

Self Through the Other

Production, Circulation and Reception in Italy
of Sixteenth-Century Printed Sources on Japan

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3 Production and Circulation of Jesuit Sources on Japan in the Sixteenth Century

Summary 3.1 The Jesuit Mission in Japan in the Sixteenth Century: Valignano's Vision. – 3.2 The Published Jesuit Reports on Japan. – 3.3 Francis Xavier's Reports: Laying the Foundations of the Mission. – 3.4 The Published Jesuit Letter-books: Shaping an Imaginary of Japan. – 3.5 The Impact of the Reports in Europe: Italian Editions in the Sixteenth Century.

3.1 The Jesuit Mission in Japan in the Sixteenth Century: Valignano's Vision

The Portuguese were motivated to pursue their maritime expansion not only by the economic benefits derived from the African (and Asian) trade, but also by religious ardour. Missionary effort had come hand-in-hand with Portuguese sea explorations since 1418, when Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) had assumed the position of *regedor e governador* (ruler and governor) of the Order of Christ. Ever since, this crusading militia had been ideologically and materially involved in the Portuguese explorations, providing the Crown with the greatest source of funding for its maritime enterprise (Hamilton 1948, 37). The link between Portuguese imperial ambitions and Christian missionary efforts had been, as seen above, formally asserted by the Roman Church in the second half of the fifteenth century through a series of Papal Bulls: the *Dum Diversas* (1452), the *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) and the *Inter Caetera* (1456), which granted the right to the Portuguese Crown to administer the newly 'discovered' territories in the East Indies, in both a civil and an ecclesiastical capacity. This established the system that came to be known as *patroado real* (royal patronage) (Boxer 1969, 20-4). The system was then formalized in 1494 with the ratification of the Treaty of Tordesillas, which established a circular line of division, running from pole to pole 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands and splitting the known world into two spheres of influence. All territories east of the line were

to pertain to Portugal.¹ Under the protection of the Portuguese Crown, the Franciscan order and the Dominican order had carried out their missions to India in 1500 and 1503, respectively. By 1538, the Episcopal see of Goa was established, creating what would become the key structure for the administration of the Christian missions in Asia - including the one settled in Japan.²

At the beginning of the following decade, on September 27, 1540, Pope Paul III officially sanctioned, with the papal bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae*, the creation of the Society of Jesus. The *Formula* of the order, proposed by the founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), and by the nine fathers that formed the original core of the Society,³ identified the purpose of the order in the defense and propagation of the faith. It indicated the ministries through which such purpose should be accomplished, strongly emphasizing the role of public preaching, lectures and more generally education - a trait that would find material expression, ever since the late 1540s, in the founding of the Jesuit schools. The *Formula* also required from the members of the Society the pronouncement of a particular vow, that would bind them to travel anywhere in the world to perform their ministry, once so ordered by the Pope - giving birth to what was, in all respects, an order of itinerant missionaries (O'Malley 1993, 5-6). Travel was, in other words, part of the Society ever since its foundation, in a way that influenced its development and activities in an essential way.⁴ In accord to such premises, and also thanks to the connections the early members enjoyed - being in great part of Spanish and Portuguese origin and, therefore, in the privileged position of belonging to the countries that were leading the European exploration - the Society came to exert a pivotal role in the conduction of the Christian missions both in the Pacific and in the Atlantic areas.

The first Jesuit Father to set foot in Asia was one of the members of the original group of the Society's founders, Francis Xavier (1506-1552), sent by Ignatius on a mission to India in the very year of the creation of

1 The full text and translation of the Treaty, as well as a related bibliography, are available in Davenport 2012, 84-100.

2 The See was to become, by 1557, an independent archbishopric and primatial See of the East, reference for a number of dependent dioceses, scattered in the different centers of the missions. By 1575, the dioceses of Cochin, Malacca and Macau had been established. The Japanese one, settled in Funai, was created in 1588 and assigned to the Jesuit bishop Sebastião Morais (Üçerler 2008, 155).

3 Peter Favre, Francis Xavier, Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón, Nicolás de Bobadilla, Simão Rodrigues, Claude Jay, Paschase Broët and Jean Codure. The *Formula* was approved by the Pope as presented, and only slightly revised in 1550 - adding clarifications and specifications and including changes in actual practice, but with no alteration of big consequence.

4 The role of travel in the Jesuit order is discussed in Harris 1999.

the Order, on specific request by the Pope and under the patronage of King John III of Portugal.⁵ Upon reaching his destination, in 1542, Xavier was able to send back to Europe promising reports about the situation of Christianity in India, and also to forward a request backed by the Portuguese governor in Goa for the dispatch of other Jesuit Fathers to the country. The response from Rome was favourable, and the Jesuits were permitted to establish a solid presence in India. By the moment Xavier's death, about ten years after his arrival, forty or so Jesuit missionaries already had joined him in the effort of bringing evangelization to Asia. Moreover, by 1548, the Jesuit order took over the administration of the College of the Holy Faith in Goa. The institution, that had been founded by the secular clergy in 1541 and supported by lay benefactors ever since, soon grew out to be a vital centre for the Society in Asia, exerting a role similar to that of the Jesuit colleges of Rome and Coimbra in Europe. It took in its hands the formation of the missionaries dispatched from Europe to Asia, the general direction of the various Asian colleges where they were eventually forwarded, and the sorting of the correspondence between Asia and Europe. Ever since 1556, moreover, it became the main Jesuit printing centre in Asia, with the setting up of the first moveable-type hand press brought by the Jesuits from Europe (Üçerler 2008, 155).

From Goa, Francis Xavier sailed for Japan, so as to personally assess the conditions for the evangelization of the archipelago. That was the act that led to the establishment of the local mission in Japan - where the Jesuits would exert exclusive influence for the greatest part of the sixteenth century.

The encounter, in 1547, with the Japanese native Yajirō (or Anjirō), who had fled from Japan in Jorge Álvares' ship, as well as the report received by Álvares himself, were the reasons that first motivated Francis Xavier to travel to Japan:

Father Francis Xavier got notice of that [land] in the year 1542 [sic!], through certain Portuguese merchants coming from there: in whose company came a Japanese nobleman called Angero [Yajirō]. [...] He is very intelligent, and in little less than six months, brought to Goa by Father Francis, in the College of the Society of Jesus in that city, he learned the Portuguese language, to the point of being able to read it and write it, and in the spiritual matters, and he took much profit in the Christian doctrine, and was baptized and called Paolo di Santa Fede. Through the information gotten from him and from other merchants, Father Francis was persuaded that God would be much served

5 On Xavier's activities in Asia and Japan, see Asami 2011.

in those lands [...] and he finally resolved to go himself, and left from Goa in April 1549.⁶

Xavier landed in Kagoshima in August 1549, accompanied by Yajirō himself, by two servants similarly converted to Christianity, and by the Jesuit Father Cosme de Torres (1510-1570) and the lay Brother Juan Fernández (1526-1567). He brought with himself letters by the Viceroy of the Indies and by the Governor of Malacca, planning to confer to his visit a quasi-official nature. He originally intended to gain an audience with the “King” (the Ashikaga shogun) in Kyoto, so as to obtain from him official permission to preach and convert on the archipelago. However, as it became clear that the shogun held no real authority over the lands that he nominally controlled, Xavier and his companions soon shifted their interest to creating connections with the local *daimyō* authorities, so as to obtain from them permission to preach the Gospel in their territories (as well as, in many cases, material support).⁷ In this strategy, that would become the key to the success of the mission in the archipelago,⁸ the Jesuits were favoured, ever since the early years of their permanence in Japan, by their connection with the Portuguese merchants that conducted the silver and silk trade. The respect paid by the crew of the *náo* to Xavier, and to the Jesuits that succeeded him, impressed the Japanese authorities, leading many of the *daimyō* to seek the Christian presence so as to attract European merchants in their dominions.⁹ In the

6 “Hebbe notitia di quella il P.M.Francesco Xavier l’anno 1542. per certi mercatanti Portoghese, che di la venivano: in cui compagnia venne un’huomo nobile Giapanese, detto Angero, [...]. è molto ingenuoso, et in poco più di sei mesi, condotto a Goa dal P.M.Francesco al collegio della compagnia di Iesu di quella città, apparò la lingua Portoghese in modo, che la leggeva, et scriveva, et nelle cose spirituali, et dottrina Christiana, fece gran profitto, et fu battezzato, et chiamato Paolo di Santa Fede. Hora per informatione di quello gentil’huomo, et di altri mercatanti, essendo il P.M. Francesco persuaso, che Dio saria molto servito in quelle parti [...] et finalmente si risolvette d’andare egli stesso, et partì di oa il mese d’Aprile del 1549” (Xavier 1558a, f. 101; translated by the Author). On Yajirō, his past and position in Japan, his experience in Goa and, later, as an interpreter for Xavier, as well as for a bibliography of the extant contemporary sources about him, see Ebisawa 1971, 228-52.

7 “Giunti a Meaco, travagliammo per alcuni giorni per parlare al Re, e chiedergli licentia di predicare nel suo Regno la legge di Dio; ma non potemmo mai parlargli; e sapendo poi che non era obbedito dalli suoi, non ci curammo di tal licentia” (When we arrived in Meaco [Kyoto], we strived for a few days to talk to the King, and ask him for permission to preach the Law of God in his Kingdom; but we were not able to talk to him; and knowing he was not obeyed by his subjects, we chose not to care about such permission; see Xavier 1558b, f. 120; translated by the Author).

8 As discussed in Steichen 1903.

9 The close ties between the Christian religion and the Portuguese commercial interests in Japan are widely documented both in the Jesuit and the Japanese contemporary sources. See in this regard, and more in general about the relationship between missionaries, local Japanese authorities and Portuguese merchants, Boxer 1951, 91-136.

two years of his permanence on the archipelago, Xavier was able to create footholds for the mission in the Satsuma domain, in Hirado and Yamaguchi, and to establish connections with Ōtomo Yoshishige (also known as Ōtomo Sōrin), *daimyō* of Bungo (modern Ōita) – who would convert to Christianity by 1578 and become one of the most important Japanese supporters of the Jesuit mission. Aside from working on getting the support of local authorities, Xavier took notice of the primary necessities for the survival and success of the mission – namely, the need for the missionaries to master the Japanese language, as well as to gain a deeper knowledge of native religion, and in particular Buddhism, so as to more efficiently convey the principles of Christianity and participate in doctrinal debates. The confusion in regards to Buddhism and the difficulties of the language actually gave way to some misunderstandings during the Father's stay in Japan – most notably those derived by Xavier's use of Buddhist terms in order to express Christian concepts, which generated the tendency in many Japanese to view Christianity as a Buddhist sect, rather than as an entirely different religion. While this, in any probability, actually eased the acceptance of the missionaries in Japan, it generated a fundamental problem of understanding in the transmission of the Christian doctrine – one of which the Jesuit missionaries had to become aware early on.¹⁰

In 1551, Xavier departed from Japan, travelling to China (where he, however, would never be able to enter) and leaving Father Cosme de Torres in charge of the Japanese mission – of which he would be Superior up to his death, in 1570. Xavier's departure marked the opening of a still in many ways unorganised phase of the Christian missionary activity in Japan. Under Torres' guidance, the mission was able to grow steadily, but given the still limited number of Jesuit Fathers operating in Japan – who were, in turn, backed up only by a few Brothers and Japanese acolytes – managing the footholds of the mission, scattered as they were through the country, was no easy feat.¹¹

10 Leading Xavier himself, for example, to reject the term *Dainichi*, and adopt the Latin term *Deus* as an alternative. See in this regard Gonoï (2002, 40-1). As Ebisawa (1966, 179) suggests, the use of Buddhist terms probably seemed like the logical choice at the time, as the Buddhist language provided for the only terms readily available in the Japanese language to be charged with the philosophical implications of religious salvation. Partly responsible for the misuse of Buddhist terms was also, surely, Yajirō – who had been the one to introduce Buddhism to Xavier, in a grossly misleading way. Only superficially acquainted with Shingon Buddhism, he had in fact reportedly declared that the Japanese “all adore but one God, whom they call Doniche in their language” (“tutti adorano un solo Iddio, il quale chiamano Doniche in suo linguaggio” Xavier 1562, f. 21; translated by the Author).

11 The Jesuits operating in Japan could be divided into three categories: the Fathers (*padres* or *bateren* as they were commonly named by the Japanese), who handled the real authority, and who included only Europeans up to Valignano's time; the Brothers (*irmãos*, named *iruman* by the Japanese), who were mostly European but who came to include about seventy Japanese by the beginning of the 1590s; and the native acolytes and catechists

Torres first settled in Yamaguchi, where, in 1552, the Daidōji temple was donated by the Ōuchi family to the missionaries, allowing them to turn it into a church. When the area was seized by the Mōri family, he moved to Bungo, where, aided by Luis Almeida (who had studied as a surgeon), he promoted the construction of an orphanage and an hospital. A division of the mission also came to be established, in 1560, in the Kyoto area, by Father Gaspar Vilela, who, after reaching Japan in 1556, distinguished himself as a true ‘pioneer in adaptation’ – shaving his head, dressing in Japanese fashion, and learning to read and write in the Japanese language. He was able to succeed where Xavier had failed, obtaining from the Ashikaga family permission to preach in the area.¹² Adaptation became a common line of action among the Jesuit missionaries, even if not, yet, with the coherence later brought by Valignano. Crucial in this early phase of the mission was also the solving of the matter of Christian terminology, which came to the forefront with new force after Xavier’s departure.¹³ Father Balthasar Gago was the one who took it into his hands, promoting a linguistic reform that, as he himself explained in a letter sent from Hirado

(*dōjuku*), who were more than a hundred by the beginning of the seventeenth century. The *dōjuku* were not, strictly speaking, members of the Society, but exerted, in practice, a big role in the organization of the mission. Aside from these categories, there were household servants and caretakers, who did not belong to the Jesuits but nonetheless impacted on the budget of the Society. For an in-depth analysis of the structure of the mission and its evolution, see Boxer 1951, 211-27. Among the leading European figures of this early phase, aside from Torres himself and the already mentioned Juan Fernandez, were Gaspar Vilela (1525-1572), Luis Frois (1528/32-1597), Balthasar Gago (c. 1520-1583), Luis Almeida (1525-1583), Francisco Cabral (1529-1609), Organtino Gneccchi-Soldo (1530-1609) and Gaspar Coelho (1530-1590). Frois, active in Kyoto, would become the most prolific writer among the Jesuit missionaries in Japan. Notable, among the Brothers was the Japanese convert known with the Christian name Lourenço, the first Japanese layman to be received inside of the Society of Jesus. Baptized by Xavier himself in 1551, he was received in the Society in 1563 by Torres. He was active in the early phases of the establishment of the Jesuit mission in Kyoto, and was author of a report letter, dated June 2, 1560, which constitutes one of the richest extant testimony about the establishment of the Japanese mission in Kyoto. See, in regard to Lourenço, Ebisawa 1942.

