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# Beyond Borders

A Global Perspective of Jesuit Mission History

Eds. Shinzo Kawamura  
and  
Cyril Veliath



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**Beyond Borders: A Global Perspective  
of Jesuit Mission History**

**Edited  
by**

**SHINZO KAWAMURA  
CYRIL VELIATH**

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## Sophia University Press

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## Gifts, Adulations, and Force of Arms: The “Devotion” of the Jesuits to the Tribal People of the Peripheral Areas of Colonial Paraguay

Kazuhiisa TAKEDA

Japan Society for the Promotion of Science

### Introduction

On observing the Jesuit mission reports that were issued from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, one cannot help but notice the devotion with which the members of the Society of Jesus dedicated their entire lives to the missionary work on hand. Some were very enthusiastic with regard to their work, braving any type of danger in order to achieve their loftiest goal, which was the Christianization of the world. According to Father John W. O'Malley, the task of conveying the Gospel to non-Christians had traditionally been referred to as 'journeying to the infidel.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, for the Jesuits, missionary activity involved nothing other than traveling from one place to the other, a job that would have to be carried out with no fear of danger.

In the case of South America under Spanish rule, the same devotion drove the Jesuits into 'humanizing' the tribal people before their Christianization. Confronting the indigenous customs that were totally different from the European-Christian tradition, many missionaries decided right from the very start that the tribal people were worse than beasts, and felt a great need to make 'men' out of them.<sup>2</sup> Hence, they undertook various measures to transform the indigenous people into 'men,' and into 'Christians.' Some of these attempts appear childish but others went to extremes, since the Jesuits were even ready to take forceful action.

This article which deals with the Jesuits in colonial Paraguay intends to probe the actual situation of their missionary work, with reference to people living under primitive conditions. First, I would like to describe the bountiful aspects of the Jesuits as givers, that is, as donors of numerous gifts to the indigenous people. Next, I will discuss their skillful persuasion of the leaders of tribal communities by word and deed, with reference to the holding of a carefully planned Christian ceremony, and finally I shall explain the forceful measures the Jesuits adopted with regard to obstinate native leaders, and their one-sided interpretation of certain mixed Christian and indigenous elements.

### Granting Numerous Gifts

To begin with, I shall introduce one of the activities of the Jesuits whereby they sought to gain the favor of the tribal people. During the first half of the seventeenth century, when Father Roque González de Santa Cruz<sup>3</sup> got acquainted with the natives in Paraguay, he repeatedly insisted that they should be allowed to have various items:

Later on, (the Paraguayan Indians) wanted to prevent my (Father Roque's) steps, and they told me to return. But I told them that I came here not for that reason, but to teach them the road to Heaven, and I gave them some items. The Indians then became quite soft, and one place seemed to me suitable in order that the members of the Society may build a reduction. I asked them to erect a cross there. The Indians, in spite of being infidels, helped to set up the cross.<sup>4</sup>

We see here that an offer of goods played a key role in opening the hearts of the tribal people, and leading them to promise generous support to the Jesuits in building the villages known as Reductions or Missions. In other words, giving those items was an effective way for the missionaries to get to know the natives.

However, as regards the content of the items, Father Roque did not mention anything. But Father Justo Van Suerck, a contemporary of Roque, explained them in detail. According to his letter, the goods offered were the following: needle, pointed metal piece, knife, scissors, mirror, comb, rosary beads, small bell and other things.<sup>5</sup> For the Europeans all these items were quite trivial, but for the indigenous people living under primitive conditions even glass was equivalent to gold.<sup>6</sup> A number of tribal people became attached to just a knife or a wedge, and approached the Jesuits in order to develop a good relationship with them.<sup>7</sup> The Jesuits themselves had a correct understanding of the effects of giving these goods to the natives. They did it for purposes of evangelical work, and they continued with that policy into the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

However, in spite of the efforts of the Jesuits in providing all kinds of goods to the tribal people, they did not always meet with success. In some cases, the leaders of these indigenous people saw through the purpose of the Jesuits, and consequently became skeptical of their generous acts. As an example of this I shall now deal with the reactions of two leaders of the Tobatín, one of the tribal peoples of the peripheral areas of colonial Paraguay, against the missionary activities of the Jesuits.

