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## Strangers in a Strange Land: Translating Catholicism in Early Modern Japan

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Though many scholars have understood Tokugawa Japan's encounter with Christianity (1549–1650) to have ended in failure, an analysis of the period's religious literature demonstrates the considerable extent to which missionaries engaged with Japanese culture. This article examines several Kirishitan (Japanese Christian) texts printed between 1590 and 1620, devoting particular attention to the theological and philosophical terminology they employed. While sometimes borrowing directly from Latin and Portuguese, the new Catholic lexicon also drew from pre-existing Japanese vocabulary in the context of Buddhist and Neo-Confucian spirituality. Along with the education reforms introduced by the accommodationist Jesuit Alessandro Valignano, projects of Catholicism in translation complicate the picture of defeat and mutual misunderstanding that are often thought to characterize Japan's Christian Century.

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### Introduction: Gods and Men

As the first Christian missionary to reach Japanese shores in 1549, Francis Xavier, SJ (1506–52) was captivated when he learned of a bodhisattva named Dainichi during his interactions with the Buddhists of southern Kyushu. Triune, immaterial, and praised by Shingon monks as the source of all being, Dainichi bore unmistakable parallels with the Jesuit's own god. Accordingly, Francis thought he had found a suitable starting point for introducing the Japanese to a foreign religion. Through the medium of a translator, he brought the gospel to the streets of Kagoshima, exhorting locals to “Pray to Dainichi!” as a name for the Christian Trinity. Yet when he came to learn that Dainichi was venerated as a manifestation of *sūnyatā* (the Buddhist concept of *emptiness*) rather than as a personal deity, Francis took his misunderstanding to heart. Soon after he returned to the streets, this time with a new message: “Do *not* pray to Dainichi!” (Farge 2012, 67–68).

This episode illustrates the challenges faced by those rendering Western religious ideas into Japanese from the very beginning of the Christian Century, the period from 1549 to 1650 that witnessed Christianity's arrival, growth, and downfall in Japan. Tasked with presenting the Catholic faith in a radically foreign culture, missionaries and converts alike sought the proper balance between preexisting Japanese vocabulary and a newly imported lexicon from Europe in their efforts at evangelism. The introduction of the printing press in 1590 offered a turning point in this regard, allowing for innovative new modes of literary experimentation. The flowering of Kirishitan literature (Japanese Christian literature, or *Kirishitan-ban*) produced over the following decades not only included mere translations of Western texts, but many genuinely creative works of theology and philosophy. Such creativity was just one facet of the broader interactions between Catholicism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism in Japan—a dynamic yet contentious affair that brought Christians into direct confrontation with the emerging institutions of the early modern Japanese state. Analyzing the theological terminology used in Kirishitan literature from 1590 to 1620, along with the responses that this literature provoked, allows us to better appreciate these intersections of competing faiths and ascendant powers.

The value of this exchange has been questioned by some scholars. In his 1973 classic *Deus Destroyed*, George Elison (1988, 153) claimed that the great “tragedy” of the Christian experiment in Japan was that “there was no meeting of minds” between Christians and non-Christians. Likewise, Michael Cooper (1974, 285) wrote in 1974 that the importation of European religious vocabulary “served only to accentuate the foreign origin of Christianity” and contributed to the Christian Century's end in violent persecution. The present study hopes to provide a corrective to such assertions. Over the

past decade, religious historian Haruko Nawata Ward (2009, 2012, 2016) in particular has critiqued some of Alison's conclusions, showing that translation was a far more Japanese, and far more female, process than might be expected. In a similar vein, Rui Manuel Loureiro (2006) and Yoshihisa Yamamoto's (2012) bibliographic surveys have highlighted where Kirishitan literature went beyond mere translation, and Ichiro Taida's (2017) study of Jesuit education has underlined the seriousness with which many Europeans treated Japanese thought. Here, these findings will be synthesized with linguistic analyses and primary source translations provided by Stefan Kaiser (1996), Ikuo Higashibaba (2001), and William J. Farge (2012) to paint a fuller picture of the lexical landscape. A preliminary sketch of the world that the missionaries encountered will be followed by a discussion of post-1590 Kirishitan texts, as well as the Tokugawa regime's reactions to them—all of which exhibit the processes of legitimate cultural borrowing and interreligious dialogue that formed Japanese Catholicism before its unfortunate demise.

