

The Catholic Architecture of Early Modern Japan: Between Adaptation and Christian Identity*

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Catholic architecture of the so-called “Christian century” (1549–1639), the period of evangelization before the ban on Christianity in early modern Japan, has been a relatively unexplored topic. The complete destruction of missionary buildings and the scant documentary evidence have limited scholars’ ability to carry out research. Yet, the critical review of missionary documentation opens up alternative possibilities for study. This paper examines Japan’s missionary architecture by re-surveying the historical record. The paper focuses on the problems the missionaries faced in adapting vernacular buildings even as they aspired to erect churches “in their own way.” It further explores how architecture was used by Catholic missionaries and the Christian faithful to visualize their distinct Catholic identity.

Keywords: early modern Japan, Catholic missions, church buildings, architecture, globalization, Spanish-Portuguese expansion

Introduction

Catholic missionary architecture in early modern Japan is a difficult subject of study due to the lack of material remains. All church buildings were completely destroyed following the anti-Christian policies during the Azuchi-Momoyama and early Edo periods (late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries). As a result, the only sources available today are the descriptions of the churches and outbuildings found in Western manuscripts and chronicles, as well as the pictorial representations in the famous *nanban* 南蛮 folding screens. Exceptionally, on the original site of the church of Santo Domingo in Nagasaki, some remains of stone corridors, drainages, and tiles were discovered during excavation works carried out in 2000–2001. However, the scant archaeological data makes an exact reconstruction of architecture difficult. A number of previous studies have focused on collecting historical data on missionary establishments as well as analyzing the Jesuit architectural rules dictated by Valignano in

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Chapter 7 of *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (1581).¹ Moreover, during the last century scholars have been mostly interested in matters of style, such as whether missionary architecture followed a “Japanese” or “Western style.”²

In this paper, an historical reconstruction of missionary architecture in Japan will be attempted. The paper opens with an historiographical review in order to address the current state of research, highlighting different positions and views, and outlining distinctive features of Japanese Catholic churches. Then, it opens a debate on traditional approaches to this topic by examining concrete examples of Jesuit and mendicant buildings in Japan. The potential of documentary sources to explore the problems the missionaries faced in adapting vernacular buildings to their purposes will be explored. Missionaries aspired to erect churches “in our own way” (*a nuestro modo*), once the mission started to gather momentum, but did they actually succeed? Since church buildings were a vital display of Catholic identity, both Jesuits and mendicant friars strove to introduce Western architectural solutions. Yet, the historical record suggests that missionary architecture was far removed from European construction norms and patterns. This paper uses missionary sources to reconstruct the debates on Catholic architecture in early modern Japan as well as the different solutions eventually implemented by the Europeans.

1.1. Historiographical Review

Academic interest in the study of Catholic buildings in early modern Japan emerged in the last decade of the Meiji era (1868–1912) when Japanese scholars undertook to collect historical materials and documents in European archives and libraries. Murakami Naojirō 村上直次郎 (1868–1966), a pioneer of Western philological studies, compiled important primary sources concerning diplomatic and missionary exchanges between Japan and the Iberian monarchies during research in Europe from 1900 to 1902. More importantly, he translated into Japanese Jesuit letters and other documents useful for historical research.³ Murakami was also the first to discuss issues of architectural style. In 1911, he concluded that missionary buildings were not in “Western style,” as presented by Marco Antonio Ciappi, in his *Compendio delle heroiche et gloriose attioni et santa vita di papa Gregorio XIII* (Rome, 1596), with engravings illustrating Jesuit colleges and seminaries in Japan. Murakami rather argued that these buildings had been in “native style.”⁴ This assertion was supported by prominent scholars in the field of *nanban* studies, such as Hamada Kōsaku 濱田耕作 (1881–1938), Shinmura Izuru 新村出 (1876–1967) and Okamoto Yoshitomo 岡本良知 (1900–72), who took into consideration documentary references to “wooden buildings,” as well as visual representations in the *nanban* screens.⁵

On the other hand, some scholars argued for the existence of “Western-style” buildings. A representative of this position was Satō Kōichi 佐藤功一, doctor of engineering and professor at Waseda University, who, without offering a critical apparatus to back his

1 Pacheco 1977, pp. 131–51; Miyamoto 1991, pp. 121–26.

2 Okamoto 1948, p. 23; Okamoto 1955, pp. 58–62; Kuga 1963, p. 95.

3 *Yasokaishi Nihon tsūshin* 1927–1928; Vivero and Vizcaino 1929.

4 Ciappi 1596, pp. 39–40. This book contains illustrations of the Jesuit colleges and seminaries of Arima 有馬, Azuchi 安土, Funai 府内, and Usuki 臼杵. Yet, according to Arai, these figures have little historical value, since these prints were reproduced reusing same plates. Due to this print making method, the engravings of different collages of the world resemble each other. See Arai 1961, pp. 12–16; Murakami Naojirō, “Azuchi Momoyama jidai no Kirisutokyo” 安土桃山時代の基督教 (1911), quoted by Kuga 1963, p. 95.

5 Okamoto 1948, p. 23 and 1955, pp. 58–62.

claims, asserted that Francis Xavier brought to Japan the Italian edition of Vitruvius's *De architectura* and Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, treatises that allegedly influenced subsequent construction projects.⁶ This idea was given support by Ebisawa Arimichi 海老沢有道 and Kuga Ichio 久我五千男, who also adduced the evidence of the rock-hewn chapel of Taketa 竹田, Ōita 大分, which has an ogee arch, as well as the façade of the Church of St. Paul, Macao, which is in part the work of *Kirishitan* exiles.⁷ In their judgement, these monuments proved that Japanese Christians had knowledge of Western building techniques.⁸

With regard to this debate, Ishikawa Tōru 石川徹 argued that in the first decades of evangelization, the missionaries simply reused abandoned Buddhist temples, whereas from approximately 1580 they were able to erect “Western-style” buildings. Yet, Ishikawa countered that, considering both the scarcity of persons who possessed knowledge of European architecture and the inexperience of native workers in this field, *Kirishitan* buildings resulted in an “eclectic style,” combining Western and Japanese traditions such as occurred at the beginning of the Meiji era.⁹ In brief, Japanese Catholic architecture has been understood in terms of generalized and vague concepts such as “Western,” “Japanese” and “eclectic” styles. This approach was in part due to the Japanese cultural context: from the Meiji period, artworks produced by Japanese were classified according to bipolar concepts of “Western” or “Japanese style,” both in art criticism and in the dogmatic divisions enforced by the art academies.