12 Vilela first approached the Buddhist monks of Mount Hiei, who exerted an exceeding amount of political and economical power in the city, so as to gain their permission to preach the Gospel in the area. Unable to persuade them, he proceeded, not without difficulties, to preach without official permission, until he was granted an audience with the shogun Ashikaga Yoshiteru, who granted him not only the permission to preach, but also exemption from taxes, also putting a stop to the open opposition that the missionaries had been encountering by the majority of the Buddhist sects of the city ever since their arrival. On Vilela, see Cieslik 1954c.

13 The act of cession of the Daidōji openly referred to the Fathers as ‘bonzes’ (*sō*) and declared that they had come to Japan in order to preach the laws of Buddhism – revealing how the misunderstandings generated by Xavier were far from being dispelled. Moreover, the Fathers’ deepening knowledge of Buddhism made them aware of subtleties in Buddhist terminology they had not been conscious of when they first adopted it, and that inherently complicated its use to convey a set of alien religious concepts. See Cieslik 1954a.

on September 22, 1555,¹⁴ aimed at removing from the use of the Fathers all the Japanese native words he deemed as dangerous or harmful (i.e., theologically charged in a way that would generate misunderstandings about the true meaning of what was being preached). The fathers would substitute them with the original Portuguese or Latin term, expressed in *kana* (so as to avoid the meaning-charged *kanji*).¹⁵

In the 1560s decade, the Jesuits came to be involved in the game-changing events that started the unification of Japan. They assisted to the rise of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), the first of the three great unifiers, who conquered Kyoto in 1568, and appointed as a new governor Wada Koremasa, a supporter of the Christian mission (who allegedly intended himself to become a Christian). In 1569, thanks to Wada's intercession, Father Luis Frois (who had joined Father Vilela in Kyoto in 1563) was granted an audience by Nobunaga, sanctioning the beginning of a very advantageous relationship for the missionaries. In the long run, Nobunaga turned out to be one of the most solid supporters of the Christian Fathers - with whom he shared a common hostility towards the Buddhist monasteries settled on the slopes of Mount Hiei, due to their overbearing influence on Kyoto's political and religious life. In 1576, a church was built in Kyoto, followed by another one in the outskirts of the city, two years later.¹⁶ The mission similarly progressed in Kyūshū, where, as already mentioned, the Jesuits came to exert a fundamental role as middlemen in the Portuguese-Japanese trade, while in Bungo mass conversions were achieved, thanks to the influence of the Ōtomo family. By the end of the 1570, about 150,000 people had reportedly been converted in Japan (Elisonas 2007, 31).

The arrival of Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) on the Japanese archipelago inaugurated a new, more organized phase in the mission. Much as Xavier had acted as the initiator of the missionary effort in East Asia, Alessandro Valignano played the central role in shaping it, most of all by allowing it to assume a new, localized, identity - partially independent from the European forms and adapted to Japanese (and, later Chinese) society and culture. The Italian father was selected as Visitor to the East of the Society of Jesuit in 1572, by the at the time current Superior General of

14 The letter ("Copia d'vna lettera del P. Baldassar Gago scritta in Firando alli 23. De Settembre 1555. al padre M. Ignatio, Preposito generale della compagnia di Iesv") is included in Gago 1558, f. 260.

15 This included a list of about fifty terms, to which other were added in later years. They included terms such as the above mentioned *Dainichi*, as well as *hotoke* (similarly used to express 'God'), *jigoku* (for 'hell'), *jōdo* (for 'paradise') and *tamashii* (for 'soul'). For a more detailed insight on the language reformation by Gago, see Cieslik 1954a.

16 For an in-depth analysis of the relationships between Buddhist monks and Christians and of the political events of the Nobunaga era in connection with the missionary life in Japan, see Sansom 1961, 291-9.

the Society of Jesus, Everard Mercurian. The appointment was the result of a deliberate policy aimed at, at least partly, freeing the activity of the Society in Asia from its dependence from the Portuguese Crown, which had come to weigh on the missions not only in the terms of the Portuguese patronage (according to which the Fathers were dependent to the Crown in terms of transport and subventions), but also through the overbearing authority of some members of the order who were closely connected with the Portuguese Royal family. Valignano was supposed to seize the rein of the missions in Asia in his own hands, and to challenge such authority. And he did manage that, by bringing with himself to Asia a chosen number of missionaries whose formation he had personally accomplished, and by nominating a special Indian procurator in Lisbon, who, among other things, got to manage the entirety of the correspondence to and from the Indies. Backed up by the General, and solid in his authority, when he reached India in 1574 Valignano could firmly take the reins of the mission in his hands. He was in Japan from 1579 to 1582, and then again from 1590 to 1592 and from 1598 to 1603. His first visit to Japan was probably the most influential in terms of the conduction of the mission on the archipelago, as it took place in a phase when the missionaries mostly enjoyed the support of Japanese authorities.¹⁷

Boscaro (2008) sums up the measures taken by Valignano for the conduction of the mission in Japan into six main points:

1. The promotion of the formation of a native clergy, through the foundations of seminaries, novitiates and colleges, and through the composition of the *Catechismus Christianae Fidei in quo veritas nostrae religionis ostenditur, et sectiae Iaponenses confutantur*;¹⁸
2. The compilation of the *Avertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (Account of the customs of Japan, completed in 1581);
3. The compilation of the *Sumario de las cosas de Japon* (Summary of Japanese matters, completed in 1583);
4. The handling of the mission's financial matters, and particularly of the acquisition of the port of Nagasaki;
5. The Japanese embassy in Europe known as *Tenshō ken'ō shonen shisetsu* (boy's embassy to Europe of the Tenshō period), or simply *Tenshō shisetsu*; The Embassy, nominally sent by the *daimyō* of

¹⁷ As it is not within the scope of the present work, we will not dwell on Valignano. We refer to the large literature that already exists on his role as Visitor in Asia and Japan, including: Ross 1999; Volpi 2004, 2005; López-Gay 2005; Tamburello et. al 2008.

¹⁸ The manual, promptly translated from Latin to Japanese, included the confutation of a number of Buddhist concepts, as well as the explanation of Christian teachings such as the Ten Commandments, the Resurrection, the Last Judgment, Paradise and Hell. The Latin version of the work was given to print in Lisbon in 1586 by Antonius Riberius.

- Kyūshū (but, in reality, carefully orchestrated by Valignano), was composed of four young boys: Mancio Itō, the thirteen-year-old chief emissary, a relative of Ōtomo Yoshishige; the thirteen-year-old Michael Chijiwa, cousin of the *daimyō* Arima Harunobu and Ōmura Sumitada; and, accompanying them, Martin Hara (13) and Julian Nakaura (15); they left Japan in 1582 and travelled through India to Portugal, Spain and Italy, returning by 1590, after having been received by a number of representatives of the European nobility, and most notably by the King of Spain and by the Pope, in 1585;¹⁹
6. The diffusion of moveable-type print in Japan, through the printing press brought by the members of the above mentioned embassy in their return trip from Europe; the printing press was installed first in Goa and then moved to Japan, operating successively, according to the change in political circumstances, in Kazusa, Amakusa, Nagasaki (and later, when the persecutions began in full force, in Manila and in Macao); it gave birth to the so-called *kirishitanban* (literally, 'Christian prints') literature.²⁰

Both Valignano's strong support toward the formation of indigenous Fathers (a matter that caused some heated controversy among the missionaries in Japan upon his arrival)²¹ and his compilation of the *Avertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* suited his ambition to develop the mission in a direction at least partly independent from European forms. Through the *Avertimentos*, in particular, Valignano promoted (for the first time systematically) an approach to missionary activity that assumed adaptation as its core method. The work instructed the missionaries on the common conduct of the laymen and, most importantly, of the

19 For a general overview of the embassy, I refer to Cooper 2005.

20 *Kirishitanban* included works in Latin, *rōmaji* or Japanese, of a number of different categories – such as Japanese works in simplified form, printed to ease the learning of the Japanese language for the missionaries; Christian works and, sometimes, European lay works translated in Japanese to divulge the Catholic doctrine or simple moral concepts in Japan; dictionaries. The materials are really rare, as most of them were destroyed during the persecutions. A very useful source to access *kirishitanban* material is the *Laures Rare Book Database*, created by Sophia University. URL <http://digital-archives.sophia.ac.jp/laures-kirishitan-bunko/?lang=en> (2018-08-10).

21 Valignano found himself at odds, in particular, with the current superior of the mission in Japan, Francisco Cabral, who strongly opposed the idea of bestowing the ministry to native Fathers, mainly on the grounds of a distrust of the Japanese character. This distrust partially emerged also in Cabral's attitude towards the *daimyō*, that had in many cases elicited their hostility, in spite of their general support towards the mission. Cabral was finally pressed to resign from his position two years after Valignano's arrival, in favour of the more yielding Gaspar Coelho. See Cieslik 1955. The native staff would come to play a crucial role in the mission, particularly for the translation of doctrinal material, as discussed in Higashibaba 2001, 20-8.

most influent religious people in Japan - a conduct which they were to imitate, at least on a surface level, in treating with the native population. Valignano was in fact persuaded, both by previous reports from Japan and by his own in-depth investigation of the mission, that the only way to gain the respect of the Japanese (and above all of the civilized *daimyō*) and, consequently, to achieve true success in evangelization, was to conform to local customs and courtesies in approaching them.²²

In a way, the compilation of the *Sumario de las cosas de Japon* in 1583 came as a direct consequence to such stance. The work, similar in spirit to the *Avertimentos*, consisted of a lengthy account of Valignano's experience in Japan and covered, even though not always coherently, a vast variety of matters. A significant section of the work (in particular, chapters 1-5) was focused on the description of Japan (based on what Valignano had been able to gather about the archipelago during his first visit): it offered an overview of Japanese costumes and their basic differences with European ones, presented a list of alleged Japanese virtues and vices, and introduced Japanese religion (mainly Buddhism) and the political situation in Japan, with particular regard to the provinces where the missionaries were stationed. The rest of the work was focused on matters more specifically related to the mission: it stressed the successes of the Fathers, and the importance of the enterprise in Japan in the overall picture of the Jesuit missionary activity in Asia; it also pointed to the difficulties and necessities the missionaries were encountering - ranging from the need to form a native clergy, to financial problems, to the urgent matter of preventing the arrival in Japan of different Christian (and particularly Protestant) orders - so as to continue to present to the Japanese a unified picture of Christianity; it also included, much as the *Avertimentos*, instructions for the missionaries on how to approach the Japanese population, as well as more general directions on the conduction of the mission as a whole. Inherent to the structure of the work was a multiple aim: the report was meant as a source of information about the mission, to be relayed to superiors and, possibly, to be circulated, among the Jesuit colleges in Europe as an instrument of edification, celebrating the victories of the Catholic church overseas; it was intended as a guide for future missionaries, giving prelimi-

22 Valignano's radical position was bound to generate some controversy among the order, as demonstrated by the contemporary correspondence between the Visitor and the current general Claudio Acquaviva, who generally approved Valignano's approach, but expressed strong doubts regarding the need to assume Buddhist monks as models. Samples of the correspondence, as well as a complete, commented edition of Valignano's work (in Italian translation, by the hands of the Fathers Pirri and Da Fonseca) is included in Schütte 1946. A proof of the controversial nature of the text lies also in the fact that it was not forwarded to Rome, as was usual, through normal correspondence, so as to avoid the risk of it being casually read by members of the Society unfamiliar with the situation in Japan. Nevertheless, the work was established as mandatory reading for the missionaries in Japan, at least up to 1592.

nary instruction about the missionary approach they would be expected to adopt if they decided to travel to Japan; and, most importantly, it was meant as an instrument to promote the importance of the mission in the eyes of the Jesuit authorities (and more generally of the members of the Jesuit colleges in Europe), so as to gain support, both in terms of money (in light of the above mentioned pressing need for funds) and manpower.²³

The *Sumario* was largely used as a basis for the section on Japan of the *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*, Valignano's summa on the missions in the East Indies. Three sections of the work were compiled during Valignano's lifetime: the first and second volumes, which covered the history of the mission under Xavier (with an heavy focus on the matter of his sanctification) and in the subsequent years, up to 1564, were sent to Europe, respectively, in 1584 (probably along with the emissaries of the *Tenshō shisetsu*) and 1588; the third one, meant to cover the history of the mission from 1564 up to Valignano's time, was actually never completed. The work focused mainly on Jesuit activities, but reserved attention also to the description of the costumes and 'qualities' of the inhabitants of the regions in which the missionaries were stationed. In this sense, while not as informative as the *Sumario* itself, it was one of the earliest European works to provide

a sophisticated framework for the comparison of different peoples under the concept of rational behavior, enshrining an idea of civility (not yet 'civilization') which was nevertheless combined with racial and religious forms of classification. (Rubiés 2002, 6)

This was actually, as we will see, one of the key elements in the Jesuit cosmographical approach. Much as the *Sumario*, however, the work was never published in the sixteenth century.²⁴

Similarly unpublished was another work by Valignano specifically focused on Japan, *Del principio y progreso de la Religion Christiana en Japon*. The work, intended as a general history of the mission in Japan, was abandoned, incomplete, in 1601.²⁵ The project had actually been devised by Valignano after his own veto on the publication of Frois' history

²³ For a commented edition of the *Sumario*, see Alvarez-Taladriz 1954. Excerpts in the English language are also included in De Bary and Kurata Dykstra (2005, 155-62) and in the anthology by Cooper (1965).

²⁴ On the other hand, Maffei (1588) relied heavily on the work in compiling his (published) general history of the missions in Asia. A modern edition of Valignano's work is included in Wicki 1944.

