

Challenging Comparative Biography

A Review Article

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SUZUKI Norihisa 鈴木範久, *Uchimura Kanzō to sono jidai: Shiga Shigetaka to no hikaku* 内村鑑三とその時代～志賀重昂との比較 [Uchimura Kanzō and his times: A comparison with Shiga Shigetaka]. Tokyo: Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan Shuppan Kyoku, 1975. 269 pp. Notes. ¥1,500.

In this excellent study, Suzuki uses events in the life of Shiga Shigetaka (often read “Jūkō” in Japan, 1863-1927) to illuminate the biography of Shiga’s contemporary, the much more famous Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930). In the decades since World War II, Uchimura has become a cultural hero, universally admired for his courage in the face of hostile opposition from government and society. Suzuki’s pioneering study focuses on the causes behind the differing historical roles of two men who shared many similarities.

Suzuki organizes his work around ten comparable elements in the careers of the two men. In the first seven which cover their lives up to the age of about forty, their careers ran parallel. The last three demonstrate the opposing points of view which the two mature scholars developed out of their similar earlier experiences. The evaluation of Suzuki’s work begins with a summary of his argument.

Each of the two men was born into a samurai family. Both families served daimyos who remained loyal to the shogun in the War of the Restoration. Because their domains had backed the losing side, the fathers of both Shiga and Uchimura lost their considerable positions as scholar-bureaucrats shortly after the Restoration. Their sons were impressionable school boys. Shiga’s father died a few years later at thirty-nine, while Uchi-

mura's father, devoid of self-confidence and unable to find further employment, turned over the headship of the family to his eldest son Kanzō. Kanzō was sixteen and he himself forty. Shiga subsequently kept alive his ties with his father's colleagues in the old domain, while Uchimura turned his back on everything connected with the Tokugawa past. He thus lost the sense of continuity that Shiga cherished.

Both boys decided to train themselves for careers in the new world of Meiji Japan through the study of the English language and the practical sciences it made available. This career choice brought them to the Sapporo Agricultural College in Hokkaido. Here they encountered the evangelical Calvinism which the chief American teacher at the school had so persuasively taught. Uchimura became a Christian while Shiga did not, but each acquired scientific training which helped him in his later career. Immediately upon graduation, Uchimura stayed on in Hokkaido as a government officer in charge of fisheries production while Shiga became a middle-school teacher in Nagano. Neither remained long in his post; Uchimura's restless ambition pushed him to Tokyo while Shiga's bibulous relaxation led to his dismissal.

Both young men then left Japan for pivotal encounters with the West. After a disastrous marriage and divorce, Uchimura studied in Massachusetts. Here he received an excellent contemporary liberal arts education and gained a healthy sense of confidence in Japan's cultural tradition. Shiga, in contrast, journeyed among the islands of the Pacific as an observer aboard a Japanese warship. He returned fearful of the destruction that the incursion of the West had brought to the native peoples. His first book, a report of his impressions, warned his fellow Japanese of the dangers posed by contact with the West. His apprehensive return from a first encounter contrasts with Uchimura's greater confidence. Back in Japan, both men acted on the basis of their conclusions. Shiga became an editor and writer who consistently championed the need for greater Japanese strength

to ward off the Western threat. Uchimura accepted a job as head teacher in a new middle school at Niigata, determined that it should at the same time offer high quality Christian education and retain its financial independence. He left in disillusion when it became clear that the founders of the school could not pay the eleven missionary teachers whose services they had accepted. Patriotism enthused by contact with the West had earned Shiga a respected place in society, but brought Uchimura only embarrassment and impoverishment.

Back in Tokyo, Uchimura soon became embroiled in another controversy. As a part of its program to foster nationalism, the Ministry of Education had commissioned a statement defining the nature of Japaneseness. It was the intent of the authors that this Imperial Rescript on Education would strengthen the national consciousness of the people. Copies of the new document were distributed to schools where they quickly became objects of pious veneration. Uchimura, now teaching at a prestigious government school, attended along with other faculty and students the ceremony which marked the arrival of his school's copy of the Rescript. At that time he did not bow before it—as observers thought he should. His act became the immediate target of outraged editors throughout the country. They interpreted his hesitation to bow before heathen idols as treasonous non-conformity. In the ensuing hubbub, Uchimura caught pneumonia; his wife contracted the same disease and succumbed to it while he slowly recovered. Shiga's magazine commented on Uchimura's act with far more understanding than most. Shiga later followed at a distance the lonely cortege consisting of Uchimura and three friends who accompanied his wife's body to the cemetery on foot. Shiga's acts of friendship for an old schoolmate demonstrate perhaps more than anything the sense of communion he felt with Uchimura.

