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Real and Imaginary Dialogues in the Jesuit Mission of Sixteenth-century Japan

Joan-Pau Rubiés*

Abstract

This article takes as a starting point for a contextual exploration of the dialogue as a form of cross-cultural interaction the accounts of disputations between Francis Xavier and his companions and various Buddhist monks during the first years of the mission in Japan (1549-51). The essay considers the differences among a lay popular version of these disputations offered by Fernão Mendes Pinto, the account publicized by Francis Xavier in his letters to Europe, and the internal working documents produced by his companions Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernández during these encounters. The latter reflected the complexity of the exchanges that took place in Yamaguchi in September 1551, offering many echoes of Buddhist arguments that stretched the Christian theological capacity. More interesting still is the process by which the Jesuits came to reject the possibilities for convergence through analogy and chose instead to emphasize doctrinal and moral differences, often employing arguments that echoed, unwittingly, the recent divisions within European Christendom.

À partir des récits des disputations qui opposèrent François Xavier et ses compagnons à différents moines bouddhistes durant les premières années de la mission au Japon (1549-51), cet article se livre à une exploration contextuelle du dialogue comme forme d'interaction transculturelle. Cet essai met à jour les différences entre la version populaire et laïque de ces disputations offerte par Fernão Mendes Pinto, le récit diffusé par François Xavier dans ses lettres destinées à l'Europe et les documents de travail internes produits durant les rencontres par ses compagnons Cosme de Torres et Juan Fernández. Ces derniers reflètent la complexité des échanges qui eurent lieu à Yamaguchi en septembre 1551 et donnent à entendre les échos des arguments bouddhistes qui poussèrent les limites de la théologie chrétienne. Ce qui est plus intéressant, cependant, c'est le processus qui conduisit les Jésuites à rejeter les possibilités d'une convergence via l'analogie et à mettre plutôt l'accent sur les différences doctrinales et morales en recourant souvent à des arguments qui faisaient involontairement écho aux récentes divisions internes à la chrétienté européenne.

Keywords

literary dialogue, religious disputation, Jesuit missions, Japanese Buddhism, Francis Xavier

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Literary Dialogues and Christian Apologetics

The Jesuit missions in Japan, which were made possible by the success of a Portuguese commercial enterprise connecting the islands to Macao, constituted the first sustained cultural contact between Europeans and Japanese, as well as a key chapter in the Christian discovery of Buddhism. Because the Portuguese were trading not as an empire but rather according to the needs and desires of Japanese feudal lords, the missionaries were guests with precarious standing, and to the extent that all religion is also culture (although not all culture is religion) their whole missionary strategy took the form of an exercise in cultural seduction. The mission therefore fell into the category of a cultural dialogue between roughly independent powers, far different from that prevailing in the most successful overseas Catholic missions of the period, between a dominant colonizer and a subordinate indigenous culture, where the cross often followed the sword.

That the relative equality of the Jesuit encounter with Japan created the basis for some sort of “cultural dialogue” does not, however, mean that the dialogue, driven largely by religious exclusivism and zealotry, was genuine, or deep. (For the purposes of this paper I am leaving aside another, less intellectual, type of cultural dialogue that took place in parallel, between the Portuguese traders and their Japanese partners.) The missionary effort did, nevertheless, generate a host of writings that made the dialogic form explicit, and it is these explicit formulations that I take as a starting point for an exploration of the context of dialogue as a form of cross-cultural interaction. What do the written dialogues tell us about what truly went on?

The literary form of the dialogue had, of course, philosophical roots in classical culture, from Plato to Cicero, and was readily adopted by the first Christian apologists, from Justin Martyr, in the Greek East, to Minucius Felix, in the Latin West. The apologetic genre never disappeared in the Middle Ages—famous examples include works by Abelard and Ramon Llull—and its more philosophical form was revived in the sixteenth century, under the influence of humanism. Many missionaries, especially but not exclusively the Jesuits, were humanist-educated and participated in this revival, often combining religious apologetic aims with broader cultural concerns. They used the form to write for European audiences and for their would-be converts, in some cases producing classics in languages such as Chinese, an important example of which is Matteo Ricci’s *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (1603).

However, such dialogues, usually polite in tone, often had a basis in real encounters. When reading a text like Matteo Ricci's *Ten Discourses of a Paradoxical Man* (1608), written in Chinese for an audience of Confucian literati, the reader is invited to assume that the exchanges took place as described, and many of the characters and situations are historically recognizable. On close inspection, however, it seems that the exchanges were probably fictionalized, not only because the outcomes were too one-sided, but also because many of Ricci's sources were textual.¹ It is often difficult to obtain independent information about the alternative point of view of the native speakers, although it is possible, in some cases, to read fruitfully between the lines. We can assume for all cases that, in a real encounter—the kind of exchange that could serve as inspiration for a literary work of edification—the rules of interaction were outside the control of a single party and thus very different from those that operated when composing a text. It is also essential to distinguish texts written for a European audience from texts and encounters where the key aim was no longer the “edification” of European readers but rather the persuasion of people with different cultural assumptions. This required a degree of “cultural accommodation.”

The importance of the intended audience brings out a structural problem with the genre that is especially clear in the case of apologetic works: the literary dialogue needed to be fictionalized in order to be effective, yet it had to remain within the margins of plausibility that made sense to each given audience, otherwise it ceased to be interesting and persuasive. Two rhetorical forces—control of the argument and dramatic equality (which required some fair distribution of rational claims)—had to be balanced. The fundamental equation underlying Christian missionary dialogues, from the apologists of the second century to those of the early modern period, was, of course, misleading, because the genre's assumptions implied that there was no real equality underlying a rhetorical even ground: the point of the dialogue was to persuade, not to explore alternative possibilities.² But it remained true that the fiction of the dialogue had

¹ For an edition with an Italian translation, see M. Ricci, *Dieci capitoli di un uomo stranno*, ed. and trans. F. Mignini and S. Wang (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010). Some historians take these dialogues to be largely factual; see R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City, Matteo Ricci 1552-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

² The same is true of non-Christian examples of the genre—consider the twelfth-century Jewish *Kuzari*.

a great pedagogical attraction, and the best dialogues could become literary masterpieces. Although the classical form had been developed in the context of primarily philosophical arguments, Christians were attracted to it because they often felt the need to appeal to reason in order to create the foundations for a system of religious faith. This was the case especially when there was no context of coercion that might facilitate conversions. Many writers engaged in missionary or apologetic efforts—even including some, who, like Ramon Llull in the thirteenth century, lived in a crusading culture—realized that an appeal to the authority of scripture was obviously not sufficient, because the status of scripture could in itself be contested from an alternative tradition, and questions of scriptural authenticity, especially when claiming (as Christians did) a universally valid status, were not easily dismissed.

Rhetorically, the dialogue could be a very flexible tool. There were examples of classical and humanistic dialogues that left important questions open—for instance, Jean Bodin's *Colloquium of the Seven Sages*, a remarkable sixteenth-century exploration of religious diversity, which, for good reason, remained in manuscript, as his conclusions were largely libertine. But usually this ambiguity was only apparent, and when, in his *Llibre del gentil i dels tres savis*, Llull did not push for an explicit pro-Christian settlement, he was not being naïve, but rather sophisticated: it was obvious which one of the three competing religions had won the debate.³ In fact, most dialogues written by religious apologists were unambiguous in their aims and conclusions: they *had* to be decisive, in a way that pagan philosophers writing about religion (e.g., Cicero's *De natura deorum*), or Christians writing on non-religious subjects (e.g., Castiglione's *Courtier*), could afford not to.

An ideal typology of missionary “dialogues” would start from the distinction between the empirical reality of oral exchanges between independent parties (often with the intervention of interpreters) and its literary representations. From a wider perspective, we could also describe the cultural exchanges that took place in the context of a missionary campaign—or, more broadly, under the umbrella of a colonial system—as a sort of dialogue, but this use is largely metaphorical, and, to the extent that it targets a vast array of agencies, many of which were not consciously engaged in a formal exchange of views, it is often misleading. The Jesuit method of

³ H. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 155-61.

accommodation, for example, generated both real and literary dialogues, but, taken as a whole, it cannot be considered “a dialogue” without raising important problems.⁴

I propose here to compare some published dialogues relating to the early Jesuit mission to Japan with documents that offer us a glimpse of actual encounters, in order to examine the interaction between real and literary dialogues and to consider the impact of the contextual differences between them. The literary dialogues generated by the early-modern Catholic missions, of which the Japanese materials offer one fascinating example, can themselves be divided into several sub-categories: dialogues between Europeans describing cultural diversity, often in relation to missionary methods; dialogues of the same kind, involving native figures, such as Japanese converts; accounts of actual religious disputations, as recorded from the point of view of a missionary or a sympathetic observer; obviously literary elaborations of the latter, composed for public edification, in Europe or in the missionary field; and, more rarely, accounts of such disputations and exchanges from the native, non-Christian point of view.⁵ Unfortunately, the Japanese Buddhist perception of Christianity is known primarily through the anti-Christian tracts produced in the seventeenth century, after the religion was banned by the secular authorities, so the most detailed sources we have are retrospective. The focus here will thus inevitably be on assessing the extent to which the Jesuit accounts of actual disputations in the sixteenth century reflect, beyond a Christian apologetic strategy, also a Buddhist perspective. Some of the later Buddhist tracts nevertheless contain remarkable echoes of the views suggested by these early Jesuit accounts.⁶

⁴ See J.P. Rubiés, “The Concept of Cultural Dialogue and the Jesuit Method of Accommodation: Between Idolatry and Civilization,” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 74 (2005): 237-80.

⁵ Although it is outside the scope of this article, it would be worth creating a catalogue of all such dialogues generated by the Catholic missions in the early modern period.

⁶ An example is the *Taiji jashū-ron* (1648) by Sessō Sōsai, a Zen monk, which raised questions similar to those father Cosme de Torres had confronted in 1551, such as how a compassionate God could possibly have created the Devil. See J.M. Pinto dos Santos, “A 17th-century Buddhist Treatise Refuting Christianity,” *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 4 (2002): 91-110.

The 1551 Disputations of Francis Xavier with Japanese Buddhists: Fernão Mendes Pinto's Popular Version

Let me begin with published dialogues that illustrate the purpose of public edification. The first example appeared in one of the most famous books of the Portuguese expansion in sixteenth-century Asia, Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação*, which I have defined elsewhere as an autobiographical romance.⁷ The account of the travels of the merchant adventurer included a visit to Japan in 1551, where he witnessed a series of religious disputations between Francis Xavier and a number of Buddhist monks. Although the book was not published, posthumously, until 1614, it was written largely in the 1560s, after the merchant adventurer's return to Lisbon in 1558, and must have been completed by 1583, when Mendes Pinto died.⁸ The *Peregrinação* is heavily fictionalized, but the Japanese episodes in particular reflected on Mendes Pinto's final years in Asia, when he actually joined the Jesuit order. This is a relatively well-documented period in his career, and, compared to other sections of the book, it is possible to ascertain that these passages are relatively reliable as a factual record. We know, for example, that Mendes Pinto and other Portuguese traders had indeed met and helped Francis Xavier in Bungo (Kyushu) in late 1551; in particular, Mendes Pinto gave him a loan to build a church. We also know that Pinto experienced some sort of religious conversion in April 1554, when the apparently incorrupt corpse of Francis Xavier, who had died trying to get into China, was returned to Goa, and he participated closely in the popular reception of a saint in the making, a marvellous spectacle of popular piety, as far as the merchant was concerned.⁹ This spiritual catharsis—by which his former life as a prosperous *casado* (a married settler in Portuguese Asia) whose idea of salvation had consisted merely in “not being a Moor” and trusting in God's mercy for his sins was now suddenly perceived as a pack of self-serving lies—is reflected in the autobiographical letter that Pinto wrote to his new brothers from Malacca in December

⁷ J.P. Rubiés, “The Oriental Voices of Fernão Mendes Pinto, or the Traveller as Ethnologist in Portuguese Asia,” in J.P. Rubiés, *Travellers and Cosmographers* (Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2007): 6:24-43.

⁸ By 1569, there existed a draft of the work, but revisions were made as late as 1578. In any case, Pinto had informed João de Barros about Japan in the early 1560s.

⁹ Pinto had accompanied Melchior Nunes Barreto to Bhatkal to receive the body, which had been brought from Malacca by sea, preserved in lime; R. Catz, *Cartas de Fernão Mendes Pinto e outros documentos* (Lisbon: Presença, 1983): 41.

1554.¹⁰ Although Mendes Pinto eventually discovered, after three years in the religious order, that he was unable to continue his new life of vigorous Christian virtue—we might guess that he found it difficult, after all, to adapt to the rigid discipline of self-denial—the parting was discreet and did not leave a legacy of open bitterness.¹¹ On the contrary, notwithstanding the fact that the *Peregrinação* omitted mention of Mendes Pinto's embarrassing Jesuit episode, the moral autobiography that created a skeleton for his romance of adventures mirrored, to a large extent, the conventionalized form of a Jesuit spiritual autobiography that had framed his own exemplary letter of 1554. The moral economy of the *Peregrinação* opposed the vain gains of trading in silk and precious stones to the lasting glory of service to God, and the Japanese sections of the book, which provide a morally uplifting ending, can still be read as a retrospective homage to the charismatic Francis Xavier and his mission.¹²

Francis Xavier's dialogues with the *bonzes* (from the Japanese *bōzu*, “monk”) are framed by an account of how a group of thirty Portuguese merchants led by Duarte da Gama and including Mendes Pinto, accidentally learnt of his arduous mission and met him in the city of Fucheu

¹⁰ For a new edition, see Catz, *Cartas*: 39-45.

