forefinger of the right hand and is recognized by diverse names such as *vitarka-mudra* (*mudra* of argumentation), *karana-mudra* (*mudra* of (religious) action) and *vyakhyana-mudra* (*mudra* of exposition). In this portrait, however, both hands (and not only the right one) have the thumbs and the index fingers forming a circle at chest level, which can be associated with the *mudra*

This key element gives a clue to the possible identities of both the subject and the painter. As the gesture suggests a teaching role, the possibilities put forward by Vlam are that it portrays the Vice-Provincial Pedro Gómez (1533/35–1600), whose writings and teachings of European science, culture, and courses in Theology strongly influenced the Japanese Christian mission, and that the use of the *mudra* betrays the unidentified artist's Buddhist background. Portraying a Jesuit Vice-Provincial in such a way is by any means extraordinary, even in the ground-breaking experimental context of the Mission. Not even the famous posthumous portrait of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) depicted in the manner of the Chinese *literati* is as audacious.

In my view, the hypothesis that this depicts not merely a European missionary, but probably Pedro Gómez, is highly plausible given his achievements within the context of the Christian mission in Japan after his death, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when this portrait was probably painted. Briefly summarizing what is known about Gómez, he was born in Antequera in the province of Málaga, Spain, in 1533/1535.<sup>16</sup> He studied at the University of Alcalá de Henares and joined the Society on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1553. His career began at the Jesuit College of Arts in Coimbra (the well-known Colégio das Artes), where he taught liberal arts from 1555 to 1563. During this period, in 1557, Bernardo of Kagoshima, the first documented Japanese to have visited Europe died in Coimbra,<sup>17</sup> and although there is no evidence that the two ever met, it is plausible that they did. Gómez attained the degree of *Maestro*, was ordained in the summer of 1559, and from 1564, taught theology at the college for over 3 years. According to coeval records, he was highly esteemed as a theology teacher, as a priest, and as a preacher. His wish to be sent

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known in Japanese as *tenbōrin-in* (転法輪印) (the *Dharmachakra mudra*), literally meaning the turning of the Dharma Wheel, that is, Buddha preaching of the Dharma, or the Buddhist law. Sometimes the *tenbōrin-in* is referred to as *seppō-in*, but they are not synonyms. Cf. “seppou-in 説法印” and “tenbourin-in 転法輪印”, JAANUS. Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System: <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/tenbourinin.htm> (May 2020).

- 16 For the biography of Pedro Gómez, see Hiraoka and Watanabe, “A Jesuit Cosmological Textbook in ‘Christian Century’ Japan: De sphaera of Pedro Gomez (Part II)”, *SCIAMVS* vol. 16 (2015), pp.125–223, a text that corresponds to a new critical Latin edition and the first English translation of Pedro Gómez’ *De sphaera*, Part 2, and Santos, *A Study in cross-cultural transmission of natural philosophy: The Kenkon Bensetsu*. PhD in History, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (NOVA FCSH), June 2012, p.91, based in Schütte, *Monumenta Historica Japoniae I. Textus catalogorum Iaponiae aliaeque de personis domibusque S. I. In Iaponia. Informationes et relations, 1549–1654*. Monumenta Missionum Societatis Iesu, vol. XXXIV, Missiones Orientales. Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1975.
- 17 For an outline of Coimbra’s Colégio das Artes and its connections with the Christian mission in Japan, see Curvelo, “Coimbra e a missão do Japão no século XVI numa perspectiva histórico-artística”. Carlota Simões; Margarida Miranda; Pedro Casaleiro (Ed.). *Visto de Coimbra, O Colégio de Jesus entre Portugal e o Mundo*. Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra, 2020, pp.175–192.

on a mission to Asia dates from 1563, the year of his first application, but in 1570, before he was granted a license to go, he moved from Coimbra to Terceira Island in the Azores archipelago to establish a new college. There he taught *Casos* (moral theology) until 1579,<sup>18</sup> the year he returned to Lisbon to travel to the Indies.

Gómez eventually reached Macao in 1581, where he assisted the Italian Jesuit Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) in compiling a Chinese catechism. In the summer of 1583, he finally arrived in Japan. This was precisely the moment that Giovanni Niccolò (c.1558–1626), who would found the Painting Seminary in Japan,<sup>19</sup> arrived in Nagasaki. In other words, Gómez and Niccolò, to whom I shall return later, arrived in Japan in the same year and were together for some time, as is attested by a letter sent by Gómez to the Jesuit *Visitador* (Visitor, or Inspector) of the East Indian missions, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), written from Usuki on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1583.<sup>20</sup>

Usuki was located in the province of Bungo, for which Valignano appointed Gómez Superior immediately after his arrival. In Bungo, Gómez worked at the Jesuit College of Funai, nowadays Ōita, where under his supervision the first official course of philosophy or liberal arts began in October of the same year.<sup>21</sup> In the spring of 1585, the philosophy course finished, he introduced a program of theological study, which was interrupted by political tumult. The College relocated, setting in 1591 on the island of Amakusa (Kumamoto prefecture). By this time, and amidst a very challenging political context, Gómez became the Vice-Provincial of the Jesuit mission in Japan in 1590, a position he held despite poor health until his death in Nagasaki in 1600.

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- 18 According to Hiraoka and Watanabe, following the work of Robert Aleksander Maryks, it is possible that Gómez's delayed consignment to Japan had to do with his Jewish origin. Hiraoka and Watanabe, *op. cit.*, p.126.
- 19 For a study of the life of Giovanni Niccolò, see Curvelo, *Nuvens Douradas e Paisagens Habitadas. A Arte Namban e a sua circulação entre a Ásia e a América: Japão, China e Nova-Espanha (c.1550 – c.1700)*. PhD in Art History, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (NOVA FCSH), November 2007 and Curvelo; Cattaneo, "Le arti visuali e l'evangelizzazione del Giappone. L'apporto del seminario di pittura dei gesuiti". Tanaka Kuniko (Ed.), *Geografia e cosmografia dell'altro fra Asia ed Europa. Geography and Cosmology Interfaces in Asia and Europe* (Proceedings of the III Dies Academicus of the Accademia Ambrosiana, Milan, 22–23 October 2010). Roma: Bulzoni, 2011, pp.31–60.
- 20 ARSI, Jap. Sin 9-II, Letter from Pedro Gomez to Alessandro Valignano, Usuki, 2nd November 1583, fls.177–178v. See Curvelo, *Nuvens Douradas e Paisagens Habitadas. A Arte Namban e a sua circulação entre a Ásia e a América: Japão, China e Nova-Espanha (c.1550 – c.1700)*, p.296.
- 21 For a study of the role of Jesuit Seminaries and Colleges in Japan, see Girard, "Collèges jésuites dans le Japon des XVIe et XVIIe siècles". *Centre et Périphérie, Approches nouvelles des orientalistes*. Actes du Colloque organisé par l'Institut du Proche-Orient Ancien et du Collège de France, la Société Asiatique et le CNRS (UMR 7192), Paris – Collège de France, Cahiers de l'Institut du Proche-Orient du Collège de France, I, Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient. Paris: Jean Maisonneuve, 2009, pp.371–394



In 1593, on Valignano's request in response to the progressive replacement of the European clerics in the territory, Gómez completed his *Compendium catholicae veritatis* (Compendium of the Catholic Truth),<sup>22</sup> written in Latin and presented as a Catechism aimed at the formation of local clergy. This textbook gave instruction on the philosophy course and theology course in the mission in Japan. The manuscript has three parts or treatises: (1) *De sphaera*, on cosmology; (2) *De anima* (On the Soul), whose main objective is to show the human soul as rational, having free will, and able to reach God, and (3) *De Fide*, written following the decisions of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) regarding the teaching of doctrine. Only a single example of Gómez's original survives, discovered in 1937 in the Vatican Library. But more than 50 years later, in 1995, a translation into Japanese of two of the treatises – *De anima*<sup>23</sup> and the *Compendium catholicae veritatis* (Kōgi Yōkō / 講義要綱) – the joint work of a team coordinated by Pedro Ramón (1550–1611) and Japanese translators during the years 1593–1595, was discovered at Magdalen College in Oxford.<sup>24</sup>

The impact of Gómez's *Compendium* is impossible to determine. At the Japanese Mission it was read to students of Amakusa College beginning in September 1593 and for the following 20 years, until the expulsion of the missionaries in 1614. Furthermore, the Japanese translation was probably printed.<sup>25</sup> Thus, we can assume that it may have been used by hundreds of Japanese: above all, but not exclusively, catechumens, belonging to a certain elite.<sup>26</sup> Sources indicate that the *Compendium*, the first substantial work that directly introduced Western science, philosophy and theology into Japan,<sup>27</sup> was compiled as a textbook for the European and Japanese students, and was used at Jesuit colleges there as well as in Macao.<sup>28</sup>

This last point is of particular relevance as it may explain why – despite its position outside mainstream Japanese scholarly tradition – it reappeared in Japan almost one century later under the title *Nigi Ryakusetsu*, authored by Kobayashi

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22 Full Latin title: *Compedium Catholicae Veritatis, in gratiam Iapponicorum fratrum Societatis Iesu, confectum per Rdum. Patrem Petrum Gomezium Vice-Provincialm Societatis Iesu in provincia Iapponica* (Compedium of the catholic doctrine intended for the Japanese brothers of the Society of Jesus concocted by the father Pedro Gómez, Vice-Provincial of the Society of Jesus in the Province of Japan).

