

Neo-Latin in 17th Century Japan: Two Epistles from Japanese Seminarians to the Jesuit Superior General (ARSI Jap.Sin.33.75, 78)¹

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Introduction

It may be true, as an authoritative worldwide survey of Neo-Latin literature states, that “Japan has been touched only slightly by Latin.”² But one may also ask how well this statement squares with the wide role Latin seems to have played in the Japanese Jesuit educational venture of the late 16th to early 17th century. Indeed from the said period we have both Latin textbooks specifically designed for use in Japan and original Latin compositions produced by the Jesuit-educated Japanese. But one must also admit that current understanding of this intriguing period in the Japanese reception of European classical humanism is still open to reinterpretations and in need of further exploration, despite (and in some ways, because of) the limited amount of primary evidence that now remains. This article, which takes a close look at two unpublished Latin documents authored by Japanese Jesuit seminarians in the early 1600’s, attempts to both contribute to the body of evidence currently available for extra-archival inspection and reflect on the directions research in this area may take in the future.

Humanist Neo-Latin in Japan’s Christian Century: A Survey

First, a general survey of the use of Latin by Japanese Christians of this period may be in order, as an adequate one does not exist yet in English. I must however add a word of caution that what follows represents a work in progress, and a very rough one at that. Even though the primary material that is currently known to exist must be a small fraction of what once existed, it is still substantial enough that I cannot claim to have complete command thereof.

Francis Xavier, who landed on Kagoshima, Japan in 1549, may have been the first visitor with some training in Greco-Roman classics to enter the country. Even though centuries before him religious and other cultural motifs as well as real artifacts from the ancient Mediterranean had reached Japan, these came through

¹ D.M. David Morgan (1959-2013), *viri doctissimi iucundissimi humanissimi*.

² Ijsewijn (1990) 319.

various (Indian, Chinese, Buddhist etc.) non-Western intermediaries which themselves had rather tenuous connections with Greece and Rome.

When Xavier left Japan in 1551, he took along a young Japanese convert by the name of Bernardo. The same Bernardo subsequently sailed to Europe, became a Jesuit and studied in Rome and Portugal until his early death in 1557. He may well have been the first Japanese to receive training in Latin, though published information about him is regrettably scarce.³

From as early as 1561, Jesuit missionaries who followed Xavier began to operate church schools for local converts. At this stage however the Latin education they offered may have been limited to making the converts memorize a limited number of devotional and ritual formulae in the language.⁴ It may be worth noting that this basic training did become a remarkably enduring legacy, as, orally transmitted and often modified beyond recognition, a few of these Latin prayers survived centuries of persecution and are used in some Japanese Christian communities to this day.⁵

This kind of rote memorization however must be differentiated from the study and composition of humanistic Neo-Latin which we are now concerned with. A major development in this regard happened in 1580, when, under the initiative of the energetic and ambitious Italian Jesuit and Visitor of the East Indies Alessandro Valignano, a program to train native Japanese clergy and Christian leaders was inaugurated. Over the opposition of some subordinates who wished to exclude non-Europeans from leadership positions in the missionary effort, Valignano argued for the need for integration as well as accommodation toward local conditions, and decreed that select Japanese youths be trained in Latin as well as in their native language. The surviving curriculum of the Japanese Jesuit seminary, drafted by Valignano himself,⁶ suggests that he was quite earnest in making students learn both languages in equal measure.

Valignano was also behind the project to send four Japanese seminary graduates on a journey to Europe, which did take place and lasted from 1582 to 1588.⁷ This trip, which was ostensibly an ambassadorial mission organized by newly converted Japanese nobles to pay homage to the Roman Pope but was also clearly meant to strengthen Valignano's missionary reform agenda, contributed to the (admittedly

³ On Bernardo see Pasquale (1959).

⁴ See Schilling (1931) 29-39 for the early Jesuit church schools in Japan.

⁵ See e.g. Miyazaki (1996) 80-85 and Obara (2005).

⁶ See e.g. Schütte (1951) 438-440 (German translation).

