



Mark R. Mullins, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*

Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003. x + 423 pp. \$124, cloth,
ISBN 90-04-13156-6.

THIS IS A FINE BOOK. It could have been a great book. But before getting into the reasons for this assessment, I should begin by pointing out the intention that informs the organization of the whole.

The editor explains the intention succinctly. “Without disregarding the importance of various indigenous folk and Shinto traditions, the larger and fascinating story of religion in Japan is, in fact, one of the reception, impact, and adaptation of foreign-born religions in relation to native traditions and cultural concerns. The aim of this volume is to provide students and scholars of religion and Asian studies with a guide to research on Christianity in this larger context of Japanese religious history, culture, and society” (vii).

In pursuing this aim, the editor has organized the material into three parts of unequal length. The first and longest is “Christianity in Japanese History” (225 pp.). At first glance, this part seems to deal with familiar subjects: the beginnings of Roman Catholic mission work, including the subsequent banning of Christianity, the persecution of foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians, and the appearance of underground Christian communities; the establishment of Christian schools, especially Protestant; the changing relationships between Christianity and a series of Japanese governments that initially welcomed, or at least did not interfere with, Christian missionaries from the West but later grew ambivalent about Westernization, eventually opposing it in favor of harshly imposed nationalistic and imperialistic values. One soon discovers, however, that this part also features subjects not usually touched on in Western surveys: the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Charismatic movements; indigenous Christian bodies including both the relatively familiar Nonchurch movement and less familiar groups such as the Christ Heart Church, the Spirit of Jesus Church, the Holy Ecclesia of Jesus, etc.; a chapter on theological currents in Japanese Christianity; and the story of Bible translation in Japan.

Part 2, “Christianity in Japanese Society and Culture” (156 pp.), presents seven chapters on Christianity in broader contexts: interreligious dialogue; Christianity’s relationship to Shinto and, separately, to the new religions; its role in the lives of novelists; mission schools and education for women; Christian social work; and Christianity’s slowly growing sense of autonomy in speaking out on sociopolitical issues—or issues of human rights and social ethics.

Part 3, “Resources for the Study of Christianity in Japan” (22 pp.), presents one list of archival collections in Japanese institutions and another or research institutes

and academic societies together with the names of publications and information as to how these organizations can be contacted—though the layout is sometimes puzzling.

For all these varied subjects, the editor has elicited the cooperation of top-notch scholars. The range and depth of research is immediately evident and is supported by excellent bibliographies, one at the end of each chapter plus a general bibliography toward the end of the book. Contributors (from Canada, England, Japan, Norway, and the US) are identified in terms of their institutional affiliation and publications. The book concludes with a helpful index.

To consider each chapter in turn would be tedious. I propose, therefore, only to say a word about the chapters that struck me as particularly noteworthy—without prejudice to other chapters.

“The Cross under an Imperial Sun: Imperialism, Nationalism, and Japanese Christianity, 1895–1945,” by A. Hamish Ion, traces the fortunes of Christianity under an increasingly militaristic empire. The reader will not easily forget the author’s observations about the actions of Japanese Christian leaders during the war years and how the government exploited their vulnerability and nationalism.

The editor’s “Indigenous Christian Movements,” taking issue with the “myth of the homogeneous Japanese,” discusses how the founders and followers of “made in Japan” movements have found ways to free their expressions of Japanese Christianity from its Western trappings and to be “authentically” Christian and Japanese.

Michael John Sherrill, in “Christian Churches in the Postwar Period,” sketches the complex story of the mainline churches. This is a sensitive piece that not only states the facts but also discerns the pain that has befallen both those who remain in the churches and those who see it as having betrayed its own principles.

No account of Christianity in Japan would be complete without attention to “Bible Translations.” Bernardin Schneider’s chapter tells the story clearly, and readers will sense immediately that they are in the hands of a master.

Often excluded from books of this kind, the subject of interreligious dialogue is presented winningly by Notto Thelle in his “The Christian Encounter with Japanese Buddhism.” He shows how conflict gave way to dialogue in the late nineteenth century and, in turn, how dialogue has taken shape in the twentieth century. His reflections on “Buddhist-Christians” and “Christian-Buddhists” and on the significance of the emerging internationalization of dialogue will be refreshing to many.

John Breen’s chapter on “Shinto and Christianity” is superb. A richer and more nuanced account of historical developments in Shinto and its conflicts with Christianity would be hard to find. But here and throughout the book, Shinto comes across as a “villain” in relation to Christianity. I wish that there had been space for a more balanced picture of Shinto. It would have been appropriate, I think, to give some account of why it is that Shinto, particularly in its local festivals, commands such powerful support from ordinary people—and of the challenge this poses to Christianity.

