An interesting and, to some extent, a controversial figure among the early Jesuits in Japan is Father Joao Rodriguez often called “the Interpreter.” He is frequently confused with a contemporary of the same name Father Joao Rodriguez Giram, the author of a number of the Annual Report and it was to avoid this confusion that the nickname “the interpreter” (Tzuçu or Tsuji) was given to the first of these two priests. No better designation could have been found for him, for he was in very truth an “interpreter, first of all by reason of his fine command of the Japanese language and secondly because of his skill as a mediator between the Church and the Government.

(I) Favorite of Hideyoshi

Joao Rodriguez was born probably in 1561 (or 1562) at Sernancelhe the Portuguese Diocese of Lamego. A true son of this rough and mountain district of Beira, he was sturdy in character and strong in body. He had not, however, received any of his higher education in the Portuguese homeland, and his use of the Portuguese language always betrayed so many rusty inelegancies that one of his superiors described him as "a Beira churl" even when he was seventy years of age.

Nothing is known of his early youth but it is certain that he went to India when he was not yet 15 years of age and sailed from there to Japan in 1577. Here the young adventurer found a place at the court of the Christian Daimyo of Bungo, Otomo Sorin, and took part in the campaign against the Shimazu faction in the following year. When the Bungo troops were defeated in the battle of Mimizu-gawa, he returned to Bungo, where he entered the noviciate of the Society of Jesus at Usuki in December, 1580.

In 1581 he was transferred to St. Paul's College in Fumi (now Oita), and there he devoted himself to the study of Latin and the humanities. When the first classes in philosophy were begun in 1583, he also began his study in that subject and later taught grammar at St. Paul's College for two years. Thus it came about that his first eight years in Japan were spent in the Bungo area, and it was there...
that he attained to such a fine command of the Japanese language. Since he was very young when he came to Japan and spent some time at the court of Bungo, he was able, thanks especially to his native intelligence and his excellent memory, to express himself better in the polite forms of Japanese than he could in his rough Portuguese dialect. Another reason for this is to be found in the fact that during his years St. Paul's College, he was able to benefit by the company of good language teachers such as Paul Yofuken, Fabian Fukan, and others.

War broke out again in 1587 when the Satsuma troops forced their way into Bungo and the Jesuits were forced to leave the mission as well as their college in Bungo and take refuge for the time being in Yamaguchi. It was during July of this same year also that Hideyoshi's decree of proscription came like a bolt from the blue and threatened to paralyze all mission work indefinitely. As a result of this decree, the missionaries had to move again and the Scholastics attached to St. Paul's College found a refuge in Hachirao, which was under the jurisdiction of the Christian daimyo of Arima. There they were able to continue their studies.

Rodriguez also left for Hachirao, where he began his studies in theology. Since his superb command of the language enabled him to preach fluently, he also helped the missionaries in this way from time to time. During the years 1589 and 1590, he likewise devoted a certain amount of his time to teaching Latin to his younger confreres.

The four young nobles who had left for Europe eight years earlier as “ambassadors” of the infant Church in Japan to the Pope returned to Japan in 1590 in company with Father Valignano, who then came as an ambassador of the Viceroy of India. Due to the Edict of Proscription issued three years earlier and due especially also to Hideyoshi’s suspicions and the intrigues of various enemies of the Christian name, it was highly problematical whether Valignano would succeed in his mission. Under these circumstances, wisdom and prudence were necessary not only for Valignano himself but also for the interpreter who was indispensable since Valignano could not speak Japanese. It was Rodriguez who was chosen for this task and events proved that the choice was indeed a happy one.

Rodriguez therefore accompanied the Visitator to Kyoto and took part in the solemn audience which took place on March 3, 1591. The audience itself was rather stiff and formal, but Hideyoshi was so pleased with the clever and gifted “Irmao” (the name then used to designate Brothers and Scholastics) that he asked Rodriguez to come back later and spoke with him privately until midnight. From that time on, Rodriguez enjoyed the favor of the mighty warlord, and Hideyoshi insisted that he should stay at court even after the departure of Valignano. It was thus that Rodriguez began his career as an “interpreter” and it was in this capacity that he was able to render sterling service to the Church and to his Society in the various crises that were to occur in the years to come. It was probably at about this time also

2. Hideyoshi
that his confreres began to designate Rodriguez as “Tzuççu” (interpreter), a title by which he is also identified in the Japanese annals.

