

# The Church in Japan



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Seiji Katanuma

I have been asked many questions like, “Do the Japanese originally come from Hagoth in the Book of Mormon?” or “Why has the economy of Japan developed so rapidly?” or “What kinds of foods do Japanese people eat?” or “Do the Japanese still wear kimonos?” These questions are so diversified that I sometimes find it difficult to answer them all, but I have answered them as best I can in order to give a good understanding of Japan and her people. However, there is one question which is difficult for me to answer clearly. It is, “Why has the Church in Japan grown so tremendously?” There are many reasons why this question perplexes me. One is that I do not understand what the standard is for judging whether the Church in Japan has grown tremendously or not. And the second reason is that I have been involved in the history of the Church in Japan for sixteen years so that now I have difficulty understanding the total aspect of our Church just the same as a man in the forest cannot see the forest more clearly than another man outside the forest. And the third reason why I am quite at a loss is that, in our traditional modesty, it is not so polite to say so, even though I do feel that the Church is getting stronger than ever before. So my article about “The Church in Japan,” is not only the success story of the Church in our country, but is also about how the members in Japan have lived through Japanese history.

On 14 February 1901, the Church called Heber J. Grant to go to Japan. Louis A. Kelsch, Horace S. Ensign, and Alma O. Taylor, age nineteen, were with him. They left the United States on 12 August 1901 aboard the ship *The Empress of India* and arrived at the Yokohama port several weeks later. On Sunday morning, 1 September, Elder Heber J. Grant went up to the hill of Ohmori with the three elders and offered a sincere dedicatory prayer for the proclamation of the truth and for the bringing to pass of the purposes of the Lord concerning the gathering of Israel and the establishment of righteousness upon the earth. The first Asian mission was begun in this way.

The first convert baptism was a Shinto priest named Hajime Nakazawa. In Japanese Hajime means “first” or “beginning,” so it was appropriate that Hajime became our *Hajime no* member. Naturally he was excommunicated from the Shinto sect to which he belonged. This sect told him that he would be permitted to return to the sect if he gave up the Church of Christ. However, this man did not rejoin his Shinto sect. According to the diary written by Alma O. Taylor, which is now kept in the Church Historian’s

Office in Salt Lake City, Brother Nakazawa helped Alma O. Taylor as an interpreter in the early days of their missionary work. They went to Tokyo Bay in a small fishing boat—not for fishing, but for baptizing Nakazawa off Tokyo Bay. Elder Grant baptized him; then they returned to the shore and laid their hands upon him. Similarly, that same day, he was ordained to the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods.

Let us concentrate our focus on the general attitude of the Japanese toward our Church in those days. The young generation had a natural interest in Christianity, and all generations except a small number of nationalistic Japanese were interested in American people. Generally speaking, the Japanese had a good feeling about foreigners because they were in a hurry to import the Western civilization, having a high regard for western countries. Our missionaries were not persecuted. However, Protestant and Anglican churches made up all of Christianity in the Meiji Era of Japan (1868–1913). Not the Mormon Church. Young boys and girls rushed to the churches of these Christian sects. I would like to explain this phenomenon through modern Japanese literature. Famous modern literary men such as Kitamura Tokoku, Kunikida Doppo, Masamune Hakucho, Tokutomi Roka, and Shimazaki Toson were influenced by Christianity. If today's students who study Japanese literature hear their names, they would know that these men were among the most representative writers of modern Japanese literature, and they cannot talk about modern Japanese literature without mentioning them. They used Christianity to write better literature. However, they never used Christianity to get close to God. Why did they have a strange attitude about Christianity? To explain this point, I would like to show a very interesting example as follows:

A Hymn which was translated into Japanese

1. Yuugure shizukani *inorisentote*  
Yonowazuraiyori shibashi nogaru
2. *Kami* yori hokaniwa kikumonomonaki  
Kokageni hirefushi *tsumi o* kuinu
3. Sugikoshi *megumi o* omoitsuzuke  
Iyoyo yukusue no sachiozonegau

Original Hymn in English

1. In the twilight  
We *utter a heartfelt prayer*  
for release from  
earthly afflictions  
for a while
2. No one can hear us  
But *our Heavenly Father*  
We kneel down in the shadow  
of a tree  
and *repent our sins*

3. We continue to think  
of the Grace of God  
and to ask for His blessings  
upon us  
and are therewith content

A Love poem

1. Yuugure shizukani *yumemintote*  
Yonowazurayori shibashi nogaru
2. *Kimiyori* hokani shirumononaki  
Hanakage ni yukiti *koi* o nakinu
3. Sugikoshi *yumeji o omoimiruni*  
*Koikosotsuminare Tsumikosokoi*