¹¹ Mendes Pinto joined the order in Goa in April 1554, apparently after donating an important capital of about four thousand *cruzados* for the Japanese mission. Mendes Pinto's transformation from a proud position of wealth to humble Christian service was hailed as exemplary by the vice-provincial of “India,” Melchior Nunes Barreto. Besides becoming an ordinary Jesuit under Barreto's authority, Mendes Pinto travelled as return ambassador of the viceroy of Goa, Afonso de Noronha, to the lords of Kyushu (see Barreto's letter to Ignatius of Loyola of May 1554, in Catz, *Cartas*: 26; Barreto reveals that, had Mendes Pinto not joined the project, he might have decided not to travel to Japan). After a complicated journey involving a long stay in Malacca, the Jesuit party finally reached Japan in July 1556, where they met the superior, Cosme de Torres, in Bungo. Barreto, who was ill for most of the time, left Japan a few months later. Mendes Pinto carried out his embassy properly (the *daimyo* of Bungo, Ōtomo Yoshishige, granted houses and rents to Torres), but he must have abandoned the Society during that Japanese interval, because his Jesuit companions suddenly become silent about him in 1557. There seems to have been a pact of silence, probably a friendly one, because, even decades later, Fróis (who had travelled with him part of the way) carefully omitted his name from his history of the mission: the point of the writings was “edification.”

¹² The first skeleton of the book might have been a list of services rendered to the Crown, but the distinct moral themes echo the “Jesuit autobiography” that he composed in his letter to other members of the Society in December 1554, during his journey towards Japan.

(Funai), the capital of the “kingdom” of Bungo, in September 1551.¹³ The narrative immediately acquired a dramatic tone, through which the theme of Francis Xavier’s voluntary Christian humility was tempered by the social recognition that he received from the wealthy Portuguese traders and *fidalgos*, in this way exposing the lie of the Buddhist monks, who routinely accused the Jesuit of being a poor nobody (it is suggested throughout that one of the cross-cultural challenges faced by the Christian preacher in Japan was to escape this stigma of poverty). The clash between Francis Xavier’s true nature as a saint and the narrative of misrepresentations created by his devilish Buddhist opponents forms the core of the subsequent disputes at the court of the *daimyo* (feudal lord) of Bungo, Ōtomo Yoshishige (1530-87). The Japanese lord in this context emerges as the virtuous gentile open to learning the truth of the gospel, while Francis Xavier is the hero who, through his actions and his rhetoric, manages to expose the lies of the servants of the idols.¹⁴ In a further rhetorical construct entirely characteristic of the *Peregrinação*, Mendes Pinto uses the voice of an innocent seven-year-old child to declare the meaning of the dramatic encounter that is about to occur: hence Francis Xavier offers salvation to all, whilst the bonzes exclude women and the poor. Most often, it is these voices of innocence and those of the courteous and rational lords of Bungo, rather than the voice of Francis Xavier himself, that make the truth explicit in the ensuing dialogues.

The interventions by the monks, which stand in contrast to the principles of rationality and innocence, are also given in full. Despite their occasional plausibility, as when they describe the life of the monks as pious, charitable, and chaste, their style is arrogant, angry, and intemperate, evidencing a lack of ethical virtue that leads the gentile “king” towards an open confrontation with the monks (in the *Peregrinação*, moral truths always point towards spiritual ones). The king’s choice is understood as rational. One of the key arguments on behalf of his own religious teaching

¹³ Fernam Mendez Pinto, *Peregrinação* (Lisbon: Pedro Crasbeeck, 1614): 271v-275r. For details of Francis Xavier’s moves in Japan, see G. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier. His Life, His Times*, vol. 4, *Japan and China 1549-1552* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1982). Despite its subtle apologetic agenda, Schurhammer’s detailed work of historical reconstruction remains indispensable.

¹⁴ There is an interesting Jesuit seventeenth-century iconography on this disputation, based on Mendes Pinto’s account, albeit possibly through Lucena’s biography. Notable in particular is the painting by Manuel Henriques (1593-1653) at the Catedral Nova of Coimbra.

offered by the great “Fucarandono”¹⁵ is that he remembers Francis Xavier as a trading partner from a former life, some fifteen hundred years earlier, but the Jesuit ridicules this Buddhist belief in the transmigration of the souls by noting that, according to the accepted records, Japan has been peopled for only about six hundred years (clearly Mendes Pinto expected this figure to be more plausible). Fucarandono’s subsequent arguments emphasize the eternity of the world—as it happens, also one of the most famous “heresies” of the ancient Greek philosophers—and his incomprehension of the Christian prohibition of sodomy (*uso nefando*), all of which would have suggested to Mendes Pinto’s European audience a lack of natural reason. Mendes Pinto, however, does not dwell on Francis Xavier’s “clear and evident” arguments against sodomy, for example, on the grounds that he was incapable of comprehending them in his modest intellect.¹⁶

Given this retreat from detailed scholastic argument, it is again the dramatic context that allows Mendes Pinto to dwell on his own version of the Christian truth. By rejecting the intolerant manners of Francis Xavier’s Buddhist opponents, the lord of Bungo had imperilled his own standing amongst the people, as well as the life of the missionary. Following this dramatic setup, the confrontation reaches its peak just before the Portuguese leave Japan, with a final debate in front of three thousand monks, which is to be decided through “natural reasoning” and the vote of the audience. Here, Mendes Pinto has the whole audience agree that “Xaca, Amida, Gizom, and Canom,” the Buddhist deities, did not deserve to be worshipped, because they were no more than rich men of old, as told in their own scriptures.¹⁷ Other arguments relate to worldliness, the salvation of women and the poor, the sale of indulgences, and, finally, the paradoxes of Christian providence. The latter constitutes the most delicate moment of the narrative, as the monks argued that it made no sense for a loving God

¹⁵ “Fucarandono” sounds like a plausible Japanese name, something like “Hokara-dono” (the honorific suffix *-dono* meaning lord or master), but he need not have been a particular individual. Mendes Pinto was often inventive with oriental words and distorted those he knew.

¹⁶ “as quais aqui não ponho por escusar prolixidade, mas principalmente porque não cabem no estreito vaso do meu engenho”; Mendez Pinto, *Peregrinação*: 279r.

¹⁷ Xaca and Amida were the Buddhist saints Shaka (i.e., Sākyamuni, the historical Buddha) and Amitābha (an equivalent figure in the Mahāyāna tradition). “Gizom” was the popular Jizō, helper of travellers and those in need, who guided the dead to the paradise of Amitābha. “Canom” was the equally popular Kannon, female goddess of mercy (in fact a bodhisattva), often represented with many heads and arms.

to allow men to be tempted by the Devil, nor for the coming of Christ to the world to be delayed for so long. They are plausible arguments that suggest the reality of a dispute, but here again Mendes Pinto retreats into a confession of intellectual ineptitude, “because I realise that I am not competent to handle matters of this nature.” Paradoxically, in a Counter-Reformation culture marked by the fear of Christian heresy it was easier for Mendes Pinto to mock openly the false philosophy of the Buddhists than to get entangled in the true arguments of the Christian theologian. Hence, the triumph of the reasoning of the Paris-trained Francis Xavier is, in the end, only implied, and relies almost entirely on the declaration of the gentile king, who acts as neutral judge. Throughout the debates the Japanese emerge as the most rational amongst the gentiles of the Indies (this was, of course, how Francis Xavier had also described them), even those bonzes who still refused to listen to reason, because, as the missionary commented to the Portuguese in an aside, they had been taught by the Devil.

Mendes Pinto’s extended episode constitutes an example of an almost purely religious disputation, in this case against Buddhists. The obvious issue is how much of the dialogue is real and how much fictionalized. Mendes Pinto did not know enough Japanese to follow the debates, and his knowledge of Buddhism seems superficial (as in his mixing of the popular “Gizom and Canom” with the doctrinally central Buddhas “Xaca and Amida”). Crucially, the Jesuit sources, especially the letters by Francis Xavier himself, fail to mention any such dispute in Bungo.¹⁸ There had, on the other hand, been important disputes in Yamaguchi a few weeks earlier, and these had generated several Jesuit documents to which Mendes Pinto might have had access. A comparison between Pinto’s account and those sources, which I examine below, suggests strongly that the writer partly invented the dialogues: he used the accounts of real disputes recorded by the Jesuits to furnish the substance for the imagined dispute that he placed in the dramatic context of the actual encounter in Funai of the Portuguese merchants, led by Duarte da Gama, with their religious hero Francis Xavier. There was a good reason to transfer the dispute: at the time of writing, the once promising mission of Yamaguchi had been abandoned, and, after 1556, Bungo had become the stable core of the Jesuit mission in Kyushu, so much so that in 1578 Ōtomo Sōrin Yoshishige became, as Don Francisco, the most prominent Christian convert in Japan, even unleashing a dramatic campaign of destruction of Buddhist temples and

¹⁸) As noted by Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*: 4:291-3.

Shintō shrines (he had until then practiced Zen meditation).¹⁹ The event was widely publicised by the Jesuits. Retrospectively, Mendes Pinto understood that the lord of Bungo had *listened* to Francis Xavier's message in 1551.²⁰ Because Mendes Pinto had been an actual participant of the journey of 1551, and thanks to his skills at dramatization, the invention was the more plausible. Some of the first and most influential Jesuit biographers of Francis Xavier, such as João de Lucena, would, in fact, take the account by Mendes Pinto as a reliable source.²¹

Although Mendes Pinto travelled with Francis Xavier from Japan to Goa in 1552 and might have exchanged views with him about the beliefs of Buddhist monks, his interest in religious disputations probably dates from the period immediately after his "conversion" in 1554, when he travelled as a novice to Malacca, Macao, and Japan, and presumably read, under the guidance of Melchior Nunes Barreto, some Jesuit letters for edification. In addition, after his return to Europe and when writing the *Pergrinaçam* in the 1560s and 1570s, he might have wished to supplement his memories with published material available in Lisbon, as, for example, he is known to have done when writing about China, using the treatise by Gaspar da Cruz as a source. Bearing this in mind, there are, in fact, four closely related documents that could have served Mendes Pinto in his reconstruction of a religious disputation in Japan in late 1551: a letter from Francis Xavier's second in command, Cosme de Torres (Valencia 1510-Amakusa 1570), addressed to his brethren in Goa and written in September 1551, which included some notions about the beliefs of various

¹⁹ However, by 1578 Ōtomo Sōrin had already retired as daimyo, succeeded by his son Yoshimune. His conversion was connected to a change of wife. On this and the remarkable attempt to create a fully Christian state in Mushika, see J. Elisonas, "Christianity and the Daimyo," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4, *Early Modern Japan*, ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 335-43.

²⁰ In 1551, Yoshishige was a curious young man keen to attract the Portuguese traders to his port of Funai—one merchant, Diego Vaz de Aragão, had been there since 1546—but he was far from the fully-fledged conversion of later years. The importance of Bungo for the mission had become apparent throughout the 1550s and 1560s and was at its height when Mendes Pinto completed his revisions to his book.

²¹ J. de Lucena, *Historia da vida do Padre Francisco de Xavier* (Lisbon: Pedro Craesbeck, 1600): bk. 9, chaps. 8-10. For these passages Lucena seems to have followed Horatio Tursellinus, Xavier's first biographer, who, for the second edition of his *De vita Francisci Xavierii* (Rome: ex off. Joach. Trognaesii, 1596) had access to a manuscript copy of the book by Mendes Pinto, ahead of the book's publication. See Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977): 2:642-3.

Buddhist sects, on the basis of the disputations that took place in Yamaguchi and elsewhere in the previous weeks; the notes taken by the Jesuit interpreter Juan Fernández of a more extended disputation between Cosme de Torres and various Buddhist monks that also took place in Yamaguchi in late September 1551, whilst Francis Xavier travelled to Funai to meet the Portuguese (these notes were sent to Francis Xavier in October 1551, who had them with him when he left Japan, and were eventually also published in Europe); the influential letter produced by Francis Xavier for his European brethren in January 1552, sent from Cochin in South India, which offered a retrospective account of various debates that took place in Yamaguchi in the summer of 1551; finally, a “Summary of the errors of the Japanese”, a synthetic document that Melchior Nunes Barreto obtained from Torres when he travelled to Japan in 1556, precisely when visiting Bungo with Fernão Mendes Pinto, and which reflected a wider range of encounters.²²

Not only was Mendes Pinto physically close to these documents when they left Japan, but an analysis of their contents reveals that they were indeed the probable source of his account of the religious dispute, which he transferred from Yamaguchi to Funai, in Bungo. Their analysis also provides a first step towards an answer to the question of the distance between the reality of religious dialogues and their literary representation.

