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Universalitas & Pervasivitas

il costituirsi e diffondersi della S.J. e suoi echi (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede autori Attività missionaria

Alessandro Valignano

Alessandro Valignano, o Valignani, (Chieti, 15 febbraio 1539 – Macao, 20 gennaio 1606), è stato un gesuita italiano, missionario nell'estremo Oriente (India e Giappone).

Biografia

Figlio di Giambattista Valignano e di Isabella de' Sangro, nacque da una delle più illustri famiglie teatine; venne inviato presso l'università di Padova a studiare diritto. Nel 1562 venne accusato (probabilmente ingiustamente) di aver pugnalato una donna e venne rinchiuso in un carcere a Venezia: venne liberato dopo molti mesi solo grazie all'intercessione dell'arcivescovo di Milano, Carlo Borromeo, e comunque solo dopo aver risarcito la presunta vittima. Nel 1565 si spostò a Roma, dove ebbe modo di conoscere da vicino la Compagnia di Gesù e rimase fortemente colpito dai racconti sulle missioni: l'anno seguente entrò nel noviziato di Sant'Andrea al Quirinale e iniziò a studiare filosofia al Collegio Romano. Nominato amministratore della casa di noviziato, continuò comunque gli studi e frequentò il corso di teologia (1569 - 1571), al termine del quale venne ordinato sacerdote. In seguito, occupò diverse cariche nella Compagnia fino all'estate del 1572, quando fu nominato Visitatore generale delle missioni delle Indie Orientali: partì da Roma nel 1573 per il Portogallo, da dove salpò per la colonia di Goa (marzo 1574); visitò le missioni dei gesuiti in India, Malesia, Molucche e Macao. Organizzò personalmente la missione in Giappone e affidò quella in Cina a **Matteo Ricci**, che riuscì a fissare la sua residenza a Pechino e a farsi accogliere a corte dall'Imperatore: Valignano aveva intuito l'importanza di mantenere saldo il rispetto della cultura locale, verso la quale nutriva un'altissima considerazione, e raccomandò con insistenza i propri confratelli ad apprendere usi e costumi dei paesi che li ospitavano. In Giappone la predicazione del cattolicesimo diede ottimi frutti e produsse una significativa comunità cristiana, radicata nella fede e nella cultura locale: Valignano curò personalmente la diffusione della stampa delle belle arti occidentali; fondò chiese, collegi e ospedali. Apprese la lingua giapponese e redasse il Cerimoniale per i missionari in Giappone, affinché i propri confratelli potessero proseguire nell'evangelizzazione senza intaccare o offendere i principi millenari della tradizione giapponese, rendendo nel contempo comprensibile il Cristianesimo, senza falsarne la dottrina. Il tentativo produsse molti risultati: se infatti la Cina si aprì solo lentamente alla presenza dei gesuiti, il Giappone si rivelò terra fertile per il credo cristiano. Ma la persecuzione contro i cristiani avviata nel 1549 dallo shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi distrusse quasi completamente la fiorente cristianità giapponese: il numero dei martiri toccò il numero di 1200 (ma altre fonti parlano di 1600). Il metodo di Valignano, già avversato da altri missionari (soprattutto francescani e domenicani) che consideravano idolatriche le pratiche tradizionali delle popolazioni orientali, fu definitivamente abbandonato nel 1742, quando papa Benedetto XIV proibì ai neoconvertiti la pratica dei cosiddetti Riti Cinesi: si dovette aspettare il Concilio Vaticano II perché tutta la Chiesa si rendesse conto dell'importanza dell'inculturazione da lui intuita come necessità assoluta per l'incontro fra i popoli e il Vangelo: perciò i suoi metodi dovettero in seguito essere abbandonati per altri che non diedero molti frutti nell'Asia.





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Si spense nel 1606 a Macao, durante uno dei suoi viaggi.

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Per un più esatto resoconto della cronologia delle sue attività si veda:
http://www.valignano.org/bio_crono.html

Vedi anche: [Riscoperte / Alessandro Valignano e l'evangelizzazione dell'Asia – “Il pioniere sconosciuto” di Gianni Criveller](#)

Valignano (Alessandro) - Fan Li an, (or: Fan Li-shan) (1539-1606)

