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Emotional Practices of Catholic Martyrdom in Early Modern Japan

He showed so much happiness that, as the path was uneven and the night very dark¹ ... most [of the guards] stumbled, but [Arakawa Adán]² walked with such levity that he was nearly dragging them after himself. Kneeling, he prayed devoutly; with two strikes they cut his head: because it was night, the first hit a shoulder and the holy man, without swaying, waited for the second, calling out loud: "Jesus, Jesus." The Gentiles said that after his head had fallen, it called twice the holy name of Jesus, so loud that it was heard throughout the valley: frightened by this, they said that it was sufficient to see the perseverance and happiness he showed when dying, to make one Christian; nor was it possible that a person who died like this would not be saved.³

This text fragment is part of a narrative of martyrdom that was written in Japan by a Jesuit missionary and then sent to Europe as a letter. It belongs to a vast corpus of Jesuit documents that strove to present the persecutions suffered by the Catholic communities of Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate. The letters that were sent to Europe and other Catholic centres in Asia and the Americas certainly represent the most extensive output in terms of overall production of martyrdom narratives in Japan: printed editions were translated into different languages and were widely disseminated across the Catholic world.⁴

However, missionary correspondence is not the only source of information about the model of sanctity and martyrdom that developed in Japan. *Kirishitan-ban*, the corpus comprised of the titles printed in Japan by the Jesuit press, also offers important details.⁵ In addition, as will be considered below, some of the documents that belonged to the depository of the so-called hidden Christians (*kakure* or *senpuku kirishitan*) survived in manuscript copies and also offer insights into the development of this model of martyr.

¹ The research for this paper has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 101028277.

² Arakawa Adán (approx. 1554–1614; beatified 2008) had been a lay helper of the Jesuit mission of Shiki (Amakusa). Being a pious and experienced old man, he was chosen to be the spiritual leader and catechist of the Christian community after the expulsion of the missionaries to Nagasaki. He was arrested, tortured, and then executed on the 5th of June 1614 (J. Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio del Japón, 1558–1873* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1999), 332.)

³ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años contra la Iglesia de Japon y los ministros della* (Zaragoza: Juan de Larumbe, 1617), 102.

⁴ For instance, in the first half of the seventeenth century, more than 430 titles were printed in Europe on the topic of the persecutions in Japan. A. Fernandes Pinto, *Tragédia mais gloriosa que dolorosa. O discurso missionário sobre a perseguição aos cristãos no regime Tokugawa na imprensa europeia (1598–1650)*, Doctoral dissertation, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2014. For publications in Spanish, see R. Roldán-Figueroa, *The Martyrs of Japan. Publication History and Catholic Missions in the Spanish World (Spain, New Spain, and the Philippines, 1597–1700)*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021).

⁵ On the *Kirishitan-ban* corpus, see Y. Orii, "The Dispersion of Jesuit Books Printed in Japan: Trends in Bibliographical Research and in Intellectual History", *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 2 (2015), 189–207.

This paper will analyse this varied collection of written documents to identify the model of sanctity achieved through martyrdom that developed in Japan, with a focus on the emotional practices that were attributed to it. The emotional practices of Jesuits and Japanese Christians will be investigated by following the approach proposed by Monique Scheer, which is to consider the bodily practices that aim to mobilise, regulate, communicate emotions, passions, feelings, etc.⁶ The fact that Jesuits and Japanese Christians could recognise these emotions in others, through these practices, says more about their shared values about emotions than what was “really” felt in that moment. This paper will show that this model was widely disseminated throughout a Catholic community consisting of Japanese laity and Jesuit missionaries of both European and Japanese origins. Finally, it will illustrate how this exemplar depictions were fundamentally marked by their emotional practices, as suggested by the above quotation: together with their blood, the emotions displayed by the martyrs, too, could become “the seed of the Church”, as the famous expression by Tertullian goes.

The Origins of the Model

The Catholic mission in Japan was founded in 1549 by Jesuit Francis Xavier under the patronage of the Portuguese Crown.⁷ The missionaries immediately identified the Japanese people as an excellent target for evangelisation, describing them as rational and curious about religious matters. After a challenging start, partly due to instability caused by the civil war that had been fragmenting Japan since 1464, the mission began to thrive in the 1570s, thanks to the financial and political support of the Portuguese silk trade with Macao. At the beginning of this decade, the Christian port city of Nagasaki was founded in southern Japan and soon became the heart of the Christian presence in the country. This first period of missionary work was characterised by the intense support of Japanese helpers, most of whom had informal roles. The years after 1579, under Visitor Alessandro Valignano’s policy of adaptation to Japanese culture and etiquette, were marked by a growth in the production of religious literature in the form of theological treatises, catechisms, and similar texts to guide and assist the Catholic community. During this period, more Japanese men acquired formal roles, and by the end of the century, they represented half of the members of the Society of Jesus in Japan. In addition, the daily activities of Christian communities were guided by lay leaders and members of confraternities, such as the Misericórdia.⁸

The seemingly positive relationship with the Japanese authorities suddenly came to an end when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, on his way to becoming the unifier of the country, banned the missionaries and Christian practices in 1587. The first phase of the persecutions, mostly sporadic and local, ended in 1597. The crucifixion of twenty-six missionaries and their Japanese lay helpers in Nagasaki marked the beginning of the second phase, which was

⁶ M. Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion”, *History and Theory* 51 (2012), 193–220. The term “emotion” is thus used in this paper as an umbrella term.

⁷ For an overview of the history of the mission, see M. Cooper, “A Mission Interrupted: Japan”, in R. Po-chia Hsia (ed.), *A Companion to the Reformation World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 393–407.

