The Japanese and the Jesuits

Alessandro Valignano in sixteenth-century Japan

J. F. Moran

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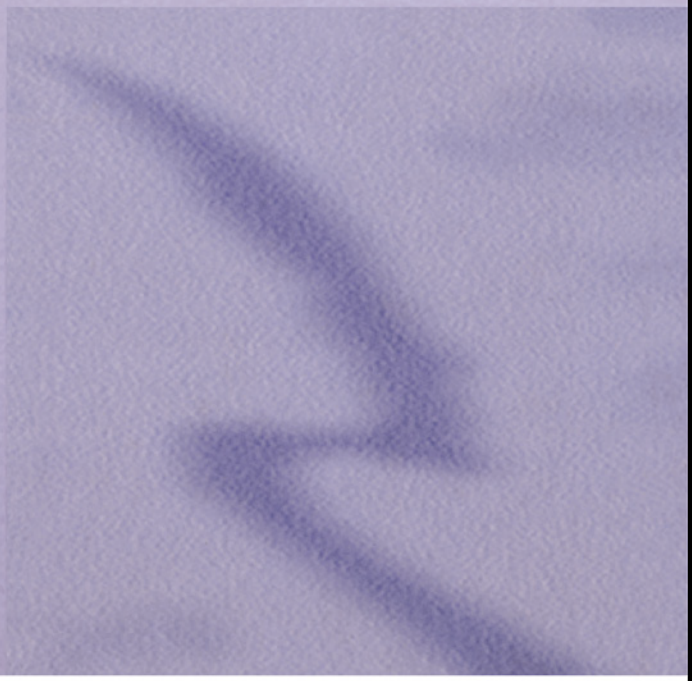

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The Japanese and the Jesuits examines the attempt by sixteenth-century Jesuits to convert the Japanese to Christianity. Directing the Jesuits was the Italian Alessandro Valignano, whose own magisterial writings, many of them not previously translated or published, are the principal source material for this account of one of the most remarkable of all meetings between East and West.

Valignano arrived in Japan in 1579. In promoting Christianity, while always seeking the support of the ruling classes, an important part of his strategy was to have the missionaries adapt themselves thoroughly to Japanese customs, etiquette and culture. He was insistent that they must master the Japanese language, and he brought to Japan a printing press, which turned out grammars and dictionaries of Japanese for the missionaries and works of instruction and devotion for Japanese Christians.

Following Valignano's death, Christianity was proscribed and missionaries banished from Japan. This, however, does not detract from his remarkable achievements. He understood perfectly well that by themselves foreign missionaries were not capable of converting Japan to Christianity, and one of his principal concerns was the training of Japanese Jesuits and priests and the breaking of barriers between them and the Europeans. Few people have ever been more acutely aware of, and grappled more determinedly with, the differences and problems of the Japanese-European relationship.

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Preface

Very little of the work of Alessandro Valignano has previously been published in English, and much of it has never been published at all. This book includes substantial excerpts from his letters and treatises, published and unpublished. Translations are my own.

The arrangement of the matter is thematic rather than chronological, and the themes are, for the most part, the same which preoccupied Valignano himself.

My debt to Father J.F.Schütte, SJ, Professor J.L.Alvarez-Taladriz, and other scholars, will be obvious. I am grateful also to Kirishitan Bunko, Sophia University, Tokyo, for allowing me to consult their copies of the relevant parts of the Jesuit archives; to Father Edmond Lamalle, SJ, for kindly providing microfilms of some of Valignano's letters; to Angela Newman, for help with the maps; and to Dr Michael Cooper, SJ, who answered enquiries, read the script, and offered valuable comments and suggestions.

Here in Yamaguchi the labour of composition has been lightened by help and encouragement from colleagues and friends, especially Father Domenico Vitali, SJ, and Professor Nakamura T ru.