When Hideyoshi’s answer to the Viceroy of India had been drawn up, it was Rodriguez who was asked to take it and various gifts for the Viceroy to Nagasaki. Before his departure, however, Rodriguez had another audience with Hideyoshi who told him that he wanted to continue commercial relations with the Portuguese but that he considered Christianity to be harmful to the Japanese people.

After arriving in Nagasaki, Rodriguez resumed his theological studies but had to interrupt them on several occasions. The first interruption came in 1592 when Hideyoshi, who was then preparing for his Korean expedition, came to Kyushu to set up his headquarters at Nagoya, a port in northern Kyushu, in order to supervise the campaign from there. Valignano feared that there might be some new complications for the missions in Kyushu and therefore sent Rodriguez to Nagoya as companion to the captain of a Portuguese ship. The conference with Hideyoshi was a complete success, and when the Portuguese captain returned to Nagasaki, Hideyoshi insisted that Rodriguez remain with him for another month. At the end of that time, Rodriguez obtained permission to go back on the plea that his health was not too good. When the Portuguese arrived in the following year, Rodriguez was again sent to Hideyoshi’s headquarters in company with the captain in order to make a report and to serve as the captain's interpreter. He used his free time, however, to establish friendly relations with various officials attached to headquarters and once spent a whole day with Tokugawa Ieyasu. On this occasion, he had a debate about religion with a Buddhist bonze in presence of Ieyasu and was acclaimed by the latter as the victor in the debate.

When Hideyoshi returned to Kyoto in September of the next year, Rodriguez was also sent there to help the aging Father Organtino who had already been permitted by Hideyoshi to remain there. This meant that there were at least two missionaries in central Japan who could move about freely. It was Rodriguez also who made the usual New Year’s visit to Hideyoshi in 1594 as representative of the Church in Kyoto. Thanks to the growing esteem in which he was held, it was possible for the other missionaries also to continue their work though they had to be extremely cautious in whatever they did.

Busy though he was with many things, Rodriguez had managed somehow to continue his theological studies and had completed the course in the fall of 1593. Even before his visit to Kyoto, therefore, it was decided that he should go to Macao with the next ship in order that he might be ordained over there. He was recalled from Kyoto during the course of the next year, and he left for Macao in company with several others with whom he was ordained by Bishop Peter Martinez who had but recently been appointed as Bishop for Japan.

No Portuguese ship went to Japan in 1595, and it was, therefore, not until 1596 that Rodriguez was able to return to his mission—this time in company with Bishop Martinez. They landed in Nagasaki on August 14, and Rodriguez immediately set out for Fushimi in order to announce the arrival of the Bishop and to beg the favor of an audience. His efforts were successful. Rushing back to Nagasaki, he accompanied the Bishop to Fushimi where the audience took place on November 16 with Rodriguez serving again as interpreter. Bishop
Martinez had brought an official answer from the Viceroy of India, and though it had been long delayed, Hideyoshi accepted the explanation Rodriguez gave for this delay. After the audience, Hideyoshi also invited the Bishop and his entourage to take part in the tea ceremony.

New and serious dangers arose to threaten the mission even before Bishop Martinez left Kyoto. The San Felipe, a Spanish vessel, had been ashore in Shikoku in the fall of 1596 and was confiscated by the local daimyo in accordance with orders received from Hideyoshi. This led to violent disputes during which someone—whether the pilot or some other person will not be discussed here—made the remark that the missionaries were the blazers for Spanish colonialism. Hideyoshi, always suspicious, was infuriated.

The Spanish sailors appealed for help to the Bishop, who promptly sent Rodriguez to Maeda Munehisa, the Governor of Kyoto, in the hope that he could work out some kind of a solution. It was too late, however, since Hideyoshi had issued orders on December 9, the day on which Bishop Martinez left for Nagasaki, that all the Christians in Kyoto and Osaka should be arrested. Hideyoshi himself had made an exception, however, in favor of Organtino and Rodriguez, and Ishida Mitsunari succeeded in getting the names of most of other Christians removed from the list also. In the end, the list contained only the names of the twenty-six sainted martyrs, who were taken overland to Nagasaki and crucified there on February 5, 1597.