The Love poem translated into English

1. In the twilight  
I have a beautiful dream  
of release from earthly  
afflictions  
for a while
2. No one can hear me  
but *my lover*  
I go into the shadows of flowers  
and cry for love
3. I continue to think  
of the dream of love  
and love is sin  
and sin is love

Here we can understand that the hymn was changed into a love poem. The word “prayer” was changed into the word “dream.” The word “God” was changed into the words, “my lover.” The phrase “the Grace of God” was changed into the Japanese phrase, “the dream of love.” In my opinion, this adaptation was not made by Shimazaki Toson<sup>1</sup> for the mere sake of making the words nicer, more aesthetic, but to represent his true understanding of what he thought Christianity to be. This was also representative of many young men in the Meiji Era. Therefore, it can be said that such an adaptation was a spontaneous result. That is to say, in Christianity they found such new, interesting teachings and customs as being able to sit next to girls and talk to them freely, beautiful teachings of equality and love, and then beautiful music. They thought they could get true insight into the Western spirit through Christianity. They learned many new things from the churches, but I think they seemed to be most fascinated in “Confession,” which we do not have in our church. I think the young literary men in the Meiji Era came to get a new style of expression through “Confession.” They began to express their own consciousness of sin and lust in

their literary works. But they could not reach an understanding of what God truly was. Those who belonged to the younger generation in the Meiji Era did not want to know the true meaning of Christianity and Christ's teachings of salvation, but merely wanted to touch the core of European spirit and culture. They expected these Christian churches to release them from the traditional pressure of Neo-Confucianism, which had strongly bound the relationship between men and women by such specific teachings as: "Boys and girls should not sit down next to each other after they become eight years old." This is the reason why the "Hymn to our Heavenly Father" was changed into a love poem by Shimazaki Toson.

This general atmosphere also had effects on our church. To the Japanese people, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was only a religion of a remote countryside in the United States. However, even some other churches refused us. Alma O. Taylor wrote in his diary<sup>2</sup> details about what other churches felt about our church.

On the other hand, however, it seems to me very interesting that some famous Japanese literary men were helpful to our church. For instance, Goro Takahashi, who was a very famous critic in the Meiji Era, wrote the book, *Mormon and Mormonism: A Supplement of the Origin of the American Indian*, in Japanese and it was published on 20 August 1902. Heber J. Grant, speaking at General Conference in Salt Lake City later, said that "This man has written a book that, I believe, will do us a world of good."<sup>3</sup> Alma O. Taylor also mentioned this book:

On the whole, it is quite reliable—when he has stated "Mormon" doctrine he has kept pretty close to some of our good writers. We are not responsible for any of his opinions or the comparisons which he draws. We do not give or sell his book as a "Mormon product," but present it as the writing of a "Non-Mormon" who writes from the standpoint of what the "Mormons" say of themselves and not what their enemies say of them.<sup>4</sup>

I would like to explain about the very famous modern novelist, Soseki Natsume. Alma O. Taylor contacted him and asked his help in correcting the first translation of the Book of Mormon. He was unable to give time to the correction of the translation of the Book of Mormon. He suggested Hiroharu Ikuta, a recent graduate of the philosophy department of Tokyo Imperial University. Ikuta later became a very famous critic with Ikuta Choko as his pen name, and he revised and corrected some of the manuscript. How wonderful to know that our Heavenly Father directed the most excellent literary men in the Meiji Era to work for our church!

To my regret, I have to touch on the unhappy days of our church in Japan, especially the period following the time when the Anti-Japanese Immigrant Bill<sup>5</sup> was established in the United States. Anti-American feeling was increased in Japan, and spontaneously the Japanese people became

less congenial to the American people in Japan. Consequently, the Japan mission had to be closed in 1924. I would like to inform you in detail about the history of the times when the Japan mission was closed. On 19 February 1924, the prime minister, Kiyoura Keigo, invited the representatives of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity, and asked them to establish the spiritual foundation of the Japanese, and to instruct the members of each religious sect to be patriotic to Japan. That was, however, a very dangerous sign to democracy in those days in Japan, since the meaning of establishing the foundation of Japanese was to establish militarism, and the meaning of “Patriotic to Japan” was to support “the Imperialism” in Japan. In the next year, the Japanese government passed the Bill of Mandatory Daily Military Education, and this new law became effective in all schools in Japan. On 28 May 1926, the Ministry of Education proclaimed unilaterally the Law of Religions which prohibited free missionary work in Christianity, and made Shintoism the core of nationalism in Japan. During these first twenty-three years (1901–1924) of our missionary work in Japan, we had only 176 convert baptisms. And then Japan rushed into the dark age of the Showa militarism.

