

Article

Modeling Missionary Masculinity: Jesuit Cassocks, Silk Kimono, and Emotions in Sixteenth-Century Japan

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Abstract

This article analyzes the crisis related to garments that characterized the Jesuit mission in Japan during the initial years of the 1570s. It identifies the features of Jesuit masculinity that emerge from one of the few accounts of this crisis, a letter penned by Portuguese missionary Francisco Cabral (1533–1609), highlighting which emotional values and expressions this masculinity envisioned. By analyzing the tenets of Jesuit masculinity in Iberian countries, it then considers how these aspects were framed in relation to possible Japanese counterparts and what objectives this comparison had in the intentions of Francisco Cabral.

Keywords: early modern masculinity; dress history; Jesuit missions; history of emotions; Catholic missions in Japan; fear

1. Introduction

This article analyzes the crisis related to garments that characterized the Jesuit mission in Japan during the initial years of the 1570s. It identifies the features of Jesuit masculinity that emerge from one of the few accounts of this crisis, a letter penned by Portuguese missionary Francisco Cabral (1533–1609), highlighting which emotional values and expressions this masculinity envisioned and how these aspects were framed in relation to possible Japanese counterparts.

The first Catholic mission in Japan was founded in 1549 by Francis Xavier, a priest belonging to the religious order of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). In the following twenty years, the mission grew especially in the southern island of Kyūshū, where it could count on the economic and political support of the Portuguese silk merchants, whose carracks docked there yearly from Macao. In the mid-1560s, news reached Goa (the headquarters of the Society's presence in Asia) that missionaries in Japan were wearing silk garments, contravening Jesuit regulations. Later Jesuit texts called these garments kimono.¹ The priest Francisco Cabral² was dispatched to Japan to curb this use, under the orders of the Visitor, Gonçalo Álvarez. The latter had no knowledge of Japan and, by admission of his own brethren, held a very rigid opinion of what constituted proper Jesuit behavior. His directives therefore did not account for the specific context in which the Japanese mission was operating and completely discarded Japanese culture (Schütte 1980, vol. 1, p. 213).

Not many letters survive from Cabral's initial years in Japan. His initial report on the mission, addressed to the Visitor, has been lost as well.³ Still, an extended discussion on the debate around silk is found in a long missive Cabral wrote in 1572, to describe his first visitation to central Japan. This text illustrates in detail his understanding of the dress crisis suffered by the mission and offers a description of the point of view of the missionaries who worked there, making use of silks to better integrate themselves in the more refined culture



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of the capital city, Kyoto.⁴ Addressed to António de Quadros, Jesuit Provincial of India, this letter's original manuscript appears to be lost, but a Spanish copy from the College of Alcalá de Henares is still extant.⁵ Although the way Cabral's arguments are presented suggests that they were often rehashed in the hopes of persuading his brethren to change their minds, the fact that in the end the missionaries complied only out of holy obedience suggests that he was not particularly persuasive. Still, Cabral's view must have had some measure of impact on the values of the Jesuit community since, when Visitor Alessandro Valignano implemented his policy innovations in the early 1580s, the possibility of using a silk dress was outright rejected (Schütte 1980, vol. 2, p. 44).

During this debate, the relevance that experience had in the articulation of Jesuit obedience provided the missionaries in Japan with a powerful rhetorical tool to resist Cabral's ban.⁶ They asserted that experience in the field had shown that the Japanese were attracted to beauty and to the visible expressions of religiosity,⁷ and therefore reviled the black cassock, which was too poor to impress them. This meant that the local Japanese held the missionaries in low regard and, most importantly, felt the same about the religious message they carried. In particular, the missionaries asserted that it was crucial to gain the support of the Japanese daimyō (warlords) needed to preach in their domains. They concluded that silk garments were necessary if Christianity was to be accepted among the Japanese. Although contemporaneous sources do not mention silks, according to a common narrative of the time, the practice of adapting Jesuit dress to Japanese standards dated back to Francis Xavier, the mission's founder and one of Ignatius of Loyola's original companions. He appears to be the first to realize that better garments were necessary to impress the Japanese and to change his own clothes before appearing in front of the daimyō of Yamaguchi to ask permission to preach (Zampol D'Ortia 2020).⁸

The knowledge they had built about Japan therefore allowed the missionaries to oppose Cabral's reform and left the new superior with very limited authority to carry it out. Forced to frame his reasoning in the terms laid out by his brethren, Cabral scrambled to collect evidence to support his counterclaim that the black cassock was just as respectable to Japanese people as silk garments. He wore it while traveling through cities and towns to show that it was not scorned by the common people. He had upper-class Christian men confirm that the Jesuit dress was acceptable and even commendable. Most importantly, he framed positive experiences and successful deals he had with Japanese men of all classes as evidence that his policy change was divinely approved and rewarded. Believing he had confirmation to assert that he had divine and human support, Cabral was able to go ahead with his reform on the rest of the mission, even if the dispersion of the missionaries did not facilitate its implementation on a practical level (Zampol D'Ortia 2016).