In 1697, two Jesuits Bartolomé Jiménez and Francisco de Robles left Nuestra Señora de Fe, one of the Jesuit Missions built at the southeast region of Asunción, for the northern region of that city, in order to convert the Tobatín to Christianity. They were accompanying many Guaraní who had already become Christian, and who were the major tribal group of Paraguay. When the two Je-

suits and the converted Guaraní arrived at the Tobatín village, they began to negotiate with the two leaders, namely Pedro Pucu and Marcos. According to Father Antonio Sepp, who was the translator and redactor of the document written by Father Jiménez, the former was a famous Indian leader and performer of the traditional indigenous rites, while the other was called his 'assistant' (ayudante in Spanish) or 'pupil' (alumno in Spanish) in the ceremony.<sup>9</sup> It also appears that both had been baptized at least twice, but had abjured their faiths.<sup>10</sup>

As expected, most of the followers of the two leaders were greatly fascinated by various goods as the following description shows:

Tomás Anoti, a Christian Indian of my (Father Jiménez's) reduction of Our Lady of Faith, who always served me faithfully, took courage. This time, he began to shout in a voice: "I have brought many pieces of tobacco, herbs, clothes, needles, pointed metal pieces, knives, and fishhooks, as gifts. Beloved brothers! Come out without fear! We have brought peace, peace, not war. Come on!" The barbarians pierced their ears, and their mouths were filled with herbs and tobacco.<sup>11</sup>

However, it appeared as though Pedro Pucu and Marcos did not want to accept the items offered by Tomás Anoti. The opposition of the former is expressed as follows:

"Your needles and pointed metal pieces are baits to attract us and to put us in the hard jail of the Spaniards." Pedro Pucu said to Tomás Anoti [...] "Get out of here, or I will shoot an arrow at you!"<sup>12</sup>

Fathers Jiménez and Robles kept on with their work of persuading the two indigenous leaders, but their obstinate attitude did not change, despite the fact that most of the natives were captivated by a number of useful gifts:

As we have said before, when the barbarians were satisfied with those herbs, we began a conversation with them, with reference to the purpose of our coming, and the principles of the Catholic Faith to which we desired to convert them. Except for the malicious Largo Pedro (i.e., Pedro Pucu) and his pupil Marcos, all the Indians listened to us with attention and goodwill. [...] the two magicians were not satisfied with the proposals (of the Jesuits).<sup>13</sup>

Although the Jesuits were confronted with such a harsh reality, they stuck to the idea of building a good relationship with Pedro Pucu and Marcos. As regards the reason for this, Father Sepp gives us the following explanation:

If you desire to convert the entire population of a village, the most impor-

tant thing would be to start from the leader. If you succeed in his conversion, the others will follow.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, in order to facilitate Christianization, the missionaries had to win the favor of the Tobatín leaders at all costs. Pedro Pucu and Marcos, nevertheless, took a skeptical view of the donation of gifts. In this situation, the next strategy the Jesuits adopted was well-prepared and clever persuasion, by word and deed.

### **Christian Ceremonies Performed with Adulations**

While the Jesuits and the converted Guaraní stayed at a place near the Tobatín's village awaiting the agreement, the time for the celebration of Candlemas arrived. A brilliant idea suddenly came to Father Jiménez. He asked Pedro Pucu with great courtesy for permission to realize the following proposal, and finally, Pedro Pucu, under pressure of his excessive courtesy, admitted the Christian ceremony:

"Pedro—I (Father Jiménez) said to him—as you lived with the Spaniards, you will know that today, all the Christians make a great and holy feast, the day of Candlemas, the purification of the Holy Virgin Mary and Mother of God." [...] "We have to make a great feast. Let us be permitted to carry out the sacrifice with reference to our God in the desert." [...] It is not suitable to omit the important feast [...] we are in your territory as outsiders. Therefore, we beg for permission to celebrate our office here, and to render to beloved Mother of God the honor related to this day."<sup>15</sup>

This type of politeness was a meticulously planned strategy to persuade the stubborn leader. Father Jiménez revealed his real intention behind the politeness as follows:

What can the barbarian (Pedro Pucu) reply to so polite a petition? Whether he liked it or not, such an unexpected kindness from annoying guests put him in a quandary. There was no other way for him to accede to the wish of Father Jiménez.<sup>16</sup>

No matter what the real intention was, after getting the permission of Pedro Pucu to perform the Christian rite, the Jesuits and the converted Guaraní began the most magnificent ceremony possible for them.<sup>17</sup>

In the midst of the performance, there was a change among the Tobatín. Father Jiménez described this change as follows:

The cruel barbarians, dressed in skins of jaguars and wolves, equipped with bows, arrows, and sticks, surrounded us quietly, modestly, and si-

lently. They were astonished at the ceremony and the splendor of the Holy Mass. Especially the magician Marcos listened to the words of God with the greatest attention.<sup>18</sup>

Marcos, who was one of the spectators, moved by the majesty of the Christian ceremony, remarked to the other Tobatín as follows:

It seems to me that the best we can do is to trust all these holy Fathers. Also, we might have to openly accept all that they (Fathers) preach us the Christian Faith, so laboriously and with tears in their eyes. I do not want to mention their generosity and the numerous gifts that they distributed among us; neither do I want to mention the promises that they have made to us, as for example the promise to protect us from the Spaniards. They fathers gave us their own words. All this is enough evidence of their charity and their love for us.<sup>19</sup>

Observing this amicable attitude, Jiménez said with confidence: “[...] the roots (of Christianity) have already grown, and Marcos was determined to follow the servant of God with his people [...]”<sup>20</sup>

On the contrary however, Pedro Pucu, another leader superior to Marcos, was totally unaffected by the ceremony, and rebuked his assistant sharply:

“You (Marcos) preached to us as if you did to old stupid women. You didn’t preach to men like me. Your assertions are fantasies created from a cowardly heart. Your proofs are the fabrications, not based on the truth [...]”<sup>21</sup>

The fantasies pointed out by Pedro Pucu were not necessarily one-sided assumptions. In fact, Father Jiménez admitted frankly that their way of persuasion did not always depend on honesty. It was sometimes based on fiction, and was out of touch with reality

The reader must know that at their first encounter with the barbarians, our (Christian) Indians told them (non-Christian Indians) all kinds of tales, not just the truth, but also fables that were invented with exuberant fantasy [...]”<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of how acute the caution of Pedro Pucu was, there was no doubt that his assistant Marcos yielded to the Christian ceremony that was performed with such adulation. As we saw before, the countless goods the Jesuits offered had already held almost all the inhabitants of the Tobatín village captive. But Pedro Pucu, the most obdurate leader in the community, did not bow to any such adulation. In this situation, the Jesuits decided as a last resort to have re-

course to arms.

### Encounter with the Cross after the Armed Conflict

For the Jesuits in Spanish America, using armed force as a last resort in persuading the indigenous people was regarded as reasonable. Such a conviction was based on the theory of Father José de Acosta. In his famous work *De procuranda indorum salute* (Salamanca, 1588), Acosta argued about the need to resort to arms in order to convert warlike tribal people to Christianity.<sup>23</sup>

Father Jiménez did not make any direct mention of the *De procuranda*, but after explaining the failure of gifts and adulations, he touched upon a precedent of the Jesuits of the seventeenth century, and justified the use of armed force as follows:

It seems as though two measures are useful for our plans [...] in particular with our gifts such as herbs and tobacco that are essential to convert the Paraguayan Indians. The second measure was discussed many times by the missionary Fathers. It was based on pious fraud, for the purpose of capturing two wrong-Indian leaders and putting them in secure protection [...] if the peaceful measures do not succeed, the strong Spanish force will be useful, and it would be able to enchain Pedro, the leader of the conspiracy [...] For these reasons, our missionary Fathers decided to take drastic measures with regard to justice. Soft evangelical words were not successful in leading this wild human beast into the fold of the Christian sheep through the celestial door. Therefore, we have to take action, in accordance with the severe words: *Compellere entrare* (enter forcefully). Jesus Christ himself said so, and incorporated our herd by force. Other missionary Fathers also had to resort to such measures. Lucas Quesadas and Justo Marcilla had attacked, and later converted this Tobatín Indians.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, armed conflict broke out between the converted Guaraní under the command of the Jesuits and the followers of Pedro Pucu. The final result was that the leader was caught alive and taken into custody by the armed Guaraní. However, one of them killed Pedro Pucu, the moment the Jesuits averted their eyes from him.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of this article is not to analyze the battle, and so I will not take up the issue of the war. Rather than the conflict itself I would like to concentrate on an event after the battle.

After the death of Pedro Pucu, the Jesuits and the converted Guaraní could finally enter his village, and came across an interesting cross:

When we came up to the huts of the infidels for the first time, we saw an artistically created cross in front of the huts. There was no doubt that the cross was made by a devout Spaniard who had built it when he stayed there. However, a large bird of prey was fastened to this cross. This bird



was a kind of eagle with its wings spread, similar to our poor Savior. The bird was forced to unfold his limbs on the cross. His chest was pierced by an arrow.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the meaning of the bird of prey, Father Jiménez declared as follows:

When we saw that cross, our Indians (the Guaraní Indians) asked what this bird on the cross signified. The other Indians (the Tobatín Indians) answered that the idiot Pedro Pucu, an apostate of the Christian Faith, wanted to mock the mystery of our redemption, and cause it to lose prestige. For that reason, a bird of prey was put on the cross, instead of the Savior.<sup>27</sup>

