

**Members without a Church:  
Japanese Mormons in Japan  
from 1924 to 1948**



# Members without a Church: Japanese Mormons in Japan from 1924 to 1948

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What happens to two dozen faithful church members who are almost totally isolated from their church for over twenty years? One of the best case studies of this phenomenon in recent years is the withdrawal of the missionaries, and essentially the Church, from Japan in 1924. From 1901 to 1924 the early missionaries experienced struggles, challenges, and some tremendous accomplishments. However, the decision to withdraw all missionaries from Japan left the members in Japan almost entirely on their own from 1924 until 1945.<sup>1</sup> Although the “early” and “modern” missions have been subjects of numerous articles, the more than twenty-year interim has never been treated more than in a footnote. It deserves more attention.

When the missionaries left Japan in August 1924, one hundred seventy-four Japanese people had been baptized, though only a few were still active. The last mission president, Hilton A. Robertson, reported, “we have at least a dozen Saints who could be called such,”<sup>2</sup> but at least twice that number called themselves Saints. They were located in four cities throughout Japan—Kofu (where the missionaries had been withdrawn in 1922), Tokyo, Osaka, and Sapporo.

Both despair and hope were caused by the manner in which the missionaries left. President Robertson tried to visit many of the active members and assure them that the closing would be only temporary. Sister Kumagai of Sapporo said she felt that the order to close was revelation from God as a test of faith to the Japanese Saints, and, after the test, the work would be restored by another revelation from God.<sup>3</sup>

The missionaries did little to prepare the members, other than to give them general encouragement. In fact, the native priesthood holders were explicitly prohibited from functioning in that priesthood. They were specifically *not* allowed to hold meetings of any type except MIA.<sup>4</sup> After the closing of the mission, Brother Katsura of Osaka felt, “said and lonely, as though he had lost a brother or a sister.”<sup>5</sup> Sister Kumagai said she felt, “zen to kuraku natta yona kimochi” (“I felt like all had become darkness”).<sup>6</sup> Thus, with the hope of a not too distant restoration, and yet, with the frustration of not being allowed to function in the church they loved, the members were left to themselves.

### The Nara Era: 1924 to 1933

Into this vacuum came Brother Fujiya Nara<sup>7</sup> of Tokyo to give some organization to the Saints. He had become friends with the “foreigners” as a young teenager in Sapporo, had been baptized when he was seventeen, and had been ordained an elder by President Ivie at age twenty-four, in January of 1923. He had been mission secretary under presidents Stimpson and Ivie.<sup>8</sup>

A month after the closing, Elder Nara and a couple of other Saints gathered in Tokyo and officially established the Japan Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They also discussed starting some sort of publication to help hold the Saints together. In November 1924, the small Tokyo group published and circulated the names and addresses of all members of the Japan MIA.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of these early meetings in late 1924 Brother Nara and others began to publish a magazine to keep in contact with and encourage the Saints. It was called *Shuro* (*The Palm*) after the palm leaves strewn on the way as Christ entered Jerusalem. Their plan was to publish sixty-five copies of each issue, ten issues per year. Each issue would have about twenty pages and a contribution of ten *sen* (about three cents) per issue would be asked. Copies would be sent to all known Japanese Saints and friends in Hawaii and America. It was a good plan, but it didn’t quite work. The number of issues gradually decreased and Brother Nara ended up paying most of the cost himself. Through several of the extant issues, we can get an insight into what the members thought and did during those early struggling years.<sup>10</sup>

The first issue appeared on 1 January 1925. It listed Fujiya Nara as editor and Brothers Yamaide and Kitagawa and Sister Reiko Mochizuki as his assistants. In the first article, “About the Beginning,” Nara says that his heart hurts so much since the missionaries left that he doesn’t have words to express it. However, the MIA is the path to light in the present darkness. He hopes both *Shuro* and the MIA will be of concrete spiritual benefit to the members. He hopes that the Saints can be unified, love each other, and live righteously. In a similar vein, Sister Mochizuki says, in “Impressions,” that at Christmas time when she saw the Salvation Army she was reminded of the Church and was saddened. She has been further saddened by seeing many fall away, and thinks that even though the active Saints may not be perfect themselves, they must still warn the others when they are doing wrong before it is too late. *Shuro* has reenthused her faith.

Further issues included editorials, correspondence, scripture study, news of members (about travel, marriage, new jobs, armed forces, college entrance), expressions of feelings, short stories, poems, and serialized articles (as Brother Kentaro Mochizuki’s about Tolstoy’s short stories and Brother Nara’s about tomatoes).

Members expressed their feelings quite frankly in the subsequent issues. In one article entitled “Deep Feelings,” Brother Takeo Fujiwara of Soppero mentions that he looked for almost any way to strengthen his faith. He found the way in *Shuro*, and has been moved to tears, at times, reading it.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, in a later issue another member writes a note of thanks to *Shuro* and mentions how happy his family has been in another Christian church since the Mormon Church left Japan.<sup>12</sup>

Sister Mochizuki and Brother Yamaide were the poets among the Saints. A rough translation of one poem of Brother Yamaide’s, “If One’s Alone,” is included below because it gives insights to the longings of some Saints. It appeared in the November 1925 issue, more than a year after the closing.