⁸ See M. A. Üçerler, *The Samurai and the Cross. The Jesuit Enterprise in Early Modern Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). Joseph F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993). On the confraternities, see João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, “The Misericórdias Among Japanese Christian Communities in the 16th and 17th centuries”, *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 5 (2002), 67–79.

characterised by a limited number of deaths and the growth of the Christian communities due to the arrival of mendicant preachers. The numerous mass executions in the following stage were initiated by the shogunate's complete ban on Christianity in 1612. Finally, between 1624 and 1650, the Japanese Christians were nearly annihilated, although further persecutions did happen as late as in the nineteenth century, targeting communities that had survived in hiding. The population was strictly controlled, with annual ceremonies of *fumi-e* (stepping on Christian icons) and mandatory Buddhist parish enrolment. The Sakoku edicts of 1633–1639 cut ties with all European nations except the local Dutch merchants, who were secluded on a small island in Nagasaki Bay. An estimate puts the number of martyrs at the height of the persecution, between 1614 and 1640, at around 4,000 out of a Christian population of approximately 300,000–400,000.⁹

Examples of martyrdom, as elaborated and communicated through the Catholic tradition, had been presented to the Japanese Christians by various didactic means. A significant educational tool was the rich literature on the lives of many martyrs of the early Christian period. While oral narrations of the lives of martyrs had been circulating in the mission since its founding,¹⁰ the most comprehensive example in this sense was *Sanctos no gosagueo no uchi nuqigaqi* (*Compendium of the Acts of the Saints*, Kazusa, 1591), the first text printed in Japan by the Jesuit press.¹¹ The final section of this publication was dedicated to the persecutions and resulting martyrdoms under Roman emperors, with an explanation of their importance in demonstrating the righteousness of the Christian faith. The narrations presented in this collection were translated, abridged, and re-elaborated from various textual sources, including Jacopo da Varazze's renowned thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives, *Legenda Aurea*, and *Introducción al Símbolo de la Fe* by Luis de Granada. Some elements that were present in the European stories were adapted or eliminated, arguably to adhere to Japanese sensibilities. The final product was the result of a collaboration between European missionaries and Japanese laypeople to create a text that would best suit the needs of the Christian community in Japan.¹² Printed elaborations on the matter of martyrdom can also be found in Alessandro Valignano's *Catechismus Christianae Fidei*, published in 1586 for the use of missionaries, whose sixth *concio* elaborated on the point of the martyrs' importance as witnesses of the Christian faith.¹³ The later *Fides no doxi* (*Guide to the Faith*, Amakusa, 1592), a partial translation of Granada's *Introducción*, exhorts the faithful to follow the examples of the ancient martyrs, while the martyrdom model par excellence, Jesus Christ, is presented in the Japanese translation of *Imitatio Christi, or Contemptus Mundi*, (1581, earliest print in 1596 in Amakusa).¹⁴ These texts offered representations of a martyrdom model that was not

⁹ H. Nawata Ward, "Women Martyrs in Passion and Paradise", *Journal of World Christianity* 3, No. 1 (2010) 47-66.

¹⁰ T. Gonoj, "Kirishitan: les chemins qui mènent au martyre. Pour une histoire des martyrs chrétiens du Japon", *Karthala* 11 (2009/3) 48.

¹¹ E.M. Satow, *The Jesuit Mission Press in Japan, 1591–1610* (Privately printed, 1888) 1–12. For a complete list of texts on martyrdom composed in Japan see M. Anesaki, "Writings on Martyrdom in Kirishitan Literature", *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 2nd series, 8 (1931) 21-65, on pp. 21-22.

¹² On the complex process of translating the *Sanctos*, see P. Jolliffe/A. Bianchi, "Jesuit Translation Practices in Sixteenth-Century Japan. *Sanctos no gosagueo no uchi nuqigaqi* and Luis de Granada", in J. Kiaer et al (ed.), *Missionary Translators. Translations of Christian Texts in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2021) 29–51.

¹³ A. Valignano, *Catechismus Christianae Fidei* (Tokyo: Tenri Central Library, 1972 [facsimile of the 1586 edition]) 53–54.

¹⁴ Gonoj, "Kirishitan", 46-48.

necessarily to be imitated to the point of death. While dying for the faith was a possibility, in the years in which the texts were translated and adapted, it was rather a remote one. Instead, the narratives aimed to depict these holy people as examples of religious perfection and were to be seen as sources of inspiration more than direct models.¹⁵

With the beginning of the first organised persecutions, written Jesuit texts became, unsurprisingly, more focused on martyrdom and its mechanisms.¹⁶ In 1597, as an answer to the twenty-six executions in Nagasaki, mission Vice-Provincial and theologian Pedro Gómez compiled a short treatise on the theme of dying for the faith, returning to some points he had already raised in his *Compendium*, which he had written for the local Jesuit college in Funai just a few years earlier. While this treatise is lost, its contents can be found in a later composition, conventionally titled *Exhortations to Martyrdom* (*Maruchiriyo no Susume*).¹⁷ This latter text circulated among the hidden Christian communities at least until the end of the eighteenth century, when a copy was seized by the authorities in Urakami (Nagasaki). While its structure suggests that active persecutions were affecting the Christian community it was composed for, the general lack of urgency in its language points to a composition prior to their exacerbation, putting its creation around 1615. Another text relevant to the topic at hand, which was also confiscated in Urakami, is *Instructions on Martyrdom* (*Maruchiriyo no Kokoroe*); this shorter treatise was probably written at a later date than *Exhortations*, as it focuses on more practical aspects of martyrdom and contains repetitions that hint at the author's haste.¹⁸ The last text on martyrdom found in Urakami was a compilation of three *vitae* of virgin female martyrs, *Mirror of Martyrdom* (*Maruchiriyo no Kagami*).¹⁹

These didactic texts of various kinds strove to present a model of sanctity that did not concede to violence in its proclamation of the faith. Unsurprisingly, central to the emotional state of the martyrdom model, as presented by this literature, is hope. For instance, explicit references to this theological virtue, which has strong roots in feelings,²⁰ can be found in *Sanctos no Gosagyō*, *Fides no Doxi* and *Instructions*.²¹ *Instructions* and *Exhortations*, composed during the heat of persecution, were more inclined to mention emotional states and sometimes even emotional practices to guide future martyrs. The complete definition of hope in the context of martyrdom is indeed found in *Exhortations*: it is described as the “virtue of holding the hope that the afterlife is saved”, i.e. hope to be saved after death.²²

¹⁵ As martyrdom as a complete fulfilment of a Christian life, see P.A. Fabre, “Conclusion: The Narrow Road to Martyrdom”, *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9, no.1 125-135, on p.131.

