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The Brotherhoods (*Confrarias*) and Lay Support for the Early Christian Church in Japan

By the end of the sixteenth century, the Japanese mission had become the largest overseas Christian community that was not under the rule of a European power. Its uniqueness was emphasized by Alessandro Valignano since 1582, who promoted a deeper accommodation to Japanese culture. It was also understood by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who issued the first national anti-Christian laws while he was unifying the Japanese empire. The main reason for the religious success of the Catholic Church in Japan was, undoubtedly, the engagement of many converts and their descendents. This article deals with the role of Japanese lay people within the Church, analyzing how individuals gave support to daily activities and how the communities strengthened themselves through the formation of brotherhoods. Japan was then the sole overseas country where all members of those confraternities were locals, in spite of the presence of a colonial elite.

KEYWORDS: Portuguese — Japanese Christianity — local communities — brotherhoods

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THE PORTUGUESE sustained contact with the Japanese for nearly a century (1543–1639).¹ The main reason for the regular visits of the *nanbanjin* 南蛮人 (“southern barbarians”) to the islands was trade, since the Portuguese controlled much of the Sino-Japanese commerce for several decades and founded two new and distinctive cities in the China Sea region: Macao and Nagasaki.² The ships that sailed between those cities, however, did not carry only goods for trade. They also brought men of different races, animals, many objects (such as glasses, chairs, buttons, or firearms), and scientific knowledge in areas such as geography, medicine, astronomy (see NAKAYAMA 1969) and mathematics (LEITÃO 2000), which opened a new era in Japan. After centuries of isolation from Europe, Japanese civilization acquired a more accurate understanding of Earth and an awareness of contemporary technological developments.³

The Portuguese, in turn, were initially received by a medieval and anarchic society in the mid-sixteenth century, and were subsequently expelled a century later by a modern and centralized empire. The *sengoku* had been replaced by the *taihei*—an evolution that cannot be explained without reference to the *nanbanjin* contributions (NOSCO 2003), who exhibited “for once [...] a genuine international dimension in a period of Japanese history” (ELISON 1981, 60).

Along with European trade goods and Western cultural influences a new religion also came to Japan. The propagation of Christianity was always one of the motivations which pushed the Portuguese during the Age of Discoveries.⁴ There was a sincere desire that Christendom would profit from those voyages, enlarging the areas and the populations under the leadership of the Catholic Church, and by the 1460s the Portuguese Crown acquired absolute control of overseas ecclesiastic activities.

Later, from the middle of the sixteenth century, when private traders became more autonomous, pushing Portuguese influence to areas where state authority was weak, those adventurers also brought with them clergymen, just as the king’s representatives had done before.⁵ Therefore, the arrival of Portuguese

1. For the general history of the Portuguese presence in Japan see BOXER 1993 and COSTA 1993.

2. For the Portuguese presence in Asia see SUBRAHMANYAM 1993. For the specificity of the political organization of the *Estado da Índia*, the main study is THOMAZ 1994. For the particularity of Macao and Nagasaki see COSTA 2000a.

3. There is a lengthy bibliography on this theme. Besides the studies quoted in the previous notes, see also other important works such as JANEIRA 1970, PARKER 1989, and FUJITA 1991.

4. For the religious dynamics of Portuguese expansion, see COSTA 2000b.

5. The dynamics of Portuguese expansion started a structural change by the middle of the

explorers to Japan in 1543⁶ opened a new field to missionary activity, and the first clerics of the Society of Jesus landed in Kagoshima in 1549.⁷

Christianity in Japan

A SUCCESSFUL MISSION

The Jesuits were able to found a sizable community in Japan, which had about three hundred thousand baptized by the end of the sixteenth century. It was at the time the largest and most important overseas Christian community not under the control of a colonial power, as was the case with Christian missions in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, the Philippines, or India.⁸

Most Japanese Christians lived in Kyushu, but Christianization was not a regional phenomenon and had a national impact. By the end of the sixteenth century it was possible to find baptized people in virtually every province of Japan,⁹ many of them organized in communities. On the eve of the Sekigahara battle, fifteen daimyo were baptized, and their domains stretched from Hyuga in Southeast Kyushu to Dewa in North Honshu (see COSTA 2003). Hundreds of churches had been built throughout Japan.