From the 1970s, research on *Kirishitan* architecture saw the participation of specialists from different disciplines who broadened the analysis. Yamaguchi Mitsuomi 山口光臣, Yūki Ryōgo 結城了悟 and Miyamoto Kenji 宮元健次, who were trained as engineer, historian and architect respectively, approached the subject from the structural point of view rather than focusing on issues of style. Miyamoto sought to recreate building plans of the *Kirishitan* churches by cross-referencing historical sources with archaeological data.¹⁰ The floor plan of the Church of Santo Domingo in Nagasaki reconstructed by Miyamoto in 2004 coincided roughly with the previous layout drawn by Yūki based on documentary sources (Figures 1 and 2).¹¹

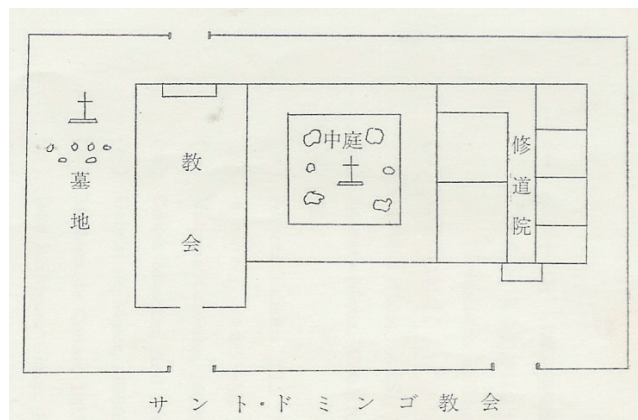


Figure 1. Reconstruction of the convent of Santo Domingo in Nagasaki (Yūki 2004).¹²

6 Satō Kōichi, “Zegōshi” 是豪誌, in *Gakutō* 学鑑, August 1939, quoted by Ebisawa 1958, p. 99.

7 Ebisawa 1958, p. 99; Kuga 1963, p. 96.

8 Kuga 1963, pp. 203–204.

9 Ishikawa 1949, no. 3, pp. 128–29.

10 Mori 1973; *Katsuyama'machi* 2003.

11 Miyamoto 2004, p. 66; Yūki 1977, p. 146.

12 Yūki 1977, p. 146.

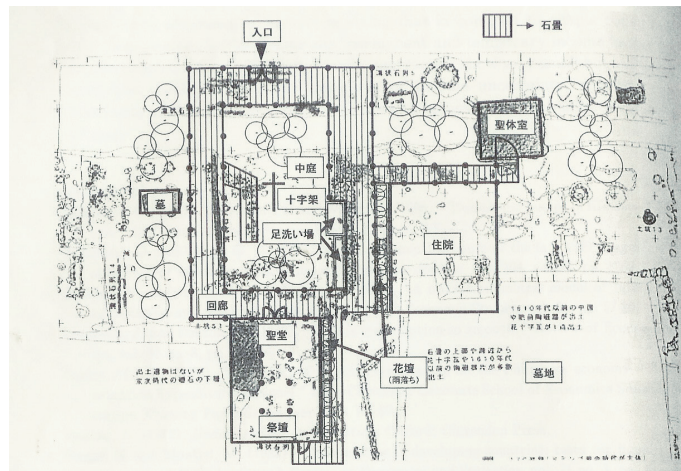


Figure 2. Reconstruction of the convent of Santo Domingo in Nagasaki (Miyamoto 2004).¹³

Despite these advances, some problems have remained unresolved. In particular, the interpretation of *Kirishitan* architecture has remained schematic. Taking into account only the building rules dictated by Valignano, specialists have emphasized a radical change in Jesuit architecture before and after the first arrival of the Jesuit visitor in 1579. Valignano's regulations are characterized by their insistence on adapting Jesuit buildings to Japanese traditions. They stipulated it was necessary to seek advice from Japanese master builders with regard to proportions for the buildings, customs and construction methods. Both college and residence (*casa*) had to have a *zashiki* 座敷, a reception room floored with *tatami* mats, as well as a space for practicing the tea ceremony. Finally, Valignano insisted, the spaces for non religious functions (e.g. residence with *zashiki*, kitchen and pantry) should be built in the Japanese style, although the church itself had to be built in accordance with European customs.¹⁴ Previous studies have argued that in the first stages of missionary activity (1549–79), churches were adapted or built according to the particular needs and wishes of the Catholics, while in a second stage (1579–1614), there was greater uniformity due to the adoption of Valignano's instructions.¹⁵ However, the extent to which these instructions were actually implemented is a matter of debate; so too is the question of whether we should continue to regard the year 1579 as a “turning point.”

Another issue concerns the historical reliability of pictorial representations of Catholic residences and places of worship on *nanban* screens. During the first half of the twentieth century, scholars such as Okada Akio 岡田章雄 (1908–82) used these screens without questioning their historical value in the study of Catholic buildings in early modern Japan.¹⁶ In 1970, Takamizawa Tadao 高見沢忠雄 established criteria for classifying *nanban* screens

¹³ Miyamoto 2004, p. 66.

¹⁴ Alessandro Valignano, *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (1581), Chapter 7: “Do modo que se ha de ter en fabricar nosas cassas e igrejas em Jappão.” Miyamoto Kenji has already conducted an analysis of these instructions. See Miyamoto 1991, pp. 121–26; Miyamoto 1996, pp. 50–54.

¹⁵ Ishikawa 1949, no. 4, p. 4; Yamaguchi 1970, p. 48.

¹⁶ Okada 1940, no. 43; Okada 1940, no. 47.

according to compositional and figurative features of the landscape.¹⁷ More recently, Sakamoto Mitsuru 坂本満 has systematized *nanban* screens, including some newly discovered pieces, and updated data.¹⁸ All this has allowed the identification of original screens and their distinction from derivative works. For instance, the *Nanban byōbu* 南蛮屏風 (Nanban Screen) of Kanō Naizen 狩野内膳 (1570–1616) belonging to Kobe City Museum is regarded as an original painting of great historical value for its depiction of objects and persons in a sharply detailed, realistic manner.¹⁹ Yūki Ryōgo has noted that Naizen travelled from Kyoto to northwestern Kyushu in order to decorate Hideyoshi's castle in Hizen Nagoya 肥前名護屋 (presentday Saga prefecture) between 1591 and 1597. During this time he must have taken notes and drawings of Catholic buildings as well as liturgical and votive objects located near Hizen Nagoya, Nagasaki. After returning to Kyoto, Naizen produced the aforementioned screen, based on sketches and notes he had taken in preceding years.²⁰ In summary, such paintings as the *Nanban byōbu*, produced by observing real objects, have descriptive value and can indeed be used as historical sources.

1.2. Distinctive Architectural Features of *Kirishitan* Churches

The diversity of construction methods employed in *Kirishitan* liturgical and devotional spaces during the century of evangelization emerges powerfully from the historical record. This diversity was largely due to the fact that Catholic missions in Japan were not under the authority of the Iberian monarchy, as was the case in Spanish America and the Philippines; in the latter cases, Catholic establishments typically occupied strategic locations in the colonial towns. In Japan, by contrast, the permission of native rulers to preach the Gospel and build churches and residences was always required. Hence, missionary activities had to be subordinated to natural and social conditions, and often suffered the effects of local political vicissitudes. Thus, the destruction or burning of *Kirishitan* temples and artworks, as well as the relocation or closure of churches and seminaries, were frequent. In the early 1580s, the Jesuits founded seminaries in Arima 有馬 and Azuchi 安土, the College of Funai 府内, and the Novitiate of Usuki 臼杵. The Seminary of Azuchi was then merged with that of Arima in 1587 as a result of Hideyoshi's Christian expulsion edict in that year. Afterwards, the Jesuit seminary in Arima was transferred from one town to another in the "Ximo" (Shimo 下) region: Hachirao 八良尾, Kazusa 加津佐, Arie 有家, Amakusa 天草, Shiki 志岐 and Nagasaki 長崎.²¹

It is also important to stress that besides anti-Christian policies, which led for example to the burning of the church of Omura in 1575, the constant civil wars in the second half of the sixteenth century frequently interrupted missionary labors and led to the demolition of churches and their outbuildings.²² These difficulties forced the missionaries to adapt as much as possible to local circumstances and to find innovative solutions to create Catholic liturgical spaces.