The Dialogues of 1549-51 According to Francis Xavier: The Dangers of Analogy

The documents produced by Francis Xavier, Cosme de Torres, and Juan Fernández between 1549 and 1552 are historically important, because they constitute the first detailed assessment of Japanese culture and Japa-

²² Of all these, the three first documents were published in the sixteenth century, and Mendes Pinto could have easily consulted them when writing his book. At the same time, Torres also produced a more autobiographical version of his letter, for his brethren in his native Valencia, with details of his spiritual journey. The letters by Torres and Xavier from Japan were meant to be circulated widely. What is more remarkable is that Fernández's account of Torres' disputation, with only a few cuts (especially in the section on sexual morality), was published in Coimbra in 1565 in the collection of Jesuit letters *Copia de las cartas que los padres y hermanos de la Compañía de Jesús que andan en al Japón escrivieron... hasta el pasado de LXIII* (Coimbra: João de Barreira & João Alvares, 1565), and also in subsequent editions produced by the order in Portugal and Spain throughout the sixteenth century.

nese Buddhism by early modern Europeans and shaped some of the basic stereotypes that became central to the Jesuit image of the country over the next few decades.²³ A first letter by Francis Xavier, written from Kagoshima in November 1549, for example, insisted that the Japanese were “the best people discovered so far,” because they refrained from stealing and valued honour over wealth, something that appealed to Xavier’s own aristocratic values. Although the Japanese “enjoy listening to things according to reason,” this was especially true of the laymen, who were less sinful than their “priests,” noting especially the latter’s open practice of the “sins that nature abhors” (sodomy), which had, through custom, become normalized (hence, as Francis Xavier notes especially for his brethren, “the continuous indulgence of imperfection destroys perfection”). The monks who taught the children of the nobility how to read and write in their monasteries were accused of that abuse against nature, but when reprehended, they laughed, because they did not think it wrong. Many of the laypeople, however, thought otherwise.²⁴ Japanese idolatry was relatively rational, because it involved the worship of the sun and moon, as well as great philosophers of old (Xaca, Amida, and other Buddhas), rather than foul animals, as elsewhere in the Indies.²⁵ The existence of many “universities,” especially near

²³ For assessments of these letters as contributions to the knowledge of Buddhism in Europe, see D.F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 1, *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965): 674-88, 727-9; and K.-K. Sindemann, “Japanese Buddhism in the 16th Century. Letters of the Jesuit Missionaries,” *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 2 (2001): 111-33. For the context of the mission more generally, see C.R. Boxer’s classic *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650* (Berkeley, 1951), and L. Bourdon, *La Compagnie de Jésus et le Japon 1547-1570* (Paris: Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, 1993). G. Elison, *Deus Destroyed. The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) offers an account of the largely negative Buddhist reaction.

²⁴ The people also criticized the continuous intercourse within a particular sect of male and female “friars,” which led to many pregnancies and abortions. The observation probably referred to the Ikkō sect of Amida, who are described as wearing grey gowns, “like friars.” By contrast, Francis Xavier described other Buddhist monks—“those who wear black like priests”—as fully celibate, at least in relation to women, as well as intellectually potent, and he thus granted that they were the object of genuine popular veneration; *Epistolae S. Francisci Xavierii aliaque eius scripta*, eds. G. Schurhammer and J. Wicki (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1944-5): 2:255, 268.

²⁵ Reference to the sun and the moon might be related to Shintō but also to the mythology of the Buddha Amitābha and his emanations, or to the interpretation of the cosmic Buddha Vairocana. The “Summary of Errors” of c.1556 connected the belief to Shintō most

the capital city of “Meaco” (Miyako, i.e., Kyoto) was also noteworthy, as it suggested a rational foundation for spreading the faith.

The positive tone of this first letter also permeated the account of some remarkably friendly dialogues with an old Buddhist wise man called Ninxit (“true heart”), apparently the famous Zen monk Ninshitsu, abbot of the monastery of Fukushō-ji, one of the most important in Satsuma.²⁶ Francis Xavier wrote that, “in many conversations we had, I found him to be very doubtful and unable to determine whether our soul is immortal or dies with the body; sometimes he says yes, sometimes no. I fear the other men of letters are not like him. It is quite extraordinary what a good friend of mine this Ninxit is.”²⁷ For the Spanish Jesuit, the venerable Ninshitsu’s lack of philosophical dogmatism offered room for a friendly dialogue, not because such agnosticism was in itself good but because it offered hope of conversion.²⁸ Remarkably, there is an alternative account of these conversations that purports to reflect the memory of this encounter by some Japanese monks of the same monastery who, years later, spoke to the Jesuit brother Luís de Almeida. Although it presents a native point of view, it is again mediated by the narrative strategies of the European apologist. Nonetheless, it clearly suggests that Ninshitsu was being ironic and modest, without, in effect, giving any ground to the Jesuit: he claimed that many of the monks sitting in meditation were actually wasting their time thinking about worldly things, and he argued that he did not wish to settle for any particular view as to what happened after death.²⁹

explicitly, as the sun and moon were principal *kamis*. See J. Ruiz-de-Medina, ed., *Documentos del Japón 1547-1557* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu 1990): 656.

²⁶ These black-robed Zen monks followed the Sōtō sect (though other sects also wore black). For an account of Ninshitsu and his relationship to Francis Xavier, see Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*: 4:73-5.

²⁷ Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:190.

²⁸ Similarly, Xavier had high hopes for those Zen monks of subtle intelligence who were sceptical about the doctrinal schools and instead declared themselves agnostic about the ultimate principle of all things (ibid. 2:275).

²⁹ L. Fróis, *Historia de Japam*, ed. J. Wicki (Lisbon: Presidencia do Conselho de Ministros, Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural, Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1976-84): 1:27. Fróis concluded that this good old Zen master found hell waiting for him after death, because despite all his natural virtues, he had retained his false religion, in order to preserve his worldly dignity, reputation, and rents. It is interesting, nevertheless, that, for all his hostility, Fróis was able to report (through Almeida) the Japanese side of the “dialogue.”

Despite his initial hopes, Francis Xavier was in no doubt that the missionaries were, generally speaking, bound to clash with the bonzes and that this would lead to persecutions. The existence of an occasional *friendly* dialogue, which (at least from the Buddhist perspective) might have been driven by a combination of curiosity and politeness, should not lead us to declare that there was a *genuine* dialogue, if by that we understand an exchange characterized not only by formal equality in the exposition of points of view, but also by some openness to the idea of learning from the other and possibly finding some common ground. It does, however, allow us to glimpse interactions that went beyond the religious disputation typical of the Christian (and, for that matter, also Muslim and Jewish) apologetic traditions, in which, despite an appeal to universal rationality, the default positions could not, as a matter of principle, be altered, and participants therefore sought only to find arguments against an opponent. Similarly, the Japanese who undertook the disputations in effect had their own local sectarian agendas, conditioned by their own search for patronage: they might have been less doctrinally dogmatic than Christians, but the public exchange of opposing views was nevertheless a theatrical performance. We could say that a variety of language-games were being played out in a common stage.

A friendly discussion about religion was, of course, facilitated by a positive European assessment of Japanese civilization, suggesting a myriad of peripheral dialogues on non-religious issues, which need not have been controversial. This sympathy led the Jesuits to express early on a willingness to adapt to Japanese nature and customs, a principle of accommodation arguably of Ignatian origin ('to follow their ways in order to bring them to ours') which was eventually developed by Cosme de Torres when, after 1552, he succeeded Francis Xavier as superior of the mission. Already in his letter of September 1551 to his brethren in Goa, Torres emphasized the need for formed missionaries, with enough knowledge ("science") to engage in endless rational discussions on theological issues and with the prudence to learn how to accommodate the peculiar Japanese character, which sometimes required great severity, sometimes exaggerated humility.³⁰ Although he has remained relatively obscure, Torres created, over two decades, the foundations of a successful penetration of Japanese society, eventually acquiring a saintly status as an pious old man and austere

³⁰ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 217.

vegetarian, an obvious way to gain respect in the context of Buddhist clerical vegetarianism.³¹

Francis Xavier's optimistic views of November 1549 had been preliminary, because the letter was written less than three months after he reached Japan. Of course, the Jesuits had previously acquired some ideas about the country, mainly from their conversations with the samurai convert Anjirō (or Yajirō), otherwise known as Paulo de Santa Fe.³² By contrast, the letter Francis Xavier wrote from Cochin to his European brethren in January 1552, soon after returning from Japan, reflected a more mature judgement and gave a more detailed account of Buddhist beliefs. He noted how many Buddhist monks and nuns there were and how deeply divided they were along sectarian lines, emphasizing, in particular, the contempt that the black-robed (probably Zen monks) felt for the ignorance and bad habits of the grey-robed (these were probably a Pure Land sect).³³ Although his

³¹ Torres' background as a Jesuit is atypical: a former secular priest and teacher of Latin grammar in Majorca and Catalonia, he eventually embarked for New Spain, working as chaplain for Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza for several years. In 1542 he decided to accompany Ruy López de Villalobos on his controversial expedition across the Pacific. Torres accidentally met Francis Xavier in Amboina in 1546, although he only joined the Jesuit order in 1548, after reaching Goa. Torres' two autobiographical letters—one to Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits of Europe of January 1549, after joining the order in Goa and following the exercises, and another to his Jesuit brothers of Valencia, written from Japan on 29 September 1551—remain the key sources for his earlier life, as given, for example, by twentieth-century Jesuit historians G. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*: 3:15, D. Pacheco, *El hombre que forjó a Nagasaki. La vida del padre Cosme de Torres* (Madrid: Apostolado de Prensa, 1973), and J. Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 45*. It is probably on account of his limited theological education that Torres professed only three rather than four votes in 1563, notwithstanding his reputation for extreme virtue and self-denial—an example of the strong social hierarchy within the order. J.F. Schütte, *Monumenta historica Japoniae*, vol. 1, *Textus catalogarum japonice 1553-1654* (Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1975): 40-1.

³² Anjirō, who Xavier met in Malacca, was a fugitive from justice and may have been a *wakō* pirate; he certainly died one, as Luís Fróis noted (*Historia*: 1:46), albeit possibly still a Christian, capable of last-minute repentance and thus salvation. His introductory account of Japan was inspirational, although some authors emphasize that it was also misleading, especially in his willingness to help Xavier identify a core of Buddhist monotheism. See J. Elisonas, "Christianity and the Daimyo": 303, 307. Given the complexity of Buddhist philosophy, however, it seems unfair to blame a samurai convert and interpreter for failing to identify the theological issues that would become relevant over the course of the mission.

³³ Francis Xavier explained that those wearing *pardo* (light grey) worshipped Amida, those wearing *preto* (black) mainly Xaca. The "Summary of Errors" noted, more subtly, that only one of the three sub-sects of the Pure Land School Amida (probably the Ji Shū or Ikkō

exposition of the various sects was not systematic—he distinguished nine separate groups, but only one was identified by its doctrine, namely that souls were not immortal—the letter contained some important insights. For example, Francis Xavier understood that Buddhism had reached Japan from China in the form of a written literature and that it was based on the lives and teachings of “men who did great penance” for an incredible number of years, in order to facilitate the salvation of others (a clear allusion to the doctrine of the *Bodhisattvas*).

An important point for understanding these initial exchanges with the Japanese monks is that, while Christian assumptions tended to generate false analogies and dismissive interpretations, it also makes sense that the empirical complexity of Japanese Buddhism would be difficult to comprehend.³⁴ The Jesuits were confronted with at least four great Mahāyāna traditions of Chinese origin—Tendai, Shingon, Pure Land (*Jōdo*), and Zen—all of which had generated distinct indigenous versions and various sub-sects. They were, moreover, often combined with Shintō worship of traditional tutelary deities.³⁵ This variety of Japanese Buddhism provided Xavier and Torres with an obvious line of attack (since there could be but one truth), but the many doctrines also suggested interesting parallels and analogies with Christianity, which became, at times, attractive as an

sects) wore grey. The document likened their different appearances to Franciscan and Dominican friars (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 662).

³⁴ Xaca (Shaka) and Amida were only two of a pantheon of Japanese Buddhist deities that included thirteen that could be worshipped. They were *hotoques*, or Buddha saints, explicitly understood by the Jesuits as analogous to a redeemer figure. Some of the other deities were also extremely popular, in particular the female Kannon (derived from the Indian *bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*), a figure of motherly mercy, whose thirty-three statues called forth great pilgrimages.

³⁵ The Jesuits interpreted the Shintō cult of *kami* as an aristocratic worship of deified ancestral lords, which fit nicely with the early Christian literature on idolatry. Buddhism does not worship a single creator God, but in addition to the worship of various cosmic, eternal, or compassionate Buddhas in the Mahāyāna tradition, some schools in Japan (e.g., Sōtō Zen) had pantheistic tendencies. Many also incorporated the traditional tutelary deities, often interpreted as avatars of Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*, a theory systematized by the Shingon school. Funerary practices concerned with the spirits of the dead were crucial in this synthesis, as the deceased were eventually worshipped as *hotoques* (i.e., buddhas), whilst great national figures, such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, were even enshrined as *kami*; see B. Masahide, “Thought and Religion, 1550-1700,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4, *Early Modern Japan*, ed. J. Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 379-95. Mediaeval Buddhism in Japan was, in this respect, a multi-faceted movement, with both nationalist and syncretic overtones.

apologetic tactic. In this respect, Francis Xavier's first dialogues with Japanese monks such as Ninshitsu were probably influenced by his experience in India, where, in 1543, he had dealt with the religious views of Brahmin interlocutors by seeking to discover a monotheistic secret doctrine behind the self-serving lies of idolatrous cults.³⁶ That is to say, Francis Xavier's default assumption was that the more rational the opponent, the more likely he was to concede that there was a common philosophical basis for true faith. A number of Japanese doctrines and practices offered suggestive analogies, but, on close inspection, apparent similarities proved to have disturbing implications.