¹⁶ Anesaki, “Writings”, pp. 23–25.

¹⁷ Üçerler, *The Samurai*, 61–62; Gonoï, “*Kirishitan*”, 51.

¹⁸ A Japanese critical edition of *Exhortations* is in A. Ebisawa (ed.), *Kirishitansho, Haiyasho* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970); *Instructions* is available in a partially critical edition in M. Anesaki, *Kirishitan shūmon no hakugai to senpuku*, (Tokyo: Dōbunkan, 1925). For this article, I have used the English translations taken from Anesaki, “Writings”, except when indicated.

¹⁹ When compared to the narration of the same martyrdoms in the *Sanctos*, the style of the *Mirror* is more colloquial (H. Nawata Ward, “Images of the Incarnation in the Jesuit Japan Mission’s Kirishitanban Story of Virgin Martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria”, in W. Melion/L.P. Wandel (Ed.), *Image and incarnation: The early modern doctrine of the pictorial image* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 489–509, on p. 495.

²⁰ On the historically close connection between virtues and feelings developed in the Middle Ages, see B. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling. A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapt. 3.

²¹ Anesaki, “Writings”, 26; 28; 65.

²² My translation from Ebisawa, *Kirishitansho*, 335.

Exhortations declared that hope would allow the faithful to endure the tortures they would suffer.²³ *Instructions*, with its more practical slant, suggested practices to mobilise this emotion: “While being tortured visualize the Passion of Jesus ... the [angels] awaiting the coming of you [soul] ... Hope and confidence should occupy your mind.”²⁴ Far from being the only emotion mentioned in these treatises, hope often appears in emotional sequences²⁵ or, at least, in causal relation to other feelings: fortitude and joy are frequently mentioned, as is humility.

In addition to literary texts, Jesuit correspondence contains references to other didactic means, such as oral narrations of the lives of martyrs and saints, and mystery plays. Theatrical pieces often accompanied Christmas festivities: “Christmas is celebrated here with much happiness ... [the Japanese Christians] performed many stories of the Holy Scriptures, containing much doctrine; chants and couplets are composed in the [Japanese] manner about these stories, and they sing them continuously.”²⁶ During the celebrations of 1561 in Funai (Oita), various religious stories were staged for the faithful: the fall of Adam and Eve, the hope of future salvation offered by the angel, the judgement of Solomon, and other scenes until the birth of Jesus. At Easter, the Christians portrayed the “past sorrows of the Passion”, putting them into perspective with the subsequent “cheerfulness of the Resurrection”,²⁷ two key elements also found in the martyrdom narrative. The main objective of these plays was didactic in a broader sense, aimed to console and edify the audience. Nevertheless, they represented examples of sacrifice whose perceptibility by and engagement of the senses could facilitate the assimilation of its underlining precepts by the faithful and even modify their attitude towards emotions.²⁸

The embodiment of the model

The previous section showed that an initial model of sanctity centred around martyrdom emerged from the didactic and general examples offered by Jesuit literature. This section will consider what forms this model took when it was embodied by the Japanese Christian community. The sources that facilitate this consideration are mainly Jesuit correspondence, from which it is also possible to track and describe which correct emotional practices were attributed to the model and how the latter circulated within the Japanese Christian community.

²³ Anesaki, “Writings”, 47.

²⁴ Anesaki, “Writings”, 26.

²⁵ Sequences are concatenations of emotions and their practices that put them in relation chronologically, allowing a better interpretation of their specifics (Rosenwein, *Generations*, 8).

²⁶ Luis De Almeida to Antonio de Quadros, Japan, 1st October 1561, in J. Ruiz de Medina (ed.), *Documentos del Japón* (Rome: Instituto histórico de la Compañía de Jesús, 1995) vol. 2, 378.

²⁷ This example refers to the 1562 Easter festivities of Funai (Oita) (Aires Sanches to the Jesuits in India, Funai, 11th October 1562, in Ruiz de Medina (ed.), *Documentos* vol. 2, 526. On Christian music set to Japanese melodies, see M. H. Takao, “‘In Their Own Way’: Contrafactual Practices in Japanese Christian Communities during the 16th Century”, *Early Music* 47, no. 2, 183-198.

²⁸ R. Garrod, “Senecan Catharsis in Nicolas Caussin’s *Felicitas* (1620): A Case Study in Jesuit Reconfiguration of Affects”, in R. Garrod/Y. Haskell (ed.), *Changing Hearts. Performing Jesuit Emotions between Europe, Asia, and the Americas* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019) 23–42, on p. 24.