⁷ On which see Cooper (2005).

short-lasting) rise of Christian Japanese Neo-Latin in several notable ways. For one, although the Japanese ambassadors often communicated with their European hosts in the vernacular, they also delivered Latin speeches at ceremonial events. The best known of these occasions is the celebration of their return held at the Jesuit College of Goa in June 1587. The text of the Latin speech that Hara Martinho the ambassador delivered in Goa was put to print the following year and a few copies of it have survived. A careful examination of its labored Latin reveals a few grammatical and stylistic infelicities, but overall it reads like a standard piece of Renaissance encomiastic oratory.⁸

Another outcome of the journey was the importation of the Western printing press and the production of Latin teaching materials specifically intended for use in Japan. In the first years of the Japanese Jesuit seminary, the need for printed materials was much felt as pupils were said to be using up too much time and energy in copying their textbooks by hand. The ambassadors' journey to Europe addressed the pressing need for textbooks in a couple of ways. First, a vernacular manuscript of a catechism for Japan, which Valignano had entrusted to the mission, was translated into good humanistic Latin and printed in Europe, then brought back in multiple copies for use in the seminary.⁹ Secondly, the mission itself became the subject of a remarkable Latin dialogue which was composed in Macao and published there with the newly imported printing press, again for use as a cultural and linguistic textbook in Japan.¹⁰ Thirdly, the mission brought back a Jesuit-authored school text consisting of Latin anecdotes and this too was put to print in Macao, with a few modifications made for the Japanese audience.¹¹ The following excerpt from this textbook's Macao version may serve as a representative sample of the kind of florid humanistic Latin to which the Japanese at this time were exposed:

Nec vero haec seminariorum utilitas in Indiae tantum partibus percepta est, sed in Iaponia multo fortasse clarius eluxit: cum enim pueri ex infidelibus parentibus nati simul cum illis nostram religionem suscepissent, e matrum prope gremio ad seminaria nostra translati ita disciplinarum omnium et virtutum laude floruerunt, ut multi ex illis digni a patribus nostris sint iudicati, qui ad nostram societatem cooptarentur: in qua tale virtutis specimen praebuerunt, ut docendi

⁸ See Watanabe (2012).

⁹ JL-1586-KB2-2-1a in LRBD.

¹⁰ JL-1590-KB5-5-3 in LRBD. On the author (translator) of the Latin version and its style see Burnett (1996). There is a full English translation with introduction and commentary in Massarella (2012).

¹¹ JL-1588-KB4-4-2 in LRBD.

alios et publice evangelicam veritatem praedicandi iure optimo fuerit illis cura commissa: in quo munere obeundo tam strenuos et fideles ministros se gesserunt, ut hac potissimum ratione sperandum sit, ex tota Iaponia brevi tempore idolatriae malum radicitus esse exstirpandum: cuius operis mora longe diuturnior esset, nisi iisdem ipsis Iaponicis adolescentibus ad Iaponicarum sectarum errores confutandos patres nostrae societatis usi fuissent. Ex his autem quattuor illos adolescentes legatos ex eadem Iaponia missos nobilissima stirpe satos, quo triumpho Gregorius XIII Pontifex Maximus immortalitate dignissimus ad se religionis ostendendae causa venientes exceperit, quo item honore qui Gregorio Dei munere ac dono successit Sixtus V item Summus Pontifex in patriam remiserit, quos eis ludos Italia fecerit, quae in eorum adventu Hispaniae gratulatio plaususque fuerit, quae Philippi regis cum laetitia, tum beneficentia exstiterit, nemo est quin sciat, nostramque aetatem perbeatam vel hoc uno nomine putet, in qua antiqua pietas reflorescere videtur.

(Lib. 1.f.12)

The above is a good specimen of the culture of rhetoric which young Japanese converts such as Hara Martinho must have been encouraged to imbibe. It is also notable for mentioning the Japanese seminary, its pupils and the ambassadors themselves in a flattering light, presumably with a view to garnering interest among the intended audience. This book, whose style, content and organization are highly reminiscent of Valerius Maximus, deserves further study as a bridge spanning Roman rhetoric, Renaissance humanism and the Jesuit penetration into the Far East.