For example, Francis Xavier's initial understanding of Japanese theology, which as we have seen relied on Paul Anjirō's information, had been coloured by the Shingon idea that there was a self-generated cosmological principle at the heart of Buddhist worship (Vairocana, an ultimate reality that was also the enlightened mind), and it was only after many months in Japan that he realized that *de ny chy*, the Shingon *Dainichi*, was not a proper equivalent of the Latin Christian *Deus*. During those months Xavier decided that the lack of a belief in a creator God was the key to Buddhist idolatry, and made the proclamation of such an eternal being, who was also responsible for creating the immortal souls of human beings, the cornerstone of his mission. The episode by which Buddhism came to be interpreted as non-theistic is particularly illuminating, because it required reversing an initial logic—a logic influenced by the oral reports of an early lay convert—that had privileged analogies. To initially mistake *Dainichi/Vairocana* for an analogue of the Christian deity was not entirely absurd, because this cosmic Buddha was understood as a harmonious totality—luminous, wise, and compassionate—that penetrated all things in the universe. According to Luís Fróis, Francis Xavier's realization that there was no creator God in the Buddhist pantheon seems to have crystallized in Yamaguchi in the summer of 1551, when he became suspicious after some Shingon monks seemed too easily satisfied that the Jesuit proclamation of an eternal principle of all things was equivalent to

³⁶ In his letter of 15 January 1544 to his Roman brethren, Francis Xavier accused Brahmins of lying to the people, in order to receive gifts from the laity, whilst maintaining a secret doctrine by which a single creator God should be worshipped. Popular idols were in fact demons. Hence these gentile priests were hypocrites but potentially knew the truth. Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:170-4.

their own understanding of perfect wisdom.³⁷ From a Japanese perspective it made sense, of course, that a preacher coming from “India,” ancestral home of Śākyamuni’s teaching, would seek to restore a particular version of Buddhism, but Fróis suggests that they did not react well to further questioning:

Those bonzes were of a sect called Xingonju (Shingonshū), who worship a principle they call Dainichi, meaning “great sun,” to whom they give many titles and attributes that belong properly to the divinity; according to what we have understood of this sect, this Dainichi is the same that our philosophers call primary matter. But the bonzes make him a sovereign and infinite God. . . . Hearing our things, it seemed to those bonzes that the divine attributes resembled those of their Dainichi, and they told the father that, although they differed in words, language, and dress, their core teachings were the same as those the father taught. . . . Father Master Francisco, reflecting about the satisfaction and happiness of the bonzes and about this Dainichi, to the extent that his limited language skills allowed, talking to the bonzes he asked them about the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the relation between the divine persons, and whether they believed, or perhaps also preached, that the second person of the Holy Trinity was incarnated, becoming man, and died on the cross to save mankind. The bonzes were so ignorant of this, and so far from believing it, that they thought these were fables or dreams, and others laughed when they heard the father.³⁸

This was all Francis Xavier needed in order to instruct his interpreter, the lay brother Juan Fernández, to proclaim in the streets of Yamaguchi that the law of Dainichi was false and an invention of the Devil, like all the other sects of Japan. The Trinity, rather than a debate about monotheism, was the decisive clue. This embarrassing episode was not mentioned in Francis Xavier’s letters of 1549 and 1552, and we know about his dramatic change of mind only from Fróis’s later account.³⁹

A different kind of potential analogy was provided by the Pure Land School (which, for the followers of the thirteenth-century monk Shinran,

³⁷ L. Fróis, *Historia*: 1:40. The monks asking the questions concerning the God of the Jesuits were in the entourage of the daimyo of Yamaguchi.

³⁸ Fróis, *Historia*: 1:40. All translations mine.

³⁹ Fróis wrote this section of his history in the 1580s, but in 1563 he had obtained oral information from Fernández; he also had access to a kind of journal written by the same Fernández about those first months in Japan. Fróis’ retrospective desire to create distance may explain his emphasis on the idea that, in Dainichi, the divine principle was reduced to a material entity, that is, “the primary matter” of the universe of the Aristotelian tradition. In fact, by 1562, about the time when Fróis reached Japan, some Jesuits had concluded that the followers of the Shingon sect openly worshipped the Devil.

became “True” Pure Land, or Shinshū). This sect had a fideistic emphasis, centred on the recitation of the name of Amida (Amitābha), an archetypal Buddha of infinite love whose compassion alone had saved all beings. Whilst one’s efforts at virtuous conduct and meditation were, in this decadent world, futile, sincere faith in Amida would take the believer to the Pure Land after death (through rebirth).⁴⁰ Francis Xavier thought that this was the most popular of the sects in Japan.⁴¹ This Pure Land obviously echoed the Christian paradise, and Shinran’s emphasis on grace and faith sounded somewhat Augustinian, if not Lutheran. The fact that Shinran also sought a female helpmate (and even married) would have increased the Lutheran echoes of his “True” Pure Land sect.

No less important than extreme fideistic parallels were overtly ethical ones. In his summary letter of January 1552 Xavier recognized Buddhist versions of paradise and hell, but, because he sought to interpret them as Christian analogues, he struggled to comprehend them.⁴² What Xavier did make sense of was the system of salvation by which laymen were deemed unable to follow a rigorous moral life according to the “commandments” common to all the sects and therefore relied on the monks for their salvation through an elaborate system of merit transfer.⁴³ The whole religious system was described as an abusive exchange, by which the people offered money, houses, and rents to the vast clergy, in exchange for relinquishing

⁴⁰ In Mahāyāna Buddhist theology, belief in this Pure Land was made possible by the existence of many parallel worlds with their own Buddhas.

⁴¹ Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:269. Torres noted that this sect was popular because it made salvation so easy (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 213-4).

⁴² Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:265. The Japanese objected to the eternity of the Christian Hell. The connection between the Pure Land, or Yondo (Jōdo), with its opposite, Jinguoku (Jigoku), and the Christian notions of heaven and hell, was also made in the “Summary of Errors” of c.1556. See Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 660. By contrast, the Lutheran parallels of Pure Land fideism were never mentioned.

⁴³ The Five Precepts (Pañcasīla, in Pali) constitute the core of Buddhist ethics and apply to laypeople as well as to monks and nuns, but the latter usually follow a longer list of Ten Precepts, or training rules, a distinction that Xavier failed to make clear. The Five Precepts were to refrain from taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicating drinks, although Xavier offered a slightly different version (see note 44, below). In his emphasis on the inadequacy of ethical precepts, Francis Xavier may have had in mind the Pure Land (Jōdo) sects, which proposed a fideistic system that brought salvation through the mere invocation of the name of Amida. Francis Xavier refrained from drawing any parallels with Lutheranism, but some of the True Pure Land School (Shinshū) that followed Shinran sought to erode the distinction between laymen and monks, because the additional ascetic ethical precepts were irrelevant in the face of Amida’s saving compassion.

their personal moral responsibility for the five prohibitions of not killing or eating living beings, stealing, having sex, lying, or drinking wine.⁴⁴ Given the necessities of everyday life, which run counter to keeping the five precepts, offering charity to monks and nuns was the only way the laity could attain some indirect means of salvation (Xavier noted that it was particularly hard for women, because, on account of menstruation, they were deemed especially sinful).⁴⁵ In other words, the laity had been persuaded to believe that they could “buy” the freedom to sin, while the monks undertook to follow the ethical precepts in full in order to transfer their merit back to the common people and thus rescue them from “hell.” In some cases, they even promised compensation in a future afterlife (in exchange for specific sums) and sold written documents to this effect. Thus Francis Xavier expressed pity for the common people, who, by listening to this obviously self-interested clerical teaching, were deprived of their money (not to mention the true means to salvation), but, curiously, he offered no hint that his fierce denunciation of an abusive religious system that transformed the merit of the layman into the profit of the cleric might have echoed remarkably closely the Lutheran attack on salvation through works, in particular the sale of indulgences, taught by the Roman church to which he belonged.

⁴⁴ In this list Xavier emphasized vegetarianism, and he appealed to a rule of celibacy rather than to the more universal prohibition of sexual misconduct. This suggests that he was confusing the five ethical rules that applied to Buddhist laypeople (see note 43) with those that applied to monks and novices, which were indeed more demanding. The “Summary of Errors” of c. 1556 offered a more accurate version of the Pañcasīla, apparently based on discussions with Pure Land monks (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 660). Xavier’s account of the Buddhist theory of merit transfer was also imperfect, as it did not recognize the extent to which laypeople acquired merit through their generosity.

⁴⁵ Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:258: “Those women who do not obey the five precepts have no way of escaping from hell, and they give as a reason that every woman has more sins than all the men in the world, because of their menstruation, saying that such a dirty thing as a woman can hardly be saved; and yet they follow this by saying that if women give many alms, more than the men, then they will always have a remedy to escape hell.” The emphasis on the negative aspects of menstruation were noted in the “Summary of Errors” (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 657), in relation both to specific Shintō rules and to one of the more traditional Pure Land sects (those black-wearing monks of the Jōdo sect, who also worshipped other deities). The text also mentioned, in this respect, the Yamabushi hermits, who combined Shintō and Shingon mysticism and whose fear of menstrual blood led them to periodic abstinence from sex with women. The Jesuits argued that the Devil introduced this doctrine so as to lead the Japanese to sodomy, which was, of course, the real sin, as far as they were concerned.

There is a reason for this apparent paradox: by targeting the idea of how merit could be acquired and transferred, the Jesuit was in fact identifying the point at which Christianity could seek to supplant Buddhism on the basis of a remarkably similar logic of salvation. The politics of differentiation was possible precisely because there was a fundamental analogy between the Christian economy of salvation through prayer and charity, which crystallized in the Christian Middle Ages, and the Buddhist theory of merit transfer, which made their monastic system at all possible. (That laypeople acquired merit by supporting monks and nuns was, in fact, an original Buddhist principle, shared by all traditions, Theravāda and Mahāyāna.)⁴⁶ In other words, whilst radical differences offered little common ground for a consistent dispute, emphasizing subtle ones might prove effective in attracting lay support.⁴⁷ But by pursuing this avenue of attack, in effect opposing the Christian ideal of spiritual equality to the Buddhist abuse of the spiritual hierarchy between monks and lay people, the Jesuits were also entering the very terrain that had become particularly controversial in Europe, where the Catholic orders, duly reformed, in fact sought to reassert the spiritual claims of the clergy. The lay readers of Mendes Pinto, who echoed Francis Xavier's argument, might have had occasion for some private smiles, when they read that Francis Xavier "forbade that bonzes should be able to offer letters of exchange to go to heaven," on the grounds that only works accomplished with faith mattered, and that salvation was therefore open to all, laymen and laywomen, who practiced faith and charity.⁴⁸

Francis Xavier's letter of January 1552 omitted the embarrassing analogy with Dainichī, but he mentioned some of the specific exchanges that took place in Yamaguchi in 1551. Earlier in 1550, during their first visit there, Xavier and Fernández had been allowed to read out at the court of "the duke" (Daimyo Ōuchi Yoshitaka) from a Christian catechism that

⁴⁶ Hence, in traditional Buddhism the monastic community (*sangha*) aimed also to become a "field of merit."

⁴⁷ In reality, Buddhist ethics, emphasizing right intention (the key to karma), absolute principles grounded on an objective natural law (dharma), and the cultivation of virtue, could be construed as very similar to Catholic ethics in their Aristotelian (late scholastic) and neo-Stoic versions. In addition, Buddhist compassion, central to the Mahāyāna theory of salvation, echoed Christian love, and, of course, the virtue of giving (*dāna*) was similar to charity. For a discussion, see D. Keown, *Buddhist Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2005), 25-32.

⁴⁸ Mendez Pinto, *Peregrinaçam*: 281r.

they had produced in Japanese, and they had acquired a popular reputation for a few distinctive teachings which, to many, seemed absurd: the exclusive worship of a creative Deus as the only way to salvation, and the rejection of infanticide, abortion, polygamy, and sodomy.⁴⁹ The latter point, in particular, was not well received by the cultured Yoshitaka because, as Fróis emphasized “he was much given to the abominable sin against nature.”⁵⁰ A few months later, however, he became very friendly, especially after receiving some valuable gifts sent by the Portuguese authorities in Goa, including a clock, a gun, and some glasses. (It is clear that he cared little for the Christian teachings, but, like other daimyos, was keen to compete for the trade of the Portuguese, and Francis Xavier had finally decided to offer the letter from the viceroy to the Lord of Yamaguchi.) Thus the Jesuits were given a “monastery” where they lived and preached, receiving many visitors and conducting several dialogues. In this context, an intense intellectual exchange eventually took place, in which the Japanese often took the initiative: “They asked so many questions, that, from the answers we gave them, they understood that the laws of their saints under which they had been brought up were false, and that the law of God the true one.”⁵¹ Many of the Japanese converted, including some of the most aggressive questioners, and quite a few *fidalgos* (samurais).

