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How to Make “Colored” Japanese Counter-Reformation Saints – A Study of an Iconographic Anomaly

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jemc-2017-0010>

Abstract: The 1627 beatification of the twenty-six martyrs of Japan was a major milestone in the history of the Church and especially for the missionary orders. These martyrs were the first officially recognized saints from the newly “discovered” lands. However, while the majority of the twenty-six were in fact Japanese, surviving paintings depict them as white-skinned missionaries and without any physical features that would have been considered “typically Asian” at the time. This paper analyzes this iconographic tradition and shows how it can be understood as a consequence of a process of assimilation of Christian Japan into the Catholic world view. Associating particular skin color with true faith and civilization was part of discourses that blended the physical “otherness” of these martyrs. This paper demonstrates how these discourses point to the first seeds of a racial perception of East Asians, which would later become the notion of “yellow.”

Keywords: Iconography, Japanese martyrs, mission, modern period, race

In 1627, Pope Urban VIII solemnly proclaimed the beatification of twenty-six martyrs from the mission in Japan. The twenty-six martyrs consisted of missionaries and local Christians whom Toyotomi Hideyoshi had executed for their Christian beliefs in 1597.¹ Their beatification and the permission granted to their cult could be now understood as a milestone in the history of the Catholic Church. It was the first approbation of the sanctity of those from what they called the “Indies”— the territories discovered in the time of European expansion. In fact, only four of these twenty-six were originally from Europe; most were non-Europeans, including, of course, people from Japan, China (a person who was

¹ On the historical details of this event, see Clotilde Jacqueland, “Une catastrophe glorieuse: le martyre des premiers chrétiens du Japon, Nagasaki, 1597,” *e-Spania [En ligne]* 12 (2011): 2–15.

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most certainly of mixed Sino-Japanese descent),² one from India,³ three from Korea (according to later sources),⁴ and a *novohispano*.⁵ The diversity of their geographical origins is obvious. This diversity would later have a profound impact on the formation of the identities of a Christian identity in these regions. However, this article will focus on how this diversity was interpreted in early seventeenth

2 A man called Antonio. His last name is unknown. Due to the lack of a consensus on the transcription of Japanese names in roman letters at that time, the spelling of those martyrs' names varies in each historical document, written in Portuguese, Spanish and Latin. There are at least twelve variations according to Kiichi Matsuda, who analyzed twelve primary and secondary contemporary sources (both Franciscan and Jesuit), including manuscripts written by Luis Froís, Pedro Morejon, Avila Girón. Kiichi Matsuda, "Nihon 26 Seijin No Jinmei Ni Tsuite," *Kinsei Shoki Nihon Kankei Nanban Shiryō No Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kazama Shobō, 1963), 899–939. See especially his table of the spelling of the names, 909–921. Diego Pacheco, a Jesuit who was the director of the Museum of the twenty-six martyrs in Nagasaki, calls him the first Chinese Saint. Diego Pacheco, *26 Seijin to Nagasaki Monogatari* (Nagasaki: Seibo no kishisha, 2002), 40.

3 In the seventeenth century, Gonçalo Garcia (a.k.a. Gonzalo García) was considered to be the only beatified in the Indian subcontinent (with exception of the legendary figure, St Thomas). See P. X. Swami, *St Gonzalo García. Indian Martyr on Japanese Soil* (Mumbai: The Bombay Saint Paul Society, 2004), 7; James H. Gense and Aloysius Conti, *In the Days of Gonzalo García, 1557–1597* (Mumbai: J. H. Gense, 1957). This book was published for the 360th anniversary of his death. In his birth town, in Bazaim, north of Bombay in India, we can find a church dedicated to him.

4 The presence of people of Korean origin in the group of the twenty-six, although not impossible in the context of the times (especially with the invasion of Korea by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1592–93), has been doubted by several researchers. For example, Diego Pacheco says that no contemporary document supports this claim. See Diego Pacheco, *26 Seijin to Nagasaki*, 29–30. The three martyrs were brothers, known in early sources as (with many spelling variations) Leo Karasumaru, and Paul and Ludovico Ibaraki. Jesuit sources of the late sixteenth century, such as Ribadeneira and Froís affirm that they originally came from the Japanese province of Owari. See Kiichi Matsuda, "Nihon 26 Seijin," 932–934.

The earliest mention of the presence of Koreans can be found in Louis-Charles Proffillet, *Le martyrologe de l'Église du Japon* (Paris: Téqui, 1895–1897), 50–51. The author claims to have used the bull compiled by the Franciscans in preparation for the canonisation of the martyrs of Japan, including the twenty-six, in 1865. The existence of this bull is confirmed by Ruiz de Medina, but he remarks that it contains many errors, and sees the inclusion of Koreans to the twenty-six martyrs as one of them. See Juan Ruiz de Medina, *El Martirologio del Japón, 1558–1873* (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1999), 294. This suggests that the inclusion of Koreans in this group, which would later have a profound impact on the peninsula itself (they were included in the Jeoldu-san Martyrs' Memorial in South Korea), must be understood in this particular context.

5 Felipe de Jesús (ca. 1572–1597), was a native of Mexico City. About his cult, see Cornelius Conover V and Cory Conover, "Saintly Biography and the Cult of San Felipe de Jesús in Mexico City, 1597–1697," *The Americas*, 67 (2011): 441–466.

century Europe. It will do so by analyzing the reception of the twenty-six martyrs and the consequences this reception had on the European world-view of the time.

The favor displayed by the Vatican for these twenty-six martyrs draws a sharp contrast with the treatment of other contemporary saints who were originally from regions outside Europe. Particularly striking is the example of Benedict the Moor (1526–1589), the Ethiopian “Black” saint, whose cult began in Sicily right after his death in 1589 and whose beatification process preceded that of the twenty-six martyrs.⁶ While depictions of Benedict normally reflect his physical otherness, the iconography of Japanese martyrs, a very popular theme for the Jesuits after their beatification, does not convey any suggestion of their actual physiognomic features—especially of their skin color. In the extant paintings that depict the twenty-six martyrs, such as those in Madrid, Munich, or Naples and also in remaining engravings, these figures are always depicted with European-like physiognomies.

This article analyzes this discrepancy. It concentrates on the process of integrating these new martyrs of missions in the narrative of Counter-Reformation Europe with its corresponding Catholic rhetoric and traditional religious iconography. It also discusses the implications this integration had on Western worldviews of the period. In fact, in the seventeenth century, the contemporary notion of race, and especially the idea of the “yellow” skin color, was not completely formed. However, the absence of this idea as a fully-fledged conceptual category does not imply that discrimination based on skin color or geographical origins was completely absent.⁷

The word “race” itself existed, but it was mostly used to distinguish nobles from commoners. In the eighteenth century, it became a translation of the Latin word “gens,” which describes a clan or a tribe. The term acquired its cultural and political connotations mostly in the nineteenth century,⁸ when the concept

6 Benedict the Moor (1526–1589), whose image was closely linked to the African Continent, was beatified by Benedict XIV in 1743 and canonized in 1862. Martin de Porrès (1579–1639), a Dominican from modern-day Peru, was beatified in 1837 and canonized in 1962. See Giovanna Fiume, “Il Santo schiavo. Devozione e culti a Benedetto il Moro nelle Americhe,” in *Ordini religiosi, santi e culti tra Europa, Mediterraneo e nuovo mondo (secoli XV–XVII)*, t. 2, ed. Bruno Pellegrino (Galatina: Congedo, 2009), 639–671. Also José Oscar Beozzo, “San Benedetto, il Moro: da santo siciliano a patrono in Brasile degli schiavi, dei neri e dei poveri,” in Pellegrino, *Ordini religiosi*, t. 2, 623–638.

7 On this issue, see Rotem Kowner, *From White to Yellow: the Japanese in European Racial Thought, 1300–1735* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

8 See Hannah Francizka Augstein, “Introduction,” in *Race The Origins of an Idea 1760–1850*, ed. Hannah Francizka Augstein (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), ix.

itself appears in its modern sense.⁹ However, before the emergence of the notion of “race,” physiognomic traits were, of course, already perceived as a factor of difference. The notion itself was already burgeoning in the Middle Ages, as seen with particular traits attached to certain populations, such as the odor of the Jews or the Moor’s skin color.¹⁰

In other words, physical traits were already perceived as a factor of “otherness.” This situation did not change in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, when Europe came in contact with the populations of other continents.¹¹ While this period did not have a clear conception of “race,” skin-color already tended to be used as a factor distinguishing Europeans from the “other.” As put by Frédéric Monneyron and Gérard Siary in a recent book on the history of this idea, “race existed almost *in absentia* until the end of the eighteenth century.”¹²

In fact, many precedents to race can be found in texts from Ancient and Medieval Europe, and such knowledge was passed on in the modern times. As we will see in the next pages, theological discourse in particular tended to valorize light-colored skins as a symbol of the purity of faith, an idea which can be interpreted as a precedent to racial discrimination. As we will show, such considerations had an undeniable impact on both the discourses regarding the twenty-six martyrs and their iconography. By analyzing not only contemporary written sources describing them, but also the way these figures were represented in images, this article retraces the process of accepting non-European saints in seventeenth-century Europe.

1 Colonial saints in post-reformation Europe

The modern period saw the expansion of what Serges Gruzinski calls the “Catholic monarchy,” a notion that describes mostly Spain, Portugal and

⁹ See Carole Reynaud-Paligot, “Construction and Circulation of the Notion of ‘Race’ in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, ed. Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Thomas (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 87–99.

¹⁰ See Geraldine Heng, “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages,” *Literature Compass* 8 (2011): 258–274; and *idem*, “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages II: Locations of Medieval Race,” *Literature Compass* 8 (2011): 275–293.

¹¹ Rotem Kowner, “Skin as a Metaphor: Early European Racial Views on Japan, 1548–1853”, *Ethnohistory* 51 (2004): 751–778.