Susumu Shimazono’s “New Religions and Christianity” provides many insights. It

deals not only with the characteristics common to the new religions and Christianity but also with the social strata to which they have appealed. Particularly noteworthy is his comparison between the situation in Japan following the Meiji Restoration and the situation in postwar South Korea. Whether his distinction between world-affirming religions, such as Tenrikyō, and world-denying religions, such as the “new new religions” and Christianity, can be affirmed without qualification is open to question, but the use he makes of these categories is illuminating.

“Bridging the Divide: Writing Christian Faith (and Doubt) in Modern Japan” is a cumbersome title, but Mark Williams does a splendid job of describing the agonizing difficulties Japanese authors have faced in trying to take account of Christianity in their spiritual wanderings. Yet such a characterization does not begin to do justice to this poignant and moving chapter. This is a “must read” piece.

In “Christianity and Politics in Japan,” William Steele identifies and discusses lucidly a number of political issues that have affected Japanese Christians during the decades since 1950: pacifism versus rearmament; the demonstrations occasioned by the imminent (and eventual) renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty; the question of Christian participation in the government-sponsored expo project; repeated attempts by conservative politicians to nationalize Yasukuni Shrine; government involvement and the use of tax money in the religious rites surrounding the funeral of Emperor Hirohito and the accession of Emperor Akihito; and protests against the declaration by Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori that “Japan is a divine country centered on the emperor.” Steele concludes, perhaps with a trace of hope, that many Christians are speaking with a louder voice than in the past and that “there is a new sense of confidence that Christian words and deeds are no longer alien to Japanese society” (374).

All in all, this book is an excellent resource. Why, then, do I praise it so faintly?

It is important here to draw a sharp distinction between form and content. When it comes to content, the praise is well-deserved. The substance of the various chapters is almost uniformly excellent. But when it comes to form, there are many regrettable problems. In general, they can be summarized under the headings of editorial inconsistencies and proofreading failures.

I should first indicate, though, that the editor’s decision to allow each author to spell words as they are spelled in his or her own country does not constitute a problem. To find “gaoled” where one would expect “jailed” is attention-getting, but not a problem. On the other hand, to find “goaled” in place of “gaoled” is definitely a problem.

This leads to the first general problem: careless proofreading. Let us begin with misspelled, or inconsistently spelled, words. A few examples, listed in a table on the following page, must suffice.

The second area where problems of form occur has to do with the editing. But before identifying some of the editing problems, I first want to commend the editor for his decision to give English translations, in brackets, for the Japanese titles listed in the bibliographies. This will make life easier for many a reader.

PROBLEMS	CORRECT FORM
globeis	globe's
distroyed	destroyed
Ho-rinesu [for Holiness]	Hōrinesu
had to trod	had to tread
Brethern	Brethren
E. W. Tompson	E. W. Thompson
Niehbuhr	Niebuhr
Systma	Sytsma
Ke-ri	[for Cary] Kēri
goaled	gaoled
Shōjii	Shōji
Isshii	Ishii

That said, a number of editorial inconsistencies leap to the eye. Here again, a few examples must suffice:

- Japanese terms are usually rendered in italics, but not uniformly
- non-existent English words stand uncorrected
- sources cited by date of publication in chapter notes sometimes fail to appear in the accompanying bibliography
- titles listed in the bibliographies are sometimes garbled
- names of Japanese publishers appear now with initial caps, now in lowercase
- the same Japanese name appears here in Japanese order, there in Western
- in Japanese names written with Roman letters “o” and “ō” are sometimes confused
- bibliographical entries prepared by an editor sometimes appear in the correct form “Name, ed., Title,” sometimes in the incorrect form “Name ed., Title.”
- the Japanese name for the United Church of Christ in Japan appears in three different forms (Nihon [or Nippon] Kirisuto Kyōdan, Nihon Kirisutokyōdan, Nihon Kirisutokyō Dan)

There are still other problems of form: several anacoluthons; imperfect alphabetization of bibliographical entries; absence of pages for part numbers and titles, etc. But the main point is clear: *laissez-faire* editing does not work.

The problems of misspelled words and editorial inconsistencies may seem trivial, even frivolous. I submit, however, that problems of these kinds not only distract the reader but also detract from the book. They lead the unwary reader (and the overworked librarian) to infer that if the editor could not be bothered to give the book a scrupulous proofreading and to iron out inconsistencies, the book is probably not worth reading. This would be a grave mistake, but sloppiness like this almost invites such an inference.

A handbook that aims to give an overall view of a subject will inevitably arouse dissatisfaction. To some it will seem too detailed, to others sadly incomplete. But from my perspective this handbook, with its multidimensional, well-researched articles written by first-rate scholars and buttressed by up-to-date bibliographies, is the best of its kind to date.

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