

# The first Jesuit library in Japan and issues on native clergy formation (1540-1580)

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In 1960, Jesus Lopez-Gay, Jesuit historian, published in that year's issue of *Monumenta Nipponica* the article "La Primera Biblioteca de los Jesuítas en el Japón (1556). Su Contenido y su Influencia" or "The first Jesuit library in Japan (1556). Its contents and influence". Instant classic on the subject, it presented a careful analysis of the books contained in the so-called *Rol do fato que o padre mestre Melchior levou pera o Japão o anno de 1554*<sup>1</sup>, a long list of about 40 titles and more than 100 volumes taken by the Jesuit Melchior Nunes Barreto in his trip from Goa to Japan in mid 1550's.

The purpose of Lopez-Gay's article was, as the author says, "to check exactly the place where the texts brought by the missionaries were printed, printing year etc." Along with this idea he classified the books in 7 groups according to its fields and nature, i.e. "Holy Scriptures", "Holy Fathers and Theology", "Morals and Canons", "Philosophy", "Liturgy", "Spirituality" and "Various". Such classification focused on the contents of the books and their relations with some of the ideas presented in Japan at the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Here I use the version in Juan Ruiz-de-Medina, SJ. *Documentos del Japón 1547-1557*. Instituto Histórico de la Compañía de Jesús, 1990. Pp. 478-488.

In this article I will take a step further following these tracks and try to find out some of the objectives and purposes of this library in Japan. For that matter, first I separated the books in two major groups: practical books and teaching books. Let's take a walk around the library.

Under the label of practical books we have all those that were used in the liturgy and by the missionaries on an everyday basis: Bibles, confession manuals, breviaries, diurnals, psalm books and guides to herbs. But were these the only practical books on the list? In the beginning of the 17th century, Alessandro Valignano, the well-known visitor of the Japanese mission, wrote a long list of supplies that should be sent every year to Japan. Among wines, cheeses, olives and other hard to find items, we can find books which, as Valignano says, are intended to be used by the increasing number of priests that were being ordained in Japan. Crossing the information on Nunes Barreto's list with Valignano's, it is possible to identify practical books that were needed by every single priests, such as bibles, breviaries, diurnals and confession manuals. Beyond these we can also include other two: first, the so called *Suma Silvestrina*, written by Silvestre Mazolini, which was a comprehensive commentary on Thomas Aquinas works and the first openly public critic to Martin Luther; second, the *Meditations*, by Saint Augustine<sup>2</sup>.

It is also interesting to note that Valignano's list points out three other works that don't appear in Nunes Barreto's list simply because they did not exist back in the 1550's. One is referred only by the author's name,

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<sup>2</sup> It is unclear if these *Meditations* are an excerpt or just an alternative name for the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

Friar Luiz de Granada, and can indicate any of his works, like the *Introdução ao Símbolo da Fé* (Introduction to the Symbol of Faith), or the *Livro da Oração e da Meditação* (Book of Prayers and Meditation), or even the famous *Guia de Pecadores* (Sinner's Guide)<sup>3</sup>. The second work is *Vaidade do Mundo* (World's Vanity), by Diego de Estella. The last one was not possible to identify yet, as it is listed only as *Montoya*.

The second category here is the teaching books, or teaching materials. These books are here classified following the analysis done by Jesus Lopez-Gay in his original article, as well as his comments about them. However, unlike the practical books that are chosen for the clerical work's nature and the missionary needs, it is necessary first to analyze the criteria that led the choices of Nunes Barreto when constructing his library before setting sail to Japan.

One of the crucial principles found in the Jesuit thought and speech during mid-16th century was the exemplar model. And the major exemplar model for the Society of Jesus in this time was Loyola's conversion. The images behind the story of the knight who dedicates himself to God were fundamental for the rise of the Jesuits as a military-like order in its activities and organization. The close connection between the founder's biography and the order's history reveals yet the central role played by books in the Jesuit culture. For instance, when the knight Iñigo de Oñez y Loyola retreats to his castle in order to recover from the wound gained on the battlefield against the French, two books instigated him to put the

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<sup>3</sup> Pedro R. Santidrian. *Breve dicionario de pensadores cristãos*. Aparecida, SP: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1991. p. 243.

sword away and follow the steps of the saints. And it is definitely not a coincidence that these two titles can be found on Nunes Barreto's list: *Vita Christi*, written by Ludolph of Saxony, and *Flos Sanctorum*, by Jacobus de Voragine. These are the most essential books in Loyola's personal history and which helped to form the bases of the Jesuit ideology.