J.F.Moran
Yamaguchi, Japan

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Notes

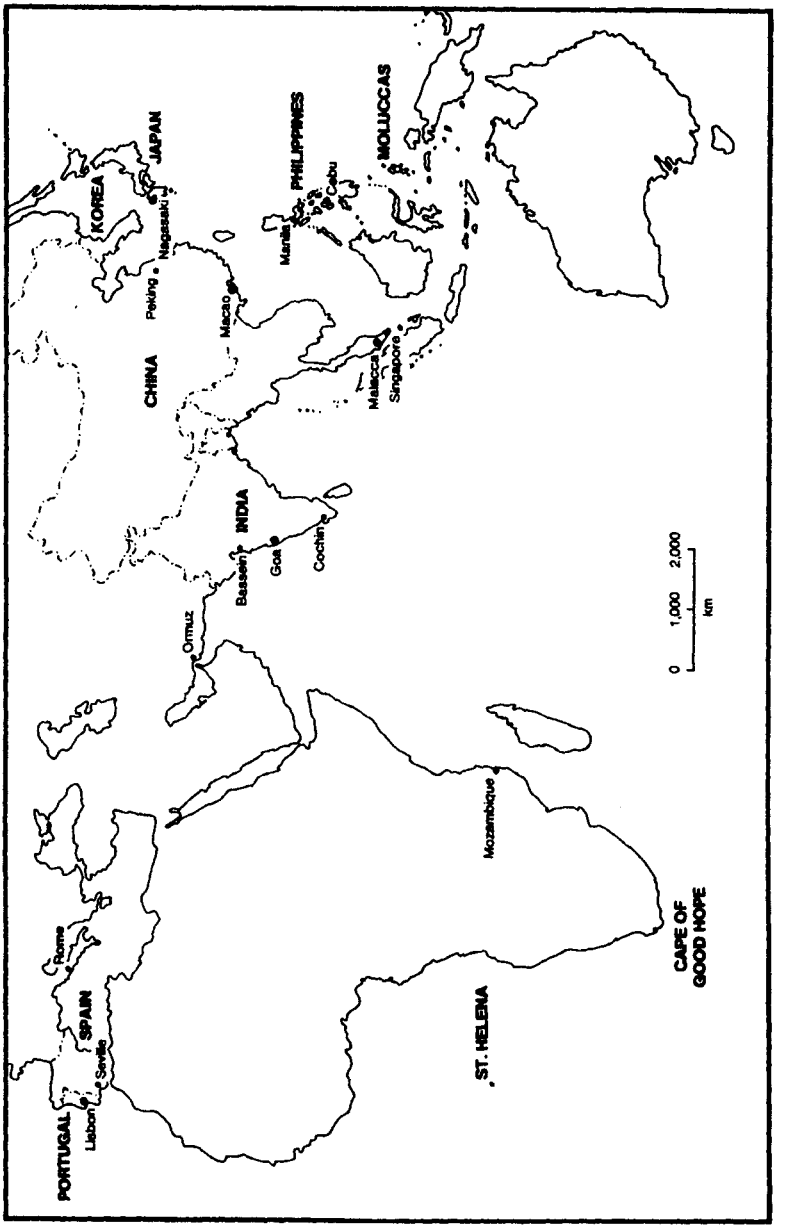
In Japanese names the Japanese order, in which the family name comes first, is retained. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century romanized spellings of Japanese words have been altered in most cases to the more familiar 'modified Hepburn' system. In a few well-known place names—for example Kyoto and Kyushu—long-vowel indicators are omitted.

'Father' is used to refer to Jesuit priests, 'brother' to refer to all Jesuits who are not priests, and 'bonze' to refer to Buddhist monks.

