

Asian Christian Writers in the 16th–18th Centuries

A Selection From Japan

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SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

The “Christian century” following Xavier’s arrival in 1549 saw the emergence of Christian writings in many forms, both by Japanese converts and through their collaboration with Jesuit scholars.

1. Amongst the earliest Christian writers for whom some texts are extant are:

- a) **Paulo Yoho-ken** (1510-1596) has been termed the “father of Japanese Christian literature.” Physician, catechist and later member of the Society of Jesus, his writings include plays on Christ’s Passion and on Christmas, and the stories *Kurofune Monogatari* (Tale of the Black Ship) and *Bungo Monogatari* (Tale of Bungo) of which only extracts are extant. He was also co-author, and translator, for a Catechism, for “Lives of the Saints”, a grammar, a dictionary and other works.
- b) **Vincente Hoin** (b. 1538, son of Yoho-ken was said in the “Catalogue” of 1593 to have “written and translated the greater part of the spiritual and learned books which have thus far been written in Japanese” (Laures, 1957, 40). See volumes listed below for the years 1586-1599.
- c) **Hosokawa, Tama Gracia** (1563-1600), wife of Hosokawa Tadaoki, wrote a series of letters to Gregorio de Cespedes S.J. (Laures, 1959, 98ff.) and also a number of poems (Heuvers 1938, 277; Laures 1956, 113f.) in the years 1587-1600. (Her life is given in Boker 1934-5, Laures 1956 and Laures 1959.)
- d) **Fucan Fabian** (b. 1565) is noted for both the first Japanese work of apologetic, and (later) for the first anti-Christian book in Japan:

Myotai Mondo (Dialogue between Myoshu and Yutei) contains an outline of Christian doctrine and a refutation of Confucianism, Shinto

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and Buddhism.(1605, the three vols. published in Ebisawa, 1964.) *Ha-Deus* (Deus refuted) a “pamphlet” printed in 1620, which attacks the Christian doctrines of Myotai Mondo in sequence. Fucan especially rejects the doctrines of original sin and eternal damnation, and bases his criticisms on Christianity’s failure to bring peace and national salvation. Fucan also compiled *Heike Monogatori* (1592), a colloquial and condensed version of the classical original in the form of a dialogue. (Laures 1957, 106f., 46f.; Reprinted in Tokyo, 1927.)

d) **Takai, Gosme** (fl. 1590) composed in 1592 *Esopo no Fabulas* (a collection of 74 moral fables from Aesop and others for non-Christians), and *Kinkushu* (a collection of 282 Chinese proverbs), both reprinted in Tokyo, 1938.

2. Amongst the many letters extant from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, those of **Francis Xavier** (in Japan 1549-1551: see Schurhammer IV, 1982) and **Alessandro Valignano** (in Japan three periods between 1579 and 1602: see Schutte 1.1,2, 1983) are of particular importance. (Valignano’s extensive writings in catechetics, “missiology” and history are fully listed in Schutte 1.1, 401-428.)

Extensive correspondence is also extant from other members of the Society of Jesus, such as **Francisco Cabral, Louis Frois, Gaspar Coelho, Organtino and Gregorio Cespedes**. See, for example: *Annual Letters of the Early Christian Missions from Japan, China, etc., 1544-1649*. (Kyoto, Kyoto University Library, 1930.)

Other letters by Japanese Christians are found in e.g.

Gokinai Kirishitan Daihyo Hoshoyo (Letters from Christians in Gokinai to the General of the Society of Jesus) ?1588. (Annotated by Matsuda Kiichi, 1958.)

Letters to the Pope (giving thanks and affirming allegiance) from Christians in various prefectures, 1621, and by **Juan Goto** (baptised c. 1613) pledging fealty to Date Masamune but affirming Christian faith, are still extant in Japanese. (Jarrett-Kerr 1972, 47ff.)

Nan bankoku Dhokan Ambun contains letters of **Date Masamune** to Spain and the Pope in support of Christianity, 1613. (Ebisawa 1960, 16.)

3. For approximately forty years, books were composed and translated into Japanese by the Jesuits and their colleagues, and circulated in manuscript. These included translations of the New Testament and of the lectionary Gospels, devotional works and sermons. (James 1973, 78f.)