There were other important warlords who were also baptized and others still who authorized the existence of Christian communities in their domains. Accepted on a national scale, Christianity was also successful among different social groups from the poor to the rich, peasants, traders, sailors, warriors, or courtesans. At the same time the missionaries faced the hostility of many other daimyo, they also found interested people everywhere, and the Church kept growing even when central power became hostile under the rule of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu between 1587 and 1614.¹⁰

Christianity challenged Japanese civilization. Despite local persecutions and Hideyoshi's anti-Christian laws, more and more people were embracing the religion that had come from Europe. From a religious perspective, Japan was receptive ground for Christianity, much like other countries with strong Mahayana

sixteenth century. See COSTA 2002a. For the evolution of the new pattern in Asia see SUBRAHMANYAM 1993, 80–143.

6. This episode is still the subject of controversy, despite the important work of SCHURHAMMER 1963. Recently there were new important contributions about this subject: LIDIN 2002 and MURAI 2002. These studies were analyzed later by Pedro Lage Reis CORREIA (2004).

7. For the first years of the Jesuit mission in Japan see RUIZ DE MEDINA 1973, SCHURHAMMER 1985–1987, vol. 4, and BOURDON 1993.

8. For the Spanish missions see BORGES 1992.

9. Jesuit documentation of this period makes frequent reference to the fact that Christianity is scattered throughout the country (*está muito espalhada*), as it was told, for instance, by Bishop Luís Cerqueira in a general report on the Japanese Church of 20 March 1613 (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 21 II, fl. 276).

10. For the reasons that influenced Hideyoshi's decision see ELISON 1973 and NOSCO 1994.

Buddhist traditions. Therefore the effort to eradicate this new religion required the kind of severe political decision taken by the Tokugawa in 1614.

The success of the missionary work in Japan can be measured also by some of the characteristics of the Japanese Church, which were unique at that time. Actually, Japan was the sole country where a bishop worked without the protection of a colonial power, and Bishop Luís Cerqueira, who lived there from 1598 to 1614, was also the only bishop of the missionary church in that age to work exclusively with native priests as diocesan clergy.¹¹

One example of the dynamism of Christian propagation in Japan can be found by comparing the annual letters written by Jesuits in Nagasaki with those written in Macao. In the first decade of the seventeenth century those in Nagasaki report hundreds of adult baptisms, despite the Tokugawa policy and the lack of Portuguese political power in the city. At the same time, the Jesuits always reported few adult baptisms in Macao despite the strong presence of the Portuguese government, as well as a much more sophisticated church structure, including the College of Macao where many European missionaries finished their preparation before going to Japan or to China.¹² In this period there were more Chinese Christians in Nagasaki than in Macao.¹³

A NATIONAL CHURCH

Japan was far from Europe, and communication was slow. An answer to a question presented to Rome could take up to five years, and even from India it would likely take three years. The missionaries often had to make decisions using their own judgment and intuition. They were alone in a country with what was for them a strange civilization, but the people there welcomed them, and many wished to receive baptism. The number of conversions was large from the start of the missionary work, and the new Church needed allies among local people, something typical of other missions as well in the sixteenth century, especially after the Council of Trent. However, in Japan the participation of natives in Church institutional activities started early on.

Ecclesiastical hierarchy and lay organizations were usually controlled or even monopolized by Europeans in most of the colonies, but in Japan there was a growing native Christian population without a European power or significant

11. My basis for Cerqueira's biography is KATAOKA 1997 and COSTA 1998.

12. For the dynamics of Christian life in Macao in this period see COSTA and PINTO 1999.

13. According to Jesuit sources, the Chinese community of Nagasaki was almost fully Christian until 1614, and there are reasons to believe this. The famous Buddhist temples built by the Chinese in Nagasaki were just begun in the 1620s, when a new generation of non-Christians arrived to the city. We have several examples of the support given by members of the Chinese community to the clandestine mission. On 8 October 1618, Mateus de Couros reported that he had been hidden in the house of a Chinese (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 35, fl. 89v). The Annual Letter of the same year referred Paulo Garces as a Chinese who helped the mission (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 59, fl. 100v-101). We have also information about mail which was sent from Macao to Nagasaki by Chinese ships.

number of European settlers. Only a few Portuguese married Japanese women and established residence in Nagasaki, and the European clergy was always small in number for such a large mission.¹⁴ Therefore most of the daily activities of the Church were done by Japanese from the beginning, giving the Japanese Church a native face, and this was one of the reasons for its success.