During World War II, how did the members in Japan hold their faith? I want to discuss this. There are quite a few members who succeeded in passing through the critical days for those who had faith in God since the Meiji Era. One of these members, Nara Fujiya, is unforgettable. He made efforts to keep contact with members, and published the bulletin called “Shuro” (name of a kind of plant) in a very humble, mimeographed printing. This bulletin was sent to the members in Japan monthly. The members’ addresses,<sup>6</sup> to whom “Shuro” was sent are now kept at the library of the Japan East Mission in Sapporo, but the list shows only seventy-two members’ addresses, so the other 104 members were lost in those days. The publication of “Shuro,” however, had to be discontinued soon because Brother Nara, like all other Japanese, old and young, had to spend all of his time for the military purposes of Japan.

Another member, Sister Kumagai, who was also one of the few early Japanese converts in Sapporo, once told me, as I was writing a drama about the historical events of the Japan Mission, how members in Sapporo held Sunday School at Sister Kumagai’s home. A few people attended every Sunday to study the Gospel, singing hymns, and giving sincere prayer. However, the young men who attended there gradually disappeared one by one. Some of them went to work at factories, and some went to the battlefield. I heard from Sister Kumagai that policemen often came to her house when she was playing the hymns, because the hymn itself was the song of an enemy country. It might be hard for you to imagine, but we Japanese people could not use any English words during the World War II. So instead of the word

“ereveitaa” for “elevator,” we had to say “Johgeshokoki,” which means, “the machine for going up and down.” We had to use the Japanese language even when we played baseball. We used to say “auto,” for “out,” but now “out” was “shini,” which meant “dead.” But the dead man who slid to second base always stood up again.

It is sad but true that most of the Japanese members lost their faith in our Heavenly Father through the severe, miserable times of the war, and only a few members were keeping the torch of the Gospel held high. I cannot help saying thanks to those who have kept their faith, because the new mission started with such wonderful members who were always obedient to the Gospel.

The first step in the new missionary work was to seek good meeting places in Tokyo, because during the war, Tokyo was completely burned out. From the Sunday School records<sup>7</sup> of those days, which were written in detail by Brother Nara, we can find some names of American soldiers who made efforts to find meeting places for the members in the Tokyo area. Some of these names were Komatsu and Horiuchi; Brother Komatsu later became a mission president and then a regional representative. Another man, Horiuchi, became a mission president of the Japan East Mission, too. Sister Kumagai once told me about the time two missionaries arrived in Sapporo. She worked at the Hokkaido Newspaper at that time, so she phoned the copyreader and said, “Here is some good news! The missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have come to Japan again!” It was surely great news for Japan.

One of the first missionaries who came to Sapporo was Paul C. Andrus. He became a mission president of the Northern Far East Mission, including Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and other Asian countries, and is now a regional representative of the Twelve. In the earlier time of the new missionary work, the church meetings were held in Tokyo only. Before long, missionaries worked in Takasaki, Nagoya, Ohsaka, Yokohama, Sendai, Sapporo, Niigata, Kofu, and Kanazawa. In the Tokyo area they worked in Ikebukuro, Koenji, Shibuya, and Minamizensoku. These thirteen branches were, of course, not enough for the Japanese. Later the Church opened fourteen more new branches. So we soon had twenty-seven branches in Japan. For the next ten years, however, there were no other new branches added to the proselyting areas in Japan. That was until about 1965. Now we have two stakes and five different missions, including 107 branches in Japan. So if you take a train in Japan, you can find our church in every city where the express train stops.

That is to summarize the recent growth in Japan since 1968. The mission has doubled twice, from one to five. Two stakes have been organized. More than half a million Japanese visited our pavilion at Expo '70. Seminaries

have recently started. Missionaries have increased from less than two hundred to over eight hundred. Branches have gone from 27 to 107, and convert baptisms have gone from a couple of hundred, to over 3,000 per year.

Although these statistics are exciting, we must be realistic in our appraisal of them. As in all parts of the world when baptism numbers begin to boom, unfortunately, inactive and dropout numbers also begin to boom. Therefore, in order to keep the Church growing, and to keep more people active, and to be able to reach all of the Japanese with the message of the gospel, we must look very seriously at present-day Japanese society. I feel Japan is now at a major turning point in her history. We have had so many fruitful results and uncountable blessing from our Heavenly Father in preaching the Gospel. To develop our church more, we have of course, many problems to overcome, as we have had in the past. One of the problems which has been on my mind is quite a new problem which we Japanese members have never had in the past history of Japan.

