

A Thread In Japan's History:  
The Historical Journey Of Japanese Christianity to the Brink of Modern Japan

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation  
in the Honors Program  
Liberty University  
Spring 2013

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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### Abstract

A Jesuit missionary named Francis Xavier pioneered the Christian faith in Japan in 1549. Japan was open to the gospel, and many missionaries followed Francis Xavier. Japanese people from a wide range of social standings supported Christianity for a variety of reasons. The Tokugawa government soon viewed Christianity as a threat to the authority of the Japanese government. Japan persecuted the Christians and the Japanese church was driven underground. Over two hundred years later during the Meiji Restoration, Japan altered its policies towards the West and tolerated Christianity in Japan. Despite never being fully welcomed, the Christian belief resonated with many well-educated Japanese men. Some of the most well educated men in Japan became Christians and their work influenced the formation of Japan during a crucial time in its history. These men's goal to develop Christianity in Japan helped shape Japan as a nation and develop Modern Japan.

### A Thread in Japan's History:

#### The Historical Journey of Japanese Christianity to the Brink of Modern Japan

The West generally identifies with and portrays Japan in two contrasting views: either as a pinnacle of modern technology and innovation or a distinctive, traditional culture, and sometimes a mixture of both.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary Japanese live a modern lifestyle that is ingrained with an element of Japanese culture. Many aspects of Japan appear to have remained the same for centuries, particularly religion. Though Japanese people are generally open and respectful toward foreign religions, they honor the religious traditions and practices of Shinto and Buddhism as it seems they have done for centuries. However, anyone who would assume this is misled; Japan does not have a long history of honoring traditional practices to uphold Japanese culture. Close examination of Japan's history of religion reveals that much of what is now considered by the Japanese to be an important part of their culture actually was not considered so prior to the Meiji Restoration, the period when Japan began to accept western influence yet sought to preserve and create its identity.<sup>2</sup> One unexpected element in the development of Japanese culture and tradition is the historical presence of Christianity within Japan, a largely unchristian nation. It is uncanny that a religion of Western tradition was a supplementary factor in the advancement of modern day Japan. To better understand the influence of Christianity in the development of Japan's identity, one must know the history of Christianity in Japan, the role of the Meiji Restoration in creating modern Japanese

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Smith. *Japan: A Reinterpretation*. (New York: Vintage House Books, 1998), 6.

<sup>2</sup> George M. Oshiro "Nitobe Inazo and the Sapporo Band: Reflections on the Dawn of Protestant Christianity in Early Meiji Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1, Christians in Japan (2007): 101.

culture, and the roles and contributions of Christians that specifically influenced and shaped modern Japanese culture.

### **The History of Christianity Before Perry**

Japan never embraced one national religion during a consistent period of time, unlike other prominent civilizations. In fact, the term “Japanese religion” was not documented until the end of the Meiji Period.<sup>3</sup> Japan had been a place “where religions have both emerged and been introduced, and have then influenced one another.”<sup>4</sup> The earliest records of Japanese religious practices reveal a basic form of nature worship in which the object of worship is called *kami*, usually involving worship of the sun, moon, mountains, trees, certain animals, or any object or natural phenomenon that inspired awe.<sup>5</sup> More systematically developed religions and practices such as Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced in Japan. Religion generally trickled from China, however the Japanese people would often combined foreign ideologies and religions, shaping them to complement a uniquely Japanese form.<sup>6</sup> The three main religions prior to 1900 were Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism.<sup>7</sup> Buddhism was the prominent religion in the fifteen hundreds, during the same time frame in which Christianity was introduced, and had become corrupt. Buddhists posed a viable threat to the *daimyos* in their attempt to extend their power into politics. The Japanese government responded to the threat by

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<sup>3</sup> Isomae Jun'ichi. “Deconstructing ‘Japanese Religion’: A Historical Survey,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35, no. 2 (2008): 236.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>5</sup> A.K. Reischauer, “Religion,” in *Japan*, ed. Hugh Borton. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 175.