Francis Xavier reveals that they were able to learn a great deal about the nine sects of Japanese Buddhism from these converts in Yamaguchi, a development that allowed the Jesuits “to look for rational arguments to prove them false.” It was their turn to ask difficult questions. This new arsenal—one underlying the documents produced by Torres and Fernández at the end of the year—took the exchanges to a more aggressive level of interaction. For example, once it became clear that the Buddhas Xaca and Amida were understood to have lived for hundreds of years or been re-born many times, they could no longer be wise men of antiquity but

⁴⁹ Fróis, for example, emphasizes that, by the end of 1550, Francis Xavier had settled on three themes as the core of his general preaching: the attacks on idolatry, sodomy, and infanticide/abortion (*Historia*: 32). According to the same source, which seems to follow the oral reports by Fernández, the Christian emphasis on the need for repentance and humility was met with incomprehension, whilst the Jesuit’s lack of scruples about eating meat caused surprise tinged with disgust.

⁵⁰ Homosexual practices were perfectly acceptable in Japan: see G. Leupp, *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁵¹ Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:263.

rather became “pure inventions of the Devil.”⁵² The Jesuits’ aim was now to reduce the bonzes to confusion and speechlessness, in order to ridicule their teachings before an audience of laymen and converts. They claimed their Christian faith to be more rational because they alone could answer all the difficult questions, however hostile, and they took particular pride in what they believed to be the superior cogency of their theology of creation. This was, in fact, fully consonant with the theological strategy of Thomas Aquinas, the key inspiration for Francis Xavier and his successors in the East, which had identified monotheism as a rational belief rather than as one that depended on faith.⁵³ In a similar vein, Francis Xavier emphasized the importance of European cosmographical and astronomical knowledge (e.g., that the world is round) during these debates, because it allowed the Jesuits to satisfy the eager curiosity of the Japanese and gain credit as men of learning.⁵⁴ Matteo Ricci would eventually pursue similar tactics in China, as did missionaries in many other regions.

Some of the counter-arguments offered by the monks are also made explicit in the letter of January 1552. An obvious sticking point was the issue of evil. Belief in evil demons was something all agreed upon, but it was illogical for a benevolent God to have created such beings, or to allow them to tempt human beings, or to punish people who sinned, especially after he had created them so obviously flawed. The ten Christian commandments were also too harsh, again suggesting a cruel God. The Buddhists also took a high moral ground in relation to hell, arguing that, in their system, all could eventually attain “salvation,” unlike Christians, who may be consigned to hell for eternity.⁵⁵ Francis Xavier did not suggest that

⁵² Ibid.: 2:269.

⁵³ *Summa contra gentiles*, bk. 1, chap. 3, doctrine of the twofold truth about God: the *nature* of the deity cannot be apprehended rationally, but the *existence* of a creator God can be demonstrated rationally.

⁵⁴ Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:265.

⁵⁵ See note 42 above. There was, in effect, no eternal hell in Japanese Buddhism, but there was a kind of purgatory, *jigoku* (from the Chinese *diyu*), a syncretic imagery inspired by the Sanskrit *naraka*, where souls were tormented before being reborn as ordinary living beings (it may be described as a particularly unpleasant place of rebirth, the opposite of a divine sphere, which in Buddhist cosmology was an equally temporary abode). Rather than one world, one paradise, and one hell, it is best to think in terms of many spheres where rebirth was possible, hierarchically organized from the gross (five senses) to the subtle (consciousness), with the human sphere near the bottom rather than the top. While accumulated karma determined the place of rebirth, it was possible to rise and fall through the spheres. Although true salvation (*nirvana*) consisted of release from the cycle of rebirth altogether,

he ever lacked an answer to these questions, appealing, for example, to the theory of moral freedom by which God created all his creatures to be good, but they could choose to turn evil. He went into some detail on what turned out to be the hardest question: why had God never manifested himself to the Japanese until that point, condemning so many generations to perdition? His answer was an appeal to a natural law that preceded any Buddhist teachings, that is, the inner moral sense of all human beings, by which killing, lying, stealing, and, indeed, all the Ten Commandments were instinctively known to be wrong:

And if they doubted this, I proposed that they should try an experiment, taking a man brought up on the mountain without any knowledge of those laws that came from China, without a knowledge of how to read or write, and that they should ask such a man brought up in the wilderness whether killing, stealing, or doing anything against the Ten Commandments was a sin or not; from the answer that he would give, despite being a complete barbarian, without anyone teaching him, they would see how he knew the law of God. Who taught this man what is right and what is wrong, other than God, who created him? And if barbarians have this knowledge, what about rational people? So that before there was any written law, there existed the law of God, written in men's hearts. This reasoning made so much sense to them that they were fully satisfied.⁵⁶

The identification of the Ten Commandments with natural law made explicit rather than a mystery of faith, was one of the cornerstones of the theology of the Counter-Reformation.⁵⁷ But Francis Xavier did not take the opportunity to investigate the obvious parallels with the Five Precepts of Buddhist ethics, which he knew and which could easily have become a version of the instinctive natural law known by reason alone. He probably did not want to offer any common ethical ground to an idolatrous religion. We are, in this respect, far from the type of accommodation that Matteo Ricci would pursue in China in relation to Confucianism some

one could reach a sufficiently high sphere of pure forms through personal enlightenment in some versions (such as Zen, which sought to release an inner Buddha nature), or through the grace of compassionate Buddhas in others (especially Pure Land). From the arguments it seems that it was against the Pure Land sects that these particular debates were primarily aimed. Francis Xavier noted that one especially pernicious sect, obviously Zen, denied an afterlife altogether.

⁵⁶ Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:267.

⁵⁷ J. Bossy, "Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments," in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. E. Leites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 214-34.

thirty years later, precisely on the grounds that the teachings of Confucius originally were not a religion—they did not involve worship—and hence were untainted by idolatry. Idolatry concerned the first commandment and constituted one key boundary that no accommodation could ever transgress. The Japanese worship of Shintō tutelary deities (*kami*) which could offer help in this world, as well as multiple Buddhas of healing and compassion (*hotoques*) whose accumulated merit could bring salvation beyond it, made clear the idolatrous—hence superstitious—character of Buddhism.⁵⁸

It may be argued that this use of idolatry as an absolute boundary marker was not simply a cultural reflex but was, in fact, logically essential to the missionary logic of Christianity in relation to Japanese Buddhism. As we have seen, one of the most striking ideas that emerge from the letters by Francis Xavier and Cosme de Torres following their crucial formative experience of Japan in 1549-51, is the conviction that the Japanese are extremely rational: they are not only the most rational gentiles “of those parts” outside Europe (together with the Chinese), but also fully comparable to Europeans. This conviction was determined largely by the way the Japanese sought to portray themselves.⁵⁹ Their curiosity for the teaching of Christianity, together with their ability to argue on philosophical grounds, especially notable in the case of the Buddhist monks who practised meditation with modest composure, helped solidify the theme of Japanese rationality into a Jesuit stereotype, although many of the civil customs of the Japanese, especially their high levels of literacy, also contributed. These early Jesuits were, however, also convinced that the very rationality of the Japanese would make them accept Christianity as soon as the cogency of worshipping a creator God was taught to them. The combination of a

⁵⁸) On the centrality of the concept of idolatry and its relation to encounters, see J.P. Rubiés, “Theology, Ethnography and the Historicization of Idolatry,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2004): 571-96.

⁵⁹) The theme of Japanese rationality, in fact, preceded the arrival of Francis Xavier in Japan, as it had been a key element of the information provided by the Japanese convert Anjirō in Malacca in 1547, an example of “successful dialogue.” According to Francis Xavier, Anjirō argued that his compatriots would only convert after asking many questions and observing the moral behaviour of the Jesuits: “and if I did two things, speaking well and satisfying their questions, and living in such a way that they could not find fault in me, after half a year of having experience of me, the king and the noblemen and all other people of discretion would become Christians, saying that they are people ruled only by reason,” Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 28.

profound faith in the rationality of Christian monotheism with the empirical conviction that the Japanese were fully rational, led the missionaries to the conclusion that, when Japanese Buddhists refused to listen and to convert, and especially when some monks campaigned against their preaching, they could only have been acting under the direct inspiration of the Devil.

Xavier's passage on the salvation of gentiles through natural law, like others in this letter, in reality paraphrased the intensive debates between Cosme de Torres and Buddhist monks that took place after Francis Xavier had left for Funai, suggesting that, in his letter of 1552 from Cochin, he was not simply relating his own experiences. Rather, Xavier also copied from the documents produced by Torres and Fernández, materials which were forwarded to him and which he had taken when he returned to India.⁶⁰ In effect, he summarized for their European brethren all the activities of the Jesuit party over two years. The letter from Cochin was perhaps the most influential single document produced during the early phase of the Jesuit encounter with Japan, before the mature reports produced by Alessandro Valignano and Luís Fróis in the early 1580s.⁶¹ However, as a depiction of a series of dialogues and disputations, it can be misleading. In particular, while Francis Xavier presented to Europe the outcome of the debates in Yamaguchi as a resounding success, as the claim of idolatrous monks and nuns to bring salvation to the people was effectively challenged,

⁶⁰ Xavier attributes the exchange to himself, but Torres (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 255) offered an almost identical argument, apparently after Xavier had left for Funai. Either Francis Xavier felt able to assume all the work of the mission as his own, or he and Torres had reached an agreement about how to answer that particular question. Torres had only joined Xavier at a late stage in Yamaguchi—he had previously stayed in Hirado—but he arrived at a crucial point in the interaction, when the Jesuit competence in Japanese had become adequate for such intensive debates to take place.

⁶¹ Less famous was the letter sent by Cosme de Torres to the Jesuits in Goa from Yamaguchi on 29 September 1551 (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 206-18, noting that it was in fact written a few days earlier). It offered a more precise exposition of the various sects of Japanese Buddhism, and was also published in Europe (see note 22 above). It included observations about the cult of Xaca (Sākyamuni), who had declared their laws, and of Amida (Amitābha), who made salvation easy, as well as about the peculiar doctrines of “jenxus” (Zen monks), devoted to great meditations, but who were divided about whether souls existed. In any case, it is quite clear that Torres and Xavier had developed a common line of attack, centred on the accusation that monks primarily sought to get money out of the laity.

the internal documents generated by Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernández offer a glimpse of a far more even exchange.⁶²

The Yamaguchi Disputations of Cosme de Torres According to the Notes Taken by Juan Fernández

The Jesuit understanding of Buddhism had crystallized during the exchanges that took place during September 1551 and, in particular, during the two weeks after Francis Xavier left for Bungo, when, each day, various groups of monks came to visit and ask questions. As Torres explained in a letter to his superior, written some time in early October, the debates were very intense during eight or ten days in mid-September, until they were interrupted by a bloody rebellion against the daimyo Ōuchi Yoshitaka, which brought chaos and violence to Yamaguchi, forcing Torres and Fernández to go into hiding. (They were allowed to stay for a few days in a monastery, despite the reluctance of the monks to host “devils” who had brought such misfortune to the land, but Buddhist monasteries and temples themselves were soon the object of attacks, and the Jesuits sought refuge in the house of a friendly samurai, Naitō Okimori, one of the rebel lords who had betrayed the daimyo.)⁶³ The intensity of the September debates had placed

⁶² Although the internal documents could be published, as was the text produced by Fernández, they were not written for that purpose. What distinguished Francis Xavier's letter writing was a keen awareness that letters had to be rhetorically constructed for a number of purposes, of which edification was crucial. Thus in 1548 he instructed the Jesuits in India to write in particular about ‘the fruits of their efforts’ (Xavier, *Epistolae*, I, 434).

⁶³ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 232-8. Ruiz-de-Medina dates the letter October 5-6, dismissing the date of October 20 that appears in the Coimbra edition of 1570 as an error. Naitō Okimori and his wife were former patrons of Pure Land Buddhism, but they were instrumental in helping the Jesuits gain a sympathetic hearing at the court of Yoshitaka, in Yamaguchi. They claimed that they did not convert to the new faith because they did not want to lose the merit accumulated in their patronage of the cult of Amida. Naitō needed as much merit as he could get, because he had betrayed Yoshitaka, and he was his secretary as well as his cousin. With the assistance of his wife, however, he protected the Spanish Jesuits, perhaps because it was important not to alienate the Portuguese traders, and the rebels had acted in agreement with the daimyo of Bungo, with whom Francis Xavier and the merchants then were. The rebel plan was to replace Yoshitaka with Haruhide, brother of Ōtomo Yoshishige of Bungo, who undertook to continue protecting the Jesuits. Naitō and his wife probably transferred Torres and Fernandez to their own home because they knew that the monasteries were centres of loyalist resistance and were likely to be plundered or burnt. Incidentally, it was because the building that had been given to the Jesuits by the

Torres in the uncomfortable position of having to deal with questions that went beyond the faith assumptions of his theological training: “they asked questions to which neither Thomas Aquinas nor Scotus could have given satisfactory answers.”⁶⁴ Cosme de Torres felt, however, that he dealt with them well, concluding that the Holy Spirit must have helped him (“it was not we who spoke”). In fact, he seems to have relied on his spiritual training: as he declared to the brethren from his native Valencia, only the *avisos espirituales* (spiritual exercises) from Father Ignatius could defeat the great meditations of the curious and intelligent Japanese. He also relied on the help of Japanese Christian converts, most famously the nearly blind itinerant bard Ryosai, who was baptised Lorenzo (Lourenço), although this is an aspect that the letters reveal only occasionally.⁶⁵

The account of these debates by Juan Fernández is perhaps the most revealing of these Jesuit documents, because it was not composed for publication (it is in fact remarkable that an edited version was published at all in Portugal and Spain).⁶⁶ In effect, this was an internal document, a collection of notes taken by a young brother who was learning Japanese and acting as interpreter in the course of the dialogues.⁶⁷ Here again we observe

former daimyo had been burnt that Francis Xavier, then in Bungo, obtained a loan from Mendes Pinto to build a church in Yamaguchi.