17 Okamoto and Takamizawa 1970.

18 Sakamoto 2008.

19 Tsukamoto 2005, p. 33.

20 Yūki 2004, pp. 163–64.

21 Kataoka 1976, pp. 1–26; Kataoka 1969, Chapters 1 and 4. The "Ximo" region refers to the island of Kyushu excluding Bungo 豊後 (presentday Ōita).

22 BRAH (Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid), Cortes, 9/2663, f. 97, a letter from Miguel Vaz, Nagasaki, 3.8.1575.

Indeed, the missionaries sought to adapt to natural, social and cultural environments, and resorted to a variety of ad hoc solutions. These included recycling construction materials, transforming native sacred places, using local materials such as wood of especial value given its earthquake resistance, and, in general, appropriating local architectural traditions. It must be noted that such architectural accommodation was not a phenomenon unique to the evangelization of Japan; it had been widely experimented with in other missionary terrains. In early Hispanic America, for example, the friars transformed a portion of the *cacique's* palace into a church and missionary houses, as the Franciscans adapted the residence of *cacique* Maxixcatzin in Tlaxcala, Mexico, in 1524.²³ Moreover, to secure more permanent establishments, they often took advantage of platforms and construction materials of pre-Hispanic temples, since these materials represented the symbolic triumph of the Church over paganism.²⁴ Furthermore, early churches and chapels known as “*visita*” were built using vernacular materials like wood, straw and adobe, because this was an efficient way to reduce both time and costs. Similarly, the first chapels and religious houses in the Philippines were made of bamboo, wood and straw.²⁵

Yet, the distinctive feature of *Kirishitan* churches in Japan lay in the fact that what, for other missions, were “provisional” building solutions became there the norm. The lack of financial and human resources, and frequent persecution too, made this inevitable. As we shall see, the adaptation without structural change of such native buildings as Buddhist temples, feudal residences and houses of the faithful was carried out under various circumstances, at different times, by various religious orders, and became an essential character of *Kirishitan* architecture in Japan. Wood, regarded as a less “noble” material than stone for religious architecture in other geographical contexts, became the main material for all kinds of buildings in Japan. The missionaries constantly recycled wood, especially cypress and cedar wood, due to its strength and durability. As a result, local “perishable” buildings in Japan were never replaced by buildings with stone and lime.

It is necessary now that we consider the process and criteria for building adaptation. How did the missionaries shape a visual Catholic identity? To what extent were Western architectural elements integrated into vernacular ones? In order to clarify these issues, I focus on Jesuit churches and on the Franciscan convent in Kyoto.

2. Jesuit Architecture: 1549–1614

2.1. Diversity of Criteria for Adaptation

The first sites procured by missionaries were Buddhist temples, and chapels built within fortified castle walls, in addition to houses and properties acquired through donation or purchase. One of the first places used by Francis Xavier to preach the Gospel was a large square in front of Fukushōji 福昌寺, a Sōtō 曹洞 Zen temple in Satsuma.²⁶ Buddhist temples were ideal places to preach the Gospel and establish mission centers, due to their expansive precincts. They also served to symbolize the triumph of Christianity over “paganism.” How-

23 Motolinía 1971, p. 184.

24 Kubler 1992, p. 166.

25 José 1991, p. 31.

26 BRAH, Jesuitas, leg. 9/7238, f. 31v, “Segunda parte da historia Ecclesiastica de Iapam, escrita em Lisboa a 16 março de 1556.”

ever, the majority of Buddhist temples procured by Catholic missionaries did not belong to the elitist Zen sect, but were instead disused buildings or properties belonging to popular Buddhist schools, such as Hokkeshū 法華宗, and Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗, particularly the Honganji 本願寺 branch of the latter known as Ikkōshū 一向宗. The organizational system and preaching methods of the latter sect were of great importance for the formation of the Catholic network in Japan. Indeed, Japanese *confrarias* or confraternities were similar to the Buddhist lay groups or congregations known as *kō* 講. The missionaries also took advantage of the propaganda method begun by the Buddhist monk Ren'nyo 蓮如 (1415–85) by writing doctrines and teachings for members of the lower social strata in an epistolary style that used the *kana* syllabary.²⁷

The permission of local authorities for the construction of religious sites was essential. Missionaries either purchased the land or received it as a donation from native Christians and Portuguese traders. The good will of *Kirishitan* daimyo was of especial importance in the selection and acquisition of sites and properties. With daimyo support, the missionaries could “take down temples and pagodas and erect, in their place, churches and crosses,” as happened in 1575 in Nagasaki.²⁸ Similarly, in Hizen Ōmura, “the most important temple the devil had in this fiefdom”—the name of which is not mentioned in historical sources—was dismantled to make room for a Catholic church at the behest of the *Kirishitan* lord, Ōmura Sumitada 大村純忠 (1533–87), also known as Don Bartolomeo. Ōmura also commanded all non-Christians to attend the site and hear the word of God.²⁹

In truth, not all Buddhist temples reused by the missionaries were as prestigious or powerful. In fact, many had been abandoned at the backdrop of the political and social instability of the Sengoku period (ca. 1467–1573).³⁰ Furthermore, Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 had set out to destroy religious institutions, or at least limit their power, as part of his strategy to unify and create a centralized regime in Japan. His burning of Enryakuji 延暦寺, the main temple of the Tendai sect on Mount Hiei in 1571, is but one example. Similarly, Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 eliminated a community of Shingon 真言 monks known as Negoroshū 根来衆.³¹ It was in order to escape religious oppression that the Buddhist monks sold their properties to the missionaries. Fróis noted this in 1577: “The reason why these monks sell their temples and monasteries where they live is because the King Nobunaga is gradually destroying and taking away their property. [...] The monks sell what they have in order to get funds to live.”³²

The techniques for transforming these native sacred spaces were two-fold. On the one hand, the missionaries and Christians reused existing temples, even as they destroyed Buddhist images.³³ At the same time, they also eliminated some Buddhist monastery structures entirely, erecting new buildings in their place “with much dispatch.” It was also customary

27 Kawamura 2006, p. 107.

28 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 98, a letter from Miguel Vaz, Nagasaki, 3.8.1575. Unfortunately, the documental source does not provide more details.

29 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 98v. This manuscript does not provide more detail.

30 Ishikawa 1949, no. 3, p. 126.

31 Biblioteca da Ajuda, Jesuitas na Asia, Codex 49-IV-53, Alessandro Valignano, “Del principio y progreso de la Religion Christiana en Japon y de la especial Providencia de que n[uest]ro Señor vsa con aquella nueva Iglesia,” 1601, Chapter 7, f. 286.

32 ARSI (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome), Jap. Sin. 8 III, f. 142, a letter from Luís Fróis, Usuki, 9.9.1577.

33 Yamaguchi 1970, p. 49.

to recycle material from Buddhist temples. These practices derived from Japanese architectural tradition. The wooden structure of most Japanese buildings was composed simply of columns, beams and a sloping roof, a system that renders easy the extension of space or restoration of damaged parts, as well as more far-reaching dismantling and reconstruction. As one contemporary actor emphasized, construction work was typically carried out without technical complications.

