

Jesuit *seminário dos pintores* of Japan and Missionary Art in East Asia: Macau, Manila and Nagasaki

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The Italian Jesuit painter Giovanni Cola founded an “art academy” or “art seminary” (*Seminario dos pintores*) in Nagasaki around 1590. The students of this art school produced numerous paintings, including secular ones that demonstrate an acquaintance with Western painting. Because of the persecution of Christians in Japan, Cola and some of his pupils were forced to flee to Macau in 1614, where he died 12 years later. One can suppose that the works of his art school remain not only in Japan and Macau, but in Manila as well, which like Macau and Nagasaki was an important Catholic center in East Asia during that period. Today, I will talk about the art of this school in Macau, Manila, and Nagasaki, focusing on this oil painting representing *St. Michael the Archangel holding a monstrance*, owned by the Diocese of Macau. It has not yet been studied sufficiently, even though this painting seems crucial to examining the artistic relationship of those three cities.

Although several scholars have done research on Giovanni Cola, little is known about him. In fact, even his surname is uncertain, and he is variously referred to as “Cola,” “Nicolao,” “Niccolò,” and “Nicholaus.” Here, I adopt “Cola,” following his own signature in an autographed letter in Italian. Also, “Cola” appears as a family name in the register of baptized Diocese members, but “Nicolao” and “Niccolò” do not. This was conserved only from the end of the sixteenth century in the Diocesan Archive of Nola, his native city. None of his works have been identified except for a small drawing of the *Salvator Mundi*, the Savior of the World, which I found in a letter signed with his name that was written in Macau in 1582 before he left on his mission to Nagasaki. Other letters and reports by Jesuits from the Provinces of the Indies report that, in Macau, Cola depicted a *Salvator Mundi* in oil, also in 1582, and that he later produced at least six paintings of the *Salvator Mundi* in Japan.

Perhaps the best-known among Cola’s students was the Chinese-Japanese painter Jacob Niwa, called Ní Ytchén (倪一誠) in China. Significantly, his only signed and dated work treated a subject that, as we know, was frequently treated by Cola, namely the *Salvator Mundi*. It is an oil painting on copper that’s signed and dated 1597, now in the Tokyo University Library. The painting shows that Niwa had thoroughly absorbed Cola’s Western-style painting education, even though there is some awkwardness in the representation of the hands.

Many of the other students of Cola have remained anonymous, but in studying the works of the students of Cola, one can recognize the hands of several individual artists. For instance, the *Madonna of the Snow* in the Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum in Nagasaki, a delicate image in watercolors on traditional Japanese paper, differs substantially from Niwa’s *Salvator Mundi* in that the facial features are more clearly defined and the eyes are larger. Similar features are found in *Western Kings on Horseback* of Suntory Museum in Tokyo. Other pieces, such as a *Western Monk and Two Children* in the Kobe City Museum and *Western Genre Scene* on a Byobu screen in the Fukuoka City Museum, feature European pastoral scenes with Christian implications. Some of the depicted faces are delicate and upturned with a particular expression and small pupils. Despite the differences among the Cola School paintings, however, it is possible to recognize certain common denominators, such as thin arched eyebrows, subtle and small folds, and delicate tonalities.

These characteristics of the school of Giovanni Cola must ultimately have been derived from Cola’s own work, not only because he was the founder of the academy, but also because he was the only Western painter in Japan at that time. Existing scholarship, in particular that by Josef Franz Schütte, Grace Vlam, Alexander Bailey, and Mitsuru Sakamoto, has investigated the career of Giovanni Cola exclusively through documents of the Society of Jesus.

From these, we know that he was born around 1558 in Nola in the Kingdom of Naples. In December of 1577, he entered the Jesuit novitiate, and after only four years, he was sent on his mission to Japan. By way of Goa, Malacca, and Macau, he arrived in Nagasaki in July 1582. After some time there, he began to teach painting, and he soon had so many students that one can speak of a veritable art school. The school was very active after 1590, even though civil wars in Japan forced it to relocate multiple times around Nagasaki. The Japanese disciples of the *Seminario* did not create original artworks, but faithfully copied Western art, mostly creating engravings analogous to Spanish colonial art. Apparently, Cola was an effective teacher. In 1601, Jesuit Vice-Provincial Francesco Pasio wrote with reference to the Seminario students' paintings: "Truly they can be compared to those of Europe."