1. Born in February 1539 in Chieti, Italy (at that time Chieti was part of the kingdom of Naples), Valignano belonged to an influential Italian family and was educated at the prestigious University of Padua, where he excelled as a student of Law. In 1562 he had an unhappy experience in Venice, where he was accused (maybe unjustly) of wounding a woman. He was arrested and after paying a large sum of money, spending a few months in prison and with the help of influential personalities was freed. In 1565 he went to Rome, where he met the Jesuits. After a deep religious experience, in 1566 he joined the Jesuit Noviciate in Rome and studied Philosophy at the Collegio Romano. Between 1569 and 1572 he carried various tasks in the Jesuit community. At the same time, he studied theology. Valignano's insights into the Christian message convinced many within the Church that he was the perfect individual to carry the spirit of the Counter-Reformation to the East. He was ordained priest in 1573 at the age of 34. It is worth noting here that Valignano was for a while spiritual director of the Jesuit Noviciate at the Collegio Romano in Rome. Among the young students there, he met Matteo Ricci, who was a novice at that time. A few years later, as Superior of all missions in the Orient, Valignano will meet Ricci again and assign him to the China Mission. In 1573 the Superior general of the Jesuits in Rome, chose Valignano as Visitor (or superior) of all missions in the Far East. The nomination of an Italian to supervise Portugal and Spain-dominated Asia was at the time quite controversial, and was interpreted as an effort by Rome to reinforce its control on missionary activities in areas under the control of Portuguese and Spanish authorities. As Visitor, it was Valignano's responsibility to examine and whenever necessary reorganize mission structures and methods throughout India, China and Japan. He was given an enormous amount of leeway and discretion, especially for someone so young, and was answerable only to the



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superior general in Rome. His commanding presence was only increased by his unusual height, enough to “turn heads in Europe and to draw crowds in Japan.” He left Rome on 20th September 1573. In Lisbon he founded the Jesuit Procuration for the Far East (a procuration is an office mainly for financial transactions in support of the missions). On 21st March 1574, from Lisbon Valignano embarked for Goa on the boat Chagas and arrived in Goa on 6th September 1574.

2. In 1578, on his way to Japan, Valignano stopped in Macao for 10 months (6 September 1578- 7 July 1579), where he founded the Jesuit college of Macao.

Valignano was deeply touched by the Chinese people and Chinese culture. The difficulties for entering China (closed to all foreigners for centuries) did not discourage him. He tried to get into China unsuccessfully several times. He understood that a special cultural preparation (especially a deep knowledge of the Chinese language) was necessary for all Evangelizers in China. Before leaving Macao, he wrote to the Jesuit superior in India to send at least one priest capable and willing to undergo such preparation for the China Mission, and left in writing instructions on the formation of the future missionaries for China. Fr Ruggieri and later Matteo Ricci will be sent to Macao for this preparation.

3. Valignano visited Japan three times: in 1579 when he stayed three years, in 1590 and in 1598.

Valignano paved the way for a closer relationship between Asian and European peoples by advocating equal treatment of all human beings. He was a great admirer of the Japanese people and envisioned a future when Japan would be one of the leading Christian countries in the world. He famously wrote that the Japanese "excel not only all the other Oriental peoples, they surpass the Europeans as well"

3a) On his first arrival in Japan, Valignano was horrified by what he considered to be, at the least, negligent, and at the worst, abusive and un-Christian practices on the part of mission personnel. The Jesuit superior of Japan at that time was Francisco Cabral, who was born in Portugal in 1529. In Japan, Cabral laboured strenuously to propagate the Christian religion. There he enjoyed the friendship of princes and kings, many of whom, together with their subjects, were won over to the Faith by his zealous labours. He filled very important places in the Jesuit society, being superior of Japan for twelve years, master of novices, and rector of the College of San Pablo of Goa, and finally visitor to India. He died in Goa in 1609, at the age of eighty-one with a great repute for prudence and holiness. However Cabral's method of Evangelization was in direct contrast to Valignano's directives. Valignano later wrote that although the mission had made some major gains during Francisco Cabral's tenure, the general methods used by the Superior were severely lacking. In addition to the problems of language study and racism, some of the Jesuits, and specifically Cabral were in the habit “to regard Japanese customs invariably as abnormal and to speak disparagingly of them. When I first came to Japan, our Jesuits (the crowd usually follows the leader), showed no care to learn Japanese customs, but at recreation and on other occasions were continually carping on them, arguing against them, and expressing their preference for our own ways to the great chagrin and disgust of the Japanese.” There is an implicit belief in the Visitor's writing that leaders influence and are responsible for the behavior of those of lesser rank. Thus in Valignano's view any lapse in the mission's behavior towards the Japanese was surely a result of Cabral's heavy handedness. He immediately began to reform many aspects of the mission, and wherever possible, undermined Cabral's authority as Superior of the Jesuit mission in Japan.