Early printed Japanese Christian literature of this period, published *In Collegio Iaponico Societatis Iesu* between 1586 and 1600 include:

Catechismus Christianae Fidei, written in Japan by **Valignano** and Japanese scholars and published in Lisbon in 1586.

Sanctos no Go-sagyo no uchi. Nugigaki (Extracts from the Acts of the Saints). Compiled from various sources and translated into romaji by **Yohoken and Hoin**. (Kazusa 1591.)

Fides no Doshi (Guide to Faith). An adapted translation of Granada's *Introducion al simbolo de la Fe* by Japanese and Portuguese Jesuits. (Amakusa, 1592.)

Doctrina Christiana First Christian catechism known to be printed in Japan, and an original composition in which the questions are put by the catechumen. (Amakusa, 1592.) An enlarged version was printed in Nagasaki, 1600 (Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, 1899) and another version of the same year has been edited by Ebisawa and published by Iwanami Bunko Tokyo 1949).

Salvator Mundi is a confessionary or "method of confession" in Japanese cursive characters. (Nagasaki, 1598.) It includes a glossary of Christian terms.

Orashio no Honyaku (a prayerbook and catechism) published by **Goto Thome Soin**, "on all that a Christian should know" (Nagasaki, 1600.)

Roei Zafitsu (Poems for recital) a collection of Japanese and Chinese poems on life and death, and upon heroes. (Nagasaki, 1600.)

A booklet on Baptism and Preparation for Death (title page missing). Teaching for lay-people administering Baptism before death. (?Amakusa, 1593.) Refer Laures 1957 67ff.)

4. Japanese members of the Society of Jesus, or lay people who were instrumental in the publication of these books included **Miguel Ichiku** (b. 1561), **Leo Togumsei** [Tokumaru] (b. 1569), **Constantino Dourado** (d. 1619), **Petro Chikuan** [Kuya] (d. 1622), **Goto Thome Soin** (fl. 1600) and **Antonio Harada** (fl. 1605).

They were responsible for much of the translation necessary, sometimes markedly improved the form of Japanese characters, and performed all the work of artisans for the development of printing with movable metal types.

5. Important writings from the first decades of the seventeenth century include:

Konchirisan no ryaku (Guide to Contrition) and abridgement of the Contrition in manuscript (1603) including rules, “considerations” and act of contrition. Found at Urakami and printed by Petitjean (1869).

The Arte de Lingoa de Japan (Nagasaki 1604-1608). A grammar for the Japanese language, by **Rodriguez Teuzzi** “the starting point of scientific study of Japanese as a language” (Boxer 1934-5.)
The Passion of Christ (printed Nagasaki, 1607). A Japanese treatise on the Passion, first used in 1595 possibly as a separate pamphlet and later included in

Spiritual Shogyo by **Gaspar Loarte** and others. A manual of meditations on the Rosary and the Passion in the style of the Keicho era. (Nagasaki, 1607.)

Maruchirio no Susume (Exhortations to Martyrdom) and *Maruchirio no Kokoroe* (Instructions for Martyrdom) circulated in manuscript (c.1615 and 1620 respectively). See Laures 1957, 73ff. and Anesaki 1931, 35-65.

6. Biographical materials and lives are extant for many Japanese Christians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including those of **Gamo Ujitsato-ki** (fl. 1595), **Hosokawa Tadoki** (1563-1600), **Itasaka Bokusai** (1578-1655), **Matsudaira Nobutsuna** (1596-1662), **Kumkuzawa** (1619-1691), who also left a number of essays on economics, **Bai Buntei** (1633-1721), and **Arai Hakuseki** (1652-1725) .three volumes completed in 1716, along with a multi-volume diary, essays and letters. (All annotated in Ebisawa 1964, 9-67.)

Following intensified persecution, the eviction of all missionary priests, and the suppression of Christian faith (from 1614 on) writings and manuals of the *Kakure-Kirishitan* (crypto-Christians) survived largely through oral transmission and in manuscript to be collected and printed only in succeeding centuries.

7. Amongst many collections of documents from sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are:

Kirishitan shomono (Christian Notebook, 1) on the Mass, the litany, daily meditations, mental prayer. (MS discovered 1920, provenance 16th century.)

