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## Christians in Japan

IN SEPTEMBER 2005 the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia hosted a remarkable two-day symposium somewhat grandly titled, “Experiences With and Within: Christians in Japan from the 16th Century to the Present Day.” The idea for the symposium actually began modestly enough as an effort to gather a handful of papers by renowned scholars in order to honor our emeritus colleague Professor John HOWES on the occasion of the publication of his *Japan’s Modern Prophet: Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930)* by UBC Press. We were fortunate indeed that our modest effort attracted the attention of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, who became the principal sponsors and co-organizers of the symposium. The project eventually grew to include eight papers, six of which appear in various degrees of revision in the pages that follow.<sup>1</sup>

Our project grew after the symposium’s conclusion. Recognizing a glaring deficiency in the original slate of papers, namely the absence of even a single paper either by a woman scholar or about a Christian woman in Japan, we felt

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1. An eighth paper, “The Act of Apostasy,” was replaced at the suggestion of its author, J. S. A. ELISONAS, with the paper “Journey to the West,” which does appear in this special issue. Given space limitations, the paper presented by Mark Mullins, “Kagawa Toyohiko: His Place in 20th-Century Japanese Society and Culture,” has not been included in this final collection but will be published in an expanded and revised version in *Japanese Religions* 32/1 (2007).

particularly fortunate to be able to add the three papers by Emily ANDERSON, Helen BALLHATCHET, and Tomoko KITAGAWA to this special issue.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of our efforts from start to finish has been not on the well-explored territory of Christianity in Japan—the story of the missions, their successes, their demise, their return, and subsequent mixed success—but rather on the experiences of certain Christians in Japan, and in two papers the experiences of Japanese Christians outside Japan, both individually and collectively. This collection of articles examines diverse Japanese experiences of Christianity clustered around two traditions and time periods: the early Japanese encounter with Roman Catholicism beginning in the sixteenth century and the Japanese engagement with various forms of Protestant Christianity from the nineteenth century. To be sure, there was no single experience that might be construed as representative of what it has meant to be a Christian in Japan, even within specific eras and the same order or denomination, and there will always be too many stories to tell. Nonetheless, our attempt to see something of the range of experience of being a Christian in Japan in different eras proved fruitful for those of us at the symposium, and we are thankful to the editors of *JJRS* for affording us the opportunity to share these fruits with a broader audience.

The lead paper by Tomoko KITAGAWA is one of the three that were specially prepared for this issue. Kitagawa pieces together the fascinating story of Gō (1574–1634), the adopted daughter of the celebrated warlord and nemesis of Christianity Toyotomi Hideyoshi (d. 1598). Though adopted, Gō was raised as if she were the biological daughter of Hideyoshi and his wife Kitanomandokoro, making Gō's subsequent conversion to Christianity in her early thirties all the more remarkable. Gō's conversion, when taken together with the fashion for Christian appurtenances such as nicknames, jewelry, icons and so on among the inner circle of women closest to Hideyoshi in his castle, offers a startling new context for understanding Hideyoshi's de facto decision not to enforce the harshest elements of his own anti-Christian edicts, a kind of untidiness untypical of the Taikō.

The focus of this special issue is on Christians in Japan, but our second paper is a study by J. S. A. ELISONAS of the reception of four teenaged Japanese Christian boys paraded through Europe as erstwhile Japanese ambassadors from a Christianized Japan in the 1580s. The display was part of the calculated effort of Alexandro Valignano to inspire European donations in support of the Jesuit mission to Japan, a support Valignano deemed essential to the mission's success. Elisonas examines not just the spectacle of the four youths on their European

2. It is worth noting in this context that previous issues of *JJRS* have given attention to the experience of Japanese Christian women and feminism in contemporary Japanese Christianity. See, for example, NAKAMURA Kyōko 1997, which provides a comparative analysis of women in the Episcopal Church in Japan and Risshō Kōseikai; and YAMAGUCHI Satoko 2003, in the special issue on Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan.

tour, but also the equally fascinating experiences of the four upon their return to Japan in 1591 as part of a Portuguese embassy, including their interview with Hideyoshi.

Most studies of the so-called Christian Century (typically dated 1543–1639) during which the Portuguese and Japanese enjoyed sustained contact tend to agree that a key part of the Christians' ability to transition to an underground structure of spiritual communities was due to their decades of experience with the brotherhoods or confraternities (*confrarias*) organized by the missions. João Paulo Oliveira e Costa in his paper examines these Brotherhoods, and shows how to the overwhelming majority of Japanese Christians in the above-ground Church of the early-seventeenth century, these *confrarias* were the church in the sense that they were a community of believers who provided the most fundamental spiritual services to one another. That they were led by fellow Japanese catechists gave this ministry a native face, and was a distinctive feature among the Jesuit missions in East Asia. Costa further argues that the success of the *confrarias* meant that the mission as a whole was far less dependent on the profits of the Portuguese traders than one finds acknowledged in contemporary Jesuit reports. This in turn suggests that the mission's above-ground relative self-sufficiency provided an infrastructure that enhanced the capacity of this church to take its spiritual activities underground.