23 That was translated into Chinese in 1629 by Francesco Sambiasi (1582–1649). Girard, "Adaptation et accueil de la mission jésuite au Japon: La traduction japonaise récemment découverte du Compendium de Philosophie (*De Anima*) et de Théologie (1595)". *Mondes et Cultures*, t. LXXI, vol. 1. Paris: Académie des Sciences d'Outre-mer, 2013, p.187.

24 *Ibidem*, pp.177–201.

25 Santos, *A Study in cross-cultural transmission of natural philosophy: The Kenkon Bensetsu*, pp.107–108 and 179–180.

26 *Ibidem*, p.188.

27 Hiraoka and Watanabe, *op. cit.*, p.126.

28 *Ibidem*, p.126.



Kentei (1601-1684), an astronomer and surveyor resident in Nagasaki.<sup>29</sup> In other words, although the *Compendium* was written in Latin and its use confined to the church and its colleges (even the Japanese translation was used mostly by the students and professors of the Jesuit colleges),<sup>30</sup> it came to be known outside the mission's intellectual space and period of activity. Gómez's *Compendium*, therefore, attests to the role of Jesuit colleges as institutions of higher education, playing a significant cultural role not only as places for the preaching of the Gospels but also for scientific interactions.

Within the mission itself, the reputation and significance of Gómez and his work are undeniable. Moreover, as Vice-Provincial from 1590 until 1600, he occupied the highest position within the mission's hierarchy.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, and accepting that this painting portrays Gómez, to present him gesturing the *seppō-in / tenbōrin-in*, the *mudra* of the exposition of the Law, reveals him to the Japanese – both Christian and Buddhist – as a teacher and an authority of the Christian dogma.

In my view, this presumed portrait of Gómez may also be acknowledged as a visual parallel to what Valignano wrote in his *Advertimentos e Avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (Advice and notes on the costumes and habits of Japan, better known as the *Cerimoniale*). In this text of 1581, of paramount importance, written during Valignano's first visit to the Japanese Mission, he affirms that "Los Padres y hermanos son los bonzos de la religión cristiana" (Fathers and brothers are the bonzes [Buddhist monks] of the Christian religion).<sup>32</sup> This powerful declaration must be contextualized, because for Valignano, there was no possible confusion between Buddhism and Christianity.

It appears in a chapter titled "Regarding the approach you will adopt to acquire and retain authority dealing with the Japanese" which concerns the necessity to convey hierarchy and dignity within the Christian mission and the way it should be perceived by others (others being strangers to the Society). In the introduction to this chapter, Valignano claims:

Because one of the main things needed in Japan for the Fathers to do what they want with Conversion and Christianity, is to know how to deal with the Japanese in such a way that on one hand they have authority and on the other hand they use familiarity,

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29 Santos, op. cit., p.704, pp.723–724 and p.207.

30 Ibidem, p.704.

31 The hierarchy of the Japanese mission was designed by Alessandro Valignano to include six grades into which the Jesuits and their helpers were assigned according to their rank and office in the Society: the Vice-Provincial at the top; then the district superiors, the priests, the brothers, the novices and the *dōjuku*. See Santos, op. cit., p.85.

32 Valignano, *Il Cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone*. «Advertimentos e Avisos acerca dos Costumes e Catangues de Jappão». Josef Franz Schütte, S.J. (Ed.). Roma: Edizioni di «Storia e Letterature», 1946, "Do modo que se ha de ter para adquirir e conservar autoridade tratando com os jappoens", p.124.

accompanying these two things in a manner that the one does not conceal the other, but the two are joined so that both has his place (...).<sup>33</sup>

The focal point for Valignano is therefore how Catholic priests and brothers would gain respect, consideration, and admiration in the eyes of Japan's sophisticated, complex, and hierarchic society. The debate around the different means to reach this esteem and reverence also explains why the Christian mission in Japan came to adapt the hierarchy of the Zen Buddhist community.<sup>34</sup>

Why Zen? Because, as Valignano puts it, "the sect of the Genxus [Zenshū]" was perceived by the Jesuits as the leading Buddhist sect in Japan and the one that reached a wider and socially diverse audience "(...) que entre todas hé tida em Japão por principal e que tem mais commonicação com toda a sorte de gemte de Japão".<sup>35</sup>

For the Mission, the question of communication with a varied and broad audience, and not only the elite, was of vital importance. Its efforts in mastering the Japanese language attest to this priority. Likewise, the creation of a Painting Seminary in Japan served this purpose. When it emerged during the last decade of the sixteenth century this proficient, skilled complement to the humanist education and the study program of the Society of Jesus soon became an additional effective tool for outreach to a wider community. Its manifold activities included the construction of visual devices, printed works, and musical instruments. At the same time, through this role it placed itself as a space of cultural interaction and mediation among the different agents it involved and aimed to reach.

## Religious Interactions within the Jesuit Painting Seminary

During his years writing the *Compendium*, Gómez participated in the training and pedagogical improvements of both the Jesuit's Seminaries and Colleges in Japan, which anticipated the methods and subject matter definitively established

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33 Ibidem, p.120. Free translation from the original text: "E porque huma das principais cousas que são necessarias em Jappão pera fazer o que os Padres pretendem acerca da converção e da Christandade hé saber tratar com os Jappoens de tal maneira que por huma parte teinhão authoridade e por outra usem de muita familiaridade, acompanhando estas duas cousas de tal maneira que a huma não impida a outra, mas se ayuntem ambas em modo que cada huma tenha seu proprio lugar (...)"

34 It was in Funai that the first attempt was made to match the hierarchy of the missionaries to the degrees of bonzes, obtaining in this way a stratification that matched, in purely formal terms, the different degrees. Thus, the superior was equalled to *chōrō*, the priests to *shūsa*, and the brothers to *zōsu* and auxiliaries to *dōjuku*. See Schütte in Valignano, op. cit., p.44.

35 Valignano, op. cit., p.124.

by the *Ratio studiorum* in 1599–1600. Before this date, the Mission followed Valignano's rules concerning the course of study for its program, a document that remains lost today. However, an organizational scheme regarding the daily use of time in the Seminaries for the year 1592 has survived, giving us some valuable information.<sup>36</sup>

It reveals that the general educational program of a Seminary comprised the learning of language (Latin), subjects of general culture (including Latin and Japanese literature, as well as conversation, rhetoric, choral chant, and music, among other disciplines), and practical exercises, which included oil painting, watercolour, copper engraving, xylography, and the making of musical instruments, clocks, and astronomical tools. The names of Giovanni Niccolò, Mancio Ōtao<sup>37</sup> and Mancio João (also known as Tadeu)<sup>38</sup> appear associated with the Seminary in Shiki, north of Amakusa,<sup>39</sup>

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36 Girard, "Collèges jésuites dans le Japon des XVIe et XVIIe siècles".

37 Regarding Mancio Ōtao (also spelled Utao), who was born in Ōmura in 1569, the documentation attests to his having entered the Arima Seminary in 1581, thus even before the arrival of Niccolò to Japan. He joined the Company in January 1589, and in 1592 he studied painting in Shiki. In the years 1603, 1606, and 1607 he is listed in Nagasaki, where he lived until 1613. Like many others, he too left for Macao after the missionaries were definitively expelled from Japan, and his name is still mentioned there in 1620. Curvelo, *Nuens Douradas e Paisagens Habitadas. A Arte Namban e a sua circulação entre a Ásia e a América: Japão, China e Nova-Espanha (c.1550–c.1700)*, pp.301–302.

38 Originally from Usuki, in Bungo, where he was born in 1568, Mancio João/Tadeu joined the Society in January 1590 and studied at the Painting Seminary in Shiki in 1592. Between 1603 and 1606, he was in Nagasaki, which was followed by 2 years in Kyōto, where he was between 1606 and 1607, and again, in 1613. In November 1614, he left for Manila, returning to Japan in 1618, where he stayed for a short time before leaving for Macau, where he died in November 1627. *Ibidem*, pp. 314–315. It is to Mancio João that Grace Vlam attributes the well-known portrait of Saint Francis Xavier in the Kobe City Museum of Art. See Vlam, "The Portrait of S. Francis Xavier in Kobe". *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* vol. 42, no. 1 (1979), pp.48–60.

39 Shiki was then part of the Amakusa archipelago, which was divided, in the second half of the sixteenth century, into five small fiefdoms. In Shimo-shima, the largest of the islands were the landlords of Shiki and Amakusa. Amakusa was precisely the place where, for more than a decade, between the middle of 1588 and the end of 1600, thanks to the protection and support of Konishi Yukinaga and the various *kokujin* that lorded the islands in his name, the Jesuits carried out their activities without much disturbance. Except for the year 1589, when it was briefly installed in Kawacinōra, it was here that the novitiate functioned from May 1591 until the autumn of 1597. The college was settled in this fortress between 1591 and 1597, as well as the printing premises from 1592 to 1598. From 1598 to 1600, Amakusa was the location chosen by Bishop D. Luís Cerqueira to live. See Ribeiro, *A Nobreza Cristã de Kyūshū. Redes de Parentesco e Acção Jesuítica*. Master dissertation in History of the Portuguese Maritime Expansion (XV–XVIII centuries). Lisboa: FCSH-UNL, 2006.

where in the year 1593 eight students studied oil painting, eight watercolour and five engraving.<sup>40</sup>

The use of images played a central role in the Jesuit presence in Japan, emerging as one of the main topics in the letters exchanged by the missionaries from the Mission's first years. Created in the 1590s, the Painting Seminary's main master was Giovanni Niccolò, an Italian painter born in Nola, near Naples.<sup>41</sup> Niccolò arrived in Japan in the summer of 1583, the same year as Gómez, whom he later met in Amakusa. The island became pivotal territory for the mission and the place of important achievements both of painting production and also the printing press, brought from Europe in 1590 by the Tenshō Embassy,<sup>42</sup> is attested in different mission writings. Among these the *História de Japam* written between 1584 and 1594 by Luís Fróis (1532–1597) remarks:

With no less fruit, some progress has been made in painting and engravings. Some of the boys are engaged in oil painting. We cannot help greatly admiring them because some copy so dextrously the finest paintings brought back from Rome by the four Japanese nobles. They do this with such skill as regards colour, exactness, shading, and precision, that many of the Fathers and Brothers cannot distinguish which are their paintings and which are the paintings done in Rome, and some insist that those done by the Japanese are those brought from Rome. Without knowing that they had been made in Japan, some Portuguese saw these paintings and were greatly astonished, declaring afterwards that they looked like the paintings brought from Rome. So in this way, with God's help, Japan will have from now on people who can fill many churches with fine pictures and also satisfy many Christian lords.<sup>43</sup>

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40 Girard, "Collèges jésuites dans le Japon des XVIe et XVIIe siècles", particularly pp.376–378.