²⁵ A manuscript copy of the work can be found in the collection *Jesuitas na Asia*, at the Ajuda Library in Lisbon (Codex 49-IV-53). See Braga 1942.

of Japan, the *História de Japam* – of which 215 chapters (describing the history of the mission in Japan up to 1593) had been completed in Frois' lifetime. The history had been commissioned specifically to Frois, at the time the central chronicler of the Jesuit enterprise in Japan, sometime between 1583 and 1585, upon suggestion by Maffei, who was at the time working on his own general history of the missions (and was in search for reference works). The aim of the work would be to reunite the somewhat scattered information that had been included in the Jesuit reports up to that moment in a coherent collection, more immediately available to the European readership. Frois embarked in his monumental work in the hope that it would be circulated in unaltered form in Europe, but Valignano ended up speaking against its publication, on the grounds that its scope was too big (“opus immensum”) and that, while it could be very useful for the missionaries in Japan, a more concise, possibly one-volume work would be needed for the sake of European readers (Moran 1993, 40).²⁶

The project of the history was not, on the other hand, abandoned, even after the decision not to publish Frois' work and after Valignano's death. As Cooper (2001) underlines, the pressure exerted by the competing Christian orders that reached the archipelago by the end of the sixteenth century made it, actually, even more urgent. In the end, the history was commissioned only in 1620, to João Rodrigues (1561 or 1562-1634), who had spent more than thirty years in Japan, between his arrival in 1577 and his (forced) departure for China in 1610.²⁷ The initial project for the work, titled *Historia da Igreja do Japão*, included a prologue, ten introductory books on Japan and ten books on the mission, from its beginnings to 1634 (plus four further books on the missions in China, Korea, Cambodia and Siam, which would be the main focus of the Jesuit evangelization effort, after the forced departure of the mission from Japan). The project, however, was never completed, nor it was given to print – also due to the

26 A manuscript of Frois' history can be found at the Ajuda Library (lacking the first thirteen introductory chapters on Japanese life, which have been lost). For a Portuguese edition, see Wicki 1976-84. A Japanese translation is included in Matsuda, Kawasaki 1977-1980. In conjunction with the history, in 1585, Frois also worked on the *Tratado em que se contem muito susinta e abreviatamente algumas contradições e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão*. The treatise, as suggested by the title, was structured as a lists of comparisons and contrasts between costumes and matters everyday life – moral, customs, behaviours, techniques – in Europe and Japan, given in a simple juxtaposition of short sentences (without any effort to give an actual historical explanation of the differences). As Lach (1965, 687) suggests it may actually have been compiled for his personal use only (of for him to use for the instruction of the new missionaries arriving in the country), seeing as no contemporary source reports about it. The first published edition of the work is Schütte 1955. A more recent French translation is included in De Castro, Schrimpf 1993.

27 Rodrigues was commonly known as *Tçuzzu*, from the Momoyama-period Japanese word for ‘interpreter’. For an overview on his activities in Japan, see Cooper 1974.

forced closure imposed to the mission.²⁸

What was circulated among the more general European readership consisted, therefore, mostly in the (usually lengthy) reports sent regularly by the missionaries from Japan to Europe – which, unlike the *Sumario*, were given to print. The reports were not dissimilar from the *Sumario*, both in contents and spirit, as they were meant, as we will see, as tools of publicity. Not by chance, Valignano's influence marked an evolution in the forms and contents of such reports – which developed from narrations more strictly focused on mission-related matters, to more all-encompassing descriptions, reflecting the Fathers' strive to gain a thorough understanding of the linguistic, cultural and religious background of the people they aimed at converting.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the reports, it should be noted that the desire for publicity was also, at least in part, what motivated the *tenshō shisetsu*, as made quite explicit by both the careful instructions given by Valignano to Father Nuno Rodrigues,²⁹ who travelled with the young Japanese boys as their escort and tutor, and by the contemporary published literature on the embassy. One of the most complete contemporary works relating about it, the *Relazioni della venuta degli ambasciatori giapponesi a Roma*, stated for example, in the chapter "Le cagioni della venuta di questi Ambasciatori a Roma" (Reasons for the coming of these Ambassadors to Rome):

Father Alessandro approved [...] so that His Holiness and the others in Europe could have an assay of those lands, and could experience with their own eyes what they had read in letters about the value and good nature of the Japanese, and similarly learn that every struggle and effort to cultivate that Lord's vineyard was very well employed.³⁰

28 How many of the books were actually completed by Rodrigues' death is not sure. So far, the first four books on the mission and the first two introductory books on Japan – relating about a variety of matters ranging from etiquette, the tea ceremony, flower arrangements, painting, calligraphy, social habits – have come to light. Cooper 2001 includes an annotated and commented edition of João Rodrigues' history. The work has also been translated into Japanese in Doi 1967-70. An incomplete manuscript copy of the history is preserved in the Ajuda Library, in the *Jesuítas na Asia* series.

29 The instructions are included in an unpublished document titled *Regimento e Instrução do q hadi fazir o Padre Nuno Rois q vay por Procurador à Roma*, dated 1583 and now preserved in the Archivio storico della Compagnia di Gesù in Rome (*Japonica Sinica* 22, fl. 52). A sample of the document, and in particular of points 13, 14 and 15 (in the original Portuguese and in French translation) is included in Abranches Pinto, Bernard 1943, 395-7.

30 "Approvò il P. Alessandro [...] accio che sua Santità, & gli altri in Europa, havessero come un saggio di quei paesi, e per esperienza vedessero quel, che più volte havevano inteso per lettere, del valore e buona natura de Giaponesi, con che parimente conoscessero infatti,

In other words, Valignano intended to

parade living examples of Jesuit success in the Christianization of Japan through Catholic Europe. He knew that a demonstration of influence attained among the Japanese ruling classes was an important if not indispensable part of the presentation of that image of success, and he fully intended to have his specimens subjected to inspection in the highest of European circles. (Elisonas 2007, 32)

The embassy was, at least in theory, a success for Valignano in all respects. The four Japanese emissaries were received with all honours in the cities they travelled to, and, heavily monitored by their tutors (as per Valignano's instructions), they were shielded from any kind of information about Europe that, if relayed to Japan, could turn out to be harmful for the mission.³¹ The greatest accomplishment of the embassy was, surely, the fact that Pope Gregory XIII, even before his encounter with the Japanese boys, promulgated the Brief *Ex pastorali officio* (January 28, 1585), which designated Japan as exclusive Jesuit mission territory - temporarily dispelling Valignano's fears about the competition of different Christian orders. Valignano, however, was not able to reap the fruits of the embassy in Japan as he had hoped to. In 1590, after meeting with the boys in Macao, he accompanied them back to the archipelago, travelling both in his usual position as Visitor, and as ambassador for the Portuguese Viceroy of India. He was received by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (who, after Oda Nobunaga's death in 1582, had risen to power), but received only superficial cordiality from him, and managed to obtain little to no practical advantage for the mission in Japan.³² The political climate had, in fact, radically changed in

che ogni stento e travaglio in coltivar tal vigna del Signore era molto ben impegnato". (Gualtieri 1586, 22; translated by the Author). The text then proceeded to illustrate the other fundamental aim of the embassy - which was to impress the greatness of Europe in the minds of the young ambassadors, and have them report about it to Japan. The embassy would also have to work, in this sense, as a means of persuasions towards those *daimyō* who seemed to doubt the true intentions of the Fathers, and presume that they were travelling to Japan in search of a fortune and an esteem that they somehow lacked in their native countries.

31 The tutors of the boys were supposed to make them "see all the noble and remarkable things of Rome and of the other principal cities of Italy. It should be made sure that they are always guarded, so that they'll learn and see only what is good, and will not learn anything that is bad [...] For this reason, in no way they will have to treat with people who could scandalize them, or be told about the disorders in the court and among our prelates, or of other similar things". ("ver todas as cousas nobres e grandes de Roma e de algunas otras ciudades pncipaes de Ytalia advertendose advertendose [sic] sempre q seam guiados e man ra q saibaõ e vejaõ somõte o q he bem e não saiba nada do mal [...] por ysso en hua [sic] maneira hã de tratar con pessoas q lhe possam dar escandalo, ne conten los desordines q van na corte e nos perlados e outras semelhantes cousas"). Abranches Pinto, Bernard 1943, 401).

32 The audience is accounted for in detail in Frois 1595.

the years intervening between his two visits to Japan. The shift in power from Nobunaga to Hideyoshi had not immediately affected the mission.³³ After the campaign for the conquest of Kyūshū, however, Hideyoshi's attitude towards the missionaries had taken an abrupt hostile turn. In 1587, in the brief succession of two days (July 23 and 24) the *kanpaku* had issued two edicts, inflicting an hard blow against Christianity. The first one, directed to Japanese converts, reflected his worry over the rebelling potential of the Christians, ordering the *daimyō* to avoid taking up Christianity and to prevent mass conversions of their subjects (and only allowing individual conversions of members of the lower classes). The second one, more directly addressed to the Fathers, declared Japan to be "the land of the Gods" and Christianity to be a "pernicious doctrine", whose diffusion in the country was to be considered undesirable. It concluded that the *bateren* could not be allowed to remain on Japanese soil, taking care of specifying, however, how such restriction should not involve the *kurofune* - i.e., the Portuguese *náo* - and, more generally, the foreign merchants operating in Japan.³⁴

Still, the need to give (the right kind of) visibility to the mission, and the more general approach of Valignano's missionary strategy are aspects to be taken into close consideration, in order to understand the Jesuit sources on Japan and their impact in Europe.

33 In 1586, Coelho had actually been granted an audience in Osaka, with a group of other Fathers (including Frois, who had acted as an interpreter), and had been received in a fairly benevolent way, obtaining permission to preach the Gospel in Japan. Coelho, on the other hand, acted rather imprudently during the audience - promising to Hideyoshi to obtain for him military support from the part of the Christian *daimyō* of Kyūshū (which may have well been part of the motivation for Hideyoshi's subsequent opposition to Christianity, as it surely alerted the *kanpaku* as to how the Fathers might possess the potential influence to elicit a rebellion). An account of the audience is given in Frois 1588.

34 The Fathers' only warning before the issuing of the edicts had been a brief letter exchange between Hideyoshi and Coelho, which Coelho had handled rather clumsily (as reported in Zanetti 1590). For an in-depth analysis of the edicts and the motivations behind them, see Boscaro 1973b. Hideyoshi never actually pressed for the enforcement of the second edict, and the Jesuits were allowed to continue to live on the archipelago, even if a more demure fashion. As Berry (1989, 87-93) illustrates, moreover, Hideyoshi's victory in Kyūshū did not lead to a massive rearrangement of the power forces of the area and the Kyūshū Fathers could, consequently, continue to rely on their previous protectors. Still the edicts were a turning point for the fortunes of the mission.

3.2 The Published Jesuit Reports on Japan

The published sources on Japan produced by the missionaries in the second half of the sixteenth century include letters and reports, circulated in hundreds of translations and editions, singularly and in collections, or incorporated (often in edited – and not always referenced – form), into historical, cosmographical or political works, as well as into travel collections.

A wide number of bibliographies and studies exists, providing listings (and sometimes information) on the materials. Some of the works are focused on sources more generally related to the Jesuit missions in Asia.

In particular:

- Sommervogel 1885;
- Correia-Afonso 1955;
- Carayon 1894;
- Streit 1916-55;
- Ternaux-Compans 1841.

Some bibliographies are instead devoted documents related to Japan:

- Cordier 1912;
- Oliveira e Costa 2007, 43-107;³⁵
- Japan Institut 1940;
- Matsuda 1965;
- Von Wenckstern, Pages 1895.

Finally, a number of reference works focus exclusively on sources on Japan/related to Japan in some ways connected with the Christian missions:

- Boscaro 1973a;³⁶
- Laures 1940 – and its subsequent, enlarged editions and supplements.

The contents of the work have been made available in electronic form in a fully revised and updated version in the *Laures Rare Book Database*.³⁷

³⁵ João Paulo Oliveira e Costa's work combines information not only from most of the previous bibliographies, but also from anthologies (such as the one in three volumes Kapitza 1990) and more general catalogues listing works published in different European countries in the sixteenth century, cross-checking it, and reporting cases in which a document is only mentioned on one source (even though not going as far as verifying the existence of actual copies).

³⁶ The work, including a complete listing of the works connected with the *Tenshō shisetsu*, has the merit of not simply including information about the documents, cross-checked from several sources, but also verifying consistencies (underlining which works are included in bibliographies but could not personally be accessed by the author).

³⁷ URL http://digital-archives.sophia.ac.jp/laures-kirishitan-bunko/category/kirishitan_bunko/01 (2018-03-15) The work is, as stated in its foreword, a bibliography of *Kirishitan* literature, in the broad sense of "documents [...] relating to the Christian missions

The overwhelming majority of the missionary sources on Japan produced and circulated in the sixteenth century are to be ascribed to the Society of Jesus.³⁸ This does not surprise, considering how the Jesuits exerted an exclusive influence in Japan for the greatest part of the sixteenth century – while competing Christian orders only reached the archipelago at a time when the mission had begun its decline. Part of the reason for such an overwhelming production of sources, however, lied also in the inner workings of the Society of Jesus: by the mid-sixteenth century, the order had developed an institutionalized system for correspondence, with which no form of organized communication or intelligence system set in place by the Franciscans, the Dominicans or the Augustinians could aspire to compare.

The system for correspondence was initially devised for Europe by the founder of the Society, Ignatius of Loyola. In the later years of the 1540s, it was perfected by Juan de Polanco (appointed permanent secretary since 1547), and its scope was extended also to the overseas missions. In the following decades it was remodelled, according to changing needs, as the result of a discursive process between the administrative centre and the peripheries of the order (Delfosse 2009, 71-2). The system consisted of the regular dispatch of official reports (quarterly at first, and later annually) from the different centres of the missions to the Father General of the Company in Rome and to the Jesuit College of Coimbra in Portugal.³⁹ The letters were a way for the missionaries to communicate with each other and with their Superiors in Coimbra and Rome. They responded, in this sense, to the need to convey information and to help the bureaucratic machine of the Society. However, their purpose went also far beyond that. They were meant, as seen in the case of Valignano's *Sumario*, to connect

from their beginnings to the first years after the reopening of Japan to foreign intercourse". It is divided in three sections, the first devoted to "The ancient Japanese mission press" (i.e., *kirishitanban*) the second to "European works on the early missions in Japan", and the third to "The mission press of the period of the restoration of the Catholic missions". The second part is, clearly, the most relevant to the scope of the present works and very useful if one aims at narrowing the scope of research to Christian materials. For a bibliography focused on sources in Japanese and Chinese on Christianity in Japan, see instead Ebisawa 1960.