<sup>6</sup> Reischauer, 175.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

posing strict regulations on all religions, sensing the same potential for them to gain strength in numbers and loyalty in followers. Over time, the religion of Shinto became Japan's national religion. However, one must note that even Shinto emerged as a native tradition in response to foreign influences. Contrary to the general assumption, Shinto is not Japanese in its origin.<sup>8</sup> It is practical to observe Japanese religion as "religions in Japan and not religion particular to Japan."<sup>9</sup>

Christianity first entered Japan in the mid 1500s during a time of civil war in Japan, which would result in the legendary battle of *Sekigahara*.<sup>10</sup> Francis Xavier, a member of the Jesuit society founded by Ignatius Loyola, arrived in Kagoshima, Kyushu with his Japanese translator in 1549 and became the first Christian missionary to Japan.<sup>11</sup> Xavier had heard about the Japanese from Jorge Alvares, a Portuguese ship captain who reported that the Japanese were "eager to make friends and...gain information about other countries."<sup>12</sup> Xavier's letters and correspondence to other members in the Jesuit Society revealed a good impression of and deep respect towards the Japanese people and culture.<sup>13</sup> His letters described them as honorable people, concerned with dignity rather

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<sup>8</sup> Isomae, 240.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>10</sup> Herb Skoglund, "St. Francis Xavier's Encounter with Japan," *Missiology, An International Review* 3, No. 4. (1975):458, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0000753196&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Saburo Ienaga. *History of Japan: Tourist Library Vol. 15*. (Tokyo, Japan: Toppan Printing Co., 1954),118.

<sup>12</sup> Skoglund, 456.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 458.

than wealth, and eager to learn.<sup>14</sup> Xavier and other missionaries discovered that the Japanese resonated with the ideals of Christianity and were eager to learn about the West. The Christian community in Japan was comprised of people from all levels of society, from peasant to *daimyo* (vassals-in-chief whose lands were worth at least fifty thousand bushels of rice a year).<sup>15</sup> Christianity flourished during its first one hundred and fifty years. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Japanese Christian community was composed of about 300,000 Japanese and was the largest overseas Christian community not under rule of a European power.<sup>16</sup> Though Kyushu was the primary residence of Japanese Christians, Christianity spread throughout the Japanese state.<sup>17</sup>

Christianity flourished in Japan for a variety of reasons. Many Japanese were genuinely compelled by the gospel of Christianity. Others supported the additional facets of Western influence that were brought in by the Missionaries. After a period of constant power struggles between powerful families, the Japanese had a growing curiosity of the West and an increasing desire to gain power. The introduction of firearms was a particular incentive for a *daimyo* to support or tolerate Christianity.<sup>18</sup> There were other beneficial aspects of European culture that were available through Christianity.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Skoglund., 459.

<sup>15</sup> Ienaga, 118.

<sup>16</sup> Joao Paulo Oliveira e. Costa. "The Brotherhoods (Confrarias) and Lay Support for the Early Christian Church in Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 69, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/237191878/fulltextPDF?accountid=12085> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Costa, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Abe Yoshiya. "From Prohibition to Toleration: Japanese Government Views Regarding Christianity." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 2/3 (Jun. - Sep., 1978): 108, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30233167> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Ienaga, 118.

Jesuits built Western educational facilities in Japan that featured European paintings, writing, performances, music, European medicine, and Western values.<sup>20</sup> Japanese people were also drawn to Christianity because of how it was presented. Missionaries addressed the people directly unlike Buddhist priests, who distanced themselves from the people, and appeared more passionate in their beliefs than Buddhist priests in the way they shared their message. From a political point of view, Oda Nobunaga, a military leader from 1532-1598, welcomed Christianity to check the power of the Buddhist converts who had become a threat to the government because of their growing number and desire for power.<sup>21</sup> Many of the Japanese elites, including Oda Nobunaga's successor, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, Japan's second great unifier, were skeptical of the religion of the West and became increasingly convinced that Christianity was a threat to Japanese independence.

