Imperialism and Religion: Thoughts on the Symposium "Japanese Universities and Christianity"

Robert Eskildsen

Introduction

On November 28, 2015 the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies hosted an international symposium on the theme of Japanese universities and Christianity. Many of the people who attended the symposium remarked how interesting and thought-provoking it had been, and while it is pleasing to participate in an event that is well-received in this case its success may have been due as much to chance as to design. In the beginning the plan was for the symposium to focus on the history of education reform, Occupation policy and Christian missionaries in postwar Japan. As the participants submitted the proposals for their presentations, however, it became clear that the actual content of the symposium would be broader, both chronologically and thematically. We adapted the title of the symposium to match the breadth of the presentations, and the broader perspective that the participants brought with them resulted in an insightful exploration of connections between Japanese universities, Christianity and the Second World War. The essays in this special issue of *Asian Cultural Studies* are based on the presentations from the symposium, supplemented by an essay by Jun'ichi Umetsu, Chancellor of Aoyama Gakuin University. In this essay I will describe some of the ways the symposium provoked my thinking, especially in connection to themes I have been exploring in my teaching over the past couple of years.

Religion, the Cold War and Contemporary Japan

Not surprisingly, memories of the Second World War hung in the background of the symposium. In August, 2015 many events were held to memorialize the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war, including a major address by Prime Minister Abe Shinzō.[1)] Although Abe made a clear statement against war in his address some observers doubted its sincerity because of his longstanding effort to revise Article 9 of the constitution. Almost before the echoes of the prime minister's address had subsided Abe provoked a storm of protest in Japan by pressing for legislation that would reinterpret Article 9 to permit Japanese military forces to participate in "collective self-defense" actions. In the largest domestic protests since the early 1960s hundreds of thousands of protesters took to the streets to oppose Abe's policy. The symposium was not planned in relation to the anniversary of the end of the war and most of the details were settled before Abe's address in August and the large protests in September. The timing of those events was coincidental but it would have been difficult for

people attending the symposium not to have those events on their minds.

As I listened to the presentations in the symposium two ideas kept returning to me, neither of which had any immediate connection to the presentations but both of which contributed to the context in which I understood the symposium. The first idea was a prominent silence in the statement against war that Abe made in August. The salient paragraph reads as follows (in the official English translation):

> More than one hundred years ago, vast colonies possessed mainly by the Western powers stretched out across the world. With their overwhelming supremacy in technology, waves of colonial rule surged toward Asia in the 19th century. There is no doubt that the resultant sense of crisis drove Japan forward to achieve modernization. Japan built a constitutional government earlier than any other nation in Asia. The country preserved its independence throughout. The Japan-Russia War gave encouragement to many people under colonial rule from Asia to Africa.

As many observers noted at the time, the statement neglected to mention that Japan also possessed colonies. Japan colonized Taiwan after the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, it established a protectorate in Korea after the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and it formally annexed Korea in 1910.

Any "comfort" given by Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War would have been cold to most Koreans, and An Jung-geun, who assassinated Itō Hirobumi in 1909 for his role in arranging the annexation of Korea, is still regarded as a hero in Korea. Following the Sino-Japanese War Japan did serve as a beacon of hope for reformers in China and Korea, and intellectuals in Asia could plausibly look to Japan as a model for resisting Western imperialism, but that hope quickly evaporated after Japan colonized Korea. The March First movement in Korea in 1919 and the subsequent May Fourth movement in China provided a different beacon of hope to the peoples of East Asia who reacted in strident opposition to Japanese efforts to establish economic and political dominance. The current antagonism toward Japan so often expressed by the peoples of South Korea and China traces back, at least to some extent, to early twentieth century anti-Japanese sentiment provoked by Japanese imperialism. Postwar Japan is a pacifist country and the prime minister is able to, indeed may be politically obliged to, speak out forcefully against war. Postwar Japan is also a postcolonial country, but Abe's silence about Japan's imperialist past suggests that it is still difficult for the leader of the country to disavow the economic and political dominance that Japan secured by force during the history of its colonial empire.