Meanwhile, Rodriguez also returned to Nagasaki and went as far as Sonogi in company with Father Francis Pasio to meet the prisoners. There they were permitted to talk to the future martyrs once more and were enabled by the authority of the Vice-Provincial to admit the two "Dojuku," James Kizaemon and John of Goto, as members of the Society of Jesus. They also spoke with the Franciscans, and on this occasions both parties begged forgiveness for what had happened during the recent disputes among the missionaries. Rodriguez then embraced Father Peter Baptist in token of their reconciliation. Rodriguez and Pasio then followed the martyrs from Sonogi to Nagasaki and were present at the execution, but the Bishop and the other priests were forbidden to attend.

A few weeks later, during the month of March, Hideyoshi issued another decree ordering the Jesuits to leave the country. He made an exception, however, for Father Rodriguez and two or three priests who were to attend to the spiritual needs of the Portuguese in Nagasaki. The Jesuits were thus compelled to close their schools; Bishop Martinez was
forced to board the next Portuguese ship for Macao—he died en route—and, at the instigation of the Governor of Nagasaki, a number of old and sickly priests as well as several clerics were also forced to leave with the Bishop.

It certainly would have been impossible for the Jesuits to escape ultimate deportation if Hideyoshi had not become seriously ill during the summer of 1598. Rodriguez had just gone to the court in Fushimi in company with the Portuguese ambassador and was warmly welcomed by Hideyoshi even though the latter was already beyond hope of recovery. Hideyoshi thanked the priest for his visit and gave orders that 200 sacks of rice, a kimono, and a small ship should be presented to him as a gift. Rodriguez meanwhile made every effort during his last visit on September 4, just two weeks before Hideyoshi’s death, to get him to accept baptism. In this he was unsuccessful as can be seen from a passage in the Annual Report:

On September 4, Father Joao Rodriguez, the interpreter, came to Fushimi with some Portuguese who came to visit him from the Chief Captain with a good present, as they did every year on arriving with the China-ship. They sent him a message, and, when he had seen the present, he ordered that only Fr. Joao Rodriguez should enter. The latter found him stretched out on a quilt of silk among some velvet cushions, so worn and disfigured that he hardly looked like a man. He told the Father to come to his side and thanked him for his visit. And, as the Father wished to avail himself of this opportunity for talking with him about a more important matter which was the salvation of his soul. Hideyoshi, hard and obstinate as he was in his sins, did not give him any opportunity for doing this. So the Father took his leave much regretting to see a man of so great ability so blind and God-forsaken on account of his faults. And so he finally died in this condition on September 16 of the same year 1598. [Most of the Japanese sources say that Hideyoshi died on September 18]

(2) At the Court of Tokugawa Ieyasu

Thanks to his splendid command of the language and his contact over a period of many years with the leading circles of Japan, Father Rodriguez was perhaps better informed than any of the others concerning the religious, cultural and political situation of this country. It was not surprising, then, that his Superiors not only used him as an interpreter but appointed him to various important positions within the Society. Though he was but recently ordained, he was appointed in 1598 (and possibly at an earlier date) to serve as one of the four consultors of the Vice-Provincial, and he also served as a consultor for the college in Nagasaki where he was stationed.

In the “Consultors’ Report” sent to the Superior General on February 28, 1598, perhaps the oldest extant report of this kind, Father Rodriguez introduces himself briefly and
then gives a frank discussion of what he considered some of the short-comings of the mission. The points he stresses make interesting reading even in our day since they reveal some of the difficulties which then confronted the missionaries. He complains, for example, that Superiors remain in office too long—sometimes for no less than two decades—and blames this condition for certain failings in the mission works. He also complains about the fact that men are appointed as Superiors before their arrival in, Japan and before they have had a chance to master the language and to familiarize themselves with the conditions prevailing in the country. With regard to the admission of new members to the Society, he complains that the superiors had been too easy-going, had allowed themselves be deceived by outward manifestations of courtesy, and had not placed emphasis on solid virtue. He urges also that really capable men should be chosen and that they should be young enough so that they would be able to master the language. If they were unable to do that, he says, even the most capable men would be able to achieve only mediocre results.

In 1601 Father Rodriguez pronounced his fourth vow and was then named Procurator of the Japan mission. He was certainly the most capable man available for this position, which was of great importance for the development the mission. It was an office which involved many dangers and made great demands on the tact and circumspection of the one who was entrusted with it.

