

# The Cold War and the Founding of ICU

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“The church has never met such an opportunity in five hundred years as it is now meeting in Japan. Where they have sent one missionary, now let them send one hundred. And let them lay plans big enough for this task. Japan cannot have a democracy without Christianity.”

—General MacArthur in *The Free Methodist*, 1949

The “authority” having been torn down, all the contents of our thought gone,  
and we have not been trained to act on our own initiative ....  
What shall we do? We really do not know what to do.  
We are in a state of vacuum.  
Who is going to fill this plastic emptiness?  
Is it democracy?  
Or will it be communism?

—K. W. (n.d. but around 1948), ICU University Archives

As is well known, the campus of the International Christian University was once the site of the Nakajima Aircraft Research Center where weapons of mass destruction were conceived. In the building that is now University Hall (*Honkan*), the heart and soul of the university, plans for a transcontinental bomber, the *Fugaku*, and other weapons of mass destruction were drawn up in the hope that air power would win the war. Literally the campus is a place that, once an instrument of war, was transformed into a university devoted to peace, internationalism, and democratic citizenship. This is the postwar story of ICU. The hero of this story is Yuasa Hachirō, a Christian educator and pacifist.

Yuasa had spent 16 years of work and study in the United States, gaining a Ph.D. in entomology from University of Illinois in 1922. He returned to Japan in 1924 and first taught at Kyoto Imperial University before becoming president of Doshisha University in 1935. The military were in ascendancy at that time and Yuasa quickly ran into trouble. Refusing to compromise with demands to eliminate Christian elements from the university’s mission statement, he was forced to resign in 1937. Anonymous posters labeled him a traitor, and death threats were sent in the mail. He spent the



Figure 1: Yuasa Hachirō looking over plans to redesign the Nakajima Mitaka Research Center building into the present University Hall  
Source: ICU University Archives

years of deepening war fervor in exile in the United States, returning to Japan in 1946. Convinced that Japan’s prewar education system was partly responsible for the country’s drift into militarism and world war, he and other Christians in Japan and North America worked to set up an American-style small liberal arts college in Japan.<sup>1)</sup> They looked to Christian liberal arts universities as a model—schools such as Haverford, Amherst and Williams. According to Yuasa, the new university should be academically rigorous, international, interracial, intercultural, and coeducational. The “University for Tomorrow” as Yuasa referred to ICU, would be “a place for the creation of peaceful Japanese who the world can trust, respect and love. It is our wish to teach Japanese who will see all humanity as their friends and the world as their home.”<sup>2)</sup> This is the usual story—and the story you will find on the university homepage. But of course the reality of setting up ICU, and the reality of carrying out basic reforms in university education during the immediate postwar years, was more complex and contested.

Look, for example, at the variety of the people who delivered congratulatory messages at the Dedication Ceremony held for the new university on April 29, 1952.

The date itself is important. It marked the end of the occupation, the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the restoration of sovereignty to Japan, but it was also the emperor’s birthday—and by an odd coincidence, Yuasa Hachiro’s birthday as well. In attendance were Her Imperial Highness, Princess Chichibu representing the imperial family; General Matthew B. Ridgway, successor to General Douglas MacArthur and Commander of UN forces in the Korean War that was still in progress; Maurice Troyer, professor of education from Syracuse University and vice president in charge of curriculum and instruction, saw the new university as a chance to experiment with new ideas of liberal education with the aim of cultivating democratic values. Mr. Kiyoshi Togasaki, President of the Board of Trustees of ICU, Chairman of the *Japan Times*



Figure 2: Members of the Audience at the Dedication Ceremony, April 29, 1952  
Source: ICU University Archives

(at that time known as the *Nippon Times*), and a Rotarian with connections with the liberal business elite; Mr. Hisato Ichimata, Governor of the Bank of Japan, a Buddhist, who nonetheless served as the head of fundraising within Japan for the new university; Miss Michi Kawai, Christian activist and founder of Keisen Jogakuen women's school and representative of the established mission schools; Rev. John Maclean, from Richmond Virginia who began a movement in 1946 to raise money to help rebuild Japan and restore good will between Japan and the United States and seek forgiveness for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His reconciliation project began the fund-raising for ICU in the United States. Also in attendance was Mrs. Edua S. Diffendorfer, representing her husband, Ralph Diffendorfer, a founder and first president of the Japan ICU Foundation in 1948. He died in 1951, most likely due to overwork caused by the difficult if not impossible task of raising 10 million dollars for the new university. Mr. Diffendorfer was also a strong believer that Christianity would serve as moral re-armament to prevent the spread of Communism in Japan and Asia and used this argument in U.S. fund raising campaigns.

