

Early Christian/Non-Christian Encounters as Comparative Theological Resources: A Case in Sixteenth-Century Japan

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Recent research on cross-cultural encounters in the early modern period¹ has shown that the records of the first Europeans in eastern Asia provide us with excellent models to reflect on current issues in cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogues.² These stories are helpful for understanding ways through which the Self perceives, understands, and interprets the Other, who is radically different.³ According to sinologist Nicolas Standaert, “One is tempted to call [these records] a ‘laboratory’ for the study of cultural diffusion, transfer of knowledge, and cultural change, leading to deeper insights for broader theories of cultural interaction.”⁴ To be sure, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the European empires’ agendas for colonization dominated exchanges between Europeans and non-Europeans. Nonetheless, their interactions in eastern Asia—especially in China and Japan—were impressively reciprocal in comparison to contemporary cases in Latin America, India, and Africa.⁵ Their stories can serve as resources in conducting a case study of how one is affected by and transformed through interactions with another who is radically different in terms of language, tradition, or worldview.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Catholic missionaries’ interpretations of Japanese religiosity (i.e., religious inclination/disposition, liturgical *habitus*) in the late sixteenth century. I will show that many European missionaries were aesthetically attracted to Japanese Buddhist art and respected Japanese people’s devotion to Buddha, despite the fact that the Church considered such devotion a form of idolatry.⁶ As they understood Japanese religiosity, there emerged an interesting paradox in the missionaries’ overall assessment of Japanese culture: on the one hand, they condemned the local religious tradition as comprising demonic practices, while on the other hand, they praised the local piety and said that the Japanese were disposed to a deeper capacity for devotion than were the Europeans.⁷

This paper also aims to offer a historical case study with regards to the ongoing attempts of comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue. Following Francis X. Clooney, I consider comparative theology a venue through which one seeks a better understanding of one’s faith through comparative, inter-religious and dialogical reflections of other religions.⁸ In undertaking comparative theology, the subject (i.e., the

one who makes the comparison) is open to self-criticism and transformation that emerge during his or her study of other religions. In this context, this study entails an investigation of how the act of comparison helped European missionaries better understand Japanese religions, and how their appreciation of Japanese religiosity influenced and transformed their approaches to non-Christians.

I will first explicate the key terms that are central to this case study. They are: 1) the notion of “liturgical *habitus*,”⁹ and 2) the three interrelated categories of feeling, (re)action, and thought, which are used as tools to analyze the dynamics of Christian understanding of the Other.¹⁰ Second, I will discuss the content of selected primary sources. From the large number of European writings about Japan, I have chosen to discuss the following Jesuit records: 1) the Portuguese Jesuit Luís Fróis’s (1532–1597) account of Buddhist art in *Historia de Japam*,¹¹ 2) Fróis’s other treatise, on a comparison of Japanese and European cultures,¹² and 3) the Jesuit Visitor (mission inspector) Alessandro Valignano’s (1539–1606) *Sumario* of the Japan mission.¹³ Third, I will offer my analysis of the primary sources, focusing on the missionaries’ feelings, actions, and thoughts *vis-à-vis* Buddhism. The overall dynamics of the missionaries’ interpretation of Japanese religious traditions comprise a complex combination of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. This complex, aesthetic appreciation of the non-Christian tradition helped to transform the Jesuit mission principle from a typical conquest-style mission strategy to one that respected the integrity of local customs and *habitus*.

Tools and Methods

1) Liturgical *Habitus*

In early Jesuit discourse concerning Japanese religions, European missionaries’ descriptions of liturgical *habitus* are conspicuous for their quality and quantity.¹⁴ In this paper, I understand *habitus* as a personal system of inclinations and dispositions that influences how we feel and react toward experience. Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi explore this notion of *habitus* in terms of religious aesthetics in *Living Beauty: The Art of Liturgy*. Scirghi offers a definition of liturgical *habitus*, “the development of the higher dispositions for worship,” in which a continued practice of faith cultivates a higher disposition toward religious experience.¹⁵ Following this definition, Garcia-Rivera reflects on the question of cultural/religious distinctions and similarities in liturgical *habitus*. Religion and culture exercise great influence on shaping a person’s *habitus*; therefore, when two persons subscribe to different religions, the explicit forms of their devotion are naturally different. However, at the same time, there is also something similar across different people’s liturgical *habitus* that transcends the boundaries among religions. In this regard, Garcia-Rivera refers to Paul’s

observation of pagan devotion in Areopagus (in Athens) described in Acts 17:22–28, where Paul praises the Athenians, “I see that in every respect you are very religious.”¹⁶ Does this mean that Paul accepted certain aspects of non-Christian religions? According to Garcia-Rivera’s interpretation of this interesting passage,