When the ambassadors were allowed back into Japan in 1588, they brought the printing press with them and it continued to operate, together with the Jesuit educational system it served, until the mass expulsion of Christians in 1614. Within this span of time, the press turned out a little more than a dozen Latin books, and the following may be the most noteworthy from the viewpoint of classical reception. A grammar of Latin explained in Japanese came out in 1593¹² and a Latin-Portuguese-Japanese lexicon of about 30,000 entries was published in 1595.¹³ Both are adaptations of works widely used in Europe at that time (Manuel Alvarez for the grammar, Ambrosio Calepino for the lexicon), and show the Jesuit educators' practicality and acumen as well as being valuable sources for Japanese historical

¹² JL-1594-KB14-14-10 in LRBD.

¹³ JL-1595-KB15-15-11 in LRBD. Searchable online database in < <http://joao-roiz.jp/LGR/DB>> (retrieved 8/23/2013).

linguistics. Editions of Cicero¹⁴ and Vergil¹⁵ were also printed for use in the seminary, the former around 1592 and the latter around 1600, though of these regrettably there are no known surviving copies.

Classical education in the seminary obviously did not rely on these printed texts alone, but also on the personal knowledge of the European missionary instructors as well as on imported books housed both in the Japanese Jesuit institutions and in schools abroad to which some of the Japanese seminarians were sent. The extent of educational achievement realized in Japan at this time is not easy to gauge, largely because of the severity of subsequent persecution which destroyed most of the potential evidence. On the one hand, both in contemporary records and in modern scholarship,¹⁶ one can see profound skepticism as to the effectiveness of European humanistic education transplanted to such a foreign climate as that of feudal Japan. Yet on the other hand, some contemporary records voice admiration over the linguistic achievement of the Japanese pupils (and their mostly European instructors),¹⁷ and the few surviving Latin documents authored by Japanese converts which I have been able to inspect appear to demonstrate tolerable to high compositional skill in humanistic Latin.

Overall, I have been able to identify about 20 surviving Latin documents produced by these Japanese Christians, ranging in date from December 1 1587 to October 16 1632. Of these, the letter dated August 2 1615 by Yūki Diego, which discreetly cites both ancient patristic and contemporary European humanist sources,¹⁸ and the Ovidian epigram by Gotō Miguel preserved in a Filipino publication of 1621¹⁹ may be the high end of the spectrum. The low end, and also the latest in date to survive, is the letter by the apostate Thomas Araki dated October 16 1632 and sent to a Dutch merchant, written in fairly atrocious (at least from a grammatical perspective) Latin.²⁰ But most of these documents, like the two that will be taken up in this article, have not even been published in critical editions, let alone subjected to detailed stylistic analysis. In addition, there may be other Japanese-authored Latin documents from this period that await discovery in personal

¹⁴ JL-37-36-31-5 in LRBD.

¹⁵ JL-37-36-31-13, cf. also JL-37-36-31-14, both in LRBD.

¹⁶ See e.g. Moran (1993) 152-155.

¹⁷ See e.g. Kataoka (1969)33-34, 106.

¹⁸ On which see Watanabe (2013).

¹⁹ On which see Harada (1998).

²⁰ NA1.04.02: 1110: Japan: 467 in the Nationaal Archief in Amsterdam. Araki's oral use of Latin during an interrogation of Dominican missionaries which took place in November 1637 is also documented in Aduarte (1640) 411.

or institutional archives. To conclude this section, it is beyond doubt that from around 1580 to the early 1600's some Japanese Christians, mainly (if not exclusively) Jesuit seminarians, were exposed to classical~humanistic Latin and at least a few of them gained fair compositional competency therein, although it is equally true that comprehensive and definitive assessment of this phase of East Asian reception and reproduction of classical culture must await further documentation and research.