... Inhabitants at one of these fortresses, having just listened to a sermon on the first day, went to a very old *varela* with great zeal, destroyed both the temple and pagodas, and turned them into firewood. And the same was done by people from other villages after they were baptized. They burnt down pagodas with firm conviction, as if they had been Christians for many years. They are [currently] building many churches with much dispatch.³⁴

Additionally, according to Alonso González's letter to the Provincial Father of India dated 1576, a "*varella*," that is a non-Christian temple, donated by Arima Yoshisada 有馬義貞 (1521–77) was reused as a Christian church without any architectural modification, taking advantage of the expanse of the buildings.³⁵ Missionary bases also extended into profane spaces. From the time of Francis Xavier, a good number of churches had been established inside the walls of castles, called "*fortaleças*" in missionary documents. An example of this would be Ichiki Tsurumaru castle 市来鶴丸城 in Satsuma, and Sawa castle 沢城 in Yamato Province 大和国 (presentday Nara), headquarters of Takayama Tomoteru 高山友照 (d. 1595), also known as Dario Takayama Hidanokami ダリオ高山飛騨守.³⁶

There are other examples concerning the use of non-sacred spaces, Baltazar Gago, S.J. (c. 1520–83) reported in 1555 the beneficence of Ōtomo Sōrin 大友宗麟 (1530–87) in Funai, capital of the Bungo province: "The landlord gave us a field, where we built a house with a chapel."³⁷ The reference to "a house with a chapel" implies a building, which integrated the place of worship with the missionaries' residence. Besides, Sōrin contributed with an annual rent as well as a grant for the Jesuits to purchase "a privileged, large estate."³⁸ This became the site for a new church:

With the houses the King gave us, we built a church, and other dwellings and retreat houses, where we live, in the field we had bought. We had the help of the [local] Christians in building the church.³⁹

34 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 99v, a letter from Miguel Vaz, Nagasaki, 3.8.1575.

35 The old Portuguese word "*varella*" or "*varela*" means "temple of idols." See Dalgado 1982, pp. 405–406. I am grateful to Dr. Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner for this reference. See ARSI, Jap. Sin. 8 II, f. 14; BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 122v, a letter from Alonso González, Arima, 24.9.1576.

36 BRAH, Jesuitas, leg. 9/7238, f. 41v.

37 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 4, f. 61, a letter from Balthazar Gago to Ignacio de Loyola, Hirado, 23.9.1555, reference quoted by Schütte 1968, p. 550. Note that Ōtomo Sōrin is also known as Ōtomo Yoshishige 大友義鎮.

38 The document does not specify the amount of the annual rent. See ARSI, Jap. Sin. 4, f. 72v, reference quoted by Schütte 1968, p. 551.

39 Idem.

No doubt, homes were dismantled and the materials reused to erect the church and the missionaries' dwellings. In this regard, it is necessary to stress that the adaptation of domestic architecture for Catholic liturgical spaces was not novel to the missions of Japan, but this practice was more important in Japanese society than elsewhere. In fact, not only daimyo mansions but also ordinary domestic buildings were reused as permanent places for worship. In some cases, the homes of native converts were adapted without architectural modification; in other cases, buildings were dismantled and new ones rebuilt. Both these solutions were frequently resorted to at different stages during the Christian mission and by different religious orders.

In addition, Japanese residences were turned into ephemeral houses of prayer with the placement of a few Catholic liturgical ornaments. For instance, Adriano, a Christian aide to "Don Estevan," the son of "Don Andrés" and brother of Arima Harunobu 有馬晴信 (1567–1612), otherwise known as Don Protasio, offered his newly built house in 1584 in a "very cool and very nice site" for use as a "house of prayer," and "...decorated it so that it could serve as a church."⁴⁰ The same practice was observed elsewhere. Fróis noted in 1570 that because of the persecution carried out by the lord of Yamaguchi, "the Christians gathered in a house on Sundays and on holidays as if it were a small chapel."⁴¹ It is noteworthy that the house in question here was not a permanent but an occasional place of worship. This temporary solution was widely implemented at different times during the persecution, and especially during the so-called "underground period" from c. 1639 until the nineteenth century. Additionally, priests and their assistants sometimes made use of domestic spaces for the celebration of Mass, as reported by Fróis: "Brother Juo Vomi, a *dozucu* and I went to the fiefdom of Chikugo and Kurume castle almost at the end of June [15]89 to baptize a child who was born to Magencia, daughter of the King Francisco of Bungo [Ōtomo Sōrin]," and on this occasion, "in her new dwellings, we decorated the altar in the best way possible so we could celebrate Mass."⁴²

Kirishitan architecture was characterized by the preferential use of wood, the dismantling and relocation of entire buildings as well as the reuse of materials. All these practices were common to building traditions in Japan, as João Rodrigues Tçuzzu, S.J. (1561–1634) noted:

All buildings in Japan are made of wood, and houses are not constructed with stone or brick or partition. Only the walls are covered with a mixture of mud kneaded with straw, which helps the clay stick together better and prevent mud walls from falling [...]. They seem not to build with stone nor brick because of the many earthquakes, or because it is more difficult, while wooden buildings can be transported elsewhere. This is a daily occurrence. Not only houses, but also populous cities and towns are also moved, as we have seen many times. All this would be impossible if buildings were made of stone, brick or partition.⁴³

40 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 403, a letter from Damian Marin, Kazusa, 29.9.1584; BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 423, a letter written from Japan, 22.7.1589, with signatures of Luís Fróis and Gaspar Coellio, Cazusa, 20.9.1589.

41 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 22, a letter from Luís Fróis, Kyoto, 1.12.1570.

42 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 441, a letter written from Japan, 22.7.1589, with signatures of Luís Fróis and Gaspar Coellio, Kazusa, 20.9.1589. *Dozucu* refers to *dōjuku* 同宿, a Japanese catechist.

43 Rodrigues 1954, vol. I, pp. 197–98.

Rodrigues Tçuzzu here points to the advantages of wood as a building material: wooden architecture was more flexible in case of earthquakes, and less difficult to erect than stone buildings. Wood also enabled the transport of not only buildings but also entire towns, which would hardly have been possible with stone or brick.

The Azuchi-Momoyama period, which coincided with the flourishing of Catholic missions, was a time of intensive construction: daimyo were building castles, residences and temples. The larger part of the new buildings was recycled. Such was the case with Hikone 彦根 castle, which was built by reusing stone and wood from Ōtsu 大津 castle and Nagahama 長浜 castle in Shiga.⁴⁴ Thus, movables included not only furniture or interior decoration, but also buildings in their entirety. This practice was first adopted by the Jesuits and was subsequently inherited by mendicant friars. For instance, the Dominican church of Kyōdomari 京泊 in Satsuma was dismantled in response to the anti-Christian policy in that domain. All building materials were then transported to Nagasaki on three boats in 1609, and reassembled there the following year as the church of Santo Domingo.⁴⁵

Different kinds of wood were reused in *Kirishitan* church buildings, since construction materials varied according to the social hierarchy of the donors.⁴⁶ In Funai, Bungo, for example, the Jesuits, who enjoyed the support of Ōtomo Sōrin reused for their buildings cedar wood, which had been the chief material of daimyo's mansions.⁴⁷ Furthermore, *tatami* mats were among the material objects donated for the building of churches, as in the church of Our Lady of the Assumption built in Kyoto in 1575.⁴⁸ This suggests that the Japanese canon of proportion based on *tatami* mats was also adopted.⁴⁹

2.2. Continuity and Change in Jesuit Architecture before and after 1579

Until now it has been understood that the introduction into Japan of Western architecture was to be dated after the arrival of Valignano in 1579. This year has been regarded as a turning point for the history of *Kirishitan* architecture. Ishikawa developed the idea that Catholic buildings in Japan achieved a “Western style” or a “syncretism” by integrating Japanese and European traditions from about 1580 on.⁵⁰ Historical sources, however, invite us to interrogate these interpretations. On the one hand, the first church of Nagasaki dedicated to All Saints was founded by Gaspar Vilela (c. 1525–72) in 1569, by adapting a small Buddhist temple provided by Nagasaki Jinzaemon Sumikage 長崎甚左衛門純景 (c. 1548–1622), a vassal of Ōmura Sumitada. This temple was rebuilt “in the manner of a church” before 1574, by

44 Okada 2005, vol. II, p. 114; Okudaira 1997, p. 119.

45 Archivo del Real Monasterio de Santo Tomás, Ávila (old documentary collection of the Archives of Holy Rosary Province in Manila), Ms. Sección Japón, t. II, doc. 10, ff. 89–89v.