Paul of Areopagus seems to tell us that culture and society exist as a gift of God to each nation and race by which they could ‘grope for him and perhaps find him.’ What is interesting about this is that this groping and searching is done while God is ‘not far from each one of us.’ In other words, Paul suggests that human culture exists as a means to be sensible to divine Mystery.¹⁷

For Christians, to observe and reflect on the *habitus* of people who believe in other religions is a way to appreciate how God has granted the gift of devotion to all peoples, and how each nation and race reaches for him, each in amazingly creative and beautiful ways. As I will show later, for the Jesuits in Japan, the process of interpreting local liturgical *habitus* involved recognizing the distinctions and similarities between them. In addition to understanding the symbolic meanings and reasoning behind Buddhist practices, their experience challenged them to exploit aesthetic sensitivity in order to cultivate an openness of heart and recognize the beauty of non-Christian traditions.

2) Feeling, (Re)action, Thought

Theoretically, Paul’s preaching in Areopagus, as cited above, can be considered from four different vantages: his primary feeling, (re)action, thought, and further action toward non-Christian rites in Athens. First, Paul talked about his feeling toward the shrines dedicated to local gods. He said, “You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious.”¹⁸ Second, he reacted to the Athenian rites as follows: “The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands....”¹⁹ Third, he offered a theological interpretation of pagan piety, as follows:

He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us.²⁰

Fourth, Paul urged the Athenians to repent their ignorance; since God has established the day on which he will judge the world with justice.²¹

In relation to Paul’s speech in Athens, it is worth noting that American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce related the traditional three normative sciences of

aesthetics, ethics, and logic to feeling, action, and thought, the three elements upon which we base our understanding of experience.²² Aesthetics provides norms for assessing qualities of feeling, ethics supplies norms by which action is judged, and logic sets allow norms for arguments and procedures to be adopted. The three constitute a triadic system and are interdependent. In light of Peirce's triad, it is possible to interpret the passage in the Acts as showing that Paul's thought had developed from his feeling for and impression of the Athenian shrine. In this case, the Apostle's primary feeling was positive. From there, he developed the theological insight that God created boundaries among regions so that people might seek God in their own ways. More precisely, his insight was a synthesis of the positive feeling toward Athenian devotion and the negative reaction toward pagan idols. Paul took further action, explaining the Gospel to the Athenians with the awareness that they were the same and equal human beings created by God and that they were not far from God.

I. Sources

In light of the analytical tools explained above, I will now discuss the content of the selected primary sources, using Peirce's categories of feeling, (re)action, and thought. From the rich corpus of Jesuit reports, letters, and writings about Japanese mission, in this study, I investigate three documents. The author of the first two documents is Luís Fróis, who came to Japan from Portugal in 1563. According to J. F. Schütte's biography of his life, before entering the Society of Jesus, young Fróis had worked as a scribe at the royal court in Lisbon.²³ Probably on account of the practice he had acquired from his secular career, Fróis soon became one of the keenest writers about Japanese matters. The first document is Fróis's impressive account of Japanese Buddhist temples in Miyako (Kyoto) originally written in 1565.²⁴ Years later, in the mid-1580s, Fróis reclaimed a revised version of the same report for the *Historia de Japam*, his multivolume work on Japanese history.²⁵ For the discussion, I will mainly use the text in *Historia* with references to the original 1565 text. Comparing the respective chapters, one may notice that while the main content remained unchanged after 20 years, in *Historia*, the author's excitement and affection toward exotic pagan practices had become subdued.

The second document is the chapter on Japanese religions in Fróis's "Tratado em que se contem muito susintae abreviadamente algumas contradicções e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão" (Treatise, in which, very succinctly and briefly, are described some contradictions and differences of customs between the peoples of Europe and this province of Japan), which had been written in 1585.²⁶ By this time, Fróis knew of Japanese language and culture well enough to present a more objective and detailed comparison of Japanese and European cultures.