Despite Christianity's early popularity, various concerns led Hideyoshi and his successor Tokugawa Ieyasu to persecute Christians. There was a conflict between Christian values and the goal to establish the Tokugawa *Bakufu*, the *Shogun's* government. Many Christian values undermined the authority of the Japanese elite. For example, prior to Christianity, the "ruling philosophy was of a kind calculated to keep [men] in [their place]," but when attending church, people from all levels of society were mixed together in the congregation because of the Christian belief that all men are equal before God.<sup>22</sup> Many powerful Japanese leaders, such as Hideyoshi, suspected that the

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<sup>20</sup> Ienaga, 123-124.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>22</sup> W.G. Beasley. *The Modern History of Japan*. (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 11.



missionaries were actually spies from European countries, determined to conquer Japan.<sup>23</sup> The world had witnessed the rise of powerful countries through imperialism in recent history, so Hideyoshi and other Japanese official's suspicions were not unmerited. For one reason or another, Christianity was increasingly acknowledged as a threat to Japanese nationalism. Hideyoshi created a policy to ban missionaries and persecute Japanese Christian converts in July 1587.<sup>24</sup> In February 1597, Hideyoshi ordered twenty-six Christians, both Japanese and foreign, to be crucified in Nagasaki to demonstrate the severity of his decree to prohibit Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Tokugawa Ieyasu's famous prohibition of Christianity in 1614 carried on the legacy of his predecessor's work. In 1629 the *Tokugawa* government created a test to identify underground Japanese Christians. Japanese citizens were made to step on a Christian symbol; any person who refused to do so was identified as a Christian and dealt with accordingly.<sup>26</sup> Records reveal that many Japanese Christians were revealed in their refusal to walk on a Christian symbol. That this test was effective enough to be a legitimate identifier of Christians attests to the conviction, courage, and perseverance that underground Japanese Christians held for their belief. The strict policies forced many Japanese Christians to recant their Christian faith, and many others were martyred for their refusal to do so.<sup>27</sup>

The *shogunate* soon realized that if their policies on Christianity were to be successful, their enforcement needed to stop foreign influence at its source. In 1633 they

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<sup>23</sup> Reischauer, 184.

<sup>24</sup> Yoshiya, 108.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>27</sup> Reischauer, 184.

prohibited Japanese people from traveling abroad; the law also prevented Japanese who were outside of Japan from returning. This law banned exposure to foreign influence.<sup>28</sup> The *shogunate* became more determined to destroy that hope after a short-lived yet lively Christian uprising took place in 1637.<sup>29</sup> In June 1640, the *shogunate* responded by burning a Portuguese ship that had allegedly supplied the Christian rebels with firearms. The *shogunate* executed, banished, or forced all *daimyo* or *samurai* discovered to be Christian to recant.<sup>30</sup> Because of “this combination of prohibition and seclusion, operating over two and a half centuries”, Japan upheld a “peaceful, albeit oppressive, regime.”<sup>31</sup>

The Christian community appeared to wither under Japanese persecution during the *Tokugawa Shogunate*, but a clandestine community of believers developed and learned to thrive under harsh circumstances. Japan had been uncannily receptive to Christianity, and even after its ban Christianity's influence continued. The foundation of early Christianity in Japan was markedly unique because of the native peoples' immediate desire to participate actively in the church and also because Japanese church members provided full economic support for their church.<sup>32</sup> This would play a vital role in the survival of the Japanese church. It became the responsibility of the people to preserve their community and their religious practices in secret after Christianity was banned. Christian laymen organized brotherhoods to maintain an organized group of

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<sup>28</sup> Yoshiya 109.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Costa, 70, 71.

believers. Christian communities organized ways of meeting and observing religious rituals by using whatever was available. The discovery of many furtively printed Japanese translated religious books that were circulated is one confirmation of the Japanese Christians' resolve to preserve their beliefs. Undercover Jesuit missionaries from Nagasaki reported hundreds of baptisms carried out during the ban.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly enough, Hideyoshi's own adopted daughter was baptized into Christianity after it had been banned.<sup>34</sup> She was exposed to Christianity by servants and visitors in her own home, Hideyoshi's castle, until Christianity was banned when she was thirteen years old.<sup>35</sup> Though the danger of persecution in Japan was ever present, Japanese converts demonstrated the power of their conviction that the Christian faith was more critical and worth risking their lives to uphold.

### **The Opening of Japan and the Meiji Restoration**

Commodore Perry guided his black ships into the mouth of Edo bay with the goal of opening Japan to the West in July 1853, two hundred and thirty nine years after the edict that banned Christianity in Japan.<sup>36</sup> The primary reason for the American and European nations' interest in Japan was to gain access to its ports to repair or refuel seafaring ships.<sup>37</sup> Perry presented President Fillmore's proposal of trade and friendship,

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<sup>33</sup> Costa, 70.

