

Nanban Art in Iberia

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The first decades of the 20th century were a crucial period in the history of Japanese internal politics and Japan's international relations. This time period is of paramount relevance for understanding the country's first encounter with Europe and the related cultural and artistic manifestations it fostered.

At the beginning of the 1910s, a movement called 'Taishō Romanticism' (1912–1926) emerged in Japan under the direct influence of European Romanticism. Particularly notable in the literary field, this movement had a great impact on the interest in—and research on—the Nanban period. We can date this period between 1543, with the arrival of the Portuguese on the island of Tanegashima, and 1647, when the Portuguese crown made a last attempt to establish diplomatic relations. The study of the first relations between Japan and Europe brought to the early 20th century a past that was then being

rediscovered through primary sources and object collecting. The field of visual arts, from the 19th century on, produced works—namely paintings—that emulated the Nanban folding screens that depict the great Portuguese ships arriving in Japan and Macao with Europeans on board (Fig. 1).

In the years following the 1860s, peace treaties and trade agreements between Japan and several

Fig. 1 Six-leaf folding screen depicting the Portuguese Japan, signed Tsuda Dou-sen, apprentice of Kano Doushou, Kanō School, first half of the 19th century
China ink and watercolor on paper with cryptomeria wood frame; 139 x 275 cm
Museu do Oriente, Inv. FO/1818
Photo © Renascimento – Avaliações e Leilões S.A.



Fig. 2 Six-leaf folding screen depicting the Black Ship and the Southern Barbarians (*nanban-jin*) Japan, attributed to Kanō Domi, late 16th century
Tempera and gold leaf on paper and silk with lacquered wood frame; 172.8 x 380.8 cm
Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Inv. 1638 Mov., 1639 Mov.
Photo © Direção-Geral do Património Cultural / Arquivo de Documentação Fotográfica (DGPC/ADF) [photos by Luísa Oliveira/ José Paulo Ruas]



Fig. 3 Six-leaf folding screen depicting the Black Ship and the Southern Barbarians (*nanban-jin*)
Japan, Kanō School, c. 1600–1610
Tempera and gold leaf on mulberry paper with wood frame; 171.8 x 376.9 (each leaf)
Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, Porto, Inv. 864/865 Mob
Photo © Direção-Geral do Património Cultural / Arquivo de Documentação Fotográfica (DGPC/ADF) [photos by José Pessoa]

European nations, as well as the United States of America, led to the establishment of diplomatic embassies and the entrance of Japanese art into European courts (including that of Portugal). There was also an increased interest in Japanese history as written by both Western and Japanese authors. Two of the most famous Western contributions came from the French politician Léon Pagès (1814–1886) and the British diplomat Ernest Mason Satow (1843–1929). Pagès's *Histoire de la religion chrétienne au Japon* (History of the Christian religion in Japan) was published in two volumes in 1869 and 1870, soon after the identification of Christian communities by the French missionary Bernard Petitjean (1829–1884). Satow—renowned for his personal account *A Diplomat in Japan*, describing the years between 1862 and 1869, when Japan was changing from rule by the Tokugawa shogunate to the restoration of Imperial authority—is also the author of *The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan: 1591–1610*, printed in 1888, which is one of the first monographs on historical relations between Japan and Europe in the early modern era.

Simultaneously, Japanese scholars were also involved in the complex process of looking back to that moment when their country was in the process of relocating itself in a new world order.

One such case is that of the linguist and essayist Izuru Shinmura (1876–1967), a key figure of 'Taishō Romanticism' whose works include *Nanban Sarasa* (1924) and *Nanban Kōki* (1925), as well as an article entitled 'Christian Relics Found at Mr Higashi's House, north of Takatsuki, Settsu', published in 1923. Shinmura was among a group of scholars that studied the material culture of the 16th- and 17th-century Christian missions, which led to the discovery of several pictorial works. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Nagasaki became one of the major centres for the study of the Christian past. Writers such as Nagami Tokutarō (1890–1950), an art historian and collector, began publishing works on the Nanban folding screens: *Gashu Namban-byōbu kan* (1927), *Namban-byōbu no kenkyū* (1930), and *Namban-byōbu taisei* (1930). Nagami coined the term *Namban* art (in Japanese, *Namban bijutsu*) in the book titled *Namban-bijutsu-shū* (1928), soon adopted by other authors, such as Mamoru Seki, who published the book *Seiki Namban-bijutsu tozen-shi* in 1933 (Kotani, 2010, pp. 36–38; Arimura, 2019, p. 27).