Persecutions represented fraught moments for the Christians in Japan, who faced uncertainty and fear of exile and death for themselves and their loved ones. Previously used as general models of sanctity to follow in everyday life,²⁹ the martyrdom narratives found in the literary canon provided the community with the tools to face this threat, suddenly more concrete, by renewing and resignifying them within the changing historical context. The models offered by the ancient martyrs assumed a new relevance because of the similar circumstances of persecution from which the models had emerged. Negative emotions, such as fear, were resisted by recuperating from this repository the understanding of persecution as both God's gift to Christians to provide them with an occasion to earn salvation, and as a call to arms against Evil.³⁰ *Exhortations* states: "[Christians] are persecuted seem[ingly] against reason, yet it is the device of [God], its beneficial effects being profound and infinite."³¹ As it happened in other exceptional situations, the believers were assured that God would grant them a special grace to sustain them during their future trials as long as they kept their faith: "[the gifts of Grace and baptism] are given for your service in exalting the glories of Jesus in the battles to rage in a reign of persecution."³² Emotional practices of daily life were held to be even more effective in mobilising and regulating feelings: extraordinary grace, thus, allowed for extraordinary effects. For example, fortitude born from hope (as defined above) was one of the most common forms that this emotional resilience took. Another emotion that frequently poured from the hope of future salvation, signalling the bestowal of this special grace, was joy. This is a typical example from the beginning of the description of the martyrdom of Takeda Giovanna and Takeda Agnese, who died on the 9th of December 1603 in Yatsushiro (Kumamoto, Kyūshū):

"Ladies, be in good spirits, because I heard that ... you will receive the same death [of Takeda Simone]."³³ ... Giovanna and Agnese dried their tears at once and, full of joy as if they had received a very happy news, said: "What are you saying, sir, that we too must die? So, there is no reason to be sad, thinking that we sinners were not deserving of this favour."³⁴

As this example illustrates, the practices that communicated and named the emotions felt by future martyrs signposted the beginning of the narrative of martyrdom proper. The two women in question were then recognised by the witnesses as receivers of the martyr's special grace through the emotional practices they were displaying:

Their happiness was so extraordinary, so devout and wonderful the words that came out of their mouths ... that the Holy Spirit was clearly visible harbouring in their breasts ... The

²⁹ Consider, for instance, the examples of the Virgin Martyrs, who were primarily used to exhort Japanese women to avoid premarital and extramarital sexual relations.

³⁰ This framing is present, for example, in the *Fides no Doxi* (Anesaki, "Writings", 28).

³¹ Anesaki, "Writings", 37.

³² Anesaki, "Writings", 47. See also B. S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake. Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 286-87.

³³ Simone Takeda Gohyoe, Giovanna's son and Agnese's husband, was a Christian nobleman, who had been decapitated just before his family was condemned to death. On this group, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 298-300.

³⁴ *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi per la fede di Christo alli 25. di Genaro 1608* (Fermo: appresso Giovanni Bonibello, 1609), 57.

three [*jihiyakusha*³⁵ saw that] the Holy Spirit harboured in the hearts of these women, as, there by themselves, they showed a calm demeanour (*animo riposato*).³⁶ If the emotional sequence present here is considered, it appears that the martyrdom model paired hope and fortitude with joy and interior peace. The practices of joy and fortitude thus imparted a certain composure and “calm demeanour”, too.

The Circulation of the Model

The process of embodiment and resignification of the model was sustained by the circulation of the same throughout the Christian community. The stories contained in *Kirishitan-ban* literature were, undoubtedly, used by many Christians as a precedent to imitate before and during the trials, as this episode illustrates:

In the meantime, Agnese took a devotional book of holy Martyrs, written in Japanese, and gave it to [the *jihiyakusha*] Michele, to read [out loud] ... She [then] said ... “Oh, I feel so much consolation in myself. So, if we die in this manner, we will be martyrs? Oh my God, why do you delay so much our death?”³⁷

Therefore, the initial martyrdom model circulated in the form of written narratives and provided antecedents that could be emulated. Quickly, however, the community started proposing its own examples, which were integrated into the model and either circulated in turn or rejected.

Japanese martyrs soon became objects of imitation themselves. Testimonies can be found of exhortations by Christians to relatives and friends to also follow the examples of those who had died just before them and not only the examples of the Roman martyrs distant in space and time.³⁸ Letters from prison were another kind of medium through which Japanese Christians could circulate their beliefs about the correct forms and emotional practices of martyrdom; some of them still exist in translations embedded in Jesuit correspondence to Europe.³⁹ Before being burnt at the stake in 1614 in Takeda (eastern Kyūshū), in his request for prayers to his friends, Tarōemon Lino wrote: “I place all my hope in the mercy of the Lord ... I am very spirited, and ready to persevere until death.”⁴⁰ Uchibori Paolo Sakuemon, martyred in 1627 on Mount Unzen,⁴¹ wrote at least three letters during his incarceration: one to his confessor, one to his fellows in the Company of Saint Ignatius, and one to his wife. He addresses his fellows in this manner:

³⁵ The *jihiyakusha* were representatives of the brotherhood of the Misericórdia dedicated to charity works (Costa, “The Misericórdias”), who gave spiritual support to fellow Christians during the trials of martyrdom for which they also had the role of witness.

³⁶ *Relazione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 59–60.

³⁷ *Relazione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 60.

³⁸ See for example, *Relacion de la persecucion que huvo estos años*, 76.

³⁹ On this kind of correspondence, see R. H. Hesselink, “A Letter from Jail: Christian Culture in Seventeenth-Century Nagasaki”, *The Journal of World Christianity* 7, No. 2 (2017) 166-186. Fragments of numerous letters are collected in L. Pagés, *Histoire de la religion chrétienne au Japon, depuis 1598 jusqu'à 1651* (Paris: Charles Douniol, 1869), vol. 2.

⁴⁰ *Relacion de la persecucion que huvo estos años*, 73. On the death of Lino, his brother Miguel and his sister-in-law Maxencia, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 332–34.

⁴¹ Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 567-68.

I beg you to help me with your prayers: because, even if the spirit is ready, the flesh is disgusted, and it is right to do so, as it has been treated too well, like a fattened horse, who fights the bit. I nevertheless hope that God will give me the grace to obtain a victory, so that I will happily reach Heaven: to obtain which, I pray you again to help me.⁴²

Letter-writing becomes, in this case, another practice of hope for deliverance and an attempt to rebuild the feeling of belonging to a community that can no longer be physically joined. Paolo's pleas remind his fellows of their role in his salvation and the correct practices they, too, need to follow to help him obtain fortitude and, therefore, happiness.