46 Concerning the use of different woods, see Rodrigues 1954, vol. I, pp. 197–98: “All houses of the nobles are built with precious wood with various grains. The most popular one is cedar, which is very fine and pleasant for its fineness, brightness, and all columns are made of this cedar wood or other even more precious wood. People in the villages and other commoners use pine wood and lesser quality timber, but keep their homes clean, though humble, and build at least the reception rooms with cedar.”

47 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 4, f. 72v, reference quoted by Schütte 1968, p. 551.

48 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 8 II, f. 155v, reference quoted by Schütte 1968, p. 611.

49 *Tatami* mat (8 *palmos* in length and 4 *palmos* in width: 176 x 88 cm) is a planning module that determines the proportions of traditional Japanese architecture.

50 Ishikawa 1949, no. 4, p. 4.

recycling the temple's materials.⁵¹ This hints at the introduction of a longitudinal plan, that is, a rectangular nave whose depth is greater than the width, before the arrival of Valignano.⁵² On the other hand, Valignano's instructions were not always followed in the second stage of evangelization, and architectural solutions varied greatly. So, how were churches and missionaries' houses actually built? How did continuity and change occur?

Before Valignano's arrival there were no rules governing the building of churches and religious houses. Missionaries and native Christians freely adapted places of worship and houses according to their own needs and experiences. Indeed, the practice of the faithful building churches without consulting with the missionaries beforehand must have been common. Cabral stated in 1572 that the faithful of "Inga" in Kyoto region had built a "very good" church, which they requested him to inspect. In response, the Japanese Brother Lorenzo Ryōsai 了齋 (1526–92) was sent to this town.⁵³

Similarly, according to a letter from Cabral dated 1576, the lord of Tosa, whose name is not mentioned, "ordered a church to be built so that the Fathers could come here. Afterward he gave a large donation to the church in perpetuity, and commanded the building of large houses in other parts of the kingdom so they could begin to preach..."⁵⁴ At least in some cases, then, it had been the practice in the provinces to build even before the arrival of missionaries; it was the Japanese converts who ordered the building of missionary houses around the main church.

Valignano, in his turn, held meetings in Bungo, Azuchi and Nagasaki from 1580 to 1581, after inspecting Jesuit propagation districts in Japan.⁵⁵ He set forth building rules in Chapter 7 of his *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappão* (1581): "*Do modo que se ha de ter en fabricar nosas cassas e igrejas em Jappão*" (The way of proceeding in building our houses and churches in Japan).⁵⁶ As Yamaguchi Mitsuomi observes, the architectural adaptation policies were not Valignano's own, and the visitor simply codified practices existing prior to his arrival.⁵⁷ But to what degree were the building rules imposed by Valignano implemented? Here it is important to remember that Valignano directly advised on the selection of estates and on architectural plans for building Jesuit educational institutions.⁵⁸ He also determined to reduce the number of Jesuit residences in the "Ximo" region in order to save excessive maintenance costs. Each residence would henceforth have at least seven members of the Society: three priests, three Japanese brothers and a Portuguese brother, besides three or four *dōjuku* on probation. In addition, each residence would serve as a small college.⁵⁹

51 Pacheco 1977, p. 133.

52 Pacheco 1977, p. 133. All Saints Church was rebuilt on two occasions, after the burning of 1574 and in 1603.

53 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 72, a letter from Francisco Cabral, Nagasaki, 23.9.1572.

54 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 120v, a letter from Francisco Cabral, Kuchinotsu, 9.9.1576.

55 Miyamoto 1991, p. 121.

56 Valignano 1946, pp. 270–81 and 1970, pp. 109–114.

57 Yamaguchi 1970, pp. 54–55.

58 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 196, a letter from Francisco Carrion, Kuchinotsu, 1.12.1579. This document reports that whilst he was waiting for the Visitor, Father Francisco Cabral had decided not to build a large house or college. But, now that the Visitor has arrived, the places to build college or "*casa de probación*" (novitiate) will be chosen.

59 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 257, a letter from Gaspar Coello, Nagasaki, 15.2.1582.

Moreover, most Catholic construction works in the time of Valignano remained in the charge of Japanese lords, just as in the early stages of evangelization.⁶⁰ The initiative of those lords was a major factor in the increase in building works. Valignano defended, in Chapter 7 of his instructions, local architectural traditions and customs as well as the standpoint of native builders, and he pointed out the importance of seeking the advice of master builders.⁶¹ This adaptability enabled Japanese builders to continue their organization, resources, constructive methods and techniques between the first and second stages of evangelization.

Naturally, the Jesuits were concerned to distinguish their churches from Buddhist temples. They constantly transmitted this intention in their letters and reports. Building “in our way” (*no nosso modo*) with Christian liturgical ornaments on display was essential to catching the eye.⁶² The *Annuæ del Iapon* of 1607 reported that the church of Facata (Hakata) was “...strong and well built with a floor plan that was very new to Japan and very different from their temples and *varellas*...”⁶³ The phrase “a floor plan that was very new to Japan” (*traça tan nova em Japão*) suggests the use of a European architectural plan. The design of Buddhist monasteries thus became the starting point in determining Jesuit architectural forms in Japan. The introduction of Western architectural elements was crucial in establishing a contrast with local religious architecture, and asserting a distinctive Catholic identity.

What then was the precise meaning of building “*no nosso modo*” or “*traça tan nova*.” In the building rules, Valignano indicated: “...churches will be constructed in such a manner as observed in our European custom, having longer the length of the nave, and not the width as the Japanese do in erecting their temples.”⁶⁴ Valignano proposed the use of such a longitudinal plan by way of contrast with Buddhist temple floors. Moreover, the religious house was to have appropriate spaces to receive Japanese visitors according to their social status. However, enforcement of these rules was limited in practice. Only the major churches were indeed built with a longitudinal floor plan, like the church of Arima, which was built in 1581 reusing wood from several Buddhist temples, and had a basilical floor plan composed of three naves (or one nave and two aisles).⁶⁵ Meanwhile, native Christians continued to reuse their own houses as places of worship. Their only distinguishing feature was often a cross, placed on the roof. Thus, a church built by Organtino in 1585 in Sakai had “...a golden cross on the very nice roof...” as shown in *Nanban byōbu* by Kanō Naizen (Figure 3).⁶⁶

60 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 252v.

61 Valignano 1946, p. 271, Articles 146 and 147.

62 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 55, f. 298, “Annuæ Iapon de Outubro do anno de 1605 ate o mesmo do anno de 1606,” João Rodrigues Giram, Nagasaki, 15.2.1607.

63 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 55, f. 334v. In the middle of the sixteenth century, Hakata was under the rule of the powerful Christian lord Ōtomo Sōrin. This daimyo gave land to the Jesuits to build their church and residence in Hakata in 1557. Several Catholic votive remains (i.e. medals) were found during excavations carried out in 1998 and 1999 at the site where the Hakata Elementary School now stands. http://museum.city.fukuoka.jp/jg/html/56/56_02.htm (viewed 17.9.2012). See also *Hakata* 2002.