Some scholars believe that this treatise was supposed to be published in Europe, although there is no record indicating that it was.²⁷

The third document was written by Alessandro Valignano, who came to Japan in 1579 as the Visitor (inspector) of Jesuit missions in “the Indies,” which included all mission territories east of India.²⁸ Valignano’s summary of the Japan mission, *Sumario*, was a landmark achievement that determined the direction of the early Jesuit mission in eastern Asia.²⁹ In it, the Visitor turns away from the mission method of his predecessors and argues that European missionaries should adapt to Japanese customs. Although *Sumario* predates the extant manuscript of Fróis’s cultural treatise, the Japanese translator of both works, Kiichi Matsuda, believes it very likely that Valignano had received information from Fróis, because the content of the two works overlap in many places.³⁰

1) Feeling: Luís Fróis’s Impression of Japanese Temples

The 58th chapter of Luís Fróis’s *Historia de Japam*, entitled, “Of the things there were to see in the city of Miyako and its vicinity,” is an important source from which one can surmise the Jesuit observations of Japanese culture, especially their uncommon praise of the beauty of Buddhist architecture.³¹ Fróis begins the chapter with an assurance that European churches are so much greater, richer, and stronger than Japanese temples; he writes that the utmost grandeur of European architecture is incomparable to anything in Japan, but that the Japanese are quite satisfied with their architecture, and some of it is certainly worthy of praise. It is possible that to write this chapter Fróis first needed to declare the superiority of European culture and the Catholic world in order to evade the critical eyes of the ecclesiastical censors. Indeed, some of his superiors had considered his former reports to include “unedifying accounts” for the readers in Europe.³² The possibility of censorship notwithstanding, in the balance of the chapter Fróis goes on to describe the beauty of Buddhist temples at length and with candid admiration.

Some of Fróis’s most colorful accounts touch upon his visits to *Tofuku-ji*, *Sanjusangen-do*, and *Chion-in*. All of these are Buddhist temples that stand today in Kyoto, unchanged since that time. On *Tofuku-ji*, Fróis wrote: “[...] the temple is very noble and old, and its precinct is surrounded by a number of curiously shaped, beautiful trees. There are several worship halls within the precinct, including the three main halls on the hill that are especially grand and gorgeous [...].”³³ “In one of the main halls,” he adds,

there are statues representing some of the five hundred disciples of Buddha. These statues are so superbly and skillfully made that if one enters the hall without knowing, one might think they are alive. The statues look like Indian

hermits. But it soon looks like a house dedicated to the devil. Those figures cause more horror than devotion.³⁴

With regards to the description of *Sanjusangen-do*, Fróis made some changes to the original report, and they are featured in the *Historia de Japam*. In the original version, he had written,

[...] the main *Amida* statue in the middle of the temple hall is beautifully gilt with gold, and it is executed even finer than the works of the craftsmen in Flanders. Besides the main statue, there are one thousand life-sized statues of *Kannon* in the mail hall, all gilt head to toe with the finest gold. As one looks around the hall, it is difficult not to be bewitched by their radiance. These statues are extremely elegant, and if this building were not a temple of *Amida*, it would be very appropriate to imagine and contemplate on the ‘angelic hierarchy of heaven [*ordés, & gerarchias angelicas*]’ in this place.³⁵

On reading these accounts, the modern reader may be struck by the peculiarity of Fróis—who preached that Japanese converts must abandon all pagan idols—having been reminded of the angelic hierarchy by a thousand golden idols. Actually, when he later reclaimed this report for the *Historia de Japam*, he edited out the part referring to angels. Even in the revised manuscript, however, his fascination with the thousand Buddhist statues in *Sanjusangen-do* is palpable. He even wrote that “to look over this amazingly many statues is something extremely impressive.”³⁶

At *Chion-in*, Fróis and his colleague Gaspar Viela heard the homily given by a high-ranking Buddhist priest. They were rather curious to see how the Buddhist priests preached to the faithful. At first, Fróis and Viela were embarrassed, because they had to endure a long Buddhist ritual and prayer before receiving the homily. Nonetheless, Fróis’s observation was still detailed. He wrote that during the ritual, the entire congregation knelt on the floor and prayed to *Amida Buddha* for more than half an hour with an utmost attitude of piety and reverence. Then, with the sound of a gong, the congregation chanted “*Namu Amida but (Namuamidabutsu)*” with ecstatic voices, and some of them even had tears in their eyes.³⁷ Finally, the preacher appeared; he was about 45 years old and had a beautiful face and an attractive manner. His voice, his maturity, the gentleness of his words and bodily expression, and the actions he demonstrated during his homily were, for Fróis, quite noteworthy. His homily was so well delivered that those who were listening were amazed by his technique and his way of proceeding.³⁸