41 For the Painting Seminary in Japan, see Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*; Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1999; Curvelo, *Nuvens Douradas e Paisagens Habitadas. A Arte Namban e a sua circulação entre a Ásia e a América: Japão, China e Nova-Espanha (c.1550–c.1700)*, and Curvelo, "Exchanging Artistic Practices and Textual Narratives: The Jesuit Painting Seminary in Japan (Late 16th-Early 17th Centuries)". *Visual and Textual Representations in Exchanges Between Europe and East Asia 16th–18th Centuries. Conference on History of Mathematical Sciences: Portugal and East Asia V*. Luís Saraiva and Catherine Jami (Ed.). Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2018, pp.203–220. Of Niccolò's work, none is known to exist, although some paintings have been attributed to him on feeble grounds.

42 It was precisely in Amakusa that Christian texts (*kirishitanban*) and images began to be printed in 1590.

43 Original text: "Não menos proveito vão fazendo alguns delles assim em pintar, como em abrir laminas para estampa: porque huns se exercitão em pintar imagens de oleos, os quaes nos fazem grademente admirar, porque alguns delles tirão pelo natural algumas imagens das mais perfeitas que trouxerão de Roma os quatro fidalgos japões, com tanta perfeição assim das cores, nitidez e sombras, como das simelhanças, que depois entre os mesmos Padres e Irmãos muitos não sabião dittinguir quaes erão as

This excerpt testifies not only to the activity of the Painting Seminary but also to the importance of copying as a process of apprenticeship and as an evangelising strategy.<sup>44</sup> Another important element concerns the origin of the Japanese students enrolled in the School. The Painting Seminary was opened to anyone wanting to learn how to use the printing machine and how to paint according to the main technical principles of the European painting: the use of *chiaroscuro* and, above all, linear perspective. This attracted the attention not only of individuals already converted to Christianity or intending to do so, but also of others who kept their original religious beliefs, including the “dógicos” (*dōjuku*). The *dōjuku* (auxiliaries) not only learned the Western-style painting and engraving, but also seem to have played an important role in the dissemination of new pictorial techniques in Japan.

The presence of “dógicos” reveals the singular situation of the Japanese mission, in that it led to the adapting of a practice of Buddhist monasteries in creating a group of secular auxiliaries for catechesis. As laity, they resembled the *kanbō*, mission auxiliaries who lived in isolation, tasked with the care of the Christian community and the maintenance of churches mostly in rural areas. But unlike the *dōjuku* whom the Jesuits, like their Buddhist counterparts, recruited mainly from the noble and warrior classes – the two highest of the time – the *kanbō* did not engage in evangelization work. The appearance of both groups was thus a consequence of the Jesuit effort to adapt the pre-existing Japanese religious model. As remarked by Ikuo Higashibaba, Japanese ‘irmãos’ (brothers), *dōjuku*, and *kanbō* were the native missionary resources and performed the crucial role of mediating between the European missionaries and the Japanese. Their role was essential by 1580 and its scope was especially important for translating and preaching.<sup>45</sup> In the Painting Seminary, their position seems to have been significant<sup>46</sup> and for some of them, we can trace a short biography, as is the case of Leonardo Kimura

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que elles fizerão, e quaes as que vieram de Roma. As quaes sendo vistas por alguns portugueses, sem saberem que se fizerão em Japão, se admiravão, dizendo que, com ajuda de Deos, terá Japão daqui por diante quem possa encher tanto numero de igreias de boas imagens e contentar tambem muitos senhores christãos.” In Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, vol.5. José Wicki (Ed.). Lisboa: Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1984, Capítulo 61: “Do que este anno [de 1593] soccedeo assim em Arima, como no seminario de Fachiravó”, pp.479–480. I have used the English translation by Cooper, op. cit., p.36.

- 44 Curvelo, “Copy to Convert. Jesuit’s Missionary Artistic Practice in Japan”, pp.111–127.  
 45 Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice*. Leiden, Boston & Köln: Brill, 2001, pp.19–27.  
 46 As an example, the Jesuit Annual letter dated from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1596 makes a particular reference to the *dōjuku* working at the Painting Seminary. Cf. ARSI, Jap. Sin. 52, Carta Ânua do Japão de 3 de Dezembro de 1596, f.193 («Del Seminario de Arie»). This document is referred to by Schütte in *Monumenta Historica Japoniae I. Textus catalogorum Iaponiae aliaque de personis domibusque S. I. In Iaponia. Informationes et relations, 1549–1654*, p.517, note 5.

(c.1574–1619). Born in Nagasaki he became a *dōjuku* in 1587, but not until 1602 did he enter the Novitiate of Todos os Santos where in the next year, he is listed as “pintor y abridor” (painter and copper engraver).<sup>47</sup>



**Fig. 2.** *Yōjin sogakuzu byōbu* (folding screens). Japan, early seventeenth century. Ink and colours on paper. H. 93 × W. 302 cm (each) © MOA MUSEUM of Art , Shizuoka

In the framework of the Jesuit Painting Seminary, the circulation of individuals from different cultural and religious contexts, and of a rich, diversified visual and material culture, contributed to the creation of a very particular visual *corpus*. Its imagery originated in varied Christian iconographical models (mainly Italian,

47 Leonardo Kimura decided to stay in Japan after 1614, having accompanied Father Ishida Kyutaku António to Hiroshima. Due to its relationship with the escape of the Christian samurai Akashi Naiki, he was arrested in 1616 and burned alive in Nagasaki on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1619. Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, Appendix C, p.276; “Kimura, Leonardo”. O’Neill; Domínguez (Eds.), *Diccionario Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús: Biográfico-Temático*. 4 Vols. Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2001, vol. 3, p.2193. Cf. Schurhammer, “Die Jesuitenmissionare des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts und ihr Einfluss auf die japanische Malerei”, pp.120–121 and Schütte, “KIMURA, Leonardus S.J.”. *Monumenta Historica Japoniae I. Textus catalogorum Iaponiae aliaeque de personis domibusque S. I. In Iaponia. Informationes et relations, 1549–1654*.



Flemish, and Spanish), while it made use of different techniques (oil and tempera on wood, paper, or copper, as well as engravings),<sup>48</sup> and employed diverse pictorial supports (including the painting of folding screens, screens, hanging scrolls (*kakemono*), retables and oratories). Some authors emphasise that the Christian (*kirishitan*) images that emerged in early modern Japan, particularly the paintings, reveal “(...) that the [Japanese] artists had learned to unite their technique with Christian spirituality”, thus producing “(...) a new type of religious painting in Japan”.<sup>49</sup> The alleged portrait of Pedro Gómez attests precisely to the advent of a new type of religious hybrid images that confirm a cross-cultural partnership, thus giving rise to what has been termed “visual bilingualism”.<sup>50</sup>

Hioki Naoko conceived this term in the analysis of a set of Japanese folding screens depicting figures of European aristocrats in a European-like pastoral landscape an example of a *Yōjin sōgakuzu* (paintings of Europeans Playing Music) in the MOA MUSEUM of Art in Shizuoka (Fig. 2). By adopting a double point of view – European/Christian and Japanese/Buddhist – such a work incorporates perspectives of both Christian and Buddhist iconographies and by doing so, offers different narratives depending on the audience, whether of ordinary Japanese and/or Catholic missionaries and Christian converts. While the latter would see Christian figures in a pastoral background (a shepherd, a Catholic priest, a hermit, a winepress motif symbolizing the sacrifice of Jesus), conveying a didactic message about the pilgrimage to the heavenly city and the spiritual education of the young, the others would see as an outdoor merrymaking scene resonating a Buddhist paradise, and the depiction of a joyous mingling of the “sacred” and the “profane”. Taking this interpretation a step further, I suggest that the images of hermits set in an idyllic landscape or isolated in a plain set appear illuminated in the light of what Kendall Brown called the ‘values of aesthetic reclusion’.<sup>51</sup> That is to say

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- 48 One striking example is the painting of Our Lady of the Snow – known by locals as *Yuki no Santa Maria* – a painting that was found in the small town of Sotome, Nagasaki, in the 1970s and today on display at the Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum, in Nagasaki. This is a hanging scroll format painting whose material and laboratory analysis attests to be most likely a part of a larger painting which is painted on a piece of Japanese paper possibly using emulsion paints such as tempera with different pigments mixed to create colour variations, and a final layer of varnish of natural resin, producing a final work compatible with the European techniques of the Painting Seminary. Asano; Takeda; Takabayashi, “Our Lady of the Snow in Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum, Nagasaki: Scientific Examinations and an Analysis of Painting Technique”. *Junshin Journal of Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research*, no. 1 (March 2012), pp.1–30.
- 49 Garcia Gutiérrez, “A Survey on Namban Art”. *The Southern Barbarians. The First Europeans in Japan*. Michael Cooper, S.J. (Ed.). Tōkyō; Palo Alto: Kodansha International Ltd.; Sophia University, 1971, p.152.
- 50 Hioki, “Visual Bilingualism and Mission Art: A Reconsideration of “Early Western-Style Painting” in Japan”, pp.23–44.
- 51 Kendall, *The Politics of Reclusion. Painting and Power in Momoyama Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997, with a particular focus on pp.175–179.



that they also express a cultural phenomenon associated with the power elite that developed in the Momoyama and early Edo periods, that featured paintings of Chinese-hermit themes such as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and the Four Graybeards of Mt. Shang, or even the lives of hermit-scholars, namely Shōkadō Shōjo (1584–1639) and Ishikawa Jōzan (1583–1672).

