here to there, we would never cross the chasms that divide, and we would never unite what would otherwise be eternally separated.

"The Mediator." It is more than the name of this journal. It is the role of Christ. And while it is uniquely his, he calls us to share that task with him. Mediators. Bridges. That is also the role of faculty members — of those who have contributed to this journal. That is what God calls us all to be. So we must each accept the risks of being a bridge. We must lay down our lives so our students can cross from uncertainty to confidence, from spiritual adolescence to maturity, from incompetence to ability, from ignorance to wisdom, from who they are to what God can make of them.

But sitting there across that highway in Australia is a very different bridge. It looks like a bridge, but no one can cross it. It hangs on to nothing, so it connects nothing. There it stands as a tribute to someone's misreading of the plans, as a symbol of someone's haste and waste, as a warning of what we become if we refuse the risk of responsibilities, as a witness to the fact that a bridge that doesn't connect is worthless!

We at this seminary are called to be bridges for men and women so they can walk with confidence into the unknown of tomorrow with the best of their heritage, to change their world -- by the power of the Spirit -- shaping it into the likeness of the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

Somewhere along that pathway, they also will come to a chasm. Perhaps when they come to it, they too will lay down their lives, barely hanging on to both sides, clinging to the past with their toes and to the future with their fingernails, stretched to the limit over the dangers and the nothingness, accepting the insecurity and the pain, letting others walk on them into the Kingdom of God! Then, and only then, will we know that we have accomplished the mission God has given us.

# The Role of Christianity in the Modernization of Japan

by Hitoshi Fukue

A rationale for our research into the role of Christianity in the modernization of Japan may sound rather dubious since the Christian population has been very small. In the eyes of the political leaders who attempted modernization of Japan on the basis of Western technology and military, the Christian minority must have seemed rather insignificant. However the impetus to explore the matter comes from the fact that Protestantism was introduced to Japan just at a time when the society was radically moving from a traditional feudal system which had alienated itself from the rest of the world for nearly 250 years to a

modern nation which strove to stand equal with the Western countries in economy and military. The question how Protestantism was introduced and accepted, or rejected by the Japanese is of keen interest to us as well as the question what role it played in the radical modernization of the nation.

Just as Peter Berger has poignantly pointed out in the paper "Secularity: East and West," I believe that the Oriental religious culture, particularly Confucianism, Mahayana school of Buddhism, and Oriental pluralism, is the foundation of the modernization of Japan. I also believe that Protestantism, in spite of its numerically inconspicuous existence, played a very unique role, because it was a totally fresh teligious culture to the minds of the people who were deeply imbedded in the long tradition of Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism.

So we wish to explore in what way and to what extent we will approach the subject by looking at the encounter of Protestantism and the Japanese society in Meiji Period (1868-1912). Second we will look at social characteristics of Protestantism in Japan during the same period. Our concern is to clarify what types of social movements Protestantism particularly deployed.

The history of Protestantism in Japan begins shortly before the dawn of its modernization with the incoming of foreign missionaries in 1859. The country had isolated itself from the rest of the world since the early 17th century with the beginning of Tokugawa government. At first the Tokugawa regime was tolerant toward Christianity which was introduced to Japan first by St. Francisco Xavier and later by his Jesuit followers in 1549. The Jesuits' missionary activity proved to be very successful, for they quickly gained converts from the nation's leaders as well as the multitudes of poor peasants in the western parts of Japan. But in 1606, following the policy of his predecessor Hideyoshi, Shogun Tokugawa began issuing anti-Christian edicts, and they started a full persecution in 1612. By 1628 it had become customary to force suspected Christians to step on some Christian symbols called Fumie, such as a bronze plaque portraying Christ or Mary, and to execute or force into apostasy through torture those who refused to step on this Fumie. 1 The Catholic church recognizes 3125 martyrdoms in Japan between 1597 and 1660. Starting in 1640, all Japanese were forced to register at local Buddhist temples as a means of keeping check on their religious affiliations.2

In an effort to keep the virus of Christianity and Western influence out of Japan, all Japanese were prohibited in 1636 from leaving Japan or from returning to Japan if already abroad, and ships large enough to sail to foreign countries were banned.<sup>3</sup> Political and social pressures from abroad were reduced to zero, and a strict ban was maintained on all Western books and on Chinese books mentioning Christianity.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Americans, British, and Russians repeatedly sent expeditions to Japan in efforts to persuade the Japanese to

open their ports to foreign ships. The American government eventually decided to try to force the doors open.<sup>4</sup> As a result of political menace from outside and internal upheaval, the Tokugawa government ended its long reign of 260 years.

