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Imagem: Ink, color, gold, gold leaf on paper were the media used for the famous Kanō Naizen's six-paneled painted screen. Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

## Portuguese ambitions vs Japanese tradition: the transformation of the western civilization artifacts into the multifaceted Nanban objects (1543-1615)

Ambições portuguesas versus tradição japonesa: a transformação de artefatos da civilização ocidental em objetos multifacetados Nanban (1543-1615)

Dr. Johannis Tsoumas\*

### Abstract

The article aims at exploring the particularly enchanting – in terms of scientific research – historic area of the Nanban art period in Japan during which a new type of Japanese art emerged reflecting the scopes and intentions of the first European traders / Christian missionaries who arrived in the southern part of the country in the mid sixteenth century. More precisely, it focuses on some of the most characteristic artifacts of the Portuguese daily way of life or religion which played a particularly important role in the imagination, ideology, consciousness and creativity of the locals who seemed to assimilate this new type of practical, aesthetic and religious information by transforming it to a new type of art and craft. But under which conditions were all these happened and what did these new objects mean? Were these objects used by the local communities or were they exported to Europe? What were the social and political, conditions in traditional Japan during this ‘cultural upheaval’ caused by the Portuguese traders and Jesuits? The article aims also at exemplifying questions of this type as the moving and transforming of objects in history is always associated with changes in the cultural physiognomy of societies.

### Keywords

Portuguese traders; Jesuits; Japanese tradition; transformation; Nanban artifacts.

### Resumo

O artigo objetiva explorar a encantadora – em termos de pesquisa científica – área histórica do período artístico Nanban no Japão, durante o qual emergiu um novo tipo de arte japonesa, refletindo escopos e intenções dos primeiros comerciantes europeus / missionários cristãos que chegaram na parte sul do país em meados do século XVI. Mais precisamente, detém-se em alguns dos artefatos mais característicos do modo de vida diário e religioso dos portugueses que desempenharam particularmente um importante papel na imaginação, ideologia, consciência e criatividade dos locais, que pareciam assimilar esse novo tipo de informação prática, estética e religiosa ao transformá-la em um novo tipo de arte e artesanato. Mas sob que condições tudo isso aconteceu e o que significavam esses novos objetos? Eram esses objetos usados pelas comunidades locais ou eram exportados para a Europa? Quais foram as condições sociais e políticas no Japão tradicional durante essa “agitação cultural” causada por comerciantes portugueses e jesuítas? O artigo procura também exemplificar questões desse tipo e como o movimento e a transformação dos objetos na história estão sempre associados com mudanças na fisionomia cultural das sociedades.

### Palavras-chave

Comerciantes portugueses; Jesuítas; tradição japonesa; transformação; artefatos Nanban.

## Introduction

The material, as well as, the ideological nature of the objects, constitutes important elements of their further exploration with regard to their ideological, temporal and geographic transition within certain historical contexts. Objects, especially works of art, but also those of widespread national, cultural, religious or social uses and values, are usually part of the human experience and therefore they are often subjects of study on the cognitive fields that analyze and interpret them (Baker, 2017). At the same time, these objects, and especially the way in which they are able to travel in space and time in the form of trade or cultural exchanges through fair or even unfair ways or means, can affect different social and ethical structures, both through their aesthetics, as well as their functionality, while they are often incorporated into the new data through their partial or complete transformation, are elements that, inter alia, prove not only the strong historical complexity of themselves, but also of their users.

This is the case of objects of different cultural and national identity, the 'encounter' of which not only betrays the perpetual ability of a work of art or of a merely utilitarian object to move in spacetime, but also to be transformed according to the circumstances.

In this case this is fully represented by the mobility, invasion, transformation and eventual capacity of the European religious, military, artistic and everyday objects which through the leading propaganda campaign of the Portuguese traders and missionaries in Japan in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, managed to reveal their primordial "unquiet nature".

Historically, we refer to the time when the fierce Spain and competitive Portugal were trying to divide the then known world into areas of political, religious and economic influence, such as colonialism and trade. However, the initial entry of the Portuguese ships into the southern ports of the country on the island of Tanegashima in 1543 marked the beginning of an important historical period that not only demonstrated the supremacy of the Portuguese traders against the Spaniards in East Asia, but also the contact of the European ideals with a culture of profound social, aesthetic and philosophical values. Both as traders and as Christianity missionaries, the Portuguese initially faced a chaotic situation in the country, which, though, seemed to favor their goals to a large extent: the country was in a civil war (*Sengoku jidai*)<sup>1</sup> and it was difficult for the divided Japanese society to resist easily to the new challenges of the West (Boxer, 1951: 41). At that time, the country was also ruled in terms of military power by the Shogun, a type of military leaders with strong political power, which they used to exercise on behalf – or instead of – the emperor. It was also divided into several military regions among warlords known as *daimyō*, and the Portuguese felt it looked like medieval Europe. However, warlords were directly subordinated to the Shogun and possessed military and economic power, but to a lesser extent. In terms of society stratification, Japan, aside from any regional or temporal variations, had also had a feudal social structure with several class ranks, which included the highly respected warriors, the aristocrats and the Buddhist clergy, followed by the lower classes of artisans, farmers, peasants and finally the out-castes (Deal, 2007: 109).

The apparently ambitious entry of the Portuguese into the country was originally intended to commence trading with the local community, as, apart from the few Chinese commercial goods they brought for sale, they spared a huge volume of products of western origin, including tobacco, which impressed the

native population. The parallel establishment of the coastal city of Nagasaki as the main port to facilitate commercial transactions and several times merchandise exchanges, took place at that period and for decades it was the emblematic port not only of the commercial, but also of the deeply ambivalent cultural relationship between the two peoples. Six years after Japan's first commercial engagement with the Portuguese and the western civilization in general, the first Catholic missionaries arrived, resulting in the creation of first Christian Ministry by the famous Roman Catholic Priest Francis Xavier<sup>2</sup>, at the end of 1549 (Magoc & Bernstein, 2016: 248). Although Spaniard, Xavier soon came in contact with the Portuguese, starting with their own support the Christian proselytism of the Japanese, and therefore, quite soon afterwards, a huge wave of Portuguese traders and Jesuit missionaries began to flood the country, starting from the city of Nagasaki. This unprecedented cultural experience for the surprised Japanese made they call them *Nanban-jin*<sup>3</sup>, namely *The Barbarians of the South* as they all invaded the country from the south. But under the guise that Christians posed a threat to the nation as they seemed to use religion as a weapon for revolts, political and social upheaval in order to gain control of the country, Christianity was banned at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1614 all the missionaries were deported from Japan<sup>4</sup>.

These two new economic, social and cultural challenges to ancient Japanese culture, among other things, were represented by a specific type of objects in multiple ways, trying, as new Trojan horses that travelled from another, distant world to conquer the valuable concepts of harmony, simplicity, philosophical thought, freedom and ritual life that the Japanese had as a lifestyle. The new objects that emerged from the attraction, but also the repulsion of these two cultures, were baptized through the Japanese ethnocentrism as *Nanban*, while many of them were created either by traditional Japanese craftsmen or by Japanese Christian converts. The significance of these items will be commented on and analyzed below.

### **The Portuguese transmissible material culture**

The Portuguese traders brought along with their own culture, which was perhaps the most important form of influence on the Japanese civilization, several bulk products, including well-known and useful metals such as gold, lead, tin, but also raw materials for fabrics such as Chinese silk, European and Indian cotton and wool, as well as rare Chinese porcelain goods<sup>5</sup>. Generally speaking, however, this kind of trade brought important elements of a wide intercultural exchange between the two peoples and which would never happen if there was no such perpetual, for that time, mobility of goods on Portuguese ships that took over four years of travel roundtrip from Portugal to Japan, with extended stopovers in the rich port of Goa in India and many Chinese ports, too (Weston, 2013: 17).

We will not refer to the purely bulk merchandise, which was also intended to be marketed in Japan. On the contrary, we consider that it is important to examine the objects themselves which although were not addressed directly to the main interest of the indigenous people, inspired their curiosity, creating new data in their deeply traditional culture. Not only the local artisans, but also many other craftsmen and manufacturers of weapons, armor, and even fancy dresses, were ecstatic in front of the new, complex and impressive practical and aesthetic objects that had begun to flood the country. However, it was only the local artists who, impressed by the advent of foreigners who bore qualities of so different ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds both in terms of physical characteristics (such as their height, color and

facial features), and acquired ones (such as ships, books, furniture, works of art, writing, weaponry, clothing, habits, the special way of their behavior and speech), produced an important visual, but at the same time, functional work based on this thematography.

In addition to the above, the expansive policy of Catholicism, part of which was the propaganda reproduction of the Western religious art, was another important aesthetic, but mostly, ideological / religious motive for creating an astonishing array of cult objects, of a mainly devotional character. Classical religious objects, even religious pieces of furniture, many of which later acquired a secular character, were replicated by the natives establishing a new aesthetic and religious order in Japan of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Objects of special use

The Portuguese clothing had exotic, unprecedented features in the eyes of the Japanese. Both the colors and the qualities of the fabrics, the sewing and the final design of the clothes, as well as their special features, such as the buttons and button holes, the golden or embroidered lacing, the glossy beads and the tall, imposing collars, were features the Japanese had never encountered before either in their own clothing or in other foreigners' costumes, such as the Chinese. It was not surprising that in the first decades after the arrival of the first Portuguese, the tailors in Nagasaki began to adapt the local costumes according to the 'western way', despite the fact that initially several types of fabrics they used were totally different from those used in Europe.



Fig. 1. Front and back sides of an unusual *jinbaori*, of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Source: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

These new types of clothes which differed significantly from the familiar, traditional *kimonos*, were addressed mainly to the middle and lower classes, and they stood out for their practicality, durability,

intense colors, but also for their whimsical decoration with glittering buttons, golden braids and beaded collars. As warriors constituted a much respected social class in the country, it was inevitable that some of these clothes would be soon transformed into military clothing items that would facilitate their objectives, especially of the high ranked ones, such as Samurais.

So, many of them became, by the time, military clothes called *jinbaori* [fig. 1], that is battle jackets<sup>6</sup>, which were made of various types of fabrics, the dominant of which was the famous red woolen fabric *rasha*, coming from the similar Portuguese *raxa*, and were designed according to the corresponding Portuguese garments (Bogansky, 2013: 63).

The depiction of the costumes was a motive for creation for many other forms of art and craftsmanship. According to Bergeron (2013), one of the many Japanese artists of that period who produced some of the most representative samples of Nanban art, drawing information from perhaps the most striking event of that period, was Kanō Naizen (1570-1616)<sup>7</sup>. His work, titled *Southern Barbarians Come to Trade*, is a large-scale six-paneled screen (*Byōbu*, 屏風) which was also made in a long time between 1570 and 1616 and depicts the first arrival of the Portuguese traders and Christian missionaries in Japan.



Fig. 2. Ink, color, gold, gold leaf on paper were the media used for the famous Kanō Naizen's six-paneled painted screen. Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The typical Japanese landscape, the grandiose ship, but above all the figures of the newly arrived foreigners with their fancy, peculiar costumes, wide belts and strange hats, constituted a new painting theme, unprecedented in the then limited Japanese painting, paving the way for a new thematic unity [fig. 2]. However, it is particularly interesting that Naizen remained closely attached to the traditional Japanese painting techniques which supported the right rendering of the theme, by not diverging from the concepts of color brightness and flatness, the use of sharp outlines and the application of bold brushwork. That is, he emphatically overlooked the newly introduced rules of the Western, Renaissance

painting such as the mathematical perspective in art and the use of other materials beyond the well-known and established ones (Okamoto, 1972: 97). The specialty of art of screens was also associated with the fact that it was a combined type of art at that time, because, although it was an ancient art with specific thematography, it also absorbed and interpreted this new cultural invasion in a miraculous way, singling out the clash of the two cultures, especially during the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573-1600) (Costa, 2010: 6). Through this type of works which had utilitarian value as well as other purely artistic ones, it is easy to understand the importance of the objects, which, in direct connection with their functionality, were the focus of curiosity, admiration or wonder, but also a source of inspiration for the depiction of a number of works of historical significance, not only for their high value techniques, but also for the fact that they were important sources of scientific, historical record which now sheds light on what had been taking place in the country at that time, and especially on the Japanese customs and tradition.

In our view, the clothes and accessories of the new Western visitors were a great challenge for the indigenous artists, not only because there were often objects associated with the senses of exoticism, strangeness and idiosyncrasy, but also with the senses of power and social supremacy. So, it was not at all paradoxical to portray, through the lacquering technique, golden Portuguese figures in their characteristic, weird costumes, which replaced the traditional Japanese patterns and landscapes, on classic Japanese objects such as the famous *netsuke* or *inro* [fig. 3].

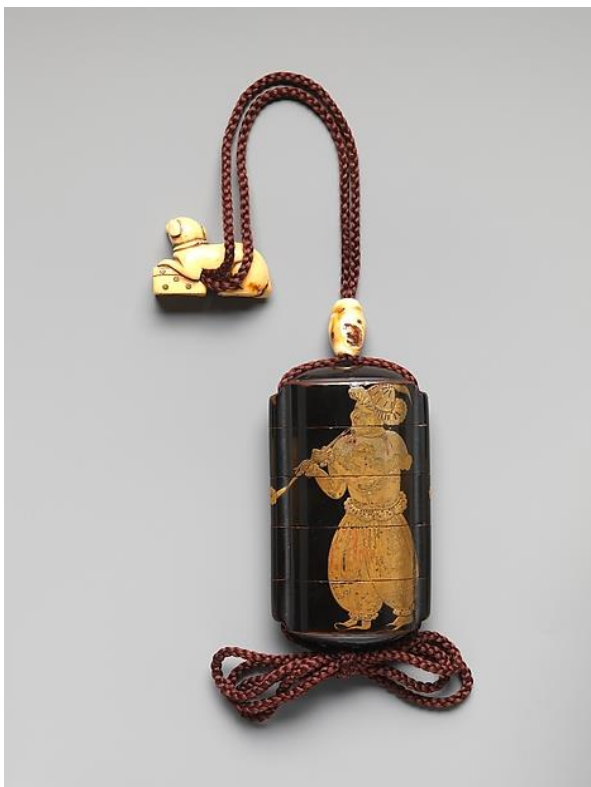


Fig. 3. Inro with gold leaf detail depicting a Portuguese trader playing a musical wind instrument, early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

*Inros* were small-sized containers made of unusual materials such as ivory, rhinoceros horn, hippopotamus tooth but also paper, wood, clay or porcelain, with a long silk cord, worn suspended from the waist. They were used by the Japanese for the storing of their personal items such as money, seals, medicines or tobacco as their traditional garments, such as kimonos or kosodes, had no pockets. Like many other forms of Japanese decorative arts, these artefacts reflected, apart from the artistic self-expression of the Japanese within the narrow framework of traditional customs and law, the social fluctuations of their era (Bushell, 1981: 25). It was not strange that they began to portray in their own way the new sweeping effects that Japanese society had on the invasion of the Portuguese traders and missionaries through their distinctive, flamboyant costumes with the balloon type trousers or the high, stiff collars. However, not long before the beginning of the Edo period they started becoming just decorative accessories and were addressed mainly to the middle and high classes people such as the Samurais, the rich merchants and the governmental rulers or to anyone who could afford their high price, keeping much of their westernized decoration style.

Special items such as leather water flasks, but mainly flasks in lacquered wood for gun-powder (*kayaku-ire*) also featured all the artistic qualities of the Japanese tradition, although their importance was based solely on their usability. In a large part of them, we observe that the traditional theme of their decoration both on their front and back sides had been replaced by a number of Portuguese figures, in their daily, extravagant clothes and accessories, in rather exaggerated poses [fig. 4]. From a technical point of view, we also see that their painted parts were independent of their main bodies, as they consisted of two flat lacquered panels which were affixed to each side of the body, and for the final finish, they were rounded to the sides and bottom. This type of objects also included copper, which was used to make the spout and the side pin of each item.



Fig. 4. Characteristic flask for gun powder depicting, in a rather funny way, a Portuguese merchant, late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Source: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

However, it would be inconceivable to believe that the intentions of local artists and manufacturers of items such as these flasks were independent of the political and social conditions of the era, which, alongside the new cultural and commercial invasion of the West, was also haunted by a fierce, as already mentioned, civil war. These items, along with the bullet containers, the fuses, the ammunition pouches and several musket balls, would accompany the warfare weapons imported from China<sup>8</sup> and which had already been known to the locals long before the arrival of the first Portuguese in the country. Within the context of their contact with Western culture, the Japanese also experienced the Western war technology and techniques, which were unknown until then in the country and which, however, proved to be particularly useful at the time (Ogawa, 2009: 280). The advantages of the Western firearms compared to the Chinese ones of outdated technology, were numerous: they were light, easy to carry and to use as they had a rather simple matchlock firing mechanism, thus they could be easily copied and manufactured on large quantities by the traditional swordsmiths and metalsmiths. As early as in the 1560s, the famous *arquebus*<sup>9</sup> rifles, also known as *tanegashima*<sup>10</sup>, were massively used to violent and bloody battles, and by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Japan could boast that it had managed to hold the largest number of weapons from any other country in the world (Perrin, 1979: 8). At the same time, the introduction of this new type of weapon was a catalytic, innovative step towards the westernization of Japanese culture in general, as it greatly displaced the construction and use of traditional war swords. The *tanegashima* firearms style was simple and austere, and many types of them, like other forms of armor, were usually decorated with Christian motifs and symbols to protect soldiers during the battle. Apart from the weapons, the Japanese, enchanted by the originality and the exoticism of the Portuguese unusual hats, created a number of metallic helmets, which were their faithful reproductions, introducing in this way a new aesthetic and functional style in their traditional wartime history.

### Objects of religion and trade

The arrival of the famous St. Francis Xavier in Japan in 1549 was associated with the customary practice of the Jesuits to carry objects directly contracted with their mission, which they used to give to or exchange as gifts with the natives, while at the same time, they succeeded in bringing them into Christianity in an easy and proficient way. Among these objects there were small or large icons depicting the Christ or the Virgin, shrines and altars, as well as metal and wooden objects in the cross symbol, expensive religious jewels and furniture among which there was a vast series of mainly small-sized lecterns. Although the number of these items was limited, they were largely acceptable for not only their excellent artistic quality, but also their new religious symbolism, as the Japanese people, according to Xavier's own testimony, were open to the foreigners and particularly susceptible to the idea of innovation since they "were people of very good manners, good in general and not malicious; men of honor to marvel and prize honor above all else in the world" (Boxer, 1951: 37). Besides, in spite of the considerable efforts of the Christians to belittle and finally abrogate the domestic religion which was Buddhism, the Japanese always found similarities between these two religions. And it was these similarities that created the favorable conditions needed both to spread Christianity and to consider the objects that were contracted with it as sacred (Higashibaba, 2001: xx).

Thirty-two years after the introduction of Christianity into the country, the second mission of the Jesuits with many Portuguese, but also Italian and Flemish missionaries that arrived in Japan brought a larger

number of Christian sacred objects most of which were of much larger sizes. Many of these objects were placed in about 200 churches that had already begun to be built in areas such as Hizen, Kinki and Bungo, as the number of converts had already reached 150,000 in 1581 (Okamoto, 1972: 96).

However, the mass production of most of these religious paintings introduced in the country by indigenous painters was of great importance, as this constituted the proof that Christianity, especially in the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, had already begun to establish itself as a powerful religion in the country. Already, many of the young converts who were students at the special Jesuits religious schools in areas such as Azuchi, Funai and Uzuki, were delighted to receive their training in the Western way of painting<sup>11</sup> and managed to produce faithful copies of Western works, thus contributing to create conditions appropriate for the propagation of Christianity. Many of these works of art, mainly portable altars or shrines for churches or individuals, which were commissioned by the Jesuits themselves because of their high cost were made well enough to be sent and presented to the royal palace in Madrid. However, they were considered imperfect as sacred, religious works and this is why their number for export was limited. In general, though, in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the definitive ban on Christianity in the country, which coincided with the emergence of other competitive to the Portuguese European traders, such as the Dutch and the English who were not interested in converting the Japanese people to the Protestant doctrine, the production of these objects decreased dramatically (Oliveira e Costa, 2003: 54).

Although today the number of these artifacts is extremely small and few of them can be found in the Kyoto and Kobe Museums in Japan, but also in some museums of countries such as Portugal and the United States, it would be interesting to focus our attention on specific art samples of that period, in our attempt to understand their technical peculiarities, but also their cultural value.

The portable shrines, or else *seigan*<sup>12</sup>, used to be made mainly by anonymous Japanese converts. Most of them were commissioned by the Portuguese Jesuits during the Momoyama period and constituted a typical attempt of the converts to reproduce the idea of the typical Catholic, portable triptych which had already been an important form of religious art in the West since the late medieval times, and became particularly popular in the Renaissance (Gombrich, 1998: 236).

In the shrine of our interest, one can observe the artist's attempt to faithfully represent the Western-style characteristics of the Italian and Spanish Renaissance and Baroque painting, to the extent that this is permissible by his own profound Asian culture [fig. 5]. This Europeanizing painting depicting the Virgin Mary who prays, the Sacred Infant Jesus Himself, St. Joseph attending carefully, but also the infant St. John the Baptist who holds a cross wrapped with an inscribed ribbon, in dark background, have much in common with the religious artifacts of this kind imported from the Vatican. This sacred scene seems to be based on a strongly symbolic inscription in *Latin Egodormio et Cor Mev. Vi-gi-lat (I sleep and my heart wakes)*, emphasizing even more on the powerful significance of Catholicism<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, the fineness of the figures, especially in their upper limbs, their particularly pale skin color, the shape of their eyelids and the shallow look of St. John the Baptist, reveal severe influences from the Japanese traditional art. Of particular interest is the rectangular case in the center of which the painting

composition is arranged. Its magnificent, almost architectural curved top with the gilded details is marvelously combined with the copper hinges that connect the two folding doors of the triptych with the central part. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the work is the decoration of these two doors, both on the inside and on the outside, with the lacquering techniques of *hiramakie* and *harigaki*<sup>14</sup>, creating patterns of different types of flowers in gold and silver (Watt & Ford, 1991: 377). This in itself is an impressive innovation of Nanban shrines, as the Western paintings of the typical religious triptychs of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods are replaced by a simple decorative application which is nevertheless a classic example of the traditional lacquering Japanese art. It is also an important indication of the unbreakable bonds of the Japanese with their history and culture despite the new religious, social, ideological, economic and aesthetic challenges of that time.



Fig. 5. Portable Christian shrine, late 16<sup>th</sup> century. Source: <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/an-important-portable-christian-shrine-seigan-commissioned-5894139-details.aspx>

Lacquering was already used in different versions centuries ago and constituted one of the most prestigious and great professions in Japan executed by specialized artisans who were united in also specifically established guilds called *Nakama*<sup>15</sup> (Pekarik, 1980: 12). It was one of the major decoration techniques for the making of a vast and impressive series of Nanban furniture [fig. 6], many pieces of which were made for religious purposes. Many of these objects were commissioned by the Jesuits, and they started being produced in masses mainly during the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while some types of them were still produced even after the final ban of Christianity in Japan in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,

during the Edo period. In terms of making, these newly-made objects, including purely religious furniture such as sacred chests, tables and seats, lecterns in different types and sizes, iconostasis, caskets and large boxes, but also coffers for the preservation of holy relics and heirlooms, seemed to be directly influenced by the then modern European style Baroque furniture, particularly that of Portugal and Spain. The impressive bulky trunks, heavily decorated with metal details, the domed coffers influenced by the Mauritanian architecture and particularly the famous *vargueños* or *escritorios*, the imposing writing desks made of carved wood, and heavily decorated with leather or velvet surfaces as well as with coarse studs, were the main types of Nanban furniture design (Perivoliotou, 2004: 129).



Fig. 6. A characteristic Nanban style secular cabinet drawer, mid Moyomama period. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The “explosive” combination of traditional Japanese lacquering technique, which in many cases had been successfully combined with shell inlays and gilt copper details, with the European Baroque resulted in the creation of objects of unprecedented aesthetic value, despite their excessive ornamentation. Thus, the love of the Portuguese for luxury items of high value and especially their attraction for the exotic, particularly durable but rare in the West lacquering technique, soon rendered this type of products goods of high commercial value. The furniture of this kind turned out to be the main objects of Nanban art that were heavily commercialized, unlike the others that were principally used by the indigenous Japanese population. Thus, as they were originally intended for domestic religious use, they were soon became objects of desire for the Western markets: their commercial exploitation would be proved as a source of incredibly high profit for their traders, whereas it would satisfy, at the same time, the thirst of the wealthy

and bourgeois customers of Europe for high-class Asian art objects, adapted to the Western ideology and aesthetics. For this reason, the conditions under which they began to be produced massively with the main purpose of being exported to the West, and especially to the royal courts of Portugal, Spain and Austria, were formed shortly, as many of them constituted diplomatic gifts of the Spaniards to the Habsburg rulers. Many of these, however, continued to be religious items as after they were bought they were granted to several European monasteries, abbeys and churches where they were used as reliquaries or sacristies (Dunn, 2008).

A characteristic secular piece of furniture of that period is a portable cabinet of drawers with a drop front for keeping valuable objects and documents, based on the idea of the Spanish *vargueño*. In spite of its apparent Spanish Baroque structure, we can see that its classic details of heavy leather or velvet decoration with the support of strong polished nails is replaced with a rather intense and complexive floral decorative pattern of birds and Japanese flowers such as cherry tree and wisteria branches and camellia flowers. Its geometrically stylized borders on its sides seem to enhance even more the central floral theme, whereas the well made arch detail around the central drawer lock is still reminiscent of the European architecture of the time. The mother-of-pearl inlays on a black urushi<sup>16</sup> lacquer background is also another characteristic feature of this type of furniture, making the symmetrically arranged drawers and the inside part of its cover stand out from the whole object. Finally, its bronze details on its four corners as well as its delicate bronze handles give a final touch of both durability and luxury to this unique piece of Nanban art.

### **Interpreting the behavioral nature of the objects**

According to the above and looking at the history of objects mobility in time and space, we can focus on specific forms of their behavior, in relation to their destination, usability, predisposition to moving to a certain place and travelling to distant regions promoting transregional exchange or better to getting adapted to the needs defined by events of specific historical periods or even to be transformed through them. For the era of our interest we can see that trade routes by sea and by land enhanced the promotion of cultural exchange, as the infrastructure for the mobility of different makers, materials, techniques, ideas, technologies and fashion of the objects made it particularly feasible. At the same time, the meaning of communication through them seemed to play an extremely important role in their mobility, as it facilitated greatly their dialogue with populations of a completely different social, religious and political background and thus made their accepting and transforming easier. In this way the life history of these objects was meticulously enriched with new national, social and religious elements making them behave in a totally different manner from their initial scope, in connection with the people they were addressed to and the place they arrived in (Hahn & Weiss, 2013: 5). The communication character of the Portuguese artifacts of everyday use had these particular features since the cultural dialogue developed between them and the locals created new needs for their use, even a change of their own identity, as happened in the case of clothes and fabrics.

Of course, it is important to state that the behavior of Western objects was totally stripped of any constitutive myth of the Western civilization that would trigger the Japanese people's imagination and consequently direct their opinions and decisions, simply because they were totally unaware of the Western culture until then. And it was not simply the broad contrast of the two cultures, but mainly the

evolutionary instinct of the Japanese who identified in the way of behavior of the daily use objects, even in the firearms themselves, the origins of the constitutive features of Western civilization which should be combined with their own in order to produce fruitful results in the form of brand new objects (Thomas, 1991:10). However, the behavior of the Western artifacts was in many cases inextricably woven with not only their functionality itself, but also with the conditions they functioned in and the people they were used by. This is why in many cases all these were so inseparable, that could be transformed only into images (figures, objects, scenes), which had such a strong cultural physiognomy that would replace primordial patterns or compositions in many types of traditional arts such as paintings, screens, inros, flasks etc. Both ways, Nanban art and craft objects would facilitate the evolution narrative of the Japanese material culture, which, at the time, was trying to invent its own new language in order to enter a new political, national and religious era of its age-old history.

On the other hand, objects of religious and devotional value that arrived in Japan were of a different behavioral nature as they had a specific expediency. This was not because of their original nature, that is, their creation as sacred objects / symbols of Christianity that were made to meet the religious needs of the faithful of the West, but because of their use as key-objects of a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign of proselytizing peoples and tribes of mainly the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Asia and Latin America. Therefore, their mobility, but also their own making were strongly associated with this expediency, as many of them were exclusively made in order to travel in places where Christianity was to be propagated. This means that they were made to behave in a rather intentional and pretentious way and, thus, they were translocated on purpose. Their transformation in the form of reproduction into sacred, local objects was only a part of this propaganda as they started to constitute a kind of indigenous religious art, non recognizable abroad though, that would help Christianity be more easily transplanted in the country, as Japanese were a homogenous and receptive people, despite the social and political upheavals they were experiencing at the time (Mullins, 1998: 5). The fact that many of these objects 'broke the protocol' of their sacred purpose and became secular objects, as is the case of Nanban furniture, was something expected. As their sacred nature was not strong enough to secure their Christian character, they soon became trade goods that would serve the Western courts needs and customs both as expensive private artifacts and exchange or diplomatic gifts.

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## Notas

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<sup>1</sup> The *Sengoku jidai*, (戦国時代) 'Age of Warring States' is an important period in the history of Japan, during which intense social unrest, which lasted for a very long time (1467-1603), has been observed because of both the prolonged political instability and the repeated civil warfare. Coloquei vírgulas aqui, mas não aparece claramente minha interferencia

<sup>2</sup> Francis Xavier, who sought religious converts throughout Asia during the 1500s, is now considered the patron saint of missionaries and has been one of the most important founders of the Jesuit Society, a Roman Catholic order of religious men. After many missions in India, Malaysia and China, his interest focused on a region of East Asia that had only been discovered a few years before: Japan.

Knowing that this people had a deep culture and philosophy in their culture, unlike the uneducated fishermen and wild tribes he had already met, he decided to visit Japan, opening, thus, the great chapter of its christianizing.

<sup>3</sup> The origin of the word is Chinese (*Nanman*) and initially referred to people who came from Southeast Asia. The Japanese borrowed it and adapted it to their own historical / social conditions, initially, when they wanted to refer to the Portuguese traders, and later to all Europeans.

<sup>4</sup> After many and violent revolutionary attempts, those of the natives who remained Catholic were forced to be socially marginalized, while many of the Jesuits remained illegally in the country under the protection of the Portuguese crown.

<sup>5</sup> The Japanese were deprived of the Chinese goods they were fond of as they were prohibited by the Chinese Emperor himself to enter Japan as a punishment for the many and devastating raids of Japanese pirates (*Woku*) on Chinese merchant ships and harbors. The Portuguese intermediary position therefore favored the Japanese commercial interests of that period.

<sup>6</sup> They were mainly worn over the armor and they were meant to keep the warrior protected from cold.

<sup>7</sup> The Kanō School, in which this painter belongs, is one of the most important and dominant schools of traditional painting in Japan as it had already begun to show samples of its idiosyncratic style since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, while its decline did not appear before the end of the Edo period, that is in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Kanō family, which some of the most important artists of the country of the next generation came from, was responsible for its creation and further development.

<sup>8</sup> Usually small and effective, but heavy iron cannons called *Teppō*.

<sup>9</sup> Although it was in itself a special type of firearm, it constituted a military term used to describe all types of weapons introduced to Japan at that time, including calivers and muskets.

<sup>10</sup> This name was given to the new Japanese firearms mainly because the Portuguese-made guns were first introduced into the country through the Tanegashima island.

<sup>11</sup> Many of these artists were not only specialized in the painting techniques and the materials of the West, but also in the ocooperplate engraving technique which soon became particularly popular among the artists.

<sup>12</sup> A kind of vow in Zen Buddhism.

<sup>13</sup> This constitutes an extract from the Solomon's Old Testament Song chapter 5, verse 2, in the Vulgate Latin version.

<sup>14</sup> Both belong to the traditional Japanese lacquering technique widely known as *maki-e* which was particularly popular in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the Edo period and was applied mainly on household objects for the rich. Its main characteristic was the use of sprinkled gold, brass, copper and silver powders in combination with fine brushes of various sizes used for laying them and drawing delicate lines.

<sup>15</sup> This type of guilds was quite similar to the European guilds of the time and were made in order to bind together the independent artisans and also protect them from any type of unfair competition. In general they helped the lacquering craftsmen not only to improve their techniques, but also to handle successfully the 17<sup>th</sup> century flood of commissions.

<sup>16</sup> *Urushi* is a kind of strong, durable lacquer which was often used to describe the whole Japanese lacquerware itself. Some people say the origin of this word derives from two other Japanese words: '*uruwashii*', which means 'beautiful', and '*uruosu*', which means 'to moisten' because of the special technique used for its making. It was applied with a brush to objects already formed, usually out of wood or bamboo, but also out of paper or leather.

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