### **I. Mission, Conversion, Education**

The Catholic faith could not have gained a foothold in Japan at a more auspicious time. Spurred on by Counter-Reformation zeal, Jesuit missionaries arrived in Kyushu near the midpoint of the Sengoku (Warring States) period, which since the fifteenth century had witnessed a struggle for preeminence among the archipelago's dozens of local daimyo (feudal lords). The social unrest and lack of central authority that marked this era were ideal conditions for a new religion to thrive, making the Japanese mission one of considerable success in the few decades following Francis Xavier's arrival. Beginning in the 1560s, several daimyo in Kyushu and south-central Honshu volunteered for baptism—some out of genuine conviction and others to more easily obtain firearms—introduced to Japan some decades earlier by Portuguese traders (Strathern 2020, 247). Subjects consequently adopted the new religion of their rulers, bringing the total number of converts into the thousands. Although the processes of political consolidation undertaken by Oda Nobunaga (1534–82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) would complicate their situation later in the century, in happier times evangelists could focus on making their faith appealing to the unchurched and intelligible to the baptized.

Correspondence from a Portuguese Jesuit attests to the difficulty involved in this task. Luis Fróis, writing to his superiors in Europe in 1575, recounted an eventful debate held at Oda Nobunaga's court with the bonze Nichijō Shōnin. By most accounts, Nobunaga was indifferent to religion, but he took a personal liking to several missionaries and even once donated land for a church (Taida 2017, 570). Christians invited to dialogue

with local clerics thus became something of a fixture at his court. According to Fróis, Shōnin argued “at some length that the *hōben* of the Zen sect [a reference to the Buddhist concept of *upāya*, or guidance on the path to enlightenment] was the same as our God,” evidently grasping for a common point of reference between the Eastern and Western traditions (Cooper 1995, 378). When the Japanese convert Brother Lourenço explained that the Christian God rewards good and punishes evil “either temporally in this life or eternally in the next,” Shōnin reacted with “a loud laugh at the thought that there is something immortal in man.” Fróis, for his part, was unsurprised, as he believed Japanese religion to be “founded on the theory that nothing exists save what was visible and contained within the four elements” (378). The conversation ended abruptly when Shōnin flew into a rage at the missionaries’ erudition and had to be restrained from killing them with Nobunaga’s glaive.

The specifics of Fróis’s account should not be taken at face value, not only because of his gross mischaracterization of Japanese religion but because other Jesuits admitted that his writings tended toward exaggeration (Taida 2017, 571). Nevertheless, that interfaith dialogue on matters of doctrine took place was also attested by Fróis’s less insistent contemporaries. The Spanish Jesuit Juan Fernández recorded his own discussions with Zen monks in 1575, in which the latter argued against the Western concept of the immortal soul. The monks identified “a certain principle” within man that “neither lives nor dies, is neither good nor bad,” and allows him to discern good from evil, a kind of capacity for reason rather than a divinely bestowed spirit (Cooper 1995, 374). They further claimed it impossible to know what happens after death. Only when Fernández invoked the example of the wind, “a corporeal thing although it has no colour and cannot be seen,” did his interlocutors concede that the human soul could possibly be immaterial (375–76). In a similar exchange, the Portuguese Franciscan Marcelo de Ribadaneira recounted objections to divine providence worthy of a scholastic *disputatio*: the Japanese thought God “both imprudent and unwise, for he created Lucifer knowing that he was to fall ... and be condemned eternally to hell” (377). The same logic was extended to the creation of Adam.

While Fróis’s account ended in violence and the others in reasoned disagreement, they all demonstrated mutual misunderstanding between Christians and Buddhists. If Fróis was incorrect to think that Japanese religion began and ended with material phenomena, then Nichijō Shōnin was just as misguided to equate the triune God with Zen soteriology—a mistake not unlike that made by Francis Xavier in his confusion over the nature of Dainichi. These incidents also evince the wide diversity of Japanese spirituality; the epistemic humility of the Zen monks described by Fernández stood in marked contrast with, say, the Pure Land sect’s stringent belief in a Blood Pool Hell

(Williams 2009, 50–58). Yet whatever the level of one side’s comprehension for the other, the bulk of the intellectual burden undoubtedly fell to the Europeans endeavoring to root their faith in East Asia. Japanese religions and Christianity indeed rest on divergent ontological assumptions, and as foreigners urging the Japanese to repudiate their long-held beliefs, it was the missionaries’ task to understand their audience before they could make themselves truly understood (Baskind 2018, 231).