<sup>34</sup> Tomoko Kitagawa. "The Conversion of Hideyoshi's Daughter Go." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no.1 (2007): 9-25, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/237> (accessed September 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Kitagawa, 11.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh Borton. *Japan's Modern Century*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: The Ronald Press Company, 1970), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Pierre Lehmann. *The Roots of Modern Japan*. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 136.

and fifty-nine of the most important *daimyo* met to discuss their response to Perry. They were divided in their opinions of how to respond; the three general positions were to either support some form of trade with the U.S., to avoid hostilities so that Japan would have time to strengthen defenses, or to maintain Japanese policies and reject the American request.<sup>38</sup> Though the *daimyo* were evenly divided between the three positions, they realized that the fleet represented several other powerful European countries that also wanted to end the Dutch monopoly of trade with Japan; therefore, acceptance of Perry's demand to open Japan to the West was the only wise decision to make to avoid warfare.<sup>39</sup>

Though some in the *Tokugawa* government opposed interaction and dealings with foreign nations, the "more enlightened leaders sponsored the use of European technical knowledge" even before Perry's visit.<sup>40</sup> Japan was aware of the strength of Western nations and desired to obtain Western knowledge as a means of defense.<sup>41</sup>

The reopening of Japan to the influence of Western ideologies was unavoidable. Tokugawa Nariaki, the lord of Mito, foresaw this and strongly opposed restoration of Christianity in Japan. He believed Christianity would threaten Japanese nationalism.<sup>42</sup> Japan's regulations against Christianity immediately became a problem despite President Fillmore's assurance that American would not "meddle in Japan's religious affairs."<sup>43</sup> When offering gifts to Japanese officials, Perry included Bibles and "other Christian

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<sup>38</sup> Borton, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 30, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>41</sup> Lehmann, 134.

<sup>42</sup> Yoshiya, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

literature,” much to the dismay of the Japanese.<sup>44</sup> The Japanese responded with an angry rebuttal to Perry and returned the Christian books, reaffirming their adherence to laws against Christianity.<sup>45</sup> The Japanese government had to reiterate this message constantly because European nations generally upheld Christianity in some form. Eventually, the Japanese government was compelled to compromise some of their strict standards against Christians, first by eliminating the practice of making subjects walk on Christian symbols so as not to offend the West.<sup>46</sup> Christianity gradually found its way into Japan again.

Several factors caused the fall of the *Tokugawa* government and enabled the Meiji Restoration to take place. The Tokugawa *Shogun* passed away in July 1853, shortly after Perry's first visit to Japan. This provided an opportunity for Japan to assess the future of government in Japan. It also sparked political struggles concerning who should be the next *Shogun* as well as questions about the issue of foreign policy. Japan needed a strong leader to handle growing problems such as the issue presented by the opening of Japan to the West immediately.<sup>47</sup> The new leaders of Edo attempted to deal with the threat of Westerners' enforcement of their privileges by “playing off foreign against domestic enemies, which ended in their own destruction.”<sup>48</sup> The Emperor of Japan who formerly held little power, was placed in charge of administrative responsibility on January 3,

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<sup>44</sup> Yoshiya, 111.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>47</sup> Beasley, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

1868, during the height of political conflict. Emperor Meiji was restored to the throne, from which the name Meiji Restoration originates.<sup>49</sup>

Practical measures had to be taken for Japan to transition from the *Tokugawa* feudal style of government to an Imperial government. The new government had to deal with the remnants of the old Tokugawa government after the establishment of the fifteen-year-old Emperor Meiji as the new sovereign of Japan. The Emperor's first priority was to gain an army to support him and defeat opposition.<sup>50</sup> The transition ended with far fewer casualties than reforms in the histories of other nations, though a number of *bakufu* officials were executed. In one instance, Enomoto Takeaki, a naval strategist genius who rebelled against the new government and attempted to create a separate republic in Hokkaido, was defeated and pardoned by the new government. He was later promoted to a new career in the new navy and, eventually, in the new government.<sup>51</sup> The new leaders were concerned with the wellbeing of Japan and tried to resolve differences peaceably. They also saw the value of putting talented people to work in improving Japan.<sup>52</sup> The newly appointed *shogun* Tokugawa Keiki soon rebelled against the Emperor but was overpowered by the Emperor's army.<sup>53</sup> The Tokugawa *Shogunate* dissolved after the *shogun's* surrender, and the new authority was prepared to face its most important challenge.