¹² “La ‘race’ a existé presque *in absentia* jusque vers la fin du XVIII^e siècle.” Quoted from Frédéric Monneyron and Gérard Siary, *L’idée de race, histoire d’une fiction* (Paris: Berg International, 2012), 9.

their colonies,¹³ to new territories all over the globe. These newly “discovered” lands and their inhabitants became targets of missionary work. This process also gave birth to a series of patron saints associated with the newly evangelized territories. Besides the above mentioned St Benedict the Moor, the modern period thus saw the emergence of several such saints, especially in modern Mexico and South America.¹⁴ In each case, the formation of cults associated with these saints was deeply connected with the devotion of the local society and with the enthusiasm of laymen who at one time shared their lives with these particular saints. For example, there is the case of Catarina de San Juan (1606–1688), who probably had Asian-origins. She was kidnapped and forced into slavery, taken to Puebla in Mexico via Manila, later freed, and died as “saint.” Although she was never officially beatified, she attracted people’s devotion, just because her life reflected that of a typical subaltern of this time in that society.¹⁵ Another example is that of the Franciscan, Felipe de Jesús, who was later called the “creole saint” (“el santo criollo”) and who became the patron saint of Mexico.¹⁶

Both of these cases suggest that the development of their cults was related to the formation of local identity and the dignity of their particular Christian faith. Ordinarily, colonial sainthood is thus mostly analyzed in the socio-religious context of the establishment of local or national identities. For example, the canonization of Rosa de Santa Maria (1586–1617), who was born in Peru, became a source of pride for the local population, as it showed that the New World was an integral part of the Catholic Church.¹⁷ The official

13 Serge Gruzinski, “Les mondes mêlés de la monarchie catholique et autres « connected histories »,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 56 (2001): 85–117.

14 For example, we can mention the blessed Sebastian de Aparicio (1502–1600), St Rosa de Lima (1586–1617), St. Mariana de Jesus (1618–1645), Catarina de San Juan, and San Felipe de Jesus. On Brazil, see Anthony John R. Russell-Wood, “Atlantic Bridge and Atlantic Divide: Africans and Creoles in Late Colonial Brazil,” in *Creole Societies in the Portuguese Colonial Empire*, ed. Philip J. Havik and Malyn Newitt (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2007), 171–218.

15 Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: from Chinos to Indians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 8–32.

16 Reiko Kawata, “Dos cultos de origen mexicano: La Virgen de Guadalupe y San Felipe de Jesús. El proceso histórico manifiesto en el estudio comparativo de documentos escritos e iconográficos” (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007).

17 For a summary of the issues regarding colonial sainthood, see Jodi Bilinkoff, “Introduction,” in *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas, 1500–1800*, ed. Allan Greer and Jodi Bilinkoff (New York: Routledge, 2003), xvii–xviii.

recognition of the sanctity of such figures can also be understood as a response to more extreme discourses denying natives the ability to reach spiritual achievement.¹⁸ As a whole, these sainted figures functioned as promoters of the growth of local Christendom.

While some of them were later associated with specific territories, the twenty-six martyrs of Japan were originally very different from typical colonial saints. Their cult was not observed in the country where they were active; rather their cult was fostered in Europe and its colonies. As a matter of fact, their beatification was celebrated in many European cities, not only in the major places like Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Milan, Paris, and Bologna, but also in relatively smaller towns, such as Castelnuovo Scrivia (in Italy), Caller (in Sardinia), Sevilla, Ronda, Carmona, Valladolid, and Wiesbaden. However, no particular festivities were reported in Japan. As Japanese Christians were almost completely destroyed by the repression of the Edo regime, the beatified martyrs of Nagasaki were not, at the time at least, national “Japanese” saints with devoted local followers; therefore, they did not contribute to the creation of a Christian identity inside the country.¹⁹ The fact that Felipe de Jesús became the patron saint of Mexico underscores this. In fact, they were rather “missionary” saints, closely related to either the Franciscan or Jesuit order. As the representations show, they were mostly designed to appeal to a specific public: first to the members of the orders themselves and then to modern Europeans as a whole. This background explains partly why the beatification of a figure such as Benedict the Moor did not happen before that of the martyrs of Nagasaki, although, in his case, the process started earlier.

18 For an example of such discourses regarding native women in New Spain, see Julia Boss, “Iroquois Virgin: the Story of Catherine Tekakwitha in New France and New Spain,” in Greer and Bilinkoff, *Colonial Saints*, 238–245.

19 Local hidden Christians (normally called *Kakurekirishitan*) had formed their own idiosyncratic style of devotion, and Catholic missionaries who came to Japan at the end of the nineteenth century accused them of superstition. Japanese anthropologists have called it “Kirishitanism,” a concept to be distinguished from the original Christianity. See Yukihiko Ōhashi, *Senpuku Kirishitan* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2014), 14–15. They had actually formed a kind of cult related to a legend of their executed members and maintained this even when they lacked any contact with trained priests. However, the martyrs they worshipped were not related to the twenty-six martyrs officially recognized by the Vatican. The Holy See’s official edict could not reach local laymen in such a remote place. Kiyoto Furuno, *Furuno Kiyoto chosakushū vol. 5: Kirishitanism no hikaku kenkyū* (Tokyo: San-ichi Publishing Co., Ltd, 1973), 154.

2 The exceptional beatification process of the Japanese Martyrs

The entire process of beatification of the twenty-six was advanced mainly based on Franciscan efforts. It started first with several publications on their hagiographical reports written by Marcelo Ribadeneira (ca. 1560–1610), Jerónimo de Jesús (?–1601), Juan Pobre de Zamora (1550–1614, or 1615) and the governor of Manila, Francisco Tello (?–1603).²⁰ The order did not stop at merely publishing the news, and they even produced images of the martyrs. A series of these images was displayed to the public, in the basilica of Santa Maria di Aracoeli, before the official beatification. However, the Vatican ordered the destruction of these images in 1626.²¹

The Jesuits were at first reticent to promote the cult of these victims, partly because they wanted to avoid inciting Christians in Japan to actively seek heroic deaths. The other reason was that the three Jesuits who were involved were not true members of the Society; rather, they were just unofficially linked to it.²² But the situation changed after the edict banishing Christianity in 1614. With the difficulties encountered on the ground, the major destination of the mission in the East Indies gradually shifted from Japan to China. Consequently, Japan became an ideal setting for martyrs’ hagiography as a literature theme, rather than a potential target of active evangelization, at least from the perspective of the Jesuits’ erudite members. In this context, the three “Jesuit” martyrs of 1597,

20 Marcelo Ribadeneira, *Historia de las islas del Archipiélago Filipino y reinos de la Gran China, Tartaria, Cochinchina, Malaca, Siam, Cambodge y Japón*, ed. Juan R. de Legísima (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, [1601] 1947). The report written by Jerónimo de Jesús was published by Lorenzo Pérez, “Fr. Jerónimo de Jesús, restaurador de la Misiones del Japón. Sus Cartas y Relaciones,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 1 (1923): 507–544; *idem*, 17 (1924): 98–117; *idem*, 18 (1925): 90–113, 559–584; *idem*, 19 (1926): 385–417; *idem*, 20 (1927): 575–588; *idem*, 21 (1928): 303–340; *idem*, 22 (1929): 139–162. Omata Rappo, “Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges,” (Ph.D. diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris - Université de Fribourg, 2016), 89–90. For an English summary of these reports, see Héléne Vu Thanh, “The Glorious Martyrdom of the Cross. The Franciscans and the Japanese Persecutions of 1597,” *Culture & History Digital Journal* 6, 1 (2017), e005. A more in depth study can be found in Clotilde Jacqueland, “Une catastrophe glorieuse,” and Kiichi Matsuda, *Hideyoshi no Nanban gaikō: San Felipe gō jiken* (Tokyo: Shin jinbutsu ōraisha, 1972).

21 Benedictus XIV (Prosper de Lambertinis), *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, Vol. II/1, ed. Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum (Città del Vaticano: Libreria editrice vaticana, 2012), 212–213.

22 Omata Rappo, “Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges,” 105–109.

who could be seen in some isolated publications prior to this date,²³ became a major subject of such literature, with other anecdotes of heroic martyrs that had originated from the Japanese mission, such as those told by Pedro Morejón (1562–1639) and Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628). By the mid-1610s, the focus of Jesuit discourse had shifted, and they were actively championing the beatification process.

Another crucial event leading to the decision of 1627 was the “embassy” lead by Hasekura Tsunenaga (1571–1622). Conducted under the initiative of the Franciscan Luis Sotelo (1574–1624) and sent by the northern warlord Date Masasume (1567–1636), this diplomatic mission arrived in Rome in 1615.²⁴ It inspired many ceremonies, and the organizers made sure to insert the issue of the beatification into the agenda. Things were arranged as if the Japanese Christians officially requested it,²⁵ and they brought what they claimed was an authentic relic of the martyrs.²⁶ The strategy was successful, as the beatification process was greatly sped up right after the visit.

In 1616, the process officially began. Six apostolic tribunals were established, two in Mexico, and one each in Nagasaki, Macau, Goa, and Manilla. Their mission was to prove not only the martyrdom of the twenty-six but also to verify the miracles that could be attributed to them. The sessions, mainly directed by Franciscans and Dominicans, concluded in 1622. At that time, the commission of the Rota, in the Vatican, agreed to the beatification.²⁷ While many miracles were cited in the official documents, the main reason for this beatification lay elsewhere. The non-European-origins of the martyrs were not identified as the main reason either. Rather, as one of the official documents on the matter put it, by shedding their blood on a cross, they did more for the faith

23 Bartolomeo Ricci, *Triumphus Jesu Christi crucifixi* (Antwerp: Joannes Moretus, 1608). This book displays several wood-carving representing Japanese martyrs, including those of Nagasaki.

24 *Da Sendai a Roma: un'ambasceria Giapponese a Paolo V*, eds. Fabio Massimo Fioravanti and Karin Dirven (Rome: Office Move, 1990).

