
This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

González-Bolado, Jaime. «A brief introduction to two unpublished notes about the jesuit mission press in late sixteenth-century Japan». *East Asian Publishing and Society*, Vol. 13 Núm. 1 (2023), p. 37-46. Brill. DOI 10.1163/22106286-12341370

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TWO UNPUBLISHED NOTES ABOUT THE JESUIT MISSION PRESS IN LATE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY JAPAN

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This article presents a few unpublished notes, included in two different Jesuit letters, which provide new details about the Jesuit Mission Press in late sixteenth-century Japan. Information about the problems that the Jesuits faced in the internal administration of the printing press and the tools that they employed to run it can be found in these notes, which may be useful for those interested in the Jesuit Mission Press, and in general, in the history of book-production in Japan.

Printing Press, Japan, Jesuits, Matrices, Giovanni Battista Pesce

1. Introduction

On 21 July 1590 a Portuguese trading ship (*nao*) arrived at Nagasaki Bay. Among its cargo there was a printing press, which the Father Visitor of the Jesuit Order in Japan, Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), had brought with him from Europe. This printing press was used by the members of the Society of Jesus to produce, a large body of printed publications collectively known as *kirishitanban* キリシタン版 between 1591 and 1614.² The importance of these publications as essential linguistic tools, for both the missionaries and their Japanese pupils, and as a vehicle for the transmission of European culture in Japan has attracted the interest of scholars in a number of fields: the history of literature, theology, historical linguistics, cultural history, etc. Thus, there exists a wide range of scholarship analyzing the publishing endeavors of the Jesuit Mission Press, its publications as the realization of a policy of linguistic and cultural translation, or the roles

¹ This research has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement N° 758347).

² *Kirishitan* is the phonetic spelling of the Japanese pronunciation of the Portuguese word for Christian *Cristão*; *-ban* means printed item(s).

played by different Jesuits in the activities of the printing press.³ The two letters presented in this article bring new details about some of these topics to light, and are valuable for the study of the Jesuit printing press in Japan.

The first letter, written by the Father Vice-provincial Pedro Gómez (1535-1600) in 1594, documents one of the major Jesuit concerns during the early years of the printing press in Japan: the absence of an experienced printer. Since 1556, the Society of Jesus had been operating a printing press in India, brought by the patriarch João Nunes Barreto (1517?-1562) and the Bishops of Ethiopia, Andrés de Oviedo (1517/18-1567) and Melchior Carneiro (1516?-1583), who also brought Father João Rodrigues, also known as ‘Bustamante’ (1530-1588).⁴ This João Rodrigues, for more than twenty years, was the only Jesuit in Asia who had been trained in the art of printing. When Valignano landed in Goa in 1587 after his travel to Europe with the Tenshō Embassy 天正の使節, he ordered Rodrigues to move to Macao and spend what proved to be his last eight months

³ Among many others we can list: Ernest M. Satow, *The Jesuit mission press in Japan (1591-1610)* (London: Privately Printed, 1888); Johannes Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko* 吉利支丹文庫: *A Manual of Books and Documents on the Early Christian Mission in Japan, and More Particularly to the Collection at Sophia University* (Tōkyō: Sophia University, 1957); Yoshimi Orii, ‘The Dispersion of Jesuit Books Printed in Japan: Trends in Bibliographical Research and in Intellectual History’, *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2 (2015): 189-207; Johannes Laures, ‘The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan’, *Monumenta Nipponica* 13 (1957): 163-5; Peter F. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Aiko Okamoto-MacPhail, ‘The Jesuit Mission in Japan and History of Rhetoric and Its Languages’, *Literaria Copernicana* 32 no. 4 (2019): 89-104; Pia Jolliffe and Alessandro Bianchi, ‘Jesuit Translation Practices in Sixteenth-Century Japan: *Sanctos no gosagueo no uchi nuqigaqi* and Luis de Granada’, in Jiuen Kiaer *et al.*, eds, *Missionary Translators: Translations of Christian Texts in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2022), 24-57; Joseph K. Yamagiwa, ‘Revisions in the *Rakuyōshū* at the Time of Its Printing in 1598’, *Monumenta Nipponica* 11 (1955): 185-94; Małgorzata Sobczyk, ‘Estrategias de domesticación y extranjerización en la traducción al Japonés de Tratado de la Oración y Meditación’, in Yoshimi Orii and María Jesús Zamora Calvo, eds, *Cruces y Áncoras. La Influencia de Japón y España en un Siglo de Oro Global* (Madrid: Abada Editores: 2020), 159-77; Diego Pacheco, ‘Diogo de Mesquita, S. J. and the Jesuit Mission Press’, *Monumenta Nipponica* 26 (1971): 431-43; Joseph F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 1993); Rui Manuel Loureiro, ‘Alessandro Valignano and the Christian Press in Japan’, *Revista de Cultura* 19 (2006): 134-53.

