



Kiri Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*

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FOR LONG THE common practice in scholarship on Japan's Tokugawa and Meiji periods was to describe a sharp break between the two and to emphasize the discontinuities as the good-new displaced the bad-traditional. More recently, however, the trend in much of the best scholarship on Japan has been to show the continuities between a not-so-bad early-modern Tokugawa and a not-so-great modern Meiji. Perhaps owing to the late-Tokugawa roots of several of Japan's "New Religions," the field of religious studies was actually well ahead of this curve, and one can see this interpretive framework alive and well in a number of studies of nineteenth-century Japanese religion, including excellent works by Helen Hardacre and Janine Sawada.¹ Kiri Paramore's *Ideology and Christianity in Japan* is very much in this vein, with the principal difference being that Paramore takes a much larger sweep, examining anti-Christian themes in some three centuries of Japanese intellectual history, and the role of these themes in the formation and support of both the statist ideology of the Tokugawa as well as the subsequent nationalist ideology of the Meiji.

Paramore identifies "two major outbreaks of anti-Christian writing, propaganda and discourse" from 1600–1900 in Japan with the first occurring "in the decades after the banning and suppression of Christianity ... by the Tokugawa shogunate through the early and mid-1600s," and the second beginning "during the decline and fall of the Tokugawa from the early 1800s" and continuing "through the Meiji restoration and well into the twentieth century" (1–2). Working within this broad framework, Paramore's analysis is actually more nuanced, and in a carefully presented thesis, he shows how the initial arguments against Christianity, especially those in which it was compared to Buddhism and Confucianism, focused on its perceived failure "to acknowledge the structure of political control that supported the current political order." By contrast, anti-Christian texts from the mid-1660s onwards, according to Paramore, "created an image of Christians that used xeno-

1. For two examples, see Helen Hardacre, *Religion and Society in Nineteenth-Century Japan: A Study of the Southern Kanto Region, Using Late Edo and Early Meiji Gazetteers* (Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, 41); and Janine Sawada, *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

phobic discourses to present them as exotic, foreign-like Others” (65). Within the sweep of this first period, Paramore examines such well-studied texts as the anonymous *Kirishitan monogatari*, as well as less-well known anti-Christian writings by Hayashi Razan, Habian, Kumazawa Banzan, and Suzuki Shōsan.

Paramore maintains that during the mid-Tokugawa in the writings of eighteenth-century political philosophers like Arai Hakuseki and Ogyū Sorai, the concern with Christianity reverted to a worry that it might dilute “the people’s loyalty to sovereign and parent” (115) and that it thereby posited a threat to the social order. Paramore argues that this perspective reappears in the second major phase, that is, the late-Tokugawa arguments of Fujita Yūkoku and Aizawa Seishisai, and the early Meiji writings of Inoue Enryō, Inoue Tetsujirō and Uchimura Kanzō. Throughout, Paramore links anti-Christian arguments to efforts to support either the formation of a new kind of secularized state, or the renovation of a paradigmatic model state from the past, and among the major contributions of Paramore’s study is to show how major 19th-century authors like Aizawa Seishisai and Inoue Tetsujirō “set the primary source canon and established the parameters of the secondary literature dealing with anti-Christian discourse” (161).

At the time of his writing, Paramore believed that the employment of anti-Christian discourse in diplomatic correspondence had been “virtually ignored” until his own volume under review, and this makes it doubly unfortunate that Paramore was not able to engage Nam-lin Hur’s recent *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System* (Harvard University Asian Center, 2007) in *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*. Hur’s study similarly examines anti-Christian rhetoric in the first half-century of Tokugawa rule, though Hur does so through the prism of “divine country” (*shinkoku*) thought, and one senses that a lively dialogue might have emerged between his and Paramore’s studies.

My only serious issue with Paramore concerns his assertions that by the 1640s “nearly all Christian elements had been eradicated from Japanese society” (5), the “annihilation of Christianity was complete” (6–7), and Christianity had been “effectively wiped out” (53). Though Paramore is certainly not alone in embracing this perspective—one which is rooted in an understanding of the church as fundamentally sacramental and hence dependent on ordained clergy—it ignores several inconvenient facts. First, thousands of underground Kirishitan were “discovered” by local authorities in village after village after persecutions resumed from the 1790s with over five thousand in 1805 alone, begging the question of how “secret” these communities actually were. Second, both arrest reports and material evidence confirm that while the underground Kirishitan understanding of and fidelity to Catholic theology and practice over some two-and-a-half centuries was decidedly uneven, it was nonetheless remarkably faithful when prayers and liturgies were transmitted in Japanese rather than in Latin. And third, once they began coming above ground in the 1870s, thousands more Japanese Kirishitan wrestled with whether to join a

Catholic church that seemed so different from what they “remembered” from the handed-down stories of their ancestors.²

Paramore’s ambitious agenda has resulted in an exceptionally stimulating study. He successfully identifies a number of echoes that resonate in anti-Christian arguments over some three hundred years; he situates those discourses within their respective social and intellectual contexts; and he demonstrates the contribution of these anti-Christian discourses to state and nation formation in widely separated instances. In all these ways, Paramore sheds new light on an under-appreciated aspect of Japan’s cultural, social and political history, one with suggestive implications for Christianity’s status in present-day Japan. The sheer breadth of this book’s scope is extraordinary and even panoramic. Yet despite its remarkable plumbing of primary sources, the volume under review at times still has something of a preliminary quality to it, as if the author were intimating that he knows where more work is needed, is prepared to undertake it, and asks us in the meantime to be patient. I, for one, will be pleased to do so, and I shall be much looking forward to Paramore’s subsequent publications on Christian and anti-Christian discourse.

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2. See Ikuko Higashibaba’s *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Brill 2002), Stephen Turnbull’s *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day* (Routledge/Curzon, 1998), and my “Secrecy and the Transmission of Tradition: Issues in the Study of the ‘Underground’ Christians,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 1993 (20: 3–29).