Since Rodriguez was especially favored by Hideyoshi, it was but natural that he should serve as go-between in all matters pertaining to the relations between the missions and the Government. This work he did even after the death of Hideyoshi and the records show that he was the official interpreter during the first decade of the Tokugawa regime and visited the court in Edo almost every year in the company of the Portuguese ambassadors. On occasions he also secured many advantages for the mission.

After the death of Hideyoshi, the “Committee of Five” which had been appointed by the dead warlord himself, immediately decided to recall troops from Korea and thus bring that unfortunate campaign to an end. When Generals Asano Nagamasa and Ishida Mitsunari, who had been entrusted this task, arrived in Hakata, Father Valignano, who had just landed in Nagasaki together with Bishop Cerqueira, sent Father Rodriguez to Hakata to announce their arrival. The two generals received the priest very cordially, but thought it best that and the Bishop should stay in Nagasaki for the time being to await developments.

It soon became evident that Tokugawa Ieyasu exerted the greatest influence in the Committee of Five and aimed by all available means to set himself up as the sole heir of Hideyoshi. When Terasawa Hirotaka, the Governor of Nagasaki, began to oppress the Church so much in his district that the College and most of the missionaries had to be transferred to Amakusa, Father Valignano sent Rodriguez to Kyoto to see Ieyasu. Ieyasu still remembered Father Rodriguez and since he hoped to win the support of the Christian daimyos for his future schemes, he promised to protect the missionaries and advised Terasawa to do nothing against the Christians.

This visit marked the beginning of Father Rodriguez's activities at the Tokugawa court, where he was treated perhaps with even greater trust and favor than he had been treated by Hideyoshi. Writing in October, 1599, Father Valignano notes that “Rodriguez always
acted as interpreter for us and the Portuguese in our dealings with the Taikō-sama (Hideyoshi) and was looked upon with great favor by him. For this reason he also had ready access to Ieyasu and to his principal courtiers and came to be well acquainted with them, a fact which has been very useful to us.”

The year 1600 brought a great loss to the Church in Japan. Konishi Yukinaga, who had been the mainstay of the Church since the fall of Takayama Ukon, had fought against Ieyasu in the battle of Sekigahara and was executed after being defeated in that battle. While a number of Christian generals such as Kuroda Nagamasa had sided with Ieyasu, there was reason to fear that the new warlord would not be satisfied merely with destroying Konishi but would wreak vengeance on the Church also.

Ieyasu, however, was far too clever to stir up new enmities against himself before his own power was firmly established. When, therefore, Father Organtino sent a Brother to visit Ieyasu twice shortly after Sekigahara, Ieyasu treated him very courteously. A little later, Rodríguez was sent by the Superior to pay his official respects to the new warlord and on this occasion was able to secure Letters Patent in which Ieyasu granted official recognition to the Jesuit houses in Kyoto, Osaka and Nagasaki. On his return journey, Rodríguez stopped in Karatsu to visit Terasawa Hirotake, the successor of Konishi as Commander-in-Chief in Kyushu, in order to give him an official report concerning the appointment of Bishop Cerqueira as Bishop of Japan. Terasawa received him very kindly and even made an official visit to the Bishop later.

In the following years, Rodríguez had occasion to visit Ieyasu in Edo almost every year and sometimes twice a year. After Ieyasu surrendered the dignity of Shogun to his son and set up his own residence in Sumpu (now Shizuoka), these visits were paid to him there. During most of these visits he served merely as interpreter for the Portuguese Captain and the Japanese Government, but on several occasions his service amounted practically to mediation and he was able to bring about a solution for various problems, which was satisfactory to both parties. Since the mission had an agreement with Macao to the effect that the missions were to be supported to a great extent by sharing in the profits derived from the Portuguese-Japanese trade, Father Rodríguez, as Mission Procurator, was naturally anxious to promote good trade relations.

Under these circumstances there was naturally a danger that the priest would become too much involved in commercial matters. To make matters worse other complications now arose in the international sphere. Portugal had long had to contend with the rivalry of Spain, and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Protestant England and Protestant Holland began to challenge both of these Catholic countries and tried to win this profitable trade for themselves.

The competition of Holland made itself felt in a way that was very painful for the Missions as early as 1603. In that year the Portuguese mercantile fleet was attacked by the Dutch shortly after its departure from Macao and was sacked completely with the result that the mission lost its entire income for that year. When Ieyasu heard about it, he gave Father
Rodriguez a munificent personal gift of 380 cruzados and lent the mission an even greater sum.