In recent days, there appears a notable sign of change which we can recognize by general social phenomena in Japan. Part of this social phenomena seems to be a rushing to the past, to traditional Japan. After World War II, we adopted a western-style democracy, and progressed very rapidly economically. Because of this rapid economic progress, many are beginning to feel that we have sold out our Japanese uniqueness in the process. So, lately, there has been a reaction against post-war democracy in Japan, and a new interest in traditional Japan. It is not that we are trying to return completely to prewar Japan, but rather that we are trying for a new Japanese (rather than Western) blend of traditionalism and modernization. Thus, we are heading somewhere we have never been before.

As a political phenomenon, I would like to explain that now the Japanese people are facing the problem of which party they should choose, the Liberal Democratic Party, or the Socialist or Communist Party. It seems quite strange to me that even the Japanese Communist Party must be not internationalistic, but nationalistic. This party insists that they will establish a proper Japanese Communist country, without any interferences of foreign Communist countries and this party is making an effort to alter Communist terminology to fit into the Japanese mentality. In the meantime, two ministers of the present ruling Tanaka Cabinet caused some trouble by strongly emphasizing their opinion that Emperor Hirohito is the essence of Japan and her people and culture. This bothered many, since it was reminiscent of pre-war, militaristic Japan, and present-day Democrats say the people themselves, not the Emperor, are the core Japan.

As cultural phenomenon in Japan, many traditional arts, like NO-Play, Kabuki, and Calligraphy, are being favored by the younger generation for a change. And many religious books are now booming in Japan. Are the

Japanese becoming more religious? Are they going to switch their minds from the economic animal to the religious animal? Why are there such phenomena in Japan? Does it have a special meaning to our church? I would like to explain why these changes might be as dangerous to our church as the changes which took place before the war. We need more information in order to understand the real meaning of this problem. These changes are coming from the desire that the Japanese people have to find their own identity. Consequently, this enthusiastic desire means that we must deny the days of post–World War II. What were the days of post–World War II? In those days we borrowed many things from the United States of America, just as the Japanese had borrowed many things from Europe one hundred years ago, and had borrowed much Chinese culture 1200 years ago. We borrowed American democracy, jazz music, movies, literature, and so on. We also borrowed even the life style of America. To the Japanese people, the United States was the idealistic and dreamlike country they saw represented in a lot of Hollywood movies. When we were hungry, the Americans in the movies ate big dinners. When we walked on rough roads, they drove Cadillacs. When we lived in humble houses, they lived in big houses with swimming pools. When we were in a crisis because of the political confrontation between the Government party and the opposite parties, they were discussing difficult political matters humorously and democratically in the movies. However, the Japanese people—especially the young men—are becoming aware of the fact that all these things which seemed to us so good were just in the movies made in Hollywood. As they became aware of the fact that America was fallible in such things as the Vietnam War, and the Negro problem, and some inequality, they became disillusioned with all of America. Many young men in Japan are now singing old-fashioned songs such as “My Castle Town,” etc. which praise the Japanese-like atmosphere in a town, where there was once a Samurai’s castle; at the same time they are enjoying the Beatles’ songs, for instance, “Let It Be.”

The government of Japan represented by the Liberal Democratic Party now seems to be in a crisis. Probably the election of Tokyo assemblymen held soon will be an important indicator of how the Liberal Democratic Party will do in the future. On the other hand, both the Socialist and Communist parties are getting stronger. From Tokyo to Osaka, the governors of the main prefectures, and the mayors of the main cities are all socialists and communists. Why are so many Japanese people turning against the Liberal Democratic Party? Only the scholars of politics or sociology can give us the true meaning. From my point of view as a scholar of literature, the Liberal Democratic Party has been a typical political party which did the typical function after the war. It has been representative of the days of post–World War II. The decline of this party, in my opinion, is closely connected with

the social phenomenon which denies the days of post–World War II, and rushes back to tradition. Of course, this phenomenon, as I already mentioned, did not begin only recently. Several years ago, there were many radical movements in Japan among the students called the “New Left.” They had such slogans as, “Deny the democracy of the post–World War era.” Especially I want to call your attention to Mishima’s Harakiri. Why did he commit suicide by doing Harakiri? There are, of course, many elements to analyze in his Harakiri. However, it can be said that he also thought we should turn from the post-war democracy to traditionalism. He thought that democracy had destroyed the traditional virtues of the Japanese people.