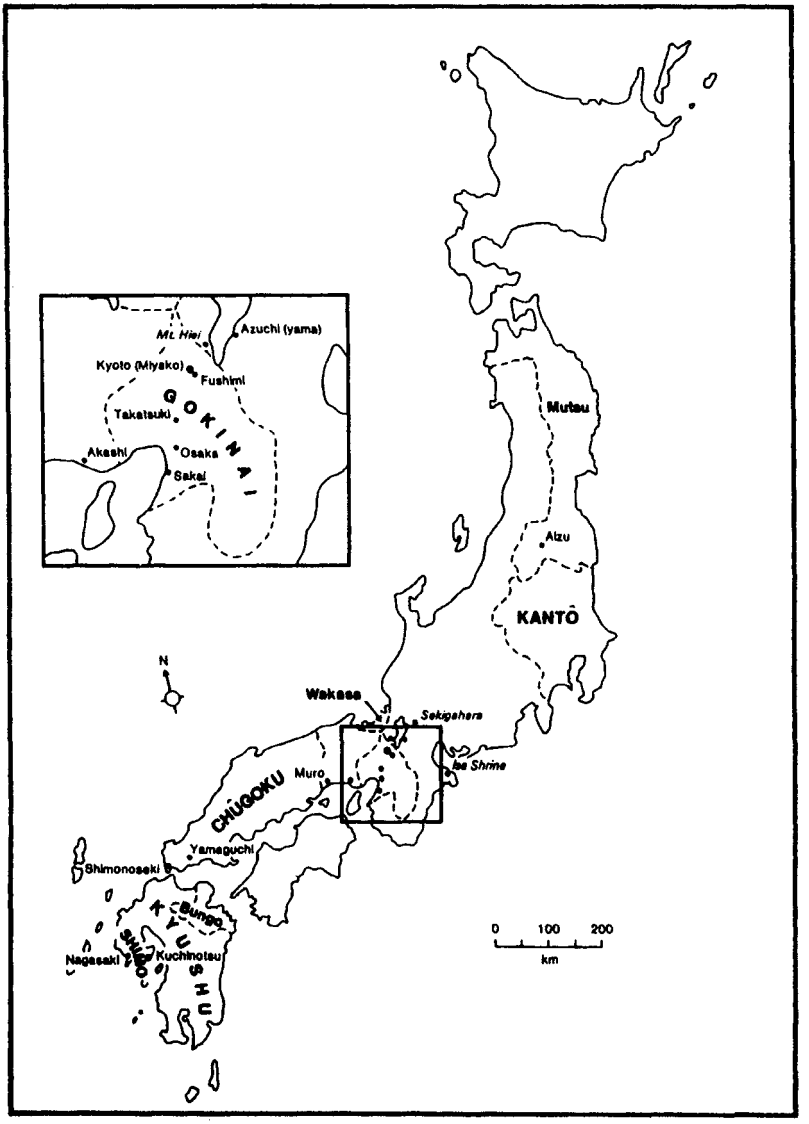
The maps show the location of places mentioned in the book.

The index includes an explanation of some terms not explained in the text (see, for example, *mai, monogatari*). With regard to currency units see also Chapter 9, note 19.

Sources of information are indicated, as briefly as possible, in the notes, most of which are in the form of references to letters or to the bibliography. Abbreviations are explained on pp. 204 and 225.