⁶⁴ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 234 (Torres to Xavier, October 1551).

⁶⁵ Lorenzo, who eventually became the first Japanese Jesuit, had been converted in the summer of 1551. Although his participation in the dispute of September that year might seem to have been premature and is not documented, he soon participated actively in similar debates in Yamaguchi. According to Brother Pero de Alcáçova, who was there in 1552-3 and offered a full report to his brethren in Europe upon his return to India, “he knows the things about God very well by heart, which is a great help to the father [Torres], because when the father begins a great disputation, soon he takes over, and because he has good judgement and has the [Japanese] language to speak about the things pertaining to God, the father lets him dispute with the Japanese.” Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 428. Lorenzo’s role is analysed by J.P. Oliveira e Costa, *O Japão e o cristianismo no século XVI* (Lisbon: Sociedade Histórica da Independência de Portugal, 1999): 87-106.

⁶⁶ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 238-61. All references are to Ruiz-de-Medina’s edition of this document, in preference to the one supplied by G. Schurhammer from a Portuguese copy, *Die Disputationen des P. Cosme de Torres S.J. mit den Buddhisten in Yamaguchi im Jahre 1551* (Tokyo: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur, 1929). An English version can also be found in Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*: 4:280-90. Although my overall interpretation differs from his in important respects, Schurhammer’s annotation remains useful.

⁶⁷ Juan Fernández de Oviedo (Córdoba c.1526-Hirado 1567), a young lay brother recently arrived from Lisbon, joined Francis Xavier and Cosme de Torres for their expedition to Japan in June 1549. At first, the Jesuits had as their interpreter and informant Paulo Angirō,

the apparent paradox that communication skills were stronger in the lower hierarchies of the mission. Hence Father Torres, rather than Xavier, conducted the great disputation of Yamaguchi, even though his theological training was more rudimentary (this may have contributed to the modesty with which he led the Jesuit mission so successfully for almost two decades); the lay brother Juan Fernández, classified an *idiota* because he knew no Latin, was his indispensable interpreter and was reputed to speak Japanese better than some naturals: as Torres explained to his superiors, little could be accomplished in Japan without him;⁶⁸ finally, as we have seen, the Japanese convert and former itinerant bard Lorenzo was both a key informant and their most effective communicator.⁶⁹

In the summer of 1551 there was no great dramatic confrontation in the form of a staged disputation, such as those that had occurred in the European Middle Ages and which inspired Mendes Pinto's account of the debates in Bungo. The notes collected by Fernández were "raw" materials and reveal the hesitations and improvisations of an actual encounter in a way far more vivid than could the retrospective letters by Francis Xavier or even Torres.⁷⁰ Crucially, the Japanese and the European Christians took turns asking questions and giving answers. At that level, at least, the dialogue was equal, and therefore real.

The notes cover about fifty exchanges, although the vast majority can be grouped under two broad headings, the differences between Christian and

who, upon their arrival in Kagoshima in August 1549, acted as the crucial intermediary between the European Jesuits and the court of the local daimyo of Satsuma, Shimazu Takahisa; he translated Christian literature into Japanese and converted his own family. But he remained in Kagoshima after the European Jesuits departed for Hirado and then Yamaguchi, in the late summer of 1550. By then, Juan Fernández, still in his early twenties, had learnt enough Japanese to act as interpreter.

⁶⁸ Torres' praise of Fernández was reported by Nunes Barreto to the Society's general in Rome: J.F. Schütte, ed., *Monumenta Historica Japoniae*: 1:41. In the 1550s, Baltasar Gago wrote similarly about his extraordinary competence in Japanese.

⁶⁹ Brother Lorenzo would, a decade later, accompany Gaspar Vilela to Miyako, where he helped him conduct several debates and dialogues.

⁷⁰ These constitute an early example of Jesuit note-taking, based on the training system used by students in the colleges of the University of Paris, where the first Jesuits had met. By 1550 this practice was quickly becoming established as crucial to the wide-ranging educational practices developed by the Jesuits, under the direction of the order's secretary, Juan Polanco. See P. Nelles "Libros de papel, libri bianchi, libri papyracei: Note-taking Techniques and the Role of Student Notebooks in the Early Jesuit Colleges," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 76 (2007): 75-112.

Buddhist cosmology and metaphysics, and issues concerning morality. It is also apparent that the main contenders were Zen monks. Torres was aware that his arguments were far from perfect syllogisms: as the document puts it, “although the answers we gave them do not seem totally conclusive amongst Christians and the learned and are not the [best] one could say in philosophy and theology, for these people one has to use such manual and material arguments.”⁷¹ This appeal to the lower hierarchy of the manual and material, opposed, by implication, to the scientific and spiritual domain that belonged to Christian thought, is symptomatic of the fact that the Jesuits could not control fully the rules of the game and lead the debate to their own scholastic terrain.⁷² It also represented a form of accommodation, and constituted a prudent rhetorical move: the “real” dialogue, the dialogue which they could not control, was also one that could be discounted if necessary, because it was conducted at a lower, more popular level, emphasizing, for example, utilitarian over normative ethics, and rationality was not perfect. Perfect rationality was exclusive to the assumptions of Christian philosophy.

Some of the first exchanges related to the existence of a “universal principle of all things,” an idea introduced by the Jesuits obviously in order to talk about God. The Zen bonzes (*jenxus*) replied that this principle existed but was neither good nor bad, dead nor alive, and indeed could be defined as non-being (*un no ser*, elsewhere *nada*, fairly translating the Japanese *mu*, “nothing, nothingness, non-being”).⁷³ These negative metaphysics were

⁷¹ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 242.

⁷² Torres, who knew Latin but not much theology, might also have felt intellectually insecure, compared with the fully-trained Francis Xavier. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Xavier did not entirely trust Torres’ ability to argue at the highest level against the bonzes (Xavier, *Epistolae*: 2:290-1), and his role during the disputation of 1551 was accidental, made necessary by Xavier’s sudden departure for Bungo. As Schurhammer notes (*Francis Xavier*: 4:281), opinions about the extent of Torres’ learning amongst his superiors differed; Valignano’s appraisal, who never met him, was markedly negative.

⁷³ The universal Buddha-nature (*bussbō*) of Japanese Buddhism, which, in influential texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*, was understood to be inherent in all things, was defined as lacking intrinsic existence—that is to say, “empty”—and was, in this respect, contrary to the Christian metaphysics of a transcendent being. In Buddhist philosophy, however, it was clearly not a nihilistic concept, because Buddha-nature represented a positive potential for salvation (some Zen masters, under the influence of the *rathagaragarbha* doctrine, conceived of it as inherent awakening). While Buddha-nature was opposed to “selfhood” and dualism, it should not be interpreted as absolutely nihilistic. P. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 2009): 103-28.

also anti-humanistic, and the bonzes resisted the Christian idea that the human soul is uniquely immortal.⁷⁴ Whereas Torres sought to argue that human moral consciousness implied a higher nature than that of beasts—appealing to classical humanist theory of the soul and insisting that moral consciousness was a *natural* faculty—the Buddhist monks refused to accept that human rationality implied such an immortal nature, and they even denied “sainthood.”⁷⁵ These Zen contenders, possibly of the Rinzai school, were thus placing themselves at some distance from the Buddhist doctrine that emphasized reincarnation and the bodhisattva status (those in the path for attaining a perfect awakening): the denial of “saints” (hotoques), was not, in this respect, primarily an anti-Christian polemic but rather was part of a debate within Japanese Buddhism.⁷⁶

The problem for Torres in this part of the debate was that his argument that rationality existed and morality had consequences for the “soul”—reflecting what could be described as his Catholic emphasis on moral realism—was only accepted without his metaphysical foundations, that is, the Platonic dualism that supported a theory of the soul as fundamentally distinct from the body. And yet the monks opposing him also faced a problem: pushed by the Christian arguments about how morality required a doctrine of good and evil that was connected to salvation, they were forced to agree: “they answered that we were right.”⁷⁷ This agreement is unlikely to be a Jesuit fiction; it was probably a response to the public doctrine of mainstream Buddhism—what we might consider their popular ethical doctrine for the laity (around the notion of karma), which the Zen sects also shared. In effect, Torres had spotted and exploited the fissure between elite Buddhism and its accommodation of popular expectations, a strategy that would reach its full expression in the “Summary of Errors in

⁷⁴ The concept of the soul, or human spirit, was, however, translatable. According to the “Summary of Errors,” the word used was *tamaxi* (Japanese, *tamashii*).

⁷⁵ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 242-4.

⁷⁶ Zen practitioners rejected the appeal to faith in an external Buddha figure, instead emphasizing the process of awakening of the inner Buddha nature through meditation. But while the Rinzai school sought *sudden* awakening, typically relying on intellectual puzzles that defied ordinary logic (*kōan*), the Sōtō tradition, traditionally less elitist, adopted a more gradual process, which emphasized the practice of “sitting in meditation.” Dōgen, the thirteenth-century founder of the Japanese Sōtō sect, also accepted the value of the sutras as transmitting the teaching of Śākyamuni and insisted on the importance of karma and the afterlife.

⁷⁷ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 244.

which the Japanese Gentiles live, and about some Gentile Sects in which they mainly place their Trust" (*Sumario dos erros en que os gentios do Japao vivem, e de algumas seitas gentilicas en que principalmente confiã*) produced by him and his collaborators in the following years.⁷⁸ Some monks tried a radically sceptical argument, according to which all passions ceased after death, and hence all guilt became irrelevant; only simple-minded people worried about an afterlife—the wise did not. But this could lead to moral indifferentism, by which all moral responsibility was simply an error, and, when under pressure, the monks were willing to follow Torres in denying such a conclusion.⁷⁹

The discussion of hell and paradise was closely connected to this debate about the soul and its moral responsibilities and again revealed a division between those Buddhists who shared the Christian doctrine of punishments in an afterlife (the Japanese *jigoku*), and those others who saw death as liberation, limiting "hell" to suffering in the world and to attachment to the body. This was an idea that Torres struggled to contain, observing that many crimes went unpunished in this life and appealing to Aristotelian arguments of final cause to justify his belief that the human soul, never satisfied with worldly things and frightened about death, was clearly not made for this world only.

The debate on the nature of the soul led in turn to God. Again, the radical Zen doctrine was materialist and denied that either the soul or God, lacking a body, could exist, while Torres insisted (through analogies such as the lack of bodily properties of the air) that immaterial things, such as the Creator God, did exist. Against the Buddhist doctrine that what makes a human are simply the elements and the *kū* (an empty form that dissolves after death), he argued for the unique characteristics of the rational mind, although he was, paradoxically, forced to acknowledge that some of its faculties, such as memory, depended on the body to function properly (some of these exchanges were sophisticated). Some monks liked Torres's argument that the soul inside the body is like a jewel in the mud and is unable to see God. They sought to argue that this made human souls identical to "God," here interpreted as a universal principle that was neither physical nor mortal. Faced with the possibility of some agreement, Torres did not lose his head: rather, eschewing the temptation of facile analogies, he insisted on the difference between the creator and creatures,

⁷⁸) Edited by Ruiz-de-Medina in *Documentos*: 652-67.

⁷⁹) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 244.

including human souls, which were morally corruptible. He was especially keen to dismiss the idea that “all things” were without beginning and introduced the Aristotelian doctrine of a prime mover to silence his opponents on this point.

The debates about the nature of the human soul, God, and the afterlife demonstrate a genuine exchange of views, driven by mutual curiosity and made explicit by the fact that the Jesuits and the Japanese took turns asking questions and answering them. This is even clearer in a subsequent series of questions that relate to the problem of evil and its relation to divine Providence, which, on the whole, put the Jesuit on the defensive. First the Japanese asked about the Devil, the fallen angel, asking why God allowed him to get away with doing so much damage by deceiving, out of envy, the very people He had created for an afterlife of glory. Torres’ reply appealed, predictably, to human moral freedom and responsibility. The emphasis fell on the power of human reason rather than on original sin, a concept that Torres failed to mention when asked why a merciful God had created men so morally fallible:

We answered that God made all things to be good, and that man was created good and with clear knowledge to reject evil, but when men do evil, they make themselves become evil, by acting contrary to the reason and understanding that they received from God.⁸⁰

This Pelagian tinge fit nicely with the doctrine that right reason alone was enough for the salvation of gentiles.⁸¹ Here we find a clear precedent to that remarkable dialogue about natural man and “the law of God, written in men’s hearts,” which Francis Xavier echoed a few months later in his letter from Cochin. As Torres put it:

Others came asking why, if God was creator and saviour of the whole world, he did not set things up in such a way that his law would be declared and manifested in these parts from the beginning, instead of waiting until now. We answered that the Law of God had been declared in the minds of men everywhere from the beginning of the

⁸⁰) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 249.