It was during the years 1606 and 1607 that Father Rodriguez was able to achieve his greatest successes. When the negotiations between the Japanese and Portuguese traders threatened to break down in 1606, Father Rodriguez was able to bring about a satisfactory solution and then presented Ieyasu with a number of valuable gifts which had been brought by the Portuguese ships. Included among the gifts was a great clock, a present from the Vice-Provincial, which was destined for the castle in Fushimi and which indicated not only the hours of the day but also the days and the months of the year and even registered the course of the stars. Ieyasu then invited Rodriguez to his castle repeatedly and asked him many questions about Europe and its culture.

In addition to the negotiations Father Rodriguez carried on between the Japanese and Portuguese in 1606 and 1607, he was also called upon to make preparations for the visit of the Bishop to Ieyasu. Since Ogasawara, the Governor of Nagasaki, had sent in various reports about the prestige of the Bishop and the influence he had with the Portuguese, Ieyasu was more than willing to grant him an audience. The Bishop’s trip to Kyoto proved to be a veritable triumph as Christians came in from everywhere to meet him en route. The audience, too, proved to be a grand occasion of state with the Bishop appearing in his regalia. On this occasion, Ieyasu allowed the Bishop to be carried in a sedan into the interior of the palace, a privilege enjoyed only by the highest members of the nobility. Rodriguez also was present for the audience and was allowed to take a place immediately in front of Ieyasu.

The publicity given [to] the Bishop’s the trip to Kyoto and his solemn audience with Ieyasu gave a great impetus to the work of the missions. After the audience, the Bishop also visited the other daimyos and leading personalities such as Honda Masazumi, a warm friend of the Christians, and Tadaoki, the husband of the deceased Gratia Hosokawa. On his return journey to Nagasaki, he also visited all the Christianities and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation everywhere.

It seems that the visit of Father Pasio, the Vice-Provincial, in 1607 netted even better results for the missions. In this case also, the preparations had been made by Father Rodriguez,
who received an assurance from his friend Honda Masazumi, then Secretary to Ieyasu, that Father Pasio would be received not only by Ieyasu but also by the Shogun, Hidetada.

Father Pasio set out from Nagasaki in May to visit Osaka, Kyoto and Fushimi. From there, he went on to Sumpu (Shizuoka) in the company of Father Morejon, the Rector of the Kyoto mission, one other priest and three Japanese Brothers. Rodriguez had gone on a few days earlier to make the final preparations, but at the last moment it seemed as if all of the arrangements might have to be cancelled due to the death of Yūki Hideyasu, an illegitimate son of Ieyasu, which was reported on the very day on which the audience was to take place. Honda succeeded in holding up this report for a short time and fixed the audience for an earlier hour so that everything went off nicely.

This audience was of special significance since this was the first time since the Decree of Proscription in 1587 that a Jesuit was received by the Government in his official capacity as Superior of the Mission. It is recalled that Valignano and Martinez had been received simply as ambassadors of the Viceroy of India. According to Japanese custom, such an audience, accorded to one who had been banished, signified that the decree of banishment had, for all practical purposes, been withdrawn. This audience was therefore tantamount to a rehabilitation of the Jesuits and did much to revive the good repute of the missions and missionaries in Japan.

From Sumpu the Vice-Provincial and his companions went on to Edo (Tokyo). En route they had their first glimpse of snow-capped Fuji and later spent two days seeing the sights in Kamakura. There they were greatly impressed by a “huge bronze idol (the Dai-Butsu) erected in the middle of a field”.

In Edo they were also received very cordially by the Shogun and had a chance to view his castle, which had been completed only in the previous year. They then visited Honda Sado-no-kami and Okubo Sagami-no-kami and other members of the Shōgun's court and begged them to use their influence in favor of the mission in the future also. The Vice-Provincial spent eight days in Edo, but his companions took this opportunity to visit several of the neighboring provinces also. This was thus the first time that these provinces had ever been visited by a priest.