I think we Japanese members need to think more about this new situation which we have never had before. Our church, is, of course, not an American church. It is the Church of Jesus Christ, who is God of all people on this planet. I have already pointed out that the Japanese people in recent days are denying America itself, and in a way returning to their tradition. If most of the Japanese people look at our church as an American church, can it stand the changes of time? I dare say, this is not the problem of “If,” but the problem of “Reality.” As far as I know, many Japanese intellectual men already take our church as an American church, that is, the question is not *if* the Japanese look upon us as an American church, but since they now do look upon us as an American church, what can we do?

I will give my definite conclusion about these matters. I think one of the most important ideas in overcoming this problem is to have a formula like: “Internationalization of the Church necessitates nationalization of the Church.” It does not mean that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints becomes a Japanese people’s church. It means that our church in Japan becomes the church for the Japanese. What methods can we take for this purpose? How can we do that? In the first place, I think we Japanese members should pay attention to our brethren’s need, desire, and hope to go back to their traditional things, and their reason for wanting to do so. These brothers are not nameless existences called the Japanese, but are our neighbors themselves. And it is necessary for us to reconsider ourselves, whether or not we preach the virtues of America when we preach Mormonism to our neighbors. As part of the beautiful traditions of Japan, as well as of China, Korea, and other Asian countries, we think much of our family and ancestors. Since these are the same virtues our church continuously teaches us, we need only an efficient way to approach the Japanese on these subjects. Do we try to understand the Buddhists and Shintoists with the same respect we ask of them? Or do we have a strange isolationism in terms of thinking ourselves the chosen people in Japan? I myself was a Buddhist. I do not think my knowledge and experience as a Buddhist became obstacles in my joining our church. I had done Zazen<sup>8</sup> for a week before I

began studying our church, from early morning till night. I learned through this experience to concentrate by myself on one thing and to understand the importance of thinking by myself on the silent world. And I also understood what the spiritual world was. Because of the deep meditation and spiritual insight I gained from Zazen I was better able to understand our scriptures. I could identify with Nephi when he said, "I was led by the spirit not knowing beforehand the things which I should do." (1 Ne. 4:6)

I gained an affinity for many other scriptures also, and could better understand how Jesus and the prophets thought. For instance, when the Pharisees brought the adulterous woman to Jesus and tempted him to condemn her, the Bible says:

But Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. (John 8:6)

From my Zazen experience, I could feel what Jesus was thinking at this time. In these ways traditional thought can sometimes aid us in understanding God's teachings.

What role can the Japanese members play in the new situation of society in Japan? If the Church's teaching methods, textbooks, and image are not changed in Japan, will it not retard the Lord's work there in relationship to the rapidly changing social scene? I think if we ignore a consideration of this new situation, that is, how can we make Japanese people recognize that our church is not an American church but their own church, then our church in Japan will meet somewhat troublesome trials. Of course I do not forget the exhortation which our Lord spoke:

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (Heb. 12:5-6)

We know, of course, we will be chastened and tried for our religion, but we would rather be persecuted for our true doctrine and faith than for a false American image.

We members in Japan have, as I have mentioned already, many problems which are sobering and challenging. There will never be any other men to take these problems in Japan except the Japanese people. So I want to emphasize as my conclusion that we have to pay attention to the transculturalization of curricular materials, because the scriptures urge the Church to speak to men "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding." (D&C 1:24) We have never had such an opportunity to think over the connotations between our tradition and our church. That is the newest and most pressing problem. And "the works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated, neither can they come to naught." (D&C 3:1)

I think for our Japanese members, as well as you in every nation, as James E. Talmage once said, “that there is room and place for every truth within the Gospel of Jesus Christ, thus far learned by man, or yet to be made known.”<sup>9</sup>

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1. Shimazaki Toson, “Yuugureshizukani,” in his collection of poems, *Wahanashu*, in *Toson Shisho* (Tokyo: Iwanahishoten, 1946), p.2.

2. Alma O. Taylor, *Journal*, April 1904.

3. Heber J. Grant in *Conference Report of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5 April 1902.

4. Alma O. Taylor to Hedges and Fairbourn, Sendai, 25 September 1905, Copy-book B, p. 105.

5. This bill was established in 1924.

6. The list is two pages long, and on the cover there is a title “Matsujitsu Seito Iesu Kirisuto Kyokai Jushoroku.”

7. These records are now in the possession of Brother Nara, with a copy kept in the library of the Japan East Mission at Sapporo.

8. To sit in Zen meditation.

9. Passage taken from Elder James E. Talmage’s monument in the Salt Lake City Cemetery.