⁸¹) Torres would, of course, never be openly Pelagian (holding that salvation comes from the moral effort of free human agents) or semi-Pelagian (holding that the beginnings of faith are an act of human free will). The point is that, in these particular arguments about morality and salvation, the *explicit* role of divine grace was reduced to the act of creation. A more Augustinian line would not have satisfied the Japanese.

world until now. And even if a man were to be raised in the mountain without seeing any people, knowing good and evil, he would know that it would be sinful to do to another the same that he would not want to suffer from another. And we gave them some arguments in order to convince them and declared the commandments to them, explaining that those things need not be learnt from preachers, because their creator had taught them.⁸²

The existence of a creator who created the soul was thus an instinctive and universal knowledge. The worship of this God who may be known rationally—what we might call natural monotheism—together with the ethics of the golden rule, was all that was needed to attain salvation. Even the least intelligent were capable of this, Torres insisted against his more sceptical opponents, although it was, of course, crucial that “sticks and stones” should not be worshipped.⁸³

Possibly aware of the theological dangers that this minimalist account of salvation might pose, Torres elsewhere introduced the theme of the human need for divine help. Hence, when other questions of a similar tenor asked why God had created the Devil and why he did not do more to keep him away from men—in fact, many Japanese puzzled over the actual means used by the Devil to leave hell and visit the world—the Jesuit resorted to the argument that people need to be tempted in order to be humbled and avoid the danger of pride. In other words, Torres argued that, unless men were tempted, they would not know fear and hence would fail to worship their Creator. Ultimately, it was temptation that made it possible for the good to be distinguished from the bad. Fernández did not record what the Japanese made of this—which might have sounded slightly perverse on the part of God—but it seems that the argument about the salvation of their gentile ancestors through reason alone had been offered to a different set of questioners.

A substantial number of exchanges relates to matters of sexual morality. The starting point was Torres' contention that salvation was accessible to all, because God's commands were reasonable. As we have seen, all that was required was to worship God and love fellow beings. And yet the sexual restrictions imposed upon Christians did not seem easy to the Japanese, and Torres was placed in a position of having to justify that there was nothing anti-natural about those restrictions. He insisted, instead, that the commandments made life easier. If, for example, the Japanese queried the

⁸²) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 255.

⁸³) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 256.

value of virginity, Torres answered that “God does not command one to be a virgin but only to have one single wife, although it would be more perfect to be a virgin.” He added that, by pursuing someone else’s wives or by lying or stealing, a man made enemies.⁸⁴ But the Japanese replied that by this logic having sex with “single women” would be no sin, because it would not create conflict with another husband. Torres struggled to answer this one, first pointing out that it would be hard to live in peace with many women, then adding that female sexual honour concerned not only husbands but also various other male relatives. He eventually realised that what was needed was a clear statement that simple fornication was a sin.⁸⁵ In other words, as the dialogue advanced he saw that he had to abandon his minimalist appeal to a purely utilitarian law of nature. This was because the Japanese, pursuing their advantage, eventually noted that, whilst it might be socially disruptive to have many women, as Torres claimed, surely all this honour did not affect sex with a boy, “because he has no virginity to lose, hence sodomy is not a sin.”⁸⁶ It was at this point that Torres declared that God made male and female for the purposes of reproduction and that this was the natural law of sex for animals and humans alike. This led to the counter-charge that this made it legitimate to seek more women when a wife could not have children. The debate concluded with Torres asserting that it was God’s will to give or not to give children, irrespective of how many women one had, and that if God denied children to some, it was in order to show that He had the power over nature and that He had created the world, which some might otherwise wish to deny. Thus the claims of divine Providence eventually superseded a logic restricted to natural law. Given the Buddhist denial of a creator God, it is difficult not to be sceptical about the concluding remark of this debate: “they said that we were right.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 250.

⁸⁵) *Ibid.*: 251. At this point, one of the oldest copies, currently in the Jesuit Provincial archive of Toledo (MS 1, in Ruiz-de-Medina’s edition), has a marginal note, partly illegible, making the point that fornication without the aim of reproduction is sinful but also noting that the argument was made to attack the “sin against nature.” All this discussion is omitted from the sixteenth-century editions of the *Cartas*; see *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreverão dos reynos de Japão & China aos da mesma Companhia da Índia & Europa, desde anno de 1549 até o de 1580* (Évora: Manoel de Lyra, 1598): 1:20.

⁸⁶) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 251.

⁸⁷) Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 252.

The document of 1551 made only some cursory references to debates with non-Zen monks, in particular those of the Pure Land and Nichiren sects.⁸⁸ It is, however, clear that further disputes took place, as revealed in particular by the “Summary of Errors,” a document finished in about 1556, which may be considered largely complementary to the notes taken by Fernández in 1551, as it detailed discussions with Shintō priests and Buddhist monks, especially from the three Pure Land sects.⁸⁹ It was probably produced by Torres and Fernández, possibly with contributions from Baltasar Gago.⁹⁰ The document began by offering a detailed account of the worship of kamis and other Shintō beliefs, then mentioned briefly the “overt Devil-worshippers” called *yamabushi* (armed mountain ascetics influenced by the esoteric doctrines of the Shingon sect), and finally went on to discuss the *buppō* (Buddhist) sect, mainly its three Pure Land subsects that worshipped Amida and Xaca. This section also included references to the final scriptures given by Xaca (the *Lotus Sutra*) and to Zen monks and their meditations, giving some actual examples of *kōans*.⁹¹

The “Summary of Errors” was obviously an important working document and was clearly intended for internal use. It concluded with a sharp reflection on the subtle trap set by the Devil in the form of the doctrine of two truths: as the Jesuits saw it, there was a radical contrast between Buddhist exoteric doctrines and practices (acknowledging that popular ritual worship and salvation ethics were very similar to Catholic ones), and the

⁸⁸ Ibid.: 257-8. The sect founded by the thirteenth-century monk Nichiren was a Japanese version of the Tendai school that sought a restoration of Buddhism by relying exclusively on the *Lotus Sutra* as the final and only true teaching of Shaka, the primordial Buddha (all other sects were invalid). It rejected esoteric accretions and emphasized the power of the very name of the *Lotus Sutra* (through its recitation) to save everyone. It was prophetic, militant, and nationalistic, and the Jesuits found them particularly “obstinate.”

⁸⁹ It is possible that the very fact that the Jesuits had come to see Shintō as a distinct sect in a highly syncretistic religious landscape was the result of the rejection of Shintō traditions by the True Pure Land (Shinshū) with whom they had been speaking, who emphasized the single-minded worship of Amida. See, in this respect, the suggestive analysis by J. Elisonas, “The Jesuits, the Devil and Pollution in Japan. The Context of a Syllabus of Errors,” *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 1 (2001): 3-27.

⁹⁰ I must, however, disagree with Ruiz-de-Medina’s assessment (*Documentos*, 652-3) that this document mainly reproduced the stereotypes produced during the exchanges of 1551, as, for the most part, it covered different sectarian ground and offered new material, despite a few points in common.

⁹¹ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 652-67. Shintō beliefs (655-9), *yamabushi* (659), *buppō* (law of Buddhas) sect (659-665), references to the *Lotus Sutra* (665), Zen meditations (665-6).

esoteric beliefs of the elites, namely, a philosophical materialism held by those who claimed true understanding, or enlightenment.⁹² Earlier in the document the Jesuit author had provided a full analysis of the doctrine of *fombem* (Japanese, *hōben*), or “virtuous lies,” taking as his target the popular Pure Land tradition:

When asking the most learned to justify how Amida can save people, they say, in the end, that all is *fombem*. This word is not understood by the ignorant and unlettered. Most think it is a holy rule, but in the language of those who have letters, that is the bonzes and fidalgos, this word *fombem* means virtuous lie. And they say it is a virtuous lie, because the inner teaching of this religious law has it that there is no soul or an afterlife and that everything ends in this life. And they say that they made these sects, which are lies, so that men would live well and do no evil.⁹³

The passage refers to the Mahāyāna doctrine of skilful means (*upāya*), central to the *Lotus Sutra*, a book that was extremely important to all the doctrinal schools in Japan. The point was that the Buddha, out of compassion, adapted his teaching to the disposition of his hearers. The accusation of hypocrisy (which can be traced back to Torres) seems unfair but was perhaps inevitable in a polemical context, and the Jesuits, of course, did not draw a connection with the Protestant criticism of the various compromises with popular piety common in the Catholic Church. They could not have known that, a few decades later, their own Society would be accused by other Catholic orders of adapting its teachings excessively to the disposition of their gentile audiences in the East, an accusation that led to the famous rites controversy.

The debates and conversations that Gaspar Vilela undertook in Miyako in 1560, assisted by the convert Lorenzo, were another important episode in the Jesuit encounter with Buddhism,⁹⁴ and there were more “dialogues” of this kind. Although this is not the place for a detailed consideration of these further exchanges, it is noteworthy that, despite some refinement of the arguments, the relative positions soon became fixed, leading to some firm negative stereotypes. One such was the idea offered by Vilela that Zen monks spent all their “meditations” (*kōans*) trying to eliminate their moral consciousness, or sense of remorse, because they did not believe in an after-

⁹² Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 667.

⁹³ Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 662-3.

⁹⁴ Fróis, *Historia*: 1:164-73.

life.⁹⁵ And yet, despite such negative bias, what remains most remarkable in these Jesuit materials is the rational intelligibility of the positions that they sought to refute as manifestations of devilish idolatry. Some forty years after the early dialogues, the religious disputations had become almost ritualized affairs, but they continued to focus on the most salient philosophical and theological differences that had been identified in the course of that summer of 1551. Hence, Tokugawa Ieyasu, in 1593, beginning to emerge as a key political player in a potentially more united Japan, invited João Rodrigues to his home to debate with two learned monks, and the two issues that were discussed were the Buddhist denial of divine providence, in particular a creator God, and their belief in a plurality of worlds: it was the endless task of the Jesuit theologian to refute that “everything happened by chance and naturally, and by the decisions of men.”⁹⁶

Conclusions: The Logic of Fictionalization and the Rhetoric of Differentiation

A first general conclusion is that the intended audiences of any written document are the key to interpreting the way in which real dialogues were transformed into literary ones. The documents produced by the Jesuits in relation to the Yamaguchi disputations were, to begin with, addressing internal Jesuit audiences for the purposes of training and preparation for future disputes; this is clear in the notes taken by Juan Fernández and the “Summary of Errors” composed some years later. Although these documents, especially the “Summary of Errors,” are already imbued with an apologetic spirit they also reveal, at this stage of composition, a Japanese Buddhist point of view, through the generally accurate recording of their questions and answers. Subsequently, with minor editing, the materials were incorporated into authoritative letters by the fathers, and many of those letters either served to write histories—e.g., the detailed but, at the time, unpublished work by Luís Fróis—or were incorporated into ever larger monographic collections of Japan letters published in Catholic Europe, of which those produced in Coimbra in 1565 and 1570, Alcalá in

⁹⁵ Fróis, *Historia*: 1:171.

⁹⁶ Fróis, *Historia*: 5:502-3. Incidentally, Ieyasu was, at that point, seeking to portray himself as a Christian sympathizer, by contrast with the persecution inaugurated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He would eventually emerge as a Buddhist believer who turned even more decisively against the Jesuit missions.

1575, and Évora in 1598, are especially important.⁹⁷ At this secondary stage, the materials served the purpose both of religious edification within the order (a global enterprise), and propaganda in Europe, addressing the lay Catholic elites (hence all these collections were published in Portuguese or Castilian). The underlying message must have been that the letters, given almost as originally written, told their own exemplary story, hence the tendency to pile up the materials in successive publications. It is remarkable that Buddhist arguments were considered so self-defeating that there was no embarrassment in publicizing them with little censorship, including the notes taken by Juan Fernández in 1551.⁹⁸ João de Lucena, whose fundamental hagiography of Francis Xavier (Lisbon, 1600) offered an extensive account of the disputations of Yamaguchi based on this document, expressed his wish that Fernández had recorded the Jesuit answers in more detail, but he overcame his hesitation to publicize the Japanese side of the disputation: “in the end, it seems a greater ill not to refer to the questions of the Japanese, as they are testimony of their great ability and natural intelligence and the best proof of the rational foundations and care with which they, among all other nations, receive the faith.”⁹⁹ He understood that Francis Xavier and his companions did not feel the need to dwell on their own Christian doctrine when writing to their brethren but nevertheless believed that the disputations remained a valuable source of doctrinal instruction.¹⁰⁰

The case of Mendes Pinto is more complex, revealing a further transformation of the material for an even more popular lay audience. Mendes Pinto wrote his autobiographical romance in an accessible vernacular,

⁹⁷ *Copia de las cartas* (Coimbra, 1565); *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Jesus que andão nos reynos de Japão escreverão... até o de 66* (Coimbra: Antonio de Maris, 1570); *Cartas que los padres y hermanos de la Compañía de Jesús que andan en los reynos de Japón escribieron... hasta el de mil y quinientos y setenta y uno* (Alcalá: Juan Iñiguez de Lequerica, 1575); *Cartas que os padres e irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreverão*, 2 vols. (Évora: Manuel de Lira, 1598).