2) (Re)action: Comparing Japanese Rites to Catholicism

More than 20 years after the first experience of the temples in Kyoto, Fróis—by now a veteran missionary—penned a treatise comparing Japanese and European cultures. By this time, he had seen many other Japanese temples, sacred sites, and religious rituals. Between the earlier reports discussed above and the treatise, there is a sharp contrast in writing style. In their early reports on Japanese art, Fróis and his colleagues tended to use inflated adjectives such as “very fine,” “grand,” “extraordinary,” and “perfect.” In contrast, in his treatise on cultural comparison, Fróis adopted a systematic, itemized style; its overall tone is detached and objective, and there is no extended display of the superlatives seen in his reports or the *Historia de Japam*.

The treatise consists of 14 short chapters. It compares the Japanese and European cultures on broad topics such as people and their costume, children’s behavior, religions, art, drama, food, the conduct of war, medicine, and buildings. Fróis began the chapter on “temples, pictures, and the things regarding the cult and religion” as follows:

1. Our churches are long and narrow; the Japanese temples are wide and short.
2. Ours [Christian churches] have high choirs, and there are benches or chairs to sit down; the Buddhist priests pray before their altar sitting on *tatamis* [*tatami*, the Japanese straw mat].³⁹

On religious images, he wrote:

5. Our pictures are mostly painted altarpieces; in the temples of Buddhists, they are all graven images.
6. We use multiple colors for painting; they paint their statues gold.
7. Ours all come in human heights; some of theirs are so tall, they look like giants.⁴⁰

In item 8, Fróis reveals his judgment on religious images:

8. Ours are beautiful and lead to devotion; theirs are terrible and fearsome, with figures of demons burning in fire.⁴¹

The chapter goes on to the 30th item in this way; Fróis’s observations are acute at times, but at other times, his understanding is wanting. Throughout the treatise, he maintains an objective tone, but occasionally he inserts his own value judgments, thus painting a picture of Japanese religions as corrupt and conceited:

25. With us, someone who changes religious faith is considered an apostate and renegade; in Japan, one changes one's own without any shame, every time he wishes.⁴²
30. Our prelate travels on a mule; a Japanese prelate on a sedan chair.⁴³

As far as this treatise is concerned, it appears that Fróis's long-term reaction to Japanese religions tended to be negative. At one time he had had very positive impressions of Buddhist art and rituals, but those positive feelings seemed to have subsided. Matsuda has commented that the style of the cultural comparison treatise is too detached to be by the same author of the *Historia de Japam*⁴⁴; on this point, however, J. F. Schütte has shown that there is enough evidence to determine Fróis's authorship of the treatise.⁴⁵ The uncharacteristically detached tone of the text is understandable, if the treatise had been meant to serve apologetic purposes—especially for the use of missionaries, who preached to the Japanese about the superiority of Christianity over Buddhism. The format of comparison was effective for this purpose, since it allowed Fróis to present his readers with an analysis of wide-ranging material.

3) Thought: The Jesuit Inspector's Summary

Alessandro Valignano completed his *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón* in 1583. In that work, the inspector of the Japan mission stated his assessment of matters regarding Japanese customs and religions; he also delineated a concrete mission principle as to how to deal with the Japanese. As noted earlier, scholars believe that in writing *Sumario*, Valignano relied not only on his own experiences with life in Japan, but also on information from Fróis and other missionaries. In that sense, its chapters regarding local religions and people's *habitus* can be considered a summary of accumulated Jesuit experience in Japan.