25 After the Council of Trent, the diffusion of a local cult became one of the most important issues in the beatification/canonization process. See Simon Ditchfield, “‘Coping with the beati moderni’: Canonization Procedure in the Aftermath of the Council of Trent,” in *Ite Inflammate Omnia, Selected Historical Papers from Conferences Held at Loyola and Rome in 2006*, ed. Thomas M. McCoog (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2010), 413–440. The Hasekura delegates were in fact told to report the existence of a “cult” of the 26 in Japan at the time. No contemporary Japanese document makes any mention of such cult.

26 Hitomi Omata Rappo, “La quête des reliques dans la mission du Japon (XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle),” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 177 (juin 2017), 257–282.

27 Hitomi Omata Rappo, “Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges,” 135–140.

than any speech would have been able to do.²⁸ It was the way they died—on the cross²⁹—that provided a perfect opportunity to present them as ideal martyrs, in a time when this very notion—and especially the martyrs of the mission, was contested in Europe.

“Martyr” was indeed one of the most litigious aspects of sanctity in modern Europe, especially with the rivalries between Catholic and Protestants that followed the Wars of Religion, as Brad Gregory has shown.³⁰ “Martyr” originally meant a witness or a testimony of the true faith. Its application occurs most commonly in times such as persecution, when believers are forced to make the ultimate choice between death or survival through apostasy. Having been shaken by religious conflicts, modern European society provided Catholic and Protestant Christians with many opportunities to be recognized as victims of mutual “persecutions.”³¹ The validity of such martyrs soon became a central issue. In the Catholic context, the importance of martyrs and their relics had already been reconsidered after the “Sacco di Roma.” The subject became even more pressing with the rediscovery of the Roman catacombs, which provided a whole host of new saints and relics for the Church.³² However, the Wars of Religion had the greatest impact on the notion of martyrs. Since both sides claimed to have the most authentic victims of persecution directed against their absolute faith, proving the validity of their martyrs led to an ontological polemic—the means of victimizing and justifying. Confronted with such a war of “martyrs” propaganda, the Roman Catholic

28 See Giovanni Papa, *Le cause di canonizzazione nel primo periodo della Congregazione dei riti (1588–1634)* (Città del Vaticano: Urbaniana University Press, 2001), 90.

29 A letter from Martín de la Ascensión even describes their trip from Osaka to Nagasaki, where they were executed, as a “via crucis.” See Diego Pacheco, “Notas sobre la ruta de los 26 santos mártires de Nagasaki,” *Misionalia Hispanica* 17 (1960): 229–245 (230).

30 For a general introduction on martyrdom, see Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

31 On the problems regarding the notion of “persecution,” see Brad S. Gregory, “Persecution or Prosecution, Martyrs or False Martyrs — The Reformation Era, History, and Theological Reflection,” in *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present, and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011), 107–124. Also see Hitomi Omata Rappo, « Les aventures de ‘martyre’ entre l’Asie et l’Europe ou les aléas de la traduction », *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome - Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines* 129.1, (2017), 127–137.

32 Simon Ditchfield, “Martyrs on the Move: Relics as Vindicators of Local Diversity in the Tridentine Church,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 283–294.

Church put forward its own original “martyrs,” especially missionaries who died outside Europe, in territories governed by what they regarded as pagans, tyrants, and barbarians.³³

Indeed, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the Jesuits, the pioneers of the Catholic Mission in the newly connected world, kept careful records of their colleagues’ deaths as “martyrs” in Brazil, Florida, India, and especially Japan. This discourse of “martyrs” was mainly European rhetoric aimed at contemporary European audiences. Designed to gloss over the unfulfilled work of Christianization, it provided a one-sided description of local incidents in targeted areas from the standpoint of Christian missionaries. This is particularly notable in the case of Japan. In Japan, Christianity was seen as a heretical sect and even legally prohibited. Hence, Christian “martyrs” did not appear as heroes in local contemporary documents; rather, they were viewed as criminals. In its essence, the term “martyr” conveys a fundamental theological concept connected deeply with the primitive pan-European penetration of Christianity, as Simon Ditchfield indicates,³⁴ and it was untranslatable into indigenous languages, which did not share the same Christian values and history.³⁵ Shaping the discourse of “martyrs” of Japan is thus perceived as inner-European religious propaganda.

The ecclesiastical process of integration of the Christian martyrs of Japan to Catholic Europe began with the beatification of the twenty-six martyrs in Nagasaki by Pope Urban VIII in 1627. As stated above, this group consisted not only of Europeans, but also of Japanese, a Chinese, an Indian, perhaps Koreans, and a *novohispano*. Thus, they were the first examples of beatification of non-Europeans after the Council of Trent. If sainthood reflects the values of the culture in which they are perceived in a heroic light, as Peter Burke has described, the officialization of their cult stood for a new ideal of sanctified death.³⁶ Their crucifixion, inflicted on them by a pagan tyrant, “ignorant” of the true faith, offered the perfect setting to produce martyrs.

³³ See Rady Roldán-Figueroa, “Father Luis Piñeiro, S.J., the Tridentine Economy of Relics, and the Defense of the Jesuit Missionary Enterprise in Tokugawa Japan,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte/Archive for Reformation History* 101 (2010): 207–230.

³⁴ Simon Ditchfield, “Thinking with Saints,” *Critical Inquiry* 35.3 (2009): 552–584.

³⁵ Hitomi Omata Rappo, « Les aventures de ‘martyre’ entre l’Asie et l’Europe ou les aléas de la traduction. »

³⁶ Peter Burke, “How To Be a Counter-Reformation Saint,” in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 44–55.

3 The skin color of the Japanese in the imagery of modern Europe

Looking at available visual representations confirms that having Japanese origins was not a crucial issue in the beatification of the twenty-six martyrs. In all of these images, any hint of their Japanese heritage is completely absent. However, we have to wonder if this was always the case. We cannot determine the exact first visual representation of the beatified to know in which color these images were painted and how they were physically conceived. But one of the first testimonies of their painting is recorded by the famous French Jesuit Louis Richeome (1544–1625) in his “Spiritual Painting” (*Peinture spirituelle*) (Lyon, 1611).³⁷ Many historians consider that this text provides a literary representation of how the novitiate of the Jesuits in the Quirinal in Rome was designed in the beginning of the sixteenth century.³⁸ According to Richeome, portraits of the three martyrs were placed in one of the recreation rooms (*salle de recreation*) in this building; they are described as having faces of olive color (*aux faces olivâstres*) and small eyes (*petits yeux*).³⁹ Their names—Jacques Guisai (Kisai), Paul Michi, and Jean Got(o)—correspond to those of the three Jesuits beatified in 1627.

The apparition of this notion of “olivâtre” in Richeome’s writing is quite ambiguous⁴⁰. Did this adjective indicate that Richeome wanted to express his perception of a special color of their skin? What color does actually “olivâtre” stand for? Could this expression “olivâtre” represent what we call “yellow” today?

37 Richeome stayed in Rome between 1607 and 1616 as an assistant of the French District. Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu’à nos jours t. 1: L’humanisme dévot (1580–1660)* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916), 22. Hasekura’s group arrived in Rome in 1615 and met with Pope Paul V (1550–1621). In addition, there was a procession, and Richeome may well have seen it.

38 Kristof van Assche, “Louis Richeome, Ignatius and Philostrates in the Novice’s Garden: Or, the Signification of Everyday Environment,” in *The Jesuits and the Emblem Tradition: Selected Papers of the 4th Leuven International Emblem Conference, 18–23 August, 1996*, eds. John Manning and Marc van Vaeck (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 3–10. Ines Županov even calls this book a «pictorial description» of the novitiate. Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (16th–17th Centuries)* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 170.

39 Hitomi Omata Rappo, « Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges », 276.

40 This is, however, not the first occurrence of the word “olive” or “olivastro” being used to describe Japanese. The term “olivastro” can already be found in a 1585 document mentioning the arrival of the Japanese envoys in Siena. Although there is no proof that Richeome consulted such Italian sources, but we can at least say that the notion itself had already emerged before him. For details on the Siena document, see Giuseppe Sanesi, “I Principi Giapponesi a Siena nel 1585,” *Bollettino senese di storia patria* 1, no. Fascicolo I–II (1894):124–130 (125–128).

In fact, the situation seems to be fairly nuanced. Unfortunately this term was not yet included in contemporary French dictionaries, but we can find it in the first edition of the Academy Française's dictionary, published in 1694, where it is defined as "one who is yellow-colored and tanned."⁴¹ However, outside of dictionaries, the term olive skin seems to have a very wide use even in the late seventeenth century. It is used within the same abovementioned dictionary of the Academy, in the entry for white skin, where it is said that white means "peoples who have white complexion or even olive, unlike the Mores."⁴² A book published in 1676 by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) refers to the inhabitants of the Southern part of the realm of Champā (modern Viet-nâm) as being of a darker, almost "olivâtre" skin, and describes them as "uglier" than their northern counterparts.⁴³ The expression, also appears distinct from the concept of yellow skin itself. The prevailing opinion in the previous research attributes its appearance generally to the French physicist François Bernier (1620–1688). Long after Richeome, Bernier shaped the notion of "yellow skin" in a document written in 1684.⁴⁴

As we see with these examples, in the seventeenth century, the skin color "olive," when applied to Asian populations, was not perceived as yellow per se. It was sometimes likened to white or black, and an autonomous category of "yellow" did not exist until nearly the eighteenth century. So how should we understand Richeome's testimony? Did the painting hung in the novitiate really use a particular color in order to portray the Japanese martyrs? Unfortunately, the original image is now lost, and it is not possible to confirm this with our own eyes.

However, there are other sources that allow us to assess how the skin color of the Japanese was perceived by Europeans. First we have the reports of missionaries and travelers. While they do sometimes comment on the physical appearance or skin color of their host, such records are not unanimous. In fact,

⁴¹ *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie Française dédié au Roy*, Tome second M-Z (Paris: Coignard, 1694), 149.