The lineup is a remarkable mix of peoples, each with a different vision for the new university. Indeed the new university was immediately confronted with an identity crisis. The movement to create a new Christian University (not yet International Christian University) in Japan emerged immediately after Japan's defeat in 1945. The report of the first group of Christian missionaries who traveled to Japan on October 21, 1945, aware of meetings taking place at Tokyo Women's Christian College seeking to establish a new Christian university, gave priority to plans to establish a new first-rate Christian university in Japan.<sup>3)</sup> On the American side, nation-wide reporting of Rev. John A. MacLean's sermon, "Love Thy Neighbor," delivered in late January, 1946, at the Ginter Park Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Virginia, sparked a movement among Christians to offer some tangible expression of reconciliation between America and Japan.<sup>4)</sup> By March 1946, MacLean's "foolish suggestion" was adopted the

Foreign Mission Conference of North America. A committee was formed to advance the establishment of a new Christian university in Japan as a priority reconciliation project—and a project that would advance the Christianization of Japan.

However, educational reform in post-1945 Japan, and perhaps especially reform at the university level, had to deal with economic and political realities. ICU and other Christian universities at that time were “postwar universities”—either seeking to return to simpler times and restore old foundations or, as in the case of ICU, looking forward to new “postwar” world of peace and justice. But at the same time, they were also “cold war universities.” Japan was occupied between 1945 and 1952; any educational reform depended upon the support of the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP) or in short, GHQ (General Headquarters) under the command of General Douglas MacArthur.<sup>5)</sup>

MacArthur in fact became one of the strongest supporters of the new Christian University that became ICU. During the occupation years, he supported Christianity, reasoning that it would serve as the spiritual underpinning for the Occupation’s democratic reforms. As he wrote in December 1946:

Due to 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. ... If this opportunity is fully availed of by the leaders of our Christian faith, a revolution of spirit may be expected to ensue which will more favorably alter the course of civilization than has any economic or political revolution accomplished in the history of the world.”<sup>6)</sup>

To this end he invited missionaries to come to Japan and distributed bibles. Official policy supported the separation of church and state, but by April 1950, two years before the end of the Occupation, some 1,083 Catholic and 1,165 Protestant missionaries had responded to MacArthur’s call. Part of the general’s grand design involved support for the establishment of International Christian University and its promise to transform Japan’s future through Christian leadership. The new Christian university, he declared, “is one of the most important things that the United States and Canada can do to create Christian leaders to have influence not only in Japan but on the whole Orient as time goes on.”<sup>7)</sup> In 1949, MacArthur agreed to serve as Honorary Chair of the Committee to Raise Funds for the new International Christian University.

Did MacArthur and Yuasa agree with each other? Both were devout Christians and both were concerned about the future of Japan, but their worldviews differed significantly, especially after the outbreak of the Cold War in 1948 and the Communist takeover of China in 1949 followed by the Korean War in 1950. These events were the cause of what is often called the “reverse course” in Occupation policy. Instead of democratization and demilitarization, rebuilding Japan’s industry took priority. Moral re-armament was also necessary, and in this context the establishment of ICU gained new urgency—not simply for its promise to spread Christian values in the new Japan,

but more strategically as a means to counter the “siren call of communism.” As we will see, both within Japan and in the United States, ICU emerged as an anti-communist project.