The second idea follows from the first. The difficulty in disavowing Japan's imperialist past is nothing new and it continues to color the way that the Second World War is remembered in Japan. For me, the entry point into that line of argument is the Imperial Rescript on Surrender (*gyokuon hōsō*) that was broadcast on August 15, 1945. Indeed, the various commemorations of the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war all took that momentous day as the basis of commemoration rather than, say, the formal surrender that took place a few weeks later. The salient passage in the rescript is as follows:

> To strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations as well as the security and well-being of our subjects is the solemn obligation that has been handed down by our Imperial Ancestors, and we lay it close to the heart. Indeed, we declared war on America and Britain out of our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement.[2)]

John Dower describes the rescript as a "polished ideological gem," not least because it affirms a key justification of the war—that Japan intended to liberate East Asia from Western colonial rule—even as it admits defeat.[3)]

The problem is that the rescript does not acknowledge that Japan's "liberation" of Asia from Western colonial rule entailed the replication of Western colonialism, a recursive operation that Peter Duus and others have described as "mimetic imperialism."[4)] The problem posed by this justification for war, stated in abstract terms, is how to understand the relationship between Japanese imperialism and Western imperialism on the one hand, and the relationship between Japanese imperialism and Japan's war on the other. How could Japan possibly use imperialism to liberate Asia from imperialism? The rescript deals with the problem by ignoring it. That Abe Shinzō could commemorate the end of the war seventy years later in virtually the same way suggests how little the American Occupation changed the way the Japanese empire is remembered in Japan. The Occupation sought to extirpate militarism from Japan, to assign blame for the war and punish those responsible for it and to prevent Japan from ever fighting such a war again. Assigning blame for Japanese imperialism was never an issue, and the neo-colonial nature of the Occupation would have made it difficult in any case for Occupation authorities to offer a full-throated condemnation of imperialism. There has been a strong repudiation of war in postwar Japan, but no similar repudiation of colonialism in postcolonial Japan. If anything, the Cold War ossified the amnesia about Japanese imperialism because it suited both Japan and the United States in their shared struggle against Communism, and the result is that many young people today have little understanding of how or why Japan's colonial empire was problematic for its East Asian neighbors.

Fortuitously, by focusing on questions relating to Christianity before and after the war the symposium made some of these issues more visible. That religion bears a close connection both to Japan's empire and to its war is really no surprise, but in recent years I have found it necessary to spend much more time explaining the connection in my courses about modern Japanese history. This need is exemplified by something that happened a couple of years ago when I introduced to one of my classes the idea that the war in China in the 1930s and 1940s was a "holy war" (*seisen*). I assumed everyone knew that fact but my students' puzzled reaction taught me otherwise. Since then I have tried to provoke my students' thinking by challenging them to think about how Japan could possibly fight a holy war in China. The question confounds simple explanation, but it does get students to think about the relationship between Japanese imperialism, religion and war. At the same time, I remind my students to understand that the idea of a holy war in China was contested at the time,

and that while it enjoyed popular support it did so in the context of coercion and propaganda. The idea of Japan's holy war needs to be considered critically.

In that regard it is interesting to see how much emphasis the leaders of the Occupation placed on eliminating State Shinto. The Americans, intending to reshape Japanese society after the war, believed that emperor worship had contributed greatly to militarism and that all vestiges of emperor worship must be eliminated in order to prevent a recurrence of militarism. Perhaps the Americans took Japanese propaganda a little more seriously than they should have. In her analysis of the active support by Douglas MacArthur, the leader of the Occupation, for Christian proselytizing in Japan, Hilary Elmendorf shows MacArthur believed that because of "a vacuum which events have left in the spiritual phase of Japanese life, there now exists an opportunity without counterpart since the birth of Christ for the spread of Christianity among the peoples of the Far East."[5] In the view of Occupation authorities State Shinto had formed the foundation of militarism and to eliminate State Shinto would create a spiritual vacuum that Christianity could fill, thereby providing a proper foundation for democracy. In the early years of the Occupation MacArthur truly seems to have believed that Japan would become a Christian—and democratic—country through such a simple transference of religious faith.[6] In retrospect it is clear he misread the situation; comparatively few conversions happened and democracy still flourished. To the end he doggedly insisted, however, that Japan must be Christian for it to be truly democratic and, as Ray Moore explains, when proselytizing proved ineffective MacArthur shifted his support to the longer term goal of supporting Christian higher education, including the founding of International Christian University.[7]

On "Seventy Years after World War II, What Does the Future Hold for Christian Universities in Japan?"

