

# Thoughts on Some Little-Known Paintings Relating to the Christian Missions in Japan

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Thank you very much for the introduction. It's always a great pleasure to come back to Waseda to speak; I have, many old friends here. It is so lovely to see everyone.

Usually, when I come to events related to Nanban, I'm invited because my role, I think, is the Protestant side and to question whether the missions were a good thing or a bad thing for Japan. I intend to do a little bit of that today.

But as you'll see from the first painting, taking the theme, which Professor Igawa had suggested to us about new discoveries related to research materials, I wanted to introduce some paintings since I'm a historian of art. But before I do that, let me just continue with the Protestant angle for a minute because it's not just the fact that the Dutch and then the English turned up and told Japanese people about the existence of a divided Christian Church in Europe, but also because that news changed the way the missions were perceived in Japan. The way they undertook their work, on the whole, was adversely affected. Note that in the history of painting, so much Nanban art actually dates from into the 17th century; some of it from after the time that the Dutch and the English arrived. So that's something to think about as art historians.

Finally, on the Protestant side: nobody came to Japan from Europe who was anything like as formally educated or as long-serving as many of the Italian and Iberian Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries were. But still one person spent a very long period here, and you probably know who this was: William Adams, called in Japan Anjin, or sometimes people say Miura Anjin. He died in May, 1620.

So this coming May is his 400th anniversary and be prepared because there are going to be quite a lot of events associated with his life.

So back to the real topic of this presentation. One thing that Protestants don't really do so well as Roman Catholics is art. So here we have got a wonderful painting entitled *Propaganda Fide*. But the role of painting in many of our lives is to enhance and beautify, but also to challenge our surroundings.<sup>(1)</sup> The Roman Church always used art for the sake of propaganda. In modern English, the word 'propaganda' has a rather bad nuance, meaning forcing people to believe things which are not true, but in Latin it doesn't imply falsehood. It just means the propagation, or spreading of news.

Intriguingly, then, the notion of the spreading of news *itself* became the subject of paintings. Here we see not a terribly famous work, I don't think, but anyway, we see a Virgin with Child treading a serpent, which is covering the globe. So the world is filled with disharmony, derived from ignorance and hatred, but the Christ child crushes the serpent's head. He does this in divine innocence, supported by his mother. But also with saints are all around, representing the continuing church. I'm not a great expert in Western iconography, but it'd be easy to find who those saints are. Added to this, I think I'm right in saying, on the left hand side there appears to be a group of Iberian missionaries. Down in the bottom we have on the left-hand side a dark skinned person who must emblemise the Americas, and on the right hand side a dark-skinned person with a turban, who is the Indies.

So this painting is putting *Propaganda Fide* in the context of world expansion of the church. You can also see

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(1) [http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/scheda.v2.jsp?tipo\\_scheda=OA&id=54089&titolo=Quagliata%20Giovanni%20Battista,%20Madonna%20di%20Propaganda%20Fide&locale=en&decorator=layout\\_resp&apply=true](http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/scheda.v2.jsp?tipo_scheda=OA&id=54089&titolo=Quagliata%20Giovanni%20Battista,%20Madonna%20di%20Propaganda%20Fide&locale=en&decorator=layout_resp&apply=true)

that in Japanese historical terms, for this painting was made in Japan's Edo period, in other words, it was produced in the full knowledge that Protestantism is challenging the church in one its most promising places - Japan. This kind of thinking does not predate Protestantism. It is a result of it, often referred to as the Counter-Reformation.

So in Japanese terms, a lot of Nanban art is more Counter-Reformation than it is pure Roman Catholic.

Let me continue then with introducing a few paintings, which I think are of interest. I have selected ones you might not know. In order not to be totally random, however, I'm going to show you some moments in the 17th, and just into the early 18th century, suggesting how they fit into a wider context. I hope this will be useful.

I've never conducted a formal survey into the depictions of Japan in Western art. I'm not a historian of Western art. Some paintings are known in Europe, and certainly also in Latin America, but there are paintings of Japan and of the Japanese missions that are unrecognized and unstudied, which is a pity.