In 1948, Ralph E. Diffendorfer helped to set up the Japan ICU Foundation in New York in order to raise funds for the new International Christian University. He was an advocate of ecumenism and inter-faith cooperation; but he also agreed with McArthur that Christianity could serve as an antidote to Communism. In 1949, for example, Diffendorfer sought support for ICU from former Ambassador to Japan and Under-Secretary of State during the war years, Joseph Grew, declaring that the new university would not tolerate communism. When recruiting faculty for ICU, for example, he wrote:

they must be faculty members of first-class intellectual caliber who must possess entire academic freedom, but at the same time must be not in the least committed to the communist point of view. This would bar them at once from becoming teachers who are free to pursue the truth. I think that communism and Christianity are at complete variance with each other. For the development of democracy and human personality, they are at the opposite poles.”<sup>8)</sup>

Earlier in 1948, in his capacity as executive secretary of the Board of Missions of the Methodist church, Diffendorfer proposed to send missionaries to Japan, Korea, China, India, the Philippines and Latin America to stave off the “millions of communists who in all languages are seeking to batter down the work of Christ.”<sup>9)</sup>

Diffendorfer invited Grew to speak to ICU supporters in New York in 1949. In his speech, Grew described the real-life issues standing in the way of democracy and favoring the advance of communist ideology in the new postwar Japan: inflation, a shortage of consumer goods, lack of foreign trade, housing shortage, and destruction of national ideals. He said “Japanese youth stands at the crossroads leading in one direction to peace and democracy and on the other hand to communism and totalitarianism.” Hope existed in the new university ICU as it would become an important stabilizing influence where leaders could be trained to preserve the principles of democracy after the United States forces of occupation have departed.” ICU would not only counter “the love-call of communism, but also guide young people on the true road to democracy.”<sup>10)</sup>

In a private letter sent to Diffendorfer on November 3, 1949, Grew made the point clear:

“Efforts are bound to be made by left-wing elements to infiltrate and get fellow travelers into positions of influence in this University (ICU). In our country (USA) our universities can afford to engage professor or others whose political views may be radical, just so long as they are not outright Communists. Our American students have a right to learn all they can about Communism whether they support it or not. ..., But we face quite a different situation in Japan that we do in our country. Here we can control subversive elements. In Japan, such control is far less sure. Penury, hardships and a very low standard of living cre-



Figure 3: Yuasa addressing a fundraising event sponsored by the Japan ICU Foundation in New York. January, 1950. To the immediate left of Yuasa is Maurice Troyer; to his right are Ralph Diffendorfer and Joseph Grew.  
Source: ICU University Archives

ate the soil in which Communism is easily planted and can grow and flourish. ... Those Japanese boys are malleable. They are groping for something that they have never known and they are going to be largely guided by what they hear from their teachers in lecturers and seminars, especially from their foreign teachers. Any teacher in our university who is an apologist for Soviet Russia and the evil which she has spread and is constantly spreading throughout the world could do an immense amount of permanent harm.”<sup>11)</sup>

In other words, Grew wanted to make sure that “our university” will not hire anyone who might be sympathetic with Communism. American students can study about Communism, but Grew was afraid that Japanese students (Japanese boys) were not ready to think critically: “In broad terms the Japanese have never known our Western system of education—the kind of education that makes a man think for himself with the right kind of background and with the day to day guidance that helps him to think straight.”<sup>12)</sup>

Here we can see another identity crisis: the existence of multiple ICUs. When Grew spoke about about “our university,” whose university did he mean? America’s University? Japan’s university? The university of Christian believers? But which sort of Christianity? Reverend Maclean wanted American Christians to seek reconciliation with Japan and atonement for having dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

His “foolish suggestion” was to “do something in a big way for these victims of our military might, ... and dramatize the Spirit of Christ, who taught His followers to forgive and to love their enemies. ... Thus, we might do something to destroy the seeds of future wars.”<sup>13)</sup> Another American Christian, Ernest E. Greenough, a farmer from California who helped to set up the ICU farm in 1951, declared that ICU was “the



Figure 4: Stone Monument honoring Reverend John Allan MacLean whose fundraising efforts on behalf of ICU are symbolized by the cherry trees on MacLean Avenue.

church's contribution toward combatting Communism in the Orient.”<sup>14)</sup> Yuasa Hachirō sought reconciliation with the victims of Japanese aggression in Asia and set up one of the first exchange programs with students from Korea, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Instead of a world divided between East and West, his university would seek to realize a “united world” where “all the world’s people live freely in equality.” Which is the true ICU?

ICU was both a post-war university and a cold war university. And I suspect that many Japanese universities, Christian, public and private, were similarly caught between postwar ideas and cold war realities. In ICU’s case, MacArthur’s hopes to combine Christian evangelism with American democracy failed to take root. Moreover, debates within ICU were more nuanced than simple support or rejection of American goals in Japan.