Evangelists were aided considerably in this regard by Jesuit education initiatives, central to the Society of Jesus from its inception and to its Japanese mission from Francis Xavier’s arrival. A school was first established in 1561 at Bungo, Kyushu, where around fifty boys were taught theology, music, Portuguese, and Latin (Taida 2017, 567). School curricula fell squarely within the Catholic controversy over accommodation, or the extent to which Christianity should adapt to local customs and beliefs as it spread to new domains during the Age of Discovery. Though the legacy of Matteo Ricci, SJ in the Chinese Rites controversy remains the best-known example, the accommodationist debate featured in much of the early modern Church, not least in Japan. Francisco Cabral (1529–1609), superior of Japan’s Jesuit mission from 1570 to 1581, exemplified the anti-accommodationist approach in both evangelism and education. Despite overseeing a growth in the number of converts to more than 150,000, Cabral distrusted the faithful in his charge; he opposed teaching Latin to the Japanese and the Japanese language to missionaries, relying solely on converted daimyo to force Catholicism on their subjects (Yamamoto 2012, 252). Cabral’s chauvinism was countered when Alessandro Valignano, SJ (1539–1606), a champion of accommodation, was appointed personal delegate to all East Asian missions in 1579. Under his tenure, Jesuit schools fused cultural and language education with traditional Western learning and became the most important institutional structures in Japan’s Christian encounter (Taida 2017, 568).

Valignano understood that the kinds of exchanges recorded by Fróis and Fernández could only bear fruit insofar as they proceeded from a shared vocabulary, both literally and conceptually (Cooper 2004, 399). Accordingly, he forced Cabral’s resignation and ordered the establishment of schools based on the three-tiered system for priestly training promoted by the Council of Trent. By 1583, around two hundred *seminarios*, *noviciados*, and *collegios* dotted southern Japan. The young men who filled their ranks learned more than the theology, music, and Latin standard to European institutions: they also studied Japanese language and literature, as well as traditional religious practices to sharpen the debates they regularly held with Buddhist monks (Taida 2017, 569–70). Today, the sincerity of such cross-cultural education would be questioned, as it was transparently adopted with the end goal of conversion in mind rather than the understanding of Japanese thought on its own terms. Nevertheless, at a time when

a Cabral was far closer to the norm than a Valignano, the curricular reforms were revolutionary. They fit within the broader accommodationist vision of winning souls by respecting local culture.

In the decades following the introduction of the printing press, schools took on an even greater importance by doubling as publishing houses. In 1590, four Kirishitan (Japanese Christians) sent by Valignano on a goodwill mission in Europe returned to Japan with movable type. A lack of language textbooks had stunted school growth—while many *seminarios* could admit up to one hundred students, for instance, only twenty studied at those in Arima and Azuchi, both in Honshu (Taida 2017, 572). Several dictionaries and grammars, among the first to compare Japanese with Western languages, were compiled to remedy the shortage and facilitate language education. The most notable lexicons included the thousand-page *Dictionarium Latino Lusitanicum ac Iaponicum* (Latin-Portuguese-Japanese Dictionary) published in 1595 and the *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam* (Vocabulary of the Language of Japan) published in 1603. This genre, however, accounted for only a small fraction of the dozens of titles that were produced. It was rather devotional and catechetical literature that made up the bulk of printed works and allowed for new modes of cultural exchange.

## II. Faith in Translation

The first title off Japan's Jesuit press was published in 1591. *Sanctos no gosagveo no vchi nvqigaqi quan dai ichi* (Compendium of the Acts of the Saints) was printed at the *collegio* in Kazusa, Kyushu, and composed in an early form of Romaji. Spanning two volumes and more than seven hundred pages, it adapted martyrdom stories from the famed *Legenda aurea* (Golden Legend), a collection of medieval hagiographies popular with European audiences. Translation into Japanese was undertaken by Paulo Yoyo and his son Vicente Hoin, Jesuit *irmãos* (lay brothers) praised for their facility in their native Japanese. Yet the final product was more than a direct translation, in a deeper sense than any translation can be considered the product of its author's subjectivity. Like Francis Xavier before them, Paulo and Vicente had to decide when to employ preexisting terminology from Japanese Buddhism and when to simply approximate Western languages in matters of doctrine and spirituality (the latter can already be seen with the Latin borrowing *sanctos*, or "saints," in the title). Such a process was necessarily selective, and extensive enough that the stories were capped with a glossary defining more than two thousand words in both Japanese and Portuguese (Loureiro 2006, 140). Analyzing the incorporation of non-Christian religious vocabulary in *Sanctos no* and other Kirishitan texts provides a useful window on the Catholic faith's transmission in Japanese and how translation choices may have impacted its reception.

