

# Religion and Violence

## Were the Military Method ruled out in Japan and China Missions in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries?

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### Abstract

「暴力 Violence」は実は様々な意味で使われている。日本語の「暴力」では「他者への物理的・精神的力の不当な行使」程度を意味するが、西欧語ではたとえば「強制」等の意味でも使われ、「他者に対する対等意識の欠如から教育や助言の意識で行われる他者侵害」という意味合いを定義する研究者もいる。一方宗教を理由にした暴力の行使は現在世界にも頻繁にみられるが、それは正にこの意味が非常に妥当する。

当研究ノートでは、日本と中国のカトリック宣教とそれに弾圧をもって対応した日本の為政者の論理を検討するための前段としてその環境と議論を紹介する。中南米のカトリック化は征服行動と宣教活動が平行して行われ、その宣教は「暴力」的であったと言われ、その弊害が1580年代には多く語られた。時を同じくして本格化した日本・中国宣教は、その反省から「言葉」のみで宣教が行われたと言われてきた。しかし、宣教師の書簡を仔細に検討するならば、宣教師の立場の不安定さや形成され始めたカトリック共同体保護のため、あるいは外国人の入国を警戒する政策を突破するため、理由は様々なながらフィリピンにいるスペイン軍を呼び込むことも検討されていたことが明らかになる。

Keywords: Religion, Missions, Violence, Jesuits, Japan, China, the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries,

## 1. Introduction

What is violence? David Riches distinguishes between violence and its synonym “aggression” in the following sentence: “aggression connotes antagonistic behavior which, even when consciously performed, is nonvolitional..., the immediate impulse for which lies in uncontrollable forces within the human body that are barely at all subject to reason or sense”, “while the performers of *violence* are reluctant to concede that what they have done is violence, and their representation of what happened will be that it was self-defence, unavoidable force, freedom-fighting, social control and so on”, as “violence has strong pejorative connotations”<sup>1</sup>.

In this short article, we would like to consider meanings of Violence in Religion through discussions about methods of the Catholic Mission carried out in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A Jesuit Father Provincial of Perú, José de Acosta (1539-1600), writes the following sentence as his ideal missiology in his masterpiece *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (1588); “Intelligence finds a way to combine Violence and Freedom, which are very conflicting notions with each other, and an agile and charitable virtue combines and unifies them (Conciliar cosas entre sí tan contrarios como son violencia y la libertad, y hacer que la inteligencia halle camino para unir las y la industriosa Caridad las torne coherentes.)”. The book is based on deep-rooted humanism

<sup>1</sup> These phrases are quoted in Jack David ELLER: *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence Across Culture and History*, Prometheus Book, New York, 2010, Chap 1, sec.2 (Kindle version).

supported by rich experience, profound theological knowledge and an excellent sense of balance for mass scale American missions, which was the first experience in the entire history of Catholic Church.

He mentions two kinds of violence committed in the evangelization: Violence to allow missionaries to be accepted by those who refuse them and that of physical punishment to correct neophytes. I would like to discuss the former, since this is closer to our common theme. The latter, however, is also a very important topic in terms of institutionalization of violence that tramples human dignity and personal charitable communication with Christ as a base of the faith.

What he and other missionaries did not recognize as violence might be considered as yet another kind of violence. In Japan, for example, it is Catholic converts' destruction of traditional religious facilities and statues worshipped and respected among local inhabitants. These acts may have been instructed by missionaries themselves. The same acts had been committed both in the Americas and India on a much larger scale and systematically. Missionaries reported these actions in their letters to Europe as 'good acts' in which the converts decisively abandoned their former "fake" religion or demons. This is an especially important issue in Japan, because the ban edicts of Christianity issued by Hideyoshi (1587) and Tokugawa Shogunate (1612, 1614 and after), mentioned unanimously those acts as one of the reasons for banning the religion<sup>2</sup>. It may be difficult for most people immersed in the Christian tradition to understand why the non-Christian people and reacted so harshly against those acts in which no physical injuries were inflicted<sup>3</sup>. A considerable number of researchers do not only ignore this point, but interpret it as a mere excuse for the repression against the Christian community.

The evangelization of East Asia began after wide missionary activities supported secular arms for fifty years to convert masses of people on the New Continents, where the spiritual conquests progressed in parallel with military ones. While the missionaries seemed to regard it as a great achievement that the indigenous societies had converted to the Catholic faith in such a short period of time, they were keenly aware that the new Christians were not spiritually maturing as they had expected. They ascribed the neophytes' deplorable state of faith to their lack of "Reason" which justified the use of violence. This point is very obvious in Acosta<sup>4</sup>. We can now understand that the neophytes' seemingly insufficient faith was caused largely by differences in the cultural tradition and the cosmological view.

