

Francisco worked among the Christians of Goa (whose faith, by tradition, was planted by St Thomas the Apostle in the first century) but he was soon attracted to more challenging work among the pearl fishers of Cape Comorin at the very southern tip of India. Francisco learnt Tamil, the local language, and translated the creed and prayers so that these people could hear Christ in their own tongue. This adaptation of the faith to the local language and customs was to become a hallmark of Jesuit missions.

Another characteristic Jesuit way of proceeding was to write frequent letters back and forth to each other and especially to Ignatius in Rome. These letters provide a fascinating insight into lost worlds, hard for us to imagine. Francisco wrote many such letters.

Francisco spent seven years on the coast of South India, constantly travelling, preaching the gospel, teaching, consoling, comforting, begging alms for the poor, and visiting the sick. During this time he sailed to Malacca in Malaysia and here met a Japanese man, Anjiro, who inspired him to travel further east to Japan.

Arriving in 1549, the Japanese made a deep impression on Francisco. In them he found a depth of spiritual awareness which, he believed, made them especially ready to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. He wrote to the Jesuits he had left behind in India, "May it please God our Lord to grant us a knowledge of the language so that we can speak to them of the things of God, for we shall then, by his grace, favour and assistance, produce much fruit."<sup>5</sup>

But the Japanese refused to believe what Francisco taught them if it was not known in China. Undaunted, Francisco set out for China, seeking audience at the imperial court. If converting the Japanese meant first converting the Chinese, this is what he would do. He landed on Sancian Island in 1552 but there contracted a severe fever from which he died a few weeks later, in sight of mainland China across a narrow stretch of sea.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to the Jesuits of Goa in India, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1549