The most striking inclusion of Japanese vocabulary in *Sanctos no* draws parallels between Christian persecution in the classical world and the Kirishitan's own situation in an increasingly hostile Japan. Throughout the text, terminology relating to Roman polytheism in the context of the early Christian martyrs consistently borrows from Buddhism and Shinto (Loureiro 2006, 142). A 1587 edict from Toyotomi Hideyoshi expelling the Jesuits from his domain helps to clarify this choice; though Hideyoshi's threat went unenforced, it was sufficient cause to equate Japanese authorities with the ancient enemies of the cross (Cooper 2004, 403). Several Buddhist expressions are also employed in illustrations of everyday spirituality. For example, the Japanese term *tenma* (evil spirit) is used in place of the Portuguese *demonio* (demon; Kaiser 1996, 14). According to a modern dictionary of Japanese Buddhism referenced by the historical linguist Stefan Kaiser, *tenma* serve a similar function to demons in the Christian imagination, causing "hindrances to those who follow the Buddhist Way" (Kaiser 1996, 27). Likewise, virgins are referred to as *bicuni* (a title borrowed from Pali for Buddhist nuns) rather than the Portuguese *virgem* (virgin; Ward, 2016, 325), and Christian teachings as *mōnen* (preaching the Dharma, or expounding Buddhist teachings) in place of *pregação da Lei* (preaching of the Law; Kaiser 1996, 14). Rather than attempting to transliterate the Portuguese, Paulo and Vicente evidently judged these concepts to be alike enough between Buddhism and Christianity that they could be retained in a more recognizable Japanese.

Even before *Sanctos no* was put to paper, its stories were part of a process that further highlights the creativity and cultural exchange inherent to the production of Christian texts. In the years preceding the arrival of movable type, Jesuits had translated certain acts of the martyrs and staged them among local converts in a traditional Japanese form. Performances known as *setsuwa* (moral ballads) depicting the lives of the saints were acted out by *biwa hōshi*, whom religious historian Haruko Nawata Ward has described as "itinerant... guitar-like-instrument-strumming-singer-story-telling former Buddhist monks who had become Jesuit preachers" (Ward 2012, 274). Audiences provided these performers with reactions and criticism, which the Jesuit translators then took into account for later revisions. A popular process by nature, it is likely that Paulo and Vincente also incorporated elements of this feedback when putting their work to the press. Translation could thus be an effort that implicated whole communities, a didactic call-and-response that transcended the mere comparison of texts through its inclusion of Japanese ritual (Ward 2012, 275).

In 1592, a similar work was published at the *collegio* in Amakusa, Kyushu. The six-hundred-page *Fides no dōxi* (*Teacher of Faith*) was an abridged adaption of the *Introduction of the Symbol of Faith* by Fray Luis de Granada, a Spanish Dominican whose

tractates were popular throughout the Counter-Reformation world. Prepared in Romaji by the Spanish Jesuit Pedro Román with the assistance of Paulo and Vicente, *Fides no dōxi* was notable for its linguistic innovations (Loureiro 2006, 143). For instance, *Passiom* (a variant of *Paixão*, referring to the Passion of Christ) had already been established as one of dozens of theological terms left in untranslated Portuguese across Kirishitan literature. In this text, however, it is enhanced by Japanese grammatical conventions to more accurately convey its significance. The honorific prefix *go*, used to signify deference toward superior things, is added to the Portuguese to create a new noun: *go-Passiom*, the all-holy Passion, a morphological union of the familiar and the new (Ward 2012, 276).