MOA MUSEUM of Art's pair of folding-screens is by no means unique in utilizing a classic Japanese format in which to present depictions of Europeans in an idyllic landscape, nor of European musicians playing Western instruments or hermits reading books. An important repertoire, extant specimens can be seen in private and public collections, namely in the Fukuoka City Museum, the Eisei Bunko Foundation (Tōkyō), the Kobe City Museum, the Yamato Bunkakan (Nara) and the Nanban Bunkakan (Ōsaka).<sup>52</sup> Particularly relevant to the study of the Kobe City Museum's portrait are the paintings of religious men, mainly hermits, of which one of the most impressive, due to the application of Western-style techniques, is attributed to Nobukata (active in the first half of the seventeenth century)<sup>53</sup> (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** A Hermit reading a book Attributed to Nobukata. Japan, late sixteenth-early seventeenth century. Colour on paper. H, 35.0 × 55.7 cm. Private collection

52 Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, op. cit. See also Garcia Gutiérrez, “A Survey on Namban Art”, particularly pp.163–175; *Namban Arts Selection. Kobe City Museum and The Namban Art of Japan. Paintings and screens*. Ōsaka: The National Museum of Art, 1986.

53 This painting is in a private collection but has been displayed in exhibitions such as *A Record of Encounter with the Namban Culture*. Special Exhibition. Kobe City Museum, 1992, Cat. 30, p.32, and 105. See Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, op. cit., Cat.37, pp.226–227.



**Fig. 4.** Portrait of Nikkyō Shōnin. Seal of Nobukata. Japan, early seventeenth century (1608?). Colour on paper. H. 117 × W. 60 cm © Shōren-ji, Yamazaki, Hyōgo Prefecture. Reproduction from: *Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan* 東京国立博物館編, ed. Dai Nichiren ten: Rikkyō kaishū 750 - nen kinen 大日蓮展: 立教開宗750年記念 (Tōkyō: Sankei Shinbunsha, 2003).]

However, when it comes to making a parallel between the presumed portrait of Gómez and other paintings, another image calls for attention: the Portrait of Nikkyō Shōnin at Shōren-ji, complete with the Nichiren invocation *Namu Myōhō Rengekyō* (“I devote myself to the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law”). It also bears the seal and signature of Nobukata<sup>54</sup> (Fig. 4). Nikkyō (1552–1608) was a priest of the Nichiren sect and founder of the Shōren-ji temple, where he is buried.<sup>55</sup> This hanging scroll is probably a posthumous portrait.<sup>56</sup> When compared to the alleged portrait of Gómez, it is particularly striking to observe the same realist approach, similar pose, and delicate treatment of the light and shadow modulation.

Nobukata’s extant works reveal an artist of considerable talent. Yet, the only information we have about him comes from his seal, which appears on various paintings, including the above-mentioned portrait of Nikkyō. Some consider this painting unique in that although executed in Western-style, it depicts a Buddhist figure and therefore does not follow the common practice within the Painting Seminary of replicating an imported European example.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, another of Nobukata’s pictorial compositions, a stylised painting of Daruma, or Bodhidharma,<sup>58</sup> the Indian monk who introduced Zen into China, testifies to Western-style technical principals but utilized in an image not produced under Jesuit patronage.

Nobukata’s signature and seal on several paintings, some painted in oil, allow by extension for attributions of others based on comparative stylistic and technical grounds. But no documentary evidence of his life remains, so that any theory about him is mere speculation. His name does not appear in the Jesuit Catalogue, yet this should not be considered a factor of suspicion about whether he passed through the institution, as these listings were far from exhaustive. We cannot determine definitively whether or not – or when – he studied in the Jesuit Painting Seminary, but nowhere else could he have obtained this specific training and such accomplished results. Based on her analysis of his signed works, including “Priest with

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54 Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, pp.171–173. About Nobukata, Cf. Vlam, *Ibidem*, p.19, and pp.181–183; McCall, “Early Jesuit Art in the Far East”. *Artibus Asiae*. vol. X/3. Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1947, pp.216–225.

55 Shōren-ji, Yamazaki, Hyōgo Prefecture. For a reproduction of the painting, see *Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan*, Ed. Dai Nichiren ten: Rikkyō kaishū 750-nen kinen. Tōkyō: Sankei Shinbunsha, 2003, p.78. I am grateful to Orion Klautau for having provided me with this image.

56 However, this portrait is dated from the late sixteenth century in Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, *op. cit.*, Cat.40, pp.234–235.

57 Cooper, “Western-Style Paintings in Japan”. John Breen; Mark Williams (Ed.), *Japan and Christianity. Impacts and Responses*. London; New York: Macmillan Press Ltd.; St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1996, p.39.

58 In Yōchiku-in, Saitama. There are several portraits of Zen masters that feature distinct Western-style and which are attributed to Nobukata because of the seal on the painting. See Hioki, *op. cit.*, p.33.

two children” (based on the painting of Shōtoku Taishi and His Sons)<sup>59</sup> Vlam was the first to attribute to him the Kobe portrait presumably depicting Gómez.<sup>60</sup> She assumes that before enrolling in the Jesuit Painting Seminary as a convert to Christianity, Nobukata was a Buddhist priest-painter, which thus explains the source of elements from Buddhism in his works. Yet in my view, the possibility exists of Nobukata being enrolled without converting to Christianity at any point. Analysis of his production argues that he was a Buddhist painter who incorporated Buddhist elements in a work that assimilated his apprenticeship of Western painting techniques. Moreover, his work reveals stylistic parallels suggesting possible prior training in one of the workshops of the Kanō School of painting, before entering the Jesuit Painting Seminary, perhaps in Arima.<sup>61</sup>

The Portrait of Nikkyō Shōnin at Shōren-ji suggests that around or after 1608, Nobukata must have been at Yamazaki, which indicates a relationship with the Nichiren sect. That a Western-style trained artist had been asked to portray the founder of a Nichiren temple must be emphasised. In the words of Okamoto Yoshitomo, “If we take it that this Nobukata was one of those who worked collectively on the making of genre screens for the Jesuits, we may be sure that he was the first of their art students, and that as a result of his technical superiority over his fellows received frequent commissions both from within and outside the Society, to which works he affixed his seal. For surely the pictures which survive bearing his seal can only be a fraction of the many works he must have completed.”<sup>62</sup>

The likelihood of Nobukata having had commissions from inside and outside the Society, on one hand, and maintaining a connection with both the Christian mission and the Nichiren sect, on the other hand, illuminates interesting interactions between these two religious realms through the activity of specific agents. That this Buddhist sect, at least in and around Kyōto, adopted the Maltese cross as a crest (*mon*) for their temples, supports the theory of lineage between these two communities. One striking example comes from Nose Yoritsugi (1563–1625) a Christian *daimyō* from the Settsu area between Ōsaka and Kyōto who adopted the same crest and kept it after his conversion to the Nichiren sect.<sup>63</sup>

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59 In the collection of Kobe City Museum. See *Namban Arts Selection. Kobe City Museum*, pp.66–67; Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, op. cit., Cat.36, pp.224–225.

60 Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, pp.181–183 and Appendix C, pp. 273–274. Cooper, op. cit., p.39.

61 McCall, op. cit., p.225.

62 Okamoto, *The Namban Art of Japan*. New York; Tōkyō: Weatherhill; Heibonsha, 1972, pp.144–145.

63 Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, pp.182–183, and Appendix C, pp.273–274. Interestingly, a *tsuba* (handle guard), knife, and a hairpin with the decoration of a Maltese cross dating from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century and coming from the collection of Ichio Kuga, in Ōsaka, are supposed to have belonged to Nose Yoritsugi. See *Namban Art. A Loan Exhibition from Japanese Collections*. N.p.: International Exhibitions Foundations, 1973, Fig. 64.