38 Noteworthy non-Jesuit sources on Japan include, actually, only a handful of titles, that even when based on information collected during the sixteenth century, were given to print in the seventeenth century. The earliest one is the general history compiled by the Franciscan Friar Marcelo de Ribadeneira, and published in Barcelona in 1601, the *Historia de las islas del archipiélago* (De Ribadeneira 1601). The work, a precious eye-witness account on the activities of the Spaniards in the Philippines and in the neighbouring countries, included an in-depth narration of the Franciscan activities in Japan, as well as of the martyrdoms. It did not, however, add much to the corpus of knowledge on Japan developed by the Jesuits.

39 The letters from the East Indies were usually sorted in Goa, the administrative and religious centre of the mission in Asia. Together with official reports, other private forms of correspondence travelled between singular members of the Society, usually in separate sheets known as *hijuela*. The structure of the system is described in detail in Lach 1965, 314-31.

Jesuit communities, spread apostolic models and edifying news, and, in the final instance, build a common religious identity for the Society (Palomo 2005, 59-60). In this spirit, copies of the reports were forwarded from Rome and Coimbra to the various Jesuit colleges of Europe, as a guide and inspiration for future missionaries and other members of the Society. Given the amount of work required to sustain this system, to speed up the process of reproduction and circulation, manuscript copies soon gave way to printed ones (Palomo 2005, 74).

The reason why such a regular system of communication and publication of the reports was arranged by the Jesuits in the first place, and not mirrored (at least not to a similar extent) by different Christian orders, can likely be ascribed to the fact that no other order of the time accorded as much importance to the practice of letter-writing as the one founded by Loyola. One peculiar element of the Jesuit missionary approach was the way in which it combined Christian belief with humanist moral values. Jesuit thinkers highly valued the mastery of *eloquentia* (that is, proficiency in the language arts and, more specifically, in the rhetorical practice, including the composition of letters); it was considered a means, in itself, to moral perfection and a strategic tool to propagate the Christian message, edify the audiences, and, more prosaically, win the patronage of the ruling classes. Letter-writing was, in other words, instrumental to that pursue of publicity that, as seen in describing Valignano's approach, was vital to the very survival of the missions. To quote Boswell,

The cultivation of rhetorical prowess was also strategic in enlisting the patronage of the elite. The overall success of the society depended significantly on the benefices of the ruling classes, as Jesuits did not accept fees for preaching or for celebrating Mass, and because they were not a mendicant order. They therefore had to depend on the liberality of others to establish and sustain their colleges. Although some among the mendicant orders likewise distinguished themselves by rhetorical skill to obtain important offices or to win patronage, the Jesuit strategy [... was] to win favor by demonstrating results to the ruling classes in the rhetorical practices of preaching and teaching. The Jesuits demonstrated that they could effectively propagate the Catholic faith by taking an active role in society among the ignorant, the lapsed, and the heretical. The Jesuits' success in preaching and teaching was crucial to the effectiveness of this religious activism. As a result of their accomplishments, the society was able to secure the benefices of the wealthy and powerful to establish yet more colleges and to further their cause. Thus the Jesuit pursuit of eloquence was instrumental to their growth and renown. (Boswell 2003, 248)

The constant flow of information from the overseas missions was, on the other hand, very welcome to the central authorities of the Catholic Church. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Roman Church was facing, in full, the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, marked the beginning of the Catholic response to the Protestant threat, setting in place a set of measures – both passive (i.e., the enactment of a strict censorship) and active (the movement known as ‘Catholic Revival’) – that fell under the policies of the ‘Counter-Reformation’. In this climate of religious controversy, the news of the conversions of faraway populations, and more generally of the successes of the Catholic faith overseas, could work as a powerful ideological instrument, to be spread throughout Europe, and set against the losses locally suffered by the Catholics. Printing the letters was, in fact, also a way of exposing them to a wider public. That this was a conscious intent is reflected in the fact that the letters were not merely printed, but published and placed in a circuit of commercial distribution. In this sense, printed Jesuit reports became vehicles through which the European public gained information about the missions, as well as, collaterally, about the geography, climate, culture and contemporary political events of the countries in which the missionaries were stationed. The published letter-books, with their wide accessibility, made knowledge about Eastern Asia available to the European readership in a way previously unthinkable.

Reports from Japan retained a prominence among published Jesuit missionary reports throughout the second half of the sixteenth century – so much so that, as Lach points out (1965, 321), many later writers gave the Jesuit letters from this period the generic title of *Japan letters*. This fact should not be surprising. The prominence of ‘Japan letters’ was connected to the centrality of the Japanese mission during this phase of the Jesuit enterprise in Asia: as seen above, unlike in India, the Jesuits were the first Christian order to reach Japan, and they retained exclusive influence over the archipelago, as per open Papal instructions (included in the *Ex pastoralis officio*, dated 1585) until the 1590s, when the first Spanish Franciscans made their way to the archipelago from the Philippines (Massarella 1990, 15-24). Moreover, as seen above, the mission achieved promising results, at least up to the death of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) and the rise of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), when the first persecutions against Christians began in Japan. It makes sense, therefore, that the Jesuits deemed the reports about the mission as appropriate edifying material. The Jesuit writings came therefore to offer a steady and rich source of information about the Japanese archipelago, actively contributing, for the first time, to the construction of a coherent European imaginary of Japan.

3.3 Francis Xavier's Reports: Laying the Foundations of the Mission

The earliest Jesuit reports on Japan to be dispatched to Europe were the ones written by the founder of the Japanese mission, Francis Xavier: a total of ten letters composed before, during and right after his trip to Japan from 1549 to 1551: one letter in Cochin before his departure, five in Kagoshima upon his arrival and four in Cochin, after his return.

A selection of the letters was circulated in published form in Europe very shortly after its reception. It included

- a letter from Cochin, written by Xavier on January 14, 1549, before his departure from Japan, and accompanied by a letter by Father Nicolao Lancillotto, reporting the information relayed by Yajirō on Japan; the letter, titled "Copie et estratto delle lettere di M. Francesco Xauier con la informatione di Paolo di Giapan, et alcuni capitoli della lettera di Nicolao Lancillotto del Cocin. Estratto di certe lettere dell'India, et d'una di Maestro Francesco Xauier di Cocin à dodici di Gennaro 1549. Alcuni capitoli di una lettera di Nicolao Lancillotto di Cocin à uentisei di Dicembre 1548", was included in a collection by Michele Tramezzino (Xavier 1562); the report was also later reprinted in the second edition of the first volume of Ramusio's collection of travel literature, *Navigazioni et viaggi* (Ramusio 1554).
- a report from Kagoshima, addressed to the Jesuit college of Coimbra in Portugal and dated November 5, 1549; it was first included, with the title "Copia de una lettera del Padre Maestro Francesco Xauier dal Giapan indirizata al Colleggio della scolari de detta Compagnia in Coymbra di Portugallo" in a collection by Dorico and Bressani (Xavier 1552),⁴⁰ and subsequently reprinted both in Ramusio (1554), although wrongly dated October 5, 1549, and in a collection by Michele Tramezzino (Xavier 1558a);
- one report written by Xavier, again from Cochin, upon his return from the archipelago, and addressed to the Society of Jesus; it was included, under the title "Copia d'vna lettera del P.M. Francesco Xauier, preposito provinciale della Compagnia di Iesu nell'Indie, per tutti quelli di essa Compagnia in Europa, riceuta nel mese di Marzo. 1553" included in the same collection by Tramezzino (Xavier 1558b).

⁴⁰ The letter is preceded by a brief introduction relating about the discovery of Japan, grouped with the letter under the title: "Copia de alcune littere del Padre Maestro Francesco Xauier & altri padri della Compagnia de Iesu del Iapon nuovamente scoperto & de Maluco tradotte in Italiano riceute l'anno 1552".

The first report from Cochin illustrates the events that prompted Xavier to travel to the Japanese archipelago. The Father relates about his encounter, in Manila, with Paolo (Yajirō) and two other Japanese natives, and about the promising attitudes all of them showed towards learning in general, and the Christian doctrine in particular:

[Giapan] is an island close to China, where everyone is gentile, and not Moor, nor Jew; and they are very curious people, and eager to learn new things about God. [...] Three young men from that island of Giapan are in the College of Holy Faith in Goa, and they are people of good costumes, and of great intellect, especially Paolo. [...] Paolo, in eight months, has learned to read, write and speak Portuguese [...] I have great hope in God Our Lord that we will manage to make many Christians in Giapan, and I am resolved to go. (Xavier 1562, f. 15)⁴¹

Xavier proceeds to illustrate his plans for the voyage, accounting, in particular, for how he intends to travel first to Japan's "King" and then to Japanese Colleges, where they preach, allegedly, a doctrine imported from China. He adds that he will send, together with the manuscript of the letter, a sample of Japanese writing by the hands of Paolo (which is not, however, reproduced in any form in the published work).

The letter is followed by Nicolao Lancillotto's account of Yajirō's report on Japan, that represents one of the earliest full-fledged description of the archipelago to have been circulated, in print, in Europe. The account opens with a rough description of the political system of the country – presented as an island governed by a single "King", who commands fourteen "Lords similar to Dukes, and Counts"⁴² (who in turn exert control on dominions passed on in hereditary fashion, from first-born to first-born). The King, called *Voo* (in all probability a rendition of the term *Ō*)⁴³ possesses, much like the Pope in Europe, spiritual authority over Ja-

41 "[Il Giapan] è una isola presso alla Cina dove sono tutti gentili, non Mori, né Giudei, & gente molto curiosa, & desiderosa di sapere cose nuove di Dio [...] Sono tre gioveni nel Collegio di Santa Fede di Goa di quell'isola di Giapan [...] & narrano gran cose di quelle parti del Giapan, & sono persone di buoni costumi, & grande ingegno, spetialmente Paolo. [...] Paolo in otto mesi imparò a leggere, scrivere, e parlar Portuguese [...]. Ho grande speranza e questa tutta in Dio Signor Nostro che s'habbiano da fare molti Christiani nel Giapan, & sono risoluto di andare". Translated by the Author.

42 "Signori simili a Duchi, & Conti" (Xavier 1562, f. 18).

43 In this case, the term seems to be referred to the Emperor, while the title *Gozo*, which, as Lach (1965, 661) suggests, could be a rendition of *goshō* (the term indicating the imperial palace, which had come to be applied to the ruler himself) is probably referred to the shogun. Actually, the problem of the double sovereignty in Japan, touched upon in several passages of the Jesuit reports, is not treated with much terminological coherence. De Torres (1565) would write of the dichotomy between the *Zazzo* (the spiritual authority,

pan, but leaves all practical matters of government, such as war and the administration of justice, in the hands of the man called *Gozo*. In spite of being in all respects the effective ruler of the island, the *Gozo* remains, nonetheless, subject to the *Voo* and can be stripped of his power by him at any moment.

The report proceeds to give some examples of the workings of the Japanese justice system, as applied to both life in the court and the common population.⁴⁴ The rest of the account is devoted to a (pretty miscellaneous) description of Japanese religion – in the sketchy and for the most grossly inaccurate terms in which it had been relayed by Yajirō. Three kind of religious groups (composed of both men and women) are said to exist in Japan,⁴⁵ and to conduct a monastic kind of life,⁴⁶ both inside and outside the cities. They are celibate, shave their heads and beards, eat in communities and refrain from eating meat, so as to avoid temptation (and sometimes completely abstain from food, much as the Fathers). They preach frequently, in a way much similar to the Europeans. Their prayers, apparently unintelligible to the ones who are not educated among their ranks (such as Yajirō), are described as, nonetheless, able to move their hearers to deep emotion. They “preach only one God, creator of all things, and they preach Purgatory, Paradise and Hell [...] and that [God] they call Doniche”.⁴⁷ Such teachings have been delivered to them by “Xaqua” (Shaka), the founder of Buddhism, and carried from China to Japan, together with five main moral precepts (“the first, not to kill, the second,

i.e., presumably the emperor) and the *Voo* (the shogun), who in turn delegated his power to the *Gunge*, *Enge* and *Doxo*. In the “Lettera Annale del Giapone...” (1591), the emperor would instead be referred to as the *Dairi*, whose sovereignty in Japan had been stolen “500 years ago”. On the representation of dual sovereignty in Japan in European literature, see Baty 1951, 24-39.

44 The letter relates, for example, about the legitimacy of murder from the part of the husband in case of adultery. (Xavier 1562, ff. 19-20).

45 Only a superficial description is given of the three religious groups, who are distinguished on the base of the colour of their clothes (black and grey) and of the enumeration of their alleged virtues and vices (such as the addiction to sodomy, or the tendency of the priest and nuns to entertain sexual intercourse). The text does not leave, in this sense, much way for the identification of the Buddhist sects it may be referring to. It might be noted, as Ellis (2003) underlines, that the accusation of sodomy was one that was often addressed by the Spaniards, and by Spanish literature on the New World, to native Americans, so as to justify their territorial conquests on a moral ground. It made sense, therefore, that the Jesuits would employ the same accusation so as to disqualify their religious opponents. The same allegation would be repeated, as we will see, by Xavier himself, as well as by many later Jesuit writers.

46 “They have monasteries, like friars” (“Hanno monasterji à modo di frati”) (Xavier 1562, f. 20).

47 “Predicano un solo Dio creator di tutte le cose, predicano il Purgatorio, Paradiso, & Inferno [...] il quale [Iddio] chiamano Doniche” (Xavier 1562, ff. 20-1).

not to steal, the third, not to fornicate, the fourth, not to be disturbed by things without remedy, the fifth, to forgive insults").⁴⁸

The report proceeds to the description of a number of Buddhist practices (such as the performing of prayers and penances) as well as of other Japanese costumes supposedly bearing strong resemblances with European ones – which leads the writer to conclude that “in their costumes, and vivacity of mind, they [the Japanese] are really similar to us”.⁴⁹ The resemblance is both intellectual and physical: the Japanese are described as “white”, as the Europeans, and sharing similar costumes and the same way of conducting government, as well as a love for virtue and literary arts. The author even ventures to express the idea that the Gospel might have been preached in the country in the past, by some of the “Armenian missionaries” that had spread primitive Christianity in China during the Middle Ages. The report closes, consequently, by evaluating the chances of the diffusion of Buddhism in Japan with great optimism.