Never before in Japanese history had the state sought to exercise such control over the private spiritual lives of its people, and the policies toward the Christians emerged at the same time as the state was formulating its initial policies toward religious institutions generally. Within the half-century from 1570–1620, the Mt. Hiei community was massacred along with the destruction of thousands of buildings by fire, and Mt. Negoro was likewise annihilated though the scale of destruction was necessarily smaller. Once the Ishiyama Honganji surrendered, and an accommodationist faction was identified within the Nichiren denomination, the way was cleared for establishing what eventually became national policy with respect to religion and religionists, including the:

1. absorption of all Buddhist temples into a spiritual arterial system comprised of main temple–branch temple affiliations;
2. limiting of the Kyoto court's latitude in conferring religious accolades;
3. requirement that all persons register their households with one or another local Buddhist temple, and thereby become parishioners of that temple and its denomination; and
4. proscription of Christianity in any form, as well as the fundamentalist *fujufuse* faction within the Nichiren denomination, and the offer of bounties to informants.

Not for over a thousand years had the state exercised such control over religious institutions in Japan, but even during the highpoint of enforcement

of these policies during the 1650s and 1660s compliance was uneven, and for nearly a century from the late-seventeenth to the late-eighteenth century no one in Japan lost her/his life owing to personal faith.

Peter Nosco examines the experience of being an “underground Christian” during the era of persecution, focusing on those who risked death in their defiance of the state through their secret practice of their religion. Applying some of the insights of sociology to individuals who concealed their activities from not just their contemporaries but later historians as well, Nosco sees the opening of a zone of privacy in the area of religion in the eventual relaxation of the state’s enforcement of its own religious policies.

The difference in the experience of Christianity between the first and second Christian centuries was as different as the times themselves, though in each case the number of Japanese Christians seems to peak at about 1.5 percent of total population. Where young men aspiring to better themselves were drawn to Catholicism in the sixteenth century, it was Protestant movements that captured the imaginations of ambitious young men in the Meiji period, and studies of Protestant Christianity in Japan often refer to the three “bands,” or early Christian communities, that were formed in Kumamoto, Yokohama, and Sapporo. While the influence of the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed clergy was dominant in the Yokohama band, Christianity was spread in Kumamoto and Sapporo by lay Christian educators from the United States who had been invited by the Japanese government to serve as teachers in newly established institutions.

George M. OSHIRO’s study of “Nitobe Inazō and the Sapporo Band” begins with an examination of the formative role of William S. Clark, who arrived in Hokkaido in 1876 to assist the Japanese government in the establishment of Sapporo Agricultural College. In addition to providing instruction in agricultural studies, Clark taught his students the Bible and, shortly before returning to the United States, organized the “Covenant of Believers in Jesus” with several of his students. It was this group that came to be known as the Sapporo Band and gave birth to such well-known Japanese Christians as Nitobe Inazō, Uchimura Kanzō, and Satō Shōsuke. Oshiro provides a detailed analysis of Nitobe’s early intellectual and spiritual development as a student in Japan, the United States, and Germany, and gives particular attention to his religious experiences with the Quakers, which ultimately proved definitive for his own Christian faith.

John F. HOWES’s study of “Christian Prophecy in Japan” focuses on Uchimura Kanzō, another well-known Meiji Christian leader associated with the Sapporo Band. Distilling insights from his much larger study (see the book review in this volume), Howes explores Uchimura’s prophetic stance through a consideration of his representative writings and his efforts to develop an authentic expression of Japanese Christianity. Some of the major themes of Uchimura’s prophetic vision include independence from Western churches and missionaries and Japan’s potential role in salvation history.

Another important development in Japanese Christianity in the modern period was the arrival and impact of liberal theology and Unitarianism. This latter day Christianity in Japan was a far more intellectual experience for Christians than the first Christian century had been, as Yosuke NIREI demonstrates in his paper. Turn-of-the-century Japanese Christianity was in this sense as modernist as the times themselves, and therein lay both the strength and the eventual Achilles heel for Christians in modern Japan. This stream of Christianity was particularly important for Dōshisha and the Congregational Church in Japan, but it also led to numerous conflicts between missionaries and Japanese intellectuals and between traditionalists and modernists within other denominations in Japan. Matsumura Kaiseki (1859–1939), for example, at one time a staunch member of the Yokohama Band and grounded in the orthodox Reformed creeds and traditions, abandoned them in favor of the new theology and eventually established an independent religious movement, The Way (Dōkai). This was another Confucian version of Christianity, though quite distinct from Uchimura Kanzō's Nonchurch movement, which was based on more traditional convictions about the Bible and Jesus Christ. As Nirei's study shows, the new theology took its toll on the churches. Kanamori Tsūrin, a leading interpreter and advocate of the new theology in Japan (and a person who had befriended Matsumura Kaiseki after he separated from the Yokohama Band), also resigned from his position as minister of one of the major churches in Tokyo and withdrew his membership from the Congregational Church shortly after publishing two major works on liberal theology.