By the time Xavier left Japan, in November 1551, there were already Japanese catechists spreading the Gospel, and the missionaries had several collaborators who helped them in their daily activities as well as in the translation of the scriptures, doctrinal and catechetical materials, and liturgy.¹⁵ Without the consent of either Goan or European authorities, the missionaries began accepting Japanese members into the Society from 1557, and thirty-three years later there were seventy native brothers in Japan, fully one half of Jesuits in Japan and fifteen percent of all Jesuits who were working in Asia (COSTA 1999, 17–47 and 87–106). From 1601 to 1614 Bishop Cerqueira ordained sixteen Japanese priests, and by the time of his death four others already had minor orders (COSTA 2000c). The sole other mission with a significant number of natives was China,¹⁶ making this a distinctive feature of East Asian missions of the Society of Jesus.¹⁷

The Japanese church was also economically self-sufficient, despite the claims to the contrary often found in Jesuit letters. Alessandro Valignano finished his days in Macao in great anxiety due to the difficulties of Portuguese trade in China Sea, owing to the arrival of the Dutch. The Jesuit mission annually received a share of the profits of the *kurofune* (“black ships”), and Valignano considered that subsidy to be the economic basis of the Japanese mission. The hundreds of churches throughout Japan, however, were not built with that money but with the donations of local Christians and even of some non-Christian warlords. From the beginning we find references to communities that could support their own religious life, including their clergymen, and by the early years of the seventeenth century, the Japanese Church already had a strong economic foundation (see COSTA 2000d and RODRIGUES 2003.). Therefore, when Valignano ordered from Macao the demission of two hundred *dōjuku* 同宿 in 1604, the Jesuits in Japan only had to dismiss some seventy, since all others kept serving the mission with financial support from their local communities. Later, in 1613, when a new order reached Japan from Rome forbidding the participation of the missionaries in trade, many Jesuits accepted it easily because they were sure that each community could support its own clergy.¹⁸

14. For an analysis of the Jesuits who worked in Japan see SCHÜTTE 1975 and COSTA 1999, 17–47.

15. In his letter of 23 September 1555, Baltasar Gago, reporting missionary activities emphasized already the importance of the Japanese collaborators (DJ, vol. I, 554–72). See also LOPEZ GAY 1967.

16. For the Jesuits who worked in China see DEHEGNE 1973.

17. For a comparison with other Jesuit missions see the following collections: DI, MB, MM, MP. Other religious orders usually did not accept natives for clergy.

18. In a letter dated 24 March 1611, Diogo de Mesquita reported that, due to the lack of money

Finally it is important to stress that many Christian communities kept their faith despite the usual shortage of clerics. Many of them were visited several times a year by a priest or a brother, while others survived many years without any contact with Church representatives due to local persecutions. The first community that faced such a problem was Yamaguchi, which did not receive a priest from 1556 to 1576. According to Juan Ruiz de Medina, Cosme de Torres kept contacts with the leaders of Yamaguchi's Christian community—laymen who took care of the funerals, baptized the children of Christian parents, and even preached to adults who wished to become Christians. These catechumens went later to Bungo to receive baptism (DJ II, 79).

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These examples demonstrate the distinctive nature of Japanese Christianity among overseas missions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Valignano, in his *Sumario* and in many letters written after his first visit to Japan (1579–1582), emphasized the uniqueness of the Japanese mission, repeating the expression *diferentissima* (VALIGNANO 1954; DI, vol. XII–XIV). In fact there was then no other overseas people organizing its own Church under Rome's authority, just with the support of a hundred Europeans.

When the bakufu banished the Church and started the final persecution, many communities challenged shogunal orders and kept their clerics underground. In Macao some of the priests who had been exiled sought permission to go back to Japan because their ancient communities wanted to host them.¹⁹ One of the best examples of lay solidarity with priests is the survival of Juan Baeza during twelve years in Nagasaki (1614–1626), changing shelter almost every night until his death, demonstrating thereby that he was protected by a large network of families who hosted him in turns (see PACHECO 1963).

from trade (because the *kurofune* had not come), many missionaries and other institutions attached to the Church were then supported by locals. Some Jesuit residences were kept open by the decision of their own communities. Nagasaki's hospital was sustained by the city's inhabitants. Mesquita reported that father Manuel Barreto, who was in a residence with more than three clerics and sixteen collaborators, had written to him telling that the local *tono* (who was not a Christian) would sustain his residence (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 36, fl. 12v). Later, Barreto would confirm these references telling on 20 December 1614 that they had much support in Japan from both the Christians and pagans (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 34, fl. 131v).