The centrality of emotional practices was an aspect that endured in the model and was often expressed by Christian convicts: "Look at us carefully", two of them are reported to have said, communicating their emotions verbally and bodily to their tormentors, "and understand that suffering what we suffer willingly, and with the joy you can see, is a clear sign that our [religion] leads to salvation."⁴³ On the occasion of the exile of Takayama Ukon (Dom Justo),⁴⁴ his group was (incorrectly) informed that they would be executed: they began to pray "with much happiness, without showing sadness, nor resistance."⁴⁵ If the communication of certain emotions was a crucial practice, equally important were bodily demonstrations that other, specific emotions were not present.

While internal Jesuit mission letters promoted the dissemination of the model in the various local communities, these texts also show that witness accounts of many martyrdoms circulated through the dispersed community in other ways. This is particularly evident following the 1614 ban issued by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu. The Jesuit missionaries were forcibly gathered in Nagasaki to be expelled and left the faithful to be guided and helped by local lay leaders. The presence of these spiritual authorities, who was deemed necessary both socially and spiritually during the trials, was sanctioned specifically in regards to women, as they were generally executed after their male relatives and therefore lacked paterfamilias.⁴⁶ Children, too, were given this particular support, although it was often the mother who had the primary role of instructing them.⁴⁷ In any case, the missionaries were always careful to mention the people to whom their information could be attributed, even if they were not necessarily called witnesses in an explicit manner. On some occasions, a sort of preliminary process for canonisation was organised to establish the trustworthiness of some specific aspects of witness reports, as happened with Shichirōbyōe Mathias's case.⁴⁸ Jesuit correspondence sometimes copied letters from eyewitnesses, such as a letter sent by an anonymous "trustworthy Japanese Christian" who had been sent to spiritually support a

⁴² *Lettere annue del Giappone de gl'anni MDCXXV, MDCXXVI, MDCXXVII*, (Rome/Milan: Filippo Ghisolfi, 1632) 217.

⁴³ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años*, 60–61.

⁴⁴ Takayama Ukon (1552–1615), baptised with the name of Dom Justo in 1563 and beatified in 2017, was one of the most important Christian daimyō (warlords); he was exiled to Manila, where he died, when he refused to abandon Christianity. See J. Lares, "Takayama Ukon. A Critical Essay", *Monumenta Nipponica* 5, no. 1 (1942) 86–112.

⁴⁵ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años*, 64.

⁴⁶ See for example the *Exhortations* (Anesaki, "Writings", 58).

⁴⁷ See, for instance, the martyrdom of Luigino in *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 74.

⁴⁸ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años*, 86. On Mathias, who died in Akizuki on the 15th of March 1614, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 330.

group exiled from Miyako (Kyoto); he testified to the group's fortitude and declared that "they are happy to be able to somewhat imitate the martyrs, of whose struggles they discussed among themselves."⁴⁹

The narratives that related to a specific martyr also followed the latter's relics. The practice of collecting and worshipping relics from those condemned to death was very popular in Japan,⁵⁰ to the point that the shogunate implemented various strategies (such as using secret executions and hiding the remains or throwing them in the sea) to prevent it.⁵¹ Envisioning a similarly glorious future, the blood collected in handkerchiefs from the martyrs' wounds in 1597 was explicitly equated to that of the martyrs of primitive Christianity, which had made Christendom grow.⁵² Between the missionaries' banishment to Nagasaki in January 1614 and their expulsion from the country in November of the same year, numerous accounts of martyrdom in their correspondence concluded with a paragraph to the effect that the holy remains had been taken to the priests confined in the city, to be treasured in the Jesuit church of Todos os Santos. For example, it is stated that the body of Shichirōbyōe Mathias, whose head was reputed to have cried out the name of Jesus three times after being severed, was taken there to lie with the remains of other martyrs.⁵³ These relics necessarily arrived in Nagasaki accompanied and marked by the accounts of the eyewitnesses to the death of their respective martyrs. These narratives and the relics they observed circulated their own interpretation of the model of the martyr as it had been embodied and interpreted by the witnesses, in that specific historical moment. Relics were also emotionally charged and often promoted emotional practices. Giovanna and Agnese both caressed and expressed their love for the severed head of Simone, and prayed to him to intercede for them with God.⁵⁴

Jesuit correspondence also gives examples of debates among the condemned, their friends, and their relatives about the correct practices of martyrdom. Debates on the admissibility of specific actions or emotions also developed from the Christians' habit of meeting to pray together when under threat. The Christians of Arima considered the value of allowing the authorities to drag their female members to be exposed in the streets naked as a practice of humility (both for the exposed women and for the men, who would not take arms to defend

⁴⁹ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años*, 56.

⁵⁰ An example offered by *Kirishitan-ban* literature is found in the life of St Polycarp, included in the *Sactos* (Gonoi, "Kirishitan", 46), but it was a practice that predated the diffusion of this specific example and had deep roots into the connection Christian practices had to healing in Japan (see for example I. Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan. Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2001), 32–33.)

⁵¹ Japanese polemical texts against Christianity comment on this practice: the *Kirishito-ki* notes that sometimes remains were even shipped overseas (see George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 206); the *Taiji Jashū-ron* denounces the preservation of remains of criminals as relics (H. Omata Rappō, "La quête des reliques dans la mission du Japon (xvi^e-xviii^e siècle)", *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 177 (2017) 257-282, on p. 264-65.) Some instances of destruction of bodies to prevent relic collection are mentioned in Stephen Turnbull, "The Veneration of the Martyrs of Ikitsuki (1609-1645) by the Japanese 'Hidden Christians,'" *Studies in Church History* 30 (1993), 295–310, on p. 303. Arakawa Adán suffered the same fate (*Lettera Annua del Giappone del M. DC. XIV.* (Rome: Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1617), 151-152.)