Another work that we may find both in Nunes Barreto's list and Loyola's experience is the *Imitatio Christi*, by Tomas de Kempis, a book to which Loyola remained faithful for the rest of his days<sup>4</sup>. In the list it is registered as "the works of Tomas de Kempis", but it most certainly included the *Imitatio*. This book would affect Loyola's interpretation of the Christian philosophy in the exact moment when he was starting to write his *Spiritual Exercises*, in 1522<sup>5</sup>.

A few years later, when studying in the University of Salamanca, Loyola came to know a new form of scholasticism, centered around Thomas Aquinas interpretation of the bible in his *Summa Teologica*<sup>6</sup>. The strength of Aquinas's exegesis inside the Society of Jesus can be identified in the list as we see books like the *4 parts of the Summa Teologica*, the *Summa contra Gentiles* and *Opuscula Divi Thomae*. The Thomism is present also in the formation of many Jesuits who would take part on the Japanese mission afterwards, such as Cosme de Torres, who while in the University of Valencia studied under the guidance of the famous Dr. Calaya

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<sup>4</sup> John W. O'Malley. *Os primeiros jesuítas*. São Leopoldo, RS: Editora UNISINOS; Bauru, SP: EDUSC, 2004. p. 48. [Brazilian Portuguese translation of O'Malley's

<sup>5</sup> Jose Eisenberg. *As missoes Jesuíticas e o pensamento político moderno*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2000. P. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Jose Eisenberg. *Idem*. P. 30.

and Master Peris, authentic Thomists and defenders of Aquinas in that institution<sup>7</sup>.

Besides the correspondence with Ignatius's experience, the list contains work of purely pedagogical nature, real textbooks that were in use in European universities. Here we can detach works like the ones by Franz Titelmans or Tilmans (like *Titalmano Super Cantica*, and *Philosophia de Titalmano*) for their clarity and simplicity; Jean Gagne (listed as *Guanheo in Epistolas Pauli*) by its unpretentious contents, simple language and accessibility, causes of its popularity among Portuguese students graduated in the College of Navarra; last but not least we have the *Concordantiae Bibliorum et Cononum*, by Hugo de Colonia, that was so used in the schools during the 16th century. The great number of didactical books shows us an interesting characteristic of this library, and as we can see by the great amount of books intimately connected to the Jesuit culture, it was more than just religious or catholic teaching, it was Jesuit teaching.

By realizing the great amount of textbooks in the library, we can instantly infer that the purpose of this library was the formation of native clergy in Japan. And beyond that, it is noted that the intellectual content of the library would serve to form not just clergy, but Jesuit clergy. The fact is that, until Xavier's meeting with Japanese in Malacca, he did not believe in priests ordained in Asia and their capability. New members should not be taken in the Company in India unless to perform domestic and administrative functions, as Xavier insists that the rhythm of studies in Asia

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<sup>7</sup> Jesus López-Gay, p. 362.

was too slow<sup>8</sup>. The father-master is quick to criticize Jesuits wannabes in India, saying that many of them knew no better than to read and write.

But in Japan, Xavier changes his mind. He declares that the Japanese Christians seemed to be good enough to perpetuate by themselves the fruit that the Jesuits would attain in life. This opinion diverged from the one he had about the Christians in other parts, where he considers that there would be no way of perpetuating the religion by themselves and it would last only until the Jesuits lasted among them.<sup>9</sup>

But even though that may be considered the final purpose, it does not seem to be the only one. Let's take a look at the Xaverian project to Japan and the precedents of Nunes Barreto's journey to the archipelago.

Melchior Nunes Barreto was born in Oporto in the 1520's. He arrived in India in 1551, carrying letters by Simão Rodrigues indicating him to the rectorship of the Jesuit college in Goa. As we can see in this letter by Xavier to Gaspar Barzeo written in April 1552, the job was extremely important inside the structure of the Jesuit missions as in the Portuguese *padroado*.