While Father Pasio and the other members of his entourage followed the same route on their return journey from Edo, Father Rodriguez, in accordance with a suggestion made by Ieyasu, went by ship to Izu in order to view the silver mines in that area. During this voyage the ship met with a very violent storm and narrowly escaped destruction. It was probably this adventure that he had in mind when he wrote at a later date in connection with Mt. Fuji:

At times a small, round and white cloud that looks something like a hat appears over the top of Mt. Fuji. Local people look upon this cloud as a sign of a violent storm to come. We ourselves were caught in such a storm during a sea voyage in that area and were in imminent danger of a shipwreck. So violent was the storm that it seemed almost as if the southern coast was to be completely swallowed up.
(3) Exile and Last Years in China

Even though Tokugawa Ieyasu was never sincerely in favor of the Christians and showed his real sentiments towards them a number of times, the missionaries were able to continue their work with great success for a decade and a half. Credit for this fact is given repeatedly in the Annual Reports to Father John Rodriguez and his influence at court.

The very prominence of Father Rodriguez’s position, however, netted him many enemies. Then, too, the economic tie-up between the Mission and the Portuguese traders in Japan brought it about that Rodriguez in his capacity as Procurator, interpreter and middle-man became too much involved with business affairs. Even Bishop Cerqueira admitted that Father Rodriguez acted sometimes “with less moderation and religious prudence than could be wished.” It’s hardly likely, however, that this was the real reason for his banishment from Japan, and if his Superiors had taken the charges against him seriously, they would certainly not have appointed him Procurator again in Macao.

Far more dangerous for Father Rodriguez were the repeated attempts that were made to involve him in various intrigues at court. Terasawa Hirotake, the Governor of Nagasaki hoped at this time to obtain the fief of Omura as a reward for his work against Shimazu and thought that Amakusa might be given to the Omura family by way of compensation. At a moment when Terasawa felt sure of success, the lord of Omura made desperate efforts to prevent the trade and also asked the Jesuits to help him in this matter. Since Terasawa had apostatized, the Jesuits were naturally reluctant to see him get control of the Omura district, which was entirely Catholic, and Rodriguez, therefore, sought the help of his friends at court in behalf of the lord of Omura. In the end, Terasawa had to be satisfied with receiving Amakusa but he swore vengeance against the mission and tried in various ways to alienate Ieyasu from Rodriguez.

In this matter, also, Terasawa was doomed to failure since Ieyasu had always found Rodriguez to be honest and reliable, and his confidence in the priest increased still more. Ieyasu even granted Rodriguez the privilege of dealing with him directly instead of applying first to the authorities in Nagasaki. This meant that instead of being merely an interpreter, Rodriguez was now on an equal footing with the bugyō of Nagasaki.

When Ogasawara Ichian was named Governor of Nagasaki, Murayama Tōan, a fervent Catholic, was appointed as an executive officer (Daikan) and had such full freedom of action that the mission also could develop normally for another decade.

It was not long, however, before Omura also sided with the enemy. At this time there were many jurisdictional disputes over the Urakami district, and Murayama Tōan finally succeeded in having this area attached to Nagasaki, while another district was given to Omura by way of compensation. Though it was clearly proven that the Jesuits had nothing to do with this—a fact which was also vouched for by Murayama—Omura put the blame on them and especially on Father Rodriguez. He, therefore, apostatized and began to oppress the Christians in his domain.

There were other troubles also, such as the open clash between Japanese and Portuguese traders in Macao in 1608. In 1609, Arima Horunobu destroyed the Portuguese
ship, Madre de Dios, whereupon the Portuguese promptly demanded an indemnity. Since Rodriguez was always called upon to act as middleman and interpreter in such cases, it is not surprising that his enemies finally succeeded in undermining his influence with Ieyasu and getting a decree of banishment against him in 1612.

There are still many details about this affair which have not been cleared up. In point of fact, Rodriguez had left Japan in 1611 as is proven by a letter he wrote from Canton (China) on January 25, 1612, in which he said that he had left Japan for reasons of health but hoped to go back there again since Ieyasu permitted him to do so.

It is clear also that Rodriguez did actually return to Japan with the Portuguese Embassy in 1612 since he acted as interpreter in the audience granted by Ieyasu on September 25 and succeeded at that tune not only in restoring Japanese-Portuguese relations, but also in securing a favorable trade agreement.

It is possible that the decree banishing Rodriguez was issued only after this audience, but there is evidence to show that Ieyasu regretted this step and wanted to have Rodriguez come back to Japan again. Nothing came of this, however, and at the beginning of 1614, Ieyasu issued his final decree of proscription against the Christians which ushered in the violent persecution which raged for several decades and spelled out the ruin of the early missions in Japan.