64 Valignano 1946, p. 279.

65 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 45 II, f. 34v, “Annuæ del Japon,” Gaspar Coello, Nagasaki, 15.2.1582; BRAH, Cortes, 9/2663, f. 257v; Valignano 1954, t. I, p. 84 n.

66 ARSI, Jap. Sin., 10 I, f. 40, a letter from Pasio, Sakai, 4.10.1585, reference quoted by Schütte 1968, p. 634.

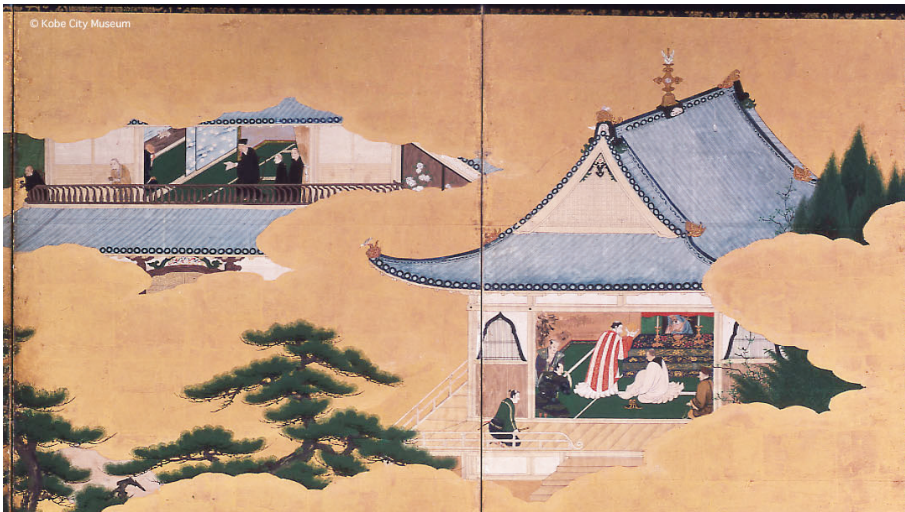


Figure 3. *Nanban byōbu* 南蛮屏風 (detail) by Kanō Naizen, late 16th and early 17th centuries, Kobe City Museum.⁶⁷

2.3. Jesuit Churches in Kyoto

From the time of Francis Xavier, the Jesuits had hoped to establish a missionary centre in the capital Kyoto. However, in the first decades of evangelization, local disturbances prevented them from developing the mission there. Fróis believed that the Kyoto mission yielded no great results before 1575. Indeed, the earliest church was not founded until 1561, using a house purchased in Kyoto on Shimogyō Shijō 下京四条 in the district of Ubayanagi 姥柳.⁶⁸ But it was a shabby, small and old building.⁶⁹ The Jesuits then negotiated with a Buddhist monk the purchase of a temple located outside of Kyoto; the Jesuit plan was to dismantle the temple and transport the materials to the site where they had settled.⁷⁰ The purchase did not finally go through, owing to a failure to agree on a price. As a result, the Jesuits next decided to build from scratch there a church dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption.⁷¹ This was eventually built elsewhere in the same district of Ubayanagi between 1575 and 1578. The local faithful donated funds toward the purchase of building materials and provided carpenters and other workers. Interestingly, not only the missionaries and native masons, but also some *Kirishitan* daimyo participated in building and design work.⁷²

The church, perhaps designed by Organtino Grechi-Soldi (c. 1530–1609), was admired greatly for its artistry; the carpentry work was carried out by artisans of Kyoto. This building was a true “*invenção*” (invention) as stated by the Portuguese Luís Fróis, S.J. (1532–97). It followed neither traditional canons of native religious architecture, nor those of Catholic churches in Europe. In fact, the church was made up of “three floors” and had six rooms

67 <http://www.city.kobe.lg.jp/culture/culture/institution/museum/meihin/046.html> (3 January 2012).

68 Miyamoto 1996, p. 86; Fróis 1976, vol. I, p. 196.

69 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 8 III, f. 142, a letter from Luís Fróis, Usuki, 9.9.1577.

70 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 8 III, f. 142, a letter from Luís Fróis, Usuki, 9.9.1577. The document does not indicate the exact location of this Buddhist temple.

71 Idem.

72 Schütte 1968, p. 610.

for missionaries upstairs.⁷³ This is the building depicted on the fan-painting, *Miyako no nanbandera* 都の南蛮寺 (Nanban Temple in Kyoto), by Kanō Eitoku's brother, Sōshū 狩野宗秀 (1551–1601) (Figure 4). This unusual architectural design caused a dispute among local inhabitants for three reasons: 1) it was taller than local temples and houses built under the rules established by Oda Nobunaga, thereby implying a contempt for the city;⁷⁴ 2) it was a living space built upon a worship area; in Japan, this was not customary; moreover 3) "...the third floor overlooked the interior gardens of nearby houses so that the neighbor's wives and daughters could not go outside."⁷⁵



Figure 4. *Miyako no nanbandera* 都の南蛮寺 by Kanō Sōshū, c. 1578–87, Kobe City Museum.⁷⁶

Fróis and Valignano justified the verticality of the structure in terms of the confined area of land on which they were required to build.⁷⁷ However, Miyamoto Kenji argues that this was not the only reason for building the church in that way. In fact, the area on which the Jesuit church in Azuchi stood was soon extended, and neighbors' houses were destroyed to make room for it. As Fróis pointed out, Jesuit buildings were characterized by their height, unlike Japanese architecture, which tended to be single-story. It is reasonable to conclude that the missionaries intentionally sought architectural verticality in order to dominate the landscape and draw the public's attention.⁷⁸

In 1571, Gaspar Vilela had explained that Buddhist monastic residences were invariably composed of two or fewer floors to guarantee their safety in the face of "heavy storms," namely the typhoons periodically approaching Japan.⁷⁹ The church of Our Lady of the Assumption was the result of cooperation between Japanese lords and carpenters and Organtino, who had extensive knowledge about local architecture, arts and custom.⁸⁰

73 Schütte 1968, p. 611.

74 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 8 III, f. 143, a letter from Luís Fróis, Usuki, 9.9.1577.

75 Valignano 1954, p. 119 n.

76 <http://www.city.kobe.lg.jp/culture/culture/institution/museum/meihin/045.html> (3 January 2012).

77 ARSI, Jap. Sin., 8 III, f. 143, a letter from Fróis, Usuki, 9.9.1577.

78 Miyamoto 1996, p. 100.

79 A letter from Gaspar Vilela, Goa, October 6, 1571, in *Yasokaishi Nihon tsūshin* 1928, vol. II, p. 165.

80 BRAH, Cortés, 9/2663, f. 27, a letter from Luís Fróis, Kyoto, 10 March 1571.

Valignano notes that the church of Our Lady of the Assumption remained an object of dispute between missionaries and local residents for a number of years. But the building must have been admired by native Christians, since they used it as a model for other Catholic buildings in the outskirts of Kyoto. Indeed, in 1577, Fróis reported that the residents requested “Muray-dono” (Murai Sadakatsu 村井貞勝, 1528–82), a vassal of Nobunaga and official of Kyoto, to demolish these buildings owing to their proliferation. Murai, however, was a friend of the Jesuits. Seeing that the request failed to move him, local residents took the law into their own hands and set about destroying churches that had living areas on elevated floors.⁸¹

The church of Our Lady of the Assumption was eventually demolished in the aftermath of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s expulsion edict of 1587. The re-establishment of new churches in Kyoto had to wait until Hideyoshi’s death in 1598 and the regime change that followed. Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, granted the Jesuits permission to settle in Kyoto, and the missionaries duly founded a new church in the Kamigyō 上京 district in 1600. This church building was humble and small according to the annual report of 1601.⁸² The church in the Shimogyō district was rebuilt in 1605 in a more ambitious mode: “...a beautiful church, all of excellent wood and the best in Japan, deep and of large capacity, above all, very clean and well finished.”⁸³ From the adjective “deep” (*larga*), we can deduce that the church must have had a ground plan with its length greater than its width, unlike the former church of Our Lady of the Assumption.