Both the orders he had received from the Visitor and Cabral's own judgment after he arrived in Japan identified the use of silk as the mission's most pressing problem. It was the major cause attributed to "the Society losing itself" in the country.⁹ The Japanese garments adopted by the missionaries came under attack by the Visitor mostly due to their fabric, whose luxury was incompatible with the vow of poverty, and therefore with proper religious humility, and was condemned in the Jesuit *Constitutions*.¹⁰ However, Cabral's references to these silks being the garments of Buddhist monks, and his denunciations of these monks' supposed sensual tendencies, point to an underlying issue, that is, the selection of a proper example to follow and embody when attempting to infiltrate Japanese society. This suggestion that the missionaries had chosen an incorrect model echoes a controversy about the appropriateness of the Jesuit dress that had roots in Loyola's formative period and in the Society's initial years, and that soon would be the topic of similar debates in relation to the Chinese mission (Pavone 2013; Torres Trimállez 2022; Yeh 2019; Brockey 2016). In his letter, therefore, Cabral presented a better model in the martial

virtues of the upper-class samurai men, and in examples such as Sanga Yoriteru, baptized as Sancho, and Oda Nobunaga.

To illustrate the tensions surrounding the dress of missionaries in sixteenth-century Japan, this article will first consider the models of masculinity proposed by the Society of Jesus and how they promoted the values of the Jesuit emotional communities.¹¹ It will then analyze Cabral's argument against the use of silk kimono as tainted by its association with fear, an emotion he rejected as incompatible with being a Jesuit. It further examines Cabral's 1572 letter to identify the different kinds of Japanese masculinities he described. Rejecting the model of the courtier and that of the monk, Cabral preferred the martial features exemplified by warlord Oda Nobunaga and his followers, and used their case to further argue that the poor Jesuit cassock would be accepted among upper-class Japanese men. Finally, the article will consider the function of the black cassock in fostering Jesuit homosociality and unity in missionary lands.

2. Jesuit Masculinity, Missionary Masculinity

Cabral's correspondence depicts an image of the average Jesuit missionary in Japan as that of a man who has abandoned his solemn vows, especially those of poverty and obedience, together with his black cassock and his faith in the divine means to carry out evangelization. It is not just a depiction that presents them as failing as missionaries and their masculinities lacking; the Jesuits are shown failing as missionaries precisely because they are flawed as men.

Research on early modern Jesuit masculinity has unveiled some of its key aspects as derived from military masculinity. Two models, Ignatius of Loyola, the Society's first founder, and Francis Xavier, patron of the Jesuit missions among the non-Christians, presented features that are found in this successful conceptualization of manhood (Strasser 2020). Religious men's keenness to suffer and to die for God, and patience during adversities, were masculine virtues that were translated from soldierly attitudes and reinforced by their long-standing connection to martyrdom (Routt 2013; Kirk 2020). This model of "military holy man" supplanted the appetite for worldly glory with the pursuit of virtue, but maintained the same competitive attitude towards other men (Routt 2013, p. 186).¹² Indeed, the Society of Jesus seems to be, among the early modern Catholic orders, the one who incorporated the trait of combativeness of traditional Spanish masculinity the most (Rhodes 2006).

However, if traditionally this ideal of religious man substituted armor with garments that facilitated penance (the "arms of Christ"), Loyola considered hairshirts and similar tools as an expression of spiritual vainglory instead and therefore discarded them. After abandoning the model of the ascetic man, he identified obedience as the foremost practice of self-denial for a Jesuit (O'Malley 1993). Retaining the martial attitudes that had characterized his life as a son of the Spanish landed nobility, Loyola "conflates the courage required of a knight in battle with the fearlessness that results from the devout person's trust that God to provide. . . He rejected any fear or uncertainty about his future as a sign of cowardice not in battle with other men, but as a lack of faith in God." (Routt 2013, p. 187). As Loyola incarnated the model for all his brethren, courage became a valued emotional trait of the masculinity proposed by the Jesuit emotional community. For instance, the Jesuits' Spanish seminars, which hosted English exiled Catholic men, offered "a bellicose counterreformation religious education that held martyrdom in the mission field of the home country as the ultimate manifestation of masculine agency and exemplarity" (Kirk 2021, p. 151), fostering those values of the model that were closer to martyr masculinity.

At the same time, as shown by Ulrike Strasser, Jesuit homosociality was characterized by emotional, intimate connections equated to familial ones:

“Knights, university scholars, and craftsmen alike established their masculinity first and foremost by measuring themselves against other men, especially their elders. By contrast, the homosocial milieu of the Society of Jesus emphasized cooperation among men for the sake of their common good (‘the greater glory of God’) and fostered abiding emotional ties between spiritual fathers and their sons.” (Strasser 2020, p. 50)

Jesuits strove to build a loving relationship between superior and inferior, as the one that was modeled by Loyola in his so-called *Autobiography*, the affective core of what the Society’s *Constitutions* called “the union of the hearts” (Padberg 1996, p. 323). The mechanics of Jesuit obedience were thus softened by attributes generally represented as “feminine,” and superiors were tasked with maintaining “a community of love for the service of Christ” (Strasser 2020, pp. 58–59; Futrell 1970).

If Loyola’s masculinity was characterized by a heightened emotionality in both its intramural sociality and its spirituality, he followed more common Renaissance standards when he advised moderation in other matters. One such matter was the relationship with men who could hold different religious opinions, such as Christians newly converted from Islam, or Protestants. As illustrated by the *Autobiography*’s episode of the argument between Loyola and a “Moor” about the virginity of Mary, the correct action prescribed by the Jesuit model was debate, not physical aggression. These kinds of instances provided opportunities for the Jesuits to display their competitive prowess in a way that was compatible with their masculine values. Moderation guided the treatment of the Jesuit body as well (Strasser 2020, pp. 61–64). Loyola’s refusal of the hairshirt was part of the same drive for moderation. Indeed, the body and its modifications were regulated in the same way: gestures and behaviors were controlled to project moderation and modesty; the dress needed to express poverty and humility, avoiding excessive strictures, to be socially acceptable and to not project vainglory (Zampol D’Ortia 2016; Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992). As mentioned above, Loyola chose a cassock for the garment, but avoided specific details, ordering to adapt it to the dress of the area’s clergy. Dark colors were to be favored for their austerity, and different hues were adopted in practice (Levy 2011).

Francis Xavier strove for the same quality of fearlessness as expressed by Loyola. Missionary lands provided an apt setting to exercise the practice of this emotion, with their perennial uncertainties and dangers, but the oceanic travel between Europe and Asia or the Americas, too, offered numerous opportunities to exercise proper Jesuit masculinity with the emotional management of fears. Indeed, the Society’s approach to mundane terrors was to transform them into a spiritually productive fear of God (Strasser 2020, p. 81). At the same time, Francis Xavier too believed that the Society should strive for the affective union of its members (O’Malley 1993).

Not all these values were embodied, or even accepted, throughout the Society in the same way, suggesting the co-existence of more than one “Jesuit masculinity.”¹³ Strasser’s research, which has focused on German lands, points to the highly affective model as flourishing in reaction to Protestant ideals of manhood (Strasser 2020, p. 46). This suggests that in other territories it might have developed differently. Indeed, although he had been the one to transcribe the *Autobiography*, the highly influential Jesuit Luís Gonçalves da Câmara rejected the idea that governing with love was part of the Ignatian ideal, and held the Province of Portugal to stricter standards (Schütte 1980, vol. 1, pp. 70–73). This style of leadership influenced the Indian Province as well, suggesting that various emotional communities intersected in the Society of Jesus, which could foster some values while rejecting others. Cabral’s model of Jesuit masculinity appears to disregard, for the most part, this affective proclivity towards other Jesuits and to prioritize the martial elements of Iberian influence instead. Even if he initially attempted to persuade his brethren to change

their garments, he then imposed his will through holy obedience, as will be described below. The severity of his governance style emerged especially in his dealings with the Japanese brothers and lay helpers, as was lamented by Valignano years later (Schütte 1980, vol. 1, pp. 252–53). Thus, Cabral's ideal of Jesuit masculinity was at the same time marked by a selection of elements that he imposed on his fellow missionaries, and a blueprint that guided his judgements on Japanese masculinities.

3. Fearful Missionaries in Kimono

As detailed above, between 1571 and 1572 Cabral carried out a visitation of the various outposts of the Japanese mission north of Kyūshū. Returning to Bungo, he penned a long missive to the General in which he explained the dangers that the silk kimono represented to the Jesuits. Although this argument did not take an explicit form, Cabral's 1572 letter appears to present the kimono as a materialization of the missionaries' fear. More specifically, he created a narrative that linked the wearing of silk garments to fear in various manners, identifying this practice as both cause and consequence of such emotion. On the one side, fear was depicted as pressuring the Jesuits into using silk kimonos. "They tried to frighten me" into wearing silk, Cabral's letter began. He attributed to his experience his ability to identify, in his brethren's behavior, the familiar groundless fears of those who lacked confidence in God.¹⁴ He believed that it was not prudence that guided the actions of the missionaries, as they claimed, but the "human dread" of being ridiculed for their black cassocks.¹⁵ Two years into his stay in Japan, Cabral claimed to have acquired enough experience of Japan, and collected enough evidence, to disprove their argument and reveal their fear for what it was.

Arriving in central Japan, Cabral visited the port city of Sakai with the Japanese Brother João de Torres; both wore black cassocks. The text describes a Japanese Brother, Lourenço, accompanying them dressed in a silk kimono, while the local superior, Father Organtino Gnechi Soldo, stayed in the Jesuit house, after refusing to change into a cassock.¹⁶ Although their fear takes two different forms, one evident (Organtino), the other made clearer by comparison (Lourenço), the narrative suggests that both missionaries were hiding, and that their silks play a role in it.

The upper-class Japanese men that Cabral consulted on the matter, too, were reported to couch the problem in the same terms. A turning point in the narrative of the 1572 letter is when the long-time Christian, Yoriteru (Sancho), lord of Sanga, is quoted exhorting the missionaries to ignore the scorn they feared, and to not be afraid about the evangelization of the country, as the Japanese lords appeared to respect them even when wearing poor cassocks.¹⁷ It is not possible to measure the accuracy of the recording of Yoriteru's opinions, nor what question was posed to him to obtain this specific answer, but certainly his testimony was presented to strengthen Cabral's argument. Not only were the missionaries implicitly shamed in this narrative, but they were also negatively compared to the fearless converted soldier, who surpassed them in faith because he surpassed them in confidence. Already in this passage, it is possible to note Cabral's appreciation for the values of the upper-class samurai masculinity. His meeting with Yoriteru finished thus:

"He gave me additional reasons that made me certain of my decision. Still, I wanted to ask the opinion of the fathers, who disagreed. . . but concluded that, as sons of obedience, they would do what it was ordered to them. With my [renewed] confidence, I decided we would all wear only one dress, abandoning the silks. Against their surprise, I wanted to be the first to be stoned if anybody wished to stone us for [wearing cassocks]. . . I went among the people and children [reunited for the Gion matsuri, a major festival of Kyoto]. . . They all just stared at me as [someone does with] something new. In the end, I returned to the house

disillusioned and I had some cassocks made, ordering that no member of the Society should appear in public wearing silks. [The other missionaries] obeyed this order, like good religious.”¹⁸

In early modern Europe, garments were held to change the wearer on a deep level, because they shaped the wearer physically, socially, and spiritually (Jones and Stallybrass 2000). A garment that indulged the sensuality of the body was understood as being harmful for the soul, perpetuating sinful inclinations (Juárez Almendros 2006). Indeed, if the missionaries purported that the kimono would shape them socially, in a manner acceptable to Japanese people, Cabral responded that the silk it was made of was shaping their souls as well. If the kimono seemed to materialize the missionaries’ fears, it was also making them weak to temptation. In this narrative, facilitated by its closeness to the body of the wearer to stimulate the senses, silk was corrupting the Jesuits, making them lose confidence in God. This framing of the issue by Cabral offered a simple solution to the very complex problem of the evangelization of Japan. It suggested that, to regain their courage (and thus their membership in the Jesuit community), it would be enough for the missionaries to abandon the silk garments and return to the Jesuit cassock. Just as it had done for Cabral when he traveled through Japan dressed in black, God’s favor would shine on them again after this change, because they were proper Jesuits again. At that point, Cabral insisted, there would be nothing to fear.

4. Depicting Japanese Masculinities

As he visited the Gokinai area, Cabral obtained an audience with Oda Nobunaga, who was poised to unify the country after a century of civil war. As Cabral informed the reader, Nobunaga had just destroyed the powerful Buddhist temple complex of Enryakuji, on Mount Hiei, and was preparing to rekindle his war with the Ikkō Ikki faction of the Jōdo Shin school. Nobunaga’s plan of submitting Buddhist institutions explained his favor toward the missionaries and his approval of their criticism of Buddhist monks (McMullin 1984). Cabral took advantage of his visit to the warlord to compare the monks with the missionaries, to demonstrate the superiority of the latter:

“I ordered [Japanese lay helper] Lourenço to declare [to Nobunaga] the difference between the Christian Religious and his monks, saying that the monks, not knowing about life after death, nor hoping for [salvation], focused completely in treating themselves well in this life. For this reason, they ate and dressed so exquisitely. However, since our Religious knew the truth and knew of the existence of Hell and Heaven after this life, they tried to live with humility and lowliness, to later rise to Heaven. Nobunaga was very satisfied [with this explanation].”¹⁹

This passage attributes Jesuit superiority over the monks to their modesty, granted to them by their religious knowledge, and made visible through their active disregard of luxuries. At the same time, the sermon is also meant to persuade the other missionaries present that the use of silk degrades them to the level of the monks. As it often happens in Jesuit writings, Buddhist monks appear as sensual men, arrayed in luxurious garments and lacking restraint in their bodily appetites.²⁰ The depiction of the monks’ masculinity as prone to excesses further highlights their inferiority when compared to the moderate Renaissance ideal that the Jesuits promoted. Accordingly, their lack of restraint linked them to femininity. Such representations were a common rhetorical point among Catholics that suggested a lack of piety, even in their own co-religionaries (Kirk 2022). The Buddhist monks’ inability to moderate their appetites was attributed to their ignorance of the tenets of Christianity. It is hardly surprising that, for Cabral, the only fully acceptable masculinity

would be a Catholic one. This paragraph's explicit comparison facilitates delimitation and definition of Jesuit masculinity by means of contrast: Cabral strove to confirm and reinforce its boundaries because, in his perception, they were becoming more and more unstable in Japan.²¹

Still, Cabral's depictions of the monks and their habits were very superficial. He repeats one or two visual elements, all pointing to the rich fabrics of their garments. Although he was aware of the many schools of Buddhism present in the country and had collected information on some of them, he did not, as a rule, attempt to differentiate them nor to consider their different socio-economic realities. As already mentioned, he did not appear bothered by inconsistencies in his own depictions, either. He had already established in 1571 that not all Buddhist monks wore silk: some were forbidden from doing so and so used black or white garments made of cotton.²² Furthermore, in a passage of his 1572 letter, he recounted an anecdote attributed to a Christian of Sakai:

"The members of the Ikkō [Buddhist] school petitioned Osaka [i.e., the abbot of Ishiyama Honganji temple], who among them is like the Pope, to be allowed to change their dress, because it was so poor that everybody laughed at them. They were told that they should not be upset if others mocked it, because that was the dress of the religious order."²³

Cabral's knowledge that not all Buddhist habits were made of silk suggests that the actual dress of the monks was not the focal point or purpose of his discussion. Unlike the Jesuits in China, who would later adopt the literati's garb to be accepted within their circles (Laven 2012; Menegon 2020), the missionaries in Japan were keen to appeal to the daimyō and, in general, to the upper-class samurai who could grant them support and protection. Thus, the possibility that some monks wore cotton was irrelevant, so long as the lords were perceived as favoring silks. As the model of religious specialist proposed by Buddhist monks had been explicitly imitated by the missionaries in the past (although generally with limitations),²⁴ Cabral seemed to consider it necessary to condemn this practice forcefully. He used his observations on their silk garments to support his negative judgment on all the monks' embodiments of manhood, regardless of textile predilections, and quickly dismissed them as incompatible with the Jesuit lifestyle.

Nonetheless, not all models of masculinity offered by Japanese culture were dismissed. Cabral, determined to find additional evidence to support his policy change, described other kinds of manhood and compared them to his vision for the Jesuit one. O'Leary (2023) has recently pointed out that Jesuit descriptions were focused mostly on upper-class masculinities due to their political relevance. Cabral's analysis, too, was limited to powerful men. Moreover, he was interested in observing and describing Japanese masculinities only insofar as he could compare them positively or negatively to the Jesuits, and with the objective of supporting his argument against silks.

Another model that appears in the 1572 letter was that of the courtier. The use of silk had been justified by his brethren with the necessity of appealing in particular to this class of men of the capital, so Cabral attempted to collect evidence of the contrary. As he visited shogun Ashikaga Yoshiaki, Cabral appeared amused by the latter's curiosity towards the Jesuit dress and satisfied by his declaration of protection of the mission. Cabral seemed to also enjoy the special honors he received from the shogun as another sign of divine approbation but accepted them only partially. Cabral, a former soldier from the Iberian landed nobility, like Loyola, made sure to record his disdain for courtly culture in his letter for the Provincial of India. He first asserted his knowledgeable domination of its rules ("I drank [*sakazuki*] like a good courtier (*cortesano*)"), and then immediately disregarded them ("without any of the ceremonies that are essential").²⁵ The competitive aspect of Jesuit masculinity, always visible in Cabral's embodiment, emerged starkly during this visit, as

he strove to show his superior virtuosity and the divine protection he believed it granted him, more efficacious than the safety offered by silk garments or the respect of Japanese courtly manners. Unsurprisingly, this attitude of Cabral would end up offending many a daimyō, according to Alessandro Valignano, who would later make Japanese etiquette an important part of his policy of evangelization for Japan (Schütte 1980, vol. 1, p. 259).

The masculinity exemplified by Nobunaga was the one Cabral perceived as having the most elements in common with the Jesuits' own. This was facilitated by the fact that, before his death by ritual suicide, Jesuit texts tended to depict Nobunaga as a man sent by Providence due to his hostility towards Buddhism. Conforming to this idea, Cabral presented the warlord as agreeing with his reforms: "Nobunaga was very satisfied," referring to Jesuits who discarded luxuries. Still, the similarities that Cabral perceived were illustrated, implicitly, by another episode. Nobunaga was known for his eccentric character and, according to Jesuit sources, had supervised the construction of Kyoto's Nijō Castle in 1569 dressed in "rough clothes" and wearing a tiger skin. All other upper-class men in the city had abandoned their refined, courtly garments to change into animal skins, in fear of otherwise offending him (Lamers 2000, pp. 62–63). It appears that Nobunaga kept a similar policy in the following years, since the 1572 letter described him as still forbidding the use of court dresses in his presence. Cabral recorded the following, as the Jesuit group arrived at the warlord's residence in Gifu:

"We entered in a room where there were twenty or thirty badly dressed people, wearing no silk, and for this reason I thought they were servants of some knights. However, Father Luís Fróis informed me that they were important people: some were commanders of ten thousand men, and others of eight thousand [...] and all great lords. The reason why they were dressed so badly was that Nobunaga does not wish that his soldiers and war-like people were polished and decked out, because he says they become effeminate (*afeminados*)."²⁶

Since Cabral understood Jesuit masculinity as mainly expressing elements of a martial nature, the parallel between the missionaries arrayed in luxurious garments and the Japanese soldiers imperiled by the effeminate influences of silk was rather straightforward. Such an effect attributed to luxury was a common trope of Western depictions, especially for clothing considered exotic and foreign (Upson-Saia 2011; Juárez Almendros 2006; Amsler 2018). The masculinity of samurai was appreciated and condemned at the same time, depicted as being on the verge of degenerating, like that of the missionaries.²⁷ The establishment of a positive connection with a masculinity that was not Catholic was enabled, doubtlessly, by the fact that the Japanese were perceived as a white race, and thus more rational and noble. In this narrative, Nobunaga again played the part of a man sent by Providence, by banning silk garments and avoiding the corruption of his army. His perceived status as a potential convert, confirmed by his actions, allowed Cabral to depict his masculinity and that of his men positively, as Catholic-adjacent. The warlord and his (imagined) army of soldiers who rejected luxuries presented positive male facets that could be imitated by the Jesuits. At the same time, their example demonstrated that a manhood that refused silks in principle could be acceptable to Japanese upper-class men.

In general, Jesuit depictions of Japanese society presented the samurai's martial prowess as a positive quality and appreciated the courage they displayed on the battlefield; this is especially evident when they were compared to the "emasculated" Chinese.²⁸ Indeed, Cabral followed contemporaneous opinions when he considered the Chinese as easily conquerable due to their feminine weakness and suggested to Philip II of Spain to enlist some three or four thousand Christian samurai to subjugate China.²⁹ The Japanese barbaric form of government and their unmoderated violence, as was described by the Jesuits,³⁰ would turn into an advantage once they had converted to Christianity, and were

tempered by their faith. In Cabral's writings, this model of masculinity was exemplified by Sancho Sanga Yoriteru: when it came to garments and emotions, the Christian samurai, with his courage expressed via his rosary beads, mirrored positive qualities that Cabral believed Jesuits too should possess.

5. Jesuit Homosociality and the Cassock

As he composed his narrative about the dangers of the silk kimono, Cabral presented the black cassock as its diametrical opposite, a tool that could at the same time mobilize and express the Jesuits' courage. He chose two models of cassock-wearing missionaries for the Jesuits to follow, Francis Xavier and himself, and reported in his own correspondence the narratives he probably used to illustrate them to his brethren. By creating these accounts, Cabral attempted to implement, albeit somewhat crudely, what was becoming a standard method to foster the union of the hearts in the Society of Jesus, that is, the creation of common histories and hagiographies in which the single Jesuit could identify himself (Friedrich 2022). He then circulated his narratives through the Jesuit network in the form of a letter which, once translated and copied into a volume read during meals by the Jesuits and their students of the College of Alcalá de Henares (Schütte 1961), further disseminated them throughout Spain. As was the case with similar processes within the Society at large, Cabral carefully chose the elements that best fit his argument in support of the cassock. Therefore, in Cabral's retelling of Xavier's travels in Japan, no reference was made to the change or betterment of garments that was commonly attributed to him, and the focus was instead on the future Catholic saint's humility and extreme poverty.³¹ The consequent success of Xavier's evangelization was interpreted as another affirmation of divine favor towards his poor lifestyle and, therefore, his modest garments. As for himself, Cabral crafted a narrative that highlighted his own virtues. His tests of the wearability of the cassock among Japanese people doubled as attestations of his personal courage:

"They tried to frighten me and bother me with various reasons to convince me that it was necessary to change my dress, to save my life [travelling] in incognito. . . But I . . . had confidence in God. . . so I decided. . . not to change the dress of the Society and. . . everywhere I declared myself a priest of the Society of Jesus."³²

This connection between garments and the Jesuit missionary's ideal emotional state is the basis of Cabral's argument that the black cassock was the only proper garment for a Jesuit: it preserved and communicated his religious association, his vow of poverty, and his humility. Moreover, as a common garment of European students and clerics (Harvey 1995), the black cassock was a strictly gendered garment. While it expressed the missionary's fearlessness, making it "emerge" on the visible spectrum, it marked the body as male.

Furthermore, the cassock also acted as psychological armor: it helped the missionary mobilize the correct emotions when needed. Indeed, it also acted as a memento. As dress evokes memories of emotions, it can remind the wearer of loyalties and associations (Jones and Stallybrass 2000). The *Constitutions'* above-mentioned section on "the union of the hearts" listed this dress among the tools that could be used to foster unity: "Still another great help can be found in uniformity. . . exterior uniformity in respect to clothing, ceremonies of the Mass, and other such matters, to the extent that the different qualities of persons, places, and the like permit" (Padberg 1996, p. 335). In other words, this dress was one of the tools that could strengthen the homosocial ties that were at the heart of the Society of Jesus. This could often prove vital if such connections had been weakened, as it happened due to the isolation suffered during missionary work (Strasser 2020). Memories tied to positive experiences of "union of the hearts" could easily be evoked by a garment that had been an important element in their creation. The wearer could feel consoled, or spurred, as the cassock reminded him of the connection he had to his brethren, regardless

of the distance that separated them. By functioning as a reminder of belonging, the cassock could confirm and strengthen the Jesuit's vows and his resolve to carry on his evangelizing activities. In the same way, it could lend power to the models offered by Loyola and Xavier, whose representations were traditionally associated with their cassocks (Levy 2011).

Even if the lack of a specific Jesuit dress might have meant not having a reliable, visual identifier for the Jesuits in Europe (Friedrich 2022), the *Constitutions* held the cassock to be specific enough to support uniformity, and thus unity. These qualities, however, could be perceived more starkly in the missionary lands of Asia, where cassocks (and European garments in general) were less common. While specific references to this effect of the cassock are not present in his letters, Cabral certainly had in mind its function in supporting "the union of the hearts."³³ His correspondence is marked by feelings of nostalgia for his life in the Jesuit colleges of India, which he associated with virtue, safety, consolation, communion, and charity.³⁴ As he orders new cassocks for his brethren, he describes them as made of "cloth of black cotton, which is what is custom among us,"³⁵ meaning in the Province of India, and more generally in the Assistancy of Portugal. The cassock therefore also assumed the function of connecting the missionaries in Japan to the larger body of the Society of Jesus. Thus, it acted against the dispersion of the Jesuit spirit that Cabral had identified, since his arrival, as the primary problem of the mission.

6. Conclusions

Due to their relevance to society, garments and the tensions that surrounded them reveal many aspects and values of early modern European cultures. Their analyses can therefore illuminate various mechanisms of coeval intercultural contacts.

In this case study, missionary Francisco Cabral's representations of the silk kimono and of the cotton cassock shed light not only on aspects of Jesuit masculinity, but also on the role it played in the Jesuits' encounter with Japanese culture. At the same time, Cabral's multilayered reaction to the missionaries' wearing of silk speaks of the emotional communities that were more closely linked to them. Cabral depicted his fellow Jesuits as motivated by fear to accuse them of disregarding the model of maleness upheld by the Society. In doing so, he denounced them as abandoning the tenets of the Jesuit emotional and spiritual community and, therefore, rejecting it in its key aspects as well. In this context, fear was perceived as a form of hopelessness, a loss of trust in God akin to sin.

Cabral was also mostly dismissive of Japanese masculinities due to their being non-Christian. Still, his own interpretation of Jesuit manhood as martial in nature allowed him to see in a positive light some elements of Japanese samurai masculinity, as compatible with Jesuit lifestyle, and thus as a possible model for his brethren. Cabral's depiction presented martial masculinity as a common ground where a connection with the Japanese ruling class could be built, based on a potentially shared rejection of the silk garments that counteracted the adaptation proposed by his brethren. The construction and implementation of this missionary strategy were a tool, for Cabral, to express and manage his own anxieties regarding the future of the mission, and of his success as superior. Indeed, the identification of a single, simple solution, based on a generalization of his short experience of the country, allowed him to avoid contending in full with the complex socio-cultural reality of evangelization in sixteenth-century Japan.