*Confiando eu, Francisco [Xavier], (...), de vós, Gaspar [Barzeo], (...), que sejas reitor deste colégio de Santa Fé, assim dos padres e irmãos portugueses da Companhia do nome de Jesus que estiverem do Cabo da Boa Esperança para cá (Goa), assim dos que*

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<sup>8</sup> Ruiz-de-Medina, p. 329.

<sup>9</sup> Xavier to Loyola, letter written in January 12th 1549 in Cochin, in: Felix Zubillaga. *Cartas y escritos de San Francisco Javier*. Madrid: BAC, 1996. Pp. 268 and 269.

*estão em Málaga, Molucas, Japão e em todas as outras partes, assim dos que vierem de Portugal como de outra qualquer parte de Europa a estas partes para estar à minha obediência.*<sup>10</sup>

[Trusting I, Xavier, of thou, Gaspar, to be the rector of this college of the Holy Faith, as of the portuguese priests and brothers of the Company of the name of Jesus who are from the Cape of Good Hope until here (Goa), as of those that are in Malaca, Molucas, Japan and every other part, as of those who come from Portugal as from any other part in Europe to these parts to be under my obedience.]

One can notice that being the rector of the college meant much more: the rector had the powers of a vice-provincial and superior of the missions in India. There is no doubt that the rectorship was one of the key posts in the administration of the Jesuit missions in the East.

But when Nunes Barreto arrives to India as the new rector, he faces resistance by Jesuits of Goa. The problem is that when the former rector Antonio Gomes resigned, the Jesuits chose a new rector, the Italian Paulo de Camerino. Gaspar Barzeo, recently arrived from Ormuz, tell us more about the deadlock in this letter from 1551:

*Vindo de Ormuz, chamado pelo padre mestre Francisco*

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<sup>10</sup> Ruiz-de-Medina, *idem*. p. 337.

*para o Japão, achei aqui o padre micer Paulo [de Camerino] substituído por reitor deste colégio de Goa na desistência do padre Antonio Gomes, que antes fora reitor. E isto por voz de todos os irmãos da casa, sem embargo de ser chegado outro de Portugal pelo padre mestre Simão [Rodrigues] ser provincial, que se chama o padre Melchior Nunes [Barreto]. O qual não quiseram obedecer até vir recuado de Japão o padre mestre Francisco, dizendo-me que esta era a intenção dele, não dar a ninguém cargo até ser experimentado na sua suficiência por algum tempo.<sup>11</sup>*

[Coming from Ormuz, called by father master Francisco to Japan, I found here Master Paulo substituting as rector of this college of Goa on the desistance of father Antonio Gomes, who was previously rector. And that by choice of all the brothers in this house, even though another one (rector) was sent from Portugal by father master Simão Rodrigues as provincial, who is called Melchior Nunes Barreto. To whom they did not want to obey until Father Master Francisco comes back from Japan, telling me that it was his will, to give the post to no one until he was experienced enough for some time.]

The Goan Jesuits refused to accept Nunes Barreto, claiming that the letters he brought were only from Simão Rodrigues, not from the general of

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<sup>11</sup> Ruiz-de-Medina, *idem*, p. 275.

the order, Ignatius de Loyola.

Trying to mend things up until a definitive solution arrives from Rome, Xavier indicates Gaspar Barzeo as the new rector, while Nunes Barreto is sent to be the rector of the college in Baçaim. In 1553 Barzeo passes away, and the rectorship is finally taken by Nunes Barreto, in accordance to instructions left by Xavier. The final solution to this standstill is given by a letter in 1555, when finally a new rector, Baltasar Dias, is indicated by Loyola from Rome.

Amid this situation, Nunes Barreto decides to go to Japan in 1554. But his journey wasn't just to follow the example of Xavier and go preach in distant lands. According to Nunes Barreto himself, beside his will to leave Goa, where he was having an easy life, and follow the example of the Apostle of the Indies, Xavier himself left instructions to Gaspar Barzeo for him to send Barreto to Japan, as we can see in the following excerpt from a letter written in April 1552.