These and other research studies opened the path to the creation of Nanban art collections in Japan, such as that of Nagami Tokutarō, later inherited by Hajime Ikenaga (1891–1955) and

subsequently incorporated into what is today the Kobe City Museum, one of the world's most important collections of its kind. The Ikenaga collection, containing approximately 4,500 pieces, was later followed by Yoshirō Kitamura's collection, which gave rise to the private Nanban Bunkakan museum in Osaka, founded at the end of the 1960s. In the meantime, some European diplomats living in Japan during those years had the chance not only to contribute to the study of the Nanban art phenomenon but to acquire Nanban objects as well (Curvelo, 2018, pp. 146–52).

The Portuguese diplomat José da Costa Carneiro (1883–1946)—appointed Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Minister in Tokyo from 1925 to 1930—not only wrote a pathbreaking study entitled 'Notas sobre a iconografia dos Portugueses no Japão nos séculos XVI e XVII' (Notes on the iconography of the Portuguese in Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries) (1929); he also acquired some of the objects today in the collection of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (National Art Museum) in Lisbon. He worked closely with Japanese scholars such as Yoshitomo Okamoto (1900–1972) and Tadao Takamizawa (dates unknown), collaborating with the latter to acquire a series of Nanban objects for his collection: a game

box, a pair of stirrups, a gunpowder flask, and a food box (*jubako*). Along with these lacquered objects, Takamizawa also acquired a pair of Nanban folding screens attributed to Kanō Domi (dates unknown) from a small castle near Osaka in the 1930s, before they were sold to the collection of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon (Pinto, 1988, p. 13) (Fig. 2). Another pair of Nanban folding screens, attributed to Kanō Naizen (1570–1616), entered the collection in 1954 and are exhibited in the same room of the museum. Just one year after this addition, another Portuguese museum—the Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, in the city of Porto—acquired a pair of Nanban screens that came to Portugal in 1955 with the assistance of Yoshitomo Okamoto (Fig. 3). When this pair of folding screens was subjected to conservation and restoration, successive layers of documentation were found. Given the scarcity of paper at the time, Japanese artists recycled old paper to make the filling for these wooden structures, often using official documents. This helps to explain the discovery of some 2,400 Japanese documents, the majority of which are manuscripts, although some printed materials have also been found. The oldest documents are dated between 1583 and 1590, and the most recent—corresponding to the surface



Fig. 4 Nanban oratory
Japan, late 16th or early 17th century
Lacquered wood (*urushi*), gilt lacquer, mother-of-pearl and gilded copper fittings, and pigment on copper; 47.2 x 35 x 5.1 cm
Santa Casa da Misericórdia, Sardoal
Photo © Paulo Sousa/CMS

layers—to the 19th century, indicating relatively recent interventions and providing a valuable source of information for the study of that period (Curvelo, 2015, pp. 45–59).

This collected data attests that significant Nanban art objects in two major Portuguese museums came to Europe in the 20th century, between the 1930s and the 1950s, in a process that seems to have no parallel in Spain. The Spanish collections—most of which are not integrated into museum collections, but rather in religious institutions, much more so than in Portugal—attest to different networks of circulation that go back in time.

The new visual and material culture that emerged in Japan after the arrival of the Portuguese in the middle of the 16th century, soon followed by the Spanish and Italians (called the Southern Barbarians

by the Japanese), claimed local (Japanese) and foreign elements and assumed different modes of expression, from painted screens to ceramics, metalwork, and lacquerware. Moreover, it is associated with diverse kinds of commissions and recipients. Therefore, encompassing the range of this phenomenon calls for an understanding of different cultural and religious contexts, along with the circulation of people, goods, and commodities from various parts of the world. Although Nanban art was mainly intended for a clientele located in Asia, some objects travelled to Europe, above all to the Iberian Peninsula, through different routes and over a long period of time (Curvelo, 2010, pp. 20; 155–161; Canepa, 2016, pp. 322–405).

In Iberia, a significant percentage of Nanban art consists of lacquered religious objects, above all items needed for the Christian mission in Japan.

These include missal lecterns, ciborium for the consecrated communion wafers used in the Holy Eucharist, oratories, chests, and caskets, many of which have in fact survived to this day in religious establishments (Pinto, 1990). In Portugal we can find Nanban objects in churches (for example, the church of Aljezur, in the district of Faro, or the church of São Paulo, in Lisbon), in convents (like the Convent of Santa Clara-a-Nova in Coimbra—Confraria da Rainha Santa Isabel), and in collections of religious institutions, such as the museum of the Church of São Roque, in Lisbon.

Of all these objects, one deserves particular attention: the Nanban oratory presently held in the Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Sardoal, a village in central Portugal (Fig. 4). The importance of this piece stems from its being firmly identified with a specific religious space, as proven by the inscription on the altar of Nossa Senhora da Esperança in the Church of Nossa Senhora da Caridade in Sardoal: 'This [painting of] Senhora da Esperança with its oratory was ordered to be set in this altar by Gaspar de Souza de Lacerda, who is buried here, and his wife D. Hyeronima de Parada placed it here on the 7th of September 1670'.