ARSI Jap. Sin. 33.75 and 78: Background, Content, Handwriting and Latin Style

The documents now under consideration are both housed in the Jesuit Archives in Rome. They are numbered ARSI Jap.Sin.33.75 and ARSI Jap.Sin.33.78 according to the current foliation²¹ and are internally dated October 3 1603 and November 21 1604, respectively. They are both letters directed to the Jesuit Superior General Claudio Aquaviva. Their place of origin is Arima (ARSI Jap.Sin.33.75.34, ARSI Jap.Sin.33.78.32), where the Japanese Jesuit seminary was located from 1601 to 1612.²² The senders are internally identified as Kogawa Aleixo (or Alexius), prefect of the Sodality of the Most Blessed Virgin of Annunciation of the Japanese Seminary (Sodalitas Beatissimae Virginis Annuntiatae Seminarii Iaponici) together with its secretary Funamoto Thomas for the earlier ARSI Jap.Sin.33.75, whereas the internally named senders of ARSI Jap.Sin.33.78 are Funamoto Thomas, presumably the same individual as the Sodality's secretary who had become prefect of the Inferior Sodality of the Blessed Virgin of Annunciation of the Japanese Seminary (Inferior Sodalitas Beatae Virginis Annuntiatae Seminarii Iaponici), together with its secretary Shirakura Balthazar.

The following information concerning these senders may be gleaned from outside sources. A missionary report of 1604 announces that Aleixo, the first prefect of the Sodality and a catechist much admired for his virtues, passed away and was buried in a solemn ceremony attended by many.²³ As for Funamoto Thomas, the secretary and prefect of the Inferior Sodality, his name resurfaces in a Jesuit record of 1621 which states that he returned to Japan and was dismissed from the Order due

²¹ In older foliations that are often used in secondary literature, they may be numbered ARSI Jap.Sin.33.86/88 or ARSI Jap.sin.33.III.1/2.

²² See e.g. Moran (1993) 168. Arima is now Minamishimabara City, Nagasaki Prefecture.

²³ See Giram (1932) 10-11.

to leprosy.²⁴ Concerning the secretary of the Inferior Sodality Shirakura Balthazar I could find no independent surviving information.

The two letters announce the establishment of Marian sodalities or congregations²⁵ in the Japanese seminary. Catholic congregations or confraternities, which arose in the late Middle Ages and became a major movement in early modern Europe, form a large academic topic on their own, and their introduction to feudal~early modern Japan, along with their similarities to and antagonistic relationship with indigenous political and religious societies, has also begun to receive scrutiny.²⁶ At least in the case of Japan, however, attention tends to focus on lay confraternities which later enabled the survival of (at least some elements of) Catholicism under persecution, and not on the Marian sodalities of the seminarians which, as far as I could ascertain, did not survive in Japan past the dissolution of the seminary in 1614.

From contemporary missionary reports one may learn the following details concerning the Marian sodalities of the Japanese seminary. The first sodality was founded in 1603 at the behest of the Jesuit Superior General Aquaviva communicated to the seminarians by Valignano the Visitor. By the following year, members of this sodality came to number about 50, and as the capacity for new members seemed limited, a second sodality was formed to train younger prospective members for the first. Members of both sodalities practiced good works inside and outside the seminary, met regularly for prayers, and took part in festivals, in which they gave exhibitions in Latin and in Japanese.²⁷

The “Primary Congregation” (ARSI Jap.Sin.33.75.9, ARSI Jap.Sin.33.78.24) or “Roman Congregation” (ARSI Jap.Sin.33.78.6), which the letters refer to and to which the Japanese sodalities became aggregated, is the so-called Primary or Head Sodality of Our Lady, formed in 1564 in the Collegium Romanum by the Belgian Jesuit Jan Leunis. A papal bull of 1584 officially recognized the primacy of this Sodality, to which the Jesuit Superior General was to aggregate other suitable bodies worldwide. Soon aggregated sodalities were in existence not only in Italy and the

²⁴ See Schütte (1968) 353. For the practice of dismissal from the Order due to sickness see O’Malley (1993) 57-58.

²⁵ The body in question is called *sodalitas* and *congregatio* in Latin sources and *congregação* in Portuguese missionary records. On these terms see Mullan (1912) 7-8.