The report from Kagoshima relates of the events leading to the establishment of the Jesuit mission in Japan. It opens by narrating the tortuous navigation of the small group of missionaries from Malacca to the Japanese archipelago. According to Xavier’s report, the Chinese captain of the ship procrastinated the navigation to Japan with a number of unarranged detours, so that the missionaries ran the risk of having to spend the winter in China (Xavier 1552, 282-7). The letter then proceeds to discuss Xavier’s arrival in Kagoshima, and the warm reception he and the other members of his group were granted in the city. Xavier illustrates his resolution to learn the Japanese language and his intention to travel to Meaco (Miyako, i.e., Kyoto), the main city of Japan – where the “King” and the most important Lords reside, and where the Buddhist “universities” can be found.⁵⁰

The letter includes also Xavier’s earliest first-hand assessment of the Japanese population. Much in accord with the tone of his previous letter, his description sounds remarkably optimistic and admiring. He describes the Japanese people as “the best that have yet been discovered”:⁵¹ good in conversation, righteous and not malicious, and respecting honour more than anything else – even more than richness, as the Japanese are generally poor, but neither the noblemen nor the members of the lower classes

48 “Il primo che non ammazzassino, il secondo che non rubassino, il terzo che non fornassino, il quarto che non si pigliassero passione delle cose che non hanno remedio, il quinto che perdonassino l’ingiuria”. (Xavier 1562, f. 22).

49 “Ne’ costumi, & vivacità de ingegno sono molto conformi à noi”. (Xavier 1562, f. 24)

50 Xavier writes about a main university inside the city, hosting the five main Buddhist colleges and more than two hundred Buddhist houses, and of five more, located in the outskirts of the city (Xavier 1552, 303-4).

51 “La gente che habbiamo conversato, è la migliore che in sin’adesso si sia scoperta & fra gli infideli me pare non se troveria altra migliore” (Xavier 1552, 288).

are shamed for that. The noblemen are, apparently, held in great esteem and only marry among themselves. They always carry swords and daggers, and so does every member of the population, ever since the age of fourteen. They are moderate in eating and drinking, and very healthy, so that they usually live up to old age. The majority of the population is literate and can read and write. They only take one wife, and rarely steal, as their justice system is really strict. Xavier expresses optimism in regard to the possibility of evangelization, as the Japanese seem open and curious towards the Christian doctrine, and better disposed toward it than any other infidel population he has met. They “take pleasure in hearing things congruent with their reason, and while they are not exempt from vices and sins, when they are shown reason and it is demonstrated to them that they are acting wrong, they accept it”.⁵² Xavier only has reproaches to make when it comes to the country’s religious groups, that are held in great esteem by the common population, but are prone to vices such as sodomy and promiscuity, and unapologetic about it.⁵³ Even in relation to Buddhist monks there are, on the other hands, exceptions. Xavier relates, for example, of his friendship with the Buddhist priest Ninxit (Ninshitsu, abbot of the Fukushōji), in whose conduct he finds no reproach.⁵⁴

Very similar in tone and content is the later account from Cochin – if only slightly more moderated in its enthusiasm, and reflecting, conversely, a deepened knowledge of the archipelago. Xavier reports once again of the warm welcome he received in Kagoshima, and proceeds to a narration of what followed that first encounter with the Japanese population, and with a detailed narration of the earlier phases of the Jesuit mission in Japan. He reports about his departure from Kagoshima (where Paolo was left behind to preach), his visit to Miyako, the establishment of footholds for the mission in Hirado and Yamaguchi and the encounter with the “Duke of Bungo”. He intersects the narration with accounts of contemporary political events in Japan, such as the shift in power in Yamaguchi, which led to the establishment of the brother of Ōtomo Yoshishige as *daimyō*. He dispels the belief expressed in Lancillotto’s account that the Japanese might have been converted to Christianity before, declaring that no one there seems to possess any kind of previous knowledge about Christ.

The report includes also a new general description of the country, “discovered eight or nine years before by the Portuguese”. Xavier depicts it

52 “Si diletano de sentire cose conforme a la loro ragione, & benché siano vitii e peccati fra loro, quando lo danno ragione, mostrando essere mal fatto quello che fanno, l'accettano” (Xavier 1552, 290).

53 “[Quando vengono ripresi] ridono di quello, non si vergognando di essere ripresi di tanti brutti peccati” (Xavier 1552, 290).

54 On Ninshitsu’s relationship with Xavier, see Laures 1952, 407-11.

as a large archipelago, united by a common language, which (in spite of his own difficulties) he deems as “not hard to learn”.⁵⁵ He describes the Japanese as honourable, exceedingly skilled in war (and with weapons in general), and very civil towards each other, if not always towards strangers. He reports that they have but one king,⁵⁶ who, however, has not been obeyed for 150 years, so that the country is affected by a state of continuous internecine war.

The major section of the report is, once again, focused on religion. Xavier describes the Buddhist monks and nuns as divided into two main groups (respectively dressed in black and grey, and generally hostile towards each other). A total of nine sects exists, among which the population is allowed to choose freely, so that sometimes members of a same family belong to different sects. The doctrine professed by the monks and nuns is said to have been imported from China, where it was preached by men, who “were great penitents, more than 1000, 2000 and 3000 years [ago] and whose names are Xaca and Amedia”.⁵⁷ Every sect has different moral precepts, but all of them preach a number of common rules of behaviour, which are not to kill, not to eat anything that is dead, not to steal, not to fornicate, not to lie, not to drink wine.

Xavier reports of several doctrinal confrontations with the monks, as well as of the main doubts and objections addressed to him by the common population.⁵⁸ The overall judgement of the religious groups is not better than it was in the first letter. They are said to be prone to vice, and also to enrich themselves at the expenses of the common population, falsely promising to liberate them from their sins, and save their souls from hell, in exchange for money donations – so that those who are poor are not put in the condition of being able to save themselves.⁵⁹

On the other hand, his general good impression on the Japanese population is not shaken. He insists, once again, on their diffused literacy, remarking on how the majority of the population, men and women, can read and write, especially the aristocrats and the merchants. And he describes them as “more obedient to reason, than any other Infidels I have met, and

55 “In tutta questa terra non c’è più d’una lingua: e questa non è molto difficile da apparare”. (Xavier 1558b, f. 120).

56 Probably referring, in this instance, to the shogun, more than the emperor.

57 “Huomini, che fecero gran penitentie, piu di 1000, 2000, & 3000 anni li cui nomi sono Xaca & Amedia [Shaka and Amida]”. (Xavier 1558b, f. 121).

58 In particular, the incompatibility of the idea of an all-mighty Lord and the existence of evil in the world (and, consequently, of a Hell without return) (Xavier 1558b, f. 122). This, as seen above, had appeared as a recurring object of debate with the ‘gentiles’ also in earlier narratives, such as Rubruck’s.

59 Xavier was referring to the practice of almsgiving (Xavier 1558b, f. 122).

so curious and ready to ask, so eager to know, that they never cease to question".⁶⁰ Such assessment leaves him, upon his departure for China, optimistic about the chances of success of the Christian religion in Japan.

While offering a punctual narration of the early developments of the mission, Xavier's writings can't be relied upon as an in-depth source of information on Japan per se. Xavier's sketchy depiction of the Japanese population, traced in the form of a list inherently attributed qualities, does not really do justice to the complexity of Japanese culture and society in the Sengoku era. In spite of the reports' insistent focus on religion, moreover, what emerges from the letters is merely a superficial knowledge of the Japanese religious background: while Xavier attacks the Buddhist bonzes on a moral level, he never truly challenges them on a theological level. Moreover, he does not seem to take notice of Shinto, either as a separated cult, or as an element of Buddhism.⁶¹ Xavier's letters are, however, highly informative in another respect. They are a fundamental instrument to understand the basic premises on which missionary activity was being settled in Japan. They, moreover, point to how the Jesuits – and through them European readers – came to conceive Japan, and provide the first sketch of an imaginary that would influence the European literary production on the Japanese archipelago well into the seventeenth century. They highlight, in other words, how the Jesuits perceived both Japan and themselves, in relation to the archipelago and their mission.

Caputo (2016) underlines how Xavier (1552) has a founding value in this regard. It was the first 'Japan letter' to appear in print in Europe, and its publication contributed both to the consecration of Xavier as an "*exemplum dell'Ecclesia Militans*" (Caputo 2016, 156) in the eye of the European public, and to the creation of a "model narrative" that would influence the representation of Japan in subsequent published letters. This narrative is based on the dramatization of the opposition between good and evil. Through the letter, Xavier's voyage to Japan is projected into the realm of divine providence: the specific reality of Japan and of Xavier's mission is inscribed in eternal dimension of God's Will, where the conversion of the 'Gentiles' is inevitable, much as the conversion of the pagans of Europe's past. In this perspective, all obstacles to the good outcome of the voyage are construed as enemies to God's will. Such is the case of the captain of the ship leading Xavier to Japan, who, in delaying the trip and in confiding in Idols, becomes the incarnation of an impersonal pagan alterity (Caputo 2016, 168-9). And such is the case of Japan's religious groups, who are

60 "Più obbedienti alla ragione, che gente infidele, che già abbia mai visto, e tanto curiosi e importuni in dimandare, tanto desiderosi del sapere, che mai finiscono di interrogare" (Xavier 1558b, f. 126).

61 Possibly, as Ellis (2003, 160) suggests, because the idea of religious syncretism was alien to a man whose background lied in Reformation Europe.

presented as the antihitetic of Christians, in a way that is rendered all the more evident by their superficial similarities to the European clergy.

Xavier's letter becomes a model for future writings on Japan also in the sense that it establishes a series of recurring traits attributed to the Japanese by Jesuit writers: their (external and internal) similarity to Europeans, their honour and virtue; all characteristics that, in spite of religious differences, make them ideal actors in the Divine Plan carried out by the Jesuits.

As Caputo (2016, 185) underlines, Xavier is not always consistent in his narrative. In some cases, as with his friend Ninshitsu, the 'factuality' of his experience overcomes the 'mythical' dimension of his narration, while in other the narrative simply becomes dominated by his intellectual curiosity towards the cultural reality of Japan – something that would recur also in later Jesuit writers and sometimes incur in censorship. However, his letters reveal "as much about mid-sixteenth-century Europe, in the throes of religious reformation and imperialist expansion, as about Japan itself" (Ellis 2003, 156).

3.4 The Published Jesuit Letter-books: Shaping an Imaginary of Japan

The idea of the Japanese as a people in possess of 'reason', one that recurs in Xavier's writings, carried a philosophical weight deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, and, in particular, in the thought of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). The concept of 'reason' functioned, in Thomist thought, as an element of distinction between populations that had to be converted. 'Reason' was identified by Aquinas as the defining characteristic of 'humanity' – the absolute element that distinguished human beings from animals. All people possessing the 'right reason' shared a common intellectual and moral framework, identified as 'natural law', from which the Christian religious system was assumed to directly derive. The logical consequence to this assumption was that all beings deemed as rational were considered naturally prone, if shown the way by means of rational instruction, to convert. On the contrary, people conceived as not 'rational' should, in order to be saved, be forced into the adoption of civil customs, and into conversion.⁶²

⁶² The notion of 'right reason', as expressed by Thomas Aquinas, had come to play a central role in the debate that had aroused, in the aftermath of Da Gama's and Christopher Columbus' voyages, among the various Christian orders engaged in evangelisation overseas. The confrontation had first sparked in the New World – precisely, in the American island of Hispaniola, in 1511 – between the Dominican Order, and the Franciscan Order, that detained religious monopoly under the Spanish settlers. The Dominicans had accused the Spaniards, and the Franciscans that supported them, of maintaining an inexcusably tyrannical attitude towards the natives. They had remarked that the natives were loaded with such amounts of

This theoretical framework functioned as a fundamental background for the elaboration of Jesuit cosmography in the second half of the sixteenth century. As Massarella (1996) illustrates, this influence clearly emerges in the writings of one of the most important Jesuit theorists – the missionologist José de Acosta. In his 1588 work, *De procuranda indorum salute*, Acosta classified the “barbarian” inhabitants of the world outside Europe according to three different categories: those who lived in stable and settled societies, and used letters; the unlettered, who nevertheless lived in organized societies; and, lastly, nomadic tribes, lacking both orderly cities and literacy, and living in an unsettled and ungoverned fashion – in other words, in an almost bestial state. In the first category, he included most of the populations residing in the East Indies, including the Japanese. He described such populations as not departing much “from right reason and the common usage of humanity”, and having

a stable form of government [respublica], public laws, fortified cities respected magistrates, secure and prosperous commerce, and that which is most important, use and knowledge of letters, for wherever there are books and written monuments, the people are more humane and politic. To this class belong in the first rank the Chinese. [...] Following them are the Japanese and many other provinces of East India. (Massarella 1996, 144)⁶³

Acosta’s categorization referred also to the notion of paganism – or the concept of ‘gentiles’ – that, in the Renaissance period, had become a well established ‘inclusive’ category of otherness in European intellectual discourse, in the framework of a basic opposition between the civilized and the uncivilized (or barbarian), that could be traced back as far as Aristotle.

The appeal of paganism also lay in the fact that there was an enormous body of literature on the subject going back to Patristic antiquity. This

work, that they did not even have them the time to receive a proper Christian instruction. Fray Montesinos, spokesman of the Dominicans, had backed his accusation by appealing to the basic humanity of the natives, arguing that their possess of ‘right reason’ put them on the same grounds as the Spanish conquerors. The Spanish settlers and Franciscans, from their part, had refuted the stance of the Dominicans, precisely by diminishing the humanity of their subjects: they deemed them as natural slaves, who could not be guided to conversion by instruction, but only by coercion. They even openly compared them to animals, saying they would only repeat prayers mechanically, “like parrots”. By the 1550s, the confrontation had been taken to Europe, were it had also come to revolve around the newly encountered Asian populations. See in this regard Massarella (2008).

63 In the last category, Acosta numbered instead most of the populations of the New World, and some of the Moluccas. In the second, the Aztecs and the Incas, and some lesser kingdoms and principalities.

literature, which grew to epidemic proportions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was rich and broad enough to embrace the new peoples in Asia and the Americas. It provided a vocabulary for understanding and describing not simply pagan religion but paganism as an entire organization of life: Since the eighth century, the term *gentiles* had been used synonymously with *barbari* by a Christian Europe still quite vulnerable to barbarian invasion. There was no problem in seeing exotics through this lens since paganism, like Christianity, was a transhistorical category. It was thus more than a merely self-validating category like 'barbarian' or 'wild man' or 'savage'. Finally, the fact that exotics were pagans served to guarantee their humanity in a crucial way: They could and, according to Biblical prophecies, would be converted to Christianity. (Ryan 1981, 525)

However, paganism did not work as the only distinctive element in Acosta's rank of civilizations. In a way that called back to the humanist moral values that were at the core of the Jesuit approach to religion (and that, in many ways, singled them out among the Christian orders) he also pointed to political and social structures, as well as to literacy, as signs of civilization.