Giovanni Cola was approximately 19 years old when he entered the Society of Jesus. Commonly, one entered into an art apprenticeship in Renaissance Italy around the age of 12 or 13. Therefore, by the time he entered the Society, he could have already obtained sufficient skill to teach others. The artist to whom Cola was apprenticed is unknown. However, I believe that he was trained in the workshop of Giovanni Bernardo Lama, who was active in the second half of the 16th century. Like Cola, Lama was from Nola, and he is known to have had a large workshop in Naples with numerous assistants and students. In contrast to Giorgio Vasari and Marco Pino, renowned Tuscan painters who were invited to Naples to execute works commissioned by the Cathedral and grand, important monasteries inside the city of Naples, Lama was involved in small-scale projects for modest monasteries, convents, and parish churches in local towns in the Kingdom of Naples. But he received a large number of orders, so there were many apprentices in his workshop. It is intriguing that Giordano Bruno, who was also from Nola and a friend of Lama, gave him an appearance in his comedy entitled *Candelaio* as a rich and pompous gentleman, suggesting that his numerous commissions earned Lama a very good living.

The characteristics of the work of Giovanni Bernardo Lama and his workshop are consistent with those of the school of Giovanni Cola, not only for the subtle and fine brushwork and the soft tonality of colors, but also for a certain weakness in the drawing and modeling of figures. These characteristics can also be found in the works of Silvestro Buono, cousin and collaborator of Giovanni Bernardo Lama.

St. Michael the Archangel Holding a Monstrance demonstrates some resemblance to the works of Lama, as seen in the delicate folds of clothing and decorative motifs in gold. These somewhat archaic decorations in gold were common in the Hapsburg-controlled domains of both the so-called old and new continents, including Naples. Flemish painting was introduced and interpreted in a distinctive way in these areas in the second half of the 16th century during the reign of the Habsburgs, as widely discussed. In the works of Giovanni Bernardo Lama, it is also possible to detect a strong connotation of Flemish art in the minute descriptions of details and expansive landscapes that extend into the background. Furthermore, these features were somehow adopted by the Japanese disciples of Giovanni Cola, who was in turn a disciple of Giovanni Bernardo Lama.

Part of the painting representing the *Virgin Mary in Glory and the Saints* from the workshop of Lama in the Cathedral of Caramanico is very similar to the style of Giovanni Cola. In particular, the face of Saint John the Baptist in this work is similar to the small drawing of the *Salvator Mundi*. This further suggests that Cola once belonged to Lama's workshop.

One should note that the warm tonality and the delicate, graceful expression of features and gestures were characteristic of Lama and his workshop. They were very distinct from the muscular expression of the human body and the strong tonality of Tuscans Giorgio Vasari and Marco Pino and the Neapolitan painters strongly influenced by them, as accurately observed by Bernardo de' Dominici, renowned Neapolitan artist and humanist of the Baroque Period.

It is just possible that this subtle and delicate Neapolitan style found a ready reception in the world of East Asia, as its soft colors and delicate brushwork had a similar feeling to the ink wash painting and delicate watercolor painting on silk or paper that were prevalent in Japan and China at that time.

At the same time, one sees certain parallels to Asian art in the works of the school of Giovanni. In several cases, the background is just blank, as it is very frequently in paintings in China and Japan. Some figures convey some artificial expression, likely a result of the fact that Cola's students never saw Westerners in everyday Western clothes or Western common scenery, not to mention Western women or classical statues in Roman armor. Cola's students had no choice but to stretch their imaginations as they consulted Western painting and engraving models.

Archival records indicate that *St Michael the Archangel Holding a Monstrance* was executed for the Jesuit's College Church of Saint Paul in Macau, constructed in the first decades of the 17th century. An annual letter of the Jesuit College in Macau of 1608 states that a gilded altar panel with the image of Saint Michael was placed in the church the previous year. Giovanni Cola and his pupils did not flee to Macau until 1614. Based on an analysis of dates, César Guillén Nuñez, author of a monograph on the church of Saint Paul, suggests that it was painted by Cola's pupil Jacob Niwa (Ní Yīchén). His painting skill was known among Jesuits in China, including Matteo Ricci. It is known that Niwa was called to Macau to work for the Church of Saint Paul around 1600 and that he returned again in 1606 for the same purpose. The attribution of the painting to Niwa becomes the more likely when we compare *St. Michael* with Niwa's signed *Salvator Mundi*. Both show the same characteristic shape of the ears and eyelid lines and the same awkward design of the hands. But there are also some differences. The execution of the *Salvator Mundi* is finer in the modeling of the facial features and the rendering of the hair.