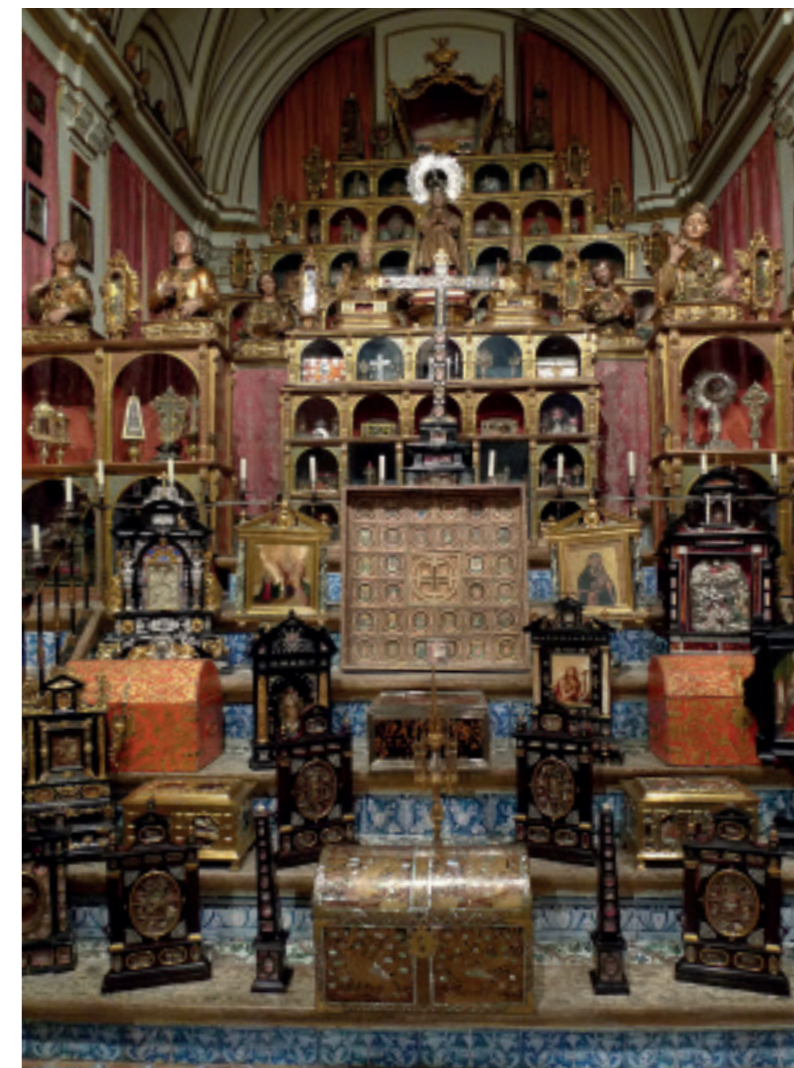
This text, although it dates from the 17th century and is thus later than the production of the object, is the oldest known reference in Portugal associated with a Nanban art object (Pinto, 1990, pp. 63–64). Curiously, the oratory appears in the *Inventário Artístico de Santarém* as an Indo-Portuguese piece, a misleading piece of information that shows to what extent Nanban objects were still little known to a wider public in the mid-1920s.

In Spain, the overall context is somewhat different, because records there are more comprehensive—both for the number of objects *in situ* and for the information we have about their owners and routes of circulation. As one might expect, Nanban items reached Spain through the Pacific route, rather than the Cape Route that linked Japan with Macao, Goa, and Lisbon via the Cape of Good Hope. From Japan and possibly Macao, objects of Asian manufacture would arrive in Manila and then be dispatched to the Spanish Viceroyalties in the Americas—mainly New Spain and Peru—while some continued their journey to Spain via the city of Seville (Cabañas Moreno, 2003; Kawamura, 2013, pp. 249–96).

An important moment in the relationship between Spain and Japan occurred with the famous Keichō Embassy in the years 1613–1620. Hasekura

Rokuemon Tsunenaga (1571–1622), a Japanese samurai and retainer of Date Masamune (r. 1585–1636), lord of Sendai, headed a diplomatic mission to the Vatican and Pope Paul V (r. 1605–1621), passing through New Spain. The large entourage, composed of 150 Japanese and two Franciscans, was in service of Date Masamune's will to strengthen Christianity in his domains and to recruit Spanish shipbuilders and pilots who could help establish an annual voyage between Seville and Sendai, the largest port of

Fig. 5 The Reliquary Room
Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales, Madrid
1559–1564
Photo © Yayoi Kawamura



Japan's dominions. When Hasekura Tsunenaga was received in Madrid by Philip III (1578–1621), another important event occurred in the capital: the baptism of Hasekura Tsunenaga in the church of the Royal Monastery of the Descalzas Reales in 1615.

