



## Conceived a long time ago

No.1

### 1. A dream of Francis Xavier as the starting point of Sophia University

Students in Japan surely learned in their Japanese history classes that the date for the introduction of Christianity into Japan was 1549; the memory aid used the first syllables of these four numbers. This year is of course the year that Francis Xavier arrived in Kagoshima. The origin of Sophia University can be dated back to the year of his arrival. Along with Ignatius of Loyola, Xavier had participated in the foundation of the Roman Catholic religious order known now as the Jesuits. Inspired with a mission to preach about Christianity in the Orient, Xavier set out via India for the distant Eastern lands. Nowadays, the trip from Lisbon to the coast of India would take less than a day by plane, but in Xavier's time, this was a danger-filled sea voyage of some ten months.

During Xavier's trip, he met some Japanese men, Anjiro and his companions, in Malacca. Xavier judged them as having a high moral sense, a great love of learning, and an honest style of life. He decided that by all means he had to go to Japan to work with persons from such a rare race. The details of these meetings were all clearly included in the letters that Xavier frequently sent to Rome.



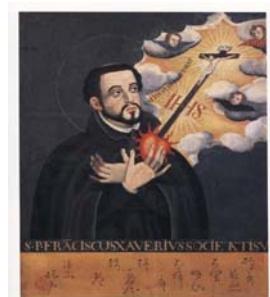
A letter that Xavier sent from Kagoshima, dated November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1549 (owned by the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus)

Xavier first set his feet on Japanese soil on August 15, 1549. He had to endure many difficulties, including the unusual climate and food, and especially the rewording into Japanese of the teaching of Christianity. Even so, he wrote in a letter about his warm respect for the Japanese people: In all my experiences, I have never encountered a more excellent group of human beings.

We should mention that Xavier had two purposes to accomplish while he was in Japan. The first was to visit the capital city and to meet with the King of Japan, by whom he meant either the Emperor or the Shogun, and to receive from this leader the permission to do missionary work in Japan. The second purpose was to establish in the capital city of Japan a university like the University of Paris where



Portrait of Ignatius of Loyola



Portrait of Francis Xavier  
 (owned by the Museum of  
 the City of Kobe)

he and Ignatius had studied so diligently. Xavier's plan was to make this university a focal point of many exchanges of thought and culture between Europe and Japan.

Xavier first created a solid base for energetic preaching and missionary work in Hirado, Yamaguchi, Oita, and nearby locations. To make practical arrangements for accomplishing his second purpose, Xavier left Oita by ship in 1551. With him were two young Japanese men who were destined to study in Europe. Xavier mentioned in a letter that he wanted to provide an experience of the breadth of the real world to Japanese, who thought that the only civilizations outside Japan were those of China and India. In a similar plan, two young monks from Japanese noble families were to be sent to Europe, which had very poor information about Japan. Xavier wanted such Europeans to see and understand how outstanding the people of Japan actually were. Unfortunately, the two young men destined for studies died, one in Goa and the other in Coimbra, and so could not return to their homeland. As for the monks from noble families, no suitable candidates could be found, so the idea bore no practical fruit. Nevertheless, the clear prototype that Xavier wrote about for exchanges of thought and cultural matters between Europe and Japan, based on exchanges of selected persons in both directions, can be seen very easily in the plans of that time.

## **2. To a Japan that had been recently liberated from centuries under an Edict Proscribing Christianity, an emissary from the Roman Pontiff could finally come at the end of the Meiji Era.**



Pope Pius the Tenth

Three hundred and fifty years had passed since the visit of Xavier to Japan. Just after the treaty that ended the war between Japan and Russia had been negotiated in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Pope Pius X chose Bishop William O'Connell from the state of Maine as his personal good-will envoy to Japan in November of 1905. Bishop O'Connell was entrusted with a personally signed letter from the Pope to Emperor Meiji. One of the purposes of this letter was to arrange for a university in the Catholic tradition to be established in Japan. The bishop held successful meetings with the governor of Tokyo, the President of Tokyo

University, and Prime Minister Katsura Taro. The bishop gained a consensus among these leaders that a university should be founded with a truly international character, rather than one that was modeled on the educational experiences that derived from strongly French influences.

The bishop gained the agreement of Prime Minister Katsura to a proposal that this university be entrusted to the Society of Jesus, because it was an organization with traditions and experience in managing educational institutions and because the people of Japan still cherished a deep respect for Francis Xavier. Two years later, in October of 1908, in response to the request of the Pope, the Jesuits missioned to Japan three Jesuit priests from various backgrounds, to fulfill the promise of organizing an institution that was not dominated by any one national educational tradition. The three pioneer Jesuit educators were the German/Luxembourgian Rev. Joseph Dahlmann, the French Rev.



Bishop William Henry O'Connell

Henri Boucher, and the British/American Rev. James Rockliff. Soon after, Rev. Hermann Hoffmann and Rev. Tsuchihashi Yachita became central figures. The latter was the first modern Japanese to become a Jesuit. The juridical person named Jochi Gakuin was inaugurated. In April of 1913, 360 years after Xavier had left Japan, his dream and hope were fulfilled with the opening of Sophia University. The early corps of professors would come from Europe, from China, from India, from America, and from Japan. They would bring with them the various cultural traditions and the various forms of wisdom from these areas. They would create a focus for exchanges of thoughts and various academic studies from all around the world. With confidence, they started the arrangements that would soon produce the special color that Sophia University retains even today.



Joseph Dahlmann, SJ



Henri Boucher, SJ



James Rockliff, SJ

Thanks to the unforgotten dreams of Xavier long ago, thanks to the decisiveness of Pope Pius X, thanks to the pushing and the praying of the Jesuits, Sophia University has taken root deeply in Japan and is continuing her progress to 2013, the hundredth anniversary of her foundation.



The third president,  
Tsuchihashi Yachita, SJ



The first president,  
Hermann Hoffmann, SJ