In *Sumario*, Valignano argues for the advantages of a mission method that was respectful of local customs. He also advocated for the education of native clergy. He acknowledged that the Japanese possessed superior manners and customs; at the same time, however, he claimed that the teachings of Buddhist priests and their idolatry had contaminated the good nature of the people.⁴⁶ Valignano made the point that there were huge differences between the Japanese and the Europeans, including their likes and dislikes with respect to certain foods, colors, and music. He writes:

The seventh reasons is because it is so big and so natural the contradiction or divergence between the Japanese and all other nations in the lifestyle, in the food, in the way of relating with each other, in the language, and in all other things, even in the natural senses, as previously said, that there is the need of much grace of Our Lord, with great care of the Superiors, in order to get them united,

especially due to the fact that the Japanese are so careful and assiduous to their customs, and the peoples of Europe are so difficult to become accustomed to their things.⁴⁷

He argues further, that in order to maintain unity between Japanese and Europeans, the Europeans must accommodate local customs. By doing so, he reasons, the Japan mission would be more fruitful than those anywhere else, because “the Japanese are by nature much inclined towards religion and reverence, and they obey much to the clergy.”⁴⁸

The 17th chapter of *Sumario* deals with religious *habitus*. In the beginning of the chapter, he writes,

Their vocation and inclination towards religion, even though they are gentiles, is so great in them that there are numerous Buddhist priests, as previously said, in all sects and congregations. These sects and congregations have all attained the highest of dignities, as previously said, due to the profound veneration and inclination that the Japanese possess toward religion, and the same [attitude] we see, by experience, toward our own [religion].⁴⁹

He also recognized that the Japanese youth were particularly apt for living religious lives. He assessed their potential as follows: “once the true spirit inhabits their hearts, as previously said, they demonstrate superior disposition than ours, for we require a lot of effort to reach what they have naturally.”⁵⁰ Valignano also related the value of Japanese liturgical *habitus* to the prosperity of Buddhism and wrote:

The Buddhist priests have led all their sects in such a prudent way, and with such an order, that they managed to attain supreme authority and dignity among the Japanese, building so many and so big universities, and so magnificent temples and monasteries, and attaining such high revenues, that they have come to possess the best of all there is in Japan.⁵¹

What is especially interesting in his remarks is that Valignano considered the quality of liturgical *habitus* independent from religious adherence. In other words, whether one were Buddhist or Christian, his or her disposition for faith would be compatible. In this sense, the liturgical *habitus* crossed boundaries for Valignano. The Visitor advocated the ordination of the Japanese, partly because he believed that the native *habitus* would be valuable when people converted to Christianity, and some Christian converts would be even more pious than the Europeans.

II. Analysis

As far as we have seen, the dynamics of the Jesuit understanding of Japanese religions involved aesthetic appreciation, dogmatic reaction, and the interpretation of *habitus*. The missionaries found the Buddhist edifices magnificent and were deeply impressed by the number of learned priests and pious believers. Although other contemporary Jesuit reports are beyond the scope of this study, many of them concur on the aesthetic appeal of Japanese tradition. Fróis's personality and style contrasted sharply with Valignano's; the former was passionate and inclined to exaggerate his experience, while the latter was more logical and speculative.⁵² Nonetheless, in the quotations provided above, even Valignano appears to have been moved by the cultural achievements of the Japanese and by the local population's utmost reverence for Buddhist clergy. Their appreciation of Japanese tradition extended beyond the explicit features of Buddhist art to include the people's inner disposition.

After his experience of living in Japan, Fróis engaged in the project of comparing Japanese and European cultures. Those comparisons provided him with an effective tool to explain Japanese culture to other Europeans. However, his initial acceptance of the aesthetic aspect of the local tradition turned to a rejection of pagan rites. The missionaries' general reaction to Buddhist art was not unlike that of other Christians to local cultures in many other places to which they traveled: they rejected the graven images as idols and condemned the "corrupt" morals of non-Christian societies. Still, the act of comparison as such was a detached and objective process of learning that certainly helped the missionaries deepen their understanding of the Other.

Finally, Valignano fashioned an innovative mission principle that respected and accommodated local traditions. It is possible that the Jesuit inspector refrained from ordering the wholesale destruction of Buddhism simply because he was open to the aesthetic quality of Buddhist art. To be sure, the Catholic Church's approach to other religions was much different in India, where Valignano also served as an inspector.⁵³ Much has been said about his mission principle of cultural adaptation in Japan, but more scholarly attention could be paid to the whole process and dynamics inherent in his interpretations of Japanese people and culture. What was special about his stay in Japan was that he could experience the radiant local tradition as it was, undisturbed by destructive colonialist powers. He recognized that the creative source of Buddhist art was the people's piety, and he came to believe that once these people became Christians, they would build beautiful churches in place of pagan temples.