I happen to have gone to Schloss Weissenstein in Pommersfelden. It's near Mainz, so of course it was part of a very important German bishopric, and the castle was owned by the Prince-Bishop of Bamberg. The town is right on the border between Roman Catholic and Protestant Europe.

Consequently, of course, the Roman Catholics put forward their notions in very aggressive terms. Almost every time you go into a little German Roman Catholic village, even today, there are huge banners, white and yellow banners, telling you that this is a Catholic village; when you go into a Protestant one, there aren't any.

But anyway, I walked in one very, very cold day and the building was unheated but I was excited to see a painting by Rubens, quite small and smaller even than it appears here on the screen. It had a caption stating that it depicted *Francis Xavier with a Japanese King*.<sup>(2)</sup> I think we would recognize Francis Xavier. It fits his iconography. He was Basque, very black-haired, and shown heavily bearded, but you'd have no clue that the scene is supposed to be in Japan. If it hadn't been for the label, how would you know? The Japanese 'king' could be anyone, but to me it must be Otomo Sōrin. He is shown inviting Xavier upwards.

Probably there are many other paintings round Europe and Latin America that are intended to depict Japan, but which are unrecognized because the background does not look Japanese. This is not because of ignorance. If painters wanted to show noble pagans, they showed them as Romans – the ultimate noble pagans. Rubens didn't know what Japanese people looked like, but he didn't care. His viewers didn't care either.

The point of Ruben's work is to show how the *Propaganda Fide* is taking knowledge of an anti-Protestant revived Roman Catholic Church to the far ends of the world, and it been accepted there. And Rubens then, produced this statement presumably on the commission of the Prince-Bishop of Bamberg, a very important clergymen.

Rubens also did a pair of much larger works which are now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. They shows the *Miracles of Francis Xavier and Ignatius Loyola*. It takes a two-storey building to display them. The one related to Ignatius Loyola is on the left, and I won't talk about as it is not relevant to Japan. But on the right-hand side is Francis Xavier.<sup>(3)</sup>

Again, we are in Japan, though you wouldn't know it from the architecture. The missionary has been preaching to the Japanese, and now he's performing his miracle. The Jesuit Missions were adamant that they wanted Ignatius and Xavier to be canonized as saints. It took some time for the Vatican to be persuaded on this point. To become a saint, a person has to perform a miracle (among other requirements) Indeed, it was claimed that Xavier raised from the dead a Japanese man. When Western artists showed Japanese they always show them with the *chon-mage* back to front, that is, with hair shaved around the sides and long on the top whereas it should be the opposite. The man is blue-skinned, because he's dead. Now he's being raised from the dead.

Rubens had never seen a Japanese person. But he had seen a Korean. And so there's a Korean person in the

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(2) The image is not currently available online.

(3) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter\\_Paul\\_Rubens\\_The\\_miracles\\_of\\_St.\\_Francis\\_Xavier\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_The_miracles_of_St._Francis_Xavier_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

background here. This figure is linked to a recently-discovered sketch - bought by the Getty Museum in Malibu before the Korean government became aware of it (they would have paid much more).<sup>(4)</sup> Rubens could have based his Japanese man on a Korean, though he chose not to do this. Actually, had Rubens wished to see a Japanese man, he probably could have done so by going to the slave markets. Don't forget that the Japanese were greatly enslaved by the Jesuits, and were taken to Europe.

Rubens did not do this, surely for reasons of class. It would be wrong to represent a glorious scene of resurrection by using the countenances of a Japanese slave.

Rubens was somebody from the north who knew a lot about the Protestant challenge.

Now for example two. This is a little bit more anecdotal. I happened to go to Sicily last Easter to stay with a Sicilian friend. There are wonderful Easter festivals, and here we are in the Jesuit church in Palermo.<sup>(5)</sup> The building is very clearly from the Counter-Reformation period, on toward the middle of the 17th century; sadly, much damage was done in the Second World War, although it was restored. Inside is a whole array of sumptuous chapels. This is my photograph, and I regret that I couldn't capture it well with my phone. I didn't go on a tour, but just walked into the church having found it by chance. Among the many altars is one to the Japanese Martyrs. It doesn't say which ones, but of course, you know it refers to the Twenty-six Martyrs of 1597.