⁴² *Le dictionnaire de l'Académie Française dédié au Roy*, Tome premier A-L (Paris: Coignard, 1694), 103. Cited by Frédéric Régent, "La fabrication des Blancs dans les colonies françaises," in *De quelle couleur sont les blancs?: des "petits blancs" des colonies au "racisme anti-blancs,"* ed. Sylvie Laurent and Thierry Leclère (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 67–75.

⁴³ See *Les six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier, deuxième partie (Indes et îles voisines)* (Paris: Clousier, 1676), 431.

⁴⁴ Rotem Kowner, *From White to Yellow*, 275–278. The elaboration of the "Yellow" skin color as a discriminative notion appeared later, around the nineteenth century. Also see Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

after Portuguese’s arrival in the middle of sixteenth century, the descriptions of the physical features of the Japanese greatly differ on the specific issue of skin color. Concretely, their testimonies swing between white and black. The first Jesuit visitor of Japan, Alessandro Valignano stated that the inhabitants of the archipelago were white.⁴⁵ Another Portuguese Jesuit, João Rodrigues, known as the “Interpreter” for his excellent capacity in the Japanese language, also described the Japanese as white, but specified that their skin was not as transparent as those of the northern people.⁴⁶ Other Portuguese Jesuits, however, such as Francisco Cabral, who was known for his disdain for the inhabitants of the archipelago, portrayed them as “black.”⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, the word “yellow” does not appear.

Such travelers to the Far East were not the only Europeans who had the chance to see Japanese people with their own eyes. This was made possible by an important event that preceded the beatification of the Asian saints in 1627. Between 1582–1590, four young Japanese boys who had converted to Christianity were taken to Europe on a tour. This encounter would decisively determine European perceptions of the Japanese people. The boys were introduced as “princes” and welcomed as “ambassadors” in various major cities and centers of political power of southern Europe, such as the courts of Philip II of Spain (1527–1598), Francesco I de Medici (1541–1587, the second Grand Duke of Tuscany), and Albert VII (1559–1621, Archduke of Austria).

On this occasion, depictions and portrayals of the boys on posters and brochures were also published. These publications clearly represented them with Asian features and wearing outfits reminiscent of Japanese kimonos mixed with aristocratic clothes of Europe. Similar to the missionaries’ reports, their physical descriptions vary. In a text mentioning their arrival to Florence in 1584, for example, they are described as small, well-proportioned and of pale complexion, using the word “pallida.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, a letter telling of their arrival

45 “La gente es toda blanca y de mucha policia.” Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las cosas de Japón (1583), Adiciones del Sumario de Japón (1592)*, ed. José Luis Álvarez-Taladriz (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1954), 5.

46 “São os Japoens brancos, não demaziadamente como as naçõens do norte, mas em boa proporção ...” João Rodrigues Tçuzzu, *Historia da igreja do Japão*, vol. 1, ed. João do Amaral Abranches Pinto (Macau: Notícias de Macau, 1954), 167.

47 Valignano criticized Cabral for his contempt against the Japanese in an unpublished report. Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan. Von der Ernennung zum Visitor bis zum ersten Abschied von Japan (1573–1582). Bd. 1: Das Problem (1573–1580)* (Rome: Ed. di Storia e letteratura, 1951), 325–328.

48 Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Archivio Mediceo. Settimanni F. Diario Fiorentino. ms IV. : “Addi 8 di Marzo 1584. Venerdi... Tuttie quattro detti giovani sono senza barba, éd il maggiore

in Siena on 19 March 1585 stated that the Japanese boys were of “medium” stature, that their skin color was “olive,” and their features were those of “Moors.”⁴⁹ Again, we find irreconcilable differences between European depictions of the appearance of the very same four young Japanese boys. The descriptions oscillate between white and black, while the notion of olive is present, but not in the sense of yellow, but more of a dark-skinned or tanned tone. In this particular document, the description does not seem to convey a positive meaning. In his analysis of such depictions of the Japanese envoys in Modern Europe, Rotem Kowner notes that while there was a tendency to perceive them as a group, rather than as individuals, writers did not agree on their skin colorations; moreover, none of them made the idea of “race” or racial superiority a core issue of their discourses—although this can be seen as an emerging topic in such sources.⁵⁰

However, beyond the mere visual impression, the fact of perceiving the Japanese as light-colored or dark was not anecdotal at all. Valignano, the original organizer of the Japanese “embassy,” regarded the Japanese as similar to “white” Europeans and made every effort in order to have them favorably received in Europe. But the treatment of the Japanese and the Europeans was not completely equal inside the Society at that time.⁵¹ Indigenous priesthood has long been a thorny issue for the Jesuits, and members from the Iberian countries were, unlike the Friars Minor, very reluctant to admit it.⁵² One of the twenty-six martyrs,

poteva avere al più anni diciotto in circa, di non troppo grande statura; ma a proporzione, e secondo gli anni erano di ragionevole altezza. Avevano la loro faccia stacciata, e similmente ancora il nàso: la testa piccola, e gli occhi piccole: e la loro carnagione pallida e smorticeia : e l'apparenza mostrava piuttosto, per quello si poteva giudicare, semplicità, bontà e benignità, che altrimenti.” *Dai Nippon Shiryō (Japanese Historical Materials) Part XI. Supplement I. European Materials. The Reign of Emperor Ō-Gi-Machi. The Tenth Year of Tenshō (1582)*, ed. The University of Tokyo Historiographical Institute (Tokyo: Tokyo University, 1959), 162–164.

49 Biblioteca Comunale di Siena. Codice D. U. 3, letter of March 19th from Marco, by António Tromei to his brother Alemano Marescoti: “La statura de’quali (four Japanese boys) è mediocre, colore olivastro, profilo di mori, ochi in fuore, bigi, et piccolissimi, e non pareva che potessero guardare in alto, bocca con labri grossi; del resto bruttissimi.” Published in Sanesi, “I Principi Giapponesi a Siena nel 1585,” 125–128.

50 He also presents the inability to perceive individual features in the young Japanese as a cognitive difficulty shared by all the writers. See Rotem Kowner, *From White to Yellow: the Japanese in European Racial Thought, 1300–1735*, 187–188, 199–200.

51 On Valignano’s complex attitude towards new converts, see J. F. Moran, *Japanese Travellers in Sixteenth-century Europe: A Dialogue Concerning the Mission of the Japanese Ambassadors to the Roman Curia (1590)*, ed. Derek Massarella (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 366n3. On Valignano himself and his work, see M. Antoni J. Üçerler, “Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer,” *Renaissance Studies* 17 (2003), 337–366.

52 Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, “Religion and Race: on Jewish Conversions,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge

Gonzalo García, an Indo-Portuguese mestizo, was first educated by the Jesuits and served them. However, he was refused membership in the Society and entered the Franciscan order instead.⁵³ The Jesuits barred Ethiopians and Africans from membership in the Society, and it also seems to have been the case for the Indo-Portuguese mestizos.⁵⁴ Francis Xavier himself, the pioneer of the mission of India, had also spoken against accepting local candidates as priests.⁵⁵

According to the interpretation of Ronnie Hsia, the notion of blood purity, “limpieza de sangre,” may well be behind this distrust of new converts.⁵⁶ As seen above, the term indicating “race” at that time derived from the words meaning “genealogy” or “generation” and carried a connotation of a pure lineage.⁵⁷ In Castilian, this idea was related to the purity and nobility of unblended blood, whether with the Moors, Jews, heretics or those who had been condemned by the Inquisition.⁵⁸ In France, as shown by a poem by Jacques de Breze, the term also described the quality of thoroughbred noble families.⁵⁹ Such notions can explain why the Jesuits emphasized the nobility of the Japanese ambassadors, which did not actually reflect their descent.⁶⁰

University Press, 2009), 265–275. See also Joseph Wicki, “Der einheimische Klerus in Indien (16. Jahrhundert)”, in *Der einheimische Klerus in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Festschrift P. Dr Laurenz Kilger OSB zum 60. Geburtstag dargeboten*, ed. Johannes Beckmann and Laurenz Kilger (Schöneck-Beckenried: Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, Supplementa II, 1950), 17–72.

53 Bernward Henry Willeke, “Die Ankunft der ersten Franziskaner in Japan”, *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 43 (1959): 166–176 (166–167). See also Lorenzo Pérez, “Carta y relaciones del Japón I: Cartas de Pedro Bautista,” *Archivo ibero-americano* IV (1915): 395–418 (405–406, note 3).

54 Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond: 1540–1750* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 258–266.

55 Hubert Cieslik, “The Training of a Japanese Clergy in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Studies in Japanese Culture: Tradition and Experiment*, ed. Joseph Rogendorf (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1965), 41–78 (72). Also Hubert Cieslik, “S. Gonzalo García’s Baçain,” *Kirishitan Kenkyu* 8 (1963): 185–194 (192). Moreover, when García asked to join the Society, the superior was Francisco Cabral, who was known for his sympathies with the local folk. See Omata Rappo, « Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges », 107.

56 Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, “Religion and Race: on Jewish Conversions,” 265–275.

57 On the shifting nature of the concept of “race,” see Fabian Fink, “Race” in *Dictionnaire des concepts nomades en sciences sociales t. 2*, ed. Olivier Christin (Paris: Métailié, 2016), 67–82.

58 Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 93–94.

59 Charles de Miramon, “Noble Dogs, Noble Blood: The Invention of the Concept of Race in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 200–216.

60 In this letter, the Jesuit Pedro Ramón complains that those “princes” are in fact poor, and that their lineage is that of low-level nobility, and not royalty. ARSI, Jap.Sin. 10 II, ff. 282–285v.