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<sup>49</sup> Beasley, 97.

<sup>50</sup> Borton, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Lehmann, 152.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>53</sup> Borton, 72.

The new government's desire for political revisions and adjustments opened Japan to Westernization. Adaptations of Western systems of government included: the formation of a bicameral assembly to provide a fair representation of various Japanese groups, a separation of powers into legislative, judicial and executive branches, the redistribution of government positions, and an eventual change to a Western style cabinet.<sup>54</sup> Japanese intellectuals studied Western political theory because they believed it would improve Japan. The *Shogun* Yoshimitsu repealed the ban on the reading and translation of European books, other than those on the topic of religion, which allowed Japanese students to study other nations.<sup>55</sup> However, the only foreign books around during the time were Dutch books until Japanese scholars found the valuable resource of Western books translated in Chinese.<sup>56</sup> This opened Western literature to a much larger audience in the Japanese academic world. Also, the government sanctioned Japanese visits to the U.S as well as assignments to observe Western nations, which assisted in the reformation and enlightenment of Japan in Western culture and practices. Japanese academics wrote of their discoveries and observations in Western nations in Japanese books, which opened the West for Japanese people. This broadened the influence of Western thought in Japan. The *Shogun* was more interested in "the British parliamentary system than in a federal scheme of government."<sup>57</sup> The government would soon permit Christianity in Japan in hopes to eventually transform Japan into a world power.

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<sup>54</sup> Nobutaka, Ike. "Western Influences on the Meiji Restoration." *The Pacific Historical Review*, 17, no.1. (Feb., 1948): 1-10, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3634763> (accessed August 2012).1., Beasley, 101-102.

<sup>55</sup> Nobutaka, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 9.

### **The Meiji Restoration and Christian Influence in Japanese Culture**

Christian missionaries reappeared in 1859 after Japan's reopening to the West, but Japan still held to strict regulations against the spread of Christianity to the Japanese. One missionary reported that when he attempted to share the gospel to one Japanese man, the man tacitly warned him, bringing his hands to his throat. Christianity was still a life-threatening issue and not to be discussed. Allowing Christians in a stringently non-Christian nation created an awkward and tense atmosphere between missionaries and Japanese people.<sup>58</sup> Even the remnants of the underground church proved hard to reach for Western missionaries due to the church's wandering from traditional theological and ecclesiastical values that developed after years of alienation and secrecy.<sup>59</sup> The harsh enforcement of Ieyasu's ban on Christianity had left its mark on the minds of the Japanese people. Though Christians were free to stay in Japan and practice their religion, they were often isolated and considered unwelcome guests, even by Japanese Christians.<sup>60</sup>

Political developments allowed practicing Christians to come into Japan despite the odd circumstance of being a welcome yet unwanted guest. However, some missionaries gained the trust and even a following of Japanese admirers, particularly among young Japanese scholars. Three notable missionaries found in Japanese records

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<sup>58</sup> John F. Howes, "Japanese Christians and American Missionaries," in *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, ed. Marius B. Jansen. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 337.

<sup>59</sup> Nirei Yosuke, "Toward a Modern Belief: Modernist Protestantism and Problems of National Religion in Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1, Christians in Japan (2007): 152, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30234179> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Howes, 337-338.



were William Smith Clark, Leroy Janes, and James Curtis Hepburn.<sup>61</sup> Clark was a former scientist who encouraged Japanese students to be ambitious in their education while appealing to their spiritual needs, and often said to his students: “be ambitious.” This advice has carried on to many generations of Japanese school children. Janes was skilled at riding horses and likened to a “victorious *shogun*”; his presence demanded respect. He was in charge of organizing the schools in Japan.<sup>62</sup> He had a distinct method of evangelizing from Clark. He waited until his students asked him about Christianity to share the gospel rather than proclaiming the gospel immediately. Many students admired him and kept in touch with him when he left Japan. Hepburn came to Japan as a missionary and also to train Japanese physicians in the field of medicine. The Japanese appreciated him because he valued their achievements and esteemed them highly. When he left, Hepburn was confident that Christianity would thrive because of the growing number of Japanese evangelists. These three missionaries emphasized “personal conversion, implicit faith in the Bible, moral rigor, and a personal sense of mission” in their teachings.<sup>63</sup>