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Notes

- ¹ The Jesuit sources use the word *qimono* (from the Japanese *kimono*, defined in the mission's *Vocabulario da lingoa de Iapam* (1603) as "Vestido," i.e., "Garment") to indicate what nowadays is referred to as *kosode*, the most common Japanese outer garment in the sixteenth century, characterized by narrow sleeves (Stinchecum 1984).
- ² On Cabral's activity in Japan, see Zampol D'Ortia (2024).
- ³ Cabral confirmed the existence of this text: "I think Your Paternity has already knowledge of the details of the Society and those who live [in the mission of Japan] through the visitation [report] I sent last year to the Visitor [Álvarez] in India" (Cabral to General Francis Borja, Nagasaki, 5 September 1571, in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (henceforth: ARSI), JapSin 7, I, 20r).
- ⁴ The point of view of the other missionaries is described in the *Historia de Japam* of Fróis (1981, p. 13) as well, who was one of the Jesuits who supported the use of silk. As both texts agree on the general points of the dispute, it is probable that the first's depiction of the opposite faction's argument was accurate.
- ⁵ "Copy of a letter of the Father Francisco Cabral to the Father Antonio de Quadros, Provincial of India, from Nagasaki in Japan, on the 23rd of September 1572," in Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia, *Cortes*, 9/2663, 85–107v. The letter appears to have been initially translated somewhat faithfully, imitating the rather long-winded writing style of Cabral, but was censored at a later stage by striking through and substituting single words and whole sentences. The aim appears to have been softening the insubordination of Cabral's brethren and excising some aspects of Japanese culture that could have been considered more scandalous.
- ⁶ On the mechanics of Jesuit obedience, see Mostaccio (2014).
- ⁷ This is a characteristic that the Jesuits had attributed to the Japanese since the beginning of the mission; see, for instance, the missive by Melchor Nunes Barreto to the General, Ignatius Loyola, April 1554 (Ruiz-de-Medina 1990, p. 448).
- ⁸ Xavier was officially canonized only in 1622, but he had been considered saintly already during his lifetime, and his body was considered a relic immediately after his death (Gupta 2009).
- ⁹ ARSI, JapSin 7, I, 21r.
- ¹⁰ "[Silk or expensive cloths] ought not to be used [in garments], in order that in everything humility and proper lowliness may be preserved, unto greater glory to God." (Padberg 1996, p. 38).
- ¹¹ I use Barbara Rosenwein's definition of emotional (imagined) communities as "groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value—or devalue—the same or related emotions" (Rosenwein 2006).
- ¹² This attitude can be found, for instance, in Jesuit academic competitions, or even struggles with demons during exorcisms (Shore 2012, pp. 66–67).
- ¹³ On the existence of different models of masculinity in the same socio-cultural context, see the seminal study by Connell (1995).
- ¹⁴ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 85rv. See a similar recounting in Cabral to a man outside the Society, 29 September 1572, in *JapSin* 7, III, 99r.
- ¹⁵ "Temores humanos" (*Cortes*, 9/2663, 90v).
- ¹⁶ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 90r–90v.
- ¹⁷ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 94v.
- ¹⁸ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 95r.
- ¹⁹ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 99v.
- ²⁰ This common Orientalist trope can be seen repeated, for instance, in Fróis' treatise on Japanese culture (translated into English in Fróis (2014)).
- ²¹ On moderate masculinity's instability and its constant need for reconfirmation, see Reeser (2006).
- ²² *JapSin* 7, I, 20v.
- ²³ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 90r.
- ²⁴ For instance, they could travel with insignia of monks but wearing a poor kimono instead of silk, or mixing and matching European and Japanese garments, some of which were luxurious (Zampol D'Ortia 2020).
- ²⁵ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 96v. *Sakazuki* is a kind of refreshment that was offered in Japan during formal visits.
- ²⁶ *Cortes*, 9/2663, 99r.
- ²⁷ A similar phenomenon is found in seventeenth-century Spain (Lehfeldt 2008).
- ²⁸ See Laven (2012) and Aranha (2008), who delineate a similar Jesuit appreciation for Asian courage, with a major impact on the construction of racial hierarchies.

- ²⁹ Cabral to Philip II of Spain, Macao, 25 June 1584, in Archivo General de Indias, *Patronato* 25, R.21. Philip was also king of Portugal at the time. On the question of the invasion of China proposed by some Jesuit missionaries, see Fabre (2008). On the characterization of the Chinese as feminine when compared to other Asian people, see Dong (2020, p. 96).
- ³⁰ See, for instance, Cabral's statement in *JapSin* 7, I, 20v; previous examples include the letter by Melchor Nunes Barreto to Diego Laínez, Kochi, 13 January 1558 (Ruiz-de-Medina 1995, pp. 102–14).
- ³¹ See Cabral's description of Xavier's life in Japan in *JapSin* 7, I, 21r.
- ³² Cortes, 9/2663, 85rv.
- ³³ To rekindle union in the Japanese mission, Cabral was indeed striving to implement the strategies delineated in the *Constitutions* (Schütte 1980).
- ³⁴ See, for instance, Cabral to Father Juan Batista de Ribera, Kuchinotsu, 23 September 1571, in *JapSin* 7, III, 36r.
- ³⁵ *JapSin* 7, I, 21r.

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