

**Asami Masakazu** 浅見雅一. **Gaisetsu Kirishitan-shi** 『概説キリシタン史』. Tokyo, Keio Gijuku Daigaku Shuppan-kai 慶応義塾大学出版会, 2016, 228 p.

---

José Miguel Pinto dos Santos<sup>1</sup>  
CHAM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

The history of Japan is a fascinating subject. Change, reformation and revolution in politics, religion, war, trade, the sciences and the arts are a constant throughout its successive ages. Successes and dramas color and make each period peculiar and give it an interest of its own. Nonetheless, of all stretches of time, the one when transience and impermanence are more keenly felt, and when more abrupt and drastic changes occurred in all the above mentioned six fields, is certainly the one spanning from the introduction of Christianity in 1549 to the closing of the country in 1639, which has come to be known as the “Christian Century.”

*Gaisetsu Kirishitan-shi* is arguably one of the best books ever published concerning this historical period focusing on Christianity, its introduction, expansion and prohibition in Japan. Although written at an introductory level, it provides deep insights into several convoluted issues. The work is composed of an introductory chapter on the sources available for research in this field, followed by four chapters presenting a wide variety of issues arranged under the broad themes of “Japan and the age of maritime discoveries”, “Valignano and adaptation”, “Jesuit education and missionization”, and “Prohibition, persecution and the martyrs”, and closes with a chapter on the period of concealed Christianity.

The strengths of this work are conceptual precision, analytical rigor, deepness of insight, expositional simplicity and thematic inclusiveness. Both beginner and specialist will greatly profit from studying it, one to build a global overview of the entire period and of its most relevant historiographical themes, the other to gain new insights into his own area of interest and to acquire a new understanding of how it connects with other *sengoku-jidai* issues.

Three topics seem to be especially well developed in this book. One is the analysis of the evolving relation between the Jesuits and the holders of political power in Japan, from the Ōuchi to the Tokugawa. Nagasaki as a Jesuit administered territory, the nature of the Jesuit participation in the Macao – Nagasaki trade, the evolution of Hideoshi’s policies

1 ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7278-4313>

toward Christianity, and the Korea campaign are some of the topics where the author is at his best.

Another is the examination of the educational and missionary policies of the Jesuits, with a special emphasis on those set by Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), for the Japanese mission. The establishment of Jesuit schools, the *seminário* and the *colégio*, the importance of language training, Latin and Japanese, in the Jesuit educational scheme in Japan, the role played by the Christian mission press, the questions surrounding the ordination of the Japanese, and the discussions arising in the Japanese mission concerning several cases of conscience are some of the issues examined.

The third is the analysis of the gradual construction of the anti-Christian policy of the Tokugawa shogunate and its consequences. How this policy evolved, how it was restrained by the desire to keep open the trading relations Japan had nurtured until then, how persecution was enforced and how the faithful prepared for and reacted to it, the Shimabara uprising and how this revolt sealed the closing of the country are some of the questions discussed.

The two pages that had the greatest impact on this reviewer, and where the author's mastery of detail and deepness of insight are in clear display, are dedicated to the discussion of the presumed use by Francis Xavier (1506-1502) of *Dainichi*, the "Great Illuminator" or the "Great Sun", the name of a Shingon deity, for designating the Christian personal God (pp. 44-45). Xavier had been deceived into using this word by Yajiro, his ignoramus interpreter, who had no deep understanding of either Shingon or Christianity. Once he discovered the mistake, Xavier repudiated the term and started using the Latin word *Deus*. Georg Schurhammer (1882-1971), who first constructed this narrative, and presented it in a short book published in 1928, evaluated this as a misstep of the early Christian mission in Japan, a view that has been held since then by several generations of scholars, including this reviewer. The author remarks that the only basis for this interpretation is a letter, written in Macao almost seventy years after the event, dated Christmas day of 1618, by Camilo Constâncio (1571-1623). The fact is that Xavier never mentions this issue in his letters and that Luis Fróis (1532-1597) gives a very different account of it in his *História de Japam*. According to the latter, Xavier was once questioned by some "creditworthy and reputable" bonzes, during a visit to Ōuchi Yoshitaka 大内義隆 (1507-1551), the lord of Yamaguchi, about the nature of *Deus*. After hearing Xavier say that *Deus* had no figure or color, but was pure substance, that He is apart from all material elements and Creator of everything, without beginning and without end, those bonzes became very happy and said that His attributes were similar to those of *Dainichi* and that the Padre's doctrine was similar to theirs, even if their language and customs were different. Some days later, goes on Fróis, Xavier, becoming suspicious of their "joy and satisfaction," decided to test the identity between *Deus* and *Dainichi*, established by the bonzes, and questioned them about the Trinity, the relations existing between the Three Persons, and the incarnation of the Son and His death on a cross to save humankind. As their reaction was surprise and laughter, Xavier became aware that their sect, similarly to all Japanese sects, "had been founded