A sort of their despair in this respect has become the major reason for high expectations for

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2 The Japanese rulers at the time emphasized clearly the existence of Japanese traditional religions against the Christian proselytizing movement. As a matter of fact, at the beginning Hideyoshi did not ban Christianity itself, and encouraged coexistence with traditional religions.

3 A Christian Daimyo Justo Takayama Ukon who was beatified in February 2016 by the Vatican did not necessarily enjoy good reputation among old and actual common habitants of his ancient feudatory, where he destroyed Buddhist temples, their statues, and Shinto shrines 400 years ago.

4 Acosta classifies race into three categories; the Chinese and the Japanese are in the first category, Aztecs and Inca people, for the second, people like the Caribbean in the third. Then, he says, it is inevitable to exercise enforcement of Christianity to those in the third category.

the East Asia mission that has entered in their sight since St. Francis Xavier stepped on the soil of East Asia. Because the people of East Asia were thought to be endowed with superior intelligence and rich rational thinking through the images that Marco Polo projected onto Europeans in the preceding 200 years, it seemed possible to evangelize East Asia by the use of words, not *violence*, as in the Apostles' era. There was a certain determination among missionaries to stay away from *violence* in the new mission fields. Historically speaking, there was no act of institutional violence in East Asia (China and Japan), and the missionaries had never acted with armed men against the rulers and habitants.

Was it because the missionaries consciously excluded military means because it constitutes a violation of their moral principles? My paper will examine this question through missionary correspondence from Japan and China with the West in the 16th and 17th centuries.

## 2. JAPAN

Since the arrival of St. Francis in Satsuma (Kyushu, 1548) Jesuits' mission was developed mainly in the Kyushu district for the first 30 years and produced many Christians through mass conversion by Christianizing local feudal lords. Later the mission field was expanded to Kyoto and Osaka<sup>5</sup>.

The path of Evangelization was cleared only through preaching of the Good News, even though the commerce with Portuguese merchants was really a strong inducement for the Jesuits to invite feudal lords to Christianity, since the merchants cooperated with the missionaries in choosing as partners those feudal lords who were tolerant of evangelical work. This was an extremely fortunate commencement compared with China as I mention later. However in 1587, when the Japanese church was about to reach its apex, the Japanese Christian community began to face unfavorable winds. We may point to three crucial historical moments:

- i. Hideyoshi's (1537-1598, 1582-1598 as the ruler of entire Japan) Purge Directive Order to the Jesuits (1587, which ordered them to leave Japan within twenty days, although it was not literally enforced)
- ii. Crucifixion of twenty-six faithfuls by Hideyoshi ("Twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan", six European missionaries<sup>6</sup> and twenty Japanese Christians in Nagasaki, 1597).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In the Kyushu district, there was many a sort of mass conversion accompanying that of the local lords, but in Osaka and Kyoto, individual conversion was more prevalent and it seemed to missionaries that their understanding of the teachings was deep.

On the other hand, according to some historians of civilization, the Japanese, in general, takes a great interest in things coming from outside, and put up less resistance to adopting them which were Japanized by its strong digestive power sooner or later. Buddhism looks almost essential for the Japanese society. But it is quite different from the original because it has been transformed by or fitted to the Japanese mentality.

<sup>6</sup> 4 Spanish, 1 Mexican and 1 Portuguese.

<sup>7</sup> According to Father Frois (1532-1597, the author of *History of Japan*), the number of believers was increasing by 8,000 per year and the Japanese church has counted up to 300,000 faithfuls in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the population of Japan is estimated to be around 15 million, even though other researchers propose different numbers.

- iii. Definite Ban Edicts by Tokugawa Shogunate<sup>8</sup> in 1612 and 1622. Most of the Jesuits withdrew to Macao in 1614<sup>9</sup>.

Theoretically speaking, these situations clearly meet the requirements that allow missionaries to take military actions for protecting the evangelical workers and the Christendom on juridical guidance provided by the Salamanca School or even by the followers of Las Casas. Then, what actions did the Jesuits take under such circumstances? We can point out some reactions for each of the three moments that I have indicated above. Regarding moments i and ii, following two reactions are available.