In 1868 they changed the name of the "year period" to Meiji, meaning "Enlightened Rule", and the whole revolution and the tremendous changes of all sorts that followed it, came to be known as the Meiji Restoration. 5 All the changes were made under the motto of 'fukoku kyohei', which means 'a rich country and strong military.' The whole tenor of the effort was expressed in a Five Articles Oath which the new leaders had the emperor issue on April 8, 1868. In it he promised that "evil customs of the past shall be broken off, careers shall be opened to all people equally, and knowledge shall be sought throughout the world." The new leaders clearly realized that Japan had to learn a great deal about technology, institutions, and ideas of the West and also had to develop an educated public capable of supporting a modernized economy and society. Although the old ban on Christianity was not officially dropped until 1873. American Protestant missionaries had entered Japan as early as 1859, and they taught English to ambitious young men who saw their need to be knowledgeable about the West. The missionaries could not officially teach the Bible until 1873.

As soon as the ban was lifted, the missionaries took the opportunity to evangelize with full force. As a result there arose three most significant groups of Christians in the early part of Meiji Period. One is called Sapporo Band, which was formed by young college students at Sapporo Agricultural School under the great influence of a New England Puritan, William S. Clark. He was a professor at Amherst College in Massachusetts. Out of this band came great influential Japanese Christians, such men as Uchimura Kanzo, Nitobe Inazo.

Another group is called Yokohama Band. Yokohama was a center of Western civilization because of its flourishing port and young people flocked at missionaries' homes to learn English and Western civilization. The first Protestant church in Japan was organized out of this band and many influential Christians were also produced from this ban, such men like Uemura Masahisa. And still another group is called Kumamoto Band. This band came into being as a result of the opening of Yoggakko (School of Western Learning) where Captain L. L. Janes was invited to teach English. Capt. Janes taught the Bible and held prayer meetings and many students were converted to Christianity. Thirty-five students who were influenced by Capt. Janes one day climbed a nearby hill and signed their names on a prospectus to dedicate their entire lives for the service of God and country. They later entered Doshisha University in Kyoto and became the core people of the Christian movement in the western part of Japan. Among them is Ebina Danjo.<sup>6</sup>

Which people and which social class responded most sensitively to the coming of Protestantism? The historical records show that they were mostly able young

samurai largely from the parts of the country that had no share in the Meiji revolution and the new political leadership it produced. Reasons for their receptivity are said to be 1) they were those who were versed in Chinese literature and could read the Bible available then only in Chinese. 2) They were those who had managed to acquire some kind of knowledge of the Western world in spite of the country's long isolation policy.<sup>7</sup>

Most testimonies indicate that these samurai were drawn to Christianity by the message of "equality of human beings". They were deeply shaped by the Confucian world views and they saw in Protestantism higher and greater teachings of Confucius. They thought that Confucian ideals were fulfilled in Christianity and Protestantism was an extension of Confucian ethics.<sup>8</sup>

They were originally warriors whose inclinations were naturally political and nationalistic. Thus samurais saw in Christianity not just individual religious salvation but hopes to establish a new Japan which could stand equal with the Western world on the basis of Christian ethics. Their faith was inseparable from their nationalistic dream of a new modern Japan. Such was the characteristic of the early samurai Christians in Meiji Period.

To enter into Christian faith in Japan then meant an extremely severe conflict with home and village community. Their communitarian life style was so closely united that any disconformity with the life style was a matter of life and death. Thus those who could become Christians, who overcame social pressure against conversion, were those who were more or less economically independent and of high social class. In case of the lower class people, conversion to Christianity was just an impossible thing to do. Thus these early Christians were a new kind of people who through their faith in one God realized equality of human beings under God, and acquired new concepts of people by rejecting the feudal style of closed interpersonal relationships which was a social commonplace then.