Before turning to a discussion of the presentations in the symposium let me explain briefly the special lecture that Jun'ichi Umetsu, Chancellor of Aoyama Gakuin University, gave at International Christian University on November 15, 2015. As part of the project to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of ICU the university organized an Archives and Special Collection special exhibit entitled "Following the Footsteps of Dr. Diffendorfer and Dr. Troyer—Building a New University." Prof. Umetsu, a graduate of ICU, gave his special lecture "Seventy Years after World War II, What Does the Future Hold for Christian Universities in Japan?" in conjunction with that exhibit. He put his thoughts about the founding of ICU in the context of Japan's intellectual history and made a clear contrast between the ideal of internationalism behind the founding of the university and Japan's prewar ideology, suggesting there was a radical break in higher education in Japan before and after the Second World War. At the same time, he suggested an important continuity between the prewar and postwar periods. Before the war many students in Christian universities developed into reliable people who contributed positively to Japan and the world. The challenge, he seemed to suggest, is for students at ICU and other Christian universities in Japan to continue to this tradition.

On "Contemporary Japanese Christianity and the History of Popular Culture"

Let me return now to a discussion of the presentations in the international symposium. Prof. Inoue Shōichi of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies began the symposium by delivering a fascinating keynote speech in which he explored connections between Christianity and popular culture in Japan. The Japanese title to his talk (*Fūzoku kara mita gendai Nihon no Kirisutokyō*) caused some consternation at the Institute of Asian Cultural Studies. Prof. Inoue, an accomplished scholar of architecture, is well-know for his irreverent and occasionally risqué topics, notably his 2002 book about underwear and shame,[8] and his keynote speech presented the problem of how to translate the word *fūzoku* for the program. It can be translated literally as manners or customs, but in contemporary usage it is typically associated with the Japanese sex industry. Prof. Inoue clearly meant to have some fun with the double entendre but the abstract of his talk suggested that his topic would be an exploration of popular culture and that is the word we used in the translation.

The talk itself turned out to be both deeply thoughtful and highly entertaining, and it explored four themes relating to Christianity and popular culture in Japan. The first theme is that Christianity has had a big influence on popular culture but the full extent of that influence is typically not acknowledged or recognized. The second is that the treatment of Christianity and Buddhism in Japanese popular culture is asymmetrical, with Christianity sometimes being held to a higher standard of morality or being seen as a more attractive source of cultural refinement. The third is the influence of Christianity on conceptions of gender in Japan, as can be seen in the Meiji era slogan of "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*) and higher expectations of marital fidelity among Christians. The final theme is that the influence of Christianity on Japanese popular culture has raised questions of cultural authenticity that remain unresolved. The combination of the themes provided a fresh perspective for considering the influence of Christianity in Japan.

The last theme, concerning questions of cultural authenticity, suggested for me at least the possibility of a deep connection between Christian influence on postwar popular culture and an enduring problem of how to contend with the influence of Western civilization—and Western imperialism—in Japan during the modern period. One of the great challenges that the Western powers collectively posed to Japan in the nineteenth century is the problem of conforming to Western political and cultural norms in the context of Western imperialism. To a great extent Western imperialism compelled Japanese society to change but Japanese people retained control over the process. To give one example, the Meiji era intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi was a strong advocate of accepting Western civilization in Japan but ambivalent about Christianity. He did not see Christianizing Japan as a necessary condition for attaining civilization. By contrast, most of the Westerners who came to Japan in the nineteenth century believed that Western civilization rested on the foundation of Christianity and some early Japanese Christians—for example Uchimura Kanzō—shared that belief. Propagating Christianity was certainly the goal of the Western missionaries who came to Japan, but it was not an explicit goal of all Westerners. For many of them the important matter was to encourage or compel Japan to become civilized, and Christianity was important in that process only to the extent that they believed

Christianity to be a prerequisite of civilization. For many Japanese Christians the challenge was to maintain their identity as Japanese and their faith in what commonly was seen as a foreign (and therefore not authentically Japanese) religion. Prof. Inoue's thought-provoking discussion of the influence of Christianity on postwar popular culture suggests that the religion has gained a measure of acceptance in Japan, at least superficially, and it is no longer seen automatically as a foreign religion. At the same time, while the trappings of the religion have gained a kind of cultural acceptance the number of adherents has not increased.

