

Shinji Takagi. *The Trek East: Mormonism Meets Japan, 1901–1968*.
Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016.

Reviewed by Stephen J. Moody

Shinji Takagi's extremely detailed and thoroughly researched book *The Trek East* makes a significant contribution to understanding early LDS Church history in Japan. Although the book covers a period that has been extensively described in previous scholarship, Takagi does not present another historical narrative of key events but rather provides a rigorous study of the social influences that impacted those events. This analytical approach brings a layer of explanatory depth that has, until now, been absent in studies of Church history in Japan. The result is a product rich in insight into the ways religious, economic, and political environments in Japan shaped the unfolding story of the LDS Church in that country. Starting in the years leading up to the arrival of the first missionaries in 1901 and culminating when the Japan Mission was first divided in 1968, this book is an essential resource for those seeking a methodical and meticulous account of the failures and triumphs of the LDS Church as it struggled to establish itself in Japan. Moreover, given the author's commitment to interpreting events in their relevant social contexts, the book will also be of value to scholars of religious history in Japan generally.

Proceeding more or less chronologically, Takagi provides a collection of self-contained, empirically grounded essays. Apart from chapter 4, which outlines the broad religious and social context of Japan before the LDS Church arrived, each of the book's twelve chapters focuses on a particular major event or significant period in Japanese Church history. These events include the arrival of Heber J. Grant and his companions in Japan, the coverage of the LDS Church in prominent Japanese newspapers, the establishment of the first mission in Japan, the translation of the Book of Mormon into Japanese, the withdrawal of missionaries prior to a heightened period of Japanese nationalism, the Church's subsequent regrouping in Hawaii, the return of missionaries to Japan after

World War II, and the subsequent growth, which culminated in the first division of the Japan mission. Although each chapter provides key background information and recounts important events and timelines, the focus is on tackling the “whys” and “hows” of those events in light of broader happenings in Japanese society. The author accomplishes this both by gathering an impressively large set of secondary sources from English and Japanese scholarship and by drawing on his own primary research and sources, including interviews, historical documents (journals, newspapers, and so forth), and relevant quantitative data (for example, Church membership statistics). This methodology offers what Takagi calls a “macro” perspective (6), which focuses more on synthesizing and interpreting large volumes of carefully compiled information than on telling individual stories.

Throughout the book, Takagi views each event critically, considering the decision-making processes of key actors in the early Church who were working under constraints of limited information and resources. The approach is pedantically methodical, with every argument copiously annotated; the book has an encyclopedic flavor in its presentation of information, with a page count in excess of 550, over a fifth of which is entirely supplemental material. Referring to himself as an “accidental historian” (xiii), Takagi is an economist by profession. This is evident in the unique perspective he brings to the topic. For instance, he seeks to understand not just how the LDS Church sought to supply LDS teachings to the Japanese, but also the impacts of the “demand side” (87), or the extent to which the Japanese people were willing to receive those proselytizing efforts. At times the author’s economic background does result in a style that might be difficult for readers to follow without having an understanding of economic fundamentals. For instance, he refers to economic indicators such as Japan’s real GDP (203) without explaining its significance and later discusses notions of “structural” versus “temporary” influences (218), which draw from economic theory, in ways that are not transparent to the uninitiated. Yet it is precisely his use of economic reasoning to interpret his data that also gives the study its explanatory power and contributes new and unique understandings into why the early Church made certain decisions. This treatment renders the final product less suitable for those looking for a narrative on Japanese Church history, even as it is indispensable as a serious social, scientific investigation.

A central contribution of Takagi’s analytical approach is that it extracts from available information new and nuanced explanations of

events. For instance, the arrival of LDS missionaries in Japan received an unusually large amount of attention in the Japanese press. Though this has been well-documented, it has often been viewed as either a surprising sidenote or as evidence of early interest in Mormonism among the Japanese. Takagi's study dives deeper into this event, interpreting it in a larger social context involving major changes in the Japanese political landscape, shifting societal views on the practice of polygamy, and rivalry between major newspapers—none of which was directly related to the arrival of the LDS Church. These observations open up the possibility that the unprecedented coverage of the early LDS Church had less to do with a fascination with Mormonism, *per se*, and more to do with various political factions leveraging the arrival of LDS missionaries to facilitate their own internal debates. It is Takagi's unwavering adherence to his source material and his unique perspective in interpreting this material that brings such important insights to light.

However, while Takagi's analytical approach is the volume's greatest strength, it is also its primary weakness when the explanations become too speculative. Takagi's arguments are always well-supported, but they can, at times, be stated too definitively. For example, it is often claimed that the early LDS mission in Japan was closed in 1924 due to the heightened nationalist ideologies in Japan that created a hostile environment for foreigners and eventually plunged Japan into World War II—or that the mission was closed because of prophetic predictions of the coming of those events. Takagi declares this explanation to be a myth (242–43), instead attributing the closure of the mission to economic factors, the haphazard decision-making of Church leaders, and a failure to produce enough converts to justify the cost of maintaining a mission in Japan. His argument is compelling, to be sure, and raises important questions about the Church's withdrawal that have not been given sufficient attention or even acknowledged previously. Yet he also speculates that because the Church in Germany experienced growth in membership in the face of similar nationalistic tides, the Japanese mission would have remained open as well (245). While Takagi is right to challenge traditional explanations and raises issues that provide insightful nuances, this observation is probably not enough to declare competing views a total fiction.

Ultimately, Takagi has provided a scholarly investigation that is unrivaled in the volume of information it amasses and its faithful dedication to articulating and interpreting the details of its source material. Unique in perspective and approach, it is insightful and raises critical

questions that are vital for developing an accurate and thorough understanding of the events it explores. It is highly recommended to anyone seeking a thorough and detailed treatment of the early LDS Church in Japan. It would not be surprising if Takagi's work eventually becomes recognized as a definitive history of the events it covers.

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