



Francis Xavier and Latin Education in Asia¹

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Abstract

Francis Xavier was a Jesuit missionary. He left Europe for Asia to propagate Christianity. The extant letters of Xavier describe his missionary work, which was conducted mainly in India, Southeast Asia, and Japan. He often talks about the establishment of schools and Latin education, especially in Goa and Malacca. After visiting these two places, he finally arrives in Japan in 1549. However, in his letters he does not refer to the establishment or possibility of Latin education in Japan. It was not until Alessandro Valignano came to Japan in 1579 that systematic Latin education started.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss why Xavier promoted Latin education in Goa and Malacca, but not in Japan, and why Xavier could not do so in Japan while Valignano actually could. In consideration of these matters, let us introduce the local situations and Latin education in Goa and Malacca, then compare the two cities with Japan. Moreover, we will compare Japanese society in Xavier's time with that of Valignano's.

Keywords: Francis Xavier, Society of Jesus, Latin, Alessandro Valignano, Japan

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Introduction

Francis Xavier was a Jesuit missionary and he left Europe for Asia to propagate Christianity. The existent letters of Xavier describe his missionary work mainly in India, Southeast Asia, and Japan. He often talks about the establishment of schools and Latin education, especially in Goa and Malacca. Latin was the official language of the Christian church. After visiting both Goa and Malacca, he finally arrived in Japan in 1549. However, he does not refer to the establishment or possibility of Latin education in Japan. It was not until Alessandro Valignano came to Japan in 1579 that systematic Latin education started.

Why did Francis Xavier promote Latin education in Goa and Malacca, but not in Japan? Xavier does not refer to the reasons in his letters, and thus, we have no choice but to speculate about them. Moreover, why could Xavier not conduct Latin education in Japan while Valignano was able to do so? Giving consideration to these matters, let us introduce the local situations and Latin education in Goa and Malacca, then compare the two cities with Japan. We will also compare Japanese society in Xavier's time with that of Valignano's time.

Goa

Goa, in India, had been a colony of Portugal since 1510, though absolute control over the conquered land was not clearly established until 1543 (Matsukawa 229). In the 1540s, the Portuguese colonial government changed its policy, and forced the local people to convert to Christianity following the missionaries' proposals. As a consequence, many Hindu temples were destroyed there (Matsukawa 231).

A large number of Western missionaries went to Goa. The Franciscans were the first to arrive in Goa in 1517, and they were followed by the Dominicans, Augustinians, and then the Jesuits (Matsukawa 229). The Franciscans began missionary education in Goa and had already established eleven friaries, three colleges, and eighty residences by 1542. The College of Reis Magos, on the peninsula of Bardez, just north of Goa, became the center of Franciscan activity in the latter half of the century. Within this territory there lived an estimated seven thousand Christians (Lach 262).

Latin education had already started. The confraternity of the Holy Faith was established under the guidance of Miguel Vaz, the Vicar General of Goa, and Fr. Diogo de Borba, an erudite theologian and cathedral preacher,² on 24 April 1541. Its purpose was to propagate the Catholic faith and to educate the young converts. It was also decided to establish a seminary for the indigenous boys, where they would be instructed in reading, writing, Portuguese and Latin grammar, Christian doctrine, and moral theology (Abreu 9; Xavier, P. D. 208; Fernando 2). This was planned as a seminary to train future priests to work in India and elsewhere (Fernando 2).

The seminary of Holy Faith became St. Paul's College under the Jesuits (Xavier, P. D. 209). Before the establishment of the college, Francis Xavier arrived in Goa on 6 May 1542. He reported on the students who had already learned Latin in his letter dated 20 September 1542: "There are already more than sixty native boys who are in the care of a Padre Reverendo. They will live in the college this summer. Among these, many, almost all, can read and recite the Office; and many of them can already write. They are already so advanced that they can be taught Latin" (Schurhammer, II 275; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 135-6; Kono 94-5).

² For Miguel Vaz and Diogo de Borba, see Xavier, P. D. 130.