Rodriguez spent the remaining 22 years of his life in China, where he was by no means idle. During the years from 1613 to 1615, he was in the interior studying the customs and the religion of the people. At a later date, we find him taking a deep interest in the old Nestorian Mission in the Middle Kingdom, and when the Sianfu Inscription was discovered in 1625, he made a special trip to that place and wrote one of the earliest of the detailed reports concerning this famous monument. He likewise took part in the historic Conflict of Rites and was one of the first to take issue with Father Ricci's contention that those rites were merely civic customs. During the Tartar invasion of China in 1630, Father Rodriguez acted as chaplain to the Portuguese Expeditionary forces that went to the aid of Peking, and for his services on this occasion, he received a rescript of praise from the Chinese Imperial Court.

Even after his banishment, Father Rodriguez's fondest wish was that he might get back to Japan, and we know that the Superior of the Japanese mission was anxious in 1620 to have this priest who knew Japan and the Japanese language so well sent back to the hard pressed mission. The Visitor in India, however, did not approve of this plan, and Father Rodriguez died in Macao in 1632.

(4) Literary Activities

Busy as he was with much travelling, Father Rodriguez found time not only while he was still in Japan but also when he was in China to do a considerable amount of writing. It is
precisely in this field, and especially in philology and phonetics that he made the most enduring contributions.

Then, as now also, the study of the language was one of the greatest problems for new missionaries. The difficulties were incomparably greater however, for these early pioneers since none of the preparatory work had been done for them and decades of hard work were required before the necessary texts could be made available. It is true that some of the very earliest missionaries such as Brother John Fernandez and Duarte da Silva had attempted to produce a simple grammar and dictionary, but it was far from perfect and had to be corrected later. Fortunately the Jesuits at that time found a number of excellent language teachers among their Brothers and lay catechists who were able to render sterling services in this respect.

It was not, however, until Father Valignano came as Visitor that language study was really systematized. It was he who ordered the establishment of a regular language school in Bungo, fixed the amount of time to be devoted to study, arranged for the hiring of suitable teachers and provided for the preparation of better textbooks. All this was done during his first visitation, and when he brought a printing press along on his second visit, the stage was set for real progress in the matter of textbooks.

In the beginning, they made it a practice to print excerpts from the Japanese classics as well as manuscripts which were specially prepared for the purpose by the Japanese Brothers. The year 1598 witnessed another advance with the publication of the "Racuyoxu," a dictionary of the Chinese characters used in Japan— the first book of this kind that was ever printed. In this book, the Jesuits also introduced a number of innovations which are still in vogue, such as the printing of the “furigana” beside the characters in order to make reading easier, as well as the pronunciation marks (nigori) in order to indicate the correct pronunciation of certain “kana.” This work was most probably done by the Japanese Brothers who, however, must certainly have consulted various Japanese and Chinese compilations.

In the course of 1603 or 1604, there also appeared a large Japanese-Portuguese dictionary containing about 30,000 Japanese words along with many phrases to illustrate their use. This was compiled “by several priests and Brothers of the Society of Jesus” and it is quite probable that Rodriguez was one of the collaborators.

Another work that appeared in Nagasaki during the period from 1604 to 1608 was the large three-volume grammar of the Japanese language by Father Rodriguez, which was probably the first standard work of its kind ever written. While the work is so detailed that it seemed rather confusing, it did represent the first attempt to give a grammatical analysis of the language along scientific lines. Though the book was strongly influenced by European grammar, Father Rodriguez sought to do full justice to the peculiarities of the Japanese language. He himself declared that while Japanese is probably not as exact as the European languages, it is far more flexible and adaptable than they are.
Father Rodriguez was deeply impressed by the many polite words and forms which make it possible to color one’s language according to the dignity and rank of each person. He likewise recognized the double function of Japanese adjectives, for which he coined the expression “verbo adjective,” and invented a number of grammatical terms such as “postposition” in place of the European “preposition” in order to describe the Japanese use of words and sentences.

For the alphabetic and phonetic rendition of the language, which had varied considerably among the earlier missionaries, Rodriguez also prepared a new Romaji system, which still interests philologists because of the exactness with which it reproduces the pronunciation of Japanese words in those days. The colloquial language which he describes is that of Kyushu and Kyoto, but in later years, he also added quite a number of examples of the Kanto dialect as spoken in Edo. He himself urged the missionaries to use the more dignified Kyoto pronunciation and says that he gave the other variations only in order that the missionaries might understand what they heard in other places.