⁴ Letter from Father Alessandro Valignano to Father Claudio Acquaviva, Macao, 22 September 1589. Josef Wicki and John Gomes, eds, *Documenta Indica XV (1588-1592)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1981), 337. This is not the more famous Father João Rodrigues ‘Tçuzu’ (1561/2-1633/4), who compiled the first Japanese-Portuguese dictionary.

of life teaching what he knew of printing to the lay Brother Giovanni Battista Pesce (1560-1626), who worked as the principal supervisor of the Jesuit press in Japan.⁵ Although Valignano was initially satisfied with Battista's knowledge of the art of printing, he must have realized that eight months were not enough training, so he asked his superiors in Rome to send a properly-trained Father from the Roman College of Printing (*Colegio Romano de estampar*).⁶ This request was not heeded, so Gómez, five years later, asked again for another printer. Gómez's main complaint about Battista was his illiteracy, which allegedly did not allow him to properly organize the workers who operated the printing press.⁷ Owing to the humanistic education that all Jesuits received following their entry into the order (which included training in Latin, Portuguese and other European languages), the 'illiteracy' of Battista probably refers to his inability to read and write Japanese because, as Laures states, unlike most of his co-religionaries he knew very little of the language. As for the workers, the Spanish Jesuit identified them as *negros*.⁸ For nearly four centuries, the Jesuits' attitude to slavery was highly permissive, in that they employed African slaves in their sugar plantations in Spanish and Portuguese America, as well as in domestic servitude there and in Asia.⁹ The letter of Gómez suggests that the Jesuits used slave manpower to run the printing press in Japan together with Japanese attendants and students.

There is another request included in Gómez's letter to the Father Superior General of the Society, Claudio Acquaviva (1543-1615). He asked that the authority for granting licenses to publish books be delegated to the Vice-provincial of Japan (i.e., himself). The rules of the Society of Jesus required that a book to be translated and printed had to be

⁵ Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 9-10.

⁶ Wicki and Gomes, *Documenta Indica XV*, 337.

⁷ Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 19. On the Jesuit schooling system and its curriculum see Okamoto-MacPhail, 'The Jesuit Mission', *Literaria Copernicana*, 97-8.

⁸ The Jesuits used the term *negros* to refer both to slaves and to *cafres* from Southeast Africa and Brazilian Indians. The number of the slaves employed in the Jesuit printing press in Japan is unknown, but it must be lower than the number of Japanese workers. In 1594 there were around 20 Japanese involved, partly in the upkeep of the College of Amakusa, partly in the printing of books: Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 23.

⁹ Charles R. Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion (1440-1770)* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 32. For a study of Portuguese slave trafficking in East Asia and the participation of the Jesuits in it, see Lucio de Sousa, *The Portuguese Slave Trade in Early Modern Japan: Merchants, Jesuits and Japanese, Chinese and Korean Slaves* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