In 1589, Jesuit vice provincial Coelho had a council calling the six senior Jesuits to Kyushu, where they argued how to protect the Christendom under the edict, and all (including a famous theologian) except Father Organtino (Italian) approved of a request to Manila for the dispatch of military men. However, as a matter of fact this request was rejected by the Jesuit Provincial of the Philippines. Some later records reveal that Coelho bought military supplies in preparation for this plan. Perhaps the title for this action was that “a tyrant refuses evangelization that people seek”, which was not explicitly mentioned in the correspondence with Rome, because it was probably too obvious to anybody at that time. This point will be very important in China’s case.

We can observe reactions against the moment ii through a letter addressed to the Father General by Spanish Father Pedro de la Cruz shortly after two incidents occurred within four months: the confiscation of the shipwrecked San Felipe (a big Spanish galleon was sailing from Manila to Acapulco and was wrecked off the coast of Tosa because of a typhoon) by Hideyoshi and the martyrdom of twenty-six Christians. Theologian Cruz discussed clearly limits to evangelization by peaceful means in Japan, and necessity of military force in order to complete Japan as a Christian country. He advocated obtaining ports and making them fortresses for the mission and military operation by the power of King Felipe so as to stabilize the Japanese mission<sup>10</sup>.

Nonetheless Father Valignano (1539-1606, Visitor of India, later Provincial of Japan) denied Coelho’s plan as reckless and condemned harshly Coelho who was dead at the moment when Valignano wrote the letters to the Father General. Cruz’s letter written in 1599 also clarifies that Valignano was against his plan. Did Valignano oppose the use of military force based on the idea that any use of violence for the evangelization was theoretically wrong? My answer is in the negative. I think that his reasons were common to these two cases in the following two points.

Feasibility. The troops that can be dispatched from Manila or Macau were very limited in size. Unless the military plan succeeds, it is obvious that the Japanese Christendom will be demolished

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8 Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) established his regime in 1603.

9 However, 18 Jesuit Fathers and 9 brothers remained secretly. This seemed to be an open secret, because the Nagasaki administrator negotiated with the Shogunate in order to facilitate the trade with Portuguese. Father Carlo Spinola, martyr, was one of them. The edict of 1613 was stricter. The oppression of 1622 was really decisive.

10 He also refers to the possibility of military conquest of China if obtaining ports in Japan turns out to be successful.

instantaneously. It was a clear example of a budget constraint in economics. Lack of resources prevents an execution of the plan, although it is desirable to resort to military means. He came to recognize Hideyoshi's military strength. Because he had ordered the superiors to fortify with armaments the port city Nagasaki<sup>11</sup>, which the Jesuits held at the time of the first visit to Japan (1580, when Japan was still under a long civil war.).

Strong determination to reject participation of Spanish Mendicant orders from Manila in Japan mission. We can detect his persistence to maintain the exclusive reservation of Japan mission to the Jesuits guaranteed by the Papal bulls in his *Apologia*<sup>12</sup> written in 1598. Mendicant monks evidently would enter in Japan with the military force from the Philippines.

On the other hand, relating to the moment iii, the Jesuits seemed to have felt a tidal wave against Christianity, when the Shogunate issued the ban edicts. We can read not only a sense of urgency in Jesuits' reports sent to Rome, but also find an expression "Razón de Estado", which is a completely different new theory not seen in their previous reports written during Hideyoshi's regime. They pointed out Shogunate's decision to defend its own country from the territorial ambitions of Spain<sup>13</sup> as the major reason for banning Christianity. Since then, military plans seemed to have faded out from Jesuit correspondence, as far as I know. The Ban of Christianity was at the center of policies by the Tokugawa regime along with the "isolation policy" for 250 years<sup>14</sup>, even though it was another reality that nobody knew exact meanings of Christianity in late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3. CHINA

China was the ultimate target of Christianization, because the Europeans had the image

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11 The port was gifted to Jesuit fathers by a local feudal lord who was oppressed militarily by a neighbor feudal lord and did not have strategies to protect it by himself.

12 Two Franciscans who were in Japan (one of them was a martyr in Nagasaki, 1597) accused severely Jesuits monopolizing of Japanese Christendom and doubtful lineage of the Japanese boys of Tensho Shonen Envoy. The friars denied nobility of the boys, about whom Valignano claimed that they were descendants of the Christian local feudal lords. As they published critical papers in several places, Valignano wrote *Apologia* to justify himself and his policy for Japan Mission. José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz published a transcript of his work (1998) with an enormous number of footnotes through which he attempted to shed light on historical facts.