Map 1 From Lisbon to Nagasaki


Mt. Hiei
Azuchi (yama)
Kyoto (Miyako)
Fushimi
GOKINAI
Takatsuki
Akashi
Osaka
Sakai
Mutsu
Aizu
KANTŌ
N
Wakasa
Sekigahara
Ise Shrine
Muro
CHŪGOKU
Yamaguchi
Shimonoseki
Bungo
Nagasaki
Kuchinotsu
KYŪSHŪ
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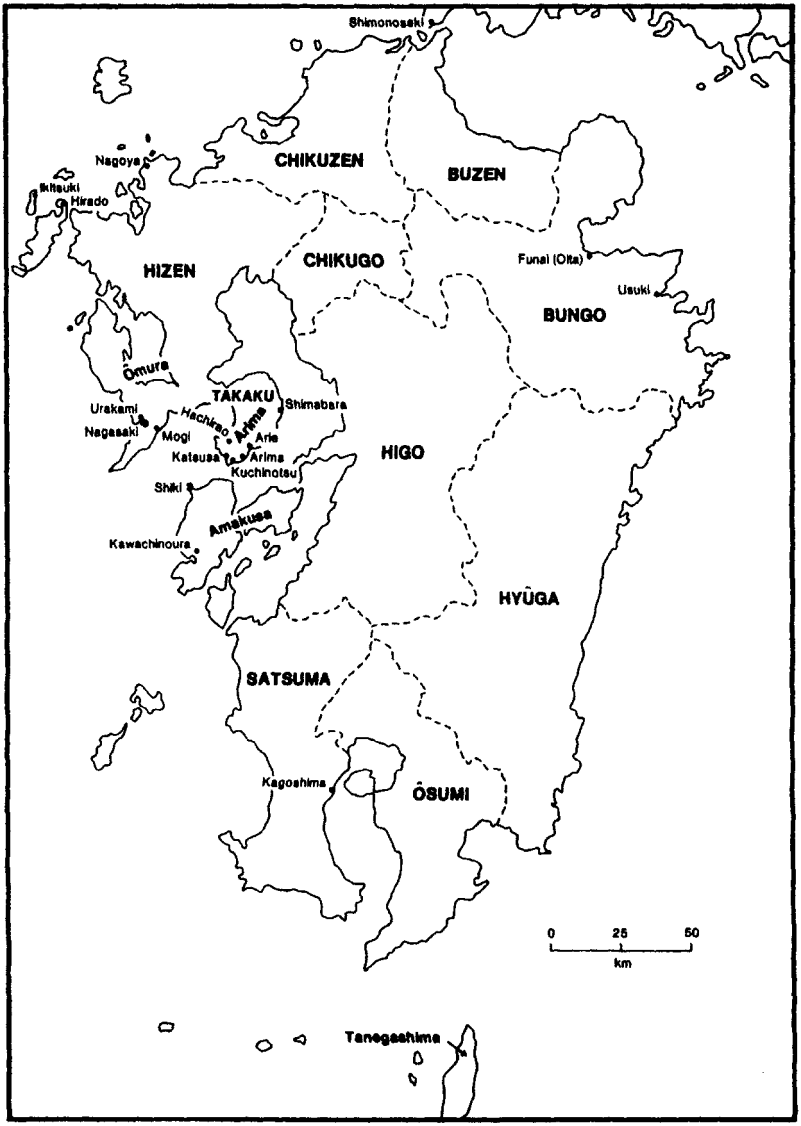
km

Map 2 Japan


Shimonoseki
Nagoya
Iki-tsuki
Hirado
CHIKUZEN
BUZEN
HIZEN
CHIKUGO
Funai (Oita)
Usuki
BUNGO
Ômura
TAKAKU
Shimabara
Urakami
Nagasaki
Mogi
Hachirao
Arima
Arie
Katsusa
Arima
Kuchinotsu
HIGO
Shiki
Amakusa
Kawachinoura
HYÛGA
SATSUMA
Kagoshima
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0
25
50
km
Tanegashima

Map 3 Kyushu

1

Orientation

Funega Cuchinotçuye iruua, sate medetai cotoya.
[The ship is coming into Kuchinotsu. Isn't that splendid!]
(from a lost *monogatari* quoted by João Rodrigues[1])

'The ship' is the Portuguese trading ship making the annual voyage which since 1555 had brought Chinese silk from Macao to Kyushu, the most western of the four main islands of Japan. In 1579 the ship came to Kuchinotsu, in the district of Arima, West Kyushu. That was the year when, according to the Jesuit chronicler Luis Frois,

> there came from China to Japan the *nao* of Leonel de Brito, and in his company came Father Alessandro Valignano, a Neapolitan, a person highly qualified in letters and in virtue, and one of the most outstanding subjects of the Society ever to come to Asia.[2]

'The Society' is the Society of Jesus, usually referred to as 'the Jesuits', founded by Ignatius Loyola and recognized by Pope Paul III in 1540 as a religious order within the Catholic Church. Francis Xavier, disciple and friend of Ignatius, was the first Jesuit sent to preach Christianity outside Europe. Three Portuguese traders whose ship was blown to Japan in a typhoon in 1542 or 1543 are the first Europeans known to have set foot there, and Xavier was not far behind them. He reached India in 1542 and Japan in 1549, and in 1552 he died on an island off the coast of South China.
Alessandro Valignano was born in 1539, joined the Jesuit Order in 1566, and was the dominant figure among the Jesuits in Asia, and especially in Japan, during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The Jesuits were the only Christian missionaries in Japan until the

arrival of Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian friars in the 1590s and 1600s, and the number of friars never rose above a quarter of the number of Jesuits. There were 115 Jesuits in Japan in 1614, the year when all Christian missionaries were ordered to leave and the persecution of Christians began.[3] Not all of the missionaries did leave, but the majority had to, and in a sense it was the end of the era which began with St Francis Xavier.