3b) Language study had always been one of the core problems for the mission. Before the Visitor arrived in Japan, seventeen of Valignano's personally appointed missionaries wrote to him complaining that language training was totally nonexistent. Cabral had protested that it was



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impossible for Europeans to learn Japanese and that even after fifteen years of study the padres could hardly preach a sermon, even to Christian converts. It was Valignano's first official act upon arriving in Japan that all new missionaries in the province spend two years in a language course, separating these newcomers by leaps and bounds from the first enthusiastic but stilted efforts of Francis Xavier. By 1595, Valignano could boast in a letter that not only had the Jesuits printed a Japanese grammar and dictionary but also several books (mostly the lives of saints and martyrs) entirely in Japanese. The main body of the grammar and dictionary was compiled from 1590-1603, and when finished it was a truly comprehensive volume; the dictionary alone containing some 32,798 entries.

3c) In 1581, he wrote "The Cerimonial for Missionaries in Japan" (Il Cerimoniale per i Missionari del Giappone) to set forth guidelines for Jesuits, who worked in Japan. Following his principle of adaptation to local culture and customs, Valignano drew models from Japanese Zen Buddhist practices. He recommended that Jesuits behave according to the class they are considered to belong to in Japan. As a result, Jesuit priests served daimyo sumptuous dishes and walked around Nagasaki with armed Japanese servants. Luxurious life and authoritarian attitudes among Jesuits in Japan were criticized not only by rival mendicant orders but also by some Jesuits. In addition, his detailed instructions on customs and manners suggest that Valignano's understanding on Japanese culture was superficial.

3d) As was ordered by the Superior General, he devoted efforts to nurturing Japanese priests. Where Cabral had worked to exclude Japanese men from rising beyond brothers in the Society, Valignano insisted that they be treated equally in every way to Europeans and while the Japanese seminarians would learn Latin for sacramental use, the Visitor remarks that it is the Europeans who must learn Japanese customs, and not the other way around. This, it must be added, was the complete opposite of Cabral's stated opinion that the Japanese must be adapted to Western ideas and modes of thought. He forced Francisco Cabral to resign as Superior of the Jesuit mission in Japan since Cabral opposed his plans. But it was not only Cabral, who disagreed with Valignano. In fact, Valignano remained in a minority within the Jesuits in Japan. Valignano was optimistic about training of native priests but many Jesuits doubted sincerity of Japanese converts. After Valignano's death, negative reports from Japan were reflected in the policies of the headquarter of the Society of Jesus in Rome in 1610s, when the society heavily restricted admission and ordination of Japanese Catholics. Ironically, persecution by the Tokugawa shogunate forced Jesuits to rely increasingly on Japanese believers. In spite of the headquarter's policies, the Jesuit college in Macao, which was founded by Valignano, produced a dozen of Japanese priests without sufficient preparation.

3e) The need for a natively trained clergy was obvious to Valignano, and so in 1580 a recently emptied Buddhist monastery in Arima province was converted into a nascent seminary. There twenty-two young Japanese converts began the process of preparation towards holy orders. The process was repeated two years later at Azuchi, where the seminarians numbered thirty-three. The first order of business in the seminaries would be language training. Valignano made clear that all seminarians, whatever their background, would receive education in both Latin and Japanese. After the foundations were laid, the students were educated in moral theology, philosophy and Christian doctrine. This was typical of Jesuit education, and reflects the state of Jesuit schooling in Europe. But there were some significant differences. For one, as the Arima seminary was a converted Buddhist monastery, and because Valignano emphasized the need for cultural adaptation, the original decor was left largely unchanged. This pattern was repeated in other seminaries at other sites, and in 1580 Valignano wrote the "Principles for the Administration of Japanese Seminaries",



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which go into great detail about seminary methods. Valignano notes (among other things) that the “tatami mats should be changed every year” and that students should wear “katabira (summer clothes) or kimonos of blue cotton” and outdoors a “dobuku (black cloak).” The students are instructed to eat white rice with sauce, and a side dish of fish. Valignano’s purpose is quite clear. The seminaries were typical Jesuit institutions of humanistic education and theological formation, but their style of living was wholly Japanese. They were carefully designed to blend, as much as possible, Japanese sensibilities with European ideology. In short, they were a perfect place to train Japanese preachers, men who would appeal to both their families and friends, and also to the Society. Some experts hypothesize that Valignano was actively trying to replicate the Japanese institution of “dojuku”, or buddhist novitiate monastics. This is probably an apt interpretation, because it does appear that the Catholic seminaries appealed to (but in typical Jesuit style were not limited to) many of the same sons of wealthy nobles, who chose to live as an apprentice in a Buddhist monastery. Valignano’s methodical and organized mind is apparent in every aspect of mission organization. Appended to his "Principles for the Administration of Japanese Seminaries" is a complete daily schedule for a Japanese seminarian. The scheduled activities include both daily Latin and Japanese instruction with a sprinkling of choral and other musical performance.