The Research Presentations

The research presentations in the symposium approached the relationship between Japanese universities and Christianity more directly than Prof. Inoue's keynote speech, but none of them addressed directly the question of why education was so important to Christians, perhaps because it is obvious and needs little explanation. The relationship between education and Christianity changed over the broad chronological range covered in the presentations, however. For most foreign missionaries in the nineteenth century education provided a means of both improving the lives of their students and seeking new converts, but it also helped to transmit "civilization" to Japan. Nineteenth-century Christians, at least for those from Western countries, often believed that inculcation in Christianity was necessary for the development of morality in children, calling into question the morality of Japanese. This point of view prompted Nitobe Inazō to write *Bushidō* (1899) as a way suggesting that there might be other sources of morality in Japan, and a similar motive prompted Uchimura Kanzō to write *Representative Men of Japan* in 1908. Christian missionaries valued education in itself, but also saw it as a tool for spreading civilization and Christianity. In later years the relationship between Christianity and education shifted.

Over time the foreign missionaries in Japan became more acclimated to the country, and Japanese Christians became more adept at running their own churches and Christian schools. As a result of these trends foreign missionaries played a different role in Japan than they had in the nineteenth century. Some Christians may have believed in the prewar years that they were helping to transmit "civilization" to Japan, but compared to nineteenth-century missionaries their mission was geared less toward transmitting civilization. As Christian churches became more Japanese they also became more nationalistic, and this had an effect both on foreign missionaries and on Christian schools. During the 1930s circumstances became more uncomfortable for foreigners who taught in schools in Japan and some of them left before the war began. After the war ended some of them returned to Japan and because of their knowledge of the language and culture they viewed questions of Christian education and evangelism in Japan a bit differently than MacArthur did, even though he strongly supported both.[9] After the "reverse course," when Occupation policies shifted toward preventing the spread of Communism in the context of the Cold War, the purposes of Christian education in Japan also shifted in a similar direction. The presentations in the symposium did not specifically address the question of changing attitudes toward Christian education in Japan, but as this brief explanation suggests those attitudes changed fairly dramatically during the past century and a half.

Turning now to a brief discussion of the presentations, the paper by M. William Steele, a longtime member of the faculty at International Christian University, addressed the question of how the Cold War influenced the founding of ICU. As he has done in so many talks in the past, Steele presented a number of contradictions that can be seen in historical sources and he encouraged listeners to think critically about what the differences meant. He suggested that the university suffered from a kind of identity crisis because ICU meant many things to many people. ICU was established in response to the Cold War, for example, and for some of the people involved in its founding it was meant to be a bulwark against Communism, but for others that motivation was not as strong. It was the Cold War, he argued, that shaped the curriculum and not defeat in the Second World War.

Kate Nakai, a professor emerita at Sophia University, gave a presentation about the history of that university. As a Catholic institution its history differed from the early Protestant universities such as Dōshisha and Rikkyō. Sophia had a strong Jesuit, and German, character to it, and the strong emphasis on philosophy and German literature made the curriculum less attractive to Japanese students. The students preferred to take classes about "business" taught by Japanese faculty. Nakai also discussed the problems Sophia experienced during the war, as the government sought to compel all university students to show reverence at shrines (*jiji sanpai*). Students at Sophia famously resisted the policy in 1932 and instigated a crisis at the university. The reaction was pragmatic, to appease the government in order to preserve the university. Different Christian school and universities experienced variations of this problem in the 1930s as the government sought, with substantial success, to subordinate religious organizations, including Christian schools, to the state.

Patricia Sippel, a professor at Toyo Eiwa University, explained the history of that university from its beginnings as a mission school for girls to its transformation into a junior college after the war. The presentation showed just how difficult it became in the second half of the 1930s to operate a Christian school under pressure from the Japanese government. According to Sippel the interests of the Japanese and foreign Christians were not aligned and that exacerbated the conflict at the school. In the end several foreign teachers were forced to resign and most of them left Japan. During the Second World War some of the missionaries from the Women's Missionary Society who had worked at the school volunteered to work as teachers at an internment camp in Canada where Japanese were held during the war. After the war the school reestablished its relationship with the Women's Missionary Society and some of the teachers returned to Japan. An important message of the presentation is of a continuity in foreign missionary presence at the school that was interrupted by militarism and war.