Xavier came from Malacca to Japan in a Chinese junk, with a Chinese captain and crew. The Chinese captain died in Japan, in Kagoshima, and the saint wrote of him, sadly: 'He was good to us throughout the voyage, but we were unable to do him any good, since he died in his unbelief; nor can we do him good after his death by commending him to God, since his soul is in hell.'[4] For the most part the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century missionaries believed that those who had not heard the Christian message, as well as those who rejected it, would be damned,[5] and accordingly that the work of evangelization, conversion and baptism was of extreme urgency.

When Francis Xavier left Japan in 1551 his work was continued by a very small band of Jesuits under the Spaniard Cosme de Torres. Torres died in 1570, only a few months after the Portuguese Francisco Cabral had arrived to take over from him, and Cabral was still Jesuit mission superior nine years later when the Italian Alessandro Valignano first reached Japan. The number of missionaries in Japan had risen to thirty in 1576 and to no fewer than eighty-five, including twenty-nine Japanese Jesuits, by 1584.[6]

Reports from the mission had been very encouraging, with Christian communities established in many places in Kyushu and some elsewhere, and substantial numbers of converts, including some very prominent persons. One of these was the lord of Bungo, in Kyushu, who had met Francis Xavier in 1551, had favoured the missionaries ever since, and had himself become a Christian in 1578. The importance of the goodwill of persons in positions of power was obvious to Valignano, but experience continued to underline it—for example in 1587, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ruler of Japan, decreed (although the decree was not enforced) that all missionaries were to leave the country; and in 1597, when twenty-six Christians were crucified in Nagasaki on the orders of the same ruler.[7]

The Jesuit Order is divided into 'provinces', each province being governed by a '(father) provincial', who is subject to the general superior (known as 'Father General' or 'the General') of the Order. A modern provincial serves one or two terms of three years each. In

earlier times the length of the provincial's period of office was more variable, but always limited. The General was and is elected for life. From time to time the General may appoint a 'visitor' to conduct a tour of inspection, or 'visitation', of one or more provinces. The visitor represents the General and has authority over all others in the province, including the provincial.

The first four Jesuit Generals were Ignatius Loyola, Diego Laynez, Francis Borgia and Everard Mercurian. Mercurian became General in 1573, and in the same year he appointed Alessandro Valignano 'visitor of the East Indies', with authority over all Jesuit missions and all Jesuits from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan.[8] The office of 'visitor' was the highest possible, apart from that of General, in the Society of Jesus.

Mercurian died in 1580 and his successor as Jesuit General was Claudio Aquaviva. Aquaviva, who was still General when Valignano died in 1606, was a fellow Neapolitan, a former classmate and a personal friend of Valignano. He made him provincial of the province of the East Indies (also known as 'the Indian province'), and later reassigned him to his former post as visitor.

The province of the East Indies had its headquarters in Goa, in Portuguese India, and Valignano arrived there in 1574. Except for the years 1583 to 1587, during which he was provincial, Valignano was visitor until his death in 1606—until 1595 visitor of the entire province, from 1595 of only a part of it, namely China and Japan. It was 25 July 1579 when Valignano stepped ashore at Kuchinotsu for his first 'visitation' of Japan.

When the Visitor left Japan in 1582 he took with him four Japanese Christian boys from noble Kyushu families. They carried letters to the Pope from the lord of Bungo and two other Christian lords, on what was the first Japanese diplomatic mission to Europe. They did not return until 1590, when:

> there arrived in Nagasaki on the 18th day of July the *nao* of Henrique da Costa, and in it there came the Father Visitor with the four Japanese gentlemen who went to Rome, namely Dom Mancio, Dom Miguel, Dom Martinho, and Dom Julião.[9]

On 9 October 1592 Valignano sailed again for Macao and India. He reached Japan for the third time on 5 August 1598, reporting to Aquaviva that 'Our Lord brought us safely to these kingdoms of Japan in 22 days, with a very good voyage'.[10] Most voyages were

less pleasant. In 1580 Valignano had written to Mercurian asking to be relieved of his office, and mentioning that he would be glad not to have to spend the rest of his life on 'these seas'.[11] In 1598, conscious of advancing years and declining strength, the Visitor had decided to stay in Japan. Four years later the financial plight of the Jesuits there forced a change of plan, but he writes to Aquaviva in Rome:

> Your Paternity should understand that it is only the extreme urgency of our need which persuades me to set out yet again, at the age of sixty-four, over these so dangerous seas, and to leave the governing of this province, which Your Paternity has entrusted to me as visitor, in order to seek some remedy from the viceroy of India and from the Portuguese in Macao.[12]

On 15 January 1603 Valignano left Japan for the last time. On arrival in Macao, after a terrifying voyage, he was for two weeks close to death, but 'with four bleedings and two purges, and with the prayers of Ours [Ours=the Jesuits], Our Lord was pleased to give me health'.[13]

In 1604 the Visitor is planning to return to Japan the following year, but again he asks the Father General to relieve him of his duties as superior. He is now sixty-five years old, weakening and tiring, and will probably be almost seventy by the time a reply reaches him. He asks particularly to be allowed to stay wherever he is when that reply reaches him, free from any obligation to undertake further voyages.[14] A year later he writes that he will be able to leave for Japan in June 1606, 'unless it please Our Lord to take me for the other life, which is what I would much prefer'.[15] His prayer was heeded, there were no more voyages, and he died in Macao on 20 January 1606.

Japan was a turbulent and fragmented country when Xavier landed there in 1549, and when Valignano left it in 1603 it was unified and at peace. The emperor, who for centuries had resided in Kyoto, had always held authority over the entire country. It was a distant and nebulous authority, which the emperor himself had no means of enforcing, but those who did wield power would from time to time claim that they ruled as instruments of the imperial will. Power was in the hands of an aristocracy until the twelfth century, but it was then taken over by the military class. Local allegiances, however, were usually much stronger than allegiance to any central régime,

and in the early and mid-sixteenth century central government, under the 'lord of the *Tenka*', controlled only the areas close to Kyoto, and the word *Tenka,* literally '(all) under heaven', had come to refer only to those areas. Local *daimy* , hereditary military lords, often acknowledged no authority above their own, and desperate struggles for power and territory were common.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century there were drastic changes, and three of the most celebrated figures in Japanese history dominated the political scene. Oda Nobunaga became lord of the *Tenka* in 1573, the year in which Valignano was appointed visitor, and when the Italian met him in 1581 Nobunaga was master of about half the country. Less than ten years later the whole of Japan was subject to Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Nobunaga's lieutenant and successor. Hideyoshi died in 1598, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, the victor at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, set about establishing the centralized system of government and control of the nation which was to last for over two hundred years.

2

The ambassadors

It was Valignano who arranged the first Japanese embassy to Europe. The ambassadors were It Mancio, Chijiwa Miguel, Hara Martinho and Nakaura Julião, the Japanese boys whom the Visitor had brought with him when he left Japan in 1582. Mancio travelled as legate of the lord of Bungo, Miguel as legate of the lords of Omura and Arima, and Martinho and Julião as their companions. In December 1583 the Visitor saw them off from Goa as they set out for Lisbon and Rome. In May 1587 he welcomed them back, and on 4 June 1587, in the Goa Jesuit College, Hara Martinho delivered a Latin eulogy of Valignano, linking him in rhetorical conceit with his namesake Alexander the Great, and proclaiming:

> Blessed are the eyes that see such things, and blessed are we who have seen them. But more blessed are you, Alexander great in virtue, for you were the principal cause of our participation in so much good.[1]

The comparison is even more explicit in the peroration:

> O Alexander greater far than Alexander the Great, you have conquered and pacified almost all India with the arms of Christ. There remains now only the world of Japan, no easy conquest to any other than Alexander…. Storm that country with the arms of God, conquer it with good works, wrest our fatherland from the enemy most cruel, and bring it to true freedom. [The cruel enemy is the Devil, and the reference is to spiritual conquest.] The Japanese call out to you, they long for you; the winds are favourable, the seas calm, the doors are open wide.[2]

Valignano is often at pains to distinguish plain truth from rhetorical embellishment, but this particular scholastic exercise can hardly have failed to please him, for he was delighted at the success of the mission, and very relieved to have the boys safely back in Goa.