Corollary to this hierarchical vision of world civilizations was also the idea that different strategies had to be applied for the conversion of different populations. Acosta underlined that the only way to bring societies of the lowest level to adhere to natural law was to force them to adopt civilized manners and then coerce them into the "true" religion. Illiterate communities with more complex social organizations, while being submitted to a strict regime, in order to be brought to the Christian truth, should instead not be forced into conversion: compromises could be made with their customs, as long as they did not depart from "natural law". Societies belonging to the highest level of civilization, on the other hand, had already, in Acosta's eyes, basically everything in common with Europe in terms of adherence to natural law. The only step to be taken with them would be to guide them to the Christian Revelation by means of reason. That did not mean that missionaries were supposed to overlook the existence of differences. Quite the contrary, it meant that they had to acknowledge them: accept that natural law identified with a universal ideal of humanity that could not be strictly equated to European costumes, and which, on the contrary, could find expression into different societal forms. The missionaries operating in the East Indies were supposed to learn about the specific forms they were dealing with, coming to understand the languages and customs of the people they aimed at converting, in order for their efforts to bear success.

This was also, to the core, the moving principle behind the strategy of adaptation adopted by Valignano (as described above): the fact that Japanese society responded in all ways to natural law meant that the Japanese were already as apt as Europeans to receive the Christian Revelation; that

they shared with the Europeans a common intellectual framework, where arguments favourable to Christianity could be presented, discussed, and understood as true. The Japanese people, therefore, did not need to be induced to adopt European manners, in order to be converted. On the contrary, it was up to the Jesuits to accommodate and compromise with local customs. Missionaries were to acquire knowledge and understanding of the Japanese language and manners, in order to grasp the best ways to rationally demonstrate to the Japanese people the Christian doctrine.

While, in concrete, not all the Jesuit missionaries stationed in the East Indian colleges smoothly adhered to this line of thought, this stance became the basic premise for the management of the Japanese mission in the sixteenth century. Much of Acosta's evaluation of Japan, actually, relied on what other missionaries, who had experienced life in the archipelago and direct contact with the Japanese, had written before him – including Xavier and Valignano.

Xavier was no theorist of the mission like Acosta, but his descriptions of the Japanese deeply resonated with the assessment of the archipelago included in the *Procuranda*: the stress on the Japanese political and justice system, the focus on the complexity of social structures and usages, the insistence on the literacy of the Japanese and on their rational and inquisitive nature – all elements that, in the eyes of Xavier, put Japan on the high ranks of an hypothetical hierarchy of civilization, and that led him to deem the Japanese as the “best people that have yet been discovered”.

As seen above, in Xavier's (and his contemporaries') reports, Japan is not (or not mainly) described for itself: the stress in the writing is put on confronting Japanese practices, manners and customs with European ones. And, in the framework above presented, it should not surprise, as we've seen, that similarities are highlighted as much as, if not more than differences. This attitude is best exemplified in a quote from the report by Nicolao Lancillotto on Yajirō's description of Japan:

These people, being in the same climate as we are, are white like us, and of the same stature; they are discreet, noble people, and they love virtue and the literary arts, and hold scholars in great consideration. Their costumes, and their way of conducting government both in peace and war are similar to ours.⁶⁴

Later missionaries' writings (while reflecting a progressively deepening knowledge of Japanese culture and society) seem to operate in a very

⁶⁴ “Questi popoli trovandosi sotto il medesimo clima che noi, sono ancora bianchi, & della medesima statura, è gente discreta, nobile, & che ama la virtù, & lettere, e tenendo in gran venerazione i letterati. I costumi, & modo di reggere la repubblica in pace, & in guerra sono conformi à nostri” (Xavier 1562, f. 25).

similar mind-set. In a 1554 letter, for example, Pietro d'Alcena, once again narrating of the religious debates in which the Jesuit Fathers usually engaged with the Japanese Christians, concluded that the Japanese were "such Christians that [...] I could not tell the difference between them and our brothers".⁶⁵ In a 1561 letter, father Cosme de Torres, compared the Japanese inclination towards honour to that of the Ancient Romans, commenting on how such attitude was what made them respect parents and friends, in spite of their lack of fear in God.⁶⁶ Alessandro Valignano, in his unpublished work, the *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*, stated that the Japanese excelled "not only all other Oriental people, but surpass the European as well".⁶⁷ This quote would be a much cited one in contemporary published literature on Japan. Giovanni Pietro Maffei, for example, would include it in his *Historiarvm Indicarvm Libri*, first published in 1588 (which, as seen, largely drew on Valignano's manuscript). Very similarly, in his work focused on the *Tenshō shisetsu*, Guido Gualtieri would define the Japanese as people of "good reason" ("buona ragione"), and declare that "it can't be denied that those people are all of good and courteous nature, and have such good disposition that they are superior not only to the Indians [i.e., the inhabitants of the East Indies] but to Europeans as well".⁶⁸ Gualtieri also commented on the "natural" Japanese rapidity in learning and on the general civility that, among them, characterized even the members of the lower classes – an observation that frequently recurred in Jesuit writings.⁶⁹

That did not mean that the Japanese were absolutely singled out among East Asian populations. As a result of the centrality of the Japanese mission for the Society of Jesus in the sixteenth century, Japan indeed became

65 "Christiani tali, che [...] non potrei far differenza da loro à nostri fratelli" (Alcena 1558, f. 177).

66 "La gente è molto bellicosa, simile agli antichi romani per le questioni d'onore. Proprio l'onore è il loro principale idolo, e ne derivano guerre e uccisioni, tanto che arrivano anche a uccidere se stessi quando ritengono di averlo perso. Per lo stesso motivo evitano di fare cose come rubare e portare via la donna d'altri, e dunque, nonostante non temano Dio, poiché non credono esserci altra vita là di là della presente, nondimeno per via dell'onore hanno rispetto per parenti e amici" (De Torres 1565). The comparison – a subtle way to underline the basic similarity between Japanese and Europeans, where the fundamental element of distinction, as it had been in the case of Ancient Romans, was the lack of access to the "true" faith – held even more weight considering how the Jesuits looked up to the Ancient Romans as models of eloquence.

67 The quote is reported as cited in Kowner 2004, 755.

68 "Non si può negare, che quella gente non sia tutta generalmente di natura nobile e cortese, e abbia sì buon naturale, che quanto a questa parte faccia vantaggio non solo agli Indiani, ma anco a nostri Europei" (Gualtieri 1586).

69 See for example the "Lettera scritta di Bungo..." (1565, f. 9).

central to the Jesuit writings (both in quantitative and qualitative terms).⁷⁰ On the other hand, however, by the final decade of the century a growing number of authors – Jesuits and non-Jesuit alike – had come to write of the archipelago in association to its neighbouring countries. Much as Acosta had grouped Japan with the “provinces of East India”, several writers pointed to the resemblance between the Japanese and the neighbouring populations, above all in terms of physical appearance.⁷¹ This was the case, for example, of Juan González De Mendoza, the Augustinian author of one of the earliest full-fledged published European works on China, the *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China* (De Mendoza 1585). In the one chapter of his work focused on Japan, Mendoza, while drawing largely on the published Jesuit sources for everything else, added a personal speculation on the origin of the Japanese, that linked them directly to the Chinese population, precisely on the ground of physical similarity.⁷²

It is worth noting that the Japanese, as well as the neighbouring populations to whom they were physically compared, were equated to the Europeans also in terms of skin colour. The description of the Japanese as ‘white’ (that traced back to Garcia Escalante De Alvarado’s account, as well as, as shown above, to the earlier Jesuits) was a recurring element in the representation of the Japanese population in both the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, not only in missionaries’ writings, but also in the works of early Dutch and English writers Kowner (2004, 754).

Nicolao Lancillotto associated the whiteness of the Japanese people to climate. The argument recalled an intellectual debate which was in full

70 As well as in practical matters such as the formation of a native clergy, a ‘privilege’ reserved in the beginning only to the Japanese (and only later extended to the Chinese and Koreans). See Kowner 2004, 756.

71 For a collection of quotes, see Kowner 2004, 754-6.

72 The Japanese were said to have originated from a group of Chinese, exiled to the archipelago from the continent after a failed attempt at rebellion: “These islands are many (as aforesaid), yet are they populated with much people, who in their bodies and faces differ very little from the Chinos, although not so politike: [by the which it seemed to be true, that which is found written in the histories of the kingdom of China, saying that these Japonese in old time were Chinas, and that they came from that mightie kingdome unto these ilands. Whereas they do now dwell, for this occasion following. A kinsman of a king of China, a man of great countenance and valour, having conceived within his brest for to kill the king, and thereby to make himself lorde of the countrie, the better to put this in execution, he gave to understand of his evill intent unto others of his friends, requesting their favour to execute the same, promising that he would do his best. This being done, [...] they did promise him [...]. Their treason came to be discovered unto the king. [...] He comanded they should not die, but be banished for ever out of the kingdome, with precise band, that they, their wives and children, and all that should come of them, should for ever live on those ilands that are now called Iapon, which were at that time desert and without people”. The quote is taken from the 1588 English translation of the work, as included in Staunton 1854, 294-302.

heat in Europe by the time of the arrival of the Jesuits on the archipelago: the one between supporters of a ‘polygenist’ theory of humankind and supporters of the idea of ‘human unity’. The debate was part of the European intellectuals’ way to cope with the new ‘reality’ of the populations of the African, Asian and American continents. Theorists of the first group argued that the ‘new’ populations encountered, displaying such a different range of physical characteristics from the Europeans, had to be part of a different ancestry altogether: they had to be, in other words, not “sons of Adams”, and therefore not truly part of the human race. Opponents of the theory insisted instead on the unity of humankind, attributing differences in physical appearances to the effects of climate and environment. It made sense for Jesuit theorists to fall in the second group, considering the view of the world and humanity expressed in Acosta’s writings. And, indeed, the polygenist theory had officially been rejected by the Roman Church with a Bull issued by Pope Paul III in 1537, asserting the humanity of the populations of the New World.⁷³

On the other hand, environmental motivations were often coupled, by the same Christian writers, with less ‘neutral’ explanations connected to biblical tradition – the ‘Ham’ curse and the idea of divine punishment were used, for example, as an explanation for the skin colour of black Africans.⁷⁴ In the same way, the idea of ‘whiteness’, associated with the Japanese, did seem to be imply an inherent (positive) value judgement for the Jesuit writers. At least, enough for Valignano to write

Withal there is this difference between the Indian and the Japanese Christians [...] each one of the former was converted from some individual ulterior motive, and *since they are blacks, and of small sense*, they are subsequently very difficult to improve and turn into good Christians; whereas the Japanese usually become converted, not on some whimsical individual ulterior motive (since it is their suzerains who expect to benefit thereby and not them themselves) but only in obedience to their lord’s command; and *since they are white and of good understanding and behaviour*, and greatly driven to outward show, they readily frequent the churches and sermons, and when they are instructed they become very good Christians, albeit the lords who have an eye on the main chance and are so preoccupied with warfare are usually the worst.⁷⁵

⁷³ For an overview of the debate and in general on sixteenth-century European views on race, see Leupp 2003, 14-16.

⁷⁴ For an in-depth analysis of environmental theories and the use of Bible references to explain diversity, see Hodgen 2011, 207-94.

⁷⁵ Emphasis added. The excerpt, from the *Historia del Principio y Progreso de la Compañía de Jesus en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*, is quoted in Boxer 1951, 94.

Of course, in the embryonic ethnical constructions built by late sixteenth/early seventeenth century Jesuit writers, physical characteristics were a factor still too largely overshadowed by cultural and religious considerations to constitute a 'racial' discourse, in the modern sense of the term.⁷⁶

Surely, though, the writings were a rudimentary expression of the mechanisms of representation highlighted by Edward Said in his well-known critical essay on the European orientalist literary tradition: they typified a "way of coming to terms with the Orient [...] based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience" (Said 1979, 1).⁷⁷ The 'Japan' pictured by the Jesuits was very different from the mythical land of Marco Polo – it was now a representation born of factual, direct observation. But it was still, in a different way, also an intellectual product, that took part in a fundamental process of self-definition from the part of the Jesuit missionaries, and through them, of their European readers. The letters did not respond (nor aimed to respond), in the first place, to objectivity in the modern sense of the term. As already mentioned, they were not conceived simply as a way to transmit information, but as rhetorical devices – meant to attract the interest and support of the European lay and ecclesiastic authorities toward the mission. Moreover, they interpreted and assimilated Japan through categories that, as illustrated above, were still deeply rooted in the Christian religion (and largely stemmed from a Eurocentric kind of vision).

On the other hand, the Jesuit reports do provide some of the most rich and informative accounts to have survived to our date (in any language) on both the history of Christian mission, and the history of sixteenth-century Japan. Each of the annual letters includes detailed accounts of the number of conversions, of the names of new, eminent Christians, of the deaths and acquisitions of new members in the mission, of the construction of houses, colleges, churches and seminaries, and of the intercourse between the missionaries and Japanese authorities – which came to include, at a later date, also the narration of the persecutions.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ I.e., in the sense attributed to 'race' by the discourses of Social Darwinism, where "race refers to alleged biological and physical characteristics, the most obvious of which is skin pigmentation. These attributes, frequently linked to 'intelligence' and 'capabilities' are used to rank 'racialized' groups in a hierarchy of social and material superiority and subordination" (Barker 2011, 253).

⁷⁷ Of course, the dynamics between the Jesuit writers and the Japanese population were very different from those between the 'Orient' and the 'West' described by Said. The Jesuits operated in a context where they held no material power, and from an intellectual standpoint that advocated "reciprocity not hegemony". In a way, the Jesuit literary corpus on Japan anticipated the seventeenth and eighteenth century tradition of European Sinophilism, which, as underlined by Ho-fung Hung contradicts much of Said's assumptions about the centrality of the idea of Western superiority in European Orientalist tradition as a whole. See Ho-Fung 2003.