Like *Sanctos no*, *Fides no dōxi* makes use of preexisting Japanese vocabulary as well. In the treatise “Martyrdom as an Excellent Proof of *Fides*” (faith), an original chapter appended to Granada’s text, female martyrs are presented as surpassing examples of Christian devotion. They are described as *itoiqenacu monoyouaqi nhonin*, or “young, weak women,” who overcame the world through their conformity with Christ (Ward 2012, 278). The word *nhonin* also forms the basis of the Buddhist term *jennhonin* (literally, “good women”), which has no direct equivalent in Christianity but was used in other Kirishitan texts when referring to laywomen and female saints (Ward 2012, 276). Elsewhere in the chapter, women are said to have an even greater capacity for *fides* (faith) than men, since “they run to win the first place... Thus, no matter the harsh tortures they inflict upon the *Virgens*, they cannot bend their strong heart (*tçuiioqi von cocoro*)” (Ward 2012, 279). Here we see an entire lexical tapestry woven within a single passage. The Latin *fides* is left untranslated and the Spanish *virgen* (virgin) used in place of *bicuni*, whereas the description of the steadfast female heart is borrowed from Japan’s emerging Neo-Confucian movement. In Confucianism, *von* denotes an “unmerited gift,” and was combined in Kirishitan literature with *go* as a translation of the Portuguese *graça* (grace); *go-von* is therefore presented as the undeserved gift of God, a theologically accurate definition of grace with respect to Catholic teaching (Ward 2012, 276). Hence, *Fides no dōxi* makes use of Confucian tradition to show that the martyrs, both ancient and contemporary, won their palms through the assistance of divine grace.

One of the most enduring titles from the Jesuit press was *Dochirina Kirishitan* (*Christian Doctrine*), based on a Portuguese children’s catechism and first printed at the Amakusa *collegio* in 1591 or 1592. Written separately in Japanese script and romaji, both editions were revised at Nagasaki in 1600 for a total of four printings (Yamamoto 2012, 257). *Dochirina Kirishitan* aimed to present a basic introduction to Catholicism and contained a wealth of Japanese as well as European terminology. The Buddhist term



*goshō* (afterlife) is used throughout in reference to heaven and hell, and the Christian freedom described in Galatians 5 is rendered with the all-important *gedatsu* (spiritual enlightenment, or the attainment of nirvana; Kaiser 1996, 15). The study of Japanese literature undertaken in Jesuit schools also left its mark on the catechism. Certain expressions use the religious and royal prefix *mi*, an archaism derived from Japanese classics, as when Christ's kingdom is rendered as *mi-yo* (heavenly realm) and God the Father as *mi-oya* (heavenly or royal parent; 15). To Japanese eyes, these small details would likely have shown that Westerners had attempted to engage with their own traditions while facilitating their understanding of Christianity.

As in *Fides no dōxi*, trilingual juxtapositions abound in *Dochirina Kirishitan*. One chapter translates the “image of God” from Genesis 1 as *soshō* (with the sense of “likeness” or “appearance”), while the following sentence clarifies that “the image is called ‘*idea*’ in the original language [Latin]. This *idea* is not a thing created. It is just in the same body as Deus”—the word for God in both Latin and Portuguese, and the name that Francis Xavier finally settled on after the Dainichi affair (Higashibaba 2001, 58). This aside is used to teach the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which had long been a point of contention for the Japanese in their dialogues with Christian missionaries. The catechism affirms that the image proper to God's nature “does not mean that Deus created things out of his will (*go-naishō*). He just created out of nothing” (58). It should be noted that in Buddhism, *naishō* typically denotes an “inner realization” or form of enlightenment, meaning that the text essentially presents God's will as his own perfection (Kaiser 1996, 13). Buddhist soteriology was thus linked with the Catholic doctrine of divine simplicity, whereby God's existence is equated with his will, meaning that he wills his very self in whatever he wills to his creatures. We cannot know if this was a conscious association on the part of the translators, but their decision was ingenious nonetheless.