Restoration of the Emperor in 1868 and political developments led to a change in the religious tide in Japan.<sup>64</sup> Confucian and *Shinto samurai* who were important to the restoration sought to institute “a national religion subservient to their interests.”<sup>65</sup> Buddhists became victims of religious intolerance thought they were formerly the most

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<sup>61</sup> Howes, 342-344.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>64</sup> Reischauer, 186.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

powerful religious group in Japan.<sup>66</sup> Buddhist priests were cast out of Shinto shrines, Buddhist scriptures and sacred objects were destroyed, and many temples were vandalized during this time. Though it was destructive, the maltreatment was short lived. In 1872, Buddhism and Shinto were permitted to manage themselves if they served the state for patriotic purposes.<sup>67</sup> In 1873, the edicts against Christianity were permanently removed, and Christianity was generally tolerated. The fifth article of the Meiji charter oath, which stated that Japan will seek knowledge of the world, revealed the purpose for Emperor Meiji's allowance of Christianity.<sup>68</sup> Christianity was a conduit to Western knowledge to the Japanese. The primary motivation for many Westerners to build schools and educate people in Japan was to bring the gospel, and many Japanese people became true converts. In the 1880's, Christianity was so influential in Japan that some officials proposed recognizing it as a national religion.<sup>69</sup> The response of other religions to the growing popularity of Christianity played an important role in shaping modern Japan.

Other religions in Japan sought to muffle what they saw as a foreign authority as a direct response to the growing appeal of Christianity. An anti-Christian movement was led by Buddhists, Confucians, and Shinto leaders in Japan. The three religions set aside their differences with each other and joined together in a patriotic spirit to disparage Christianity.<sup>70</sup> This reaction from the religions substantiates the allegation of Christianity's increasing appeal within Japan. However, the efforts of the three religions

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<sup>66</sup> Reischauer, 186.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

were overshadowed by Japan's conflicts with China and Russia and soon forgotten.<sup>71</sup>

Another force that countered Christianity derived from the same origin. Secularism and an "indifference to religion" became instituted in Western education and took hold in many schools established in Japan.<sup>72</sup> Confucian principles promoted a shift from focus on religion to morality and was widely received by the Japanese. There was a growing trend in thought that religion should be left out of public school and limited to private schools. This encouraged the replacement of religion with the promotion of nationalism.<sup>73</sup>

However, there was one particular religion that responded to Christianity by further establishing and characterizing itself. This religion deeply shaped modern Japan.<sup>74</sup>

The Shintoists established sect Shinto prior to the development of the Meiji Restoration to preserve Shinto traditions into an organized religion.<sup>75</sup> There were two elements of development in Shinto during the Meiji Restoration: first, Meiji religious policy played a role in shaping it and second, the Shinto leaders' desire to modernize played a role in creating sect Shinto.<sup>76</sup> Just as the Japanese government adapted and modified itself to meet modern standards, so, too, did religions in Japan that had to face a growth in literacy and the disappearing custom of passing religious traditions down to the

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<sup>71</sup> Reischauer, 187.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Inoue Nobutaka and Mark Teeuwen, "The Formation of Sect Shinto in Modernizing Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, no. 3/4. Tracing Shinto in the History of Kami Worship (Fall, 2002): 407, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30233729> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Nobutaka, 406.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

next generation.<sup>77</sup> Shinto became the state religion for a variety of reasons, but one crucial reason for its promotion during the Meiji government concerned the anticipated influx of Christianity.<sup>78</sup> Christianization was viewed as a threat to the nation by both the government and other religious groups. Shinto, a religion modified to reflect loyalty to Japan, provided a means of containment. Sect Shinto developed during the Meiji Restoration to become the primary form of observed religion in Japan and was deliberately altered in certain ways as a tactic to offset Christianization in Japan.