⁷⁸ From around 1610, basically only information about the persecutions would be relayed to Europe. From 1610 to 1615 little to no report was produced, and the letters from 1615 are

At the same time, the letters provide also a rich source of collateral information about Japan per se. The longer and more thoroughly the strategy of adaptation was applied, the more the missionaries came to know about Japanese culture and society – a knowledge which was mirrored in the way the reports sent to Europe were composed. Letters from the 1550s, 1560s and 1570s, written by the Fathers who took charge of the mission in Japan immediately after Xavier's departure in 1551,⁷⁹ appear to be of a more informative nature. They include, along with the narration of matters more strictly related to the mission, in-depth observations of Japan's geography, politics, society, language, religion and art, as well as descriptions of customs, ceremonies, cities and fortresses. The range of the matters treated by the accounts was further expanded under the influence of Valignano, particularly in the case of the letters by Father Luis Frois (1532-1597). Ever since 1579, the length of the annual letters significantly increased and the reports came to focus singularly on all the different regions in which the Jesuit seminaries and residences were located.

Offering a complete overview of the information about Japan contained in the reports is not easy – scattered as it is among narrations of more strictly mission-related matters. A most useful instrument to grasp the quality and amount of such knowledge is provided however in Cooper (1965), a collection of excerpts extracted from the missionaries reports,⁸⁰ aimed at providing “a picture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japanese life as seen through the eyes of foreign merchants and missionaries” (Cooper 1965, X). The selected passages, indeed, open a big window on life in Japan in the Azuchi-Momoyama and early Tokugawa periods, as depicted through the words of the missionaries. The work, moreover, provides a useful working model to catalogue the information included in the reports.

Basing loosely on such model, the contents of the reports may be grouped into six main categories:

1. General assessment of the Japanese population, of Japan (information about the geography, climate, resources and political structure of the archipelago). For example, the annual letter of 1579, which

heavily focused on the arrests, the martyrdoms, the occasional apostasies, without adding much to the already formed corpus of information about Japan made available to Europe. An overview of the contents of the later reports is included in Lach, Van Kley 1998b, 1842-3.

⁷⁹ The published letter-books from this period include reports by Cosme de Torres (1510-1570), Balthasar Gago (1520-1583), Gaspar Vilela (1715-1572), Luis De Almeida (1525-1583), Francisco Cabral (1528-1609), Organtino Gneccchi Soldo (1530-1609) and Giovanni Francesco Stefanoni (1540-1603), as well as one report by Brother Lourenço (1521?-1592), the first Japanese layman to have been received inside the Society of Jesus.

⁸⁰ As well as a, more limited, number of excerpts of merchants' reports. The work does not limit itself to published works, but includes also excerpts of unpublished histories, such as Frois' one.

- somehow sets up the tone and structure for the reports in the 'post-Valignano' era, includes a long description of Japan's political outline, introducing the reader to the warring state of Japan, and to the internal power divisions in the three main islands of the archipelago (Carrion 1584).
2. Descriptions of Japanese religion - in considerably more complete terms than in the earlier reports by Xavier. Already by 1561, Father Cosme De Torres could provide a much more in-depth picture of Buddhism, and an introduction to the beliefs of Shinto.⁸¹ Several letters reported also of religious customs, such as funeral rites.⁸²
 3. Descriptions of Japanese cities, ceremonies and art forms. One significant example, is the annual letter by Father Gaspar Vilela of 1561 (Vilela 1565), which provides an extensive description of the city of Kyoto, and of the celebrations for the Gion *matsuri* and the Obon *matsuri*. Another rich description of Kyoto is included in Frois (1584).
 4. Information on Japanese society: descriptions of political structures, family relationships and the justice system (as seen above), as well as information about the different social classes, with their customs (eating habits, clothes, housing, etiquette) and mutual relationships. The reports are not particularly informative in regards to the marginalised classes of Japan, even though they do mention them.⁸³ Much more weight is given to the warring aristocracy, with whom the missionaries maintained a regular intercourse (in accord to their strategy of approaching the authorities first, so as to get through to the common population). The annual letter of 1580 (included in Zanetti 1584) contains a description of the castle of Azuchi. The report of the years 1583 (Gioliti 1586) includes a lengthy description of Nobunaga's character, of his history of conquest, and of his relationship with his vassals - with a description of the embryonic form of the *sankinkōtai* practice. The annual letter of 1586 narrates, as already mentioned, the audience granted by Hideyoshi to Coelho, including an in-depth description of Hideyoshi's character, as well as a description of his palace in Osaka and its history (Zanetti 1588).
 5. Narrations of Japanese history before the arrival of the Fathers on the archipelago. In reality, though, the reports show little interest in giving an historicized account of Japan. Even if brief historical excursions are included in some of the reports, most of them are

81 See De Torres 1565. For an overview on the encounter between early modern Christians and Shinto and Buddhism, see Thelle 2003 and Breen 2003.

82 See for example the "Lettera scritta di Bungo..." (1565).

83 Frois writes, for example, of the Eta as the "lowest social class of Japan", whose job is to "skin dead animals and to act as executioners" (quoted in Cooper 1965, 54).

- completely devoid of references to the history of the archipelago before the sixteenth century. This is coherent with the ‘atemporality’ of the dominant narrative on Japan, as established by Xavier.⁸⁴
6. Information about the Japanese language. This was not one of the main objects for the works meant to be circulated in Europe. Passing remarks about the Japanese language are included in the reports by Balthasar Gago (as already mentioned), Alessandro Valignano, Gaspar Vilela, and João Rodrigues, but most of the full-fledged studies on the Japanese language were meant for use in Japan, or more generally among the missionaries, rather than for diffusion in Europe. This was for example the case with *kirishitanban* literature, which offered what are surely the most meaningful sources on the Japanese language produced by the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but was not generally circulated in Europe at the time. Rodrigues, renowned, as seen above, for his command of the Japanese language, was, in particular, author of the two earliest comprehensive grammars of Japanese, the monumental *Arte da Lingoa de Iapan*, printed in Nagasaki between 1604 and 1608, and the more concise *Arte Breve da Lingoa Japoa*, printed in Macao in 1620 (both with the Jesuit mission press). The works, however, were never printed in Europe.⁸⁵

84 There are, however, some exceptions. For example, the annual letter of 1589, that hints to the Genpei war and to the rise to power of the military aristocracy at the expense of the emperor: “The Dairi (called also with other many names) for more than two thousands and two hundred years, according to their histories, has been the supreme Lord, from them revered; until, five hundred years ago, a most cruel war erupted among them, and the two Quubi, called Guenei and Fryim (of whom most of their histories report about) upset the whole country, stripping the Dairi of his dominion; and the Lords now called Iacati gradually occupied these kingdoms”. Original text: “Il Dairi (chiamassi ancora questo con altri diversi nomi) ha più di duemila e duecento anni, che si trova nelle loro storie, che egli fu sempre Signore sommamente riverito, e venerato tra loro; finche già sono cinquecento anni che nascendo tra essi crudelissime guerre, i due Quubi, detti Guenei, & Fryim (de quali anco trattano la maggior parte di queste historie) misero sopra tutto il Giappone spogliando il Dairi del suo dominio, & andarono di poi di mano in mano occupando questi regni [...] i Signori che hora chiamano Iacati”; see “Lettera Annale del Giappone...” (1591, 148).

85 Doi (1955) edited a commented Japanese edition of the *Arte da Lingoa*. Studies and editions of particular sections of the grammar are included in Cooper 1971, Moran 1975, and Lamers 2001. This last work translates and comments, specifically, the section of the grammar focused on the Japanese epistolary style (*sorōbun*) and on how its forms, particularly those applied by the Buddhist clergy, could be adapted for use by the missionaries in Japan. A handful of non-Jesuit sources on the Japanese language also exists, but they were printed in the seventeenth century. The Dominican Diego Collado, who lived in Japan between 1619 and 1622 was the author of a grammar of the Japanese language (Collado 1632a) with two companion works: Collado 1632c, a collection of formulas for the sacrament of Confession, written in rōmaji, with parallel text in Latin and with added grammar annotations; and Collado 1632b, a Latin-rōmaji dictionary, created at the scope of providing a basic vocabulary for the missionaries in Japan. The works were, however, similarly intended

A major aspect of the reports (consciously disregarded in Cooper's anthology) is, moreover, their focus on contemporary Japanese history. The accounts include extensive narrations, sometimes in the order of a hundred or more pages, of contemporary political events, at both the local and central levels. Casual mentions of local shifts in power – such as the one that involved the extension of the power of the Ōtomo family in Yamaguchi – were included in the reports ever since the early years of the Jesuit presence in Japan. It is, however, since the end of the 1570s that detailed accounts of the wars that involved the Christian *daimyō* became a constant in basically every annual letter. The 1577 letter sent from Kyoto by Francesco Stefanoni mentions Nobunaga, mainly reporting about his policies towards the Christians in the city (Stefanoni 1580). The annual letters from the years 1579 (Carrion 1584), 1580 (Mexia 1584) and 1581 (Cabral 1584) extensively narrate the rise of Oda Nobunaga. The 1579 letters reports of Nobunaga's war campaign against the *daimyō* Araki Murashige ("Araque", in the account), lord of the Itami castle – accused of having allied with the Mōri *daimyō* of Yamaguchi, enemy of Nobunaga. It focuses in particular on the involvement of the Christian *daimyō* Takayama Ukon ("Giusto Ucondono"), a vassal of Araki, loyal to Nobunaga, who was forced to send his wife and son as hostages to Itami to assure his subservience (and who saw them released when the castle finally fell, in 1579). The narration is picked up in the 1580 letter, which reports of the ongoing war between Nobunaga and the Yamaguchi *daimyō*. The reports of the years 1583 and 1584 relate Nobunaga's death and the subsequent political turmoil (Gioliti 1586). The annual letter of 1586 includes a lengthy account of the rise of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Frois 1588) while the 1597 report by Francesco Pasio narrates of his demise (Ciotti 1601). There are even letters devoid of information related directly to the mission, like the one written by Father Luis Frois in 1595, which relates the death of the newly nominated *kanpaku* (imperial regent) at the hands of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (Zannetti 1598).

Given the amount of information they collected, and given the regularity with which they were composed, surely the reports potentially opened a wide window on Japan for the European public of the sixteenth century. What was, however, their effective impact on the European readership? While much has been written about the logic behind the Jesuit system for correspondence and about the mechanics of the circulation of the reports inside and outside the Society, the manner in which the letter-books fit into the European book market of the sixteenth century is still unclear. Were they pushed into the catalogues of printers from the Society of Jesus, or did they fit into a more independent editorial policy on the part of

for circulation inside the religious orders, as demonstrated by the very limited number of copies that have survived to our day.

publishers? What was the response to their publication? Did they pass by unnoticed, or can one presume that they truly helped put the ‘Indies’ on the map, not only for students in Jesuit schools but for a wider European public? If so, for which public, and to what extent? Given the lack of data about the number of sales, obtaining these answers is not easy. Clossey (2008, 197-215) approaches the questions by focusing on the writings of Nicholas Trigault (one of the best-selling authors within the order). The following explores them by using Italian editions of sixteenth-century Jesuit letters from Japan as a case study. It discusses them in light of the cultural and economic processes that led to their production and circulation, and analyses their place in the Italian book market of the sixteenth century. The “Appendix” provides a bibliography of the editions.

3.5 The Impact of the Reports in Europe: Italian Editions in the Sixteenth Century

I’ve already underlined in the introduction of the present work how Vernacular Italian editions are of particular interest from the perspective of distribution and reception. In fact, several factors suggest that in the second half of the sixteenth century they were the most popular among European editions of ‘Japan letters’. From the above mentioned bibliographies related to Jesuit material, a pattern emerges in the publication of the letter-books that favours the Italian editions, up to at least the 1580s. Many *editio princeps* are Italian, and Italian collections, as underlined by Lach (1965, 674-5), constitute about 50% of the publications. This provides the basis for many subsequent translations in Northern European languages (published in Paris, Louvain, and Dillingen).

This popularity of Italian editions is a bit of a puzzle. As early as 1563, Valignano advised against the use of Italian in published letter-books, suggesting a preference for Spanish and, later, for Latin (Asami 2002, 5). Valignano did not clarify the reasons for this request. Possibly, he prioritised the needs of the missionaries stationed in Asia (most of whom would find Latin easily accessible) over the Society’s need for publicity. However, in spite of his request, the production and circulation of Italian editions was not discontinued; on the contrary, it flourished throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. Many presume that Jesuit authorities in Europe decided in favour of vernacular editions as a conscious effort to expose the public to the letter-books. Sixteenth-century Europe was a context in which Latin, while still a common denominator for the Roman Church (Eisenstein 2005, 185), was losing its international character (Kristeller 1990, 119-38), and where the “revolution” brought about by the printing press was promoting a standardization of vernacular languages (Eisenstein 2005, 91-2). As Hirsch (1977, 41) underlines, a “new reader”, one

belonging to social groups once excluded from access to books and unable to understand Latin, was essential to the printing industry's expansion. In other words, by the end of the sixteenth century, a growing European readership was relying less on Latin.

Using Venice as a case study, Grendler (1992, 213-14) estimates the percentage of Italian readers at around 33% of the adult male population and 13% of the adult female population, and underlines how, despite the fact that many readers came from the upper strata of society (including rich merchants and professionals), only about half the men (the learned population of university professors and students, aristocracy, clergy, doctors or jurists) and a small percentage of the women had access to Latin. In this context, the use of the vernacular in publishing was rapidly spreading. In the case of Italy, in the second half of the sixteenth century, about 46,8% of an estimated quantity of 12.724 published books was written in the vernacular (Santoro 1994, 107). If the Society of Jesus meant to promote the letter-books related to Japan, the use of vernacular would certainly enable wider distribution.

Why the Society would allow - or wish to divulge - the books outside the circles of the clergy can be understood not only in light of the Society's need for publicity, but also in light of the Counter Reformation's policies. As Barbier (2004, 227-72) underlines, after the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis of 1559 and the end of the Council of Trent in 1563, the Counter Reformation influenced the book market in Catholic Europe both by means of coercion - through censorship and the *Index librorum prohibitorum* (Index of banned books, 1564) - and by means of a concurrent Catholic Revival that stimulated interest in new kinds of publications. News about the conversions of far-away populations could inspire public interest and, in the face of the defeats that Catholicism suffered in Europe after the Protestant Reformation, foster the notion of Catholic Church's greatness and world-wide predominance.