3. Franciscan Architecture: 1594–1614

The evangelization by mendicant orders in Japan took advantage of the previous work of the Society of Jesus, as well as of their own missionary experiences in the Old and New World. In fact, the mendicant missions in Japan were linked to other evangelizing regions from a methodological standpoint and the adaptation policy went beyond geographical and institutional differences. As historian García Ros puts it, the Franciscan friars “accommodated to what they found in each region, conforming to the physical conditions of the area, financial resources, the will of benefactors, the personal style of master builders, materials and construction techniques of the place in short, to the local customs.”⁸⁴

In other words, the Franciscans adapted architecturally very much as the Jesuits had before them. The friars also made use of existing buildings. For example, a native Christian called Cosme Joya bought a house in Osaka, and adapted it in the manner of a chapel. “It was was christened Bethlehem because the house and the church were very small...”⁸⁵ At the same time, the friars embarked upon large-scale construction projects such as the convent of Saint Mary of the Angels in Kyoto, which comprised both Western and Japanese architectural elements. According to the chronicler Ribadeneira, this monastic complex was built and decorated “...like the convents of the Discalced Friars in Castile.”⁸⁶ Juan de Santa María wrote that all was “...in accordance with the floor plan and measurements of

81 ARSI, Jap. Sin., 8 III, f. 143, a letter from Luís Fróis, Usuki, 9 September 1577.

82 Miyamoto 1996, p. 103.

83 Reference quoted by Schütte. Schütte 1968, pp. 614–15; Miyamoto 1996, p. 103.

84 García Ros 2000, p. 105.

85 Martínez 1756, p. 25.

86 Ribadeneira 1947, p. 342.

the convents of the Discalced Friars of St. Joseph in Spain.”⁸⁷ These Discalced Franciscans were also in charge of missionary activities in the Province of Saint Gregory the Great of the Philippines. Several friars had come to Japan from the Saint Joseph Province in Spain. Juan de Santa María stated that the Franciscan convent in Osaka was built “in our way” (*a nuestro modo*), while the buildings used for non-religious purposes, such as the hospitals and school in Kyoto were built “in the way of Japan” (*a modo de Japón*).⁸⁸

The first Franciscan establishment in Japan was the convent complex of Saint Mary of the Angels Porciúncula in Kyoto.⁸⁹ The complex was founded by Pedro Bautista, the missionary who led the negotiations with Hideyoshi in 1593 to obtain a residence permit for the Franciscans. Hideyoshi not only granted permission to found the convent, but also for the friars to live in their own way and exercise apostolic ministry.⁹⁰ He ordered the governor Guêni foin (Gen’ihōin 玄以法印 or Maeda Gen’i 前田玄以, 1539–1602) to allow the friars to choose a site in a large field of wheat, located “in the city.”⁹¹ The governor eventually complied on condition that they lease the site, not purchase it. Furthermore, he insisted, the friars should not spread the faith nor assemble Christian brethren in their house. A few days later, however, the friars began to erect on that very site a convent and a church, both in the manner of those of Spain.⁹²

A letter sent by Pedro Bautista to the governor of Manila Don Luis Pérez Dasmariñas (1539–93) on 13 October 1594, i.e. a few days after performing the first Mass in the Franciscan church of Kyoto, provides the following data.⁹³ The building materials were wood, “cane” (strong, slender stems of bamboo) and clay, a fact indicates that the mendicants adapted to local materials and architectural traditions for their buildings. Bautista also refers to a Christian “*hidalgo*,” or a *samurai* called Cosme as the builder and main benefactor. In order to complete the building works, Pedro Bautista had to apply for funding from “*Vuestra Señoría*,” i.e. Pérez Dasmariñas.⁹⁴

Pedro Bautista described in that letter a “poor” convent with its church, while in the same site, another more spacious and lavish church was completed by February 1595. This extension work aroused suspicion among the Jesuits. The Jesuit Pedro Gómez sent a letter to Claudio Aquaviva, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, to inform him of discord between Jesuits and Discalced Franciscans: “...The friars of Miaco built a large church with

87 Juan de Santa María 1618, p. 41. The province of Discalced Franciscans of Castile was called Saint Joseph. See Möller and Carabias 2003, p. 681.

88 Juan de Santa María 1618, pp. 51, 182; Ribadeneira 1947, p. 355.

89 Porciúncula, whose meaning is “small portion of land,” refers to the little chapel of Porziuncola located within the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Assisi. This term also referred to a plenary indulgence that Catholic faithful could receive on 2 August.

90 A report written by Pedro Bautista, 1.1.1596, quoted by Pérez 1920, p. 37.

91 There is a discrepancy between sources regarding the location of this convent: according to a manuscript in the Royal Academy (BRAH, Cortes, 9/2666, f. 11v), the convent was located “outside the city” (*fora da cidade*), while Ribadeneira mentions that it was “in the city” (*adentro de la ciudad*). A third source intimates that the convent was situated on “Meaco xinjo foricaua” (Miyako Shijō Horikawa 四条堀川), namely in the city. See Ribadeneira 1947, p. 342; San Martín de la Ascensión 1973, p. 97, note 238 and p. 176, note 37.

92 BRAH, Cortes, 9/2666, f. 11v. The document does not provide more detail.

93 The first Mass was held on 4 October 1594. See San Martín de la Ascensión 1973 and Ribadeneira 1947, p. 176, note 39.

94 BNM, Ms. fols. 98r-102v, “Letter to Don Luis Pérez Dasmariñas, which gives account of the result of the embassy that arrived in Japan in 1594, as well as requests an offering to complete the convent and church of Kyoto” (fray Pedro Bautista, Kyoto, 13 October 1594), quoted by Pérez 1916, p. 216.

a choir and three altars; [...] These [sumptuous] works would make him [Hideyoshi] think that all Christianity despised his authority. Therefore, he might [be angry and] destroy the Christianity that we hardly sustain.”⁹⁵

The suggestion is that the friars had built a church so large and immodest as to aggravate the authorities in Kyoto. It is worth adding that from the late fourteenth century there were two antithetical criteria for buildings among the Observant Franciscans.⁹⁶ Those following the primitive ideal of an eremitic life were in favour of building small rudimentary churches and houses in secluded sites, while others defended the erection of large monasteries in cities for the sake of evangelization. The Discalced Franciscans followed an eremitic life, settling and building churches and chapels in extra-urban areas or in isolated places. Their inaccessibility meant that many were abandoned over the years and later moved to sites closer to villages or towns, although always outside the walls.⁹⁷ This pattern was followed for the Franciscan conventual complex of Kyoto, which was located on the outskirts of the city. The Franciscan chronicler Ribadeneira described it as follows:

...Commissioner [Pedro Bautista] chose a large field in which to build a church, and a house and [plant] an orchard. Although it was situated in the city, there were no neighbors, and [the land was located] on the bank of a river which passes through [...] The pagans, in the beginning, made a mockery of the blessed monks on seeing their bare feet and poverty. Some shouted at them, and others considered them useless, and especially the boys in the streets shouted: “Deus Deus” (the pagans called Christians so), and threw stones at them. After completing the church, in Miaco, however, the friars were recognized as [noble] Christian monks. The church was built in a public place, and the building was so high that it stood out very much. It was greatly praised by the Japanese who saw it and admired its shape of floor plan, which they had never seen there. [Because of this] all kinds of people came to see it, even before the friars moved into [and settled themselves] in their [new] church. The convent had high and low cloisters, offices and cells, and the church had three altars, and a choir, in the manner of the convents of the Discalced Friars in Castile.⁹⁸

According to Fróis, this place belonged to the “Foricaua mionaji yaxiqi,” i.e. Myōmanji 妙満寺 temple of the Lotus sect. Thus, we know that the land where the Franciscan convent complex of Kyoto stood extended to the river Horikawa.⁹⁹ The estate was “*muy ancho y capaz*” (very wide and with large capacity), since it occupied an area of some 16,000 square meters.¹⁰⁰ Its strategic location within the city and in a public place responded to their need to serve the Christian community. Moreover, it was very important for the friars to build

95 ARSI, Jap. Sin. 12 II, f. 242, a letter from Pedro Gómez to Claudio Aquaviva, Nagasaki, 3.2.1595.

96 There are different branches within the Order of Friars Minor (O.F.M.). From the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, two principal tendencies in that Order were Conventualism and the movement of reform known as the Regular Observance. The Observant Franciscans are a branch of the Franciscan friars adhering to a more strict observance of the Rule of St. Francis. See García Ros 2000, pp. 137–38.

97 García Ros 2000, pp. 153–55.

98 Ribadeneira 1947, p. 342.

99 Luís Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, cited by José Luis Álvarez-Taladriz in San Martín de la Ascensión 1973, p. 176, note 37.

100 San Martín de la Ascensión 1973, p. 97, note 238.

a distinctive, conspicuous building to impress local residents. Thus, the church building served as more than a simple place to worship and study the catechism; it was intended to help missionaries establish authority in local society. In short, those buildings were key instruments in demonstrating the greatness of the Roman Catholic Church, and facilitating conversions.

According to Franciscan chroniclers Ribadeneira and Martínez, there was a rood screen inside the convent church, which separated the “*crucero*,” i.e. transept from the nave of the temple according to the “Discalced style.”¹⁰¹ This building, which included a Latin cross plan, must have represented an exception among Franciscan churches. In fact, this shape was not common for contemporaneous mendicant architecture, and the vast majority of sixteenth century mendicant churches were characterized by a single nave floor plan.

The presbytery of the Franciscan convent church of Kyoto was raised by six steps and bounded by a rood screen. The church had three altars. An oil painting altar piece (*retablo*) and a tabernacle (*sagrario*) were placed on a high altar topped by a cross, while the altar piece on the Epistle side displayed an image of Saint Francis. A choir loft was located over the narthex, at the end of the nave.¹⁰² This arrangement of the choir had been common in Franciscan churches for some centuries. Single-nave and low-rise churches began to be built in the Iberian peninsula from the late fourteenth century; after that date, a choir loft was added over the segmental arch of the narthex.¹⁰³ This architectural pattern of the mendicant churches spread worldwide from the sixteenth century. Moreover, the church of Kyoto was remarkable for its height, as referred to by Ribadeneira. Height was an essential characteristic of Franciscan churches in Japan.

The Franciscan convent complex comprised two hospitals called Saint Joseph and Saint Anne respectively. These buildings were located on either side of the church and “seemed like two bell towers” according to Juan Pobre writing in 1596. The convent was composed of upper and lower cloisters “...and one walks around them, since they were made in the manner of Castile...”¹⁰⁴ This suggests the existence of corridors in the cloisters, to be expected as this convent followed Spanish convent architecture. On the ground floor there were a refectory, a chapter room and three rooms used for catechism, while the upstairs space had cells and alibrary. The description given by Ribadeneira in 1601 contrasts with that of Pedro Bautista, who in 1594, referred to “a poor convent of wood, cane and clay.” The convent complex evidently underwent a complete transformation within six or seven years. Ribadeneira testified to the improvement of buildings, and pointing out the outstanding need for “a well decorated room”:

...sometimes Japanese Christians suggested that the convent should be equipped with at least a well decorated room to receive the honored pagans who came to visit and hear Mass and sermons. Encouraged to achieve major benefit of missionary objectives, [the friars] ordered the building of a reception room. This room was conformed with [Franciscan rule of] Holy Poverty and complied with the demands, but did not exceed the [policy of] austerity by which they were bound...¹⁰⁵

101 Ribadeneira 1947, p. 347; Martínez 1756, pp. 29–30.

102 San Martín de la Ascensión 1973, pp. 176–77, note 39.

103 García Ros 2000, p. 142.

104 Ribadeneira 1947, p. 98, note 245.

105 Ribadeneira 1947, p. 347.

Clearly the Franciscans were heeding the suggestions of the faithful that they adapt to the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Conclusion

Research on primary sources reveals that complex social and political circumstances were involved in the establishment of churches and religious houses in Japan. These circumstances forced the missionaries to adapt to the local society with great flexibility and to deploy different solutions in the creation of liturgical and devotional spaces. To date, Catholic missionary architecture in Japan has been schematically interpreted, by highlighting only the adaptation policy and practice of the Society of Jesus, and by considering 1579, year of the first arrival of Valignano, as a “turning point” from the “Japanese style” to the “Western” or “eclectic style.” Historical sources, however, show that there were multiple attitudes and criteria for adaptation within the same religious orders, and at different stages of evangelization. The Jesuit building rules dictated by Valignano were not fully implemented; they only seemed to have had an impact on the principal churches, so that in practice diverse solutions coexisted.

Even though historians have focused on the Jesuits, architectural adaptation was not limited to the Society of Jesus; it was also practiced by the mendicant orders. There were indeed commonalities between the architectural features of Jesuit and Franciscan buildings. Non-religious buildings such as dwellings, hospitals and schools followed the Japanese architectural tradition; at the same time, both Jesuits and Franciscans took into account native people’s advice on the matter of building adaptations.

The missionary reports constantly transmitted the missionaries’ desire to express Catholic identity in a visual form. As we have seen, both Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries and chroniclers used the term “*a nuestro modo*” (in our own way) to describe their churches. For the Jesuits, “our way” was contrasted to local religious architecture, in particular, the low ceiling of Buddhist temples. They aimed for elevation in their church buildings, and introduced a longitudinal floor plan different to the Buddhist model. On this point, the architectural policy of the Society of Jesus was in accord with that of the Franciscans. However, while the ideal of Jesuit churches found expression in Valignano’s building rules, the “way” of the Franciscan friars was guided by the example of the conventual complexes of the Discalced friars in Castile.

Finally, the conventional approach to *Kirishitan* architecture has emphasized differences between Jesuit and mendicant buildings. Yet, to balance this view an important future task shall be locating new documentary data on mendicant architecture, which has been little studied so far, and to rethink the issue of architectural adaptation and acculturation among Jesuits and mendicant friars, and indeed the influences of these orders on each other.

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