Though Uchimura's refusal to bow before the Imperial Rescript now lives on as Japan's most illustrious example of the assertion of individual conscience against the demands of society,

at the time Uchimura had few grounds for satisfaction. He could not avoid self-pity. After months of restless wandering, he settled down in Kyoto to write. Here one of his first books dealt with geography, a subject in which Shiga had developed a speciality. Shiga's first book on geography came out at about the same time as Uchimura's. Both men sought in Japan's position on the earth hints as to its future role in the world of nations, and both found Japan's role to lie in the position of intermediacy between East and West. Here the similarity ended. Uchimura discovered that Japan would bring together the complementary cultures of East and West into a new amalgam of the best in Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism. Shiga, in contrast, saw Japan standing between the two worlds as a manufacturer and merchant, selling to all comers. Both felt that the distinctive roles they prophesied would result from Japan's particular geographical position.

The material summarized so far constitutes approximately the first two-thirds of Suzuki's book. In these seven chapters, he notes differences between Shiga and Uchimura, but emphasizes at each point the basic similarities in their development. The final three chapters reflect the more basic philosophical disagreements that grew out of their earlier career and religious decisions.

Early in the twentieth century, Shiga entered politics and enjoyed a brief career in the Diet. For the rest of his life, he retained a lively interest in the workings and results of the government process. Uchimura in contrast turned to the study and exposition of the Bible, convinced that the political process could never better man's lot on earth. Out of this study grew the Mukyōkai (often translated "non-church") religious movement now associated with his name. The Russo-Japanese war brought into bold relief the results of the two men's differences. Shiga toured the fronts, mingled with the leaders of Japan's victorious forces, and enjoyed enthusiastic audiences when he described his experiences back home. Uchimura became an absolute pacifist and virtually retired from the world to inspire young men to

prevent their nation from further aggressive war. The events of World War I led Uchimura to join the Second Coming Movement which predicted that the world would end with Christ's return to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. Increasingly Uchimura saw these events toward which history was leading to be "real" while the world around him was "unreal." Shiga, as always, limited his concern to the immediately observable.

Suzuki concludes that the two men shared similar origins; similar careers as teachers, editors and writers; and similar love for their country and its people. Beyond that their differences led them to very divergent conclusions about the relation between this world and the next.

It has been necessary to summarize Suzuki's work in some detail because of the intricate web of interpretation and fact that he weaves. Three elements deserve particular recognition.

The first is Suzuki's thesis: that the differences between the two men arose from their contrasting experience in the attempt to relate to other individuals. Both, in common with other Japanese, placed great emphasis upon this ability. Suzuki traces their differing degrees of success to the relation of each to his father. Shiga's father died but left his son a legacy of devoted friends and subordinates from his Tokugawa position. They assisted Shiga at numerous points in his career and kept him in touch with the family roots in the provincial city of Okazaki. Shiga had carefully prepared the manuscript of a speech to be delivered before young people in Okazaki when death stilled his voice. In contrast to Shiga's father, Uchimura's father did not die for many years. Instead he lived on, as good as dead since he could provide neither physical nor spiritual support for his son. Perhaps as a result, Uchimura felt little fondness for the provincial world of Takasaki domain into which he had been born and which had shaped his family for generations. Lacking continuity in locale or human relationships, Uchimura went on to seek without success other human beings whom he could trust, but each attempt failed. Except for his third wife, most of those

with whom he sought to create lasting ties died or seemed to turn against him. Since he could not form satisfying human relationships in this world, he increasingly anticipated them in the world to come. Shiga's close ties with his hometown and family friends thus resulted in general agreement with the "realities" about him, while Uchimura's lack of warm human relations forced him to focus on the satisfactions offered by the "unrealities" of the world beyond. His conviction of the reality of the Second Coming illustrates the extent to which this process had developed by the end of his life.