It is rather risky for us to accept such an explanation without question. First, although we are aware of Jiménez's insistence that the cross in the village of Pedro Pucu was made by a Spaniard, yet we are unable to find any hard evidence to support this assertion. His insistence seems to be based on mere groundless assumption. Second, regardless of the existence of the bird on the cross, if Pedro Pucu disliked all things related to Christianity, he would probably have torn it down. However, Pedro Pucu let the cross remain in his village. He also repeatedly refused the proposal of the Jesuits to convert to Christianity. On examining the document of Father Jiménez, we see that the evidence presented to affirm that the bird of prey on the cross was a defilement of Jesus Christ, was insufficient. As mentioned before, according to a revision of the document by Werner Hoffmann in 1974, the explanation offered concerning the bird of prey was obtained through asking questions and receiving answers from the indigenous people, and these would include not just the converted Guaraní but also the Tobatín under Pedro Pucu's rule.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, the same document revised by Arturo Nagy and Francisco Pérez-Maricevich in 1967 indicates that the Jesuits asked the converted Guaraní to explain the meaning of the bird, and they answered as follows:

[...] we asked our Indians (the Christian Guaraní) what the bird on the cross would signify. They (the Christian Guaraní) answered immediately that this was a definite sign of mockery, with which an idiot Pedro Pucu who had abandoned the Christian religion, wanted to mock the mystery of our redemption. For this reason, instead of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, Pedro Pucu fixed a bird of prey on the cross.<sup>29</sup>

Here, the difference between the texts does not matter. Rather, the important thing to note is that in each case the Jesuits did not interpret the meaning of the bird on the cross entirely by themselves, by merely jumping to the conclusion

that it expressed a debasement of Christianity. Their interpretation was deeply based on the answers of the tribal people. Fathers Jiménez and Robles thereupon accepted the people's responses, having no doubts at all regarding their reliability.

Now that we have seen one possibility, namely that the bird of prey might have been a symbol of depreciation, we have to consider another one, namely the possibility that Pedro Pucu understood Christianity in his own unique way. As mentioned earlier, if the cross were an object hateful to him, he would have burned or destroyed it. When the Jesuits entered his village however, the cross certainly remained intact. This might have been a sign that the cross was something that had an exclusive meaning for Pedro Pucu, and that he saw something positive in that symbol of a religion different from his own. In any case it is certain that we have to reconsider the reasons behind Pedro Pucu's inflexible resistance to the missionary activities of the Jesuits. Considering both the existence of the cross and the bird of prey in his village, he might have been merely expressing a desire for a self-directed life, on the basis of his own understanding of Christianity.

### Conclusion

Through our reflections so far we arrive at the following conclusions. The Jesuits in colonial Paraguay adopted various measures to convert the tribal people to Christianity. Depending on the situation, the measures were moderate or extreme. In particular, when we consider the Jesuits' consensus that missionary activities among warlike natives could be carried out through force of arms, we see a clear contrast in the missionary policies that were adopted in Latin America, and in Asian countries such as Japan and China.

The important point here is to consider the evangelical work of the Jesuits in colonial Paraguay, namely their one-sided devotion to the indigenous people. Their missionary activities were carried out on the basis of the firm belief that Christianization was the only way to save the souls of those tribal people, whether they asked for God's grace or not. In this context, the word 'Conquista Espiritual' (Conquest of the Souls) is understandable, for it expresses the essence of the evangelical work in the Americas. Yet, this policy and the various attempts were obviously a sort of unilateral imposition, when seen from the eyes of the indigenous people. The sudden advent of the Christian missionaries upset them, and obliged them to accept hitherto unknown customs and codes of conduct. Even if there was a Native American like Pedro Pucu who was ready to follow Christianity on the basis of his own interpretation of the religion, it was not acceptable to the Jesuits. Here we realize the value of a multifaceted view in understanding 'others,' since it would be essential for us living in a global world where Universalism and Localism are in conflict.