From the beginning of their enterprise, the nerve center of the Jesuit mission was St. Paul's College in Goa (Lach 263). Francis Xavier reported on the foundation of the college in his letter dated 20 September 1542:

“The Lord Governor is giving all his assistance to bring the college into existence. It seems to His Lordship that the erection of this house, so necessary in these parts, is of such a great service to God that, because of his support, it will be enlarged and in a short time completed. The church which they are building within the college is very beautiful. The foundations have been completed and the walls are already up. They are now putting a roof on it. This summer Mass will be said in it. The church is almost twice as large as the church of the Collège de Sorbonne. The house already has revenues with which more than a hundred students can be maintained. Each day it becomes better endowed since it appears to all to be an excellent work” (Schurhammer, II 274; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 132; Kono 91).

In 1543 the building was completed and became St. Paul's College under the Jesuits (Abreu 10). In the same year, the Jesuits started teaching, and in 1545 they took on full responsibility for the college. An elementary school was also established near the college where students learned reading, writing, mathematics, and Christian doctrine (Fernando 2). The college had more than fifty rooms and two college dormitories; one was meant for about 30 Portuguese boys and the other for about 70 Indian boys. In 1545 the number of students increased to 60 and their age ranged from 7 to 21; in 1552 there were about 300 students, 450 in 1556, and 700 in 1564 (Xavier, P. D. 209-10). The student body was a very cosmopolitan one, made up of adolescent youths: Hindu, Sinhalese, Moluccan, Chinese, Japanese, Kaffir, and Ethiopian (Lach 263).

In the college the Jesuits taught everything from elementary Latin to advanced theology (Lach 263). The boys who knew how to read and write were admitted to the gymnasium where humanistic studies were conducted; three classes of grammar, one class of humanities with an emphasis on poetry and the main works of Cicero, Virgil, Ovid and Sedulius, and one class of rhetoric. St. Paul's College was indeed a university; and its curriculum was based on that of Sorbonne University (Xavier, P. D. 211). Francis Xavier reported in his letter dated 15 January 1544:

“Last year I wrote to you about a college that is being built in the city of Goa. There are already many students in it, who speak different languages and were all born of pagan parents. Among those in the college, where many buildings have already been erected, are many who are learning Latin, and others who are learning how to read and write” (Schurhammer, II 408; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 169; Kono 115).

The teachers at the college were mainly drawn from among the clerics (Xavier, P. D. 212). In 1544 Fr. Paulo Camerto S. J. joined the college and taught Latin grammar to the boys, while in 1545 Fr. Nicolas Lancillotto, a colleague of Francis Xavier, became the rector of the college (Abreu 10; Xavier, P. D. 212). Lancillotto was often referred to as a Latin teacher in Xavier's letters. For example, a letter dated 16 December 1545 said: “And Father Nicolao Lanciloto should remain in the College of St. Paul to teach grammar since he was sent from Portugal for this purpose” (Schurhammer, III 48; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 309; Kono 228).³ Xavier asked Ignatius of Loyola to send Latin teachers: “I am telling you

³ For Lancillotto, see also Xavier's letter dated 10 May 1546: “Before I left Malacca, I heard that three of our Society had arrived at Goa, who wrote to me, and had my letters from Rome sent to me with theirs. [...] As one of these three (i.e. Lancillotto) had come to be a master of grammar in the College of Santa Fé, and the other two to be employed wherever it seemed to me that they could be of the most use to religion.” Cf. Coleridge, I 379; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 327-8; Kono 235.

this so that you send one to dedicate himself here only to the teaching of Latin. He will have an abundance to do. [...] The Lord Governor hopes that three clerics and a teacher of Latin will come from Rome” (Schurhammer, II 275; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 136; Kono 95).

Malacca

Before Xavier landed for the first time at Malacca in 1545 (Teixeira 98), the Portuguese *The State of India* had already controlled the port-city of Malacca since its conquest by Afonso de Albuquerque in 1511 (Loureiro 78). Albuquerque had built a church and began working on the growth of Christianity. He favored all those who desired to be baptized and enter the bosom of the Church (Teixeira 85).