In August 1586 word had reached India that they and a considerable number of Jesuits were in Lisbon at the beginning of that year, awaiting the spring sailings to India. In December 1586 Valignano reported to the General in Rome that in October four of the five ships expected from Portugal had reached India safely, but the *San Felipe,* with twenty-one Jesuits and the four boys on board, had not, and that he could only hope and pray that they were wintering in Mozambique.[3]

The *San Felipe* left Lisbon on 8 April 1586, but it was the end of August before it reached Mozambique. Prevailing winds made the Mozambique-Goa voyage almost impossible after mid-August, and the *San Felipe* had to turn back after an attempt to set sail for India in early September. Instead the ship headed back to Lisbon, leaving the boys and the Jesuits to spend the winter in Mozambique, with no ship to take them to India in the spring and no certainty that the 1587 ships from Lisbon would call at Mozambique in the summer. Meanwhile Valignano, fearing for their safety, had persuaded the Portuguese viceroy in Goa to send a small galleon to Mozambique. It arrived; they embarked on 15 March and were in Goa on 29 May, having managed to send word of their coming by another and faster Portuguese ship encountered at sea.[4] There was joy, relief, and a splendid welcome from church and state, and only six days later Hara Martinho was giving his Latin oration in the Jesuit college. He and his three companions, boys no longer, are now usually 'the gentlemen' or 'the nobles' in Valignano's letters. In December 1587 he writes:

> the Viceroy has been extraordinarily kind to the Japanese gentlemen,…and he sent each of them a fine Arab horse as a present…, and he has ordered each of them to be given 200 cruzados a month to cover their expenses. They have had many visits from all the gentlemen here, and all are so impressed with them that it is clear that this mission has been the work of Our Lord. They are now grown men, very satisfied with their experience, very full of the qualities and the greatness of His Holiness and of the other Christian princes, and very enthusiastic about our things *[may afficionados a nuestras cosas]*. And they have made such progress in virtue and are so eager to explain our things to the Japanese

> and to help in the conversion of Japan that I assure Your Paternity that words cannot express the consolation they have brought me, And I have no doubt that when they arrive in Japan they will make every bit as great an impression there as they did in Europe.[5]

Valignano had good reason to be satisfied. His purpose in sending the boys was partly to impress them and eventually, through them, to impress Japan with the splendours of Christian Europe; and partly to present them to Europe, and in particular to the king of Spain and Portugal, to the pope, and to other Christian princes, as a living letter',[6] living proof of the reality, the importance and the needs of Christianity in Japan.

The Visitor had intended to accompany the boys to Rome, but in October 1583 he had received letters from Aquaviva instructing him to remain in India.[7] The priets who went with them when they left Goa in December were Nuno Rodrigues, delegated by the Indian Jesuit province to report to Rome, and Diogo de Mesquita, who had accompanied the boys from Japan. Valignano's instructions to Mesquita explain his intention as follows:

> In sending the boys to Portugal and Rome our intention is twofold. Firstly it is to seek the help, both temporal and spiritual, which we need in Japan. Secondly it is to make the Japanese aware of the glory and greatness of Christianity, and of the majesty of the princes and lords who profess it, and of the greatness and wealth of our kingdoms and cities, and of the honour in which our religion is held and the power it possesses in them. These Japanese boys will be witnesses who will have seen these things, and being persons of such quality they will be able to return to Japan and to say what they have seen. Since the Japanese have never seen our things they cannot believe us when we tell of them, but these witnesses will confer proper credit and authority on us, and thus they will come to understand the reason why the fathers come to Japan. At present many of them do not understand; they think we are poor people, of little consequence in our own countries, and that we come to Japan to seek our fortunes, with the preaching of heavenly things as a mere pretext.
>
> For the first purpose to be achieved it seemed necessary that His Majesty, and His Holiness, and the cardinals and other lords of Europe, should meet the Japanese, so that seeing them and speaking with them they may realize how able and how excellent they are, and that what the fathers write about them is not