*Eu [Xavier] folgaria mais que fosse mestre Belchior [Melchior Nunes Barreto], por causa de suas letras, porque lá [Japão] seriam melhor empregadas do que são cá [Goa].<sup>12</sup>*

[I (Xavier), would be more pleased if Master Belchior went there (to Japan), for his letters, because there they would be better used than here (Goa).]

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<sup>12</sup> Ruiz-de-Medina, idem, p. 341.

Nunes Barreto also quotes Xavier in one of his own letters to Loyola in 1554, while travelling from Goa to Cochin:

*(...) [Xavier] deixou por escrito ao padre mestre Gaspar [Barzeo], que me enviasse ao Japão, dizendo que minhas letras mais poderiam lá [se] aproveitar [do] que cá, por ser gente que em todas as coisas pede razão.<sup>13</sup>*

[Xavier left written to father master Gaspar Barzeo to send me to Japan, saying that there my letters would be better used than they are here, being the Japanese people who in everything asks for reason.]

But what Nunes Barreto meant with “ser gente que em todas as coisas pede razão?” [Being people who in everything ask for reason]? This seems to be one of the key sentences to understand what took Barreto to sail off to Japan taking a whole library with him.

Jesús López-Gay says that this mission led by Nunes Barreto was scientific, and affirms that the “ask for reason” part indicates that the Japanese when confronted with the Christian doctrine are curious and inquisitive, and it triggered the formation and transport of the library to Japan. In other words, the books would serve as a tool in the conversion of

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<sup>13</sup> Ruiz-de-Medina, idem, p. 446.

the Japanese people in general.

This may be not the only reason for the whole enterprise. One factor that Lopez-Gay didn't take into consideration was one of the most resounding aspects of Xavier's experience in Japan, the philosophical disputes with the Buddhist monks. As far as we can read in his own letters, for Xavier himself the philosophical disputes were an important front in the battle for the Japanese souls, and Jesuits should be prepared to deal with the monks. Writing to Simão Rodrigues and Loyola in January 1552, Xavier clarifies the main points to be observed when choosing and sending new missionaries to Japan:

- 1 the priests coming from Europe would be sent to the so called Japanese universities, and here Xavier uses as an example the Bandou university, as he used to call the Ashikaga Gakkou (足利學校・足利学校), a medieval monastery located in the city of Ashikaga, eastern Japan.
- 2 They needed to be experienced in hard works, as they would have to deal with persecutions done by the monks.
- 3 They would face extremely harsh and cold weather conditions, and would have little to eat, so Xavier suggests Germans and Flemish from the colleges in Spain and Italy, as they are well-built and fluent in Portuguese or Spanish.
- 4 Must not be too old, because of the physical difficulties, or too young, for the temptations in a far land.
- 5 Finally, they needed to be well-trained in arts and sophistry,

that is to say, Philosophy and Dialectics. For Xavier, it was crucial that these priests should be able to get the monks in contradiction, as they get really ashamed when they don't know how to reply to the Jesuits.

In opposition to the priests coming from Europe, priests and brothers that already were in Asia should be sent to the Jesuit house in Yamaguchi, southern Japan, where they would study the language and Buddhist philosophy. By doing so, when the priests came from Europe, these priests and brothers would be able to act as interpreters during the disputes with the monks.

Xavier created this formula, which we may call the pair of missionaries' model, where one well-educated European priest pairs with a well-trained priest or brother interpreter, based on his own and his colleagues' experiences on the disputes with the monks until he learns the Japanese language well enough to be able to work on his own. These philosophical arguments are an attempt to convert the monks to the Christian faith through rational conviction. This makes the Xaverian formula perfectly consonant with the Aquinas' teachings, according to whom the believer must be inducted to faith, not through coercion but through persuasion<sup>14</sup>.