In order to make the grammatical rules and explanations more intelligible, Rodriguez added an enormous number of examples taken for the most part from the Japanese classics. Not a few of these examples, however, were taken also from Buddhist texts or from the readers used in the language school and from the contemporary Christian literature.

Rodriguez himself felt that his three volume grammar was too detailed and even confusing for beginners, and he therefore planned to produce a simplified text for their use. He no longer had time, however, to do this before his exile, and it was not until his arrival in China that he was able to fulfill his promise. In this new text he not only simplified the earlier and larger work, but clarified many parts that were ambiguous and introduced quite a number of new improvements.

At the very beginning of this new book, Rodriguez laid down three hard and fast principles as follows: (1) Pick out good and well educated teachers; (2) Use good textbooks; (3) Employ a good method. With regard to the second point, it is significant that he no longer quoted the textbooks the Jesuits had prepared for their language school as he had done in the three volume grammar, but chose only such texts as he found in the Japanese classics, e.g., the *Genji Monogatari*. With regard to his third principle concerning a method, Rodriguez now insisted strongly on accurate pronunciation from the very beginning and demanded a great deal of translation work on the basis of the Japanese classical texts.

The last great work of Rodriguez and one which has come down to us only in a truncated condition is a large scale history of the Church in Japan. As planned by the author, this work was to be in three parts, of which the first was to comprise ten books concerning Japan and its people, the second ten additional books concerning the history of the Church in
Japan, and the third, four books on the Church in China, Siam, and Korea. (The missions in these countries were all under the same Province of the Society of Jesus.)

Of the first part only the first two books are extant but they are sufficient to give us an excellent idea of the geography of the country, many of its customs and its liberal arts. The chapter concerning the tea ceremony is still one of the best and most detailed treatises on that subject that has ever been published in a European language.

Of the second part of the History, only the first seventeen chapters of the first book, dealing with the work of St. Francis Xavier, have come down to us.

Even the fragments of this great work which survived suffice to show that Rodriguez had a highly developed critical faculty and was extremely well informed concerning things Japanese. He knew from experience that many of the accounts written by others on the basis of second or third hand information gave a completely false impression of conditions in this country. On one occasion he wrote concerning such books and reports that “if an angel came to erase everything that is false or erroneous in these books we would have more than enough blank paper to last us for several years.” This remark is still valid in our own times!

A factual appraisal of the extant portions of Rodriguez’s history shows that even these fragments are an important source-book for the study of the Japan of his day. It is true that the Portuguese style of this “Beira churl” was far from satisfactory, and this is probably the reason why his superiors did not value his work more highly.

In conclusion we may say that in spite of his shortcomings, Father John Rodriguez deserves to be listed with the most outstanding Jesuits of the early period of Japanese mission history. The following excerpt from Professor Boxer gives an excellent summary of his character:

It can be seen from the foregoing brief outline of his eventful life, that it was no dry-as-dust pedagogue who compiled the first scientific grammar of Japanese, not merely in a European but in any language. Whether as an adventurer in the suite of old Otomo Sorin campaigning in Kyushu; whether as an ardent young novice in Bungo; whether as a confidential interpreter to Japanese military dictators at Kyoto and Yedo; whether arguing knotty points of doctrine with Matteo Ricci's adherents; whether seeking for the traces of Nestorian Christians; or whether battling against the Tartars in the frozen wastes of Manchuria, Padre Joao Rodriguez Tçuzzu certainly showed himself a man of action par excellence: A study of his printed Japanese Grammar of 1604 and 1620, coupled with an examination of such portions of his monumental Historia as have come down to us, likewise proves that he was a rare combination of the man of action and the scholar.
Bibliography


Fr. Hubert Cieslik, S.J. was born in 1914 and died in 1988. One of the most respected historians of Japanese Christianity, he has written numerous books and articles on Japanese Church in German, English, and Japanese. He wrote the present article for an English journal—now defunct. Fr. Cieslik’s printed articles were collected by Francis Mathy, S.J., Ph.D. The digital version was prepared, proofread, edited, and composed for PDF by Francis Britto, Ph.D.

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