Kirishitan sho (Christian Notebook, 2) on the Rosary, capital sins, the Ten Commandments. (MS discovered 1922, dated to c. 1610 or c. 1630 and printed Tokyo, 1952.)

The Takasaki Documents. A letter of allegiance to the Companhia (Society of Jesus), a Christian calendar and name list (c.1596), printed by Gan-shodo Shoten, Tokyo, 1933.

The Mito Documents. Eleven handwritten documents including a Book of Directions, sections of liturgy, the calendar, lives of the saints and a Christian Doctrine. (All dated to c. 1615-1630, published in *Kirishitan soshō*, by Mainichi Shinbun, Osaka, 1928-1929.) (Refer Laures 1957, 112ff.)

Koyomi Oboegaki (c. 1634) a liturgical calendar of feast days and fasts, copied in 1787 and reprinted in Anesaki 1931.

8. Collections of often anonymous documents dated to the eighteenth century include the following:

Prayers and Calendars – some of which may have originally been written in the seventeenth century – are preserved in Tagita Koyo (1954) and Furuno Kiyoto (1959). See also Harrington 1993, chap. 3.

Tenchi Hajimari no Koto (Origin of the Universe) – Compiled and circulated throughout the eighteenth century – brought to Fr. Petitjean at Nagasaki, 1865; reprinted by Tagita 1954. Differing manuscripts are extant from Urakami, Sotome and Ikitsuki. (See also Harrington 1993, chap 4. and Whelan 1996.)

Yasokyo Soshō (Collection of Catholic Books). Fourteen manuscripts from Urakami, 1790-1794. Printed and annotated by Anesaki who later abridged them in 1931.

Kirishitan Nagasaki ni Kansuru Utsushi (Copies of Notes on Christianity in Nagasaki c.1760).

Nagasaki Kirishitan Monjo (Christian Documents of Nagasaki) c.1750.

Kirishitan Shiryo (Christian Documents) 1781-1800; all listed in Ebisawa (1960).

Orasa no Mitsuji (Mysterious Prayers) a manuscript (c.1794) printed and annotated by Ebisawa, Tokyo, 1953.

Prayers for the Dying, Doctrine in Ten Articles, Kereto (the Creed) and other

prayers composed and used over many decades, were brought in manuscript or recited from memory to the French missionaries in 1865. (Jennes 204f.)

9. Other sources which include Christian materials from this period include:

Kokon Bukon Seisuiiki (Rise and Fall of the Military Caste) includes in its 30 volumes, accounts of Christian Samurai (Tokyo, 1688-1704).

Arai, Haku Seki (1657-1725). *Seiyō Kibun* (Record of Things Heard About the West) ed. Miyazaki Michio (Tokyo, 1968), and *Essays and Letters* – 3 volumes, 1716, annotated by Takenaka, Kumiko (Tokyo, 1881). Also 16 volumes of *Diary* (1718).

Kanzawa Teikan (1710-1795) and **Ito Baiu** (1683-1745) also left volumes of essays containing relevant source materials.

10. *Kirishitan* art-forms. These are particularly valuable as sources of Christian history in the period. Apart from the many relics brought into Japan by missionaries and converts (e.g. from China or Europe), the Japanese-made artefacts are of two kinds. Those from the period 1574-1615, when the Kirishitan faith was approved, openly depict Christian figures and symbols on, for example, sword-hilts, candle-stands, hand-mirrors or tea-utensils. (Suzuki, 1961, plates 1-12.)

Following the proscription of Christianity (nationally enforced from 1638) the *Kakure-Kirishitan* (Crypto-Christians) concealed or disguised the Christian features of their artefacts. (Suzuki 1961, plates 13-32.) This led to the creation of an indigenous Christian folk art in which Buddhist or Shinto images were adapted to represent Christian figures or symbols.

The most wide-spread examples depict the Madonna and Child in the form of *Kannon* (Kuan Yin, goddess of mercy) or of *Kishiboshin* (Hariti) both of whom could be represented holding a child. One class of Maria-Kannon has both a distinct cross upon her breast, but also holds a budding lotus-flower instead of a child. Ten-jin (the Shinto deity of learning) also came to symbolize God, for the name translates as “God-in Heaven”.

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