This convent was built in the centre of Madrid, close to the former royal residence, the Alcázar, where the Palacio Real stands today. Together with the convent of the Encarnación, these religious institutions were linked to two Spanish Habsburg royal women, Juana of Austria (1535–1573), sister of Philip II (1527–1598), and Margaret of Austria (1584–1611), consort of Philip III, the founder of the Encarnación. Under Juana's supervision, the construction of the Descalzas Reales began in 1559, reaching semi-completion by 1564. The Descalzas was a Clarissan convent founded for royal and aristocratic women, and a number of Habsburg women retired there after Juana's death in 1573, further contributing to the outstanding material legacy of this house (Fig. 5). The Encarnación, a convent of the order of Recolet Augustines mainly intended for cloistered women from noble families, was founded in 1611 and inaugurated in 1616. Both convents and their churches are remarkably well preserved, with an assembly of donated artworks including reliquaries and other religious objects, many from Asia (including Japan) and the Americas. As the possessions of active convents, however, these collections have remained largely inaccessible to the public, as not all of the rooms can be visited (García Sanz and Jordan Gschwend, 1998; Kawamura, 2001).

Nanban objects can also be found in other religious institutions throughout the territory: Toledo's cathedral, the Convent of Santa María de Guadalupe (Cáceres), the Convent of San Juan de la Penitencia in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), the Monastery of Corpus Christi (Murcia), the Convent of the Purísima Concepción de Toro (Zamora), the Monastery of Espíritu Santo, in Seville (Fig. 6), and the parish of Santiago Apóstol in Gran Canaria, among others. There are also notable museum collections originating from religious or royal institutions, as in

the case of the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas (National Museum of Decorative Arts) in Madrid, with some of the objects coming from Carlos III's (1716–1788) cabinet of natural history; the Museo de Lorenzana in Lugo, from a Benedictine monastery; and the Diocesan Museum of Pamplona, with some coffers from the Iglesia de las Cortes de Navarra (Kawamura, 2013; Barlés Báguena and Almazán Tomás, 2020).



Fig. 6 Nanban Chest with silver cross Japan, 1620–1630; cross probably New Spain Wood, Japanese lacquer (*urushi*), and silver 35 x 58.8 x 24.8 cm (total height with cross: 71 cm) Monasterio del Espíritu Santo, Sevilla Photo © Rafael Suárez Pascual

A careful study of these objects attests to their circulation throughout the Americas, either because there is documentary proof or because their embellishment with metal fittings points to the work of American Viceroyalty silverware rather than Spanish manufacture (Kawamura, 2013).

Specimens of Nanban art in Portugal and Spain reveal the varying contexts of the Iberian dominions in the 16th and 17th centuries, with Portugal maintaining a focal presence in Asia, and Spain in the Americas. Two routes linked Asia to the Iberian Peninsula: the Cape Route, controlled by the Portuguese, and the Pacific route, under Spanish dominion. On the other hand, Japan, where Portuguese presence was accepted until 1639, was never a colonized territory. The actions of merchants and missionaries from different nationalities—mainly Southern Europeans—enabled them to stay in the archipelago for around 100 years, forging interactions that brought forth an artistic phenomenon later labelled as Nanban art.

This new visual and material culture was promoted by different agents and served diverse recipients. Many objects, including the folding screens depicting the Southern Barbarians, were created by Japanese artists and craftspeople for a local Japanese clientele. These lacquered items, for instance, preserve local forms, function, and techniques, and only the introduction of exotic elements linked to the presence of the foreigners reveals a new decorative vocabulary. Objects of this kind were intended for Japanese consumption, and the fact that they entered Iberian collections only in the 20th century further supports this claim. On the other hand, the category of Nanban art that results, above all, from religious (Catholic) commissions—and the production or adaptation of objects for religious use using local techniques and materials and a mixed decorative language—travelled around the world during that same period. Not only religious but also civil commissions led to the production of a wide range of lacquered objects based on European prototypes: cabinets, coffers, chests, writing cabinets, trunks, desks, tables, and trays, to name just a few of the more common forms. These were used by the Portuguese and their descendants in Asia and by the Spanish and their Viceroyal communities in the Americas. Eventually a number of these objects reached Iberia and are now in public and private collections, even appearing in the art market with some regularity. Their common feature is a taste

for rich decoration, with no surface left uncovered, through the application of gold or silver powder and mother-of-pearl inlay, sometimes enhanced by the application of exuberant metal elements and stones. This is a particular taste that we may associate with the Portuguese and the Spanish, and it is very different from the objects produced in Japan for other European markets.

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