19. We have references of Afonso Lucena, who wanted to stay in Ōmura (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 16 I, fl. 140; 16 II, fl. 107; 17, fl. 12v); on 8 April 1618, Lucena reported the Assistant in Rome that he received many letters from Ōmura's Christians, who asked him to visit them (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 17, fl. 139); João Rodrigues Girão, who assumed also that he had conditions to stay in Hirado (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 16 II, fl. 87v; 17, fl. 124); Lucena informed also that Hiroshima's community had asked Sebastião Vieira to stay there, but the provincial had not permitted (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 16 II, fl. 95v). On 2 January 1615, Giovanni Battista Zola claimed also that he could have stayed in Takaku area with his Christians (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 36, fl. 249v). On 12 January 1616, Marco Ferraro wrote to the General mentioning his hope to go back to Japan because he had promised to "his Christians" that he would return (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 16 II, fl. 272).

Christian solidarity made also possible missionary mail delivery throughout the country until the end of the 1620s. Even the priests who worked in Northern Honshu received news about other hidden missionaries, as well as about the *Estado da Índia* or the Society of Jesus and the Papacy.²⁰ In receiving letters from Europe and in sending their own replies and reports, they were helped by a significant number of collaborators who risked their lives.

The Role of Laymen in the Japanese Church

INDIVIDUAL COLLABORATORS

It is well known that different groups of laymen had a special role in the support of Christian life in Japanese mission. *Dōjuku*, *kanbō* 看坊, and *jihiyakusha* helped the clergymen in activities like the celebration of Sunday liturgy in the absence of ordained clergy, religious education, preparation of confessions, and spiritual support of the sick; by the end of the sixteenth century *kanbō* and *jihiyakusha* had similar responsibilities and also organized funerals and baptized children. It is important to note that the permission to baptize had been given by local authorities without the approval of Rome.²¹ At that time the sole distinction between these two groups was their social status: the *kanbō* were those who had shaved their head and who had left secular life, but did not take formal vows, while the *jihiyakusha* most of the time were married and had a profession, despite their work for the Church.

These men were fundamental to the mission, and themselves depended on both the ecclesiastical hierarchy as well as the warlords who controlled the lands where they lived. Therefore, the success of the Japanese mission cannot be explained only as the result of the action of a brilliant group of missionaries, or of the commercial and political interests of a few daimyo and traders. The reason for this success from a religious perspective was the real conversion of thousands of Japanese to the Gospel and the decision of hundreds of them to take an active role in the support of their religious lives.

20. On 28 November 1617, Geronimo de Angelis, who had been in the North of Honshu since 1615, was already aware about the demission of the provincial Valentim de Carvalho, which had happened a few months earlier in Macao; he was also in communication with Diogo de Carvalho who worked in the same area (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 34, fl. 29).

21. When the Spanish friars arrived in Japan from Manila, among their criticism against Jesuit practices was that the permission to baptize was given to laymen. Under their pressure, the vice-provincial Pedro Gomez wrote to the Pope, on 12 October 1595, asking permission for the practice, but on 13 May 1597 Claudio Acquaviva, the General of the Society of Jesus, wrote to Gomez stating that it was not convenient for him to make such a request, and asked that the issue be re-examined in Japan. In 1598 the question was decided by Bishop Cerqueira, who emphasized that this capacity was to be used by lay collaborators only in emergencies. However, in a country with very few clerics and with many communities under persecution, the exception would become the rule. See LOPEZ GAY 1970, 76–80.

Most of the local communities scattered throughout the country had a leader, with a link to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and these local leaders were among the first targets of persecution. Their homes usually had special rooms for visiting clerics to use both as lodging and as a church for confessions or catechesis. We know also that many other baptized took special interest in reading scriptures and studying doctrine. There was thus the important work of translation and copying, and there are references to certain persons who had small libraries of Christian books even before the introduction of the press. According to LOPEZ GAY (1970, 245), one of the earliest references to such collections is from 1567.

The printing of religious books in Japanese from the 1590s, some with more than one thousand copies,²² is another example of the interest of many baptized for their new religion. Since 1601 the printing press was under the supervision of Soin Goto Thomas, a citizen of Nagasaki, because the Jesuits did not wish to be accused of being book sellers. However, in most of other Asian missions it would be difficult to find a layman who would take such a responsibility. In 1599, thirty Japanese worked full time at the printing press (MORAN 1993, 153). and through these kind of activities connected to the Jesuit mission, many laymen supported Christianity's daily life. In 1605, the *scriptorium* of the bishop and the vice-provincial had eighteen secretaries,²³ suggesting an active correspondence with Christian communities as well as with important warlords and court officials.

The mission headquarters in Nagasaki controlled a large staff, which included an important archive, with books of baptisms and marriage registrations. Much of the anonymous life of lay people would have been identified through that documentation, but it was lost later during the persecutions.