It was, therefore, not a coincidence to find many Christians involved in people's rights movement in early Meiji Period. Peasants who were later converted to Christianity were well-to-do peasants who could accept new world views breaking away from traditional bondage without risking their lives. <sup>10</sup> Development of Christianity into rural areas went hand in hand with development of people's rights movement and they both stood on the same ground. Rural churches, with middle or upper class farmers as their core members, played a historic role in the modernization of Japan from the grass roots of the society. It is to be noted as a footnote that the Jesuits' missionary activity in the 16th and 17th centuries was most welcomed by the lowest class, i.e., the poverty-stricken peasants who were forced to work as slaves for the political and religious authorities of the time. But Protestantism in early Meiji drew its converts largely from the samurai class and well-to-do farmers.

In the first twenty years of Meiji Period, Christianity spread very rapidly in

spite of social and communal pressures. Records show that in 1890 (the 23rd year of Meiji) there were 300 churches all over Japan, and a 34,000 membership. This growth of Protestantism coincided with virtual craze for anything Western. However, in 1885 Meiji absolutism began to be established by the leaders of the country. It is said to be a counter movement against Westernization and a new peculiar kind of nationalism began to take place. The country was moving rapidly toward capitalistic society united with Meiji absolutism. Meiji absolutism was decisively established by the promulgation of the Constitution in 1889 and the Imperial Rescript on Education in the same year. 12

In the Constitution, the emperor was described as "sacred and inviolable" and full sovereignty and all powers were placed in his hands. And the Rescript on Education extolled traditional Confucian and Japanese virtues, becoming in time a sort of revered manifesto of Japanese conservatism. <sup>13</sup>

From then on absolute authority was vested in the emperor himself and the nation's plan was to educate and produce people who were congruent with the goals of the country. Both teachers and pupils were required to bow and pav absolute allegiance to the emperor. It is not hard to see that from then on the positions of Christians became very risky, because they could not consider the emperor as absolute. Quite similarly with the early Christians in the Roman Empire, those early Japanese Christians faced persecutions and social pressures from all corners. The most famous trouble is the so-called "Irreverence Incident" of Uchimura Kanzo. He was a Christian teacher at Tokyo 1st High School and was accused of lese majesty when he refused to bow at the Imperial Rescript on Education signed by emperor himself upon its installation in the auditorium. He was expelled from the school and was branded as a traitor by the society. He was a man of typical samurai spirit and did not submit to pressure but rather produced several books defending his Christian faith and his loyalty toward the country. 14 However, after the incident Christians and especially Christian teachers were persecuted all around the country.

From 1890 to the end of Meiji Period in 1912, Christians called it a "time of Great Trial." The idea that Christianity was incompatible with national identity penetrated the people and the number of those who attended Christian churches suddenly declined.

Japan clashed with China in 1894 and with Russia in 1904, and came out as a victor in both wars. In 1914, World War I gave Japan another chance to expand. Japan was well on its way to militarism with absolutism along with the development of a capitalistic modern society.

This has been a brief history of Protestantism in Meiji Period (1868-1912). In order to perceive the role of Christianity we wish to explore some distinctive social characteristics of Protestantism in the same period. What types of social movements did Protestantism in Meiji Period incline to deploy? In the rough

picture we have drawn, we saw that Protestantism presented to the samurai converts a radically new value system, and world perspectives. The most radical message of Christianity was the absolute equality of people under one God and that included even the emperor. Personhood was recognized in social outcasts. Christians saw in Protestantism a new ground and principle on which to build a modern nation breaking away from feudally organized premodern society. With this kind of new world view, Japanese Christians began to heal the wounds of the society at many different dimensions. We will discuss them in four categories: political dimension, social justice, education, and finally the dimension of industry.

#### 1. Political Dimension

We have said that the development of Protestantism coincided with the People's Rights Movement. People's Rights Movement was organized in order to address the crisis of the fallen samurai class who lost their property and prestige by the fall of Tokugawa Government, peasants who were suffering because of heavy tax on their farms, and the urban small bourgeois. Leaders of the movement were Itagaki Taisuke, Kataoka Kenkichi and others. The movement was nationwide and so powerful that the Meiji Government agreed to open a national assembly. The assembly was called the Diet and convened in 1890. Obviously the social foundations of the People's Rights Movement were extremely similar with those of Christianity. In many ways they were identical. That is why People's Rights Movement leaders had affinity with Protestantism and Christians also supported the movement. When the prefectural assemblies were opened, there were not a small number of Christians active in local politics. They were most active in Aomori and Gumma Prefectures.