> invented or untrue, and so the princes may be moved to help Japan, So it seems good that these boys, so honourable and so noble, sent by the king of Bungo, and the king of Arima, and by Don Bartolomeu, should, in their names, visit His Majesty and declare their obedience to His Holiness, asking their help for the increase of our holy faith and for the conversion of Japan.
>
> For the second purpose to be achieved the boys must be well treated and favoured by the same princes. They should see and understand the greatness of their estates, the beauty and richness of our cities, and the universal credit and authority of our religion. And therefore at the court of His Majesty in Portugal, and in Rome, and in the other cities they pass through, they should be shown all the great and noble things, buildings, churches, palaces, gardens, and other similar things, such as silver bars, rich sacristies, and other things which can edify them, and they should not see or know anything which would have the opposite effect.[8]

The boys were to be kept busy studying Japanese, Latin, music, and so on. They were to stay in Jesuit colleges and to be given the best possible welcome and accommodation there, but without pomp or extravagance.[9] They should see all the noble and great things of Rome and other cities, but should learn nothing except what the Jesuits wanted them to learn, and they should be shown nothing that might scandalize them. Wherever they went a Jesuit priest and a Jesuit brother were to go with them, and they should have no dealings with outsiders. Above all it was essential that they should come back edified, and with a high opinion of Christianty in Europe.[10] In 1587 the plan seemed to have been entirely successful, and Valignano was understandably delighted.

The Japanese boys had sailed from India in February 1584 on what was 'without any doubt the greatest and most arduous voyage that there is in the discovered world'.[11] There were thirty-two deaths on board before the ship reached Lisbon on 11 August, but it was considered an uncommonly agreeable voyage. The boys were in good health and spirits throughout, and we hear of them studying Latin, playing musical instruments and chess, fishing, saying their prayers, and enjoying the amenities of the island of St Helena.[12] In September they crossed into Spain, and on 1 March 1585 they landed in Italy, at Leghorn. From 22 March until 3 June they were in Rome. They sailed from Genoa on 9 August, reached Barcelona on the 16th, and were back in Lisbon on 25 November. When they left for India and home in April 1586 they had met two popes, a

king, cardinals, dukes, archbishops, prelates, ambassadors, and a great number of other noble, powerful and reverend Europeans.[13]

In all this—and not least in the very favourable impression they received of the Europeans, and the Europeans of them—the Japanese were following the programme Valignano had drawn up for them. But there was one notable departure from the Visitor's plan. Aquaviva, the Jesuit General, agreed that pomp and extravagance should be discouraged, and arrangements had been made for a private papal reception of the young Japanese legates. But the pope, Gregory XIII, decreed at the last minute that he would receive the Japanese at a public consistory 'in honour of the ambassadors, and for the glory of the Holy See, the conversion of the Gentiles, and the confusion of heretics'.[14]

Over seventy publications concerning this first embassy from Japan to Europe appeared in various European languages before the end of the century,[15] and the central event they describe is the consistory of 23 March 1585. Julião was ill and did not take part, but the other three, in full Japanese dress, each with his two swords, rode in procession through the centre of Rome. There was a salute from the 300 guns of Castel Sant'Angelo, huge crowds in and around St Peter's Square, and, in the splendour of the papal palace, a great assembly of bishops, prelates, nobles and cardinals. At the ceremonial meeting with the aged pope in the *Sala Regia,* normally used only for meetings with kings and emperors, the youthful legates formlly presented letters from the Japanese lords who had sent them.

Later the same day, and again two days later, the pope had private meetings with the ambassadors, and on 3 April he accepted presents from them, questioned them about the needs of Japan, and took them on a tour of his palace. Pope Gregory was extremely affable to the boys and solicitous for their welfare, providing money, magnificent clothing, and for Julião—who was still very ill—the services of his own physician. On the pope's instructions and in accordance with his example they were everywhere received with ceremony—as for instance when they visited 'the seven churches of Rome' on 9 April. On that day the pope fell ill, and on the following day he died. Gregory XIII was succeeded by Sixtus V, who was crowned on 1 May 1585. The Japanese legates were present at the ceremony, and the new pope received them kindly at several subsequent meetings, public and private.[16]

In Rome the Japanese stayed at the Gesù, the principal Jesuit house, and they asked Aquaviva to allow them to enter the Jesuit novitiate in Rome. This was a development which does not seem to