Besides books, liturgical calendars were also printed in Japan after 1592; these were later printed in Macao and sent to Japan until at least 1634 (LOPEZ GAY 1970, 51). There was also a booklet in Japanese characters explaining mass, some feasts, and instructions for praying during the week (LOPEZ GAY 1970, 132–33). Therefore, many laymen had considerable information about doctrine as well as about the annual calendar, despite the fact that many others would have had only slight knowledge of those matters, just as it was the case in all Christian communities, even in Europe.

Later, during the persecution, Juan Baeza reported that printed books were very helpful for the Christians in those hard times (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 34, fl. 100).

22. On 6 October 1613, Diogo de Mesquita informed the General of the Society of Jesus that had been printed one thousand three hundred copies of the Japanese translation of the *Contemptus mundi*, whose text was much appreciated by Japanese Christians. The same translation was being printed in Miyako, at the same time (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 36, fl. 24v). It was (at least) the second edition, because the Annual Letter of 1 January 1603 reported another edition (in Japanese characters) of the same book (BA, 49-IV-59, fl. 84).

23. See the Letter of Diogo de Mesquita to the General of the Society of Jesus (9/3/1605), ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 36, fl. 4.

Bento Fernandes, also, in a text about the martyrs of 1622 referred to the growing devotion for Loyola in Nagasaki due the printing of his biography in Macao in Japanese characters (BPADE, *Tratado dos gloriosos martyres...* fl. 28v).

Finally, it is also important to remember the role of lay people in many celebrations, from the start of the mission. From the 1560s adults and children performed catechetical representations on several occasions, such as at New Year's, Easter or Christmas (LOPEZ GAY 1970, 178–79), and later in processions such as the *Corpus Christi*, which went through the streets of Nagasaki in 1605 (Annual Letter of Japan, 20 March 1606, BA, 49-IV-59, fl. 292).

BROTHERHOODS

From early in the mission Christian laymen organized brotherhoods for common prayer, communal feasts, and to care for the poor, sick, widows, and orphans. Many of these institutions were created in other parts of the Portuguese empire, and were always symbol of colonial power. Most of their members belonged to the European elite or to their descendents. The most famous of Portuguese brotherhoods were the *misericórdias* created by the end of the fifteenth century under the patronage of Queen Eleanor, widow of John II (r. 1481–1495) and sister of Emanuel I (r. 1495–1521). The *misericórdias* were founded in many cities and villages of Portugal and throughout the empire, from Brazil to Macao (SÁ 1997).

Japanese Christianity adopted these organizations early on (COSTA 2002b). We have mention of a *misericórdia* of Funai in 1555 and another of Hirado in 1561. Many communities created informal brotherhoods inspired by this Portuguese model but without formal statutes, nonetheless adopting the same goals and the same kind of organization and activities, as explained later by father Afonso de Lucena, who worked for a long time in Ōmura:

There was no confraternity of the *Misericórdia* to provide for the poor and those who lived on charity, as there already was in Nagasaki, but by the teaching of our brothers and preachers, the Christians of Ōmura decided to organize a kind of confraternity [*um modo de confraria*] that imitated the *Misericórdia*; the Christians elected their officials and these officials enjoined that some of them go every Sunday to houses of the Christians to ask for donations that were later given to the poor. (SCHÜTTE 1972, 178)

We know of references to other informal brotherhoods, namely in Takushima and Ikitsuki, in Hirado (for these communities see DJ, vol. I, p. 383; HJ, vol. II, 84), as well as in Arima, Hakata, and Kyoto. In Hirado, the major-domos (*mordomos*) were elected by the entire community and not just by the members of the brotherhood, while in Hakata, according to Fróis, there were two old men there, both “very good Christians” who were “like brothers of the *Misericórdia*,” and visited the sick offering counsel and alms (HJ V, 465). From these descrip-

tions we can gather something of the importance of lay activities in Japanese Christianity, and we can also see how the communities and their clergy adapted European models of Christian life to local conditions. Some of these “informal” or “Japanese” *miseriórdias* later became formal brotherhoods, with statutes similar to other Portuguese *miseriórdias*: Funai (1557) with the same rules as Lisbon, and Nagasaki (1583) with those of Macao.