Convincing and converting the monks to the Christian faith would have a direct impact on the missionary work in the whole archipelago according to Xavier, who believes that all monks in Japan go to universities

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<sup>14</sup> Angel Santos Hernández, SJ. *Las misiones bajo el patronato portugues (I)*. Madrid: Publicaciones de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 1977, pp. 105-6.

like Bandou to study, so they can transmit everything in their homelands when they go back. Xavier tells Loyola that the “(...) seculars excuse their mistakes claiming that they also have their scholars and letters, and that they justify their acts”. So, the conversion of these monks would have a great impact on the population because, first, it would take their excuses to live in sin and second, it would spread the knowledge that they live in sin throughout Japan. It means that the Buddhist monasteries would serve as centers of expansion for the Christian ideology. The work of the missionaries and its expansion would depend on this intellectual war, where the soldiers of Christ should be well-prepared in order to accomplish their mission. In Xavier’s eyes, the Jesuits should use these pre-existing religious Japanese organizations to conquer more souls for the Christianity.

As an example of this method’s application, we can see Luís de Almeida in October 1562, one decade after Xavier’s death, trying to convert some of the main monks in Kagoshima:

*“(...) Para ver se, tendo alguma entrada com elles e procurando introduzi-los à verdade, a poderia tambem ter com o povo, que tão sugeito lhe está em tudo, que hé couza de admiração”<sup>15</sup>*

[To see if, having some communication with them and trying to bring them to the truth, I could have some with the people

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<sup>15</sup> Luís Fróis (ed. Joseph Wicki, SJ). *Historia de Japam*. Lisboa: Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1976. Vol I, p. 216.

too, who is so amazingly subdued to them.]

As far as 1574, we still have Luís Fróis and Organtino Gneccchi-Soldo, who by that time were living in Kyoto, trying to know better the Buddhist doctrine so it would be “easier to confuse the monks with the text of their own writings”<sup>16</sup>. So we can still see examples of the Xavier model being applied as late as late 1570’s, when the adaptation model defended by Valignano takes place as the hegemonic missionary model in Japan.<sup>17</sup>

Xavier reports a successful example in a letter dated as 1552 written to the Jesuits in Europe. This success certainly influenced his formula. Xavier tells us that while in Yamaguchi he converted a monk who studied many years in Bando, who was seen as a wise man and respected by the people of the city. His conversion served as a pretext for other Japanese to embrace Christianity, as well as a legitimizing case to the already existent small Christian group.<sup>18</sup>

In Xavier’s plans, the Jesuits’ house in Yamaguchi becomes a centre for adaptation to those who came from Europe and a training center for interpreters. For that to happen it was needed a certain number of tools that would be used to train the brothers and priests in Japan to be able to translate faithfully everything that they were told. As we saw before, they would work with highly educated priests from Europe, so they should be

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<sup>16</sup> Rui Manuel Loureiro. *Na Companhia dos Livros*. Macau: Universidade de Macau, 2007 and Fróis Vol II, p. 408.

<sup>17</sup> Rui Manuel Loureiro, *idem*, p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> Ruiz-de-Medina, *idem*, pp. 313.

familiar with the newest philosophical trends and all the profundity that these priests would bring to discuss with the Buddhist monks. Finally the library brought by Nunes Barreto seems to attend the needs of the mission, so now we have a purpose of bringing these books to Japan.

Through these books, Japanese, European, Euro-Asian and Japanese brothers and priests would have the necessary tools to study the Christian philosophy in the middle of a Counter-Reform process and new challenges found during the overseas expansion. So we can also understand the reason behind the authentically Jesuit nature of the library<sup>19</sup>, as the missionaries coming from Europe would be from none other order than the Jesuits. Shielded by the *unum ovile et unum pastor* ideal (that is to say, one flock, one shepherd), which guided the missionary work on lands far out of the royal influence sphere, there was no need to train interpreters and new priests in any other way than the Jesuit way.

The library was then one of the main tools for the Jesuit mission to update their knowledge, train new members and new interpreters for the mission. It was certainly one of the strongest weapons the priests had in the Far East on the war with the monks for the Japanese souls.

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<sup>19</sup> “Al fijarnos en los volúmenes de esta sección de ‘espiritualidad’, lo primero que nos sorprende es ver lo auténticamente Jesuíticos que son muchos de ellos. Bastantes libros, están íntimamente relacionados con aquellos hombres que formaron el espíritu de la Compañía”. Jesus López-Gay, *idem*, p. 372.