Moreover, from the time of the conquest of Malacca, the Crown supported the building of a Christian community for the administrators, soldiers, and merchants stationed there (Lach 286). So, when Xavier came to this city, he found that Christianity was already accepted, and he was very much welcomed by the people who lived there (Teixeira 98). Fr. Paulo Gomes said, “I saw with my own eyes Fr. Xavier landing at Malacca for the first time. The inhabitants ran to the port to receive him. They were all shouting with joy: Holy Father is coming” (Teixeira 326).

During his stay, Xavier initiated the opening of a Christian school. Due to this very early establishment of a school with a modern mindset, the name, *sekolah*, in the Malay language was borrowed from the Portuguese word, *eskola*, which means “school” (Ozay 38). The Jesuits also taught Latin in Malacca. Here is Francis Xavier’s letter dated 2 April 1548:

“I am sending two of my companions there to Malacca, one of them to preach to the Portuguese and to their wives and slaves, and to teach and instruct each day as I did when I was there; and the other companion, who is not a priest, to teach the children of the Portuguese, how to read and write and how to recite the Hours of Our Lady, the Seven [Penitential] Psalms, and the Office of the Dead for the souls of their parents. [...] I am, moreover, ordering the one who is to teach the Portuguese children how to read and write also to teach [Latin] grammar in the course of time to those who are suited for it” (Schurhammer, III 420; Schurhammer & Wicki, I 437; Kono 312).

The second person of the “companions” whom Xavier referred to in the beginning of the letter cited above was Roque de Oliveira. Xavier sent him from Goa to Malacca (Teixeira 355-6). Oliveira opened a school for the teaching of Portuguese and Latin by Jesuit missionaries, and within a few days there were 180 pupils. Its original pupils must have been the children of Portuguese, Catholic Eurasians, and Catholic converts (Winstedt 45; Coleridge, II 43).⁴ This college was a regional training center for students from the Indonesian islands, Japan, and China (Kalapura 98). Xavier referred to the Latin education done by Oliveira in his letter dated 22 June 1549. Oliveira was active in the school, where he was teaching a large number of boys, some how to read and write, and others Latin, using catechisms and prayer books as their texts (Schurhammer, IV 18; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 132; Kono 440). Additionally, Xavier asked the Fathers in Goa to send a person to Malacca who had the highest educational qualifications to teach boys how to read and write, and who would take the place of Oliveira who was to go to Goa (Coleridge, II 191-2; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 133-4; Kono 441-2).

Why did Xavier not start Latin education in Japan?

⁴ For the school in Malacca, see also Teixeira 98-9.

As we have seen, Francis Xavier promoted Latin education in Goa and Malacca. However, there is no evidence to suggest that he worked on Latin education in Japan. We should be reminded that the environment surrounding Xavier's missionary work in Goa and Malacca was quite different from that of Japan. These two cities were already part of Portuguese territory, and Christianity had already arrived there before Xavier came. Xavier was welcomed by the local people. It is almost certain that there was not a huge objection towards his plan to teach Latin in schools, and it must have been easy to obtain land to build a school and to gather local children or Portuguese students for the school.

In contrast, when Xavier came to Japan, few Westerners were living there. In addition, Christianity as well as Western culture were not rooted in Japan. It is well known that Xavier was the first Westerner to introduce Christianity to Japan. However, he was not always welcomed by the local people. After he landed in Kagoshima in August 1549, he started his missionary work. Some of the members of his audiences ridiculed his poor pronunciation and unusual gestures, and some of them also said he was crazy (Schurhammer, IV 109). In Yamaguchi, he preached Christianity on the streets and in the homes of the nobility who showed an interest in the new teaching, but few of them converted (Schurhammer, IV 443). Xavier and his companions went to Miyako, the capital of Japan at the time. On their way, they were subjected to the constant dangers of the land and sea because of wars and pirates. They experienced many hardships due to the intensely cold conditions as they made their trip in the midst of winter (Schurhammer, IV 443-4).