There was an influential group of Japanese people who remained inclined towards Christianity despite the weakening of Christianity by the newly formed nationalistic ideals. Missionaries reached out to a promising group of individuals who were susceptible to the teachings of Christianity, young Japanese intellectuals. Many young Japanese students felt isolated from society during the Meiji Restoration due to their greater privileges and unique experiences. Many had adopted an opposition to religion because of the corruption witnessed in Buddhism, and Christianity's focus on the individual relationship and the Bible, or printed word, provided a solution for their desires.<sup>79</sup> Many missionaries to Japan during the Meiji Restoration were educators, and had direct influence with the individuals of Japan who were most likely to be stirred by the message of Christianity. As the three earlier mentioned missionaries demonstrate, there was a pattern of attributes in the missionaries who successfully regained Japanese

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<sup>77</sup> Nobutaka, 407-408.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>79</sup> Howes, 345.

respect. Many missionaries arrived to educate the Japanese in Western learning and respectfully evangelize to the Japanese.

One such Japanese intellectual was Nitobe Inazo, who was born in 1862 during the last years of the Tokugawa period.<sup>80</sup> He was introduced to the Christian faith along with fellow classmates, who would later be known as the Sapporo Band, when attending Sapporo Agricultural College, which was founded by a Protestant Christian, William Clark, who was earlier mentioned.<sup>81</sup> Clark had been commissioned to organize the administration and curriculum of the entire school and to recruit the school's first students who would learn their lessons in English. Clark did not have the personality of an overtly evangelistic missionary, but he did care about the students' spiritual needs.<sup>82</sup> Clark believed that Christianity was "indispensable" in the teaching of morals, especially for an educator of youths.<sup>83</sup> Under Clark's care, several boys, including Nitobe, came to Christianity and three of the students became important Christian thinkers of Japan.<sup>84</sup> However, Nitobe assessed Christianity with a critical eye despite his acceptance as a youth, and sought to separate the Christian belief from "the taint of foreign culture."<sup>85</sup>

Nitobe's reputation as a scholar and his Christian disposition influenced Modern Japan. When Nitobe turned twenty-one, he went to the United States and Germany for

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<sup>80</sup> George M. Oshiro, "Nitobe Inazo and the Sapporo Band: Reflections on the Dawn of Protestant Christianity in Early Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1, Christians in Japan (2007): 99, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30234177> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Oshiro, 99.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 105, 107.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

two reasons: first, to gain practical knowledge of working out his issues with the Christian faith, and second, to gain academic standing that would bolster his future with skills and information to serve in Japan's elite group.<sup>86</sup> Nitobe found an outlet for his first goal through his encounter with Quakers as he studied abroad.<sup>87</sup> Though he was able to reconcile many of his former issues with faith through Quaker doctrine, Nitobe hesitated to join at first because of his "impelling need to stress his Japanese identity."<sup>88</sup> Even the most dedicated Japanese Christians during the Meiji Restoration struggled to reconcile their faith with their national pride. Nitobe was hired in 1877 as an Assistant Professor at the Sapporo Agricultural College. Nitobe continued his academic pursuits abroad and also began to write scholarly publications, which brought him acclaim.<sup>89</sup> Nitobe's most remembered contribution to Japan is his work, *Bushido, The Soul of Japan*, published in 1900. Nitobe's book became a popular representation of *Bushido*, though at times criticized for being "overly idealistic and too tinged with Christian virtues." The book is now considered the "backbone to...a unique Japanese identity."<sup>90</sup> Nitobe's portrait was commemorated on the five thousand yen bill until 2005, but a museum was soon erected in his honor, proving that his legacy continues to be endorsed in Japan.

Uchimura Kanzo was another member of the Sapporo band, and Nitobe's contemporary, who arguably had the greatest impact in Japan during its modernization because of his Christian faith. Uchimura was born in 1861 and attended the Sapporo

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<sup>86</sup> Oshiro, 112.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 119-120.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 100.

Agricultural College under Clark with Nitobe.<sup>91</sup> Uchimura also became a Christian during his time studying in the Sapporo Agricultural College. Uchimura graduated as valedictorian of his class and was unquestioningly the most brilliant in the intellectual group. Uchimura was faced with endless opportunities and possibilities for a career, but upon seeing a lack of strong leadership in the Japanese church, Uchimura found his path.<sup>92</sup> Eventually this path brought him to the United States, following Nitobe to the nation that seemed to be the model for Japan's future.<sup>93</sup> Uchimura became offended by students' earthly motivations in their pursuit of becoming pastors when he attended seminary; Uchimura quit school and returned home to serve his nation by becoming a leader of his Christian faith.<sup>94</sup> Uchimura also wanted to "develop a Christianity that would make sense to Japanese," much like Nitobe.<sup>95</sup> The doors to teach in secular schools opened to Uchimura because of his Western education and his academic credentials. This also opened the door for Japanese to hear about the Christian faith from someone with an established reputation, and, therefore, credibility. However, Uchimura is considered to have ruined any chances of having a lasting impact on Japanese education because of the infamous event in which he dishonored the Emperor Meiji by not bowing to The Imperial Rescript on Education, which, to Uchimura, countered the Christian faith.<sup>96</sup> This was a