3f) Success of Seminary Reforms. Despite their great idealism, it is unclear how successful Valignano's seminary reforms really were. They certainly stimulated Japanese converts to join the Society; in the decade after Valignano’s first visit some sixty native Japanese joined the Jesuits as novices. But there were problems too. Few Buddhist monks were forced to live under a rule of strict poverty as the Jesuits enforced it, and because gift-giving was such an important part of Japanese social relations, the inability of the novices to accept these gifts undoubtedly helped to alienate them from their families. In addition, the Ignatian mode of spirituality, with its emphasis on confession and examination of conscience struck the seminarians as terribly improper. Valignano, Cabral, and others had often noted how Japanese culture stressed the suppression and concealment of emotions. This problem was exacerbated by the inability of most of the Jesuits to fluently speak or understand the language. Revealing all of one’s secret thoughts to another, through an interpreter, was seen as a serious violation of social customs. Lastly, but even more fundamentally, Japanese culture did not and does not view religious life as totally separate from secular life in the sense that the Jesuits understood it. Within most Buddhist communities it is common, if not expected, that young men and women spend some time in seclusion as a monk or nun for a few years or months. It was no dishonor for a monk to take vows for a limited period of time and then return to his normal occupation, while the counter-Reformation era Catholic Church, with its emphasis on vocation and eternal priesthood, could scarcely have been more different.

4. Valignano gives his reasons why he is attracted by Japan.

By just reading them, we realize how deep Valignano’s affection, admiration and respect for Japanese culture and people was. Valignano believed that these were the reasons why all missionaries (and to a certain degree all Europeans) were attracted by Japan. In Valignano’s mind there was a difference between Japan and, for example, other Asian countries or the newly discovered peoples of the Americas. On one hand we are impressed by Valignano’s respect for Japanese culture, on the other hand though we remain perplexed how much Valignano truly knew of Japanese culture or of the situation in other countries. Besides, it is strange how Valignano at times identifies Christianity with the Jesuit society. These are the reasons:

4a) Japan is a very large country, and the people are white, cultured, prudent, and subject to reason.



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4b) Japan is the only oriental country in which the people have become Christians for the right reasons.

4c) In Japan, and only in Japan, the Christian converts included some of the highest in the land.

4d) The Japanese have a natural inclination to religion, and hold their Buddhist priest in high regard. We, who teach the truth and have the help of grace as well as reason, can expect a higher degree of respect in the land.

4e) The door is now open to the Gospel throughout Japan as it is nowhere else in the East. There will be obstruction and persecution, but the Society is now known and, given manpower and material support, conversions are possible all over the country.

4f) The Japanese will listen to reason, and they all speak the same language.

For the Jesuits there is no comparison between Japan, where they can see the fruits of their labors, and all the other countries. They feel that in the one case they are among rational and noble people, and in other among peoples base and bestial.

4g) The Japanese mission, unlike all other missions, will eventually be self-supporting in both manpower and revenue, as the Buddhist are. It will produce excellent Jesuits and secular clergy, and the Society is and will be honored in Europe for its work in Japan.

4h) We are now very well established in Japan, and have overcome the worst of the difficulties. We have many here who know the customs and the language, and many Japanese brothers. Our authority is high with the Christians and our reputation with the pagans because great lords and gentry are daily being converted. Our religion is increasing and all the other sects of Japan are declining.

4i) Lastly, it seems that Our Lord has reserved this great enterprise in Japan for the Society alone, since other religious orders should not and probably will not be able to go here. And with the Society in charge of Christianity more will be brought to salvation in Japan, in time, than in any other place, and my conclusion is that the Society must devote all possible attention to this great work. Without going into a more detailed analysis of Valignano's reasons, it is worth spending some time, describing the historically favorable circumstances under which the Jesuits happen to enter Japan.

5. Japan's Christian Century (1547-1650)

Many historians (both Europeans and Japanese) call the 17th century, Japan's Christian century. The general atmosphere of openness to other cultures and religions, the particular interest shown by some high ranking personalities to Christianity, the birth of a Christian literature in Japanese (both translations from foreign writings and original productions by Japanese converts) and finally (but tragically!) the ever present terrible persecutions against Christians, give to this century special characteristics very advantageous to Christianity.