by the demon on many abominations," and told brother Fernandes "to preach through the streets [to the people] not to adore *Dainichi* or think that he is God." It is no small irony that the erroneous association between *Deus* and *Dainichi* was made, according to the earliest documentary evidence available, not by an unlearned young samurai, but by a commission of erudite men of religion. That the blame for this mistake has long been attributed by later day knowledgeable scholars, not to the lettered men in clerical robes, but to the young uneducated samurai, seems not only natural but also to fit a pattern. The author also draws attention to the fact that the use of *Dainichi* by the Japanese Christians would constitute another instance of *honchi-suijaku* 「本地垂迹」, where the Christian *Deus* would be the real ground and *Dainichi* his trace made apparent in Japan, and that its supposed repudiation by Xavier would signal the early rejection of *honchi-suijaku* by the Church. Although the denial of *Dainichi* would cause confusion to many in his small flock, even cost the desertion by some, it shows that a superficial conversion of the Japanese would not be the objective of Xavier and his brother Jesuits. It would also make clear to non-Christians that Christianity was not simply a new trace of their ancestral religion, and that the Christian God would not assume a Japanese appearance during the Christian Century.

Another very interesting and important section of this work deals with the policy of gradual evangelization adopted by the Mission in Japan since its early days (pp. 56-59). This approach consisted in the missionaries preaching to all Japanese, irrespective of their disposition towards a possible conversion, some basic tenets of the faith, while reserving the teaching of the more profound truths to those who had accepted those basic tenets and showed willingness to be baptized. It was applied from the start by Xavier, and was put in practice throughout the Christian century with very slight variations to the scheme presented by Fróis, in a letter written from the Miyako in 1565, dividing the missionary message into seven parts: 1. *Deus* as creator; 2. The immortality of the soul; 3. A confutation of the various Japanese sects; 4. The creation of the world, the fall of Lucifer, the original sin by Adam and Eve; 5. The birth of Christ and the mysteries concerning his person; 6. The last judgement; 7. The Ten Commandments, the sacraments, etc. The first three points correspond to the message to be preached to all, as a "preparatory evangelization," while the last four points were to be taught only to those showing willingness to convert. The rationale for this division was to avoid the arousal of needless revulsion and to refrain from giving gratuitous offense to the hearers of the "good news" through the preaching of doctrines that would not be understood by them in a first contact with Christianity, such as the eating the flesh of Christ and drinking his blood in the eucharist, or the proclamation that a dead man in a cross is a God or a savior. This scheme, which was also approved by Alessandro Valignano, and for which there is ample documental evidence, is frequently forgotten nowadays. This is the only explanation this reviewer finds for the proliferation of so many silly theories concerning the Jesuit missionization of Japan, and their publication in peer reviewed journals, that completely ignore the established praxis of the Jesuit evangelization in that country.

The section dealing with the Korea campaigns (pp. 98-106) of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's 豊臣秀吉 (c.1537-1598) is another part of this book that was much appreciated by this reviewer for the new insights provided on the interconnectedness between the Taiko's politicoreligious constructed image, his foreign policy, maritime trade, Japanese military conquest and the Jesuits' missionary efforts and their political missteps in East Asia. Hideyoshi, after subduing the *wako*, considered that the resumption of the tally trade would be the smallest of requitals due to him by the Chinese court. The lack of a positive reply from the Ming to his requests made him decide to conquer the Middle Flowery Country. Further, in Japanese diplomatic documents he started being designated as Child of the Sun 「日輪の子」, an image drawing on the *kanseitei setsu* 「感生帝説」, an imperial theory with a long tradition, and implications, in all East Asian countries, especially in China and Korea. The Edit of Expulsion of 1587 was written with this theory as its basis. In the letter sent in 1591 to the Philippines, through the Christian Gaspar Harada Magoshichirō 原田孫七郎, demanding its submission and tribute, he designates himself as Child of the Sun. Korea, a stepping stone between Japan and China, first refused to pay tribute to Hideyoshi, and then to supply him with advanced troops for the invasion of China. This made its conquest necessary for the concretization of Hideyoshi's plans on China. The author focus is on the first invasion, *bunroku no eki* 「文禄の役」, and its military, political and religious consequences. He presents and analyses with his usual care and acumen the Church's policies regarding the Korean prisoners, the early Jesuit missionary activity in Korea, the controversy surrounding who were the first Korean Christian converts, and the plans of the Jesuits in China to evangelize Korea.

In conclusion: some of those who assiduously follow the recent scholarly trends and publications on *Kirishitan* history not infrequently wonder whether knowledge concerning the basic facts, as they can be found in Japanese and European primary sources, and which should be considered foundational to any research in this field, is still learnt and understood. Those who have experienced this feeling can hardly do any better than recommend the reading and the study of this excellent introductory book to their friends and students.