4 The Ambassadors as Oriental “Magi”

The whole expedition had been thought as a true advertising operation by the members of the Society. Valignano had selected the four candidates himself, and had them learn etiquette and the appropriate gestures of European courts. Their clothes were also carefully chosen, and the entirety of their travel can be understood as a long procession, where they acted as “living pictures.”⁶¹ This symbolical strategy was also deeply rooted in previously established conceptions in medieval Europe, especially regarding the otherness of people from afar.

The Ethiopian embassy of 1425 can be seen as a good precedent. Discourses from it would be later reused in 1585 and also elaborated on. In fact, contrary to Asian people, Africans already had a long history of contact with the Catholic world. In medieval Europe, there were several saints whose taxonomic characteristics were attributed to Africans, such as St Maurice, St Gregory, or St Caspar among the Magi. However, in their representations, their physical “otherness” was clearly depicted.⁶² As shown in Paul Kaplan’s studies on the images of black-skinned magi, such depictions increased especially after the arrival of an Ethiopian embassy to Rome in 1425. The ambassadors and Christian pilgrims from Ethiopia were rather welcomed by their European counterparts, a fact that shows how the focus was put on their faith rather than their external appearance.⁶³

While the context and the “mise-en-scène” or their arrival had most certainly an impact on their image in late Medieval Europe, there was also a clear difference between European perceptions of Africans at that time and that of the ensuing centuries. The shift in perception can be attributed to the influence of an older legend, which would be used in the Catholic world as a new framework to make sense of different-looking extra-European Christians. It was the tale of Prester John, the mythical Christian ruler of the East, or the Indies, the exact location of whose realm was unknown. So, the Ethiopian ambassadors were

⁶¹ Antonella Romano, *Impressions de Chine: L’Europe et l’englobement du monde (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2016), 96.

⁶² The figure of St. Maurice is studied in Geraldine Heng, “An African Saint in Medieval Europe: The Black Saint Maurice and the Enigma of Racial Sanctity,” in *Sainthood and Race: Marked Flesh, Holy Flesh*, ed. Molly H. Bassett and Vincent W. Lloyd (New York: Routledge, 2015), 18–44.

⁶³ Paul Henry Daniel Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 103.

thus perceived as a delegation from the real Prester John,⁶⁴ an association which greatly explains the favorable welcome they received.

An analogous process was at work with the Japanese ambassadors of 1585. When they arrived in Rome, they were similarly described as delegates of the King of the Indies, or Princes of the Indies. They were also included in a similar discourse and symbolism to the Ethiopian envoys of Prester John. This was clearly a part of a communication strategy, where many details were modified or enhanced to fit a particular narrative. In many of the ceremonies in which the young boys took part, especially their processions in Rome, their number—which originally consisted of four—was reduced to three. This number, as several sources attest, was meant to evoke a well-known element of the image of the East in Christendom: the three Magi who came to visit Christ after his birth.

The story of the Ethiopian ambassadors has been interpreted by scholars such as Matteo Salvatore as a proof of the importance of religious homogeneity, which surpassed physical “otherness,” in the acceptance of the Ethiopian delegates in Europe. While this may well have been partly the case, the example of the Japanese ambassadors also warns us against overestimating the open-mindedness of pre-modern-Europe; we need to guard against seeing in such events an early manifestation of the concept of “diversity” that derives from post-modern or postcolonial values. In fact, Europeans were aware of the appearance of the Japanese boys, and as we have seen, their characteristics, such as skin-color or stature, were not always perceived in a positive manner. While it would be easy to say that this reflects individual differences in appreciation, their acceptance by most of the public in the cities they visited was also, and mainly, the consequence of a strategy in which their otherness played an important part in a precise ideological discourse.

Their presence was particularly important in the procession (*Posesso*) organized after the enthronement of Pope Sixtus V (1521–1590), shortly after their arrival. In this image and in the official record of the ceremony, published by Muzio Panza a few years later, the Japanese are described as “young Indians,” envoys of the “king of Japan,” coming from the “Antipodes.”⁶⁵ A painting

⁶⁴ On this subject see Hervé Pennec, « L'Europe et le royaume du Prêtre Jean (Éthiopie): vers la construction d'une frontière religieuse (XIII^e–XVII^e siècle) », in *Frontières religieuses à l'époque moderne*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Denis Couzet (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2013), 143–152.

⁶⁵ Panza states: “Sopra la porta si vede in un apittura l'andata solenne, che fece Sisto à Laterano quando essendo già salutato Pontefice; prese il possesso della Sede Pontificia accompagnato da i tre Giovani Indiani, che vennero dagli Antipodi à rendere obediienza alla Chiesa Romana, & à prostarsi à i piedi del vero Vicario di Christo in terra, in nome dei loro Re del Giappone, che illuminati già dallo Spirito di Dio, havenvano ricevuto la santa Fede, & abbracciato la Croce, e l'Evangelio di Christo.” Muzio Panza, *Della Libreria Vaticana ragionamenti*. Ne'

representing this glorious ceremony is also displayed on a wall of the Vatican Library, in the salon which was given the name of the Pope himself. It is described by Panza as a scene of the “Antipodes going with Sixtus to the temple.”⁶⁶

In all their travels through Europe, their superficial otherness provided obvious proof of the infinite distance between Europe and the territories from which they came. This geographical distance was an important element that illuminated the centrality of Rome. Another vital theme was the travelers’ Christian faith. The very fact that they had managed to travel all the way to Rome could only have been possible due to having been motivated by the depths of their faith. Therefore, the presence of such newly-converted Christian “others” efficiently established the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic true faith and also confirmed the order of their dogmas and social hierarchy.

This Roman standpoint is also confirmed by the description in Cesare Ripa’s “Iconologia.”⁶⁷ This guidebook of symbols and iconographies had a great influence on the iconology used in the ceremonies and images of the Baroque era, as it was broadly used to create this visual framework. In this book, the allegorical representation of the Catholic Church is arranged to emphasize its centrality and stand for its supremacy over other religions in the world.⁶⁸ In this very context, the presence of Japanese ambassadors as decorative elements in the Roman pomp would have highlighted such discourse. The splendor of the procession in Rome was organized with the understanding that it would be presented not only for Roman eyes but also to the broader European public. This demonstration

quali non solamente si discorre dell’origine, e rinovazione di essa, anco con l’occasione delle pitture, che vi sono nuovamente fatte si ragiona (Rome: Giovanni Martinelli, 1590), 39.

66 “Onde questa attione, come celebre per la dignità del ponteficato, e per la presenza di non più viste, e conosciute genti, fece egli quivi nella Libreria dipingere con questi versi di sotto Ad Templum Antipodes Sixtum comitantur euntem. Iamque novus Pastor pascit ovile novum.” From Muzio Pansa, *Della Libreria Vaticana ragionamenti*, 48.

67 First edition, without illustrations: Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia: ovvero descrizione di diverse imagini cavate dell’antichità, e di propria inventione* (Rome: Giovanni Gigliotti, 1593). Second edition, with illustrations: Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia: ovvero descrizione di diverse imagini cavate dell’antichità, e di propria inventione* (Rome: Lepide Faeii, 1603).

68 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia: ovvero descrizione di diverse imagini cavate dell’antichità, e di propria inventione*, ed. Erna Mandowsky (Hildesheim, Zürich and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1984), 333–334. The personification of Europe points with her left finger to all the attributes of sovereignty, including those of the pope, who has power over everything, and whose authority comes from “the most holy and catholic Christian faith which, by the grace of the Lord God, came to the new world.”

was all the more crucial in the context of the Counter-Reformation era, when the position of Rome was incessantly questioned.⁶⁹

5 The embassy as a conversion drama

This process of accepting “others,” sharing the same Christian faith, also correlated with the diffusion of the theme of conversion in dramatic context. During this same period, depicting conversions of pagan kings was a popular subject in religious theater, especially in performances at Jesuit colleges. Dramatic works constituted another crucial element in the visual and symbolic discourses enacted throughout the ambassadors’ journey. In fact, their entire expedition was constructed as a true conversion drama.⁷⁰

Upon their arrival in 1580, a public presentation accompanied by solemn ceremonies was organized at the Colegio Imperial de Madrid.⁷¹ Five years later, a record of their passage to Rome explicitly describes this way of staging the actions of the Japanese delegates as a “theatro.”⁷² Moreover, the Japanese

69 At that time the procession and the public demonstration in Rome was directly connected with the pan-European manifestation of power and supremacy. Martine Boiteux, “Parcours rituels romains à l’époque moderne,” in *Cérémonial et rituel à Rome (XVI^e – XIX^e siècle)*, ed. Maria Antonietta Visceglia and Catherine Brice (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1997), 27–87.

70 As an example, we can cite the play *Ismeria*, staged in Messina from the mid-sixteenth century, or the *Christus oides* by Stefano Tucci, first staged in Rome in 1569, and then diffused in the German-speaking countries. Such dramas were designed to impress the viewers by showing them the power of the act of conversion. See Daniela Quarta, “Drammaturgia Gesuita nel Collegio Romano: dalla Tragedia di Soggetto Biblico al Dramma Martirologico (1560–1644),” in *I Gesuiti e i primordi del teatro barocco in Europa: convegno di studi, Roma, 26–29 ottobre 1994, Anagni, 30 ottobre 1994*, ed. Maria Chiabò and Centro studi sul teatro medioevale e rinascimentale (Viterbo) (Rome: Torre d’Orfeo, 1995), 119–160. Jean-Marie Valentin, *Les jésuites et le théâtre, 1554–1680: contribution à l’histoire du monde catholique dans le Saint Empire romain germanique* (Paris: Desjonquères, 2001), 337–338. Mirella Saulini, *Il teatro di un gesuita siciliano, Stefano Tuccio S.J.* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2002), 113 ff. A play by Lope de Vega, *El santo negro Rosambuco*, which was published in Barcelona in 1612, can also be considered as belonging to this theatrical genre. See Bernard Forthomme, *Théologie des émotions structurée par l’expérience théâtrale* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2008), 185. Anne Teulade, “La décapitation invisible: le rejet du sanglant dans le théâtre hagiographique français et espagnol,” *Littératures classiques* 67 (2008): 71–83.