There are many references to Nagasaki’s *miseriórdia*, which became a rich and powerful institution, which every year received large donations. It had two hospitals (one for lepers) and a large church, enlarged in 1608 in Japanese style, like all churches in Japan, but with a clock tower. This building was another symbol of the uniqueness of Japanese Christianity, which was freely joining Western and local traditions (DINIZ 2001). The brotherhood of Nagasaki’s *miseriórdia* grew in number along the years, with one hundred brothers in 1585²⁴ and one hundred and fifty in 1609. According to scattered references, this brotherhood was likely controlled by the elite of Nagasaki, and not by Portuguese.

On 10 March 1602, the *provedor* and the officials of Nagasaki’s *miseriórdia* wrote to the General of the Society of Jesus requesting more indulgences for their members and other *miseriórdias* to be created throughout the country along with the existing one in Miyako.²⁵

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European Christianity had other brotherhoods more concerned with spiritual life than charity. Assembling the devout, these institutions organized common prayers and the reading of sacred or devotional texts, and the Church stimulated their creation and offered indulgences to their members. The existence of many confraternities throughout Japan, by the beginning of the seventeenth century is evidence of the strong faith of many baptized who kept a close engagement with the Church. They were called *kumi*²⁶—once again, a European tradition adapted to a Japanese one.

We have occasional references to several brotherhoods in different areas of Japan, but usually they are too brief to be useful, and are included in missionary letters and reports. However, there is some objective information to be gleaned from them, especially the 1590s onwards, when certain areas already had large Christian communities.

24. See Annual Letter of Japan, 20 August 1585, BL, *Addington* 9859, fl. 9–17. We have also a mention to the participation of one hundred brothers of Nagasaki’s *miseriórdia* in the impressive funeral of the vice-provincial Gaspar Coelho that took place in Arima, in 1590. See HJ V, 218–20.

25. ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 33, fl. 436. This is the sole reference I know about a formal *miseriórdia* in the Imperial capital. The letter was signed by seven men, who wrote their name in Western letters and also in Japanese characters. Their names in roman letters are the following: Diogo Riua, the *provedor*, Luís Rionca, Jerónimo Rionyet, Thoma Soin, João Soca, Liam Soxei, André Cariuara.

26. See Annual Letter of Japan, 23 November 1604, IAN/TT, *Manuscritos da Livraria*, n° 1951, fl. 10v.

Nagasaki was “the Rome of Japan” where, as mentioned previously, most of the inhabitants were Christians, and where newcomers usually chose to accept baptism. According to Jesuit sources Nagasaki would have twenty-five thousand inhabitants in 1611, with ten churches divided into eight parishes. Besides the rich brotherhood of the *misericórdia*, other confraternities assembled much of its people. In the sixteenth century one finds the confraternity of the Rosary (LOPEZ GAY 1970, 225, note 90), and later the Annual Letter of 20 March 1606 reports that in the previous year, Bishop Cerqueira and Francesco Pasio introduced the *confraria* of *Nossa Senhora da Assunção*, which grew to more than nine thousand members (BA 49-IV-59, fl. 291–291v). We have references to “a kind of confraternity” (*uma como confraria*) in 1608 of the principle women of Nagasaki with the purpose of visiting and helping the sick women of the city,²⁷ and two years later the Korean community of Nagasaki created its own brotherhood.²⁸

The city’s growth in this period stimulated the appearance of two more brotherhoods in 1611, one of the *Santíssimo Sacramento* and another of St. Michael, which was based in a new church consecrated to the same saint (Annual Letter of Japan [10/3/1612], ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 57, fl. 136v). It is possible that other churches or parishes of Nagasaki also had their own confraternities. These data reinforce the picture I have been drawing of a militant lay community, which was the main reason for missionary success in Japan, and it was also the main reason for the anti-Christian policy of the Tokugawa’s bakufu.

At first, the systematic persecution begun in 1614 faced stiff resistance from Christians, despite the departure of more than half the clergy. Once again, the main reason for this resistance was not the presence of a few priests but rather the self-organization of many communities,²⁹ with *confrarias* one of their best supports. According to the Jesuit Annual Letter of 15 March 1616, most of those brotherhoods had been reorganized before the priests’ exile, authorizing their officials to baptize in areas where there were no clerics. Actually, the duties of confraternities’ officials were at this time very similar to those attributed before to the *kanbō* and to the *jhiyakusha*: they received donations, took care of funerals, and organized meetings for spiritual instruction (BL, *Addington*, 9859, fl. 275v). Forced to secrecy, and having a small number of clergymen working

27. Annual Letter of Japan (14 March 1609), ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 56, fl. 8. Later, in 1613, Jerónimo Rodrigues would refer them as a “brotherhood of old devoted women” (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 15 II, fl. 258). Her leader was Mary, the wife of Murayama Tokuan Andres, who was the eldest son of Murayama Tōan Anthony the most powerful local official of Nagasaki. See BPADE, *Tratado dos gloriosos mártires*...fl. 56v.