Although the case of Nobukata is the most striking, further evidence exists of Japanese painters who, after having learned Western-style painting within the Christian mission, earned their living by painting Christian images or by applying the foreign techniques they had mastered to Buddhist repertoires. A remarkable case is that of Yamada Emosaku (d. Nagasaki, in 1655?) who aside from links to the Painting Seminary, is renowned in the history of the Shimabara uprising. From the island of Kyūshū, and a vassal of the Arima clan, before entering the service of Matsukura Shigemasa (157–1630) in Shimabara, Emosaku was among the Japanese Christians defending Castle against the Tokugawa troops. When the rebel army fell before the Tokugawa forces, Emosaku's life was spared because of his contribution as an informer. This allowed him to continue painting Buddhist subjects such as portraits of Zen masters using the Western painting techniques he had learned.<sup>64</sup>

The techniques introduced into Japan by the Christian mission resulted in a new type of image for Japanese, who found its optical illusionism particularly alluring when applied to portraits. The missionaries perceived this wonderment and perhaps one of the most expressive testimonies comes from the later period of the Mission, a letter of 1607 by João Rodrigues Girão (1558–1629) referring to the impression created by the decoration of the new church built in Kyōto:

(...) the painting and gilding of the main chapel's lining in the style of Europe and above all the setting of the altars with very good oil altarpieces, a kind of painting new for the Japanese who had never seen it, and of which they are greatly amazed; so much so that many or almost everyone thought that the images of the altarpieces were freestanding sculptures because of their perfection for not having in Japan such a way of painting with shadows.<sup>65</sup>

The remaining production associated with the Painting Seminary along with the information we have or can infer from the available data linked to specific

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64 About Emosaku, see Hioki, op. cit., pp.32–33; *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, pp.116; 280–282; McCall, op. cit., vol. X/3, pp.225–233; Mody, *A Collection of Nagasaki Colour Prints and Paintings Showing the Influence of Chinese and European Art on that of Japan*. vol.1. London; Kobe: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd.; J.L.Thompson & Co., Ltd., 1939; Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997, pp.14–15.

65 Free translation from the original text: “(...) pintando se e dourando se o forro da capela mor ao modo de Europa e sobretudo armando se os altares com muito bons retabulos de oleos, pintura para japoens muito nova e nunca vista, e de que grandemente pasmam; tanto que muitos, ou quasi todos julgavam as imagens dos retabulos por estatuas de vulto pela perfeição delas por não haver em japam tal modo de pintar com sombras”. Annual letter from Japan written by João Rodrigues Girão on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1607, Biblioteca da Ajuda, 49-IV-59, f. 434v-435. *Apud* Costa, op. cit., footnote 345.

names, such as those of Leonardo Kimura, Nobukata or Emosaku, indicates interesting networks of transmission and exchange through translators and other intermediaries between two cultural and religious spheres. Yet the Christian mission had access to other centres of visual production. Primary documents reveal two groups of artists working for the Jesuits in Japan: those at the Painting Seminary, whose diverse background has already been discussed, and those at an affiliated local workshop (namely from the Kanō school), with no direct relationship with the Jesuit Painting Seminary.<sup>66</sup> We may classify these groups as the “inner” and “outer” circles of Jesuit and the Christian mission art production.<sup>67</sup> What emerges is thus a composite environment for the production of images, with a constellation of institutions and/or persons involved. A pivotal place of learning and communication, the Painting Seminary played an essential role in the construction of the mission’s visual and material cultural context and as a mediator with a wider audience. This was possible not only by the aggregation of an eclectic body of people but also through the numerous activities they were involved in, as the Mission and the Painting Seminary in particular embraced other practices besides painting and engraving, as music, theatre, and other performative activities, which were fundamental for the Christian religious ceremonial.

## Defying (Whose) Conventions?

A pair of *Nanban* folding screens depicting the arrival of a Black ship and Southern Barbarians to a Japanese shore, now kept in the Museum of the Imperial Collections (Sannomaru Shozokan, Tōkyō), presents a curious detail. On the right screen, we can observe a group of these foreigners walking toward a religious compound where Western missionaries gather around an outdoor altar (Fig. 5). The altar, whose curtains are pulled back to reveal the interior, has in its centre an image of Christ portrayed with dark skin, long, dark curly hair, a moustache and long beard.<sup>68</sup> Although we can infer by the position of this figure that it was meant as a *Salvator mundi* or Christ as the saviour of the world, the gesture of the right-hand does not convey exactly the established iconography, nor the positioning of the left hand resting over an indistinct support and sustaining a cross. However,

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66 I call attention to Mia Mochizuki’s analysis of the World Map screens (Bankoku ezu byōbu 万国絵図屏風) in the Museum of the Imperial Collections, which illuminates this subject. Mochizuki, “A Global Eye: The Perception of Place in a Pair of Tokugawa World Map Screens”. *Japan review: Journal of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies*, vol. 29 (2017), pp.69–119.

67 Bailey, op. cit., p.14 and Hioki, op. cit., p.32.

68 There are several *Nanban* folding screens depicting the Black ship and the *nanban-jin* with details of altars with a Christian painting and similar liturgical utensils, namely in the *Nanban Bunkakan*, Ōsaka; the Tshodai-ji, Nara; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., and the Matsuoka Museum of Art, Tōkyō.





**Fig. 5.** Detail of a pair of six-leaf folding screens (each) with the Black Ship (*kurofune*) and the Southern Barbarians (*nanban-jin*). Japan, Kanō School, early seventeenth century. Colour (tempera) and gold leaf on paper; wood (frame). H. 156 × W. 344.5 cm (each) © The Museum of the Imperial Collections (Sannomaru Shozokan), Tōkyō

its identity as a Christian image leaves no doubt, as it asserts itself by the general ambience and the symbol of the cross, even though this iconography evokes similar icons of Buddhist and Daoist deities.<sup>69</sup>

If some pictorial compositions produced in the Painting Seminary gave rise to double reading, it would have not been the case here because the main symbol associated with this foreign religion in Japan is present, even if in a peculiar way. Nonetheless, sometimes the fact that the Catholic symbol was not known or recognisable as such by the non-Christians allowed a Buddhist reading of an image. That

69 Shin, “The Jesuits and the Portrait of God in Late Ming China”. *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 107, no. 2 (April 2014), pp.194–221.



was the case of the oil on canvas depicting Saint Peter, now in the collection of the Nanban Bunkakan (Ōsaka). Preserved for many years in the temple of Kakuō, in Funabashi (Chiba Prefecture), and venerated as a portrait of a Buddhist Saint, it escaped the destruction of Christian images that accompanied the persecution of Christians<sup>70</sup> (Fig. 6). In other words, this image's ability to speak a double language, or to incorporate 'visual bilingualism',<sup>71</sup> insured its survival in the turmoil that followed the expulsion of the missionaries in 1614 and the Portuguese in 1639.



**Fig. 6.** Saint Peter. Japan, late sixteenth-early seventeenth-century. Oil on canvas. H. 119 × W. 69.0 cm © Nanban Bunkakan, Ōsaka

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70 Garcia Gutiérrez, "A Survey on Namban Art", p.157; Sakamoto; Ide; Ochi; Hidaka, op. cit., Cat.74, pp.324–325.

71 Hioki, op. cit.

Returning to the folding screen of the Museum of the Imperial Collections, we can observe that other than the presence of Christ, probably attesting to production at the Painting Seminary, the colourful Japanese architectural setting includes an altar with an array of liturgical ritual instruments and objects. The utensils depicted and the altar itself closely resemble those used in Buddhist<sup>72</sup> and Shinto temples, where paintings and other elements such as textiles, incense and, ceramics play a significant part in the sacred setting as expressions of the concept and practice of *shōgon*, “which denotes adornment that proclaims and celebrates the divine”.<sup>73</sup> Western missionaries knew this term, which refers to a decorative setting to imbue rituals with a sense of solemnity and ‘gravitas’. It appears in the Portuguese-Japanese dictionary *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam*, published in Nagasaki in 1603.<sup>74</sup> With no equivalent in Western languages for the Japanese term involved, its translation as “resplendence” or “decoration” denies its religious aura. Yet these pictorial compositions, and the writings of the time, make clear that the missionaries understood it well.

The painting is sufficiently detailed for us to identify a Chinese ceramic incense burner and, on an adjacent table, what has been identified as a monstrance, or a receptacle for the display of the consecrated Host, with a *tomoemon* (or more precisely a *migi mitsudomoe*) decoration and a cross on the top.<sup>75</sup> Curiously, another folding screen with the same subject now in Tenri Central Library, portrays a similar object on the deck of a Black Ship but with the central body of the piece left unadorned.<sup>76</sup> The *tomoemon* pattern, possibly related to water and the idea of a whirlpool, typically decorates the semi-cylindrical eave-end tiles of Buddhist temples and frequently Shinto shrines, which may indicate that it expressed the spirit of the gods.<sup>77</sup> Roof tiles excavated at some Christian archaeological sites in

72 More precisely the *mitsu-gusoku* (三具足) or the Japanese Buddhism traditional arrangement of three articles, usually consisting of a censer, a candlestick, and a vase for flower offerings often displayed in front of a painting of the Buddha. Curiously, this term appears in the *Vocabulario*: “Mitsugusoku – Tres cousas que se poem diante dos idolos. s. perfumador, castiçal, & hu vaso pera por rosas, ou flores.”, p.724 (free translation: “Mitsugusoku – Three things that stand before idols. s. perfumer, candlestick, and a vase to hold roses, or flowers”).

73 Watsky, *Chikubushima: Deploying the Sacred Arts in Momoyama Japan*. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 2004, p.36.