Although this thesis is the book's most noteworthy element, three other aspects of Suzuki's work merit attention. The first is the new material for the study of Uchimura which his painstaking and devoted research have unearthed. Most important are the materials on Uchimura's childhood in Takasaki and first teaching post in Niigata. The Niigata newspaper covered the early events in the history of the school with a care which reflects the deep stake the people of Niigata felt in their new middle school. The newspaper's detailed summary of Uchimura's inaugural address shows how failure was practically foredoomed. Other chapters reflect a familiarity with numerous periodical files which have escaped the eyes of other researchers on Uchimura. Suzuki would do his colleagues a service if he made these materials available in a periodical like *Uchimura Kanzō kenkyū*.

In addition to new materials, Suzuki has provided numerous interesting new insights about events that are well known. Two that interested me were his recognition that the early Sapporo church formed by students probably gained its great strength precisely because the closest missionaries lived in Hakodate and could visit Sapporo only twice a year. The church members had to face all the problems of a young congregation without the advantages or disadvantages of regular missionary advice. Suzuki leads one to believe that more regular contact would probably not have fostered such vigorous growth. The second opinion that attracted my attention was Suzuki's interpretation

of Mukyōkai as an example of the Japanese trait of purifying systems of thought they bring in by a search for their original forms. Both insights deserve attention in future studies of Uchimura.

In addition to his thesis and new material on Uchimura, Suzuki's method should be mentioned. It is an example of what would be called in some circles "psycho-history" or "psycho-biography." The genre is distinguished by its emphasis on the development of the personality of the individual under consideration and his relations with other people, particularly his parents. The works of Erik Erikson have demonstrated how useful this approach can be in the study of religious figures. Erikson and the others who have followed him base their attitudes on the insights of Freud. Though in the hands of a master like Erikson, the method has produced memorable results, the less capable pens of other writers have often encumbered their work with murky excursions into psychological theory. Such theory, while important and necessary, serves the cause of scholarship best when developed in separate studies rather than in conjunction with the study of important historical figures. Suzuki starts from a basic Freudian assumption about the nature of a man's relation with his father. He then avoids excursions into theory to achieve a convincing interpretation which gains its strength from patient research and controlled artistry. It is a model worthy of emulation.

Many other specialists will find themselves in disagreement with elements of Suzuki's thesis. I wonder, for instance, about the obvious effects on Shiga and Uchimura of the differences in their incomes. Although Shiga's father died, he did not leave his son impoverished. We are told that he paid tuition at Sapporo when most students went specifically because of the financial assistance the government offered. Later Shiga appears to have been able to talk himself into a higher salary in his first job than one with his training might have expected. His numerous trips as an observer aboard naval vessels further testify to his

friends in influential places. Finally, the very fact that he could run for the Diet demonstrates considerable means. In contrast, Uchimura needed the student stipend provided by the Agricultural College to help support the extended family reliant on him. He lived for years close to the poverty line and preached the advantages of democracy to his countrymen while property qualifications prevented him from voting. These differences in financial capability, one would suppose, may have shaped the dissimilarities between the two men as much as their contrasting attitudes toward tradition. To suggest in this way an alternative interpretation is not to belittle Suzuki's accomplishment, but rather to affirm the strengths of his arguments and the careful reading his work deserves.

In Suzuki's afterword, he notes that some authors finish writing with a sense of relief, but that for him "only slightly bitter regrets and a sense of embarrassment remain" (p. 267). Elsewhere he informs us that he has studied Uchimura off and on for eighteen years. Some of Suzuki's readers might expect such depth of acquaintance to induce a greater sense of accomplishment, but others better acquainted with Uchimura will understand Suzuki's problem. The biographer's difficulties in dealing with Uchimura result from their subject's terrible demands on himself. Suzuki has produced the best interpretive essay to date and opens up new avenues for further research. His final chapters demand particular attention. They deal with the years after the Russo-Japanese War during which Uchimura produced the vast majority of his writings. Practically no work has been done by scholars on this period. Although we can understand the cause of Suzuki's dissatisfaction, therefore, we cannot agree with it. He has no cause for anything but deep satisfaction.