⁵² *Breue relatione della gloriosa morte di Paolo Michi, Giovanni Goto, e Giacomo Ghisai martiri giapponesi della Compagnia di Giesu* (Rome: per l'erede di Zannetti, 1628), 13.

⁵³ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años*, 86. The finger of Mathias was later taken by future martyr Pedro Kibe to Rome as a relic (Gonoi, "Kirishitan", 46).

⁵⁴ *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 54–55.

them), against framing it as a risk of losing the women's chastity, which was to be avoided even at the cost of fighting. They solved the problem by asking authorities to use more traditional punishments instead of exposure that, they asserted, would have met the censure of the Court.⁵⁵ The literary canon was often evoked during discussions to identify correct practices: Simone Takeda Gohyoe referred to the imitation of the Passion of Jesus Christ to further his martyrdom bid when his Christian friends wanted him to save himself instead.⁵⁶ Arakawa Adán, imprisoned in a private house, was often visited by other Christians. However, he spent all his free time praying and reading devotional literature, especially *Contemptus Mundi*, "of which he was very fond."⁵⁷ When an old Christian visited him to confess that he was afraid of apostatising if his wife and young children were tortured, Adán told him not to be perturbed by his own imagination because God would give him the strength to face such a trial, too.⁵⁸ Fear was not an emotion that a prospective martyr was supposed to entertain and, thus, did not belong in the model. The old Christian's expression of fear contrast with the emotional practices of Adán and highlights the perfection of the latter's embodiment of the model.

Another, less explicit, contrast among future martyrs on the correct emotional practices that characterised the model can be found in the account of the preparation for the death of Agnese and Giovanna. They invited to their house a third woman, Maddalena, and her young son Luigino, likewise condemned, to spend some time together before going to their executions together.⁵⁹ While this decision was supported by the *jihiyakusha* as Maddalena did not have a male relative to oversee her in this fraught moment, it might still have suggested a lingering attachment to earthly connections:

At night, they saw Maddalena arriving with her Luigino ... Giovanna and Agnese went out to greet her, and their meeting was of the greatest consolation for all of them ... "Oh, how happy we are, to see here our companion, together we'll go to heaven from here." "I too", answered Maddalena, "am happy, that we'll go together from here, even if it didn't matter much, to see each other in this world, because we were together in the spirit in Christ; and at home I was praying and preparing for death. But I appreciate much that you remembered and thought of me, making it possible for me to come here."⁶⁰

The meeting, even if it gives the three women "great consolation", is stated to be of minor importance when compared to the joy that is generated by the imminent prospect of going to heaven. This passage underlines the lessened potency of the distribution of emotional practices on fellow humans when it comes to martyrdom: earthly connections, including those fostered by love, become secondary if compared to future divine relations. Maddalena (or her three witnesses?) redresses the correctness of the emotional practice, and the diminished value of earthly consolation with it, by marginalising the latter in the model of martyrdom she has chosen to embody.

⁵⁵ *Relacion de la persecucion que huuo estos años*, 88.

⁵⁶ *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 47.

⁵⁷ *Lettera Annua del Giappone del M. DC. XIV.*, 143–44.

⁵⁸ *Lettera Annua del Giappone del M. DC. XIV.*, 154.

⁵⁹ On Maddalena and Luigino, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 299; they, too, are among the martyrs beatified in 2008.

⁶⁰ *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 63.

The correctness of the model and its emotional practices as proof of the salvation brought by the Christian God was, unsurprisingly, debated with non-Christians and lapsed Christians, too. Debates and arguments with guards, jailors, persecutors, judges, and other figures were common, as they are in the narratives on the ancient martyrs. Martyr Paolo Miki displayed his fortitude by preaching to the spectators about the righteousness of his faith while he was being crucified.⁶¹ Numerous instances of Christians converting fellow prisoners were recorded.⁶² From these interactions, the perception of the martyrdom model as presented in Japanese anti-Christian literature emerges, where it, unsurprisingly, takes the form of caricature. The chapbook *Kirishitan monogatari* presents a comical depiction of the emotional practices common in the martyr model: the communication of the emotion of joy and the use of imagination and visualisation of heaven to foster hope. Tied up in rough straw sacks and piled on one another, the condemned

kept telling one to the other: “Well, now, how fortunate! Just us, and us alone—meeting with the final extremity, we’ll obtain salvation from [God] and be born in [Heaven], where no want will disturb our life of ease, where we’ll have jewels dangled from our necks. Every [Sunday] we hear this in the sermon. Quick, let them go ahead and kill us!” Thus they kept whispering to each other.⁶³

Unsurprisingly, the model of the “martyr”⁶⁴ presented in this polemical text did not have the same qualities of heroism and fortitude as those presented in Jesuit correspondence. After receiving threats of being burnt alive, the condemned recant among the laughs of the crowd: their emotional practices are revealed to be empty and ineffective, aimed only at trying to save their honour. Thus, while on a superficial level, such practices resemble those of the Christian martyrdom model, indicating that some echo of it had reached the Japanese population at large, they are resignified, attributed to different emotions, and perceived as demonstrating the convicts’ less noble dispositions.

Debating the Model

As the emotional practices considered above suggest, the model of sanctity via martyrdom that emerged in Japan was capacious. If its resilience allowed it to survive through the difficult periods of persecution, succumbing only at the end, it also meant that various elements it originally did not entertain could be recognised as coherent (or not), and accepted (or rejected) in subsequent embodiments, resulting in a changed model. Emotions that could compromise the model were outright rejected, together with their practices: fear of torture and death, if not temporary and overcome, was a common emotion that characterised failed martyrs; in other words, Christians who expressed fear could not be martyrs, as they were not recognised as embodying the model correctly.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Breve relatione della gloriosa morte di Paolo Michi*, 11. On Paolo Miki, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 289-90.