71 José Simón Díaz, *Historia del Colegio Imperial de Madrid. T.: Casa y Colegio de la Compañía de Jesús (1560–1602)*, *Colegio Imperial (1603–1625)*, *Los Reales Estudios (1625–1767)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Estudios Madrileños, 1952), 10–11.

72 “Ma hoggi all’incontro si vede in Roma istessa, Theatro nobilissimo de l’universo, che questi giovani Giaponesi nati in lontanissime Regioni delle famiglie Reali, si prosternano a’ santissimi

delegates even played a role in a ceremony of this kind. During their stay in Mantua, they were actually invited to the baptism of a Jew.⁷³ The convert took the Christian name of Miguel Mantio, which would have combined the names of two members of the embassy. In this context, the conversion of the Japanese delegates would have appeared as a model for the new Christians.⁷⁴ They are deliberately depicted as figures of foreign princes, pagans converted to the true faith, and contemporary incarnations of the three Magi—the same symbols as the act of conversion.⁷⁵

This rhetoric of transformation was all the more apparent during the arrival of the Japanese embassy, which followed in 1615. At this time, the leader of the embassy, Hasekura Tsunenaga, was baptized in Spain. A great festival was organized in the Cathedral of Descalzas Reales for this event,⁷⁶ which took

piedi gi Geogrio pontifice Massimo, & domandano à nome dei propii Rè alla tua Santità, non l'amicitia, come compagni, & uguali, ma come sudditi rendono obediencia alla tua beatitudine." *Descrizione dell'ambasciaria dei regi, et dei Principi del gran Regno del Giapon. Venuti novamente à Roma* (Cremona: Christophoro Draconi, 1585), sixth page after frontispiece (no page number).

73 Report from Ippolito Voria to Claudio Acquaviva, ARSI, vol. Ital. 159, 87–89v, (f. 88r); Report from Ippolito Voria to Claudio Acquaviva, ARSI, vol. Ital. 159, 83–84v, (f. 84r).

74 Their role in an edification discourse can be seen in a text published by the Swiss humanist Renward Cysat, an important figure in late sixteenth-century Luzern, the *Warhafftiger Bericht von den newerfundnen Japponischen Inseln und Königreichen*. This book was published the year following the embassy's arrival (in 1586). In his introduction, Cysat insists on the importance of the diffusion of stories about Japanese Christians, which could bring light to as many persons as possible, and especially those who spoke German "...dazu auch notwendig daß solche herzliche Historien unnd Geschichten zu grossem Nutz vieler Menschen publiziert und an das Liecht geben werden möchten," IV recto.). See Omata Rappo, "Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges," 225.

75 Such depiction reinforces again the legitimacy of the pope as the leader of the true and only Church of the whole world. This idea is also formulated in the official papal response to the oration pronounced at their arrival in Rome, in 1585: "Ad hanc orationem ab Antonio Buccapadulio, Summi Pontificis nomine, in hæc verba responsum est. ... Quod Franciscus Bungi Rex, & Protasius Arimanorum, Protasiique patruus Barptolomæus Omuræ Princeps, ab Iaponiorum insulis remotissimis vos suos propinquos huc ad se miserint, eius quam obtinet Dei benignitate potestatis coram venerandæ causa, pie illos sapienterque fecisse. Esse enim unam fidem, unam Ecclesiam Catholicam, unum huic ipsi Ecclesiæ Præfectum, Christique gregis universi, hoc est Catholicorum omnium, qui ubique terrarum sunt, Petri successione Pastorem, Romanum Pontificem. Hoc illos una cum ceteris fidei orthodoxæ mysteriis agnoscere & profiteri lætatur, immortalesque." *Acta consistorii publice exhibiti A. S. D. N. Gregorio Papa XIII. Regum Japoniorum legatis Romæ, die XXIII. Martii M.D. LXXXV* (Rome: Joan Mayer, 1585) 18. A French translation can be found in *Les actes du consistoire public exhibe par nostre S. P. le Pape Grégoire XIII* (Lyon: Benoît Rigaud, 1585), 27.

76 *Historia del regno di Voxu del Giapone, dell'antichità, nobiltà, e valore del suo re Idate Masamune, delli favori, c'ha fatti alla Christianità, e desiderio che tiene d'esser Christiano, e dell'aumento di nostra santa fede in quelle parti. E dell'ambasciata che hà inviata alla Santità di*

place in the presence of the king and queen and of other nobles from all over Europe. A report of the events states that the court ladies even shed tears of emotion at the sight of the spectacle.⁷⁷

A similar ceremony was reenacted in Rome. According to the memoirs of the Roman Jesuit Giaginto Gigli (1594–1671), Hasekura was presented as a “brother of the King of Japan” who came with his companions from “the Indies.”⁷⁸ The ceremony took place on 29 October 1615 in the presence of the Pope, cardinals, and various important figures of the European nobility. Three companions of Hasekura were baptized in the Eternal City.⁷⁹

In some cases, the conversion was much more than a performance. In Spain itself, members of the Hasekura delegation remained in the country, and their descendants continue to carry proudly the name “del Japón” today.⁸⁰ This acceptance is all the more surprising given that Spain at the time was obsessed with the question

N. S. Papa Paolo V. e delli suoi successi, con altre varie cose di edificazione, e gusto spirituale dei lettori. Dedicata alla Santità di N. S. Papa Paolo V. Fatta per il Dottor Scipione Amati Romano, interprete, & historico dell'ambasciata. In Roma, appresso Giacomo Mascardi. MDCXV (Rome: Giacomo Mascardi, 1615), 44–46.

77 “Viftò poi con gran devotione, & humiltà tutte le Cappelle, e fante Reliquie con molta edificazione di tutte le Monache, Dame della Regina, che per eccello di contento interno, mostravano di lagrimare.” *Acta consistorii publice exhibiti a S. D. N. Gregorio Papa XIII, 45*

78 “Adi 29 di ottobre 1615. entrò in Roma un Imbasciatore venuto dall’Indie Fratello del Rè del Giappone. Venne in compagnia di un frate di S. Francesco spagnolo, il quale serviva per interprete era stato per viaggio pi di due anni, et di quanti condusse seco, sole nove giunsero vivi, et con lui erano dieci. Fece l’entrata per Porta Angelica, et andò ad al loggiare nel convento de frati d’Araceli. gli fre fatto grande honore, essendo così lui come tutti li suoi compagni condotti sopra cavalli in mezzo a diverti signori, et con grandissimo concorso di Popolo. Havevano vestiti di diversi sorti di colori, berettino, branco, nero dipinto et di altre sorti con giubbe, mozzette et storte alla loro usanza. Furono accompagnati da molti gentil homini, corte, et guardia del Papa et tutte ciò che e solito nelle altre simili causaleate. No habbero dal papa il Concistoro, solito darsi alli altri Ambasciatori de Prencipi, perche il loro Re del Giappone non ancora battezzato. Portorono al papa presenti maravigliosi. l’Imbasciatore era christiano et si era battezzato in Hispagna dal Re filippo III. che gli diede il suo nome, chiamandolo Francesco Filippo d’Austria. li Altri erano ancor loro christiani, da uno in poi il quale fu battezzato in Roma a S. Giovanni baterano per le mani del Card.l Borghese, et hebbe il nome del Papa, chiamandosi Paolo Camillo Borghese.” Manuscript entitled *Memoria di Giacinto Gigli di alcune cose, gironalmente accadute nel suo tempo, cominciando dell’anno della sua Età XXVIII, che era fanno del Signore MDCVIII & del Pontificato di Papa Paolo V. l’anno III*, Biblioteca Nazionale V.E. Roma, Mss. V.E. 811, f. 18 r.

79 ASV. Fondo Borghese, I-723.

80 Such people still live around Coria del Río, in Spain. See Traci Abraham and Dan Serradilla-Avery, “The Japón Lineage in Spain. Voices from the Unsung Past in the Creation of Identity through Tourism Today,” in *Japanese and Nikkei at Home and Abroad: Negotiating Identities in a Global World*, ed. Nobuko Adachi (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2010), 105–131.

of origins. In this same period, former Jews and Muslims who had converted were the target of sometimes harsh discrimination or subjected to the interrogation of the notorious Inquisition.⁸¹ This harshness was not directed towards the Japanese delegates, whose descendants have never been subjected to such treatment, to this day.

Hence, the favorable acceptance of physical difference in the context of pre-modern Europe was hardly related to a vague notion of diversity that is associated with open-mindedness in the modern sense. Rather, it was possible only within a very particular framework. It was only when either the Ethiopians or the Japanese were presented as envoys or incarnations of either Prester John or the Magi, that such a strategy worked; that is, only in the limited condition where “others” shared the same “right” Christian faith. In turn, such acceptance of the other showed the centrality and righteousness of the Church.⁸²

6 The Japanese and the sons of Ham

As seen above, the effort to assimilate the Japanese embassies that took place in the context of Baroque pomp and ceremonies is often explained as a form of propaganda. While this aspect was indeed crucial, it can also be understood as a reaction to the racial considerations that have been discussed above. In the context of modern Europe, the issue of Asian skin color was not an isolated issue. Instead, it was linked to a much larger and deeper network of symbolic and ideological elements.

Most scholars agree that “race” as a human category based on the taxonomic differences took a clearer and more fixed form only in the eighteenth century. Its emergence in vocabulary and as a framework of perception is seen

81 Albert A. Sicoff, *Les controverses des statuts de “pureté de sang” en Espagne du XV^e au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1960). See also Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain vol. II: From the Fourteenth Century to the Expulsion* (Skokie: Varda Books, 2001), 326 ff.