The chapter “*Santa-ekereja no nanatsu no sakramento no koto*” (“On the Seven Sacramentos of the *Santa Igreja*,” or sacraments of the holy Church) understandably contains a greater number of foreign loanwords. Just as English has borrowed words like “baptism” and “Eucharist” directly from Greek, so too were the Portuguese names of the sacraments approximated in Japanese. The chapter also employs *go* constructions, referring to the “meritorious power” of Christ's Passion as *go-kuriki* and his death on the cross as *go-nyūmetsu* (Higashibaba 2001, 165). All of this makes *Dochirina* a sterling example of Kirishitan literature's ability to interweave the Catholic lexicon with standard Japanese. Ward has called this mixture of the exotic and the everyday the “domestication of Christianity” in Japan (Ward 2012, 276). Though a phrase as clunky as *Dochirina*'s definition of faith might strike modern readers as opaque—“the light of benevolence (*go-on no hikari*) beyond *natura* (nature) that Deus gives to the

*anima* (soul) of the Kirishitan so that [he] may firmly believe what *Santa Igreja* (Holy Church) has taught as the revelation of Deus” —we should not be so quick to think that the importation of European terminology necessarily made the faith incomprehensible in its day (Higashibaba 2001, 69). For centuries the Japanese had adopted Buddhist vocabulary from Sanskrit and Chinese and made it their own; the Christian experiment was only one chapter in a much longer story of religious transculturation.

Catholicism’s reception in Japan cannot be properly understood without reference to the works of Fabian Fukan (also known as Habian). A former Zen monk with training in Confucian scholarship, in 1605 the Jesuit *irmão* produced the first original work of Christian theology from a Japanese hand. *Myōtei mondō* (*Myōtei Dialogues*) is a fictional dialogue in three books between a Buddhist nun named Myōshū and a Kirishitan woman named Yūtei, in which the latter seeks to convince the former of the gospel (Ward 2009, 1054–55). Fabian likely drew inspiration from the Miyako no bikuni, a society of female catechists in Kyoto who debated local Buddhists and Confucians and oversaw hundreds of conversions from 1600 to 1612 (Ward 2012, 277–78). Fabian’s knowledge of scholastic philosophy lent itself to a thorough apologetic and a systematic critique of Japanese religion. While not printed at the official Jesuit press, *Myōtei mondō* stands as one of the most significant and inventive works of the Christian Century.

Fabian’s refutation of eight Buddhist sects in Book I of *Myōtei mondō* proceeds along much the same lines as other Kirishitan apologetics—namely, that Buddhist deities have no power to save mankind because they themselves are merely apotheosized humans. This was one of the major arguments of Valignano’s *Catechismus iaponensis* (*Japanese Catechism*), printed in Lisbon in 1586 and used for instruction in Japanese schools (Yamamoto 2012, 272–73). More original is *Myōtei mondō*’s treatment of Neo-Confucian thought in Book II. On creation, for instance, the principles of yin and yang are linked with the scholastic conception of God as first cause, the necessary cause of all things that itself has no cause. In the dialogue, Yūtei argues that some being with *chie funbetsu* (intelligence and moral understanding) must precede and direct the Great Ultimate, the origin of yin and yang in Confucian cosmology, because yin and yang are impersonal forces that lack agency. She further identifies the Great Ultimate with Thomas Aquinas’s theory of *materia prima*, the formless primeval matter from which God is supposed to have fashioned all things after the creation of the universe, to help Myōshū understand that the being she has described must be Deus (Ward 2009, 1056–57). We have already seen that the notion of a single creator was foreign to the Japanese mind and was the subject of much interreligious debate. Clearly Fabian’s contribution to this discourse, like the latent invocation of divine simplicity in *Fides no dōxi*, was creative and intellectually serious.

*Myōtei mondō*'s discussion of human nature is just as innovative. Later in Book II, Yūtei praises the Neo-Confucian concept of the *gojō* (five positive principles), among which are *jin* (benevolence), *gi* (reasonableness), and *chi* (knowledge). It is man's natural desire that he should attain happiness by fulfilling the *gojō* and leading a virtuous life. Like yin and yang, this desire is rooted in the Great Ultimate, thought in turn to be present in all things since all things issue from it, just as a pebble broken off a boulder contains part of the larger rock. The outcome of this cosmology is a view of the human mind as a *chōtenchi* (microcosm of the universe), constantly seeking to regain the true state of *ichinen* (one human thought) in harmony with creation. Analogies with Catholic thought on natural law and teleology are easily discernible here: man's creation in the image of God endows him with reason (*gi*) and knowledge of the moral law (*chi*), while the yearning for happiness in every human heart attests to God as the highest good (*gojō*) and fulfillment of all desire. While Yūtei does not make such parallels explicit, her appreciation for Neo-Confucian anthropology is obvious. The section ends with another refutation of Buddhism and Taoism, whose supposedly negative views of human nature are unpalatable to Yūtei's Catholic sensibilities when compared with Confucianism (Ward 2009, 1057–58). If Yūtei and Myōshū's dialogues recall Fróis's debate with Nichijō Shōnin decades earlier, one will note the greater degree of openness to non-Christian philosophies that marks Fabian's work.

### III. The Church Suffering

Fabian, of course, did not engage with Neo-Confucian thought in a vacuum. As Japan left behind the turmoil of the Sengoku period at the close of the sixteenth century, the centralizing state worked vigorously to consolidate its authority over the fractured daimyo. Neo-Confucianism, with its prescriptions of hierarchy and rigidly enforced social structures, was an ideal ideological framework to lend the regime the legitimacy it sought. Interest in Confucian scholarship from the East Asian mainland was rekindled in the mid-1590s after Toyotomi Hideyoshi's failed invasion of Korea, and by the time of *Myōtei mondō*'s composition in 1605, the Confucian firebrand Hayashi Razan had already been appointed as personal tutor to Tokugawa Ieyasu (Nosco 2007, 103). Fabian thus found his place within an intellectual current that had made its way to the highest echelons of Japanese society in less than a decade.

Not that any of these developments boded well for Japan's Catholic minority. The budding national consciousness that emerged under the early Tokugawa shogunate also implied a suspicion of Catholicism as a subversive foreign influence, a sentiment that can be detected within *Myōtei mondō* itself. In Book III, Myōshū gives voice to a popular anxiety that Europeans were plotting to invade Japan and overthrow the government,

using their religion as a foothold against the unsuspecting natives. Yūtei reassures her interlocutor that Christians obeyed “the Japanese emperor, shogun, lord and master,” prayed for peace and the stability of the *tenka* (sovereign ruler of Japan), and preached *kōjun* (loyalty and obedience) to all Japanese authorities (Ward 2009, 1059). Whatever their deference to civil government, the prospect of violent backlash was a real one. Already in 1597, more than two dozen Christians had been crucified in Nagasaki after the Spanish cargo ship *San Felipe* foundered off the coast of Shikoku; authorities feared that it was the prelude to a military campaign and opted to make an example of the Christian population, which by the end of the century may have neared 300,000. The Catholic Church now commemorates these deaths every February as the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan, the first of many instances of state reprisals against Christianity (Cooper 2004, 403). Even as Fabian was writing his apologetic, the social fluidity that had allowed for Christianity’s growth during the Sengoku period was quickly giving way to a new dispensation.

The shogunate systematized the persecution of Christians as it came more fully into its power. In 1612, Tokugawa Hidetada placed Christianity under an official ban, which led to the arrest and torture of several members of the Miyako no bikuni in Kyoto; and in 1614, unlike Hideyoshi’s empty threat, he promulgated a decree of expulsion that he intended to enforce. All European missionaries were banished from Japan, as was Julia Naitō, a former Buddhist abbess and founder of the Miyako no bikuni (Ward 2012, 278). The Great Expulsion also saw dozens of Jesuit schools shuttered, printing presses shipped back to Portuguese Macau, and many more Catholics martyred (Taida 2017, 579). Executions were characteristically brutal. In one account recorded by the Spanish Jesuit Pedro Morejón, brothers Thomas and Joachim Watanabe were hanged on a tree by their feet. They still lived after three days without food or water, all the while giving thanks to Christ “for this favour that he showeth us, in suffering something to his imitation on a tree” (Cooper 1995, 387). A local official then allowed for them to be taken down and beheaded, and they went to their execution “often repeating the holy name of *Jesus*” (387). Exaggerated though the report may be, the Watanabe brothers and thousands of others like them surely displayed *bodaixinno vōquinaru*—a Buddhist term meaning “great aspirations for salvation,” as found in *Kontemutsusu munji* (*On Contempt of the World*), a 1610 translation of Thomas à Kempis’s devotional classic *The Imitation of Christ* and one of the final publications from Japan’s Christian press (Farge 2012, 72–73).