74 In the *Vocabulario* it appears as “xōgon”: “Cazari cazaru. *Lustro, ou ornato*. ¶ Xogon suru. *ornar*”. *Vocabulario da lingoa de Iapam* (1603). Tadao Doi (Ed.). Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1960. [online, DOI: <https://archive.org/details/nippoishovocabv06doit/page/n9/mode/2up>]

75 Okamoto; Takamizawa, *Nanban Byōbu*, vol. 1, Cat.2, pp.121–122. See also Sakamoto; Narusawa; Izumi, et al., *Nanban byōbu shūsei (A Catalogue Raisonné of the Nanban Screens)*. Tōkyō: Chūōkōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 2008, Cat.7, pp. 330–331 and Okada (Ed.), *Kirishitan no seiki*. Zusetusu Nihon no Rekishi 10. Tōkyō: Shūeisha, 1975, particularly pp.113–120.

76 Sakamoto; Narusawa; Izumi, et al., op. cit., Cat.50.

77 “Tomoemon”, JAANUS. Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System: <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/tomoemon.htm> (October 2020).

Japan attest to its appearance in a Christian context. One such case can be found in Nagasaki, where the Museum of the Church of São Domingos (Santo Domingo Church) displays examples of round eaves tiles with the pattern of *tomoemon* along with tiles decorated with different variations of floral crosses (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7.** Round eaves tiles with the pattern of *tomoemon* (left) and of a floral cross (right). Japan, early seventeenth century. © Museum of Santo Domingo Church, Nagasaki

From the beginning of the Christian mission in Japan, the Western missionaries noted the Japanese fondness for religious images and objects. Recognition of this natural predisposition became a convincing argument for the necessity of replacing images of local idols with a Christian repertoire, especially pictures of Saints, to which converts became much devoted. The Museum of the Church of São Domingos, and many other private and public collections in Japan, exhibit such devotional objects. Particularly important are those of the Nanban Bunkakan (Ōsaka), the 26 Martyrs Museum (Nagasaki), the Amakusa Christian Museum, the Amakusa Rosary Museum, and the Hirado City Ikitsuki Folk Museum (Shima-no-yakata). Along with painted and printed images of Christ, those of the Virgin and the Saints, religious medals, plaquettes (*mediai*), rosaries,<sup>78</sup> and crosses played a

78 Like the Jesuits, the Franciscans also testify to the importance of rosaries for the Japanese. See *Documentos Franciscanos de la Cristiandad de Japon (1593–1597)*. San

significant role in the popular devotion of the believers. Some of these, like the pictorial compositions, came to be produced in Japan as well as Europe.<sup>79</sup>

This overall awareness, to which the foundation of the Painting Seminary is closely connected, also links with the principle of ‘accommodation’. Of the activities to which this applied, the practice of liturgy proved particularly receptive and found considerable success under the work of a number of missionaries.<sup>80</sup> One of the first to understand the need to observe and learn from the ritual and ceremony of Buddhist sects in order to convey some familiarity to Japanese converts to Christianity was Baltasar Gago (c.1515/20–1583).<sup>81</sup> This practice of attending Buddhist ceremonies to observe specific behaviours and apprehend the overall ambience was further explored by Gaspar Vilela (1526–1572),<sup>82</sup> one of the main figures responsible for the development of the cultural accommodation method. In 1565, when living in Kyōto, the oratory of a bonze at a lecture attended by Vilela left him stunned. A companion later wrote that the mission greatly benefited from the practice of listening to the Buddhist lectures: “(...) [Father Vilela] took great

*Martin de la Ascensión Y Fray Marcelo de Ribadeneira. Relaciones e Informaciones.* José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz (Ed.), Ōsaka: S.e., 1973, p.193.

- 79 Reference is due to the material and laboratory study of a *plaque* of Madonna of Loreto at the Nakatani collection, Ibaraki city, Ōsaka prefecture, whose Japanese origin, and not necessarily, a European one is put forward by scientific research. Asano; Takeda, “A Study on a Plaque of Madonna of Loreto”. *Junshin Journal of Human Studies*, no.18 (January 2012), pp.113–136.
- 80 The most important study on this subject is still the outstanding book by López Gay, *La Liturgia en la Misión del Japón del Siglo XVI*. Roma: Libreria dell’Università Gregoriana, 1970.
- 81 Baltasar Gago was born in Lisbon where he was admitted to the Company in 1546. He left for India in 1548, where he stayed for 3 years until sailing to China and then Japan, where he arrived in the summer of 1552. Gago founded the Bungo mission together with Brother João Fernandes (1552–1556), and then moved on to Hirado (1556–1557), and from there to Hakata (1558–1559); in this city, he was imprisoned during a revolt against Ōtomo Yoshishige. After three months of captivity, he was released and he left for India. He arrived in Goa in April 1562 and remained there until his death on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1583. Costa, *O Cristianismo no Japão e o Bispado de D. Luís Cerqueira*. PhD in History, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (NOVA FCSH), 1998, Apêndice ‘Jesuítas no Japão’.
- 82 Vilela was born in Aviz, Portugal, was educated by Benedictine monks and came to join the Company in India in 1553. He arrived in Japan with Melchior Nunes Barreto, in 1556 and lived in Bungo (1556–1558), Hirado (1558–1559), and Miyako (1559–1566), where he was the founder of the first mission in the centre of Japan. After returning to Kyūshū, he organized a mission to Korea, but the trip did not take place. In 1569, he was in Nagasaki, involved in the building of the first church. He left for India at the end of 1570 and died there in 1572. Costa, *Ibidem*.

advantage of this visit because he could take some teaching about how to proceed with the Christians in preaching, according to their [Japanese] taste and language (...).<sup>83</sup>

The advantage referred to in this letter comprised not only the learning of the Japanese language but also the study of the sermons of the bonzes, with the aim of subsequent adaptation to Catholic ritual. Later, Valignano echoed these same ideas in the *Cerimoniale*, when discussing how to obtain and maintain authority (respect) when interacting with the Japanese:

In order to maintain this authority it matters greatly that all the church's ceremonies should be done with much reverence and outward appearance, without any pressure or haste, but slowly, just as the bonzes do and that is why they must learn well the Church formalities, giving good order to them so there is no confusion.<sup>84</sup>

Once more, Valignano underlines that there could not be any misunderstandings in the process. The overall objective was to make Christian ceremony more familiar to the Japanese converts through the adaptation of some recognisable elements that would not change the Christian message and meaning. A principle of utmost importance for Valignano and the Mission, the Visitor discusses it both in the *Cerimoniale* (1581), and in the *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón* (1583).<sup>85</sup> Moreover, it is essential to remember that during this period there existed no such a thing as liturgical uniformity, which only came as direct consequence of the Council of Trent. Not until 1605 did the new Nagasaki press finally publish the *Manuale ad Sacramenta Ecclesiae ministranda* that López Gay refers to as a “liturgical event,” in the sense that from that moment on it would be the definitive ritual of the Mission in Japan.<sup>86</sup>

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83 *Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreveram dos Reynos de Japão & China aos da mesma Companhia da India & Europa desde anno de 1549 até o de 1580*. Em Evora por Manoel de Lyra, Anno de MDXCVIII [1598] (henceforth: *Cartas*), vol. 1, letter from Luís Fróis written in Kyōto (Myaco) for the brothers in India, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1565, f.184r. Free translation from the original text: “(...) não aproveitou tão pouco esta ida, que dali se não tomassem algumas lições pera melhor proceder com os Christãos em as pregações, conforme a seu gosto, & lingoa”.

84 Valignano, op. cit., p.154. Free translation from the original text: “Importa muito pera se conservar esta autoridade fazeren-se todos os officios da igreja com muita reverencia e aparato exterior, sem strepito nem pressa, mas pausadamente, assi como fazem os bonzos, e por isso hé necessario que aprendão bem as cerimoniaes da Igreja, dando nos officios boa ordem, pera que não aja nenhuma confusão”.

85 Valignano, *Sumario de las cosas de Japon (1583). Adiciones del Sumario del Japon (1592)*. vol. I. José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz (Ed.). Tōkyō: Sophia University, 1954, particularly p.245 ff., when answering the question number 18 “If it is good to keep in all the customs and ceremonies that the bonzes use” (free translation from the original text: “Si es bien guardar en todo las costumbres y ceremonias que los bonzos usan”).

86 López Gay, op. cit., p.15.



**Fig. 8.** Detail of a pair of six-leaf folding screens (each) with the Black Ship and the *nanban-jin*, showing a Christian chapel with an altar similar in form and decoration to the remaining exemplar inside Kōdai-ji’s memorial mortuary building (*tamaya*) built in Kyōto in the early seventeenth century. Japan, Kanō School, early seventeenth century. Colour (tempera) and gold leaf on paper; wood (frame). © Nanban Bunkakan, Ōsaka

In the use of Japanese architectural forms, including Buddhist temples<sup>87</sup> (Fig. 8), for Christian churches and residences as part of the principle of adaptation,<sup>88</sup> I shall focus on the process referred to by López Gay as the “substitution principle,”<sup>89</sup> part of what he classifies as a dynamic, “positive adaptation”. It can be perceived through a series of manifestations, including the social dynamics of the Painting Seminary framework and the work it produced. It can also be found, as López Gay pointed out, in the way that missionaries adapted the Christian celebrations. They did this not only by creating an official calendar of the Japanese church, but also by

87 Higashino, “Jesuit Architecture in Japan: How to Convert a Buddhist Temple into a Church”. *Anais de História de Além-Mar*, vol. XVII (2016), pp.245–270.

88 See in this book the text by Rie Arimura.

89 López Gay, op. cit., pp.21–26, and 34–40.



adjusting it to the religious calendar of Japan, which had a multitude of festivals. These the people could not do without, as they were linked to long tradition, and integrated the social life of the kingdom. Of particular relevance were the O-Bon, or Buddhist festival of the dead, the Shinto festival of Gion-matsuri,<sup>90</sup> and especially Shōgatsu or New Year's Day.