5a) Some important dates and happenings of the Christian century (related to Christianity):

1549: Francis Xavier establishes Japan's first Christian mission at Kagoshima

1563: Jesuit missionary Luis Frois arrives in Japan; he later writes a history of Japan that provides much information about contemporary Japan. Omura Sumitada becomes the first daimyo to convert to Christianity

1571: First Portuguese merchant ship arrives to trade at Nagasaki. The Japanese are eager to foster commerce with the Portuguese. They see in the Jesuits (who are Portuguese) a help for trade.

1578: Otomo Sorin is baptized under the name Francisco Otomo Sorin was a very powerful Daimyo of Bungo. In 1551 he had met St Francis Xavier and allowed the establishment of a Jesuit mission in Bungo. Sorin was exceedingly friendly to the advocates of the new religion, and while



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this was no doubt motivated in part by the weapons and commercial opportunities the westerners offered, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Sorin was taken by Christianity. Sorin granted most of the missionaries' requests and in 1575 had a son baptized. In 1578 Sorin divorced his wife (who was very anti-Christian) and was himself baptized, assuming the name Francisco. By then, he had already retired, and handed over the reins of government to his son, also a Christian known as Constantinho.

1579: Alessandro Valignano, visitor (superior) of the Jesuit missions in Asia, arrives in Japan

1580: Daimyo Arima Harunobu becomes Christian and take the name Protasio.

1582: Four Christian Japanese boys are sent to Rome at the urging of Alessandro Valignano. The four Japanese boys sent by Alessandro Valignano to Europe in 1586, with the Jesuit father Mesquita (the interpreter) in the centre. The mission of four young Japanese boys to the courts of Pope Gregory XIII, was conceived by the Jesuit Alessandro Valignano and organized under the auspices of three Christian daimyos in Kyushu: Otomo Sorin (Francisco), Arima Harunobu (Protasio), and Omura Sumitada (Bartolomeu). Father Valignano, on his first visit to Japan in 1579, realized that it would be extremely advantageous to the mission there to send a group of Japanese Christians to Rome. First of all, it would demonstrate to the Pope how the Jesuit work in East Asia was beginning to produce fruits and secondly it would secure the Pope's support for the Jesuit work in Japan. In addition, Valignano hoped to get financial subsidies from the Pope. Another aim was to introduce Europe to the Japanese. Its members were Ito Mancio, a Japanese nobleman, who became the leader of the mission. Other noblemen were: Chijiwa Miguel, Nakaura Julião, and Hara Martinho. Valignano chose four young boys, all 12 to 13 years old and students at the Jesuit seminary in Arima. Father Valignano added 16 more Japanese Catholics to complete the party. The mission left Japan in February 1582 and returned in July 1590. Leaving Nagasaki on 20 February 1582, the mission finally reached Portugal in August 1584. On their way to Rome, their main goal, they had the chance of being warmly received by Philip II of Spain. They reached Italy in March 1585. In Rome, Pope Gregory XIII received the young envoys, showering them with gifts, and issued a papal bull confirming that Japan was the prerogative of the Jesuits. The party later traveled elsewhere in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The mission left Portugal in April 1586 and arrived back in Nagasaki more than four years later (July 1590). However, during the mission's absence, the military strongman Toyotomi Hideyoshi had presented the Jesuits with his Expulsion Edict, and the four young men were able to publicize what they had learned about Europe only in their small circle in Kyushu. Nevertheless, European interest in Japan had been greatly aroused by the mission.

1587: Toyotomi Hideyoshi issues an edict expelling all Christian missionaries; but the edict is not obeyed or enforced. Hosokawa Tama wife of Hosokawa Tadaoka is baptized Gracia.

1596: San Felipe Incident. On August 26, 1596 a Spanish trade ship (San Felipe), travelling from Manila to Acapulco, ran aground off the coast of Southern Japan. It's cargo was confiscated by the Shogun Hideyoshi. At this time Christianity was still gaining ground in Japan. But rivalries existed between the two main religious orders working in Japan: the Jesuits (who were the first group to arrive in Japan) and the Franciscans, who had come later. The Jesuits were Portuguese and their missionary work was mainly aimed at high ranking personalities and intellectuals. The Franciscans were Spanish and more active among the common people.

The reasons for the persecution against the Franciscan missionaries are not clear, but the Shogun Hideyoshi, after having confiscated the cargo of the Spanish boat, began a fierce persecution of the Franciscans (who were Spanish) and their followers. Six Franciscan missionaries and twenty



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Japanese converts were publicly crucified in Nagasaki (Kyushu) in early 1597. These twenty six martyrs had (and still have) a tremendous impact on Japanese people.

1603: The Jesuit Mission Press commences publication of a Japanese- Portuguese dictionary.