In addition, Xavier did his missionary work under the oppression of Buddhists. In Kagoshima, the Buddhist monks insisted that if the duke (Takahisa Shimazu) permitted his vassals to accept the new religion, he would lose his lands. Consequently, the duke finally yielded to the demands of the bonzes. Conversions to Christianity were forbidden and the death penalty was threatened to be put in place for any further conversions to the new religion (Schurhammer, IV 124-5, 443; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 259; Kono 526). Xavier said the bonzes were angry because many local people had converted to Christianity (Schurhammer & Wicki, II 264; Kono 530) and they hated Xavier for uncovering their deceitful teachings (Schurhammer & Wicki, II 267; Kono 534).

In such a desperate situation, Xavier even appeared to have had a plan to establish a language school in Japan also,⁵ as he built several schools in Goa and Malacca. Actually, he built a house of the Society in Yamaguchi in 1552 (Schurhammer, IV 553; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 371; Kono 626-7), which he probably planned to organize like a school. Xavier often wrote about his intention to allow the persons in the house to study Japanese language and religion, and to train the interpreters to help the higher-ranking priests who came from Europe.⁶ Üçerler points out that Xavier's purpose seemed to be training the missionaries to preach in Japanese and engage in disputation with local Buddhists (15). However, Xavier did not write in his letters that the students had to study Latin, and the intention of this house was not to teach Latin to the local students.

Valignano and Latin education in Japan

After Xavier left Japan in 1551, the missionaries who came after him in the 1550s and 1560s continued to acknowledge the importance of education, and, at first, they provided primary level education for the sons and daughters of local Christians in Japan, besides teaching the basics of reading and writing. They also gave catechetical and musical instruction to the children (Üçerler 16).

⁵ See Üçerler 15-16 who says that Xavier's dream was to establish a university-level college in the capital, Miyako (Kyoto).

⁶ Xavier wrote that the school in Yamaguchi would be useful to train interpreters who would help outstanding missionaries from Europe. Cf. Schurhammer, IV 440, 546; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 275, 290, 298, 346, 371; Kono 542, 553, 558-9, 608, 626.

Moreover, Latin was also taught. Japanese students were required to memorize some of the important Latin prayers by rote: e.g. *Ave Maria*, *Miserere Mei Deus*, and *Salve Regina* (Taida 567; *Cartas* 77; Murakami & Yanagiya 235-6; Matsuda, III-1 350). It was perhaps by 1564 that they produced a grammar primer in Japanese that explained Latin verb conjugations and syntax, along with a vocabulary list providing the Portuguese and Japanese meanings of Latin terms (Taida 567; *Cartas* 147; Murakami & Yanagiya 389; Matsuda, III-2 208-9).

Latin education in Japan started to be gradually promoted, and it was systematically developed by Alessandro Valignano who, thirty years after Xavier, came to Japan as the *Padre Visitador*, the highest-ranking priest in Asia. Let us look at the outline of Latin education organized by Valignano. When he arrived at Kuchinotsu, Japan in 1579, he gathered the missionaries to hold a conference (Tsuruta 25). The Jesuits considered how best to develop Japanese priests and educate Japanese people, and it was decided to build schools known as *seminario*, *noviciado*, and *collegio*. A child would start elementary school in the *seminario*, and Latin was taught in the *seminario* as the official language of the Catholic Church. Moreover, a printing press was imported in 1590, with which several kinds of books, including a *Latin Grammar Book* (1594) and a *Latin-Portuguese-Japanese Dictionary* (1595), were printed. Valignano also improved the standards of Latin education by employing teachers who were fluent in both Japanese and Latin.⁷ Luís Fróis wrote in the annual report of 1596 that, during that year, there were 121 students enrolled in the *seminario* at Arie and three Latin classes were held (78; Matsuda, I-2 170). There, students gave orations in Latin, learned to compose Latin texts, and even performed plays in Latin (Fróis 80-1; Matsuda, I-2 171). Some Japanese Jesuits learned Latin remarkably well (Ide 222-3) and thus became Latin teachers.⁸ A number of Latin compositions written by Japanese people during this period still remain, allowing us to evaluate the effectiveness of Jesuit linguistic education.⁹