sent first to Rome, and that no translation could be printed without the permission of the Superior General or a member of his office.¹⁰ In 1584, even before the installation of the printing press in Amakusa, Valignano considered that this process was impractical for several reasons.¹¹ He argued that there was a risk of losing the books in shipwrecks during the long journey, that it was useless if the books were in Japanese or Chinese because the inquisitors or members of the Holy Office could not read them, and that the books that were going to be printed in Japan would be devotional, not of great profundity and would not cause scholastic controversies.¹² Although the response that he received from Acquaviva was positive, granting the Vice-provincial of Japan permission to license the translation of books for which approval to publish had already been obtained, this matter was not completely resolved.¹³ According to the words of Gómez, even though he already had the authority to translate and print books without the approval of a third party, the Jesuits in Japan were still waiting for some inquisitor from Europe to examine the books. Also, the letter states that the books produced at least until 1594 were published by bending the rules of the Society (a principle known as *epikeia*), so we can assume that, during the first years of the Jesuit Mission Press, there was not clear juridical authority allowing the Jesuits in Japan to publish texts without submitting the translations to higher authorities within the Society. To settle this issue, among others, Father Gil de la Mata (1543-1599?) was dispatched to Rome where, in 1595, he obtained a papal exemption from the obligation to submit the manuscripts before printing to the offices of the Inquisition in Rome and Goa.¹⁴

¹⁰ Orii, 'The Dispersion of Jesuit Books', 199.

¹¹ By early autumn 1590, a few months after its arrival in Nagasaki, the printing press was sent unpackaged to Katsura in Arima. In May 1591, together with the College and the Seminary, it was moved again to the Amakusa islands. The press was there for six years until the resumption of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's persecution of the Christians, which forced the Jesuits to transfer most of their residences and possessions to Nagasaki in the autumn of 1597. The printing press remained in Nagasaki until 1614 when, together with most of the European missionaries and a significant number of Japanese Christians, it went into exile in Macao. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits*, 153; Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 14.

¹² Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits*, 149. Letter from Alessandro Valignano to Father Claudio Acquaviva, Cochinoçu, 15 December 1584. Josef Wicki and John Gomes, eds. *Documenta Indica XII (1583-1585)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1975), 714-5.

¹³ Orii, 'The Dispersion of Jesuit Books', 200.

¹⁴ Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits*, 149. In February 1592 the First General Consultation of the Japanese Mission was held in Nagasaki. As a result of this meeting, the superiors in Japan chose Gil de la

The second letter presented in this article was written five years after Gómez's. Here, the Rector of the College of Nagasaki, Diogo de Mesquita (1551-1614), informed the Father Superior General Acquaviva about the shipment to Europe of a fragment of the *Guía de Pecadores* so that he could appreciate the quality of the printing produced by the Japanese printing press.¹⁵ The interest of this letter lies in the details that Mesquita offers concerning the tools and materials used in the press. For instance, he stated that due to the use of *washi* 和紙, Japanese hand-made paper, books could not be printed on both sides because the paper was too thin. Regarding the machinery of the printing press, the Portuguese rejoiced because the Jesuit Mission Press had achieved independence from European supplies thanks to the craftsmanship of the Japanese workers (brothers and *dōjiku*), who were able to produce the necessary equipment to run the press.¹⁶ Two members of the Tenshō Embassy, the Japanese Constantino Dourado (1567?-1619/1620) and Jorge de Loyola (1562?-1589), learned during their stay in Lisbon the art of making matrices.¹⁷ This knowledge allowed the Japanese Brothers to produce two thousand matrices and punches of different varieties of Latin types for printing books in European

Mata as Father Procurator to inform the Father Superior General Acquaviva about the state and problems of the mission, one of which was the issue of the printing press. In the summer of 1598, De la Mata came back to Japan with the exemption, although a year later he was lost at sea during another voyage to Europe. More information about the figure of Gil de la Mata is available in Josef Franz Schütte, *Documentos sobre el Japón Conservados en la Colección «Cortes» de la Real Academia de la Historia* (Madrid: Imprenta y Editorial Maestre, 1961), 19-21; Giuseppe Marino, 'Breve Recorrido en la Postrimería del Jesuita Gil de la Mata en la Misión de Japón (siglo XVI)', *Estudios eclesiásticos: Revista de investigación e información teológica y canónica* 89, no. 350 (2014): 499-531.