During the 1950s, Yuasa’s vision became stronger and the university’s commitment to liberal arts, to “thinking for oneself,” to internationalism, universal human rights and Christian humanism meant that by the time of the Ampo riots in Tokyo in 1960, ICU students and faculty, with Yuasa’s tacit approval, participated in demonstrations against the forced passage of the US-Japan Mutual Security Bill. Members of the faculty sent a joint letter to the Prime Minister of Japan and the President of the United States that stated:

Believing that every possible measure should be taken to prevent the revival of militarism or totalitarianism in any country; Believing that mutual trust among nations is a more fundamental basis for world peace than military alliances; Recalling that Japanese-American relations should be based on a common desire to uphold the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law ... we must deplore the attempt to impose the new security treaty in an undemocratic

fashion.”<sup>15)</sup>

Officials at the American Embassy in Tokyo felt betrayed as they suddenly realized that ICU was no longer “their university” and had a mind of its own. As one embassy official wrote to Yuasa: “I cannot tell you how disturbed and chagrined I have been—upon seeing the statement jointly signed by Japanese and American members of the faculty of ICU. This is the most astounding piece of stupidity and arrogance that I have seen in a long time.”<sup>16)</sup>

ICU would later experience further identity crises, but by 1960, in the midst of the cold war, it was clear that Yuasa’s insistence on “thinking for oneself” had become the bedrock of the university’s commitment to a liberal arts education.

#### Notes

- 1) Much has already been written about Yuasa Hachiro and his vision. See Takeda Kikoko, *Yuasa Hachiro: The Hopes and Challenges of a Christian Educator*, Tokyo: International Christian University Press, 2008. On the founding of ICU, see Charles W. Iglehart, *International Christian University: An Adventure in Christian Higher Education in Japan*, Tokyo: International Christian University Press, 1964.
- 2) “Response” by Yuasa Hachiro, “Proceedings of the Dedication Day Ceremony, April 29, 1952. Reproduced in *Remember December 8: The History of ICU’s University Hall and 70 Years of US-Japan Relations*,” ICU Institute of Asian Cultural Studies, 2012, p. 65.
- 3) “Report of the Christian Deputation to Japan in October 1945,” *The Return to Japan*, New York: Friendship Press, 1945, pp. 1–8.
- 4) “A Suggestion—As Foolish as the Teachings of Jesus,” A sermon by John A. Maclean, January 6, 1946, Keisen University History Archives.
- 5) For more information on MacArthur’s interest in plans to establish a new Christian university, see Hiliary Elmendorf, “Occupying the Vacuum: Conflicting Interpretations of Christianity in Post-War Japan,” *The Journal of Social Sciences*, International Christian University, 65, 2008, pp. 67–96.
- 6) “MacArthur Stresses Role of Christianity in Far East,” *Nippon Times*, December 14, 1946, p. 1.
- 7) This statement is one of several prepared for release under MacArthur’s name to be used in fundraising campaign literature for the new university. See letter from Laurence E. Bunker to Mr. Russell Durgin, dated 23 June 1949, in the MacArthur Memorial Archives. Copy in ICU University archives.
- 8) Ralph E. Diffendorfer to Joseph C. Grew, correspondence, November 21, 1949. ICU University Archives.
- 9) “US Methodist Church to Fight Communism,” *The Mainichi*, May 8, 1948, p. 1.
- 10) See also “Inflation in Japan seen as Aid to reds,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 1949, p. 6.
- 11) Joseph Grew to Ralph Diffendorfer, correspondence, November 3, 1949. Copy in ICU University Archives.
- 12) Ibid.
- 13) “A Suggestion—As foolish as the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth,” Sermon by John A. Maclean, January 6, 1946. Keisen University History Archives.
- 14) “Merced Farmer Says Japan Needs Christianity,” *Fresno Bee*, December 16, 1952.
- 15) “An Appeal to the Prime Minister of Japan and the President of the United States,” signed by 16 members of the ICU Faculty and Staff, n.d., ICU University Archives.
- 16) Copy of letter from William P. Woodard to Hachiro Yuasa, June 1, 1960, ICU University Archives.