Many Latin books were printed, and students used them to learn Latin,¹⁰ as was done in schools in Europe. However, Valignano realized it would be impossible to reproduce humanistic studies as taught in Europe. The young students in the Japanese Jesuit *collegio* came from different cultural and intellectual backgrounds, and thus they had different needs; they consisted of Japanese, Europeans, and Portuguese born in India and Macau. Moreover, they needed to study Japanese as well as Latin and theology, which were also taught in European schools. Therefore, in the Japanese *collegio*, the study of Greek, which was required in European schools¹¹, was replaced by the training in Japanese language and classical texts.¹²

The environment in the Japan of Valignano's time was quite different from that of Xavier's time. When Valignano came to Japan in 1579, Christianity was already accepted, especially in the Kyushu region which is a large island located in western Japan. The number of Japanese Christians increased dramatically and reached approximately 100,000 by 1579 and 150,000 by 1581 (Taida 568). At around the time of 1600, there were approximately 400,000 to 500,000 Japanese Christians, while the population of Japan was about twenty million (Volpi 35, 44, 219). Some federal lords chose to protect

⁷ For the Latin teachers, see Cieslik 27-138.

⁸ For the Japanese teachers of Latin, see Cieslik 119-37.

⁹ For the outline of the Latin education organized by Valignano, I depend on Taida 568-79.

¹⁰ See Taida 577: e.g. Cicero's orations and Virgil's works were printed. The *Compendium Catholicae Veritatis*, which includes texts on astronomy, philosophy, and theology, was edited by Pedro Gómez in Latin and then translated into Japanese. Also, the doctrines which had been decided at the Council of Trent and the *Exercitia Spiritualia* of Ignacio López de Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, were printed in Latin.

¹¹ For the importance of learning Greek in European schools, see Hughes 271-2.

¹² For the difference between Jesuit schools in Japan and those in Europe, see Üçerler 26.

Christians. In 1580, Harunobu Arima and Nobunaga Oda provided land for the Christian schools to be built upon (Taida 569-70). There were more than thirty-five federal lords who believed in Christianity (Cieslik & Ota 63).

Moreover, we should remember that Valignano regarded Japan as the most important place for missions in Asia. He said that the mission in Japan was the most important and the most highly expectant one, because the people were talented and extremely polite. He believed that even highly educated Westerners who were very knowledgeable would have lived comfortably in Japan (Wicki 310; Takahashi 388-9). Valignano said that he could surely send the Western people of great talent to Japan, and that the people whom the Society of Jesuits sent to Japan should be of greater virtue, prudence, and confidence (Wicki 300, 310-11; Takahashi 370, 389). Moreover, he wrote that Western Jesuits were willing to go to Japan (Wicki 287; Takahashi 338).¹³ He emphasized the importance of sending as many Jesuits as possible to Japan, because it was the most important place for the Society of Jesus (Wicki 315; Takahashi 397-8).

In contrast, Valignano was disappointed with the situation in Goa at that time. He spent considerable time in India between 1574 and 1577, 1583 and 1588, and 1595 and 1597. While in India, he visited the missions from Goa to Kochi and promoted the formation of a native Indian clergy (Worcester 815). However, he seriously criticized the Indian people. He said that only a few people should be permitted to enter the Society. They were spoiled and grew up badly in the barren land and the bad climate. They could not become disciplined and had little knowledge of religious perfection. Furthermore, he said that it was common for all these people in India to be of little intellect and to make little progress in learning (Wicki 259; Takahashi 287-8). As for St. Paul's College, he said that there were not enough students and Goa was not an appropriate place for study (Wicki 153; Takahashi 55). There were no schools except for Jesuit schools, and there were no professors or research centers. There was nothing there to motivate people to study (Wicki 257; Takahashi 283-4).