I don't know why it happened, but at some point the chapel was renamed, and now it's now dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus - in the middle there is a painting of that. But there are two panels on sides, which demonstrate an attempt to show Asian art.<sup>(6)</sup>

They're like Chinese landscapes. They're even done in the *kakemono* format - compared to Western art, they are very thin and tall. I don't know who made them, and I've not properly researched it - this church is not my affair (I'm a historian on Japanese art). But I hope somebody who's more qualified will do this. Perhaps Kojima-sensei has already done such work.

The painting that was formally the centre-piece of this chapel has been moved elsewhere, but it is still to be seen in the church, though very dark. It shows the *Japanese Martyrs*, though again, how would you know this is supposed to be Japan?<sup>(7)</sup> We only know because of the context. Had it been removed to a museum, the subject might have been forgotten.

Excuse my Protestant prejudice, but wherever you go to check the Catholic Church, there are so many beautiful paintings, but there will always be one hideous painting in front of which all the faithful are saying their prayers. Sadly, the painting of the *Japanese Martyrs* is partly obscured today by such a monstrosity.

Let's try and imagine the painting without that incumbrance, and also in its original position with the two Asian landscapes beside. Here is a mockup of how it would have looked.

I presume that several Jesuit churches had such chapels, though today they have been changed. I didn't bring a slide today because it's totally out the period, but the Jesuit church in London is similar. (Of course the Jesuits were expelled from England in 1604, but were allowed back in the middle of 19th century.) When they came back, they built a church, and, of course, had a chapel to Francis Xavier. It contains a beautiful painting of him dying off the Chinese coast.<sup>(8)</sup> A label next to it states the Japanese ambassador at the time (this must be early Meiji) saw this painting and loved it so much that he took a copy back to Tokyo. I would be interested to know if that copy still exists.

(4) <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/58/peter-paul-rubens-man-in-korean-costume-flemish-about-1617/>

(5) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_the\\_Gesù,\\_Palermo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Gesù,_Palermo)

(6) The panels are unclear, but are in this image: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/305822630946580707/>

(7) Not available online.

(8) The image can be easily found by visiting the website for the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm St., and taking the Virtual Tour. It is in the first chapel to the right.

Anyway, for my examples today, we have Rubens as number one, this Jesuit church in Palermo as number two.

Number three takes us back to Germany, and the town on Ingolstadt. You may know Ingolstadt because it's famous from the Frankenstein legend: Frankenstein was a Swiss man who wanted to create a person - people often forget that Frankenstein was Swiss. He went to study in Ingolstadt to learn his dark art. Why? Switzerland has nice Protestants, right? If Swiss people want to do something wicked, like make a human being which only God should do, they go to a Jesuit town to do it.

Ingolstadt was one of the great Jesuit churches outside Italy. It's not huge, but it's sensationally gorgeous inside. On the ceiling is painted IHS, the name of Christ and the Jesuit monogramme, around which are the peoples of the world - four continents on the four corners - coming to adore. This is me standing in the church, just to give a sense of scale.

The four continents are represented around the four corners, and above the altar, in the most important east end, we have the two most important continents. These were obviously Europe and Asia.<sup>(9)</sup> This is the European side. You can't see it very clearly. Here is the Asian side, there.

It has a Turk, or a sort of generic Islamic person, adoring Christ, with a camel and other bits and bobs to tell you we are in Asia, but very prominently you can see here wonderful piece of Japanese lacquer. I've got a detail. There is also coral and shells, and a large piece of porcelain. There doesn't appear to be any Japanese people, this being 18th century, after the missions had closed. Ingolstadt is worth a visit for the sake of this chapel and ceiling, but it has one other item of significant interest, which is a vast monstrance.