Natsuko Gōdo, a graduate student at ICU, gave a presentation about Esther B. Rhoads, a prominent Quaker missionary whose experiences resembled those of some of the missionaries that Sippel described in her presentation. Rhoads first came to Japan in her 20s and spent many years in the country working as a missionary. After war broke out between Japan and the United States Rhoads returned to the U.S. and she too worked at an internment camp. She came to Japan again after the war and served in many capacities. She worked for LARA (Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia), served as President and Chancellor at Friends School in Tokyo, worked as a tu-

tor to the Crown Prince of Japan for many years and served on the board of directors at ICU. Rhoads' career in Japan was interesting not only in the way it spanned the Second World War but also in the degree of influence she exerted in the postwar period.

The final presentation was by Prof. Ohta Tetsuo of J. F. Oberlin University. Ohta's paper dealt mostly with the prewar history of Sūtei Gakuen, a predecessor of J. F. Oberlin University that was founded in Beijing in 1921 by Shimizu Yasuzō. The presentation was particularly interesting because it suggested connections between the work of missionaries in the context of Western imperialism in Japan and the work of Shimizu as a Japanese missionary in the context of Japanese imperialism in China. Although Shimizu's work in Beijing revealed commonalities with the work of Western missionaries, notably the Christian commitment to education and the connection between imperialism and religion, it also served as a corrective to the emphasis on Western missionaries in the other presentations. Ohta ended his presentation with a brief explanation of how Shimizu returned to Japan after the war and founded J. F. Oberlin University, a Christian university with a very different outlook than International Christian University.

Conclusion

More than anything, participating in the symposium reaffirmed for me the importance of the connection between religion and imperialism in modern Japanese history. Until comparatively recently historians of Japan working in North America and Europe paid little attention to the Japanese empire. That began to change dramatically in the 1980s as the Cold War drew to an end and scholars explored Japanese history from new perspectives. At the same time, postcolonial studies and studies of Western imperialism flourished under the influence of scholars such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, and the close connection between missionary activities and Western imperialism has drawn considerable attention. Soon the effects of that new research began to change the way historians outside of Japan looked at the history of the Japanese empire. During the past two decades many new books and articles have appeared that explain the Japanese empire, but until quite recently few of them dealt with questions of religion. Recently that has begun to change, and several new studies have appeared that show just how important religion was in Japanese imperialism. Japanese Christians and Japanese Buddhists sought to spread their respective religions outside of Japan about as assiduously as their Western counterparts.[10] The symposium did not set out to explain the connection between Christianity and imperialism, but in the end it provided an interesting and useful context for thinking about religion and imperialism in modern Japanese history.

Notes

1) Statement by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, 14 August 2015 (http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/97_abe/discource/20150814danwa.html). For the official English translation see http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201508/0814statement.html.
2) "Imperial Rescript on Surrender (1945)," in David Lu, *Japan: A Documentary History* (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 457.
3) John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999),

36.

4) Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), "Mimesis and Dependence," 424–438. Robert Eskildsen, "Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan," American Historical Review 107.2 (April 2002): 388–418.
5) "MacArthur Stresses Role of Christianity in Far East," *Nippon Times*, December 14, 1946, quoted in Hilary Elmendorf, "Occupying the 'Vacuum:' Conflicting Interpretations of Christianity in Post-War Japan," *The Journal of Social Science* 64 (2008): 71.
6) Elmendorf; Ray A. Moore, *Soldier of God: Macarthur's Attempt to Christianize Japan* (Portland, Maine: MerwinAsia, 2011).
7) Moore 73.
8) Inoue Shōichi, *Pantsu ga Mieru: Shūchishin no Gendaishi* (Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2002).
9) Moore, *Soldier of God.*
10) Here are a few examples of books and articles about religion and Japanese imperialism that I have used in recent courses. Yoshiko Okamoto, "Buddhism and the Twenty-One Demands," in Minohara Toshihiro, Tze-Ki Hon, and Evan N. Dawley, eds., *The Decade of the Great War* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 394–414. Hwansoo Ilmee Kim, *Empire of the Dharma: Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877–1912* (Harvard University Asia Center , 2012). Emily Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan: Empire for God* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014). Ōta Tetsuo, *Shimizu Yasuzō to Chūgoku* (Tōkyō: Kadensha, 2011).