The dynamic principle of adaptation allowed new converts to continue to participate in traditional Japanese practices, but exchanged their original meanings for ones rooted in Christian belief. Among the most interesting, the celebration of 'Our Lady of Protection', known in Japanese as 'On-inamori no Santa Maria', replaced that of Shōgatsu.<sup>91</sup> However, as López Gay asserts, the theory of liturgical substitution was not limited to the great solemnities. It penetrated a multitude of details, to which the Christian architecture and interiors depicted in the folding screens attest. This principle transformed many traditional values in Japanese culture into festive elements of Christian celebrations, above all those that could find an appropriate place in the liturgy, such as music and certain performances. According to authors such as López Gay and Léon Bourdon, perhaps the most interesting realization was the creation of *mai* and *kyōgen* – representations and dances – that replaced their ancient solemnities with Christian liturgical ones.

The Jesuits in Japan had already printed a collection of *mai* (sacred dances) by the early seventeenth century. Texts compiled by father Manuel Barreto (c.1563–1620),<sup>92</sup> which included translations of Scripture on Sunday, lives of Saints and several prayers, refer to these sacred scenes that were presented in churches. Even though the information we have about the performances made during important liturgical festivities, in particular those of the Holy Week, Easter, and Christmas, makes reference to the European archetypes from which they derived, the use of the term *mai* suggests that the recitation was accompanied by gestures and hieratic poses similar to those of traditional Japanese dances, particularly in Nō and Kyōgen.<sup>93</sup> These had become popular at the end of the fifteenth century thanks to the work of Buddhist bonzes, and can be described as poetic narratives sung during

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90 To which Luís Fróis makes an interesting reference in a letter he wrote in Kyōto on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1571. *Cartas*, vol. 1, f.331v: "(...) the most solemn festivity of the year, the one that seems to call people from all over Japan and where it seems that the devil wanted to dispute the Corpus Christi celebration (...)" (Free translation from the original text: "(...) a mais solene de todo o anno pera ver, a que parece concorrem ordinariamente de todo o Iapão em que perece que o demonio quis contrafazer a festa de corpus Christi (...)").

91 López Gay, op. cit., p.36.

92 About Manuel Barreto, who was proficient in Japanese and one of the closer companions of Bishop D. Luís Cerqueira, see Costa, op. cit.

93 Bourdon, *Rites et jeux sacrés de la mission japonaise des Jésuites vers 1560–1565*. Separata de Miscelânea de Filologia, Literatura e História Cultural. À memória de Francisco Adolfo Coelho (1847–1919). Lisboa: Centro de Estudos Filológicos, 1950, p.321 e ss.



a mime dance. Having as main themes the exploits of national heroes, they contain elements of Japan's popular, military and religious life.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, the literature of the missionaries includes constant references to the presence of music in religious environments: in Shinto festivals and Buddhist temples such as in Midara, where the occupation of the bonzes was 'to sing', or that of Katsura, that celebrated a dance ritual performed by Zen nuns.<sup>95</sup>

In this context, a passage of a letter written by father Luís de Almeida (1525–1583) from Funai (Ōita) on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1561 is thus revealing. Little more than 10 years had passed since the establishment of the Mission when Almeida refers to the celebration of Christmas in the following way:

The Christmas feast is celebrated here with much joy. It is attended by the Japanese Christians with their plays that last for many days. They represent many stories of the Holy Scripture with precept. About these stories they make up songs and motets their way, singing continuously.<sup>96</sup>

Undoubtedly, these vernacular festive elements helped the Mission to come closer to a Japanese audience, and over the years this incorporation came to be more and more elaborate. Two descriptions referring to the Holy Week, one from 1584 and the other dated 1585, offer particularly detailed and evocative accounts of this complex interaction and therefore, although long, deserve our attention. The first locates this religious celebration in Usuki:

(...) The *Ofício das Trevas* [*matutina tenebrarum*] was performed in the best possible way. On Maundy Thursday, the tomb of Christ was shown and we can say that it was the most luxurious of all that have been made in Japan until now. The Japanese were so amazed that they could not keep their eyes off it. It was so huge that it occupied the whole chapel. Its structure was square; it was in a high position and had a good volume. It was constructed of diamonds made of white paper that we call *suybara* and marbled stones made the same way, with a chess pattern, and dusted with gold from China. It rested on six marbled and gleaming columns (...). Above the altar was a dome made of marbled stones dusted with gold and the altar and the round gallery that circled it, where the body of Christ was buried were exquisitely adorned. Moreover, the side chapel was dressed up with very rich folding screens ('Beonbus'). The

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94 López Gay, op. cit., p.180.

95 Ibidem, p.165.

96 Free translation from the original text: "A festa do Natal se celebra quá tão bem com muita alegria; onde os japões christãos vêm todos com seus autos que de muitos dias se provêm; onde representão muitas histórias da Sagrada Scriptura e de muita doutrina. Sobre as quoaís histórias se compõem cantos e trovas à sua maneira, que contínuo cantão." Letter from Luís de Almeida to António Quadros. Funai, 1st of October 1561, *Documentos del Japón*, vol. 2 (1558–1562). Juan Ruiz-de-Medina, S.J. (Ed.). Roma: Instituto Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús, 1995, Doc. N.º 44, p.378.

King<sup>97</sup> was so happy that he wouldn't leave the sacristy, talking to the Fathers in a very familiar way.<sup>98</sup>

One year after, in 1585, the description of the Holy Week celebration in Arima is seemingly striking:

The rest of the day was spent in continuing the structures which were begun for the Passover procession, which took place around the great four-sided square. At the corners of it, bulwarks with canopies of branches were constructed, and around it, a street of well-ordered branches and in the middle there were some trees with gunpowder devices. The church, fortress, and all the people were heavily adorned with canopies of branches, and flagged. The inhabitants had sticks as tall as masts at their doors with narrow banners, and painted ropes, and they were so many that they looked like a great navy by the sea. The Christians made many creations of paper lamps of varied figures and colours, and of these, a great number were on the streets of the procession. Inside the church, there were many other candlesticks. The procession went before dawn, and near the baldachin, there were four boys from the Seminary dressed as Angels with candlesticks and candles in their hands. The others of the Seminary and the brothers were dressed with surplices and the fathers with a cap. There were so many people that we could not break through it and when looking at the fortress, trees and bulwarks we only saw people dressed as at a party. To enter the square we passed the bridge over the river that was very bright with much brushwood. On the way out there was an ingenious and ornate carriage, and on the top of it, (because

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97 Ōtomo Yoshishige, also known as Ōtomo Sōrin and by his Christian name D. Francisco, *daimyō* of Bungo.

98 Free translation from the original text: "(...) os ofícios das trevas se fizeram com a melhor ordem que foy possível chegada quinta feira de endoenças apareceu o sepulchro ao encerrar do Senhor o quall se podia afirmar que foy o mays luxtroso e pera ver que ate gora Em Japão se fez de que os Japões ficarão admirados sem saberem delle tirar os olhos o quall Era tão grande que ocupava toda a capela & a maquina do Sepulchro Era quadrada & estava alto & em boa proporsão Era feito de diamans muito brancos de papel que se chama suybara & de pedras Jaspeadas do mesmo ordenado tudo a modo denxadres & semeado de ouro/da china fundado tudo Isto sobre Seys columnas douradas muito lustrozas – tudo o embate da Vista era feito de pedras Razas brancas Jaspeadas & semeadas douro, as grades/danbas as bandas de Jaspes Roliços Sobre o Altar estava feita huma abobada da mesma obra & o altar & charola aonde o Senhor Se emserrou [sic] Estava muy bem ornado per se meter nelle tudo o Resto de casa – a Isto ajuntava estar a capela ao Redor ornada de muy Ricos Beonbus el Rey andava tão alegre que não cabia de prazer & assi nunca Sahia da sacrestia falando & conversando com os padres & Irmãos muy familiarmente." Annual letter written by Luís Fróis from Nagasaki on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1584 and addressed to Alessandro Valignano. ARSI, Jap. Sin. 9-II, f.280v. This document is published in *Cartas*, vol. 2, f. 103 ff. and is referred to by Okamoto in *Letters of the Society of Jesus*. Tōkyō: Kirishitan Bunkwa Kenkyū Kwai (Institute of Early Japanese Christian Culture), 1949.

it was like a tower) there were five Angels, the greatest of whom was the brother of the lord of this land, and represented the Angel of Custody. The others were the sons of the noblest people here. Underneath there were other figures, which represented the devil and as we arrived in a good place they acted their sayings. Then came the dances in the manner of Japan, one from the noble people, and others from those of the villages. The bulwarks fired a great number of harquebusiers, when the carriage passed through them, the trees of fire played their role in time, and everything was ordered so that the regular was the song of the church, and in certain places the other things.<sup>99</sup>

Though these Jesuit accounts were written to impress the high hierarchy of the Society – the first excerpt comes from the Annual Letter sent to Rome and the second one from a letter directed to Valignano – there is no reason to believe that, despite some likely enhancement of the events overall, this kind of performances did not take place in the broader terms in which they are described. The same applies to the Japanese folding screens depicting the missionaries, their churches and residences. They did not represent a reality such as it existed but as it was perceived. It is

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99 Free translation from the original text: “(...) O resto do dia se gastou em continuar as armações que estuão começadas pera a procissão da Pascoa, aqual se fez ao redor de hũa grande praça quadrada (...).”