I think we already heard about monstrances this morning. They are where the host (the communion wafer) is displayed, generally in a gorgeous receptacle. This one shows the Battle of Lepanto.<sup>(10)</sup> The Battle of Lepanto takes us back to very early times in the Protestant divide, to its middle of the 16th century. I'm sure you know the story. The Turks were fighting a Christian Holy League, which is weaker, but then the Turks were unexpectedly defeated. It was said to be an act of God. Messengers were sent to Rome to tell the pope that the Turks had been defeated, and news arrived as the pope was saying his rosary. So the victory was attributed to Our Lady of the Rosary, sometimes called Our Lady of Victories, and it became a feast day.

The point of this monstrance is to show victory over the Turks, but that meant over *all* non-Roman Catholic groups. Interestingly enough, to go back to William Adams and the English, the King of England, James the First, as a young man was quite well-known as a poet and he wrote a verse in which he retold the Battle of Lepanto with the Christians now Protestant, and the Turks as Roman Catholics. King James repurposed the battle for Protestant purposes, but obviously this monstrance is clearly a Roman Catholic thing.

Germany is on the fault line between the divided churches. So, warlike and victorious images, like this, were not inappropriate. The Battle of Lepanto, from the moment that it happened, became the subject of an enormous numbers of paintings, including some in very prominent spaces. Modern day historians will tell you that the battle was not very significant and that the Turkish fleet was completely rebuilt within 18 months. This is not my theory, this is what experts say. But in symbolic terms, the battle was durable.

And it would have come to Japan. I'm sorry, I photoshopped this, but I think you all know the painting. Naru-sawa-sensei is of course very familiar with this work. It shows us the Battle of Lepanto, and it's always identified as such.<sup>(11)</sup> But the Battle of the Lepanto was at sea, and we actually don't see anyone fighting in the sea here. So as has been commented on before, this screen grafts the Battle of Lepanto onto another, completely separate and much earlier encounter - the equally symbolic battle between the Roman army and the Africans. I have given you a detail,

(9) <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-main-fresco-of-the-congregation-hall-asamkirche-or-st-maria-de-victoria-48632520.html>

(10) <http://sthughofcluny.org/2018/10/a-monstrance-for-todays-feast.html>

(11) <https://inart.org/exhibition/traces-of-exchange-from-early-western-style-paintings-to-export-lacquerware/>

which will show you that the Japanese screen painter has used Julio Romano's depiction of the Battle of Zama.<sup>(12)</sup> There are many people in the room who know much more about this than I do. Here is the classic depiction of the Roman Battle of Zama, in tapestry form.

That is number three of my examples. The fourth – I'm coming to the end, I don't want to go beyond my time - is again something I found by chance. I was in Valletta, in Malta, on the trip to Sicily which I just mentioned to you. It's very expensive to fly from London to Palermo, but if you fly via Valletta, it's cheap. So I only went to Malta to save about £200, but I'm glad I did. I visited the Casa Rocca Piccola where the senior aristocratic family of Malta lived. They were very devout, and they have this piece in their main sitting room. The item is is not a church, but in a home. It is a lovely cabinet, and you wouldn't particularly know anything other than that it was a cabinet, though instantly clear is that its decorations reference Japanese lacquerware.<sup>(13)</sup> Then if you open the doors (they wouldn't let me do it, but there's a photograph on the side with them opened) you have a family altar inside, yet the iconography of it is, for some reason, all about Japan. Here we have Francis Xavier, with the detail you can see. He is always shown with dark black hair, and we have a rather Orientalizing setting. I think you know, he was said to have performed a second miracle. As well as raising somebody from the dead, as saw in Rubens' painting, on his way across the seas in south-east Asia there was a terrible storm and he dipped his crucifix into the waters to calm them, but a strong wave broken the chain. Sadly he lost his beautiful crucifix. But some days later, on land, a crab came up to him on the beach, and returned the object. Here is is doing so. A crab with a crucifix on its back became one of the iconographical markers of Francis Xavier.

So that's what I want to say to you today. It was a somewhat randomized sets of images. I know there are several people here who've done very intricate researches, but there are plenty more materials for us to look at. Thank you for your attention.

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(12) <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/tapestry-history-scipio-battle-zama>

(13) <https://placeandsee.com/s?as=foto&fk=37731870575>