82 None of the missionary accounts of the local Japanese religious activities give really accurate descriptions. Journalistic accuracy was not their primary objective. From the Catholic Church’s point of view, none of the local beliefs could be considered as equal counterparts to Christian beliefs. Therefore they were simply reduced to “idolatries,” superstitions, or rather enemies to be beaten or to be overcome. See Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Reassessing ‘the Discovery of Hinduism’: Jesuit Discourse on Gentile Idolatry and the European Republic of Letters,” in *Intercultural Encounters and the Jesuit Mission in South Asia (sixteenth–eighteenth centuries)*, eds Anand Amaladass and Ines G. Županov (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2014), 113–155.

in studies such as those of Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778).⁸³ Of course this way of thinking had already been germinating through medieval times, which paved the way for the ensuing phenomena.⁸⁴ Skin color had been used as a parameter for the categorization of people even in Ancient Greece and Egypt. However, it was from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century that the parameter of color really began to function as a criterion determining a hierarchical relationship between the “self” and the “other.”⁸⁵ In fact, the discourse of the infamous Noachian malediction, the “Curse of Ham,” was not still firmly linked to the idea of dark or black-colored skin in the fifteenth century.⁸⁶ For example, the original Latin and German editions (1493) of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* illustrated all the sons of Noah, including Ham, with a white skin.

Interestingly, in the following centuries, this episode of the Noachian curse is frequently used to explain differences of appearance in the description of peoples newly encountered as a result of the European expansion. The *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, written by Gomes Eannes de Azurara (1410–1474), refers to the Curse of Ham to explain the slave-trade on the coast of Africa.⁸⁷ Whether or not this rhetoric had been applied to the Japanese in the sixteenth century or not remains ambiguous. However, at least one text suggests that this idea may have been transmitted to them, or at least used to explain the Catholic world

83 Benjamin Braude has demonstrated that the figures from the Old Testament, Shem, Japheth, and Ham did not always represent geographically and ethnically the same group of people or region, based on his analysis of Genesis 9–10 and *The Travel of Sir John Mandeville*. Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103–142. Kumkum Chatterjee and Clement Hawes, “Introduction,” in *Europe Observed: Multiple Gazes in Early Modern Encounters*, ed. Kumkum Chatterjee and Clement Hawes (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 1–43. Brian Bantum, “The Threefold Man: Lavater, Physiognomy, and the Rise of the Western Icon,” in *Sainthood and Race: Marked Flesh, Holy Flesh*, ed. Molly H. Bassett and Vincent W. Lloyd (New York: Routledge, 2015), 45–65.

84 Geraldine Heng, “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages,” *Literature Compass* 8.5 (2011): 258–274; Geraldine Heng, “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages II: Locations of Medieval Race,” *Literature Compass* 8.5 (2011): 275–293.

85 David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 184. For examples of a discriminatory use of the “curse of Ham,” see David Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and Justifications for Slavery* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 105–110.

86 Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 103–142.

87 Robin Blackburn, “The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54.1 (1997): 65–122.

order. The text, entitled “*De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium*,” was published in 1590.⁸⁸ It takes the form of a dialog in Latin between the abovementioned four Japanese “ambassadors” on their way back to Japan from Europe.⁸⁹ While its authorship is usually attributed to Duarte de Sande (1531–1600), it may well have been at least partly written by Valignano himself.⁹⁰ In this theatrical conversation, which did probably not reflect any real dialogue, the Japanese boys are portrayed as saying that a dark tone was a direct result of divine punishment. This is where they mention the famous story of Ham, who had allegedly disrespected his father, and was thus cursed to have “stained” skin, a characteristic that would be inherited by his descendants.⁹¹ This must be understood in the context of the emergence of the slave-trade. In fact, despite the interdiction proffered by the Portuguese King, Japanese were victims of this practice, and indigenous slaves from all the East Indies were gathered in Manila and sent to Mexico.⁹²

While Japan was not directly linked to the curse, some sources associated it with China. In fact, at the dawn of the Enlightenment, China was not considered to be equal to Europe. It was considered a pagan land, home to people without honor, who were cursed by the malediction of Ham.⁹³ The Italian Martin Martini (1614–1661) was the first to claim that Chinese character’s could be traced back to Egyptian hieroglyphs, a theory which was further developed by Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680). He explained that Fu Xi (considered to have lived c. 2,000 BCE), the legendary figure who transmitted the characters to China, was Ham, the son of Noah.⁹⁴ Later this idea was followed and expanded by Georg Horn, a professor of history and theology at Leiden, who considered that the Chinese were the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japhet. In this theory, the Japanese were also considered to share the same roots as the Chinese, since

88 *De missione legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam curiam rebusq[ue] in Europa* (Macau: Company of Jesus, 1590).

89 On this text, see Josef Franz Schütte, “Der lateinische *Dialog De missione legatorum japonensium ad Romanam curiam*,” *Analecta Gregoriana* 70 (1954): 247–290.

90 J. F. Moran, “The Real Author of *de Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam... Dialogus*. A Reconsideration,” *Bulletin of Portuguese - Japanese Studies* 2 (2001): 7–21.

91 Massarella, *Japanese travellers in sixteenth-century Europe*, 87.

92 Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians*, 55–56. For the most recent study on the problem of Japanese slaves, also see Lúcio de Sousa and Mihoko Oka, *Daikōkai jidai no nihonjin dorei* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 2017).

93 Adrian Rue Zhun Xia, *Chinesia: The European Construction of China in the Literature of the 17th and eighteenth Centuries* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 21–24.

94 Zhun Xia, *Chinesia*, 27.

it affirmed that Korea and Japan were both founded by the Chinese.⁹⁵ This widening of the populations linked to Ham correlated with frequent conflations of the images of Asians, Africans, and Native Americans, who were depicted all together with the same iconography.⁹⁶

The notion of skin color was also sometimes correlated to a certain relationship to the true faith. For example, the Protestant missionary Jean de Léry (1536–1613) describes the people he encountered in Brazil, Tupinamba, as the descendant of Ham, who was cursed and therefore unfit for Christian salvation.⁹⁷ In contrast, the whiteness or clarity of skin was gradually perceived as proof of belonging to the right faith, or of the purity of the soul. In seventeenth century New Spain, the indelible “default” of the converted Jews began to be compared with the indelible “blackness” of black slaves, and the malediction of Ham was simultaneously attributed to the Jewish people, even for those whose skin was not clearly dark.⁹⁸ In the case of Catarina de San Juan, a slave of Asian origin who attracted devotion in the local Mexican society, her hagiographer describes her as a fair-skinned princess rather than a dark-skinned female slave, which constituted a marginalized social type.⁹⁹ Another interesting witness of the perception of white-colored skin as a proof of having the right faith is “Il Moro della Bianca Fé (“The Moor of the White Faith”) (1694), a comedy played in the Jesuit school in Rome (Seminario Romano).¹⁰⁰ We know the outline of the story through the pamphlet printed in 1694, but it was played several times.¹⁰¹ The

95 Walter Demel and Rotem Kowner, “Early Modern European Divisions of Mankind and East Asians, 1500–1750,” in *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia: Western and Eastern Constructions*, ed. Walter Demel and Rotem Kowner (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 41–57.

96 Karina H. Corrigan, et al., eds., *Asia in Amsterdam: The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 320. Friederike Ulrichs, *Johan Nieuhoofs Blick auf China (1655–1657): die Kupferstiche in seinem Chinabuch und ihre Wirkung auf den Verleger Jacob van Meurs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 116.

97 *L’Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil, autrement dite Amérique* (La Rochelle: Antoine Chupin, 1876). See Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 42–43.

98 Jean-Frédéric Schaub, « De la barbarie domestique au nègre juif: parcours de l’altérité (XX^e–XVI^e siècle) », in *Au miroir de l’anthropologie historique: mélanges offerts à Nathan Wachtel*, ed. Nathan Wachtel et al. (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013), 483–500.

99 Ronald J. Morgan, *Spanish American Saints and the Rhetoric of Identity, 1600–1810* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 122.

100 Bruna Filippi, *Il teatro degli argomenti gli scenari secenteschi del teatro gesuitico romano catalogo analitico* (Roma: Torre d’Orfeo, 2001), 400–402.

101 Saverio Franchi, “Osservazioni sulla scenografia dei melodrammi romani nella prima metà del Seicento,” in *Musica e Immagine: Tra iconografia e mondo dell’opera. Studi in onore di Massimo Bogianckino*, ed. Biancamaria Brumana and Galliano Ciliberti (Firenze: Olschki, 1993), 151–175 (165).

story starts with a cortege of “moro” slaves in chains, whose presence is designed to draw a sharp contrast with the allegory of “Liberty.” The theme of the play is the freedom brought through faith and friendship, virtues which were defined with the adjective “white.”

All this evidence indicates that skin color was perceived as a projection of an individual’s faith and morality. This explains why the descriptions of the Japanese as “Moors” or “blacks” are clearly pejorative and strengthen their pagan character—it paints them as aliens or even enemies. Their depiction as “white” skinned rather reflects a form of empathy—it is an effort to integrate them into the Catholic community.¹⁰² It also at least partly explains why such physical characteristics were gradually erased from the images of the Japanese martyrs, who were revered as saints, and their portrayals began to take the physical features of European missionaries or priests.

7 The iconographic tradition

One of the first oil paintings depicting the three Japanese Jesuits (here I mention only the oil painting deliberately to pay attention to the color used to represent Japanese martyrs), is “Los mártires jesuitas del Japón,” drawn by Pedro García Ferrer (1583–1660, now in the possession of the Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia, Figure 1). It was realized in 1629, shortly after the beatification of the martyrs in 1627, and therefore not long after Richeome’s description of the iconography of the martyrs with “olivastre” faces. Ferrer’s painting depicted similar features to those that Richeome described: small eyes and rather tanned faces. But a later example, “I Tre martiri di Nagasaki,” realized by Johann Heinrich Schönfeld between 1633–1650, shows little of such “Japanese” features. This is also true of the painting hung on top of the altar of the Chapelle dedicated to St Francis Xavier (actual Capilla de las Dos Trinidades) in the Iglesia del Colegio Imperial in Madrid, or “Drei Märtyrer von Nagasaki” hung on the wall of St Michael’s

102 In a fascinating article, Erin Kathleen Rowe masterfully analyzes how the hagiographers of black saints in the modern period tried to overcome the preexisting prejudice towards black skin and blackness. They either celebrated it, condemned it while insisting on the virtue needed to overcome this condition, or minimized its implications. Either way, they could not completely ignore it. See Erin Kathleen Rowe, “After Death, Her Face Turned White: Blackness, Whiteness, and Sanctity in the Early Modern Hispanic World,” *The American Historical Review* 121 (2016): 727–754. Bearing this in mind, it is clear that the fact of perceiving the Japanese as “white” or “black” had implications that reached beyond simple physiognomic or anatomic observations.