1614-1637: Japan begins to close itself to the outside world. Spanish ships are prohibited from entering any Japanese port. All other foreign ships are restricted to the port of Nagasaki; overseas travel by Japanese is restricted; Japanese residents abroad are prohibited from returning to Japan. A nationwide ban on Christianity is imposed. Persecutions against Christians become more common. Crucifixion is a common form of punishment as being boiled alive or left to suffocate over a burning pit.

1637-1638: Shimabara Uprising . Shimabara is an area within the Nagasaki district. This area had been Evangelized by the first Jesuit missionaries and it had been ruled by Christian Daimyos. Many farmers in the area were Christians. The uprising was ignited by the heavy taxes imposed on farmers, who had to turn over 80% of their crops. Farmers who refused were forced to wear coats made of straw “mino” in Japanese and set alight. The term used to describe the way victims writhed in pain was “mino odori” raincoat dancing. Very quickly all discontented people gather together and formed a huge army of about 37.000 people, the majority of which followed a very young, charismatic Christian leader Amakusa Shiro (he was only 16 years old). In the first few months, the rebel army had the upper hand. They defeated the Government forces. They rocked themselves in the Hara Castle, which became the symbol of their resistance. But after a year of fighting, the rebels, with their supplies exhausted, had to surrender. The shogunate forces beheaded an estimated 37,000 rebels and sympathizers. Amakusa Shiro's head was taken to Nagasaki as a war trophy and Hara fortress was destroyed. The Shogunate suspected that Western Catholics had been involved in spreading the rebellion and Portuguese traders were driven out of the country. An already existing ban on the Christian religion was then enforced stringently. All Japanese families were required to register at a local temple and annually show evidences that they were not contaminated by Christianity. Christianity in Japan survived only by going underground, turning into something called “kakure kirishitan” (hidden Christian). In 1865-1868 (when Catholic missionaries could go back to Japan), a group of “kakure kirishitan” at Nagasaki publicly identified themselves as Christians. Later, many more scattered groups of hidden Christians reaffirmed their Christian identity. After 200 years of hidden life, their faith had been faithfully transmitted from one generation to another. In 1938 the Hara Castle was designated a nationally important historical site. Excavations begun in 1992 have brought back to life heroic examples of the resistance. Crosses made out of melted bullets, rosaries and various religious items suggest that the Christian and non-Christian fighters alike presumably immersed themselves in prayer in the final days.

1639: Edicts establishing National seclusion are completed. Portuguese merchants are expelled from Japan; Portuguese ships are banned from Japan; all westerners, except the Dutch are prohibited from entering Japan. Japan will remain for more than 200 years isolated and closed to the outside world. It will be in 1868 that a new era of openness for Japan begins with the Meiji Period.

5b) Japan's open attitude to other cultures and religions has been a constant feature of Japanese history, which can be characterized by her constant contacts with foreign ideas. From the beginning of her history to this day, Japan has been influenced by other cultures, from Korea to China and others. As well as her history, her religion has also been influenced by other cultures. It was during the fifth and sixth centuries that Japan became part of a strong Chinese influence that swept this southeastern region of Asia. At this time of history Japan became a civilized nation, a society influenced by “Chinese writing system and the infusion of Buddhist thought and Chinese arts and



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crafts”. Although prior to this period there had been previous contacts, it is from this point on that Japan truly became a nation of contact and exchange among different cultures. During this same period, called the Nara period, the government, once again, used religion as a means of control over the Japanese people. The government sponsored Buddhism not for the people, but for its own protection against political collapse. While Shinto (“the way of the gods” is the traditional Japanese religion) beliefs and practices weakened, Buddhism enjoyed a period of “royal favor ... since the government depended on Buddhism as the chief civilizing agency which would help the nation”. At this time, and although Buddhism was largely a religion practiced by the aristocracy, the influence of Chinese civilization on Japan as a whole had a tremendous impact.

5c) Buddhism, especially the Zen sect, would play an important role in the Catholic century, as it was a means of conversion to Christianity. After all, Zen Buddhism was based upon a doctrine of simplicity and preached a doctrine of willpower and hard work to gain salvation, very much like that of the Christian doctrine. This doctrine is self-evident of why many of the converts, as well as many Catholics missionaries, would look to Zen Buddhism while trying to convert the Japanese. Since the Catholic missionaries found Zen Buddhism an important door to Christianity (Matteo Ricci in China found Confucianism a door to Christianity), it was easier to begin the Evangelization with common ground and after that continue the proclamation of the whole Gospel. We must emphasize the strong influence that Zen had over Japanese history and culture. But the similarity transcends over the religious realm to involve the political one, since Zen attracted the aristocracy and samurai, the Catholic missionaries were attracted to the same groups. These converts would then influence, through their political power, Japan as a whole.