Still, as tools for the propagation of the faith, Spanish and Portuguese editions worked just as well as Italian editions did. In this sense, the popularity of Italian editions cannot, in my opinion, be ascribed only to the efficacy of Catholic propaganda; it is better understood in light of the entrepreneurship of Italian publishers and, more generally, of the dominating trends in the contemporary Italian book market. As Caputo (2016, 140) underlines, the fact that Italy, as opposed to Spain and Portugal, was excluded from the commercial and territorial competition in the East Indies gave Italian publishers more liberty, within the limits imposed by Jesuit censorship, to divulge the contents of the reports related to the missions in Asia. This, I argue, allowed the reports to become part of their response to the general crisis that hit the Italian book market in the second half of the sixteenth century.

To illustrate my point, I have chosen to focus on the Venetian book market, which works as a mirror for the Italian market as a whole, as

throughout the sixteenth century Venice accounted for 48,6% of the total production of Italian *cinquecentine* (Santoro 1994, 108). The policies of the Counter Reformation, as I've mentioned above, deeply affected the publishing landscape of Catholic countries. Publishers negotiated their way through the change by seeking new commercial opportunities through literary genres that the Church approved and promoted. This trend emerged clearly in Venice in the second half of the sixteenth century; works related to religious themes amounted to 25-33% of the totality of the production of Venetian printers, when in the first half of the century religious production had amounted to only 13-15%. This change in editorial policies was at the root of a new expansion in book production after an initial crisis brought about by the announcement of the Index of banned books in 1564. The plague of 1575-77 only temporarily reversed this trend; after 1585, the number of emitted print permits started growing again, though it never reached pre-plague levels (Grendler 1983, 193-5).

By 1564, the earliest editions of letter-books from Japan had appeared in the Venetian book market. They had been published by Michele Tramezzino, who cultivated ties with both the Roman publishing world (through his brother Francesco) and the Society of Jesus (through Cesare Elmi, rector of the Jesuit house of probation in Venice).⁸⁶ Caputo (2016, 243) suggests that the publication of the letters might have initially been delegated by the Society of Jesus to commercial publishers such as the Tramezzino as a means of avoiding direct involvement in commercial transactions. In this light, one may presume that, during an initial phase, editions of 'Japan letters' were not meant to be issued in a predetermined number of copies and that, instead, they were meant to be included in a more 'private' circuit of distribution.

Still, giving up the letters to commercial publishing meant, at least in part, compliance with the laws of commercial distribution. The demand for books steadily increased in Italy since the fifteenth century, in connection with an expansion of the reading population. As Santoro (1994, 96-7) underlines, at the root of the publishing industry's expansion was the ability of publishing houses to replace the logic of demand with the logic of supply, at least in quantitative terms. Editions needed high circulation figures to amortise the fixed costs associated with the printing process. For example, we know from a letter by Michele Tramezzino himself⁸⁷ that an average edition in Venice had to consist of at least 1000

86 This was not uncommon in a context in which, as Romani (1992, 524-5) illustrates, Venetian publishers handled the typographical and commercial aspects of their production, though in many instances Rome exerted a strong direct influence on the editorial process.

87 Quoted in Grendler 1983, 11.

copies, as the printing privilege was not conceded for fewer than 400 copies, and with fewer than 1000 copies, production costs would not be covered. Michele Tramezzino may have decided to publish the reports from Japan more as a consequence of his personal connections with the Society of Jesus than as the result of a qualitative evaluation of the materials in light of his editorial policy. However, one can presume that he meant to profit from the books. In this sense, his involvement in the distribution of the materials probably became, in sheer quantitative terms, a turning point.

However, as Caputo (2016, 237) illustrates, the impact of the works on the Italian intellectual landscape was still relatively small, at least up to 1585. This makes sense in light of the distribution of the editions. As the bibliography provided in the appendix indicates, the overwhelming majority of Italian letter-books on Japan saw the light in the last two decades of the sixteenth century. Moreover, reports from Japan published up to the 1570s were primarily inserts in works more generally devoted to 'India' (in the general meaning of both Brasil and the territories in Asia that the Treaty of Tordesillas had assigned to the Portuguese); however, after the publication of the first letter-book centered wholly on Japan (Zanetti 1578), works focusing on Japan - or more rarely on Japan and China - became the rule. Books published from the 1580s onward also tended to appear in multiple editions.

One factor that was probably crucial in stimulating demand for the reports - and interest in Japan in general - was the fact that the already mentioned Japanese embassy reached Lisbon in August 1584. It was received by the Holy Father and the King of Spain in 1585 and seems to have had a considerable impact on the contemporary public, as records of the time report the enthusiastic reception the envoys received in the various cities they visited.⁸⁸ Some researchers, such as Brown (1994), have actually questioned the real significance of such a reception for the general European population. What is certain, however, is that the embassy in itself spurred the publication of a number of titles - at least 80 works produced in the brief span of two years.⁸⁹ They included primarily booklets - pamphlets and gazettes reporting on the voyage of the ambassadors, their meetings with various members of the European aristocracy and the public hearing that the Pope granted to them. Sometimes they provided short descriptions of Japan (based mostly on the Jesuits' published first-hand accounts). In addition, the works related to the embassy included at least one more organic work, the *Relationi della venuta degli Ambasciatori*

88 The reception of the embassy is discussed in Moran 1993, 9-16.

89 The works related to the embassy have been catalogued by Boscaro 1973a.

Giaponesi a Roma by Guido Gualtieri,⁹⁰ which collected and reorganized all the somewhat repetitive information that had been scattered throughout previous publications. A growing interest in Jesuit writings on Japan is more easily understood in light of this editorial boom.

In my opinion, this editorial boom also prompted a number of resourceful publishers to integrate the books on Japan into their editorial policies in a more structured way. Such was the case with the Giolito publishing house. The Giolito family, active between 1536 and 1606, was one of the giants of the Venetian publishing industry. Since 1585, it had been responsible for publishing most of the Japanese reports issued in Venice. Quondam (1977, 76), through his work based on the annals of the Giolito house compiled at the end of the nineteenth century by Salvatore Bongi (1825-1899), underlines how the Giolito family embraced, from the start, a very definite identity as vernacular publishers, with only 49 titles in Latin – a meagre 4,8% of their total production. Unlike smaller publishing houses (where, in the absence of modern strategies of publicity, demand was the primary factor determining editorial policies), the Giolito family was able to drive production to a measure, through rational editorial planning, and publish an average of more than 30 titles per year (Quondam 1977, 67). They were also among those publishers able to ride the wave of the Catholic revival in qualitative terms. Their production before 1560 was almost exclusively devoted to contemporary Italian literature. When the general Italian book market was hit by the crisis associated with the Counter Reformation, the Giolito were among those publishers who found new commercial opportunities in it, and did so in an innovative way. As Quondam (1977, 74-88) underlines, while other publishers resorted to devotional literature as a response to the crisis, the Giolito devised a new editorial policy, giving birth to the form of the *collana editoriale* (editorial series). A religious editorial series was developed in accord with the trends of the post-Council Venice book market. However, hand in hand with the religious series, the publisher inaugurated a new series of *historie*. The purpose of this series was very different from that of the religious

90 The full title of the work is *Relationi della venuta degli ambasciatori giaponesi a Roma sino alla partita di Lisbona. Con le accoglienze fatte loro da tutti i principi christiani, per doue sono passati. Raccolte da Guido Gualtieri*. Several editions of the work were published in Italy: one in Rome, in 1586, by the Francesco Zanetti publishing house; two in Venice, both in 1586, by the Giolito publishing house; and one in Milan, in 1587, by the Pacifico Ponte publishing house. Another lengthy and organic account of the embassy was included in the *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam curiam*, published in 1590 in Macao. However, the work, as explained in its preface, was not intended for a European readership, but rather was to be used in Jesuit seminaries as a text for Latin studies and as a sort of guide to Europe for Japanese readers. (This was one of the reasons why the book was not sent to Rome for an *imprimatur*, as was customary). An annotated English translation of the work is found in Massarella 2012. A more recent Italian translation is included in Di Russo 2016.

series, though also somewhat complementary. While the religious series was meant to be edifying, the historical series openly appealed to curiosity, the pleasure of reading and what Eisenstein (2005, 108) identifies as a reader's growing desire to vicariously take part in faraway events.

The choice of *historie* as a countermeasure for the crisis proved to be a sound publishing decision in a context like the late sixteenth-century Venetian book market. The sixteenth century could rightly be called the first age of information. *Avvisi, relationi, fogli di notizia* and other newspaper-like publications circulated in all the major printing centers of the time, relating both national and international events with a regularity that has induced researchers such as Monaco (1992) to trace back to them the birth of modern periodical publications. A similar role in the book market was played by travel literature, in particular the *historie* about the new worlds that the Great Discoveries had brought to the public's attention. The *historie* enjoyed great fortune throughout the century, and found in Venice one of its main points of diffusion (Pallotta 1992, 347).

The decision to include the Japanese letter-books in their catalogue appears to align with both dominating trends in the editorial policy of the Giolito. The reports matched the edifying purpose of the religious series while simultaneously appealing to the thirst for 'curious' news from faraway lands, which was at the root of the historical series' popularity. For reasons already mentioned, the 'curious' nature of the narration was particularly pronounced in the lengthy 'Japan letters' published in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, turning them into materials that were fit to respond to a precise demand from readers after the 1585 embassy, and to be integrated into ampler editorial policies such as those of the Giolito.

Even in light of such considerations, defining the readership of the letter-books from Japan is not easy. Big publishing houses can indicate the type of public for which the publications were meant, as they tended to follow a definite editorial line and address a specific public. In the case of the Giolito house, publications were intended mostly for an upper, educated middle class (Quondam 1977, 88). However, one must consider that, as Eisenstein (2005, 37) underlines, the actual readership and hypothetical targets that publishers devised did not always coincide. Moreover, smaller houses often worked on commission and published materials of a more disparate nature. Outside the big publishing centres, such as Venice and Rome, defining the type of public that had access to the books has proven to be an arduous task.

Certainly, the letter-books were devised for easy and wide circulation. In fact, all editions were in the small 'octavo' format⁹¹ first adopted by publisher Aldo Manuzio at the beginning of the sixteenth century as a man-

91 In the octavo format, the full sheet of printing paper (about 19 x 25 inches) was folded to form eight leaves (sixteen pages) (Reitz 2004, 96).

ageable format that would prove convenient to scholar-diplomats and patrician councillors of state (Eisenstein 2005, 295). As Petrucci (1977, 140) illustrates, given its manageability, the format was also meant to attract a new public. This public, as Montecchi (1992, 355) reports, would come to include less-traditional groups of readers, primarily non-professionals, in the range of the upper middle class.⁹² In time, popular books would also adopt octavo, along with other small formats. However, as Grendler (1992, 211-37) underlines, books designed for lower, uneducated classes also shared a recurring set of physical characteristics – such as the use of Gothic characters – that are not common to letter-books devoted to ‘Japan letters’. In this sense, reports about Japan do not appear to fall under the flag of ‘popular’ literature.

As already illustrated, use of the vernacular in the letter-books can itself be deemed an indicator that the books were not exclusively addressed to a learned, professional readership. On the other hand, one must keep in mind that while not all readers knew Latin, all readers, including learned readers, knew the vernacular, and that, as Eisenstein (2005, 48) states, ‘traditional’ readers were still a main target for publishers and a strong driving force in the production of books.

It was through the learned readership that the letter-books came to influence a wide range of contemporary literary genres. The Jesuit reports were widely exploited not only as sources of religious histories (the most notable of which were those authored by Giovanni Pietro Maffei),⁹³ but also for a number of lay histories, cosmographies and collections of travel literature. For example, the Italian popular historians Mambrino Roseo (1500-1580?) and Cesare Campana (1540-1606) included extensive accounts of the progress of the Christian mission in Japan in their world histories (both titled *Delle Historie del Mondo* and dated, respectively, 1573 and 1598). The geographer Giovanni Lorenzo d’Anania (1545-1609) included, in his cosmographical work, *L’Universale fabrica del mondo* (1573), lengthy

92 Nor were popular books as often conserved in libraries, nor did they usually circulate in places far from the one in which they were produced, as only educated readers with sufficient financial resources could afford the shipping expenses. The fact that letter-books published in Rome, Naples or Brescia are available today in libraries throughout Europe can, in itself, indicate the type of public that used to read them – although library consistencies, as Caputo (2016, 257) underlines, are not always a reliable indicator of diffusion.

93 The *Rerum a Societate Iesu in Oriente gestarum volumen, continens historiam iucundam lectu omnibus Christianis, praesertim ijs, quibus vera Religio est cordi. In qua videre possunt, quomodo nunquam Deus Ecclesiam suam deserat, & in locum deficientium a vera fide, innumeros alios in abditissimis etiam regionibus substituat*, dated 1571, and the *Historiarum Indicarum Libri XVI. Selectarum item ex India Epistolarum eodem interprete Libri IV*, dated 1588. The first was the first attempt at an official history of the mission in Asia (particularly in Japan), while the second, which devoted four of its sixteen volumes to Japan, is probably the most complete and reliable sixteenth-century historical account of the Japanese Jesuit mission. Maffei is discussed in Asami 2002, 14-19.

chapters about Japan and China that relied heavily upon the Jesuit sources. Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1557), as already underlined, added to the 1554 edition of his *Navigazioni et viaggi* the Italian translation of some of the earliest Jesuit letters on Japan. Richard Willes (1558-1573), editor of the *History of Travayle* (1577), included in his work a discussion "Of the Island Giapan" based on Jesuit sources, while Richard Hakluyt (1553-1616), author of one of the greatest collections of travel literature in the English language (*The principal navigations, voyages and discoveries of the English nation, made by sea or over land*, first published in 1590) incorporated in his work most of the letters of Father Luis Frois on Japan.

On a more indirect level, the reports, in a way that anticipated later writings on China and the current of seventeenth-century sinophilism, fed universalistic theories that were already surfacing in European political thought. Lach (1977, 235-52) has underlined, for example, how the Jesuit writing on both Japan and China added to an interest in cultural alternatives that found its expression in the writings of such thinkers as Giovanni Botero (1544-1617).

This influence was particularly significant after 1585. Of course, Jesuit writers did not doubt the privileged status of Christendom, and the perspective of their representations of Japan remained extremely partial. Letters did not respond to objectivity in the modern sense of the term, but were conceived as rhetorical devices. As such, they interpreted and assimilated Japan through Eurocentric categories. However, by presenting Christianity as an integration rather than an alternative to Japanese culture, they set a comparison between cultures that helped open the space to a sense of cultural relativism previously unknown to Europe - one that calls for further study.