⁹⁸ See note 22 above. As Donald F. Lach noted, however, the collections published in Italy tended to be censored more drastically, possibly because of a more rigid ecclesiastical culture (*Asia in the Making of Europe*, 1:676).

⁹⁹ Lucena, *Historia*: bk. 8, chap. 1. The whole of book 8 is devoted to an account of these disputations, often amplified.

¹⁰⁰ Schurhammer noted the reception of Torres' disputation by Jesuit historians who regularly relied on the great editions of the letters, not only João de Lucena but also Luís de Guzmán, Daniello Bartoli, and Francisco de Sousa (Schurhammer, *Die Disputationen*: 29-36).

purportedly for his own children.¹⁰¹ The passages on the disputations, transferred to Bungo, and the making of Francis Xavier into the hero were heavily fictionalised, and their meaning was determined largely by the literary logic of the *Peregrinação*, which is a novel of many dialogues (in fact, many episodes are far more obviously invented than is the Buddhist disputation). An “oriental moral voice” is often heard, which, upon closer examination, seems more Christian than truly oriental. The most consistent theme throughout the large book is the denunciation of feigned virtue and, in particular, the contradiction between the moral language adopted by Portuguese Christians and their actual deeds, especially their predatory attitudes. The author’s purpose when approaching gentile figures and voices was not to teach an alternative tradition—Hindu, Buddhist, or Confucian—but rather to denounce the shortcomings of Europeans.¹⁰² There can be no doubt that this moral idiom was appropriate to the intended audience, not only his own children but also a wider audience in Portugal. Although the book was taken seriously as an historical record and vigorously defended by many (e.g., the Castilian translator Canon Francisco de Herrera y Maldonado), the better informed historians, such as João de Barros and the Jesuit Giovanni Pietro Maffei, could see through it. The book is best read as an adventure novel set against a realistic backdrop, with a moralistic message that is critical of Portuguese behaviour rather than of the underlying moral codes of Portuguese society. In this sense Mendes Pinto is fully in line with the assumption, occasionally made explicit by Francis Xavier and Cosme de Torres, that there existed a universal natural law that coincided roughly with the Ten Commandments of the Christian tradition.

In that context, how are we to read the dialogue between Francis Xavier and the bonzes? As I have argued elsewhere, Mendes Pinto’s presentation of Francis Xavier is hagiographic, and those interpretations that have sought to detect an underlying irony in his account of the disputation with Buddhists cannot be justified. For example, Mendes Pinto’s retreat from a full exposition of the arguments offered by Francis Xavier as “beyond his ken” does not reveal an attempt to undermine Catholic theology through the use of irony (as suggested by Johan Christian Laursen) but was instead a prudent move in a Counter-Reformation culture, because it was easier

¹⁰¹ He refers to “his children” in chapters 1 and 105, where he declares that he leaves them his work as an ABC.

¹⁰² J.P. Rubiés, *Travellers and Cosmographers*: 6:36.

for a layman to ridicule Buddhist arguments—as did Mendes Pinto simply by offering a defence of the *uso nefando*—than to do justice to scholastic proofs.¹⁰³ As we have seen, even Cosme de Torres had to acknowledge that the arguments he could offer were, from a scholastic perspective, imperfect, and Mendes Pinto must have been familiar with some of the Jesuit letters produced by this mission. It would have been foolish of him to try to go beyond them. Instead, he did what he was best at, namely, emphasizing the dramatic context of the disputation, in order to declare the victory of Francis Xavier. He could do so with the retrospective knowledge that the young Japanese lord who presided over the debates would eventually become one of the lay pillars of the Japanese Christian Church. Empirical accuracy was never a consideration. Mendes Pinto was not afraid to invent and fictionalize, because his purpose was entirely pious: he may have failed as a Jesuit during his visit to Bungo in 1556, but his respect for Francis Xavier was undiminished, and he now had an opportunity to redeem himself.

An account of a religious disputation, especially one which was published as part of the Counter-Reformation effort of religious propaganda, was bound to be biased and therefore fictionalised. In the case of Mendes Pinto, however, it suffered from the peculiar constraint that its author had returned to the life of a layman and is therefore likely to have made a conscious choice to avoid involving himself in a detailed theological argument that could be scrutinized by the Inquisition. With somewhat different constraints, the Jesuits embraced the dialogue as an apologetic genre, and this led them to write many works that successfully fictionalized the raw materials of their dialogic experience and transformed them into decisive literary victories. Remarkably, they employed the genre to reach both European and native audiences and sometimes both simultaneously. But the kind of Japanese voices that Juan Fernández had recorded invariably lost their power to put the missionary in a defensive position. Instead, in works such as *De missione legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam*, a work published in Macao in 1590, a small group of young Japanese travellers who had participated in a carefully choreographed journey through Catholic Europe in 1584-6 were made to witness how both European religion and

¹⁰³ J.C. Laursen, "Irony and Toleration: Lessons from the *Travels* of Mendes Pinto," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 6/2 (2003): 23-40. I debated Laursen's interpretation in the republication of my "Oriental Voices," in *Travellers and Cosmographers*, "Addenda et Corrigenda": 3-4.

civilization were superior to those of Japan and China. Although the Japanese teenagers, all carefully selected from elite Christian families, had been encouraged to take notes during their journey, they did so under Jesuit supervision, and it was the organiser of the legation and grand visitor of the oriental missions, Alessandro Valignano, who assembled various materials and composed the script, with his fellow Jesuit Duarte de Sande providing the elegant Latin of the dialogue.¹⁰⁴ It was a clever act of ventriloquism, by which the Japanese travellers would be made to speak in Valignano's voice.¹⁰⁵ The journey had a double propaganda purpose, Japanese and European, and although the text was conceived to maximize its power within the missions (i.e., amongst Japanese converts and novices), the fact that it was not translated into Japanese as originally intended perhaps reflects a new awareness of the dangers of the flow of information about Europe in the wake of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's sudden prohibition of Christianity in 1587.

This Latin dialogue, written under the constraint of having to appeal to two very different audiences, was a more complex text than those Chinese dialogues written in the early 1600s by Ricci, whose mission in China depended precisely on the support of Valignano and Sande. Ricci had provided them with a description of China that shaped their discussion in *De missione legatorum*, but he wrote his own *True Meaning* and *Ten Discourses* especially for an audience of Chinese literati. This allowed him to calibrate his message carefully, taking accommodation much further. However, the idea that the tension between the messages that were appropriate to the different European and native audiences could be skipped when different texts were produced in different languages for independent circulation proved to be a dangerous illusion, as Ricci's successors were to discover eventually, in the course of the rites controversy, because there was a risk that a message too closely tailored to the apologetic needs of the mission

¹⁰⁴ Although a few historians have sought to make de Sande the key author, Valignano's decisive role is more generally accepted. See J.F. Moran, "The Real Author of the *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam... Dialogus*: A Reconsideration," *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 2 (2002): 7-21.

¹⁰⁵ As Valignano wrote to General Acquaviva, with some duplicity, "using this occasion to provide them with an account of this embassy as something belonging to them, I treated of all the things which seemed to me necessary and suitable for Japan" (quoted in Moran, "The Real Author": 18). Valignano's letters also reveal that he composed the text carefully, so that it would work well for both European Catholic and Japanese audiences; he took particular care not to offend the latter, his primary target.

field might eventually be deemed insufficiently Christian by European critics. If a religious dialogue that was too confrontational might lead to persecution, one that displayed a high degree of cultural accommodation to the target audience might provoke a defeat on the home front.

Our first conclusion has pointed towards the power of the literary dialogue to domesticate “real” dialogues according to the needs of various external audiences, but also towards the dangers of losing control of how the texts could be read elsewhere. A second observation relates to the process by which “real” dialogues also needed to be domesticated to meet the needs of a more intimate audience, one’s own religious identity, whether individual or corporate. Perhaps the most symptomatic element of the process of fictionalization detected in this Japanese case study is the extent to which literary dialogues disguised the force that structural analogies may have had in the process of encounter, emphasizing instead the process of “differentiation through dialogue.” That is, in the transition from tentative note-taking to the definition of apologetic strategies, we witness the triumph of the rhetoric of differentiation.

In sixteenth-century Japan, the first Jesuits encountered a religious system remarkably analogous to their own, with cosmic gods and saintly figures of compassion who interceded for the many who suffered; an ethical system with a few clear rules and a notion of accumulated merit; a celibate clergy, with monks, nuns, temples, and monasteries; a priesthood that officiated in funerary rites and other devotional practices; institutions of higher learning, which incorporated practices of meditation able to challenge their own scholastic theology and spiritual exercises; and, above all, a system of salvation that led from a world of suffering to something like paradise or hell, however temporary the latter might be. Of course, in each case there were many subtle and often deep differences, but what seems crucial is that the Jesuit apologetic impulse was precisely to identify and magnify these differences. In other words, the apologetic rhetoric was built on the search for those differences. Some of the interpretative choices made by Francis Xavier and Torres were, in this respect, highly significant: first, they distanced themselves from any analogy between the Christian creator God and the universal cosmic principle of Mahāyāna philosophy; second, they sought not to analyze the diversity within Buddhism as analogous to the diversity within Latin Christendom, omitting notice of obvious parallels with Lutheranism, and instead launched a relentless attack on the corruption of a system of merit transfer from the laity to the clergy (a crucial theme in Xavier’s letters), and on the gap between popular and elite

religion, portraying the doctrine of skilful means as both incoherent and hypocritical (this theme was, as we have seen, developed forcefully by Torres). The paradox is that they chose to focus on those issues precisely where Catholicism in general, and their order in particular, were questioned by more Augustinian forms of Christianity—Protestant or Catholic—namely, the clerical abuse of the doctrine of salvation through works and the dangers of cultural accommodation. The third strategy developed by Torres in relation to the problem of the salvation of virtuous gentiles—which was an appeal to natural law as rational and sufficient—was also a form of accommodation, but he immediately toned it down, in order to insist on divine Providence. Yet here also the Jesuits who engaged in dialogue in Japan had briefly summoned the rationalistic ghost that would eventually cause so much trouble in China, in relation to the interpretation of Confucianism.

From the Japanese point of view the situation was similar: in the context of entrenched sectarianism, it made perfect sense to identify an ethical and scriptural teaching with universal pretensions that was brought by foreign priests from the West and, more precisely, from 'Tenjiku' (i.e., India, Goa being the headquarters of the Jesuits in Asia), as just another attempt to restore Buddhist teaching to its authentic version. If they were to pay some attention to the gospel story, it was perhaps even possible to argue that Christians followed one peculiar historical manifestation of a cosmic Buddha-nature in the figure of Jesus Christ—or it could be suggested, more crudely, that Jesus had been taught by Buddha. Buddhism was, in this sense, doctrinally pluralist, and some evidence suggests that real efforts were made to interpret Christianity as *not so different*, a high-level strategy, which alternated with the low-level one of spreading rumours that the Christian priests, noted for not forbidding the eating of meat, were cannibals.¹⁰⁶ It was only gradually that the Christian insistence on the utter invalidity of the teachings of Gautama Buddha, let alone any cult other

¹⁰⁶ In a letter written from Bungo in September 1555, Brother Duarte da Silva referred to both issues, "the story that we ate people" (soon discredited) and, more pointedly, how the bonzes, tired of the disputations, "were content to let the laypeople believe that the law of God and the sects of Japan are one and the same." This is followed by a remarkably clear statement of the strategy of differentiation: "Therefore it was necessary to declare the difference between lies and truth and how all the laws of Japan are founded upon lies, and that of God is the path to truth" (Ruiz-de-Medina, *Documentos*: 523). It was the same reaction adopted by Francis Xavier, when he decided to drop the analogy of *dainichi*.

than that of a creator *Deus*, made any accommodation through “equivalent pluralism” impossible.¹⁰⁷

If by “dialogue,” then, we mean “an attempt to learn from differences in an open-ended way,” there was not and could not be a dialogue. If, however, we limit the concept to “talking in order to learn where the differences are,” then it is certainly the case that the Jesuits were successful in identifying those issues that mattered, from the moral status of homosexuality, to the denial of a plurality of worlds, to the status of God as a providential creator, who alone deserved worship. From this perspective, we would be entitled to conclude that the *real* religious dialogue was mainly about finding a common ground for disagreement.

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¹⁰⁷ The *Taiji Jashū-ron* (1648) by Sessō Sōsai—which, as we have seen, reflects, from a Zen Buddhist perspective, disputes similar to those recorded by the Jesuits—contended that the reason why Christians had attacked Buddhism so fiercely was that their doctrines were so similar. It noted how some of the key Jesuit criticisms, such as that of metaphysical nihilism, constituted abusive interpretations and, after a systematic comparison of the two religions, concluded that Jesus was a disciple of Shaka but had confused his teachings. See J.M. Pinto dos Santos, “A 17th Century Buddhist Treatise.”

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