5d) Although the Europeans were the preachers of the new faith, they at the same time were acculturated into Japanese culture and customs. The missionaries were willing to adopt indigenous words, and to use former Buddhist priests as translators, as was the case with Francis Xavier’s interpreter. Importantly, this interpreter influenced Xavier to use the Buddhist words for God, heaven, religion and Catholic priest etc. Furthermore, after Valignano’s policy of adaptation was implemented, the superior of the Jesuits was regarded as the superior of the Nanzen temple in Kyoto. This was the highest rank among Zen Buddhists in Japan. This cross-cultural diffusion of words from Japanese to European was also evident from European words into Japanese. These words introduced to the Japanese language were mostly derived from either Portuguese or Spanish. These words included mainly words for items of commercial and daily use. Europeans too adopted other Japanese words (except the religious ones) in daily use. This cross-cultural enrichment was an open door to the encounter of two cultures. Valignano thought though that “commercial and political exchanges are not of themselves sufficient to bring about far-reaching changes in the national way of life or outlook...although they may act as the vehicle”. According to Valignano, only the Jesuits could bring new ideas to the geographical isolation of Japan because the other Europeans’ only contacts were for commerce. The Jesuits were the only ones able to have “an interchange of ideas involving religion, philosophy, literature, and art”.

6. Financial needs.

Valignano’s activities and institutions required a great amount of money. As the scale of the mission began to expand rapidly, financial difficulties began to crop up. All of the Jesuit institutions: the seminaries, the schools, the printing presses and the missions required money to finance. This eternal conflict, which Valignano describes as the one between "God and Mammon" raged for most of the history of the mission.



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6a) When the first Portuguese ships arrived at Nagasaki, the local Japanese daimyo had tried to curry favor with the Jesuit administration in order to have the Portuguese trading ships visit their local port more frequently. All of this changed in 1580 when Father Vilela converted the daimyo, who controlled the port of Nagasaki. As a gift, the port, which was then merely a small fishing village, was ceded to the control of the Jesuits, as was the fortress in the harbor. The superior general in Rome was shocked by news of such a blatant acquisition of property and gave firm instructions that Jesuit control of Nagasaki's port should only be temporary. But like most suggestions coming from Europe, Cabral and Valignano chose to tactfully ignore them, especially because, as Valignano would explain later, the town quickly became a haven for displaced and persecuted Christians. Under Jesuit control Nagasaki would grow from a town with only one street to an international port rivaling the influence of Goa or Macao. Jesuit ownership of the port of Nagasaki gave the Society a concrete monopoly in taxation over all imported goods coming into Japan. The society was most active in the Japanese silver trade, wherein large quantities of Japanese silver would be shipped to Canton in exchange for Chinese silk; but the superiors of the mission were aware of the inherent distastefulness of the Jesuit Society's involvement in mercantile transactions and resolved to keep the traffic to a minimum.

6b) Conflicts with Rome. This breach of ecclesiastical practice did not go unnoticed by the heads of other European missions in the area, or by those who make their living via inter-Asiatic trade. Eventually the Pope was forced to intervene, and in 1585 the Holy See ordered an immediate cessation of all mercantile activities by the Society. Valignano made an impassioned appeal to the Pope, saying that he would forgo all trade as soon as the 12,000 ducats required to meet their annual expenses were forthcoming from another source. Abandoning the silk trade he said, would be the equivalent to abandoning the mission in Japan, which was doubtlessly true. In a letter to the Superior General, Valignano asked for leniency and above all, trust: "Your paternity must leave this matter to my conscience, because with the help of God I trust that I shall continue to think about it, and also to consider the good name of the society in Japan and China, and when it seems to me possible to do so I shall gradually reduce and finally abandon the trade." But sufficient finances had to be secured from somewhere. By 1580 the society was maintaining a community of 150,000 people, 200 churches staffed with 85 Jesuits, including twenty Japanese brothers and an additional 100 acolytes. A decade later there were 136 Jesuits in Japan with a care taking staff of up to 300. At the height of the mission there were about 600 people who were entirely dependent on the society for funds. All of this in addition to the construction and maintenance of churches, schools, seminaries, and the printing press. Placed in the context of the widespread poverty that plagued Japan during this era, it is not surprising that Valignano authorized the mission to rely on the tax income provided by the port of Nagasaki.

7. Nanban period

What Westerners call the "Christian century", Japanese historians call the "Nanban period", which extends from the arrival of the first Europeans to Japan in 1543 to their near-total exclusion from the archipelago in 1650, under the promulgation of the Seclusion Laws.