Fabian was not counted among the martyrs. Apostatizing from Christianity around 1608, he subsequently came under the influence of Hayashi Razan in the Tokugawa court (Schrimpf 2008, 39). Perhaps as a penance for the years he had spent as a Catholic, in 1620 Fabian composed early modern Japan’s most theoretically robust anti-Christian

polemic. *Ha Daiusu* (*Deus Destroyed*) distilled the Neo-Confucian thought that he had once incorporated into his apologetic and that the shogunate now promoted. Some of the reasons behind the vengeance sought by Hidetada can be gleaned from this work. Among Christianity's logical inconsistencies, Fabian argued that it undermined the all-important *goten*, five social relationships: ruler to subject, father to son, husband to wife, elder to younger brother, and friend to friend (Ward 2009, 1063). He explains that the first *mandamento* (from the Portuguese for "commandment") as found in the Pentateuch meant that "one should esteem this Deus even above one's ruler, more even than one's father and mother. Refuse to follow the orders of ruler or parents if compliance would mean the denial of Deus's will! ... And not to mention all else that this *Mandamento* implies!" (Elison 1988, 282). For the regime, that authoritative opening of the Decalogue was an invitation to anarchy, an unwelcome reminder of the civil strife that had plagued Japan just a few decades earlier.

Fabian's defense of the *goten* in *Ha Daiusu* was full-throated indeed, reducing their observance to the fulfillment of man's final end. "What else can a man do if he has performed his duties within these relationships," he wrote, "And if a man deranges these, then what is the iniquity, what the atrocity to which he will not stoop!" (Elison 1988, 283). One might discern here some of the materialism that so preoccupied Fróis and Fernández in the 1570s, a this-worldliness once characteristic of Buddhist skepticism and now given the full endorsement of state ideology. Integral, too, to Fabian's social hierarchy was the subjugation of women in all spheres. While Japan was no different than the Western world in its patriarchal orientation, Neo-Confucianism did contrast with the modicum of egalitarianism found in Catholic spirituality, exemplified by the laywomen of the Miyako no bikuni and by *Fides no dōxi*'s presentation of women as surpassing models of faith (Ward 2012, 279–80). In response to the entire Christian ethic, the regime could only marvel: "What greater iniquity than this?" (Elison 1988, 283).

### **Conclusion: Power and Glory**

"Japan is the Land of the Gods," Fabian wrote in his denunciation of Christianity (Elison 1988, 283). There is a sense in which the Tokugawa shogunate proved him right, for the thirty years following *Ha Daiusu*'s publication witnessed the human gods of violence and coercion triumph over the Catholic mission. The Great Martyrdom of Nagasaki in 1622 saw fifty Christians beheaded or burned in a single day (Cooper 2004, 404), and a Jesuit reported in 1626 that "huge quantities of books were burned, almost all that we possessed" (Loureiro 2006, 149). The sense of urgency in extirpating Christianity only increased after the Shimabara Rebellion of 1638, and from the close of the Christian Century in 1650, the faithful could congregate only in the absolute secrecy of

underground communities. By most accounts, Tokugawa Japan's Christian encounter is understandably considered to have been a failure.

Whether the gospel really came to Japan as the seed sown among thorns is not for historians to determine (cf. Matthew 13:3–9). Still, there is good reason to judge certain scholars' conclusions as overstated. This includes George Alison's (1988, 153) judgment that the Christian Century saw no real meeting of minds between European and Japanese, along with William J. Farge's (2012, 73) contention that the Jesuits made no attempt at interreligious dialogue in their adoption of Buddhist terminology. Of course, even the most pioneering of accommodationists were zealous for souls rather than understanding, and one can never know how genuinely the faith was received by every Japanese convert (Cooper 2004, 396). Yet we have seen that the translation of Christian texts was often a process marked by dynamism and creativity, not slavish adherence to the letter. It made broad use of Japanese tradition, flowed from a philosophy of education that grappled seriously with Japanese culture, and viewed debate as a feature rather than a bug. If Japan was not made a bastion of Christendom, it demonstrated the extent to which Counter-Reformation Catholicism could adapt to non-Western contexts—even as persecution confirmed in the eyes of the faithful that the world hates the Church because it hated Christ first.

In all this, we see an example of cultural exchange in Tokugawa Japan that has been given insufficient appreciation, and a way forward for crafting new narratives of early modern Japanese history (Farge 2016). Doubtless, the Christian Century came to quite a different close than Francis Xavier would have hoped, but the martyrs did not allow the likes of Fabian to have the final word. Insofar as they bore witness to their faith, they also bore witness to the preachers and the texts that formed a distinctly Japanese Catholicism.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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