28. “Há nesta cidade muitos cristãos coreias de nação, os quais entrando em fervor e devoção determinaram de ter sua própria e particular igreja e nela sua confraria”; they had a ground for the church, where there was already a chapel dedicated to St. Laurence. Annual Letter of Japan (13 March 1611), ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 57, fl. 5v–6.

29. In a declaration signed in Nagasaki on 7 March 1623, twelve Jesuit priests, who were assembled in Nagasaki, reported that they were helped by many *dōjuku* and *kanbō* (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 34, fl. 156).

underground, the Japanese Church was able to recruit leadership from among its lay members to help people in their daily life. This document also refers to confraternities of children (BL, *Addington*, 9859, fl. 275v). Though there are no other references to such brotherhoods, Japanese children caused admiration among the Portuguese and seem to have participated actively in the resistance, with some included in the lists of martyrs (see RUIZ DE MEDINA 1999).

Nagasaki remained a Christian city in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Juan Baeza, a Jesuit who lived underground in Nagasaki from 1614 until his death at liberty in 1626, reported on 30 January 1624 that he was promoting the renovation of the *confraria de Nossa Senhora* and had started a new one consecrated to St. Ignatius of Loyola.³⁰ According to Baeza these brotherhoods were working in Nagasaki at that time, as well as in other areas under his influence.³¹ Bento Fernandes added the reference to another confraternity of the Innocents (BPADE, *Tratado dos gloriosos mártires...*, fl. 54v).

We have references to *confrarias* in other areas. In his *Historia de Japam*, reporting events of 1593 in Ōmura, Luís Fróis remarks that there were “some confraternities of the Rosary” (*umas confrarias do Rosário*) (HJ v, 467); and according to Francesco Pasio, Ōmura was the first territory where these institutions had been created.³² We also have references to Bungo in the biography written by Mateus de Couros on the life of Pedro Paulo Navarro, after Navarro’s martyrdom on 1 November 1622. Couros tells us that when Navarro went to Bungo in 1602, he “reorganized the confraternities there” (*reformou as confrarias*; ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 60, fl. 268v).

In Osaka, the local community had also organized “a kind of confraternity” (*a modo de confraria*; Annual Letter of Japan [15/2/1607], BA, 49-IV-59, fl. 446v), and in Miyako there was founded in 1605 a “confraternity of Our Lady of Kami” (*confraria de Nossa Senhora do Kami*; Annual Letter of Japan (20/3/1606), BA, 49-IV-59, fl. 368); later, Carlo Spinola would claim a role in the founding of secular confraternities in the Kinai area (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 36, fl. 154v). It is noteworthy that one finds mention in a letter to Rome of a brotherhood whose invocation associated an area of Japan (Kami, the upper part from a Kyushu perspective) with the mother of Jesus, another good example of the capacity of the Japanese Church to acquire its own symbols and images far removed from the model of

30. According to Bento Fernandes, its leader was Jião “a well known Christian in this city due to the great support he gives to our priests.” BPADE, *Tratado dos gloriosos mártires...*, fl. 29v.

31. “Para cumprir o que vp me ordenava, renovei esta cristandade de Nagasaki com gente que servia para isso, renovando a confraria de Nossa Senhora e começando outra de nosso padre santo Inácio em qual toda esta cidade entrou com todas as aldeias comarcas e em outros reinos que daqui cultivamos com missões. Todos entraram nesta confraria com extraordinária devoção e confiança no santo, ao qual costumam já invocar nas suas necessidades.” ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 34, fl. 121.

32. Annual Letter of Japan (20/10/1595) quoted by SCHÜTTE 1972, 178. We have another brief mention in the Annual Letter of 23 November 1604, referring the existence of brotherhoods in Ōmura lands (IAN/TT, *Manuscritos da Livraria*, 1951, fl. 30).

a colonial Church. It is also important to stress that we again have mention of several brotherhoods in each area of central Japan, usually associated with specific communities, showing the assimilation of this European practice in Japanese Christianity. During the general persecutions, other confraternities were founded. We have references about one of St. Mary, created by Giacomo Gianone in Shimabara, as well as another of the Franciscans in Edo.