Figure 1: “Los mártires jesuitas del Japón,” Pedro García Ferrer (Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia).

Church in Munich.¹⁰³ The fact that the Japanese martyrs were depicted as white-skinned people in such paintings could also be explained by purely practical considerations, such as the visual culture of the painters themselves, or a cognitive difficulty in perceiving and expressing unfamiliar traits of bodily

103 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *La quête d'Isis essai sur la légende d'un mythe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985); Dino Pastine, *La nascita dell'idolatria: L'Oriente religioso di Athanasius Kircher* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1978).

features.¹⁰⁴ However, the example of the illustrations of the Japanese and Chinese deities described by Athanasius Kircher shows that painters and engravers were able to express exoticism or otherness even while staying within the boundaries of the European visual culture. A good example of this phenomenon can be seen in the painting representing the festivities in Antwerp following the canonization of Xavier in 1622. In this painting, people from all around were represented in “exotic” attire.¹⁰⁵

Jesuit iconography like these stand in striking contrast to the Franciscan version of the same theme. Images of the twenty-three Franciscan martyrs of 1597 normally include a larger group of victims, and their number is not used to convey a particular message.¹⁰⁶ Even though the Jesuits were not as eager to promote the beatification as the Franciscans, they finally grew quite attached to the iconographic triad of their Japanese martyrs. The number of surviving images dedicated to this theme amounts to twenty-two, counting those printed and recorded in the documents.¹⁰⁷

It is possible that it is only a historical coincidence that only three of their members were among the beatified and these three were also Japanese. However, purely from the point of view of the Christian iconographic tradition, such ensembles can be easily associated with the New Testament scene of Mount Calvary, the place where the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ took place besides the two robbers. This very scene also happened to be a major subject of the spiritual exercises established by the founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius Loyola.¹⁰⁸ Such symbolism reiterates the veritable reason of their beatification: those martyrs were crucified as Jesus Christ. To convey those allusions and devotional messages, the physical characteristic perceived as

104 The recently discovered portrait of Itō Mansio, one of the four Japanese envoys, actually shows that painters could depict “Asian” facial features, if they wanted to do so (painting now conserved in Milan, Fondazione Trivulzio). See Paolo Di Rico, “L’ambasciatore Giapponese di Domenico Tintoretto,” in *Aldebaran: storia dell’arte*, ed. Sergio Marinelli, 2 (2014): 84–94. The painter, Domenico Tintoretto, probably directly observed the young Japanese envoy, and his rendition is fairly realistic. Osano Shigetoshi, *Itō Mansho no shōzō no nazo ni semaru (Indagine sul ritratto di Ito Mansio recentemente scoperto e attribuito a Domenico Tintoretto)* (Tokyo: Sangensha, 2017), 78–80.

105 On the ceremonies, see Karel Porteman, “Exotisme en spektakel. De Antwerpse jezuïetenfeesten van juli 1622,” in *Vreemdem vertoond - Opstellen over exotisme en spektakelcultuur in de Spaanse Nederlanden en de Nieuwe Wereld*, ed. Johan Verberckmoes (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 103–119.

106 For example see the oil painting “Mártires del Japón,” now in the Convento de Santa María de Jesús or “Os mártires franciscanos do Japão,” Fundação da Casa de Bragança.

107 Hitomi Omata Rappo, “Des Indes Lointaines Aux Scènes Des Collèges,” 336–338.

108 Pierre-Antoine Fabre, *Ignace de Loyola: le lieu de l’image: le problème de la composition de lieu dans les pratiques spirituelles et artistiques jésuites de la seconde moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Éd. de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales: J. Vrin, 1992), 30 and 55.

typically Japanese were no longer attributed to the martyrs; rather, they were only applied to the executioners or guards who were sometimes present in the images.

In such iconography, the “exotic” aspects of the executioners, symbols of the local authorities, are highlighted with kimono-like garments and peculiar haircuts. The role of the executioner, as Foucault indicated, is fundamental in the narrative build-up to the ultimate sacrifice.¹⁰⁹ In addition, in the particular case of imagery of the martyrs, the more cruel, barbaric and uncivilized the executors are depicted, the more it provides theological legitimacy to the martyrs.¹¹⁰ That is why the representations of the Society’s Japanese martyrs rapidly were portrayed with rather non-Japanese physical features, while the executors were drawn with more exotic aspects. This pictorial rhetoric is all the more apparent in the case of the image of the Iglesia del Colegio Imperial, where the executors are stylized with turbans, the Muslim Ottoman headdress. Actually, the turban used to symbolize the challenging religious power of the Ottoman Empire in post-Renaissance Europe. The expression “taking the turban” was even considered synonymous with conversion to Islam.¹¹¹ Because of the geographical vicinity, the Ottoman



Figure 2: “Mártires del Japón,” by Sebastián de Herrera Barnuevo, (Capilla de las Dos Trinidades, Iglesia del Colegio imperial, Madrid).

109 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 63.

110 Cécile Vincent-Cassy, *Les saintes vierges et martyres dans l’Espagne du XVII^e siècle: culte et image* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011), 55–56.

111 Michael Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 30.

Empire and the “Turks” appeared as the immediate pagan threat to contemporary Christian Europe.¹¹² Thus, in this particular picture (Figure 2), it is unsurprising that the same pagan Japanese, who executed the Christians for their faith, were associated with the “Turks,” whose images were more familiar than the Japanese.

8 Conclusion

The martyrs of Nagasaki were a special case, as they were not martyrs of the colonies but were “Europeanized” in discourses about them, in the iconography, and in popular devotion. Their recognition as saints was especially crucial in the context of Post-Reformation Europe, as it gave the Church, and the religious orders, “true martyrs,” who were a tangible result of the mission. Their exceptional beatification process really started after the Hasekura embassy. The main justification for this decision was the fact that they died on the “cross.” Their foreignness, however, did appear to be a factor.

This article explores the reason why the “racial” features of the Japanese martyrs were not reflected in their surviving iconography. We started by asking if this was indeed always the case. In fact the skin color of the Japanese in modern times was a difficult problem. Richeome’s testimony introduced us to the notion of “olivastre,” which may seem related to the contemporary notion of “yellow” but was in fact a different concept. It seems to have described a dark, tanned skin, but could also be understood as a type of whiteness. Earlier sources, such as missionaries’ letters, show us that Europeans did not have a unified perception of the skin color of the Japanese people. Some of them saw it as pale or close to white, while others described it as dark. The same pattern can be seen in the records of the first “Japanese embassy” to Europe, which arrived in 1585. In fact, one of my main arguments is directly related to this embassy, which was conceived as a way of propagandizing the Japanese mission.

This strategy also made ample use of earlier discourses related to the people of the East, such as the story of Prester John, and, above all, to the three oriental magi who came to see the newborn Christ. The four Japanese were included in a visual and symbolic strategy that went beyond their otherness—as it was perceived by the European public—to include them in the Catholic world order. Thus, their presence showed not only the centrality of the Church but also its domination over the whole world.

112 Eric D. Dursteler, “Fearing the ‘Turk’ and Feeling the Spirit: Emotion and Conversion in the Early Modern Mediterranean,” *Journal of Religious History* 39.4 (2015): 484–505.

Skin color also had a moral implication, related to a certain relationship with the true faith. The journey of the four Japanese boys throughout Europe was also designed as a living “conversion drama,” and they served as models of this act on more than one occasion. This also implied that the relative acceptance of the Japanese stemmed from their unquestioned adherence to the true faith. In this context, it is quite telling that a document published after their departure that depicts them as debating issues such as the different “races” in the world makes use of the story of the Curse of Ham. In fact, this biblical topic was also used to delineate a form of hierarchy of the people of the world at the time, and certain seventeenth-century authors saw China as a country founded by the sons of Ham. This created an ideological framework in which dark skin was seen as a sign of one’s distance from the true faith and even reflected moral depravity. The moral and physical “whiteness” of the Japanese martyrs might even partly explain why they were beatified, and not the “black saints” of the colonial world. Figures such as Teresa Juliana de Santo Domingo (d. 1743), an african born slave who lived in Madrid, remained indeed the subject of local cults, despite their hagiographers’ efforts to create new models of sainthood integrating their skin-color.¹¹³

The iconographic tradition of the Japanese martyrs, especially in the Society of Jesus, was clearly influenced by such matters, and also actively included them in a preexisting symbolic background. Depictions of the martyrs themselves, who were three in number, were associated with Christ and the two robbers on Mount Calvary. To emphasize this relationship, they were shown as simple missionaries or priests; their figures were presented as white skinned and lacking any features that were used in other sources to depict typically “Asian features.” In fact, such exotic otherness was transferred to the executioners, the enemies of the faith. Far from being due simply to practical considerations, this iconography was the product of a complex conglomerate of symbolic, doctrinal, and ideological elements that were used to integrate these “foreign” saints into the devotional context of modern Europe and its colonies. In doing so, the paintings also incarnate what can be seen as the first seeds of a racial perception of Eastern Asia and its inhabitants, which would later evolve to become the notion of “yellow.”¹¹⁴

113 See Erin Kathleen Rowe, “After Death, Her Face Turned White,” 442.

114 This article was written with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF).