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NAGASAKI

An European artistic city in early modern Japan

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In 1569 Gaspar Vilela was invited by one of Ômura Sumitada's Christian vassals to visit him in a fishing village located on the coast of Hizen. After converting the lord's retainers and burning the Buddhist temple, Vilela built a Christian church under the invocation of "Todos os Santos" (All Saints). This temple was erected near Bernardo Nagasaki Jinzaemon Sumikage's residence, whose castle was set upon a promontory on the foot of which laid Nagasaki (literal translation of "long cape")¹.

If by this time the Great Ship from Macao was frequenting the nearby harbours of Shiki and Fukuda, it seems plausible that since the late 1560's Nagasaki was already thought as a commercial centre by the Portuguese due to local political instability.

Nagasaki's foundation dates from 1571, the exact year in which the Great Ship under the Captain-Major Tristão Vaz da Veiga sailed there for the first time. In the Spring 1571 the land granted to the missionaries upon request from Cosme de Torres, was divided into six quarters, having the plots of ground been distributed among Ômura's vassals and banished Christians from other regions. The quick growth of both its population and commercial activity can be realised if we take into account that by 1579 the place had already 400 houses and some Portuguese settled there married with native women.

From the urbanistic point of view, and unlike any other Japanese town or village whose main feature even today consists on its localisation in a plane ground and a chess-like planning, Nagasaki follows the characteristics of the Portuguese cities and settlements, spreading through the irregular topography of the hills almost in a spontaneously way. If we compare the view of 16th cen-

1 C. R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650*, Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1993. About Nagasaki and its foundation, see particularly Diego Pacheco S. J., *A Fundação do Porto de Nagasaki e a sua cedência à Sociedade de Jesus*, Macao, Centro de Estudos Marítimos de Macau, 1989, and Carlos Pacheco Moura, "Nagasaki, Cidade Portuguesa no Japão", in *Studia*, nº 26, April 1969, Lisbon, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos.

ture Lisbon included in George Braun and Franz Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, a six volume collectanea of world city views, with the painting depicting an aerial view of Nagasaki dating from the middle of the 17th century, one can clearly see its similarities and general likeness.

This chart of the port and city of Nagasaki refers to Gonçalo Siqueira de Sousa's arrival as ambassador of the king of Portugal in 1647 in order to re-establish commercial relations between Portugal and Japan, as well as to give the account of Portugal's independence and King João IV acclamation. Along with Portuguese galleons, we can clearly see three Dutch vessels signalling the *komojin*'s, or "red hair men", presence².

However, and as Diego Pacheco (Yuuki) points out, one must make a distinction between what happened in 1570 and what took place in 1580, the year of Nagasaki's cession to the Society of Jesus, whose original document translation was sent to Rome on the 9th of June. According to this document sent by Alessandro Valignano, who as the official representative of the Society negotiated the matter with Ômura Sumitada, the sovereignty of the land remained Ômura's privilege. That is why the Portuguese would pay him an annual due, part of which was to be spent on the priests' maintenance, and the other in the city's military fortification and in the feudal Christian lords. However, this situation would not last for long, since in 1586 Nagasaki was invaded by the Shimazu Yoshihisa military forces, becoming directly dependent on the central power in 1587, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi turned it into an imperial city.

Nevertheless, these political vicissitudes did not interfere with the city's development and growth, since it had about 5,000 inhabitants in 1590 and circa 15,000 in 1600, a number that triplicated only in a ten year's span. More important yet, it remained as the main basis of the Jesuit enterprise in Japan, the Christian centre of the territory³.

The association and dependence of Japan mission in general and Nagasaki's in particular with the Black Ship is not only well known, as it was a question discussed and often referred to in coeval Jesuit accounts and writings.

A visual testimony of this "partnership" can be observed in the so called *Namban Byobu*, that first appeared in the early 1590's, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi ordered the construction of Nagoya's castle and its decoration with

2 See *Art Namban. Les Portugais au Japon* (exhibition catalogue), Brussels, Europalia 89, cat. 21. About Nagasaki's urbanism see Armando Martins Janeira, *O Impacto Português sobre a Civilização Japonesa*, 2nd ed., Lisbon, *Publicações Dom Quixote*, 1988, pp.181-185.

3 See João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *Portugal e O Japão. O Século Namban*, Lisbon, *Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda*, 1993, pp. 39-43 and "Japão", in *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, vol. 1, tomo II – *De Macau À Periferia*, Lisbon, *Fundação Oriente*, 2000. See also Armando Martins Janeira, *op.cit.*

paintings made by artists of the Kano School, namely Kano Mitsunobu (1560-1605). In 1593, when this major construction was finished and these painters were on their way back to Kyoto, they visited Nagasaki. There, they saw and draw the Portuguese and all that was associated with the *nanbanjin*, that is, the commercial life of the city as well as its Christian backgrounds. According to Tadao Takamizawa, it was within this historical frame that the idea of making folding screens depicting the Europeans did occur. The most ancient examples date back to 1593-1605, and were probably made by request of wealthy merchants living in the outskirts of Kyoto. Based on the sketches and drawings made by Kano school artists in Nagasaki, these works must have belonged to rich and well-to-do merchants, and not only or largely to feudal lords of Kyûshû and southern Honshû (*daimyô*)⁴.



- Map of the city and harbour of Nagasaki
- Japan, 17th century
- 166x240 cm
- Lisbon, Museu da Marinha, MB-80-84
- Photo: Museu da Marinha

Echoing the impressions caused by the Portuguese settlement in Nagasaki and the hectic life of its port, the *byobu* whose pictorial compositions were influenced by Mitsunobu's original scheme gave rise to further artistic accomplishments, such as the Kano Domi school and Tosa school *namban* screens. According to Tadao Takamizawa, the second school works were illustrated by Kano Naizen (1570-1616), whereas a third school had Kano Sanraku (1559-1635) as its prominent figure. Finally, a fourth and fifth groups of screens painted between circa 1661-1673 and 1673-1687, respectively, differ from all the rest not only in artistic quality, but mainly because they were produced by local artisans or artists who had never seen the Portuguese.

⁴ See Tadao Takamizawa, "Biombos Namban", in *Arte Namban* (exhibition catalogue), Lisbon, *Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian*, 1981. See also Yoshitomo Okamoto, *The Namban Art of Japan*, New York/Tokyo, Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1972, specially chapter 5, "Namban Art in the Momoyama Period".

- Namban folding screen (pair)
- Kano Naizen
- Japan, 1603-1610
- 178x366 cm
- Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 1640/1641 Mov.
- Photo: DDF (Francisco Matias)



Kano Naizen's workshop *namban* folding screens belonging to the collections of Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga⁵, Lisbon, are a vivid pictorial testimony of the contacts established between the Portuguese and the Japanese during the Momoyama period (1573-1603) and early Edo period. Bearing Kano Naizen's seal, this work dates from the beginning of the 17th century, probably 1603-1610, and as all other *namban* screen paintings of Nagasaki's harbour, it was executed in the *yamato-e* style, emphasising the detail representation and a careful composition arrangement. The subject depicted is related, as one could expect, to the presence of the great ship (*nao de trato*) in Nagasaki. However, and most curiously, we can observe on the left *byobu* the departure of the *kurofune* (the black ship to which the Japanese texts refer to)

⁵ See Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, *Biombos Namban*, 2nd ed., Lisbon, Instituto Português do Património Cultural, 1998, particularly pp. 15 to 18. See also Okamoto, *op.cit.*, p.127-128.

from a foreign port, presumably Goa, a city whose constructions and architecture the Japanese artists imagined to be in the Chinese style. However, the presence of some significant details such as the cross placed on the top of the main building, can induce us to think that the painter wanted to stress its Portuguese, thus Christian, possession. A most interesting feature has to do with the presence of two elephants, a feature that Maria Helena Mendes Pinto⁶ relates the arrival in Japan of the elephant presented by Philip II of Spain (I of Portugal), an event that occurred in 1596.

On the right screen, the ship has just arrived in Nagasaki. The vessel, the unloading of the merchandise and the procession of the *nanbanjin* captures our attention. A cortege of both men and some exotic animals is lead by the captain, and just as it happens in the first screen, Europeans' physical appearance is once more stressed, namely their colourful clothing: its different and uncommon shaped hats, capes, frilled ruffs and baggy trousers (*bombachas*), used particularly in the East due to the hot climate and insects' beaten.

Interestingly, not only Jesuits, but also Dominicans, Augustines and Franciscans mark their presence along with captains, merchants and sailors. The image of Nagasaki as a cosmopolite Christian city is the one that emerges not only in six-fold *namban* screens, but also in other astonishing *byobu*, both in Portuguese and foreign collections, namely Japanese ones.

* * *

In Japan, the exotic taste phenomenon centred on the Portuguese appears in a most evident form just in the 1590's, having had as another major turning point the famous embassy sent to Europe in 1582⁷. Not surprisingly, on the luggage was a set of screens painted by Kano Eitoku that were to be given as a gift of Valignano to the Pope.

This famous embassy of four young Japanese who had studied in Arima's Seminar, was sent to Europe by the three *daimyô* of Kyushu – Ôtomo Sorin (Bungo), Arima Harunobu (Arima) and Ômura Sumitada (Ômura). Once there, in a journey that took them from Lisbon to Rome, they were accompanied by Jesuits, among whom Father Diogo de Mesquita, who would become the principal (*reitor*) of St. Paul's College in Nagasaki, and a key-figure of the *Nagasaki Bunka*, that is, Nagasaki culture⁸.

⁶ See Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, *op.cit.*, p.16.

⁷ See Chantal Kozyreff, "Exotisme et occidentalisme. Un certain regard sur l'Europe", in *De Facto – Magazine de l'Art et d'Archéologie*, No. 3, September 1991, pp. 84-92.

⁸ See Diego Yuuki S.J., *Bento Fernandes, Japão 1579-1633. De Borba, no Alto Alentejo, à colina Nishizaka em Nagasaki. Biografia e Cartas do Pe. Bento Fernandes S.J.*, Macao, Comissão Territorial de Macau para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1987. See also Matsuda Kiichi, "Influencia de los Portugueses en la Cultura Japonesa de los Siglos XVI y XVII", *Separata do Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, Lisbon, July-December 1960.

Taking as a reference Duarte de Sande's *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium*, printed in Macao in 1590, we know that some of the gifts offered to the four Japanese included a printing machine, maps and charts, engravings and books, namely the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius, and Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*. Some paintings are also reported, as for example two portraits, one by Alessandro Allori and other by Vincenzo Gonzaga⁹.

When the embassy arrived in Nagasaki together with Alessandro Valignano in 1590, another important figure was already living in Japan since 1583: Giovanni Nicolao or Niccolò (c. 1558-1626), an Italian Jesuit talented painter and an unavoidable figure of the Japanese missionary artistic context. In 1583, one year after the embassy's departure and the year Nicolao arrived in Nagasaki, can be inscribed within the period during which the Jesuits' missionary action developed by Valignano was being carried on in a most effective way. Artistically, to the intentional import of western-style paintings and artists (Nicolao), an enormous investment towards education was being made by the Society. The foundation of educational institutions, which included a noviciate in Usuki, two Seminars in Arima and St. Paul's College in Funai (Ôita), were later to be reunited and settled in Nagasaki.

The reason why Giovanni Nicolao was called for the Japanese mission had to do exclusively with his artistic gifts. In August 1582, when he met Alessandro Valignano in Macao on his way to Japan, Giovanni painted a map of Italy and a "Salvatore Mundi", his first recorded paintings. As soon as he arrived Nagasaki in July 1583, he was sent to Bungo province, maybe because some group of Japanese artists were already settled there doing European-like paintings.

If the Jesuits' painting school was established in 1583 or in 1590 remains a discussed matter, it is certain that during this year it was already functioning in Katsusa. Its course was a turbulent one, marked by its constant itinerancy, until 1602, the year the school settled in Nagasaki¹⁰.

9 See Duarte de Sande, S. J., *Diálogo sobre a Missão dos Embaixadores Japoneses à Cúria Romana*, Macao, Fundação Oriente/Comissão Territorial de Macau para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1997. See also *La Première Ambassade du Japon en Europe 1582-1592. Première Partie. Le Traité du Père Frois (texte portugais)*, coord. by J. A. Abranches Pinto, Okamoto Yoshitomo, Henri Bernard S.J., Tokyo, Sophia University, 1942. About the oil paintings, see *Japan's Golden Age Momoyama* (exhibition catalogue), New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1996.

10 About Niccolò see especially Okamoto, *op.cit.* About the painting school, see Grace Vlam, *Western-style Secular Painting in Momoyama Japan*, doctoral thesis, (photocopied text), pp. 13-16 and appendix A, pp. 252 a 258 dedicated to Niccolò. Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America 1542-1773*, Toronto/Buffalo/London, University of Toronto Press, 1999, pp.53 onwards.

The Jesuits' painting school, that from 1614, the year of the *bakufu* anti-Christian edit, onwards was settled in Macao until Giovanni's death, was conceived as a complement to the Seminar's humanistic education and was part of the Society's study programme.

It was precisely within this religious and cultural context that a complex whole of artistic objects made their appearance. Inscribed under the designation of "Christian art" (*kirishitan*) and *namban* art, emerged an absolutely astonishing assemblage of objects, mainly paintings, both by their artistic and technical quality, as by their various meanings. Religious and devout images, along with western-style folding screens depicting world maps, peoples and cities of the world, mounted knights, the Battle of Lepanto, western costumes, echo this past. That is the case of the *namban* oratory depicting the "Rest during the flight to Egypt", a painting that was probably executed by one of Giovanni Nicolao's pupils taking as model European prototypes.



- Oratory Painting
- Japan, 16th century
- 28,7x22x4 cm
- Oporto, Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, 1204
- Photo: DDF (José Pessoa)

According to Father Fernão Guerreiro in a written record dated 1601: “[...] in this town [Nagasaki] there are students interested in painting and who, in the context of a Seminar, live in a house lead by two of us, one of whom has come from Rome some years ago, being now a priest and makes disciples in that art in such a manner that nowadays the churches in Japan are decorated with such rich and excellent altarpieces that one can compare them to the ones made in Europe [...]”¹¹.

In her doctoral thesis, Grace Vlam¹² includes a list of known Christian artists, having focused her research mainly on Jesuit and Japanese documents. For the purpose of this text, I shall only refer the ones whose pathcrossed Nagasaki. In a total of thirteen painters listed, only a few did not pass through the city and most of them had to run away after 1614, the year Giovanni himself moved with his school to Macao.

Pedro João (1566-after 1620), the first mentioned artist, was born in Kyūshū, joined the Society in 1585 and in 1603 is listed as painter and choir-master in Nagasaki, where he was active until 1614.

Mancio Otao, born in Ōmura in 1568, is listed as being in Nagasaki in 1603, 1606 and 1607, the last mentioned year as painter and school master. If in 1613 he was still living in Nagasaki, in the year 1620 he was already in Macao.

Born in Usuki in 1568, Mancio João joined the Society in 1590 and studied painting at Shiki in 1592, just as Mancio Otao. From 1603 until 1606 he worked in Nagasaki, a city to where he returned in 1614 after a stay in Kyoto. He died in Macao in 1627, after living there for about seven years.

Leonardo Kimura (c. 1574-1619) was born in Nagasaki, entering All Saints’ Noviciate in 1602, where he is listed in 1603 as painter and copper engraver (“pintor y abridor”). Caught and imprisoned in 1616, he was executed on November 1619.

Like Leonardo, Luís Shiozuka was also born in Nagasaki in 1577. Having joined the Company in 1607, in 1613 he was active in Nagasaki as painter, organist and choirmaster. In 1614 Luís went to Manila in exile. However, he returned to Japan, where he worked for more than twenty years before being captured and decapitated near Nagasaki in 1637. According to Grace Vlam, Shiozuka may have been the author of a number of religious paintings produced in Nagasaki around 1616/1617.

Apparently with no written mention about their presence in Nagasaki but, I believe, very likely to have been there, Emanuel Pereira (1575-1633) and

¹¹ Quoted in *Art Namban. Les Portugais au Japon* (exhibition catalogue), Brussels, Europalia 89, cat. 45, p.80.

¹² Vlam, *op. cit.*, Appendix C, pp. 273-287.

Jacobo Niwa (1579-1638) had a direct relation with China by their birth. Emanuel was born in Macao and was sent to Japan to study art with Giovanni Nicolao. Back to China in 1598, he worked for the Jesuits in Nanking under Matteo Ricci, of whom he made a portrait today kept in Rome. Unlike Emanuel, Niwa was born in Japan, although his father was Chinese. He also studied under Nicolao and was sent to Macao in 1601 at the request of Ricci, having painted two altarpieces for St. Paul's church which was being rebuilt. Together with Emanuel Pereira and four other artists, Niwa assisted Ricci in the world map edition of 1603. Back to Macao in 1606 he worked one more time in St. Paul's. After a stay in Peking after Ricci's death (1610) until circa 1617, he returned to Macao, where he died in 1638.

Yamada Emosaku was born in Nagasaki and was a subject of Arima Harunobu. In 1615 he started working for Matsukara Shigemasa, *daimyô* of Hara Castle, painting western-style oil paintings. In 1638, after the castle had fallen in the hands of the Shogunate forces, Yamada's life was spared thanks to his artistic talent. According to Shimura Izuru¹³, Yamada must have learned western style painting from the Jesuits between 1592-1602.

This list and the artists' biographies gives us an idea, even if an incomplete one, of the way such an apprenticeship was accomplished and the role of the Jesuits, namely Niccolao, in the main process. It also tells us about the importance of Nagasaki both as a reference point and, after 1602, as the producing centre, only replaced by Macao after 1614.

However, if we can deduce that these objects were mainly intended for the needs of the Japan mission, there is no doubt that some of them were exported to Europe, above all as presents. What about Japanese exports, where once again Nagasaki had its role as the departing harbour of goods?

Japanese exports to the West from the 16th century onwards consisted mainly of lacquer and porcelain goods, as well as, as Oliver Impey¹⁴ stresses, perhaps paper, an article that must have had an enormous relevance by that time, since not only it is often referred to in contemporary documents, but also because we can still find it as the main support of western artistic works. That is the case of most of Rembrandt's etchings, for example, that were printed on Japanese paper due to its highest quality.

13 Shimura Izuru, "L'introduction de la Peinture Occidentale au Japon", in *Revue des Arts Asiatiques*, 4, 1927. Quoted by Vlam, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

14 Oliver Impey, "Namban Lacquer for the Portuguese Market", in *Oriental Art*, Vol. XLVI, No. 3, 2000

A written record referring to the belongings left by Father Manuel Barreto (c.1563-1620) to Father Manuel Borges (? – 1633)¹⁵ on his departure to Japan in August 1616¹⁶ gives us a most interesting perception not only of the heritage of the Mission in Macao in the early 17th century, but also of the most searched Japanese articles and artefacts.

By 1616, Father Manuel Barreto had already been in Japan, where he had arrived in 1590. After a stay in Kamigyô and Miyako, he then left for Nagasaki. In the year 1613 he returned to Macao where he was the mission's procurator until 1616 and the college's consultant. Barreto was then sent once more to Japan in 1617, working in Ôsaka.

The man who replaced Manuel Barreto in Macao was precisely Father Manuel Borges. Having been in Japan from 1609 until 1614, he lived in Macao from then on, becoming the mission's procurator since 1616 until, at the least, 1618. In 1621 Borges returned to Japan, dying in Nagasaki in August 1633.

This document, refers amongst hundred or thousands of items, the following Japanese artefacts:

- seven small lacquered chests (“cofrinhos de Maquiye”), three bought by Father Barreto himself, having the other two been given to him by Father Baltasar Correia.
- A little trunk containing three hundred and forty two Japanese fans (“abanos”).
- ten Japanese tables (“Mezas de Japão”)
- a five store *jûbako*¹⁷ (“hum Jubaco de sinco sobrados”)

¹⁵ The data concerning Father Manuel Barreto and Manuel Borges' lives were kindly conceded to me by João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, who included them in his doctoral thesis *O Cristianismo no Japão e o episcopado de D. Luís Cerqueira*, 2 vols, Lisbon, 1998 (photocopied text).

¹⁶ *Memorial das couzas da Procuratura desta Prov.ª, e o Padre M.el Barreto entregou, hindose pª Japão em Agosto de 1616 ao P.e M.el Borges seo sucessor na Procuratura*. (Ajuda Library, Lisbon, 49–V–5, fl. 196 a 206 v). This document is referred to by some historians in recent works, namely João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, *op. cit.*, and Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, *Lacas Namban em Portugal. Presença Portuguesa no Japão*, Lisbon, Ed. Inapa, Col. História da Arte, 1990. However, and as far as I know, it has not been published in its totality. In this text I just quote what seems to be the most interesting and undoubtedly identifiable Japanese items.

¹⁷ “Tiered lacquerware boxes (used to store or serve food)” See *Progressive Japan-English Dictionary*, Tokyo, Shugakukan, 1986.

- five lacquered lecterns [?] (“Estantes de Maquiye boas”)
- two sombreros or Japanese hats made of *urushi* [Japanese lacquer] (“Dous Sombreiros, ou chapéos uraxados de Japão”)
- a big *urushi* bench from the Procuratura’s room (“Hum banco Grande uraxado da Salla da Procuratura”)
- one *tatami* in Martim da Rocha’s house, seventeen *tatami* from Kyoto (“Tatemes do Miaco”), three *tatami* from Corai and twenty four more “Ometes, ou esteiras de tatame”, all in the same place, that is, in Manuel o Velho’s house.
- also in the same house mention is made to a *urushi* bowl or pot (“Hum vaso uraxado”), nine *urushi* chalice boxes (“Nove Caixas de Calix uraxadas”), and eight new brooms (“Oito Vasouras Novas de Japão”).
- In the list of liturgical ornaments lent to the Seminar one hundred Japanese tables are referred.

This document refers to two kind of artifacts: the genuine Japanese ones (*tatami*, brooms and fans, for example), and those who were made to the export market following native or western models (chalice boxes, *jûbako*). Even if there is no mention to it, one can deduce that in some cases some of these objects were decorated with Portuguese figures, just like they appear in the folding screens.

An interesting, and I believe, a most pertinent question already formulated by Chantal Kozyreff¹⁸, has to do with the motivation (or the lack of it) that can explain the reason why the Japanese did not took the English or the Dutch as a main object of representation, such as they did with the Portuguese. Kozyreff argues that this fact has to do with a matter of behaviour. That is, the Portuguese presented themselves as rich and important lords, (and I would add influential priests), whereas the other two western peoples arrived and settled (the Dutch in Nagasaki...) as merchants. If the decorum of the first impressed vividly a noble country like Japan, the merchant realism of the others was soon naturally absorbed.

18 See *Op.cit.*, pp. 90-92.

With the settlement of the Dutch, Nagasaki remained from 1639 to 1854, during the *sakoku* period, a most unique place in Japan, since it was the only doorway to the outside world. In the 18th century a new western influence in the arts was to be developed, mainly taking painting and engraving as its vehicles, with the so called *yofuga* or western-style painting. Now seeking the West in a most conscious way, Japanese artists created European-like works both by their subject and technique. The Nagasaki school (*Nagasaki-e*) again played an important role in this new context, whose background had very different contours from those of the Portuguese presence during the mid 16th and early 17th centuries.

Abstract

Portuguese merchants and captains, as well as European missionaries, mainly Jesuits, made of Nagasaki a truly individual place in early modern Japan. As the Christian centre in the territory, the town conceived according to Portuguese urbanistic premises, soon became an important artistic centre, both for the exportation of *namban* art, as for its production.

Resumo

Os célebres biombos *namban* representam na sua larga maioria a chegada da nau de trato ao porto de Nagasaki, cidade indelevelmente associada à presença portuguesa em território nipónico. Ao comércio marítimo, de que dependia largamente para a sua manutenção, aliou-se a acção dos missionários Jesuítas que, a partir de 1602, aí fixaram a famosa escola de pintura ao estilo ocidental dirigida por Giovanni Niccolò. Motivo de inspiração para os artistas da escola de Kano, a cidade traçada de acordo com a tradição urbanística portuguesa transformou-se numa verdadeira plataforma artística entre o Ocidente e o Oriente.