⁶² See, for example, the three martyrs charged with preaching while in prison, in *Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani Giaponesi* (Rome: Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1611) 7.

⁶³ Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, 359.

⁶⁴ It is not possible to speak of “martyrs” when considering the point of view of the shogunate; in this sense, this presented in the *Kirishitan Monogatari* is the model of a criminal. See H. Omata Rappō, “De l’universalité du ‘martyre’ à l’histoire ‘globale’: repenser l’écriture de l’histoire du christianisme au Japon”, *Diogenes* 4, no. 256 (2016) 67–86. K. Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁶⁵ An example is provided in *Lettere annue del Giappone de gl'anni MDCXXV*, 314.

Statements in support of the correctness of the model against misunderstandings or attempts to obtain renunciations are numerous. Two examples can be found in the martyrdom narrative of Masuda Maddalena of Arie (south-east of Nagasaki). Taken to the sea to be killed, she was told to jump into the water. This offer from her guards would have allowed her to maintain her honour; it is not clear from the text if they knew that it would also make her lose her martyr status. However, she refused, stating that “they’re free to throw her in”, but she would not do it herself.⁶⁶ She was then tortured by continuous submersions, and, by the end, she seemed to be making some sort of sound. Two different interpretations by the people present are reported in the text. Her guards believed she was crying and interpreted it as an expression of fear or despair. The witness who reported the events to the missionaries instead stated that she was singing the hymn “Laudate Dominum omnes gentes”, which is explicitly identified as a practise of joy.⁶⁷ The suggestion by the guards that Maddalena was afraid imperiled the embodiment of the model and, therefore, the recognition of her as a martyr, and it is not surprising that her witness (probably her brother) felt the need to correct it. The practice of singing to mobilise happiness and, arguably, to help control unwanted feelings, such as fear, had been adopted by Japanese martyrs since the 1597 executions in Nagasaki: Paolo Miki sang from his cross before being killed.⁶⁸

With such a widely encompassing model, individuals were at liberty to choose the practices they preferred among those that their circumstances allowed, and still be recognised as embodying it. For example, *Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani Giaponesi* presents the different preparatory practices enacted by two future martyrs: the text informs the readers that Giovanni, although sick and forced to go without food and personal slaves, never rested during the day, never stopped his devotions, and never stopped performing the many spiritual exercises in which he was engaged. He “trust[ed] completely the divine Providence, refusing all human help and comfort”⁶⁹ (such as the medicines to treat his illness), interpreting this as part of his trials for God. His fellow prisoner, Michele, was “of a different spirit”, believing it best to accept the treatment and recover to then be stronger to “suffer more and bleed for Christ.”⁷⁰ The text confirms that they were “both walking on the path of suffering for Christ and for the greater glory of God”, thereby validating their practices.⁷¹

A special role in the authorisation of the emotional practices of the martyrdom model was given to the Japanese community leaders that accompanied the convicted to their deaths; as the above-mentioned *jihyakusha*, these figures assumed a particular relevance, reflected in the texts, in the cases of female martyrs without surviving adult Christian male relatives. Doubling as witnesses, they are often shown debating with the women about the appropriateness of certain practices and correcting their behaviour or, most often, approving it and lending it their authority. Naturally, the practical conditions of the martyrs did not generally allow for a perfect imitation of the theoretical model offered by the literature,

⁶⁶ Cristóvão Ferreira’s letter of the 14th September 1627 (printed with the title of “Relatione della persecutione sollevata nel Tacacu contro la S. Fede, nell’anno 1627”), in *Lettere annue del Giappone de gl’anni MDCXXV*, 237. On Maddalena’s martyrdom, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 572.

⁶⁷ *Lettere annue del Giappone degl’anni MDCXXV*, 237.

⁶⁸ *Breue relatione della gloriosa morte di Paolo Michi*, 10.

⁶⁹ *Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani*, 37.

⁷⁰ *Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani*, 41.

⁷¹ *Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani*, 37.

especially that provided by the narratives of the Passion. Still, the latter provided an example of the practice of humility in Jesus' walking up Calvary and Japanese Christians strove to imitate him, as the correspondence always notes to highlight their piety.⁷²

This, however, was not always possible or considered appropriate in Japanese culture, especially for noble women. The group of Giovanna and Agnese was taken to their execution place in litters, as was deemed proper for the group's status. This perturbed Agnese, who discussed how permissible it was with Giovanni of the Misericórdia:

Giovanni said to Agnese: "Please remember now, lady, how our Lord Jesus Christ, at the time of his very holy Passion, was dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, and meditate on this passage." To which she replied, "You reminded it to me just at the right moment. And since our Redeemer, when he went to die, went barefoot, it is not appropriate that I go in a litter." And she started asking to be let off the litter. But Giovanni stopped her, saying that any way of dying was the same, especially if the guards were not allowed to [let her off]; and she appeared to be satisfied of this.⁷³

Some emotional practices were, indeed, integrated into the martyr model from Japanese culture. In Jesuit correspondence, these new elements were generally discussed and excused for the benefit of European readers. As the example of the litter above illustrates, the acts' legitimacy was often debated among the convicts and their spiritual advisers, especially if there was the risk of contradicting the model inherited from the written canon. In other cases, the Japanese did not appear to doubt the validity of their practices: Mine Sukedayū Gioachino bowed in front of the ashes of those executed before him, in one such example. Later, while walking to the gallows, he took a moment to compose a poem. The letter informs us that it was a typical emotional practice in Japan:

It is common for the Japanese, in situations of great joy, to compose verses... Gioachino, staring at the sky, wrote... "I believed it was far from me and apart, now I see that heaven is close." This shows their desire for heaven, and how deep was peace in their hearts; because being so close to death, they could think of composing poems.⁷⁴

New practices of this kind mainly came from everyday habits and were recontextualised to mobilise emotions that were believed compatible with the martyrdom model: in this case, joy, in a sequence with peace and hope to reach heaven.