Within fifty years since the beginning of Meiji Restoration, the nation experienced three wars. In 1894 a war with China, in 1904 a war with Russia, and in 1914 World War I. Among the Christians Uchimura Kanzo and his disciples were most vocal against wars and the nation's militarism. It is said that a majority of Christians were rather quiet on the issue of war because they were already branded as traitors just by being Christians. But Uchimura and his followers, particularly Morimoto Keizo, were stern pacifists and severly criticized the nation's inclination to absolutize the goals of the nation. <sup>18</sup>

Ultra conservatism and the 'Tenno' system (emperor system) were two sides of the same coin. In the first half of the Meiji Period, Christians rather freely criticized the Tenno System. Some Christians even claimed that Tenno himself should receive Christian baptism in order to produce a modern nation. Others (such people like Kosaki Hiromichi) criticized Confucianism from a Christian standpoint. Confucianism provided a philosophical ground for the Tenno system - Tenno as the pinnacle of a pyramid which demands absolute loyalty from its people. In a family, the father demands absolute loyalty from the rest of the members.

These criticisms were rather openly spoken in the first half of the Meiji Period, but after the Constitutions were promulgated in the 22nd year of Meiji, the government began to suppress Christians. We have talked about "Irreverent Incident" of Uchimura Kanzo. Christian schools were forbidden to practice any religious activity at school. Because of ultra conservative national identity, Christians in the latter part of Meiji began to affirm Tenno System and claimed no conflict between Tenno System and Christianity. Others began to separate the issue of politics from religion. As a result of this attitude, Christian churches were pushed into inconspicuous corners of the society. <sup>19</sup> To a lesser degree the same kind of situation remains in our present day.

### 2. Social Justice

If Tenno System was the pinnacle of the pyramid, the bottom of the pyramid was Burakumin, the social outcast. In Tokugawa Period the society was divided into four classes: 1) Samurai, 2) Peasants, 3) Artisans, and 4) Merchants. When the nation was facing economic crisis and frequent revolts among its people, Tokugawa Government established fifth and sixth class of people in order to dodge the complaints and unrest of the people. In 1871 (Meiji 4), there were 380,000 outcast people. Today it is said 3,000,000 people are scattered all over Japan in 6000 villages and still face various types of segregation. How did the Meiji Christians respond to the problem of outcast people?

A passage from an autobiography of Abe Isoo, a pastor of Okayama Church in early Meiji, will perhaps describe the situation well. Okayama Church was active in relief work and mission of Burakumin. He says,

There was a special village called Takeda Village in the vicinity of Okayama. From the village a family called Nakatsuka became members of Okayama Church. The family had not only much property, but the father had much education. Mr. Nakatsuka was one of the elders of the church. They took turns in teaching the Bible in Sunday School those days. Mr. Nakatsuka was about forty-five years old, and the students were mostly sixty years old or older. Among the students were a couple of people who belonged to the old samurai class. When I first saw the scene, I was deeply moved. The fact that the spirit of Christianity is pacifism, equality, democracy, I learned at Doshisha University. But when I saw samurai Christians listening and studying the Bible under a man who was from a special village in the 1920s of Meiji Period, I could not help but feel that this was the power of Christianity. 20

Equality of people in the sight of God was a totally new concept, particularly to samurai, because they were the most privileged class in feudal society. This was a radical transformation of world views. And they could not simply bypass

the Burakumin who were facing social segregation and poverty. The story of a Good Samaritan was for them a realistic matter. They tried to be Burakumin's neighbor.

Historians say that in the one century of Protestant history in Japan, there is no other time than the early Meiji when Christians were most actively involved in the relief work of Burakumin.<sup>21</sup> Their active involvement in the problem of Burakumin gradually declined in the middle and latter period of Meiji. The rise of Tenno System and absolutism has forced Christians to accommodate their beliefs to the national identity and to weaken their protest against social evils.

Apart from the issue of Burakumin, Meiji Christians were active in the monogamy movement. Christians in Gumma Prefecture were the pioneers in uprooting the custom of prostitution.