Thus far, I have discussed interactions between European Christian missionaries and the "gentiles" in Japan. In view of the larger context of global mission history, here, I would like to raise two issues for further discussion. One of the issues relates to the outcome of the early Jesuit mission in Japan and the impact of the iconoclastic

imperative on Japanese converts. The other issue relates to the difference in Jesuit approaches toward local culture, depending on the regions in which they worked.

Despite Valignano's mission policy—which was innovative, in that it promoted cultural accommodation—the early Catholic mission works in Japan ended in disappointment. Having witnessed a rapid Church expansion for decades, in the late sixteenth century, the Japanese authorities—as they finally emerged from a long period of domestic war and unified the country—implemented an anti-Christian policy. Then, in the early seventeenth century, the central government run by the Tokugawa Shoguns expelled all the Christian missionaries and banned Christianity throughout the country. The xenophobic attitude of the Tokugawa culminated in Japan's "closed country" policy in 1639, resulting in a withdrawal from all European trade, with the exception of that with the Dutch East India Company. The possession of Western products, including books and art, was strictly prohibited.⁵⁴ Also, it is important to note that even when the missionaries were allowed to preach and evangelize freely, the education of Japanese clergy was not the easy success Valignano had predicted. Problems stemmed mostly from cultural differences in pedagogy and learning, as well as the difficulties experienced by Japanese seminarians in learning Latin and Western culture. In 1601, more than 20 years after the establishment of a local seminary, the first four Japanese priests were ordained. Of those, three were Japanese Jesuits who had been sent to Europe as members of the Japanese embassy to Rome.⁵⁵

One of the catalysts behind Japan's "closed country" policy and its extreme rejection of Westerners was its fear of colonial conquerors. The authorities suspected that the Spaniards had an interest in colonizing the island of Japan, as had been seen in their conquest of the Philippines. Also, Japanese rulers came to consider Japanese Christians to be a dangerous religious sect that could eventually threaten the ruling authorities. Some Japanese converts to Christianity disturbed the balance of local community life by acting violently against non-Christians. There was a series of adverse incidents, especially in the southern island of Kyushu, where a group of Japanese Christians attacked temples and monks and burned down their buildings and statues.⁵⁶

In the Japan mission documents reviewed above, the destruction of pagan idols was not considered a Christian obligation.⁵⁷ Especially in the first document written by Fróis, it is clear that the Jesuit was fully enjoying his visit to Buddhist temples, feasting his eyes on the beautiful buildings and gardens found there. Nonetheless, the missionaries encouraged Japanese Christians to destroy all religious images that they had previously used in worship. Any appreciation of Buddhist art was in conflict with what they assumed to be the orthodox Christian attitude toward non-Christian religions.

The mission histories of other parts of the world seem to reveal that, besides formal disagreements in terms of doctrine, there were at least two major causes for tension in the relationship between Christians and non-Christians: intrusions by

political/military powers and Christians' aggressive rejection of non-Christian images. Tzvetan Todorov illustrates in *The Conquest of America* how the Spanish conqueror Hernando Cortés attacked and destroyed the Aztec kingdom, despite the fact that he had fully recognized the brilliant accomplishments of Aztec culture.⁵⁸ Todorov remarks that when Cortés made a comparison between Spanish and Aztec cities, "the comparison was always in Mexico's favor."⁵⁹ In Todorov's view, Cortés was able to recognize the external beauty of the local culture, but he did not see the beauty of the people who had created them.⁶⁰ We could also say that colonial greed had ruined Cortés's primary experience with Aztec cities; the sight of the prosperous Aztec cities only fueled the motivation of the colonial conquerors to plunder and annihilate Others' cultures, rather than preserve them.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have outlined the process by which Christian missionaries interpreted Japanese Buddhism in the sixteenth century, in view of three interrelated stages: aesthetic impact (feeling), action, and thought. As for feeling, the Jesuits were deeply impressed by the liturgical *habitus* of the Japanese—especially the people's natural disposition and their achievements in creating magnificent edifices for worship. In terms of action, however, the missionaries reacted negatively to Buddhist art, rejecting it as consisting of pagan graven images. Then, summarizing that positive feeling and negative reaction, Valignano developed the assertion that the Japanese were the people best inclined to religious matters. The missionaries did not allow the Japanese converts to keep their old Buddhist statues, but they did want Japanese Christians to preserve their inclination toward worship.