Subject to correction were, in particular, practices of neighbourly and familial love. In early modern plays about martyrs, the scripts highlighted the thematic importance of the tension between the love felt for fellow human beings and the spiritual love for God. The first, considered positively in the broader Christian tradition, in martyrdom narratives became an obstacle that needed to be overcome to achieve complete dedication to God.⁷⁵ The aspect of rejection of human connections is present in martyrdom narratives from Japan, too. *Exhortations* presents the figure of the devil who, disguised as a friend, attempts to convince the condemned to avoid martyrdom.⁷⁶ Attempting to save the life of a fellow Christian was no longer understood as behaviour associated with neighbourly love, but was instead seen as

⁷² See the example of Paolo Miki in *Breve relatione della gloriosa morte di Paolo Michi*, 10.

⁷³ *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 69–70.

⁷⁴ Lettere annue del Giappone degl'anni MDCXXV, 241. On Gioachino, who was martyred in Unzen in 1627, see Ruiz de Medina, *El martirologio*, 576.

⁷⁵ Raphaële Garrod, "Senecan Catharsis."

⁷⁶ Anesaki, "Writings", 45.

an attempt to disguise more sinister feelings and earthly attachments. The convict was, therefore, to refuse any help or would otherwise be accused of deserting God. Maddalena showing disregard for earthly connections when talking with Agnese and Giovanna is another example of this re-evaluation of the practices of love. If the common death sentence could unite the convicts, the earthly connection they shared paled in contrast with the future, heavenly one they would recreate after martyrdom. The model of martyr presented instead, as the correct practice of love towards convicts, exhortation to fortify them in the face of suffering. As mentioned, with regards to children, the mother instructed them until the moment of death, since the male relatives had generally already been executed. For example, Maddalena is depicted encouraging her son Luigino to repeat after her the names of Jesus and Mary, “like a very devout echo”, as they die.⁷⁷

This warning doubled as an admonition for the friends and relatives of the martyr and even the spectators of their death. An imploring wife could become an obstacle to martyrdom, as she did not adhere to the correct practices that dictated that she should support her husband during his trial:

Giovanni was tempted ... as another saintly Job, by his young [non-Christian] wife, who was foreigner, immoral, and deprived by the Court of all her belongings; she often presented tearfully to her husband her misery and the continuous insults that she had to put up with for his choice of lifestyle.... Even if there were other paths to reach salvation; but he, without losing himself, exhorted her, with words and letters, to be patient and persevere...⁷⁸

In times of martyrdom, the correct practice that fostered familial love became acceptance and obedience, as martyrdom could only be ordered by God’s will⁷⁹ and opposing it was, therefore, to negate Providence. This change in the practices of familial and neighbourly love was significant, considering that love and concordance among Japanese Christians had been one of the central tenets of Jesuit teachings.

In some cases, the friends of the martyr could be given the benefit of the doubt when they tried to have the execution suspended by highlighting the fact that their love still had positive elements. This process was particularly evident during the 1597 trials in Nagasaki when various practices of love were condemned explicitly by the Jesuits because they did not adhere to the model of martyrdom. When the three future Jesuit martyrs of Nagasaki were incarcerated, their friends expressed a wish to free them through political pressure; however, Father Organtino Gneccchi-Soldo, superior of the house of Miyako, explained that it would be a sin to hinder their progress towards martyrdom, because it had been ordered by God. An attempt was carried out all the same, but it was unsuccessful; this prompted Organtino to commend the martyrs’ friends for showing such great love for the Society of Jesus.⁸⁰ This example highlights how older emotional practices could still be evoked to spin a positive interpretation of the actions of the Christian and, at the same time, encourage the behaviour held as most correct in times of persecution.

⁷⁷ *Relatione della gloriosa morte, Patita da sei Christiani Giaponesi*, 74.

⁷⁸ *Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani*, 35–36.

⁷⁹ For example: “this matter [of martyrdom] non currentis, neque volentis, sed miserentis est Dei” (*Relationi della gloriosa morte di nove Christiani Giaponesi*, 12); this is a reference to Rom. 9:16: “So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.” (NRSE-CE).

⁸⁰ Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Japonica-Sinica* 53, on fs. 24v–25r.

Conclusion

Before 1597, the model of sanctity through martyrdom of the Japanese Christian community, that had been imported into the country by the Jesuit missionaries since 1549, represented mostly a distant ideal that supported various religious practices in daily life. After the first mass crucifixion of that year, this model started to undergo changes to adapt to the new lives of the community under the pressure of the shogunate. A major element that had marked the model of the martyr since its arrival in the country were its emotional practices. Indeed, a martyr would not be recognised as such if they did not foster and communicate the correct emotions. Practices that facilitated arousing and controlling emotions were thus used to achieve with more surety a successful martyrdom. The specific historical reality of persecutions in Japan contributed to the changes that the model underwent on the emotional level, as the communities openly debated to identify compatibility with the original ideal, and thus with Christian life. The model's resilience allowed it to incorporate new practices (from Japanese culture, for instance), even if they modified the embodiment of key emotions of martyrdom, such as hope and joy. In other cases, leaders and missionaries reiterated the restrictions expressed by the original model, especially in cases when they curbed ordinary practices that had been at the core of the community before the persecutions. This is the case of familial and neighbourly love, that assumed a diminished importance in comparison with love for God, also through the modification of the practices that expressed it. Thus, the model of martyr assumed various expressions as it circulated in the community, thanks to eyewitnesses, relics, letters, and various media that carried the narratives of martyrdom.