Thus, Valignano's evaluation of Japan was far higher than that of other regions. This highly regarded reputation of Japan enabled him to devote human and financial resources into Japanese missionary works, although the resources of the Jesuits were not infinite, either in manpower or financially.¹⁴ In total, Valignano sent one hundred and forty Jesuit missionaries to Japan, and built more than four hundred churches or chapels (Volpi 359). Also, as we have seen before, he built hospitals and schools (three *collegios*, two *seminarios*, and one *noviciado*) as well as importing a printing press (Volpi 360). In such circumstances and under the direction of Valignano, Latin education was able to proceed in Japan.

Conclusion

The environment surrounding Christianity in Japan in Valignano's time was quite different from that of Xavier's time. It was rather similar to Goa and Malacca of Xavier's time; there were many Christians, and Christianity was accepted by the lords and society. The spread of Christianity and the sympathetic political environment made it easier to promote Latin language education. Comparing Xavier's stay in Japan with his stay in Goa and Malacca and Valignano's stay in Japan, it can be said that Xavier faced a very difficult situation and could not afford to start Latin education in Japan.

¹³ Valignano said it was very hard for Western Jesuits to live among Indian people. Cf. Wicki 287-8; Takahashi 338-40.

¹⁴ A manpower shortage and a financial shortage were always pressing problems. Valignano often described the lack of funds and manpower. E.g. Wicki 154, 157, 287; Takahashi 56, 60, 338.

It is quite probable that Xavier did consider teaching Latin to Japanese people, as he did in Goa and Malacca. As we have seen, Xavier founded the Jesuit house in Yamaguchi and was willing to organize it as a place to study. This would seem to imply that Xavier did in fact have plans to teach Latin in Japan, although it was impeded due to the local circumstances. Moreover, he evaluated Japanese people highly as follows: “From Japán, from the experience which we have of the land, I would let you know what we have learned about it: First of all, the people with whom we have thus far conversed are the best that we have yet discovered; and it seems to me that, among pagan nations, there will not be another to surpass the Japanese” (Schurhammer, IV 82; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 186; Kono 471). Xavier especially evaluated the intelligence of the Japanese people highly: “A large portion of the people can read and write, which is a great help learning the prayers and the things of God in a short time. [...] They are a people of great good will, very sociable, and eager to know” (Schurhammer, IV 83; Schurhammer & Wicki, II 187; Kono 472). The letters written by Fróis about the Japanese people are also worthy of note: “for in their culture, their manners, and their customs, as our Father Master Francis used to say, they excel the Spaniards so much in many things that it is a shame to mention it” and “Many times I heard Father Master Francis of happy memory say that the faith could be easily introduced into Japan because of the fine intelligence of the people and their good natural qualities” (Schurhammer, IV 558).

As we have seen, Xavier did not refer to the establishment or the possibility of Latin education in Japan in his extant letters. Latin education was not promoted in his time. Due to his high evaluation of Japanese people, it is quite natural to surmise that he wanted to promote Latin education in Japan as he did so in Goa and Malacca. However, the political and social situation in Japan at that time did not allow him to do so. His ideas were spread to the next generation. His records, which praised the Japanese people, were passed on to the Jesuits who later came to Japan.¹⁵ Valignano visited Japan thirty years after Xavier, and he regarded Japan as the most important place for the Jesuit mission in Asia. This led to Valignano finally being able to establish the Latin language educational system in Japan.

¹⁵ For the reports of Xavier, see Üçerler 15: “In fact, as detailed reports from Japan began to be published in numerous editions and circulated widely in Europe, they provided humanist intellectuals with a new stimulus to Renaissance reflection on the universality of human nature.”

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¹⁶ When the author of the Japanese book or article which is included in the bibliography wrote an English title along with the Japanese title, I cited the English title. Otherwise, I translated the Japanese titles into English.

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