Particularly with regards to the issue of the graven images, I would like to mention that the issue of idolatry is still poignant in and pertinent to inter-religious dialogues today. In my view, even in today's situations, most Christians' reactions to non-Christian religious images are similar to those of the early modern missionaries. As was the case in the sixteenth century, today, many Christians first encounter other religions in terms of their religious images, architecture, music, and liturgies. To facilitate fruitful inter-religious dialogue in practical, everyday circumstances, we would need a new Christian theology of art that fully accounts for our experience of beautiful things created by non-Christians.

This case study based on Jesuit documents from early modern Japan highlights the significance of aesthetic impact in the process of developing cross-cultural and inter-religious learning. Aesthetic openness is crucial for the Self in appreciating and loving the beauty of the Other. Comparisons contribute to the process by providing a tool by which one can deepen his or her knowledge of the Other, as well as that of the Self. Also, it has been considered that the presented case in Japan could have been an isolated

case, and that the same issues may not apply to cases where other elements—such as economic interests, an iconoclastic imperative, or racial/cultural prejudices—have overshadowed the “middle ground” where cross-cultural and inter-religious interactions otherwise take place.

It is very important to note here that our feelings, actions, and thoughts are bound to contexts. From a historical point of view, the case in Japan was probably one of the happier cross-cultural encounters, in that both parties interacted with each other peacefully and equally, without succumbing to the use of force. It seems to me that the most important lesson to take away from this particularly exemplary history is that, like Paul among the Athenians, the Jesuits in Japan recognized the Japanese as being very devout. Through their direct experience with Buddhist art and practices, the missionaries gained new insights: that the liturgical *habitus* could cross boundaries that the disposition toward the sacred is something God has planted in all human beings, and that each person’s refined *habitus* should be acknowledged on equal terms, regardless of the nature of their religious adherence.

Notes

¹ Here, by “early modern period,” I mean the 16th and 17th centuries.

² One of the most recent reflections on historical inter-religious and comparative learning is Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 24–40.

³ Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

⁴ Nicolas Standaert, “Christianity in Late Ming and Early Qing China as a Case of Cultural Transmission,” in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, eds. Stephen Uhalley, Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 83.

⁵ Urs Bitterli recognizes three models regarding historical contacts among cultures: contacts, collisions, and relationships. Relationships are rare occurrences, and there are examples in 16th- and 17th-century China and Japan, as well as on the west coast of Africa. *Cultures in Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), 40.

⁶ Shinto and Buddhism were the two major religions of 16th- and 17th-century Japan. Shinto is the native Japanese religion, and in those days Buddhist and Shinto practices co-existed in people’s daily lives; hence, most Japanese attended both Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines.

⁷ Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón (1583), Adiciones del Sumario de Japón (1592)*, vol. 1, ed. J. L. Alvarez-Taladriz (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1954), 204.

⁸ Francis X. Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7–12.

⁹ Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi, *Living Beauty: The Art of Liturgy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 78–86.

¹⁰ Vincent G. Potter, *Charles S. Peirce: On Norms & Ideals* (Worcester: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 19–21.

¹¹ Its critical edition is as follows: Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, ed. José Wicki, vol. 2 (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1981). Subsequent references to this work are denoted as *HJ*.

¹² Luís Fróis, “Tratado em que se contem muito susintae abreviadamente algumas contradições e diferenças de costumes antre a gente de Europa e esta provincia de Japão.” Critical edition of this treatise is: *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan (1585)*, ed. and trans. Josef Franz Schütte (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1955).

¹³ Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón (1583)*.

¹⁴ On the medieval idea of *habitus*, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 50–55. For a summary of the history of *habitus*, see Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, expanded paperback edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15–46. For a sociological understanding of *habitus*, see Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, *Habitus*, Practices,” in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–65.

¹⁵ Alejandro Garcia-Rivera and Thomas Scirghi, *Living Beauty*, 108–9.

¹⁶ Acts 17:22 (NAB).

¹⁷ Garcia-Rivera and Scirghi, 79. Also see Clooney’s reference to Acts 17 in *Comparative Theology*, 25.

¹⁸ Acts 17:22.

¹⁹ Acts 17:24.

²⁰ Acts 17:26–7.

²¹ Acts 17: 31.

²² Vincent G. Potter, Charles S. Peirce, *On Norms and Ideals* (Worcester: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), 19. For Peirce, philosophy consisted of phenomenology (perception), normative sciences, and metaphysics. Potter, 8.