The quick spread of these confraternities throughout Japan in the first decade of the seventeenth century was the result of Christianity's maturity. Most of their members were long time Christians, or even Christians from birth. Many who lived in Ōmura, Nagasaki, Arima, and Amakusa were descendents of the first converts and lived in almost totally Christianized areas.³³ Perhaps their parents originally were pressured to accept baptism, or had some political or economic incentive to do so, but most of the Christians of the second or third generations kept the faith—some were killed, others were exiled and lost both social status and economic funding, and many others resisted in silence. If we look, for example, at the martyrs list of Bento Fernandes's treaty, we find that among them there were at least eight adults who had been baptized a week after their birth. Mary, the wife of Tocuan Andres was the daughter and granddaughter of Christians.

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Spanish friars, coming from Manila adopted the same model for assembling their communities.³⁴ According to João Rodrigues Girão, the Mendicants got money for their missions from the donations of their brotherhoods (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 15 II, fl. 295v).

The Jesuits and the Mendicant Orders kept a lasting rivalry over the Japanese mission. Despite the fact that all clerics were subjects of the same king, the two Iberian empires and respective areas of influence were kept separate after the Union of 1580. Therefore the Jesuits and the Franciscan friars were attached to different imperial strategies, the former to Macao and the Portuguese interests and the latter to Manila and the Spaniards. The competition between them was rough and indifferent to both the interests of Japanese Christianity and the needs of the Catholic Church (COSTA 1994).

The brotherhoods were also part of this long dispute. One of the best pieces of documentary evidence is a request sent by the Jesuits to Rome during the second decade of the seventeenth century. There they explain that other religious orders attract people to their brotherhoods by offering better indul-

33. Some of the Jesuits worked always in these areas and their experience was not exactly the same as most missionaries. The expression of Gabriel de Matos in 1613 is significant, when he reported that Jerónimo Rodrigues had been ten or eleven years "among them" [the non-Christians], which reflects a Nagasaki-centered perspective (ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 15 II, fl. 266).

34. For the Spanish presence in Japan see GIL 1991.

gences; therefore the Jesuits wished to have four confraternities, which would be attached to the Society of Jesus and whose members would have the same indulgences as the friars' confraternities.³⁵ This absurd quarrel notwithstanding, the brotherhoods became one of the major symbols of this successful mission, and contributed to the creation of a national Church more quickly than anywhere else in the world.

Conclusion

Lay people played a fundamental role in Christianity's history in Japan. Thousands of Japanese believed that the Gospel was the true way of Heaven (see FOREST 1988), and their faith made possible the significant growth of Christianity, either with or without political support, and resulting in thousands of adult baptisms during the first years of the final persecution. The spread of confraternities in the first years of the seventeenth century was the result of the consolidation of Christianity's second and third generations in Japan. These brotherhoods strengthened the resistant communities, so that the capture of their leaders was one of the major goals of bakufu officials, and after their elimination Christianity's resistance weakened.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ARSI Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu.
 BA Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon.
 BPADE Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Distrital de Évora.
 BL British Library.
 DI *Documenta Indica*. José Wicki, SJ, ed., 18 vols. Rome, 1948–1988.
 DJ *Documentos del Japón*. Juan Ruiz de Medina, SJ, ed., 2 vols. Rome, 1990–1995.
 HJ Luís Fróis, SJ, *Historia de Japam*. José Wicki, SJ, ed., 5 vols. Lisbon, 1976–1984.
 IAN/TT Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo, Lisbon.

35. "Como os religiosos das demais religiões que estão em Japão para atraírem a gente a suas confrarias alegam que as nossas não têm indulgências como têm as suas, nos parece conveniente pedir-se ao Sumo Pontífice algumas para quatro confrarias que em Japão fossem próprias da Companhia.

A primeira a de Jesus, pois somos religiosos da Companhia de Jesus. A segunda da Assunção de Nossa Senhora por ser neste dia que chegou a Japão o padre mestre Francisco, primeiro apóstolo desta nação. A terceira de nosso beato padre Inácio depois que for canonizado como pai nosso que é. A quarta do beato padre mestre Francisco a quem os japões devem tanto." ARSI, *Jap-Sin*, 22, fl. 260.

- MB *Monumenta Brasiliae*. Serafim Leite, SJ, ed., 5 vols. Rome, 1956–1968.
 MM *Monumenta Mexicana*. F. Zubillaga, SJ, ed., 8 vols. Rome, 1956–1991.
 MP *Monumenta Peruana*. Enrique Fernandez, SJ, ed., vol. 1 a 7; Antonio Egaña SJ, ed., vol., 7 e 8, 8 vols. Rome, 1954–1986.

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