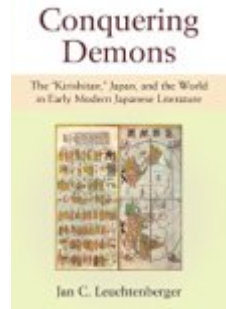


**Jan C. Leuchtenberger.** *Conquering Demons: The "Kirishitan," Japan, and the World in Early Modern Japanese Literature.* Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, 2013. xii + 240 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-929280-78-0.



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Anti-Christian sentiment was one of the defining characteristics of early modern Japan, and scholars have long mulled over the question of what generated and sustained the country's obsession with this religion. Jan Leuchtenberger's detailed study provides some answers through a focus on works of popular literature from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century that described the nature of the threat posed to the country by the "Kirishitan," a concept she defines as that which "was understood as Christians/Christianity by the Japanese" (p. 1). She argues that one of the reasons tales about the Kirishitan retained their appeal was because they enabled Japanese readers to reaffirm a traditional world order while asserting political and cultural dominance over the foreign Other.

Leuchtenberger's *Conquering Demons: The "Kirishitan," Japan, and the World in Early Modern Japanese Literature* begins with four chapters of analysis, which are followed by translations of two texts. In her explication of the anti-Christian writings, she demonstrates how representations

of the missionaries over time transformed devious humans into magic-wielding fantastical foes. In her translations of the two narratives *Bateren-ki* (History of the Padres; circa 1610) and *Nanban-ji monogatari* (Tale of the Southern Barbarian Temple; circa eighteenth century), she provides extensive annotations and puts the Japanese into pleasantly accessible English prose. The project is both a compelling investigation of the Kirishitan phenomenon from the perspective of Japanese literature, and an opportunity for the translated primary sources to reach a larger audience.

The opening chapter frames the tales as sites for early modern Japanese authors and readers to work through their persistent anxieties about identity and place. In particular, it posits that the problem of place resembled the one encountered in previous centuries by thinkers who had to deal with Japan's location on the fringe of a Buddhist world map; geography and lineage positioned the country as a destination rather than a transmitter of Buddhist teachings. She suggests that this perception of Japan as a cosmological backwater

changed when the priest Kakuken (1131–1212) determined in 1173 that the islands actually possessed the sacred Buddhist site of Kongōsan (identified as the mountain Katsuragisan in Japan), a move that reconceptualized the nation as one of the sources of Mahayana Buddhism. In addition, the physical landscape gained importance as a space protected by Buddhist deities, especially through their manifestations as Shinto *kami* (gods). Leuchtenberger suggests that the appearance of Christian missionaries in the sixteenth century and the spread of the new faith called the traditional religious order into question. According to her, the "Iberian Irruption" (a term coined by Ronald Toby) prompted people to see buddhas and gods as the ones in need of protection by strong Japanese leaders such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616).

In her second chapter, the author investigates two Japanese narratives which depict the Kirishitan as would-be conquerors. She identifies *Baterenki*, from the early 1600s, as the first tale of the Kirishitan arrival and expulsion, written at a time when missionaries still posed some threat to the Japanese polity. Leuchtenberger shows that the work treats padres as ordinary humans who rely on deceit to achieve their aim of invading the country. She notes that the Iberians are kept largely on the outside, and once their plans are discovered, they are easily handled by the authorities. Ironically, it was not until after the actual threat had dissipated that the Iberian Kirishitan took on a grotesque visage, and their Japanese Kirishitan converts became a truly menacing presence. For later works such as the *Kirishitan monogatari* (Tale of the Kirishitan; 1639), she argues that the stories not only take pains to describe the behavior that reveals someone as a Kirishitan but also begin to emphasize "the proper behavior of loyal Japanese who followed the 'true' path of Buddhism" (p. 67). The *Baterenki* material will be new to some readers, while the *Kirishitan monogatari* is already well-known

through George Elison's masterful translation and discussion of it more than forty years ago in his seminal work, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (1973).

The heart of Leuchtenberger's book can be found in the third chapter, which focuses on the imaginative *Kirishitan shumon raichō jikki*, or "True Account of the Arrival of the Kirishitan Sect" (circa eighteenth century), of which the aforementioned *Nanbanji monogatari* is a variant. Here, she shows how the transgressive interpretations of the Iberian Other drew upon traditional elements such as Buddhist cosmological maps to craft the country of "Nanban," where the "Nanbanjin" (Southern Barbarians) supposedly originated. In this strain of anti-Christian stories, the foreigners receive magical abilities reminiscent of those possessed by wizardly figures in Japanese medieval didactic literature: they fly above the clouds, turn a towel into a horse, and even transport Mt. Fuji. The rosaries in the hands of priests and converts are no mere beads but spiritual weapons that pose an existential threat to the country. Free from any living memory of the Iberians or even an approximate understanding of their teachings, the authors devise new images for the Kirishitan, yet do so within a familiar Buddhist framework.

The fourth chapter considers the Kirishitan in the context of other Japanese writings in which the figure appears. Leuchtenberger draws attention to the influence exerted by popular perceptions of the Kirishitan and highlights the overlapping categories of Others in everything from popular forms of entertainment to scholarly treatises. Taking its place alongside the *tōjin* (generic foreigner), the Kirishitan had become a familiar stock character composed of recycled images. She concludes her analysis by reminding the reader that anxieties about the Kirishitan and the outside world were "not eased by the abjection and expulsion that had been replayed for centuries" (p. 131).

The translations that conclude the book, like the analyses of them in the four preceding chapters, complement rather than challenge previous works on anti-Christian texts. The translations are short enough to make them ideal candidates for readings in undergraduate classes, but, from a pedagogical perspective, it would be difficult to assign them on a syllabus, for example, in place of the deliciously polemical and influential *Ha Daiusu* (Deus Destroyed) or *Kengiroku* (Deceit Disclosed) that Alison translated. Her selections could have been better justified by elaborating on some of their religious implications. Regarding *Bateren-ki*, the author explains her choice of the text by claiming, among other reasons, that it "serves as a resource for how some of the information taught by the missionaries was processed by the converts, presented in a way that is free of argument or controversy about doctrine" (p. 40). As intriguing as it could potentially be for scholars of religion, historians, and others outside the field of Japanese literature, this aspect of the text receives scant attention in her book. One wonders precisely what the missionaries taught, how converts understood (or misunderstood) it, and how this differed from works that have already been translated into English.

Admittedly, this question about the framing of the sources Leuchtenberger chose is a minor quibble regarding an otherwise excellent book, because the existence of the translations now in English undoubtedly enriches our understanding of literature about the Kirishitan. The author does accomplish what she sets out to do in explaining representations of the Kirishitan, and she has made a welcome contribution to the field of Japanese studies—we can hope that it will lead to further research on how the Other was conceptualized in early modern Japan. In this regard, one wonders if authors drew upon similar tropes when describing members of other personae non gratae such as the Buddhist Fujū Fuse sect, a group which was persecuted by the government in much the same way as the Kirishitan. Now that

we have this study, perhaps a comparison can be made of their respective depictions in popular culture.

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