The presence of *Saint Michael Holding a Monstrance* in Macau is significant because Macau was the center of exchange in a trading network that extended to Nagasaki and Manila. The *Madonna of the Rosary* in the Treasury of Saint Augustine in Manila is now attributed to a Mexican-influenced local Bohol artist of the 18th century. The artist's *Madonna of the Rosary* is nearly identical in composition to that of Saint Augustine in Manila. However, they do not resemble each other stylistically. I argue that the *Madonna of the Rosary* of Bohol was a copy of the *Madonna* of Saint Augustine in Manila, or perhaps the painter of the *Madonna* of Bohol used the same engraved source. Interestingly, there is an analogous case for the *Saint Michael* of Macau that was executed by Pedro Gomes Gusiunum in the second half of the 18th century. This Mexican painter likely replicated the same engraving. The execution of the *Madonna of the Rosary* in Manila is consistent with *Saint Michael* in Macau, particularly in the characteristic shape of the ears, eyebrows, and lips and the decorative motifs in gold. At the same time, the Madonna's hand gestures and eyes glancing upwards recall some figures depicted in *Western Genre Scene* on the Byobu screens and several other figures on hanging scrolls produced by Cola's school.

Hence, it seems likely that the art of Cola's school spread also to Luzon across the sea. This is not surprising, as Western missionaries in the early 17th century moved frequently between Macau, Manila, and Nagasaki. Already, from the 16th century onward, there had been significant commercial exchange between these three cities. The influence of Christian missionary art was traveling in this pre-existing network of exchange.

The iconography of *St. Michael the Archangel Holding a Monstrance* is very unusual. For one, the motif of St. Michael holding a monstrance itself is rare; even more peculiar is the fact that, inside the oval crystal in the center of the monstrance, is a representation of the *Crucifixion*. As has been argued quite extensively, the iconography of Saint Michael is strongly connected with the stance of the Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation period, as the militant archangel stands for the battle against Protestant heretics in Europe and pagans in Asian countries and the so-called New World. Francis Xavier recommended that converts beg Saint Michael to defend them from the devil in their bedtime prayer penitence. Thus, the image of *Saint Michael* was produced repeatedly in that period both in and outside of Europe. However, the image of Saint Michael with the Eucharist is very peculiar. Thus far, I have found only two other paintings depicting this potential iconographic scene: both were executed in Mexico in the 18th century – that is, well after the painting in Macau. We have already seen one of them. In contrast to these Mexican versions, in the *Saint Michael* of Macau, the chain that is hanging from the monstrance is not attached to the Dragon, but falls on a square object that likely indicates a seal of the abyss. According to the Revelation of John,

Chapter 20, the angel with a key and a great chain put the devil or Satan in bonds in the abyss for a thousand years.

It is possible to connect the iconography of Saint Michael with the Eucharist with the decree of the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent, held on October 11th of 1551, which confirmed that, under the forms of both bread and wine, the sacrament contained “truly, really, and substantially the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ together with his soul and divinity, and therefore the whole Christ.” In the post-Tridentine world, new devotions developed around the Eucharist, specifically for the Jesuits, such as frequent communion or the Forty Hours. At the center of these beliefs and attitudes, was the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Eucharist was the organizing principle of the Counter-Reformation and of the struggle against Protestant heresies and pagans. The Eucharist supposedly shielded Catholics against evil and was comparable to a relic that took on miraculous power.

Summing up, the artist who painted *St. Michael the Archangel Holding a Monstrance*, whether it was Niwa or an anonymous student of Cola’s *Seminario*, made a living within the context of the Jesuit communities of Japan and Macau. It is likely that he was given a print, perhaps the same one that was used a century later by artists in Mexico. This he copied in a Neapolitan local style of the 16th century, especially that of Giovanni Bernardo Lama, in whose workshop Giovanni Cola was trained as an artist before entering in the Society of Jesus. That subtle and soft Neapolitan local style would have been easier to accept for the Chinese and Japanese in comparison to the art of the Tuscan school, which was actually more important and admired in Europe at that time. The works of Cola’s school were also diffused to Manila, Nagasaki, and Macau through the interconnections of Western missionaries in the early 17th century in that area. Already, from the 16th century onward, there had been significant commercial exchange between these three cities, and the first Western-style painting in East Asia by the School of Giovanni Cola was traveling in this pre-existing network of exchange.