²⁶ See Kawamura (2003) for Catholic confraternities in Japan, esp. 182 for Marian confraternities.

²⁷ See Yūki (1981) 193-195 and 200-201 for summary and sources, and esp. Giram (1932) 10 for their literary activities. An abridged Latin version of the missionary reports may be found in Pasio (1610) 25-26, 73-75.

Iberian Peninsula but also Eastern Europe and the New World.²⁸ It was this worldwide, and at the same time distinctly Euro- and Romanocentric, network into which the Japanese seminarians were introduced through their letters.

When a newly formed body wished to be aggregated to the Primary Sodality, part of the normal procedure was for the prefect and assistants of this body to write a letter to the Jesuit Superior General asking for aggregation.²⁹ The latter of our two letters clearly seems to fulfill this requirement. The earlier one may also have been written for this purpose, as it informs the General of the Japanese sodality's very foundation (*sodalitatis initia iacta*: 19), even though in this case it appears that General Aquaviva had somehow already approved and aggregated it to the Roman Primary (...*ad nos tuae litterae sunt perlatae, quibus in hoc Iaponico Seminario Beatissimae Virginis Annuntiatae Sodalitatem sanciri placebat, et eam iam constitutam Primariae Congregationi Romae aggregatam declarabas*: 8-9).³⁰

The letters both have distinct and impressive handwriting. The first letter is written in a practiced and flowing hand while the second letter has a more regular hand that is easier to read. The second letter also has a hand-painted landscape drawing in black and gold ink³¹ in the background which makes for a charming presentation. In my transcripts the spelling and punctuation have been quietly modernized, but in the original documents I could not find any of the irregularities of which Japanese Christian scribes may have been guilty elsewhere.³²

As with the handwriting, the two letters are distinct in their Latin styles. While they both clearly conform to the standard norms of humanistic Neo-Latin, the first letter is less flamboyant and more correct. The use of *ab+ablative* with a non-personal agent (25-26) and the tendency to use *ut...non* instead of *ne* in purpose clause and with verb of effort (11-12, 29-30) may raise Orbilian eyebrows, but they are hardly major blemishes and parallels can doubtless be found in humanistic and late-antique if not classical Latin.³³

The letter of the Inferior Sodality has a more interesting style of Latin. On the one hand, it suffers from several lapses that a well-practiced writer would have

²⁸ See Mullan (1912) and O'Malley (1993) 197-199 for the Sodality in general. Beránek (1994) chronicles the establishment and literary activities of the aggregated sodality in Prague.

²⁹ See e.g. Mullan (1912) 62. The rule appears in a direction sent under Aquaviva's name.

³⁰ It may be that as early as 1601 a Marian confraternity of Japanese seminarians was in existence, which body Aquaviva proactively aggregated in anticipation of the seminarians' request. For the possible establishment of this confraternity in 1601 see Yūki (1979) 98-99.

³¹ According to email communication from Fr. Mauro Brunello of ARSI, received 9/10/2013.

³² Cf. the egregious interchanges of l's and r's in a Vatican Latin ms. of a Jesuit college textbook produced in Japan in the late 16th C., on which see e.g. Hiraoka (2013) 68-70.

³³ See e.g. AGNLT §405 Note 3, §531.1.Note 2, §563e.

avoided. The very first sentence, a convoluted and impressive period, stumbles in the latter half when the change of voice from passive to active is not adequately taken care of (6-8: I have provisionally addressed the difficulty by adding a pronoun in 6, assuming a haplographic error in *etiam* <eam>), which is perhaps permissible in verse but seems harsh in prose.³⁴ The construction following *ea sese difficultas obtulit* (13-14) which uses simple sentences instead of a *quod* or *cum* clause is also to my knowledge unparalleled in good idiomatic Latin. There is also a sentence toward the end (29-31) which seems confused and is difficult to understand, although it is hard to pinpoint what is exactly wrong here and simply clumsy word order or bad colometry may be to blame.³⁵ Yet on the other hand these lapses may arguably be the result of a valiant effort to vary the expression and experiment with different types of construction. Indeed overall the periods in this letter are longer than in the other one, and the general impression they give is one of (somewhat labored) elegance. Especially notable is the repetition of words with the *con-* root toward the beginning (10, 12) which recalls similar uses in Cicero's *Pro Archia* (Cic. *Arch.* 1, 14, 15), that staple text in Jesuit and humanistic European education.³⁶ While seeing a direct link between *Pro Archia* and our letter is probably overhasty at this point, the potential echo is a convenient reminder that the latter was being composed and read by those who shared classical humanism with its vast stock of linguistic signposts, despite the wide cultural and geographic barriers that intervened.

Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction, the reception of humanist Neo-Latin in 16th~17th century Japan is still wide open to exploration, and this article represents a small step, not the end of the journey. Nonetheless I contend that the two epistles scrutinized above help steer us further toward a provisional view that humanistic Neo-Latin, a rich vehicle of communication with a much longer tradition and greater political and academic capital than the contemporary vernaculars, was being learned and utilized with attention to its unique capabilities by Japanese Jesuit seminarians in the early 1600's.

³⁴ Even though this may also be seen as a permissible case of *variatio*; here further research may be called for in humanistic Latin stylistics, which has been inadequately mapped.

³⁵ One must of course always remember that these are student compositions, and that European Jesuit students were also capable of committing cavalier mistakes even in ceremonial Latin compositions; see e.g. Rädle (2013) 244, notes 180 and 182.

³⁶ Cf. Watanabe (2012) 8 and Watanabe (2013) 107 for Cic. *Arch* in Jesuit Latin education and its possible echoes in compositions by Japanese Christians.

To come full circle and return to the beginning of this article, then, can one still say that “Japan has been touched only slightly by Latin?” Though I may have given a contrary impression, in a sense I actually do agree with Ijsewijn. The reception of classical humanism as a by-product of Jesuit missionary efforts in 16th~17th century Japan did lead to some impressive results which can be excavated with some effort, but they were not lasting. However energetic, learned and versatile the European Jesuits and their Japanese pupils may have been, their efforts were to be wiped out from cultural memory with such thoroughness that standard Japanese narratives on the study of Greco-Roman classics in the country trace its origin in the late 19th or early 20th century, rather than the 16th or 17th.³⁷ But what has been suppressed or forgotten is not necessarily undeserving of attention from an academic or cultural standpoint. In fact, as an art historian has recently pointed out, the nearly total elision of Christianity in the traditions of “Western” art that have been developed in modern Japan is in and of itself a surprising feature about our national culture that deserves extended reflection.³⁸ The cultural amnesia that has tended to envelope pre-modern Japanese Christian reception of European classical humanism may be a similarly crucial and so-far neglected entry point for further exploration.

Finally, a more complete understanding of Japanese Christian Neo-Latin may have something to contribute to the study of the Western reception of the East too. As a recent book points out, the Jesuit experiments in accommodation and assimilation which took off to a promising start and then failed spectacularly in Japan and China may convene at a significant point within the historical development of the Western conceptualization of the fundamentally alien, inassimilable and “yellow” East Asian.³⁹ How the enthusiastic reception and subsequent erasure of such a quintessentially European cultural heritage as Neo-Latin⁴⁰ among the Japanese Christians fit within this development remains to be seen. But now, when the study of Western classics and European humanistic tradition is said to be gaining momentum in the Chinese speaking world,⁴¹ may be an especially relevant time to reflect further on this and related issues.

Abbreviations

³⁷ See e.g. Kure (1955) 100-101.

³⁸ See Satō (2007) 51-58.

³⁹ See Keevak (2011), esp. 23-42.

⁴⁰ On Neo-Latin and the European identity see Waquet (2002) and Haskell (2010).

⁴¹ See e.g. Fischer (2012).

AGNLG=Mahoney, A. (2001) *Allen and Greenough's New Latin Grammar*. Newburyport, MA

ARSI=Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu

LRBD=Laures Rare Book Database < <http://laures.cc.sophia.ac.jp/laures/start/>>

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