In a study of gender interaction and marriage relationships of Japanese Protestant leaders, Helen BALLHATCHET provides a fascinating comparative analysis of the multiple influences that contributed to a failed marriage, some difficult partnerships, and relatively successful marriages. Personality quirks aside, it appears that most marital difficulties were—in the words of Ibunka Kajinosuke—connected to a fundamental “clash between Confucian ideas and Christian ethics.” For all of Uchimura's prophetic biblical faith, for example, his ideal of a suitable marriage partner was a woman who did not work outside the home but lived a “life of Christian self-sacrifice as a dutiful daughter-in-law within the Uchimura household.” For this and other reasons Uchimura's interpretation of the faith has been referred to as an *otokorashii Kirisutokyō*, and today is subject to considerable criticism by feminists within the Nonchurch movement.

Emily ANDERSON's study of the controversy generated by the publication of Tamura's book in English, *The Japanese Bride* (1893), reveals the precarious nature of Japanese Christian identity in the Meiji period. She helpfully contextualizes this incident and explains how a book critical of traditional Japanese marriage customs and family values could be regarded as “subversive” even within Protestant churches in the national political environment of the 1890s. Although Tamura was not charged with heresy, his ordination in the Nihon Kirisuto

Kyōkai was revoked for behavior deemed inappropriate for a clergyman, that is, for publishing materials that were perceived as the cause of national humiliation and shame. For many Japanese Christian leaders—who sensed a special destiny to contribute to the development of Japan as a modern nation—Tamura's behavior reinforced the view that Christian identity and commitment were irreconcilable with Japanese identity, values, and national aspirations.

The significance of travel and study overseas for the development of Japanese Christianity receives more focused treatment in YOSHIDA Ryo's case study of the Fukuinkai in North America. Many of the Japanese leaders already considered in this volume studied abroad for various periods of time in the early phase of their Christian life (Uchimura, Nitobe, Tamura, Uemura, and Ibunka, for example), and their understanding and interpretation of the Christian religion was partially formed through both positive and negative encounters with Christians and churches while in the United States and Europe. The Fukuinkai was organized in part in order to provide a community of support for struggling Japanese students in the United States. It nurtured them in the Christian faith and provided education programs that helped them achieve success in an English environment. At the same time, it cultivated a transnational network and consciousness oriented toward Japan. Although ethnic Christian churches and organizations have often been seen primarily as a mechanism that aided the assimilation of Japanese into mainstream American society, Yoshida's analysis reveals a more complicated picture. Its members supported Japanese national interests and often returned to Japan to initiate and encourage the development of Fukuinkai branches there. Fukuinkai members were also concerned about their international status and identity as Japanese; members in the United States made concerted efforts to distinguish themselves from the Chinese immigrants in California and sought to be recognized as individuals from a "first-class" Asian country (see his discussion of *datsu-a nyū-ō* 脱亜入欧). This study, along with Anderson's analysis of the controversy surrounding Tamura, indicates that many Japanese Christians during this period were preoccupied with issues surrounding national identity and Japan's place in the world order.

This special collection is just a sampling of the rich studies and materials that are emerging from research on Japanese Christians. In recent years, scholars in Japan have been giving renewed attention to the study of this minority religion. The Association for the Study of Religion and Society 「宗教と社会」学会, for example, has sponsored two research projects over the past decade (one from 1999–2001 and another since 2001), which have led to regular research meetings and the organization of panels at annual meetings.<sup>3</sup> We regret that space

3. A very helpful bibliography that has resulted from this project is the *Nihon shakai to kirisutokyō ni kansuru shakaigakuteki kenkyū no bunken mokuroku* 日本社会とキリスト教に関する社会学的研究の文献目録 [Bibliography of sociological studies on Christianity and Japanese society], prepared by Kawamata Toshinori and available at the following website: <http://toshi-k.net/booklist/JC.htm>

limitations did not allow us to address some of the concerns of these recent studies, including some coverage of Catholic Christians in contemporary Japan and popular expressions of Christianity in the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Charismatic movements.<sup>4</sup> We encourage readers to pursue these topics and concerns in the bibliographies cited.

In conclusion, we would like to express appreciation to the people and institutions that made this volume possible. We are grateful for the financial and staff support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and for all the faculty and staff who hosted the initial symposium at the University of British Columbia. Our thanks also to Paul Swanson and Benjamin Dorman for allowing us to enlarge the circle of participating scholars and for their ongoing editorial advice and assistance in the preparation of the final manuscript.

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Another helpful resource is TERAO Kazuyoshi's *Nihon Kirisutokyō kankei bunken shūsei* 日本キリスト教関係文献集成 [An annotated bibliography of materials related to Japanese Christianity]. *Nanzan shūkyō bunka kenkyūjo kenkyū shohō* 11 (2001) [available at <http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/publications.htm>; search under Japanese periodicals].

4. For treatment of this latter topic, see the important new studies by IKEGAMI Yoshimasa (1991 and 2006).