¹⁵ In 1599 the Jesuits printed in Nagasaki the book *Giyadopekadoru*, a shortened Japanese version of the well-known *Guía de Pecadores* written by the Dominican Luis de Granada (1504-1588) in 1567. This book, which describes the richness of virtue and the path that one must follow to achieve it, was translated by the Japanese Martin Hara マルティン原 (1568?-1629), who met Granada personally during his stay in Lisbon in August 1584. Diego Pacheco, 'Diogo de Mesquita', 440. For an English study of this book see William J. Farge, *The Japanese Translations of the Jesuit Mission Press, 1590-1614: «De imitatione Christi» and «Guía de pecadores»* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

¹⁶ *Dōjiku* or *Dogico* is the European adaptation of a Buddhist term (possibly *Dōjuku* 同塾) which literally means 'under the same roof' and designated the laymen who helped in temples. It could be translated as 'acolyte, sacristan or catechist'. Jesús López Gay, *El Catecumenado en la Misión del Japón del s. XVI* (Rome: Studia Missionalia), 13.

¹⁷ Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 21; Loureiro, 'Alessandro Valignano', 138.

languages and Romanized Japanese, as well as ideographic types for works in *kanji* and phonographic types for *katakana*.¹⁸

2. Documentary Annex

I

FATHER PEDRO GÓMEZ TO FATHER CLAUDIO ACQUAVIVA

Nagasaki, 22 March 1594

Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome

Jap. Sin. 12 I fols. 182-183v (182)

IESUS

Muy R[everen]do P[adr]e N[uest]ro

Pax Chri[sti]

Despues de aver scrito a V[uestra] P[aternida]d la carta q[ue] va co[n] esta se me offrecio de representarle la necesidad que tiene Jappon de un hermano que entienda lo que toca a la imprecion. P[or]q[ue] como la emprenta de Jappo[n] es ta[n] neces[ar]ia para imprimir libros de Jappo[n], asi em n[uest]ra letra latina como e[n] letra de Iappo[n] na se puede scusar para la emprenta proceder bie[n] un hermano diestro y experimentado neste off[icio]. P[or] lo [que], si alla lo huviere, V[uestra] P[aternidad] nos haria a todos gran charidad si nos lo embiasse. P[or]q[ue] el hermano que agora tenemos puesto, q[ue] es muy buen ho[m]bre que se llama Juan Bapt[ist]a, natural de Calabria, sabe poco de este officio, p[or]q[ue] no está diestro en leer y escribir, [y] no puede dar experiencia a estos negros de la emprenta, puesto que su virtud y buena voluntad [no] suple las faltas.

[...] Como a este Iappo[n] hasta agora no llego Prelado ni Official del S[an]to officio por cuyas manos passe el exame[n] de los libros que se impimen ansi en letra de Jappo[n]

¹⁸ Although this may seem to have required a large number of pieces of type, in reality there was a relatively small set of characters used. Also, as Laures claims, it is very possible that among these two thousand punches there were more than one for the same character. Laures 'The Jesuit Mission', 135.

como en la n[uest]ra, para no andar siempre con epiqueya, deseavamos q[ue] V[uestra] P[aternidad] nos hiziesse p[or] amor de Dios charidade de nos aver L[icenc]ia en q[uan]to no huviere aquí Prelado que se remita el exame[n] de los libros que se imprime[n] assi en n[uest]ra letra como en Iappo[n] al superior de Jappon que los mande examinar, y con su aprobación, imprimir. Y puesto que me parece que avise disto al P[adre] Gil da Mata para que lo pidiese a V[uestra] P[aternidad], mas porque como viejo me no acuerdo bien lo torno aquí a scrivir a V[uestra] P[aternidad]. [...]

IESUS

Very Reverend Father

Peace of Christ

After having written to Your Paternity the letter that goes with this one, it was offered to me [the opportunity] to introduce to you the necessity that Japan has for a brother who understands about printing. Because, since the Japanese printing press is so necessary to print Japanese books in our Latin letters as well as in Japanese letters, it is essential that the printing press be run by a Brother skillful and experienced in this trade. So, if there is [one] there [Rome], Your Paternity would do us all great charity if you would send him to us. Because the Brother that we have now, who is a very good man named Juan Baptista [Giovanni Battista Pesce], a native of Calabria [Italy], knows little about this trade because he is not skilled in reading and writing, he cannot give the benefit of his experience to these *negros* of the printed press, since his virtue and good will do [not] make up for his faults.