But perhaps the greatest and most intense participation of Christians in social justice is found in their protest against environmental pollution of Ashio Copper Mine in Tochigi Prefecture. It was the largest social problem and social movement in Meiji Period. It took some thirty years to solve the problem, including all sorts of social workers, socialists, politicians, religious leaders, educators, and students. In such a nationwide movement, how did Meiji Christians participate in solving the problem?

Ashio Copper Mine began to operate with full force in the tenth year of Meiji and by the twentieth year of Meiji, it produced forty percent of domestic copper, and was by far the greatest copper mine in the country However, environmental pollution began to threaten the residents along the river, because it contained poisonous elements of copper. By the twenty-first year of Meiji, 300,000 residents had their farms turned into barren lands, their cattle all dead, and people often died because of unknown sickness. This was an epitome of the forced modernization policy of Meiji Government and its neglect of social welfare.

The most well known person who fought against the problem was Tanaka Shozo. He spent twenty years of his life devoted to the relief work of the people suffering from this pollution. He was a congressman in the Lower House and was the first person to bring the issue into the center of political attention. He appealed for political solutions to the problem through governmental support, but found out that the copper industry and the government were closely allied, and the government would not give up the mine easily. He forsook his position as a congressman and immersed himself in the grassroots movement to redress the grievances of the people. He was imprisoned a number times because of his protest against the government policy. It was during one of his imprisonments that he encountered the Bible which gave him a religious foundation for the movement.<sup>23</sup>

He worked with all sorts of people, particularly Christians and socialists. He read the Bible to the end of his life, and many essays on religion were found in his diary. Although he was not baptized, his life was the testimony of a Christian who devoted his life to the service of the society and people. Through his aspirations and devotion, Meiji Christians were greatly influenced to participate in social justice work.

#### 3. Education

A development of Protestantism in the Meiji Period was vividly observed in the founding of Christian schools in major cities. Doshisha University in Kyoto was founded by Niijima Jo, who was educated at Amherst College. Rikkyo University, Meiji Gakuin, Aoyama Gakuin and many other colleges were founded under Christian principles. A most prominent characteristic of Christian educational institution was its enthusiasm to educate women. Within eighteen years of Meiji Period, forty-four schools for women were established.

The Christian concept of women was revolutionary in those days when women were seen not as fit subjects for education but simply as members of the labor force. Out of these women's schools came later pioneers of women's liberation movements in the country. <sup>24</sup> Today a survey shows that women's education is believed to be the greatest contribution Christianity offered to the country during the modernization period.

# 4. Industry

In the history of local industry, it is of interest to trace how the traditional industry of feudal society responded to the rapid socio-economic transition that took place during the latter part of Tokugawa Period and early part of Meiji. We cannot ignore the roles of local leaders of industry who planned innovation of traditional industry. The philosophical and religious convictions of these leaders are inseparable components of their economic activities. Historians point out close relationships between Christianity and the promotion and innovation of local industry during the early Meiji. We will briefly take up three cases for our purpose. The first is the relationship of Christianity and the silk-manufacturing industry in Gumma Prefecture. Second is the relationship with cotton flannel industry in Imabari City. Third is the relationship of Christianity with Hokkaido settlement undertakings.

## Silk-manufacturing Industry in Gumma

It has been discussed that Christianity faced grave obstacles in the agricultural communal society, and only well-to-do farmers could accept the new world views without experiencing social ostracism. Christianity in Gumma spread its roots in the middle and upper-middle class silk-manufacturers. Their more or less autonomous industry style weakened the communal ties and tight networks

which were prevalent in most rural areas. It has been pointed out that the Puritan ethos provided the silk-manufacturers with guideposts for a new lifestyle and new directions as upwardly mobile manufacturers. We can perceive that Christianity functioned in the development of productive ethos of local industry in the early Meiji. 25

# Cotton Flannel Industry in Imabari City

In Imabari City, Christianity was welcomed by merchants who devoted themselves in free economic enterprise by denying the traditional sense of values. The cotton merchant class was the social foundation through which Protestantism spread its roots in Imabari City.