13 According to Jesuit's documents, Spaniards both secular and religious behaved and spoke imprudently, that behavior sowed vigilance and aversion among Japanese rulers. A letter of the Jesuit provincial father Mattheus de Couros to the Father Genral dated March 15<sup>th</sup> 1621 described in detail his understanding about the oppression that the Tokugawa regime carried out without mercy (José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz "LA RAZÓN DE ESTADO Y LA PERSECUCION DEL CRISTIANISMO EN JAPÓN LOS SIGLOS XVI Y XVII" *SAPIENTIA* N° 2, pp. 57-80, OSAKA, 1967). According to his discourse, the cause of the persecution was attributed to the Razón de Estado de Tokugawa Japan, which the Spanish Razón de Estado had stimulated widely. But also he referred to the words by Ieyasu, the founder of Tokugawa regime: "los mismos Padres eran más de temer que el bonzo de Osaka (Buddhist sect based on the Temple of Ishiyama Osaka), y que si éste con no plantar su secta sino entre labradores y gente baja, llegó a tanto poder y estado que por algunos años hizo frente a Nobunaga y le dio mucho que hacer, qué sería si la de los Padres se dilatase entre los *tono* y hombres principales, muchos de los cuales ya la habían recibido y otros estaban a punto de aceptarla (Op. cit., pp. 59-60)".

On the other hand, the Franciscans claimed as a reason for issuance of the ban edict the Jesuit management of the mission in which they excessively engaged in the Portuguese trade in Nagasaki with the Japanese.

14 The Ban edicts lasted till the sixth year after the Meiji restoration, while the Shogunate began to have contacts with western countries in the mid 1850's.

It is said that the number of martyrs was more than 5,000 for the first 25 years, even though there are other estimates.

of China as I mentioned above. Father Matteo Ricci is an immortal figure of the evangelization of China, although the details of his written works seem to be unknown in spite of his fame in general. The Rite Controversy was also a topic which characterizes Chinese mission in the people's mind and China's evangelization seems to be so much detached from military means. Is that an image or this discourse right?

The missions were opened in 1582 by Fathers Miguel Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci who had intended several times unsuccessfully to enter the interior of China from Macau. They finally had settled in Zhaoqing in 1583, although not as persons who came to teach, but to learn the great Chinese culture. It took Ricci nearly 17 years to reach the imperial court in Beijing for the purpose of converting entire China from the top of the society. The progress was definitely slow compared with Japan's case<sup>15</sup>. One of the major reasons was its civilization's nature that is completely different from the Japanese one. The difference was so great that I cannot emphasize any further, since China has traditionally defined itself as the Middle Kingdom which teaches or gives its civilization to peripheral countries, while, as I referred to in footnote five, the Japanese society was and is quite open toward the influence from outside, even though it shows harsh rejection against an entity that has a tendency of exclusivism.

Now we would like to present Father Alonso Sánchez who was one of the founders of the Jesuit Philippine Province and who worked particularly since 1581 on the Islands. His project, the so-called "Empresa de China" among the contemporaries, was a military plan involving on a world-wide scale many people in various countries in order to achieve the conversion of entire China. The plan called for Portuguese and Spanish military powers with Japanese and Philippine mercenaries. They were to invade China through Canton and Chíncheo<sup>16</sup>. We can easily imagine that it was impossible to execute this enterprise. There are some people who criticize it as a ludicrous fantasy on one hand, but on the other hand, he was highly regarded by many Jesuit historians that his reports were deeply rooted in his accurate and lucid grasp of the abysmal conditions working against Europeans in East and Southeast Asia. We would like to examine his project briefly.

First, the arguments presented in his proposal were based on his personal observation of the inside of China, since he set foot on Chinese soil twice<sup>17</sup>. His observations about Chinese society and his experiences in that alien land were rational and faithful to the traditions of humanism. He reported objectively on all he saw and came to know in those days, even though a few illusionary descriptions were included. The following crucial issues were historically correct:

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15 It is said that there were 1,000 Chinese Christians more or less in China and 100 Christians in Beijing around 1603.

16 漳州. There was opened a big port 海澄县月港 for commerce with outside countries since the 1560's, from where the Chinese merchant came to Manila, especially from the mid 80's.

17 His first visit was in 1582, in order to notify the Portuguese citizens in Macau of Philip's succession to their throne, and here he went about guarded vigilantly by Chinese officials after his arrival at or drift in a port on Fujian coast. For the second journey he went to Macau directly in 1584, and was interrogated repeatedly by the Chinese authorities regarding the purpose of his visit to China.

- a. Ming local government efficiently accepted foreign trade with tariffs (The Ming China had two tracks for international trade: Tribute system and trade with tariffs, and the latter was introduced in the second half of the 1560's to prevent smuggling and piracy mainly).
- b. they tolerated a sort of a Catholic mission run by Ruggieri, Ricci, and others.
- c. the vast empire was marvelously administrated by the people of rational character.