## NOTES

1. John W. O'Malley, "Mission and the Early Jesuits," *The Way Supplement*, 79 (1994), p.3.
2. "Carta del Padre Ladislao Orosz, misionero de la Compañía de Jesús, de la provincia austríaca, al Padre Francisco Molindez, en aquel entonces provincial de dicha provincia, escrita en Córdoba de Tucumán, el 1 de octubre de 1731," Mauro Matthei (ed.) *Cartas e informes de misioneros jesuitas extranjeros en Hispanoamérica*, Vol. 3, 1724-1735 (Santiago: Universidad Católica de Chile, 1972), p. 288.
3. He will henceforth be referred to as Roque.
4. "Carta del Padre Roque González de Santa Cruz al Padre Provincial Pedro de Oñate, 28 de diciembre de 1615," Fernando María Moreno (ed.) *Cartas de los santos Roque González de Santa Cruz, Alonso Rodríguez y Juan del Castillo de la Compañía de Jesús: mártires de las reducciones guaraníes* (Asunción: Secretariado del Paraguay, 1988), p. 113. For more examples with regard to the gifts offered by the Jesuits to the indigenous people, see "Carta del Padre Roque González de Santa Cruz al Padre Provincial Diego de Torres Bollo, Asunción, 15 de mayo de 1610"; "Carta del Padre Roque González de Santa Cruz, Yapeyú, 15 de noviembre de 1627," *ibid.*, p. 24, 135.
5. Justo Van Suerck, "Carta-relación del Padre Justo Van Suerck, traducida al castellano, Reducción de San Miguel, 1 de marzo de 1629," Guillermo Furlong (ed.) *Justo Van Suerck y su carta sobre Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Distribuidora y Editora Theoría, 1963), p. 85.
6. "Extracto de la carta del Padre Matías Strobel, misionero de la Compañía de Jesús de la provincia austríaca, a un sacerdote de dicha Compañía en Viena, escrita en Buenos Aires, el 15 de junio de p.1727," Matthei (ed.) *Cartas*, p. 240.
7. Furlong (ed.) *Justo Van Suerck*, 85; "Carta Anua de la Provincia de Paraguay, Chile y Tucumán del año de 1610," Carlos Leonhardt y Emilio Ravignani (eds.) *Cartas Anuas de la Provincia del Paraguay, Chile y Tucumán de la Compañía de Jesús, 1609-1614, (Documentos para la historia argentina, Vol. 19, Iglesia)*, (Buenos Aires: Casa Jacobo Peuser, 1927), p. 129.
8. "Extracto de la carta del Padre Matías Strobel, misionero de la Compañía de Jesús de la provincia austríaca, a un sacerdote de dicha Compañía en Viena, escrita en Buenos Aires, el 15 de junio de 1727," Matthei (ed.) *Cartas*, pp. 240-241.
9. With regard to the Jiménez's document, I referred to the following two revised versions: "Historia de la misión entre los tobatines. Relato de la gloriosa misión apostólica realizada por los Reverendos Padres Bartolomé Jiménez y Francisco de Robles S.J., en el año 1697, para convertir a los infieles tobatines. Según la carta del susodicho R.P. Bartolomé Jiménez, escrita de su puño y letra, al Reverendo Padre Provincial de Paracuaria, Simón de León, confiada por el autor al Padre Antonio Sepp, para ser traducida y publicada en idioma alemán," Antonio Sepp, *Jardín de flores paracuaria: edición crítica de las obras del padre Antonio Sepp, S.J., misionero en la Argentina desde 1691 hasta 1733, a cargo de Werner*

*Hoffmann* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1974), p. 73; "Descripción de la gloriosa misión apostólica emprendida en el año 1697 por los reverendos padres Bartolomé Ximénez y Francisco de Robles, para convertir la nación pagana que nosotros llamamos de los Tobatines. Esta relación se sacó del original que el nombrado R.P. Bartolomé Ximénez había remitido al Rvdmo. Padre Simón de León, a la sazón Provincial del Paraguay, y éste confió y ordenó la traducción del texto español al idioma alemán, al P. Antonio Sepp, quien quiso añadir este relato a su historia," Arturo Nagy y Francisco Perez-Maricevich (eds.) *Tres encuentros con América* (Asunción: Editorial del Centenario, 1967), p. 28. For the Internet version of the document issued in 1967, visit the following website: [http://www.bvp.org.py/biblio\\_htm/tres\\_encuentros/ficha.htm](http://www.bvp.org.py/biblio_htm/tres_encuentros/ficha.htm)

10. Sepp, *Jardín*, p. 74.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
14. Antonio Sepp, *Continuación de las labores apostólicas: edición crítica de las obras del padre Antonio Sepp, S.J., misionero en la Argentina desde 1691 hasta 1733, a cargo de Werner Hoffmann* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1973), p. 121.
15. Sepp, *Jardín*, pp. 89-90.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.
23. See the Vol. 2, Chap. 8, 'No se puede aplicar exactamente a los bárbaros el anti-guio y apostólico método de evangelizar,' José de Acosta, *De procuranda indorum salute: Vol. 1, Pacificación y colonización* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1984 [1588] ), pp. 302-312.
24. Sepp, *Jardín*, pp. 95-96.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. Nagy, et al. (eds.) *Tres encuentros*, p. 61.

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## Chapter Four

### Religious Dialogue Perspective