Aos cantos della se fizerão baluartes mui enramados, & ao redor hũa rua de ramos bem ordenados & no meo se puserão algũas aruores com inuênções de poluora. A igreja, fortaleza, & todo o pouo estauão mui enramados, & embandeirados: os moradores aluantarão paos mui altos como mastos ás suas portas con bandeiras estreitas, & cordas pintadas, & eraõ tantis que parecia hũa grande armada por mar: fizerão os Christãos muitas inuênções de alenternas de papel, de diuersas figuras, & cores, & destas auia grande numero: polas ruas da procissão, & dentro na igreja afora outras muitas candeas sahio a procissão antes de amanhecer, & junto do palio hião quatro mininos do seminario vestidos em figura de Anjos com castiçais, & velas nas mãos, & os outros do seminario, & os irmãos leuauão sobrepelizes, & os padres capas. A gente era tanta que não se podia romper por ella, & olhando pera a fortaleza, aruores, & baluartes não se via senão gente vestida de festa, pera entrar na praça passamos a ponte do rio que estaua muito fresca com muitas portas de ramos, & ao sair della veo ao encontro hum carro artificioso, & bem ornado, & no alto delle (porque era como torre) vinhão cinco molos em figura de Anjos, o maior delles era irmão do senhor desta terra, & representava o Anjo Custodio, os outros eraõ filhos da gente mais nobre que aqui há: embaixo vinhão outras figuras, que representauão o demonio, & como chegamos a bom posto representarão seus ditos. Depois vieraõ as inuênções de danças a modo de Iapão, hũa da gente nobre, & outras do pouo, & das aldeas. Os baluartes despararão muita arcabuzaria, quando passarão por elles, & as aruores de fogo fizerão seu officio a seu tempo, & tudo foi ordenado de modo, que o commum era o canto da igreja, & a certos postos as outras cousas.”

*Cartas*, vol. 2, “Annual das partes do Ximo, do anno de 1585 pera o Reuerendo padre geral da Companhia, escrita pelo padre Luis Froes de Nangaçãqui, ao 1 de Outubro de 1585”, f. 131v–132.

precisely the juxtaposition of sources from different cultural backgrounds, European (not only missionary, nor exclusively Jesuit), and Japanese, both written and visual/material, that provide the fundamentals to better understand this particular and complex historical context. The overall scenario that emerges from these accounts, and in particular the two excerpts above, is that Japan was a territory where Western missionaries, above all the Jesuits, implemented the Council of Trent's propagandistic stand that utilized art as a means of increasing and stimulating the people's faith in the church and its doctrine. To this end, the painting, music and theatrical performances that featured in the Jesuits' study programme and evangelization method, served the central purpose of appeal to the emotions of the faithful. Dramatic and illusory effects to inspire piety, devotion, and convey a sense of the splendour of the divine provided an essential counter to the reality that Japan already had a liturgy of its own that made use of singing, incense and light.<sup>100</sup> Thus in Usuki, Japanese folding screens and local materials (Japanese paper, gold from China) provided illusionistic substitutes for the diamonds, jasper stones and other costly and luxuriant materials that graced Europe's opulent places of worship. In Arima ephemeral architectures were employed, as well as gunpowder devices, painted ropes and banners, paper lanterns of diverse figures and colours, candlesticks and candles.

Light, sound and movement bonded everyone who participated in these religious Christian celebrations and practices, including the common people and the elite of society, transforming them into community events. Particularly striking is the reference, in the Arima festivities, to the use of an "ingenious and ornate carriage" (in Portuguese, 'hum carro artificioso, & bem ornado') with Angels (all played by the sons of the local nobility) and devils. It is impossible not to make a parallel between such a machine and the traditional Japanese wooden floats of the Gion festival, which the missionaries witnessed.<sup>101</sup> A festivity by this time singularly devoted to honouring the gods, it used wooden floats that incorporated Buddhist effigies into the designs. This observance featured mainly two types of floats: the *hoko*, giant constructions on wheels pulled by celebrants, and *yama*, portable shrines carried on the shoulders. *Yama* carried life-sized figurines of historical Japanese and over-sized puppets of animals and insects, all arranged into historical and legendary scenes centred on a *shingi* (a sacred tree, often a pine) as well as the occasional miniature Buddhist carving or shrine. The *hoko*, which seems to more closely resemble Fróis' description, was a three-story structure towering at eighty feet and weighing up to twelve tons, not including the massive wooden wheels at the bottom. It needed no fewer than thirty to forty men with long straw ropes to pull and push these enormous carts. Both included a stage on which troupes of sixty or more musicians using a variety of percussion

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100 Frank, *Dieux et Bouddhas au Japon*. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 2000, p.36.

101 As soon as 1561 Gaspar Vilela describes the *Gion Matsuri* in a letter sent to the Jesuits in India. Cf. *Cartas*, vol. 1, f. 89v-94r.

instruments and flutes played *Gion-bayashi*, religious music specific to the festival.<sup>102</sup> In addition, most important Buddhist festivals featured processions as key elements, participants bearing hand lanterns, tree branches, scented incense, etc. as main decorative elements.

For Funai and Arima, as for so many other places of the Mission during these years, we have plenty of references to the use of theatrical performances, dances and music.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, we know that these incorporated both Western and Japanese elements, as the above-mentioned passages explicitly refer to “these stories, that they make up songs and motets their way, singing continuously” and “(...) the dances in the manner of Japan, one from the noble people, and others from those of the villages.” However, inseparable from these celebrations and the religious “representations” that staged biblical themes with musical accompaniment, was the liturgical-musical tradition of the Church, where sacred music occupied as prominent a place in the writings of the early Jesuits, as it did in the Catholic rituals.<sup>104</sup> It comes as no surprise that the Society of Jesus devoted special attention to the teaching of music. To the Catholic Church, the ear, a sacred organ, was interpreted allegorically as a woman playing music, and music itself the mirror of the world’s harmony. To make music was a means to participate in this harmony.<sup>105</sup> The belief in music as a potent, persuasive tool of communication to arouse emotion in its listeners was further enhanced by the use of performance and visual strategies of communication. Hence, the pictorial representations associated with the Jesuit Painting Seminary in Japan, where some painters also participated in the construction of musical instruments.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, in a complex process of cultural and religious interaction, the idea that everything could be designed to communicate optically and rhetorically was explored and conventions were defied.

## Final Remarks

Broadly, an encompassing understanding of “visuality”/“visual culture” and “materiality”/“material culture” as cultural, cross-cultural and cross-geographical

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102 Miller, *A Parade of Pictures: An Examination of the Illustrated Evolution of Gion Matsuri Throughout Japanese History*. Submitted to the graduate degree program in the Kress Foundation Department of Art History and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, November 2016, particularly pp.6–7 and 140–142.

103 Another significant description of the Holy Week celebrations is narrated by Fróis in *Historia de Japam*, vol. 3 (1982), Cap. 38, pp.321–323.

104 López Gay, op. cit., pp.156 ff. See in this book the text by Kathryn Bosi Monteath.

105 Sebastián, *Contrarreforma y barroco. Lecturas iconográficas e iconológicas*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, S.A., 1985, p.33.

106 Luis Shotsuka (1577–1637) who enrolled in 1588 at the Seminary in Arima and joined the Society in 1607 is listed in Nagasaki in 1613 as painter, organist and choirmaster. Vlam, op. cit., Appendix C, pp.273–274

concepts highlights the importance of the senses, of mental images, and of discursive knowledge.<sup>107</sup> These constructs, when used as tools, illuminate how cultural (and social) values are projected and can also help us (re)consider questions of inclusion and exclusion of identity and otherness. When applied to a context such as that of this essay, they also invite us to understand through specific practices and performances the perception of cultural difference, how sensory knowledge was valued, and what effects such valorisation did produce.

Through the analysis of a process that may be referred to as “Cultural transfer,” as coined by Michele Espagne, that is, a process of relocation and of migration from one cultural situation to another, where any image and object falls into a new context and takes on a new meaning, it is possible to scrutinize practices of accommodation. An image such as the presumed portrait of Pedro Gómez reminds us that visibility is not only a practice, but also a strategy.<sup>108</sup> The same applies to the majority of the material that was analysed in this essay and which is but a minor fraction – albeit significant and representative – of the existing data.

Above all, the relentless reinterpretation, rethinking and re-signification of objects, images and ideas such as occurred in the interaction of the Christian mission with Buddhist sects and Shinto practices in Japan, led to the creation of a culture “in-between”<sup>109</sup> – a space within and among individuals and cultures, which does not maintain a single position but forms identities in an on-going process, and reveals hybrid forms of life, culture, and art.

All these achievements, stemming from very stimulating, active, and profound interactions between two different religious and cultural spheres, were dominated by the turn of political events. Politics overlapped everything else and, it was above all the context of an emerging unified Japan and the advent of the Tokugawa shogunate that determined the impossibility of anything “in-between”. From the perspective of centralized power or from a government that aimed at being so, the internal existence of a singular, original, and fluid process of intercultural and interreligious relations was hard to grasp and even more difficult, if not impossible, to control. It was, therefore, perceived as a menace and potentially disruptive for the new emerging order. “In-between”, this interstitial, relational and identity construct space, was precisely what needed to be avoided in the name of stability. Nonetheless, in the case of Christianity in Japan, or Japanese Christianity, one can even argue that this ongoing process lasted for centuries, even if hidden, or precisely because it had to be concealed, and disguised.

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107 Farago, op. cit., pp.246 ff.

108 Bal, op. cit., p.11.

109 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p.xiii and ff; p.5.