On the other hand, the main title for justifying the military operation against China was the following:

- i. The Chinese polity has a law prohibiting entrance of foreigners, acceptance of embassies and trade with foreigners.
- ii. The polity acted violently against the Iberian people.
- iii. It is possible to change the polity which cannot provide right policies: proper laws and governance to keep the evangelical life<sup>18</sup>.
- iv. It is possible to oblige the gentiles to listen to the Gospel, etc.

We should here expose his contradictions among these titles and his reports about China. I would like to indicate that he did not conclude that it is possible to open a just war against China by accumulating titles, but he understood that it is necessary to wage a war to open the Evangelizing path in China first and he accumulated titles to justify it. He was a little bit behind the most advanced theory at that time in which the Pope's authority could not be exerted over all mankind but is limited within the Christendom, as Acosta says. But he was not too much unique in his opinion, if we remember that we had mentioned previously the theologian Pedro de la Cruz in Japan. Sánchez's many reports about China show us the reasons that bridge the contradictions. Main issues are:

- i. Language barrier (Chinese appeared to be very difficult to learn, as literate class in China would never listen to crude and insufficiently spoken Chinese, and there are many dialects).
- ii. Social barrier (total indifference to or scorn for foreigners, total lack of respect toward the religious, absolute arrogance of mandarins to commoners, etc.).
- iii. Enormous amount of overconfident people who are enjoying the highly developed civilization.

He thought that there was no means other than military action to overcome these mighty barriers.

Sánchez's letters to the King testify that he recognized very well the historical setting and the

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<sup>18</sup> This would be exactly a title to justify military operations in Japan.

harsh censure that theologians would launch against him in denouncing his Empresa if he brought it to Europe, which began to realize that religious differences are not the title of war, nor is it just to wage a war to introduce Christianity among the people, at least among innovative theologians.

Eventually the Father went to Madrid and Rome with his Empresa in 1588. He talked with Felipe II as a procurator of the Philippine colonial government and presented many reports about them except Empresa de China, because the Father General Acquaviva persuaded him not to take the initiative for the Empresa, in spite of having understood well the significance of his proposal itself. According to Pablo Patells, the royal audience to him was realized three days after arrival of the information on defeat of the Spanish Invincible Armada against England.

He was received warmly by Acquaviva in Rome and was given a permission to profess the Jesuit Fourth vow. After that he went to Madrid for an other assignment given by the Father General<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, since Manila and Chincheo trade (mainly exchange of silk and silk products for silver peso de ocho real) became more popular and huge in the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the proposers of “Empresa” became very few, even though there were those who suggested it among both the civilians and the religious.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the military methods were not ruled out, but no military action was taken in both regions mainly because of a budget constraint.

We could assess reasons why the military method for Christianization had come to mind of the evangelical workers in crisis, even though they began the work with determination to realize the mission through words only. The time was when the thinking about violence in the Evangelization gradually became negative.

The mass conversion in America was a successful model for missionaries, even if it had been pointed out that there were serious problems with the method which accompanied violence. That experience led to an illusion for Evangelization among the next generation of missionaries. Any society has its own traditions which have evolved with many regional, social, and historical factors. Unfortunately the majority of missionaries had missed the chance to learn them or we could say that there was lack of objective point of view by too successful an experience in America.

Mission’s ultimate goal is conversion of “infidels” to the Catholic church as much as possible. That goal is absolutely good. Then the problem is whether the goal justifies the use of any means to achieve the good purpose or not. Which should be justified in the Salamanca school? Acosta is one of eminent Jesuit humanist missionaries. He creates the phrase that I cited at the outset of this paper.

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19 Received many of Sánchez’s papers in 1589, Acquaviva took the decision to make the Philippine mission permanent, and to elevate it to the level of a vice province in 1595.



While a “modern mass method” of evangelization that began on the American continent failed in Japan, a sort of medieval method depending on an individual missionary’s ability instead of “mass method” had maintained the Christianity on a very limited scale in several areas of China under the very deep inculturation policy.

This dilemma and choice were not only in Jesuits Fathers, but also there were not a few mendicant friars who thought that secular arms would be necessary for Christianization of Japan and China. So we would see it as one of the greater subjects which Christianity has had for long time.

Discussion about the legitimacy of use of violence in Christianity is a long lasting issue since its very early era. In reality nobody thinks that use of violence is good and proper in Christianity, but it is discussed whether it could be justified to realize better situations or not, like finalizing a war by a war<sup>20</sup>.

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20 Philippe Buc, *Holy War, Martyrdom, and Terror –Christianity, Violence, and the West*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2015.