The Masculine Discourse of Tears
A Theoretical Approach to
Emotional Habitus and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Japan

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The shedding of tears has remained an enduring trait of the human capacity to embody the emotions and indeed an ability to express them. However, the significance individuals attribute to these physical displays is shaped by sociocultural “feeling rules,” moral and religious settings, and the means by which these factors influence the aesthetics of affective display. For Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, tears formed the basis of his constancy, emphasising weeping as an efficacious state for the faithful. To this extent, the presence of devotional, penitential, and contemplative tears played a prominent role in the expansion of the Jesuit Mission throughout early modern Asia. This paper analyses Japan’s “Christian Century” (1549-1650), throughout which we find accounts of Japanese converts publicly shedding tears provoked by evocative performative practices of Jesuit worship through music, drama, and ritual. In so doing, a constructionist approach is employed through a theoretical portmanteau of religious and emotional conceptualisations of Bourdieu’s *habitus* to facilitate comparative analysis of Jesuit and Japanese approaches to emotionality. This paper emphasises that ritualised weeping is a culturally-constructed and performative act, a learned behaviour that draws upon socio-religious conventions of emotional embodiment, interpretation, and expression. Thus it considers the differences and/or similarities in the emotional pedagogies of Japanese and Jesuit weeping and their role in religion; the role ritualised weeping played in the conversion of the Japanese masses to Catholicism; and the ways in which Japanese gendered concepts of emotion influenced the aesthetics of affective expression. In so doing, it will be argued that tears are an invaluable tool for measuring emotional climates, the various expressions of faith, and uncovering the history of the Jesuit mission in Japan.