[...] Here in Japan, so far, has not arrived a Prelate or an officer from the Holy Office, through whose hands must pass the examination of the books that are printed [here], both

in our letters and in Japanese, so that [we] do not always have [to apply] *epikeia*.¹⁹ We wish that Your Paternity would do us, for the love of God, charity and give us license to have no need of a Prelate here [and instead] refer the examination of the books that are printed, both in our letters and in Japanese, to the Superior of Japan [who would be in charge] of sending them to be examined and printed with his approval. And since I think that I notified Father Gil de la Mata about this so that he could ask Your Paternity, but because I am old [and] cannot remember well, I write it again here for Your Paternity.
[...]

II

FATHER DIOGO DE MESQUITA TO FATHER CLAUDIO ACQUAVIVA

Nagasaki, 28 February 1599

Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome

Jap. Sin. 13 II fols. 292-295v (294)

[...] Aqui tenemos edificado y puesta en orde[n] una emprenta muy gra[n]de y buena, en la q[ua]l imprimimos livros e[n] Latin, y otros en lengua y charateres de Japo[n], de q[ue] aquy co[n] nuestros hermanos y dojicos hemos labrado dos mil pu[n]çones y otras tantas matrizes, cosa muy prima, p[or] ser los japones hombres de gra[n] ingenio y mañas. Y co[n] esta empre[n]ta q[ue] ya de Lisboa yo traxe, pui[n]capiada co[n] la facultad q[ue] V[uestra] P[aternidad] madeo, hazesse gra[n] fructo en esta christiandad, da[n]dosele pasto y doctrina co[n] livros [e]spirituales q[ue] les sirve[n] en lugar de predica a d[on]de no hay otros predicadores. Ya se acabara[n] de imprimir doscentos livros, y mas de 1500 co[n]fessionarios. Y agora imprimemos el libro *Guya de peccadores* de Fray Luis, traduzido en lengua y letra Japonica, cuyo pri[n]cipio embio a V[uestra] P[aternidad] para q[ue] vaya el modo como se imprime[n] los libros de letra de Japo[n], q[ue] es de una sola parte por ser el papel delgado. Todo lo q[ue] en el va, sus letras y labores, se ha hecho

¹⁹ The principle in Roman Catholic ethics that a law can be broken to achieve a greater good. It applies to Gomez's case, for he broke the rules of the Society of Jesus by printing books on the Japanese printing press without the supervision of his superiors in Rome and Goa.

azi en el Coll[egi]o p[or] los sobredichos. Y tambie[n] hizieron puçones y matrizes de letra latina, redo[n]da y grisa, tan linda q[ue] ya no tenemos necessidad de q[ue] no[s] ve[n]ga[n] de Roma. [...]

[...] Here [Nagasaki] we have installed and put in order a very big and good printing press, on which we print books in Latin and others in the language and characters of Japan, for which here, with our Brothers and *dōjiku*, we have carved two thousand punches and the same number of matrices, which are very exquisite because the Japanese are men of great ingenuity and skills. And with this printing press that I brought from Lisbon, endorsed with the faculty that Your Paternity granted me, we get great fruit in this Christianity, giving it substance and doctrine with spiritual books which serve instead of preaching where there are not any preachers. We have already printed two hundred books and more than 1500 *confesionarios*.²⁰ And now, we are printing the book *Guya de peccadores* [*The Sinner's Guide*] by Fray Luis [de Granada], translated into the language and letters of Japan, the beginning of which I send to Your Paternity, so you can see how printed books in Japanese letters look, [printed] on one side because the paper is too thin. Everything that goes [in the book], its letters and work, have been made like this at the College by the aforementioned. And they [the brothers and *dōjiku*], have also done punches and matrices of Latin [*latina*], upright Latin [*redonda*] and cursive [*grifa*] letters, so beautiful that we no longer need to bring them from Rome. [...]

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²⁰ Mesquita probably refers to texts written as a model for Japanese lay brothers when hearing confession.

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