7a) "Nanban" ("Southern barbarian") is a Japanese word which originally designated people from South Asia and South-East Asia. It followed a Chinese usage in which surrounding barbarian people in the four directions had each their own designation. In Japan, the word took on a new meaning when it came to designate Europeans, the first of whom started to arrive in Japan in 1543, first from Portugal, then Spain, and later the Netherlands and England. The word Nanban was thought of naturally appropriate for the new visitors, since they came in by ship from the South, and



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their manners were considered quite unsophisticated by the Japanese. A contemporary Japanese account relates: "They eat with their fingers instead of chopsticks as we do. They show their feelings without any self-control. They cannot understand the meaning of written characters".

7b) The Japanese were not very impressed either with the cultural, or even technological level of their visitors. Japan had grown into a sophisticated feudal society with a high culture and a strong pre-industrial technology. Japan was more populated and urbanized than any Western country of the time. It had universities larger than any learning institution in the West. Early European visitors were amazed by the quality of Japanese craftsmanship and metal-smiting. This stems from the fact that Japan itself is rather poor in natural resources found commonly in Europe, especially iron. Thus, the Japanese were famously frugal with their consumable resources; what little they had they used with expert skill. Japanese military prowess was also well noted. Its paper industries were unequalled. The Japanese were blowing their noses in disposable soft "tissue" papers made from washi, when most people in the western world still used their sleeves.

7c) Nanban guns and Nanban ships. One thing the Japanese were definitely interested in was barbarian guns. Strictly speaking, the Japanese were already familiar with gunpowder (invented by, and imported from China), and had been using basic Chinese guns and cannon tubes for around 270 years before the arrival of the Portuguese. The Portuguese guns however were light, more accurate and handy. Within a year, Japanese swordsmiths and ironsmiths managed to reproduce the mechanism and mass-produce the guns. Barely fifty years later, "by the end of the 16th century, guns were almost certainly more common in Japan than in any other country in the world", its armies equipped with a number of guns dwarfing any contemporary army in Europe. Nanban ships: The ships of the Southern Barbarian were also quite influential on the Japanese shipbuilding industry, and actually stimulated many Japanese ventures abroad.

7d) The term Nanban did not disappear from common usage until the Meiji restoration, when Japan decided to Westernize radically in order to better resist the West, and essentially stopped considering the West as fundamentally uncivilized. Words like Yofu (ocean style), and Obeifu (European American style) replaced Nanban in most usages. Still, the exact principle of westernization was Wakon-Yosai (Japanese spirit Western talent), which tends to imply that, although technology might be acquired from the West, Japanese spirit is still superior to Western spirit, but probably not to a point overtly justifying the usage of the word barbarian anymore. Today the word Nanban is only used in a historical context, and is essentially felt as picturesque and affectionate. It can sometimes be used in a cultured jokingly manner to refer to Western people or civilization. There is an area where Nanban is used exclusively to refer to a certain style of cooking and in names of dishes.

8. Valignano's last years and the Decline of the Mission in Japan.

Alessandro Valignano exercised his position as Visitor of all the Jesuit missions in Far East from the Portuguese port of Macao, but his primary focus was always on the Japanese mission, although, he too (like Francis Xavier earlier) had understood the vital importance of China and Chinese culture in Asia.

8a) Beginning from 1614 until 1638, Japan gradually locked itself in isolation from the outside world. Persecutions against Christians grew very cruel. No Japanese ships were allowed to leave the country under pain of death, and any Japanese who attempted to return from abroad would likewise be executed. The "Sakoku" ("the chained country") would last until 1867, when the last Tokugawa swore allegiance again to the Emperor, beginning the Meiji restoration and reopening the country to the international community.



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8b) Valignano died in Macao in January 1606. One of his Jesuit admirers noted: “In God we lament not only our former visitor and father, but, as some would have it, the apostle of Japan.” But in Valignano’s mind China had an important place. He had founded the China mission and on 20th January 1606 had established it independent of Macao, nominating Matteo Ricci as the first superior. When Valignano, who had been Ricci’s spiritual director in Rome, and then his superior, supporter and friend in Asia, died in Macao(1606), while waiting to enter China and meet Ricci in Peking, Ricci writes: “Father Valignano died at the door of China, just like Francis Xavier died on the island of Shangchuan. Both were anxious to enter into China. Both missionaries died at the door of their dream. Their intercession from heaven will be more effective than their sweat on the field.”
Last Modified 05/08/07 7.06 - Catholic Dictionary <http://dictionary.editme.com/Valignano>

Vedi anche: [profilo biografico di Alessandro Valignani in Dizionario di Storia nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani](#)