²³ On Fróis's biography, see Schütte's introduction to *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan*, esp. 10–9. See also the section on sources in Haruko Nawata Ward, *Women Religious Leaders in Japan's Christian Century, 1549–1650* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 17–28.

²⁴ I referred to the printed version of his report, published as a part of *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreverão dos Reynos de Japão & China...*, vol. 1 (Evora: Manoel de Lyra, 1598), 177–81. Facsimile edition of *Cartas* has been published from the Tenri University Library (Tenri, 1972).

²⁵ See note 11.

²⁶ Schütte's *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan* introduces the original text with a German translation. There is also a French translation of the treatise with a brief preface by Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Européens & Japonais: traité sur les contradictions & différences de mœurs* (Paris: Chandeigne, 1998).

²⁷ Kiichi Matsuda, *Fróis no Nihon Oboe-gaki* (Tokyo: Chuo-koron-sha, 1983), 12.

²⁸ For a short review of the life of Valignano, see Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542–1742* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 32–46. For in-depth studies of his mission strategy, see Joseph F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Schütte, *Valignano's Mission Principles for Japan*, vol. 1: parts 1 and 2 (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980–1985).

²⁹ See note 7.

³⁰ Matsuda, *Fróis no Nihon Oboe-gaki*, 10

³¹ Fróis, *HJ*, vol. 2, 20. I would like to thank Fr. Luis Ferreira do Amaral, SJ, for kindly helping me with the translation of Portuguese and Spanish texts quoted in this paper.

³² On the Roman editors who “cut out so ruthlessly” Fróis's praise of pagan temples, see Charles Ralf Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549–1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 49.

³³ *HJ*, vol. 2, 22–3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁵ *Cartas*, vol. 1, 180–180v.

³⁶ *HJ*, vol. 2, 22.

³⁷ *Namuamidabutsu* is the chant central to Pure Land worship. It means, “I trust myself to the infinite compassion of Amida Buddha.” *Ibid.*, 30–1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ Schütte, *Kulturgegensätze Europa-Japan*, 162.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴⁴ Matsuda, *Fróis no Nihon Oboe-gaki*, 11.

⁴⁵ Schütte, “Einleitung” in *Kulturgegensätze*, 3–10.

⁴⁶ Valignano, *Sumario*, 25.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136–7.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 204.

⁵¹ Ibid., 205–6.

⁵² Valignano remarked on Fróis’s writing in the annual report of 1587: “And since the said father [Fróis] is much inclined to describe things fully and at length, and be careless about checking whether or not everything he says is true, and in choosing what to put down or not, it did not seem to be that I could simply forward the said letters without alteration.” See Moran, 35–6. Today, we are able to visit the same temples in Kyoto as Fróis did. We can see that his observation was accurate, although he sometimes misunderstood the meaning of Buddhist iconography *vis-à-vis* the statues and other art objects held there.

⁵³ The traditional approach of the Church toward pagan temples was a mixture of preservation and destruction. In the sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great wrote about Anglo-Saxon temples in England thus: “The temples of idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed: but let the idols that are in them be destroyed....” Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 123. As to the situation in India in the sixteenth century, the ecclesiastical council in Goa made it clear that “all heathen temples in Portuguese-controlled territory should be demolished.” C. R. Boxer, “A Note on Portuguese Missionary Methods in the Far East,” in *Christianity and Missions: 1450–1800*, ed. J. S. Cummins (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), 79. In comparison to the destruction of Hindu temples in India, in Japan and China, the Jesuits’ approach to non-Christian images was much more tolerant and respectful of the local faith traditions. On the comparison of India and Japan missions with regards to the question of idolatry, see Masakazu Asami, *Kirishitan-jidai no Guzo-suhai* (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 2009), chapter 2.

⁵⁴ On Japan’s *sakoku* (closed country) policy, see Boxer, *Christian Century in Japan*, 308–97. John Whitney Hall, ed. *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5–6 and 368–72.

⁵⁵ Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits*, 161–77.

⁵⁶ Hirokazu Shimizu, *Shokuho-seiken to Kirishitan* (Tokyo: Iwata Shoten, 2002), 171–5.

⁵⁷ In some parts of China, the destruction of non-Christian devotional objects (mostly statues) was an imperative that was made part of the process of receiving baptism. Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 316.

⁵⁸ Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

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