

INTRODUCTION:  
IBERIAN AND FRENCH JESUITS FROM  
AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

If interpreted in a broader international framework beyond North America rather than just within the regional history of New France, will the existing historical paradigms of the Jesuit missionary activity to Amerindians remain intact? This is the thematic issue that underlies this cross-cultural study. The Jesuit mission in seventeenth-century New France will be analysed as a series of incidents that developed, not simply as a domestic occurrence of North America, but out of the earlier mission of Father Francisco de Xavier in Japan. In this analysis, the Christian mission in Japan will be used as a tool to revise the currently accepted historical interpretations of the French Jesuit mission. Through a diachronic global comparison encompassing the period from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century, this investigation attempts to add a new revisionist perspective to the conventional understanding of the New France mission.

More than half a century before French missionaries landed in North America in the early seventeenth century, another Jesuit group had already arrived in Japan. In 1549, the party of Father Xavier arrived at Kagoshima, on the southern tip of Japan. Among his accomplishments, French-educated Xavier had helped to establish the Society of Jesus [SJ] in Paris in 1534. Father Xavier's contact with Japan was but the first of many such visits. Iberian Jesuits from Portugal, Spain and Italy, under the patronage of the king of Portugal, followed. Although the Jesuit mission to Japan experienced some success during the second half of the sixteenth century, strict legislation promulgated by the Japanese central authorities eliminated the Christian missions in the early seventeenth century. Meanwhile, as the Iberian mission was ending in Japan, the French Jesuits were beginning their own mission to New France.

To understand the mission in New France, it must be discussed within both colonial North American and international contexts. Similarly the mission in Japan must be considered within the context of Iberian colonialism in this Asian country as well as within an international framework. Yet this international context has rarely, until now, been thoroughly

investigated by a single historian, either in Japan or in the West.<sup>1</sup> Apparently those researching the history of Japan and those studying that of New France have been unaware of each other's research. General histories of the Society of Jesus often deal with both missions in separate chapters, but the chapters do not draw comparisons.<sup>2</sup> There is admittedly one historian whose work addressed both missions. Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, a French Jesuit Father of the eighteenth century, was the first and last individual to do so, but even he dealt with the respective missions in separate volumes with no attempt at synthesis.

It is clear that Japan was no longer an unknown country for French Jesuit authors in the eighteenth century. In 1715, almost thirty years before his own history of New France was published in 1744, Charlevoix completed a series of volumes on the Japanese mission.<sup>3</sup> In this work, he described Jesuit activity there as if he himself had been a missionary in this archipelago. Because eighteenth-century Japan maintained no regular connections with Europeans, except via Dutch merchants, the only way that Charlevoix could have become acquainted with the ecclesiastical history of this oriental country was by reading Jesuit missionary reports on Japan. Joseph-François Lafitau, his French-Jesuit contemporary of the eighteenth century, was also familiar with Japan, though he too had never visited it. In his anthropological monograph on native North Americans, Lafitau refers to Yezo, or today's Hokkaido, as a possible land of origin for indigenous North Americans.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The only possible exception may be Shenwen Li's *Stratégies missionnaires des jésuites français en Nouvelle-France et en Chine au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Saint-Nicolas, Québec: les Presses de l'Université Laval; Paris: Harmattan, 2001), which is based on a synchronic comparison of simultaneous events in the seventeenth century rather than a diachronic comparison based on historical cause and effect. Although Li's treatise presents the Jesuit contribution to the establishment of cultural ties between the Occident and the Orient, it does not present a revisionist interpretation that would affect existing perspectives on the Christian mission to New France.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Thomas J. Campbell, SJ, *The Jesuits, 1534–1921: A History of the Society of Jesus from Its Foundation to the Present Time* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1921).

<sup>3</sup> Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix, SJ, *Histoire de l'établissement, des progrès et de la décadence du christianisme dans l'empire du Japon, où l'on voit les différentes révolutions qui ont agité cette Monarchie pendant plus d'un siècle* (2 tomes, Rouen: Guillaume Behourt; Jacques Joseph le Boullenger; Pierre le Boucher, 1715.); and Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France, avec le journal historique d'un voyage fait par ordre du roi dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (3 vols., Paris: Didot, 1744).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph-François Lafitau, SJ, *Moeurs des sauvage américains comparés aux moeurs des premiers temps* (2 tomes, Paris: Suagrain l'aîné & Charles-Etienne Hocherau,

The Jesuit priests in seventeenth-century New France were familiar with the mission to Japan because of the Society's tradition of global correspondence. The superiors of the respective missionary provinces, which by 1615 counted thirty-two all over the world, provided annual reports of their provinces. Such reports provided fellow Jesuits with an international exchange of information and advice. The successive superiors of the colonial French mission were included in this network.<sup>5</sup>

Some familiarity with Japan, associated with this global information exchange, can be detected even in the French reports on North America that referred to the Iberian mission in Japan. From time to time the Jesuits in New France visited their local superior in Quebec or Montreal, depending on where the colonial missionary station was, and they sent him annual journals. The Jesuit superior in New France included these reports in his own *Relations*, and transmitted them to the French Jesuit provincial at Paris, who supervised the colonial missions. *Les Relations des Jésuites*, or *The Jesuit Relations*, was the title of this series published in France from 1632 to 1673.

There are several references to Japan in this French series, references that are ignored in the histories of the Jesuit mission in New France. Father Paul le Jeune's *Relation* of the year 1635–1636 describes the Japanese nation as being just as superstitious as the native peoples of North America. He pointed to the Japanese belief in the need to assist the souls of the dead, which seemed to him as superstitious and absurd as that of the Amerindian Montagnais, or Innu.<sup>6</sup> The *Relation* also cites Father Xavier, who wrote that, in Asia, there was an island, probably Japan, where residents were religious enough to cry from

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1724), 32–33; Joseph-François Lafitau, SJ, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times* (ed. William N. Fenton & Elizabeth L. Moore, 2 vols., Toronto: Champlain Society, 1974), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Jetten, *Enclaves amérindiennes* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1994), 30.

<sup>6</sup> Although Father Le Jeune did not specify the source of information, he had obviously read Francisco de Xavier's letter of 29 January 1552, addressed from Cochin to his companions in Europe. In it, Father Xavier related that Japanese people, by paying a large amount in advance to Buddhist monks, believed superstitiously that it would attain a happier afterlife. See M. Joseph Costelloe, SJ (trans.), *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* (St. Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), Document [*ep.*, hereafter] 96, pp. 329–30. From another point of view, there was a parallel with the Amerindian and Japanese belief in helping the souls of the dead, which Father Le Jeune was criticising, without acknowledging the similarity of this concern with Christian beliefs. Prayers and Masses were said in the Roman Catholic Church for those souls of the dead in Purgatory.

excessive heart-felt joy.<sup>7</sup> About the same time, Father Jean de Brébeuf, SJ, implied that the Japanese, unlike the Amerindians, were already perfectly civilised. Later, in the annual report of 1637, Father Le Jeune quoted Father Pierre Pijart in the Huron country, who had read an account on Japan. In 1640, Father Le Jeune also mentioned the possibility of reaching Japan and China via the Saint Lawrence and the Ottawa rivers. He suspected that what he took to be a sea west of these rivers would connect to the northern part of Nueva España, which he believed to be opposite Japan, not far across the Pacific Ocean. Other correspondents discussed this imaginary westerly route to Asia repeatedly in the *Relations*. In the report of 1659–60, Father Jérôme Lalemant, SJ, imagined the distance from Hudson Bay to Japan to be as short as 1420 leagues, or 6,800 kilometres, in other words only sixty per cent of the actual distance.<sup>8</sup>

As early as the sixteenth-century, the French regarded the mission to Japan as an exotic and peculiar experience for the Jesuits. For example, once when the Jesuit Father Émond Auger was preaching to the residents of Valence in the French countryside, he was unable to communicate easily with the local people who spoke a regional language. He was surprised at how foreign they seemed in their reaction to his evangelistic message; so foreign, in fact, that the people of Valence made him imagine that he was in distant Japan rather than in France.<sup>9</sup>

It is in the published Iberian correspondence on Japan where one finds the best evidence of the French Jesuits' familiarity with this eastern edge of Asia. Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, numerous printed editions of accounts about the Japanese mission were published in Europe. Although historians have never asked whether French Jesuits read the mission-

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<sup>7</sup> The only two possible island regions that Xavier visited are the Moluccas and the Japanese archipelago. Among the existing letters of Father Xavier, the reference closest to Le Jeune's citation is the same letter as above. See *ibid.*, ep. 96, pp. 331–32.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph is based on Reuben Gold Thwaites *et al.*, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents...* [*Relations*, henceforth] (73 vols., Cleveland, OH: Burrows Brothers, 1896–1901), (Le Jeune) 8: 189 & 273; 12: 241; (Brébeuf) 10: 210; (the route to Japan) 18: 237–39; 45: 221; 66: 67; (Lalemant) 45: 223–25.

<sup>9</sup> A. Lynn Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 226–27. Martin cites Émond Auger's manuscript letter to Borgia, Avignon, dating 30 January 1566; preserved as Gallia 81: Epistolae Galliae 1565–1568, f. 24v, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome.

ary stories about Japan, there are numerous publications available on the subject of these Asian islands. The large number of publications makes it impossible today to determine through which particular volume French Jesuits acquired information on the Japanese experience. It is, however, possible to determine which languages were used for communication between Jesuits: French, along with Italian and Latin, although Latin was not commonly used. Before the Society of Jesus regulated its usage in 1576, forcing members to use Latin for official correspondence, many of the earlier French members received their theological education in Italy and were consequently far more fluent in Italian than in Latin. They wrote in Italian to their superior generals, such as Fathers Ignatius de Loyola, Diego Lainez and Francis Borgia, and to all other Spaniards.<sup>10</sup> One thus needs to search for published reports on Japan in these three languages.

The reports on Japan were sent to Europe and published in various European languages. The correspondence from local regions was copied at least three times at the missionary station in Kyushu, the main western island. One copy remained in Japan and others were mailed via the Portuguese and later the Spanish colonies such as Macao, Malacca, Goa, Manila and Nueva España. From the year 1579 onwards, rather than being sent from various individual correspondents, the local letters were compiled into an annual report called *Carta annua de Japão* under the supervision of the superior of Japan. The Jesuits in Europe published the reports in several languages in order to reach more European readers.<sup>11</sup>

It is probably impossible to locate all the publications on the Japanese mission because they are spread throughout Europe and in former European colonies. Yet Johannes Laures, SJ, made an extensive search, based on the copies preserved as special collections in the libraries and archives in Japan.<sup>12</sup> His bibliographical study provides sufficient data to prove the environment in which French Jesuits in Europe were able to read the Iberian missionary accounts (See table 1 and appendix 1). For the period 1552 to 1701, for example, the publications

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<sup>10</sup> Martin, *op.cit.*, 55–56.

<sup>11</sup> Matsuda Kiichi, *Kinsei shoki nippon kankei nanban shiryô no kenkyû* (Tokyo: Kazama shobô, 1967), 96–99.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes Laures, SJ, *Kirishitan Bunko: A Manual of Books and Documents on the Early Christian Mission in Japan* (3rd ed., Tokyo: Sophia University, 1957). For selected details of the Jesuit publications, see appendix 1.

are available in nine languages, at least: Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Latin, French, German, Dutch, English and Polish. Laures's list includes 448 editions, of which 142 are in Italian, ninety-two in Latin and sixty in French. The Italian editions predominated during the sixteenth century. Yet, in the seventeenth century, when the French Jesuits began their mission in North America, Latin and French were used more frequently. Even just counting the small archival collections in Japan, there were at least 294 editions published in Europe in the three languages easily understood by French Jesuits. A more extensive search focussing on the French editions, held in the USA and France, locates twenty-three additional publications, which increase the figure of sixty French editions up to eighty-three.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the actual figure in the three languages may exceed 294 quite considerably, which means that there is no doubt that many printed reports were available to French Jesuits. It seems obvious that the Jesuits in France were able to learn from their Iberian brethren who had worked in Japan, by means of these circulated European publications.

Table 1. European-Language Publications of the Missionary—Mostly Jesuit—  
Correspondence on Japan, 1552–1701  
(based on the bibliography in Johannes Laures, *Kirishitan Bunko*, 1957)

Period	Portuguese/ Spanish	Italian	Latin	French	German	Dutch	English	Others	Subtotal/ Total
1552–1601	16	69	28	13	13	0	0	0	139
1602–1651	64	60	36	27	8	4	2	1	202
1652–1701	21	13	28	20	10	6	9	0	107
Subtotal/ Total	101	142	92	60	31	10	11	1	448

<sup>13</sup> The search is based on two online databases. One is the US library database of RLG's Eureka<sup>®</sup> on [eureka.rlg.ac.uk/Eureka/](http://eureka.rlg.ac.uk/Eureka/), and the other is the Bibliothèque nationale de France on [www.bnf.fr/](http://www.bnf.fr/). Although the British and Vatican collections also include early modern missionary publications, neither the Vatican database on [www.vatican.library.vatlib.it/bavt/](http://www.vatican.library.vatlib.it/bavt/) nor the British one, called Copac, on [copac.ac.uk/copac/](http://copac.ac.uk/copac/) provides any additional editions beyond the ones in Laures's extensive bibliography.

The historiography of the French Jesuit mission has never included the Iberian mission in its discussion, on the assumption that it was unrelated to the history of New France. This historiography calls for revision. The French missionaries were aware that they were not the first group of evangelists to preach outside Europe. From the frequent publications in several languages, they knew that sixty or more years earlier Father Francisco de Xavier and his pioneer successors in Japan had already had as exotic an experience as they were having in North America. In the minds of French missionaries, the mission to Japan was meaningful and worthy, although later historians have ignored or overlooked this connection. As stated above, in the eighteenth century, Father Charlevoix dealt with the respective missions separately, as if they had no relevance to each other. Ever since his substantial and influential monographs, historians have followed his framework, thereby excluding, for almost three centuries, the French memory of Japan from discussions of the French Jesuit mission in colonial North America. As the review of literature on the Jesuit missions in the following chapter argues, historians have always discussed the Jesuit mission exclusively in a North American context as though French missionaries were ignorant of Father Xavier and other Iberian missionaries in Japan.

It is high time for the missionary history of New France to be discussed in a comparative framework. A prototype for the French Jesuit mission can be discovered in sixteenth-century Japan, which, without doubt, influenced the later mission in North America. What appears to have been original to New France may already have been experienced and narrated by Iberian missionaries, who worked unceasingly in sixteenth-century Japan. Interpretations that appear to be reasonable to Canadianists should now be placed in a broader perspective comprising the Iberian mission in the previous century. Existing interpretations of the French mission should take into account the experience of Iberian priests, in order to distinguish what was unique to New France, while of course not overlooking the fact that each mission shared certain common Jesuit outlooks and aims. The case of the mission to Japan provides an important clue to this international approach.

There was also a by-product of the missionary endeavours. The Jesuit missions to these two regions inevitably involved intercultural interactions between Euro-Christians and non-European non-Christians. To some degree, the Jesuit mission attempted acculturation

of non-Christians and of colonial settlers as well. Christian beliefs, as practised by Japanese converts, may well throw further light on the limits of acculturation. The comparative case study of Japan could well lead to more plausible identification of native Amerindian customs than a narrow contextual assumption based only on French source material.

Another consideration is possible from the comparative view of culture. A thorough analysis of the Japanese case could well shed light on the apparent cultural biases both in the Jesuit missionaries' approaches to non-Christian peoples and in their observations of foreign societies in general. This identification of the missionaries' Euro-Christian biases may also shed light on ideologically-determined French misperceptions that have been accepted unconditionally as accurate interpretations by historians of New France.

The influence of the Japanese experience on the French Jesuits is most clearly seen in missionary approaches to the native peoples. The missionary methods can be seen as encompassing the following five aspects: interpreting local cultures; winning converts; the education of proselytes; the indigenous practice of Christianity; and, more generally, the establishment of the missionary church. A comparison of the two regional approaches may reveal both similarities and differences. Although external conditions in the two cases have resulted in differing manifestations, such superficial differences could sometimes be seen as concealing fundamental similarities in evangelistic methodology.

There were three kinds of approaches used by missionaries in order to achieve success. First, they interpreted non-Christian cultures; second, they preached, won converts and then educated them; and third, they established indigenous Christian communities. In the chapters that follow chapter one, which is the review of literature on the Jesuit missions, an attempt will be made to analyse each of these methods and approaches in turn.

To begin with, chapter two will focus on the importance which the Iberian and French missionaries attached to interpreting non-Christian cultures in order to make their preaching more effective. The missionaries encountered a deep gulf between Christian and non-Christian cultures. From a contemporary sixteenth- or seventeenth-century standpoint, Jesuit priests were masters of Euro-Christian knowledge. Therefore, they were capable of understanding non-Christian cultures at least in their own systematic way. Within the confines of early-modern western intellectuals, their analysis, while biased, was the best



available at the time. Historians today, however, often note that the Jesuit interpretation of native North Americans was biased and needs to be treated carefully.

A more comprehensive analysis comprising the Jesuit interpretation of Japan will identify the missionary biases and reduce the needless scepticism of them. One will learn that, however biased the French missionary observations of the Amerindian peoples and cultures may have been, they were not as biased as they are commonly considered to have been. In Canadian historiography, the lack of written Amerindian documents has forced westerners to qualify missionary interpretations by speculation. Without written documentation, it is impossible to tell how accurate the Jesuit interpretation of indigenous culture is. By contrast, there exist today Japanese historical sources, relics and remains that can help to identify the mistakes and illusions of the Iberian Jesuits. Japan's language, culture and national polity have survived, which thus allows researchers today to view the misinterpretations made by missionaries of sixteenth-century Japanese. This identification of biases can then be transferred to the North American context.

Preaching, winning converts and educating them were the next composite methods, and are discussed together in the third chapter. Preaching and winning converts were too intertwined with educating Amerindians to be discussed separately. Education was a vital part of winning converts. It aimed at conscripting young Amerindians to act as liaisons between the Jesuits and indigenous communities. It was one of the most fundamental tasks set forth in preliminary discussions which led to the establishment of the Society, and was just as important as actual conversion to Christianity. While the Jesuits approached socially influential Japanese adults for patronage, the targets of education were boys who would eventually play a vital role in helping Jesuits to establish their colonial church. In order to educate these young lay assistants in Christianity and European languages, including Latin, Iberian Jesuits chose boys from influential kinship groups and even dispatched some to Europe. French Jesuits had a similar approach, but achieved far less success. It is important to understand the influence of the Iberian educational example on the French mind and how this influence led French missionaries to fail.

In Japan, the methods used for winning neophytes during this stage were constantly revised throughout the sixteenth century. The approach by Father Xavier and his successors in Japan began and developed gradually from Father Xavier's reflection on his first mission during

his brief sojourn in India. The more Jesuits came to understand local people in Japan, the more effective methods they developed for gaining more converts by adapting methods to local culture. This evolution of approaches was also the case with French Jesuits in the seventeenth century. This transition, however, should not be considered as having been invented and developed originally by French missionaries in New France. A comparison of the two missions will reveal how much of the French methodology was original, and how much was in emulation of the Iberians.

This third chapter raises two Canadian issues for reconsideration. In the first place, the international consideration will revise the existing interpretation of the methodological difference between the Franciscans and the Jesuits in the Saint Lawrence region. Were the Franciscan missionaries cultural absolutists compared with the Jesuit missionaries, as has been commonly maintained by the histories of New France? A better answer can be found in a more extensive discussion that involves the period starting from the mid-sixteenth century rather than just the seventeenth century. The answer will be negative, and will revise the existing perspectives drawn from the narrow framework of New France.<sup>14</sup>

In the second place, it is commonly accepted by Canadianists that educating children was of the utmost importance, and only later did the French Jesuits target adults. Is this really the most appropriate interpretation of the Jesuit approach? The Iberian examples will suggest that French Jesuits did not simply shift the targeted age groups from children to adults, but that they made a more complex adjustment in their approach.

The third missionary approach was the establishment of mission communities called *réductions*, which chapter four will examine in a comprehensive manner. The French Jesuit missionaries designed native Christian communities. Within the realm of Canadian history, they are firmly believed to have been based entirely on Paraguayan models, which were called *reducciones*. This stereotypical interpretation has prevented investigating further questions, such as 'What was the prototype for the Paraguayan model?' and 'Why did the

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<sup>14</sup> For the existing perspectives of the Franciscans and Jesuits in their cultural attitudes, see Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 376–81 & 467–69.

*réductions* of New France differ from the *reducciones* of Paraguay in some aspects?'

The answers to these questions will be found in a more comprehensive analysis that includes Japan, Paraguay and New France. The argument will take account of fundamental Euro-Christian activity and the institutional arrangements of the Roman Catholic Church. It will also distinguish the Jesuits' creations of new missionary elements from their introduction of basic Christian customs that predated the mission to Japan. A comparison will be made initially between Japanese Christian villages and Paraguayan missionary settlements, and then between the settlements of Paraguay and those of New France. The Jesuit experiment in creating non-European Christian communities in Japan of the previous century presents the concepts and precedents for both the *réductions* and the *reducciones*.

Next, it is important to understand how Amerindians and Japanese practised Christianity, since the above evangelistic approaches, which the missionaries revised to suit them, were the primary determinants for the acceptance and comprehension of the faith. This is the subject of the fifth chapter. The annual Jesuit reports frequently applaud the converts both in Japan and in New France. Without fully investigating the indigenous practice of Christianity, recent historians have merely debated whether native Canadians were socially subordinated by converting to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Yet such perspectives, confined by the degree of missionary success, do not reveal a true picture of the Christian practice by the indigenous people.

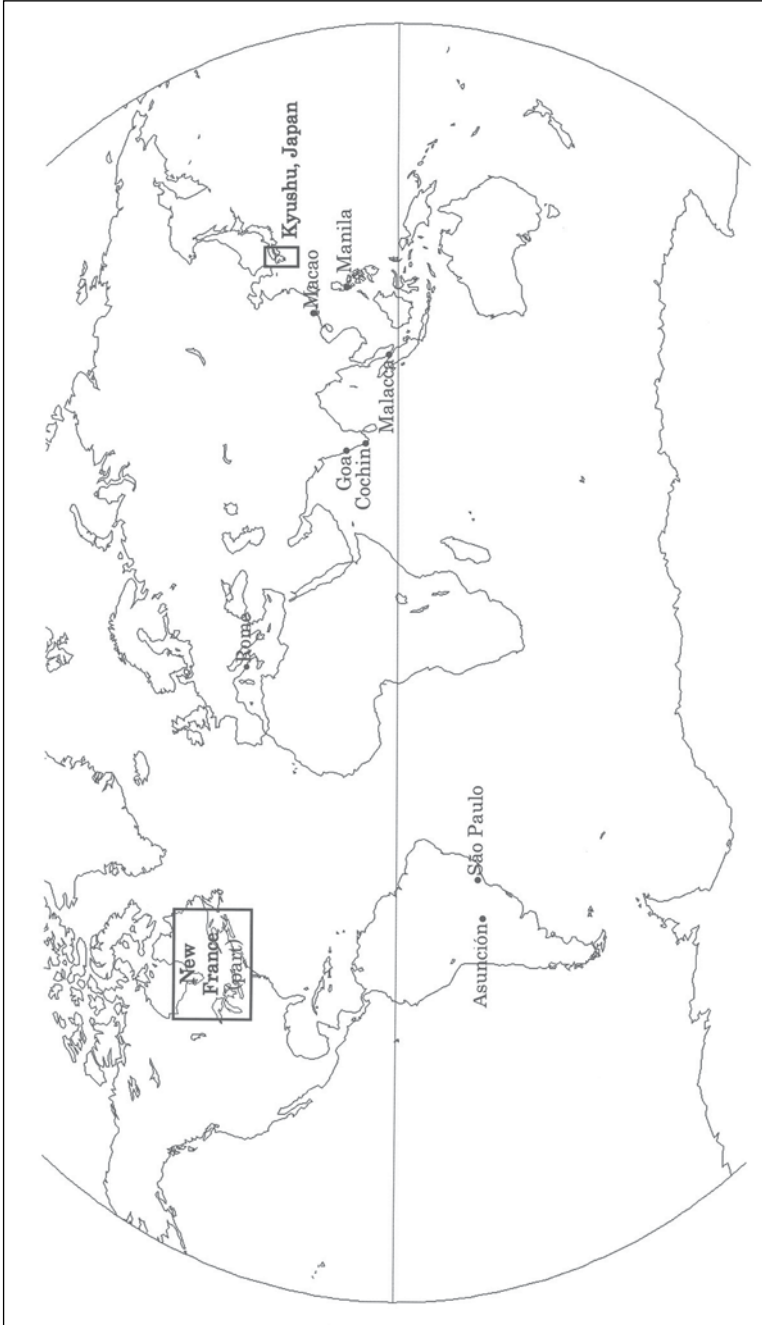
If one examines missionary accounts from the point of view of an historian familiar with both European Christianity and Japanese customs, one gains a far greater insight into the non-European ways of practising the Christian faith, and of the native customs that lived on after conversion. With the Iberian Jesuits' case in mind, a consideration of the practice of Amerindian converts will shed light on neglected aspects of autochthonous customs that were viewed through the missionary lens without any attempt to identify those customs culturally. The converts in New France seemed to have created a new version of Christian practice, retaining most of their native habits in some

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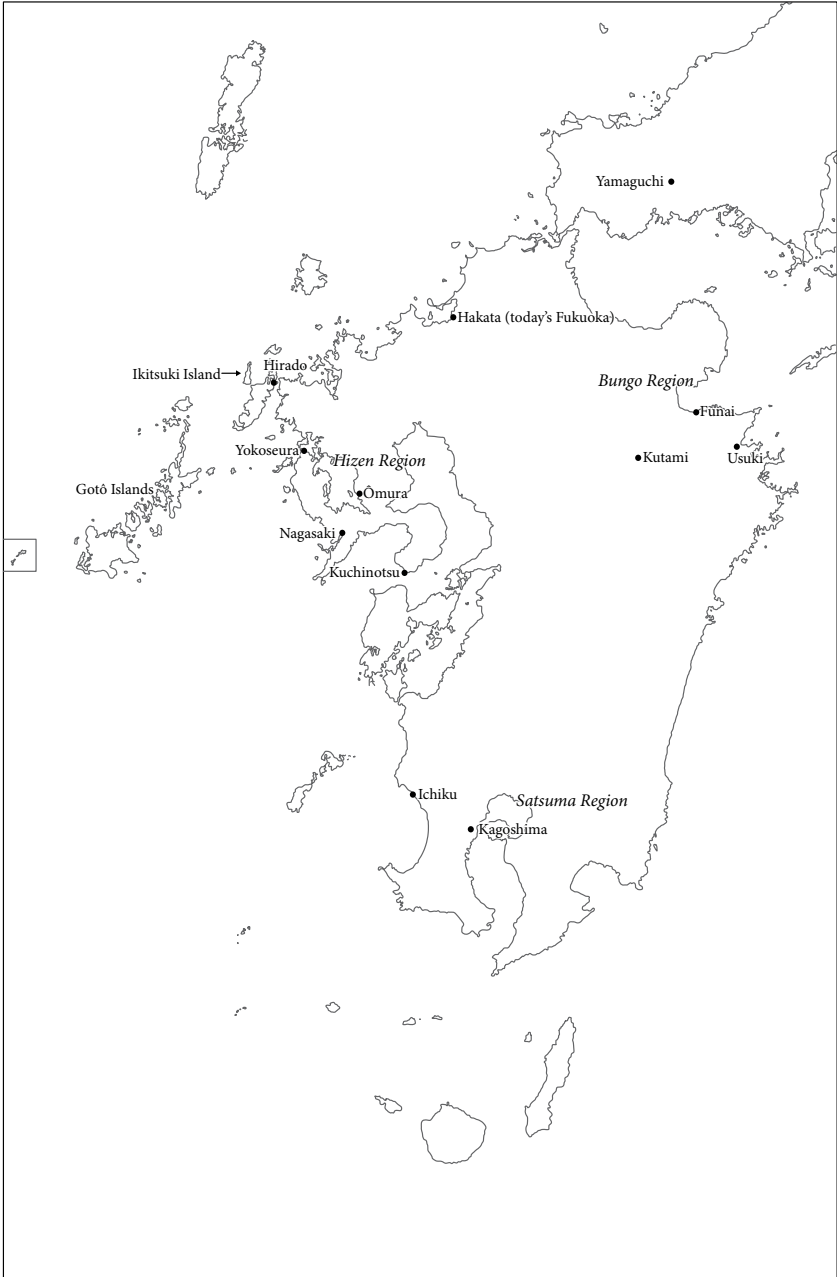
<sup>15</sup> Karen Anderson, *Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991); and Carole Blackburn, *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Mission and Colonialism in North America, 1632–1650* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

form or another, while at the same time being recognised by Jesuits as model Christians.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, with these methodological discussions in mind, a more appropriate interpretation of the French Jesuit mission will be possible. The French mission will be considered within the context of the international influence that originated in the previous century. Also, in order to revise accepted interpretations of Christianisation among the Amerindian populations, missionary acculturation of native neophytes in New France will be compared to the same process among Japanese converts. Accepted interpretations, which have been based solely on a seventeenth-century North American perspective, will be seen to be inappropriate, once these interpretations are placed in an international perspective beginning with Father Xavier's mission to Japan in the sixteenth century. Although there may be more points of view, this comparative discussion in a single monographic study is a first important step towards an international perspective of the French Jesuit mission.



1. World Map



2. Map of Kyushu, Japan



3. Map of New France