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<sup>91</sup> John F. Howes, "Christian Prophecy in Japan: Uchimura Kanzo," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007):127, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/docview/237183740> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>92</sup> Howes, 129.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 131.

historic moment for Japan because it was one of the few instances in which a Japanese individual undermined the Nation to stand up for his or her convictions. This event would become the subject of much discussion and debate throughout Japan.

Uchimura discovered his platform for reaching the nation of Japan, through his writing in 1893.<sup>97</sup> Uchimura wrote several books and articles on various topics that ranged from Japanese politics, world history, and Christianity.<sup>98</sup> Much of Uchimura's work was unique and influenced the work of other famous Japanese writers.<sup>99</sup> Uchimura founded three magazines, two of which helped develop Japanese Christianity and familiarize the Japanese with the Bible.<sup>100</sup> Uchimura helped build a community of Christians who separated themselves from the issues of Western Christianity, such as denomination issues; Japanese Christians were able to distinguish themselves from the Western Christianity.<sup>101</sup> Uchimura remained a loyal, yet honest critic of the Japanese government and, for a second time, Uchimura stood up to the Japanese government in 1903 by refusing to support Japanese political plans to attack Russia.<sup>102</sup> Japanese Christians were finally able to see what it looks like to reconcile faith with nationalism, and Uchimura's example taught Japanese citizens that being a good citizen sometimes means standing up to the government.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Howes, 131.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 145.



In 1893 a Japanese Christian minister named Tamura Naoomi published a book in English called *The Japanese Bride*.<sup>104</sup> The book was addressed to an American audience, and detailed Japanese family practices. This began a heated debate in Japan.<sup>105</sup> The book countered claims that Japan had become a modern and civilized Empire and was considered an anti-nationalistic work, which was important during this time of modernizing. Tamura believed that Christianity could “assist in reforming Japanese family practices and the position of women within the home.”<sup>106</sup> The Japanese considered Japanese Christians foreign in their ideology, and Christians were looked down upon. The conflict that Japanese Christians faced with reconciling their dedication to the Christian faith and their loyalty to Japan became clear through the debates that rose from the book. Tamura was an important early Christian leader in the development of the Meiji Christian community because of the conversations and questions that were initiated by his book.<sup>107</sup>

Japan's relationship with the West inevitably influenced Japan, despite their cultural and religious differences, through the introduction and spread of Western practices and ideologies. Christianity was well accepted when it was introduced in the mid-fifteen-hundreds. However, the potential threat of Western Nations' power caused the Tokugawa government in Japan to close its borders to nearly all foreign influence, and Christianity in particular. Christianity was persecuted and the remnant church thrived

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<sup>104</sup> Emily, Anderson, “Tamura Naoomi's ‘The Japanese Bride’; Christianity, Nationalism, and Family in Meiji Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1. Christians in Japan (2007): 203, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30234181> (accessed August 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Anderson, 204.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 207.

secretly up to the times of the Meiji Restoration. The Japanese government adapted and modified regulations during the process of modernization to meet the standards of modern Western culture. Christianity was finally permitted in Japan, albeit more as a gesture than in practice. Many of the Japanese remained closed to the possibility of accepting a religion of foreign influence. However, many young Japanese intellectuals developed their knowledge and practice in a Western environment that fostered the Christian faith due to the Meiji government's push to renovate Japan. These Japanese scholars were placed on a unique path and were distinguished from their extensive training and knowledge of the West. Those scholars who became Christians during their time with the West had the unique opportunity to bring the gospel of Christianity to a new platform in Japan and to fashion a faith that was complementary to their Japanese culture. Though Japan's shaky history of Christianity is evident in its consequences today, there is also evidence of a thin, divine line, connected by individuals of strong conviction and faith, which leads to a window of opportunity to witness to Japanese people and reconcile nationalism with faith.

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