Imabari Christians grappled with a problem of how to redress local residents from the economic depression and stagnant local industry. Cotton flannel industry was founded by early Christians as the solution to the socio-economic problems. Their innovative economic activities were said to be motivated by the new found faith which enabled them to cut ties with traditional industry and venture into a new industry. Protestantism, particularly a spirit of independence, supported and enhanced the economic attitude of the founders of the industry. <sup>26</sup>

## Hokkaido Settlement Undertaking

When we consider the relationship between Hokkaido settlement undertaking and Protestantism, we find several enterprises done by Christian leadership with Christian faith. Sekishinsha (Red Heart Corporation) is one of them, which was the earliest settlement undertaking and has been successful to the present day. It was founded by Christian samurais in 1880. They were motivated by the Puritan settlement in New England, and were also convinced that Christian patriotism would be the guiding spirit of their undertaking. Their reclamation of Hokkaido was an expression of patriotism grounded in Protestantism.<sup>27</sup>

We have discussed the relationship of Protestantism with Japan in Meiji Period from several angles. The fall of Tokugawa Government and the rapid Meiji Restoration broke down the traditional sense of values which had supported the lives of the people and created a state of great confusion and social anomie. Protestantism appeared on the scene just when the people were seeking for a positive sense of values for the future of the country. The strong communal ties produced by Buddhism and Shintoism were slightly loosened, and samurai, peasants and merchants found a kind of light in Protestantism. It was a message of universal equality of all people, which was a dominant theme of the early Christians in Meiji. Respect for personhood, people's rights, was a radical break from feudal premodern society.

Conversion took place on an individual level and was accompanied quite often by persecution and social pressure. Anybody who chose to become a

Christian had to have tremendous resolve. This may be the reason why in spite of the small Christian population the early Meiji Christians produced great energy in many facets of the nation.

Individual freedom and Christian activity were reduced and suppressed as the Meiji Government established Tenno system in order to consolidate national identity. The Constitution and Imperial Rescript on Education enforced Tenno system and family and village communitarianism. Christianity was pushed aside from the main stream of society. However, when we review its history, we cannot fail to perceive that Protestantism played a pivotal role in the transforming of the traditional communitarian society to a modern nation. Christianity brought into relief the disease of the nation and healed its wounds. But after the transitional era had passed, the society learned to do many things without its religious elements. What was transplanted in the Japanese soil was not Christianity but Western culture. Christianity has not yet been indigenized in the soil of Japan. It may be said that because it has not been indigenized, Christianity could point out problems conceived in Japanese society as problems and criticize them.

Today Christians still make up less than one percent of the population. The role of Christianity in contemporary Japan is no doubt a complex one. Today's society is radically different from that of Meiji. But if there is anything we need to learn from Meiji, it is this one fact; i.e., Christians are called to be the salt of the earth and leaven of society.

#### **NOTES**

- 1. Edwin O. Reischauer, <u>Japan: the Story of a Nation</u>, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Pub., 1970, p. 88
  - 2. Ibid., p. 88
  - 3. Ibid., p. 89
  - 4. Ibid., p. 110
  - 5. Ibid., p. 118
- 6. Yasushi Kuyama, ed., <u>Modern Japan and Christianity</u> (Japanese: <u>Kindai Nihon to Kirisutokyo</u>) Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1956.
  - 7. Ibid.
- 8. Eiichi Kudo, <u>Christianity in Meiji Period</u> (Japanese: <u>Meijiki no Kirisutokyo</u>) Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 1979
  - 9. Ibid.

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  - 12. Ibid.
  - 13. Yasushi Kuyama, op. cit.
  - 14. Reischauer, op. cit., p. 142
  - 15. Kuyama, op. cit.
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- 19. Masao Takenaka, "Person and Thought of Morimoto" in <u>Modernization of Japan and Christianity</u> (Japanese: <u>Nihon no Kindaika to Kirisutokyo</u>), Humanity Research Center of Soshisha University, Christian Research Committee of Social Problems, Tokyo: Shinkyo Shuppansha, 1973.
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  - 21. Ibid., p. 80f.
  - 22. Ibid.
  - 23. Ibid.
  - 24. Ibid., p. 123f.
  - 25. Kuyama, op. cit., p. 121
  - 26. Kudo, Socio-economic History of Christianity in Japan, p. 222f.
  - 27. Ibid., p. 236f.

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