If One’s Alone

If one’s sad and lonely  
And looks at the sunset,  
He hears the nearby temple bells ringing.  
If one hears the distant temple bells  
And it touches his heart,  
He will pray with a sad heart.  
His card is a hateful spade,  
But, sorrowfully,  
It’s just a game he is playing with his fortune telling cards.  
When I see the hearts of all the noisy people  
I see sadness.  
I’m opposed to flowers, and yet . . . spring will come anyway.  
If one’s alone,  
His heart is sad.  
In spite of all the fogginess  
I can still see you,  
Disappearing.  
If one’s alone,  
The night is sad.  
Oh miserable heart!  
What a pity,  
The light is disappearing.  
If one’s alone,  
I’ll try to pray, but . . .  
My heart is hollow.  
I can still see your  
Dear fleeting form.<sup>13</sup>

This poem is certainly open to individual interpretation and is not distinguishable from other sentimental Japanese poetry. Nevertheless, the word translated “you” is *kimi*, and not only suggests an intimate form of “you” but is also the word translated as “prince” in both the national anthem and

Isaiah 9:6 (“The Prince of Peace”). Whatever the interpretation, it was not too long before Brother Yamaide ended his association with the Church, and this poem could represent some real yearnings on his part.

The plight of *Shuro* might be representative of Church activity as a whole during these years. Nara and others published it ten times in 1925, but only four times in 1926, and that December they decided that it should only be a seasonal publication. After 1926 only the Winter 1928 issue is available, but there is mention of *Shuro*’s being published through the Fall issue of 1929.<sup>14</sup> Presumably, about that time publishing ceased altogether.<sup>15</sup> *Shuro* did, however, begin a tradition, and whenever the Church has been active in Japan since then, similar publications—whether originating in Salt Lake City or not—have flourished.<sup>16</sup>

In 1925, in addition to the publishing activities, periodic meetings of Church members were taking place. In Sapporo, for instance, Sister Kumagai held weekly meetings, but attendance became so sporadic that she gave them up. Members would move, die, or just stop coming. Then Sister Kumagai would invite her friends (all the members among them) at Christmas time and other special occasions. These gatherings would start with song and prayer, and would somewhat resemble Church meetings.

Through *Shuro* and personal letters during this time, the Japanese Saints kept in contact with friends back in Utah. As a result of this correspondence, the First Presidency asked Alma O. Taylor (one of the original missionaries to Japan) to write and find out what had been happening, who was still faithful, and what concrete things the Church could do to help the Japanese Saints.<sup>17</sup> Taylor sent letters to Brother Nara of Tokyo, Brother Katsura of Osaka, and Sister Kumagai of Sapporo in February 1926.<sup>18</sup> Brother Nara got a consensus from these and other Saints and answered Taylor on 1 July 1926. Beginning with this correspondence the Saints, through Nara, made the same two basic requests they would repeat to the brethren throughout the closed period—reopen the mission and help supply a suitable permanent meeting place (other than just someone’s tiny house).<sup>19</sup>

The next fall, President Franklin S. Harrins of Brigham Young University, on an excursion around the world, visited Japan as a representative to the Pan Pacific Congress of Arts and Sciences. As a result of Nara’s letter to Taylor, President Heber J. Grant gave Harris a commission to meet with the Japanese Saints and more officially organize the MIA. When Harris left Japan in November 1926, he had visited and organized the Saints in Tokyo, Osaka, and Sapporo. In each city he had appointed an MIA president with two counselors and a secretary—with the Tokyo MIA president (Brother Nara) to preside over the others.<sup>20</sup> Brother Harris described a meeting with the Sapporo Saints:

I was busy with official things till 9 p.m. so my meetings with them began at that hour and continued till 12:00. They clung onto me as if I were the only old friend they had.<sup>21</sup>

And a few days later he wrote:

As we passed through Sapporo last night at nine there were four members of the church there to meet me. One of them had come 200 miles to see me. . . . As we only remained at the station a few minutes the saints asked to ride a few stations with me, so we went into the dining car and they stayed with me till one a.m. when they got off. They were so tremendously hungry for someone from Utah and there were so many things they wanted to ask about—a fine lot they are.<sup>22</sup>

While in Sapporo, Harris invited two young men to come to America to attend BYU and offered to personally help them. Although Saburo Sada never made it, Takeo Fujiwara, a court reporter, did, and arrived in Utah late in 1927. In all, Harris' visit certainly rejuvenated the members and made them realize they had not been totally forgotten.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout 1927 monthly meetings were held in Tokyo, Osaka, and Sapporo. Meetings varied in contents, ranging from Book of Mormon study, to singing and talking, to mountain climbing. Average attendance at the Tokyo meetings that year was between six and nine Saints per meeting, which is interesting because only two to four attended regularly in the last weeks before the mission was closed.<sup>24</sup>

In July 1927 a Sister Tsune Nachine arrived in Tokyo for a brief visit with her old friends. She was then over seventy and had moved to Hawaii five years earlier to do missionary and temple work. Nine people attended both her welcome home party and her farewell party four months later. At both these meetings she inspired the members by giving detailed teachings about baptismal work for the dead, the resurrection, and enduring in the faith.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, Takeo Fujiwara, in the States, had been trying to help the Japanese Saints. As he later explained:

. . . I expressed and described in details through the interpretation of Dr. Elbert D. Thomas (now a senator of the U.S. from Utah) who was once president of the Japan Mission, our desire for the Church in Japan . . . to the First Presidency. With the result of the best effort and kindest assistance of Mr. Alma O. Taylor . . . in December 1927, the First Presidency appointed Elder Nara as Presiding Elder in Japan and restored all activities of Priesthood. . . . Therefore, Elder Nara felt great responsibility.<sup>26</sup>

With Nara's appointment as Presiding Elder in 1927, the First Presidency removed all restrictions that had been put upon priesthood activities at the time of closing in 1924 (except that Nara was not authorized to do active missionary work or to ordain people to offices in the priesthood without approval from Salt Lake).<sup>27</sup> Taylor sent him a good deal of instruction in the following weeks both in Japanese and English.<sup>28</sup> After some correspon-

dence between the two, Taylor reported to President Grant that Nara had accepted his call with a humble spirit, but, because he had a family to support, it would take him some time to fully translate and understand all the instructions.<sup>29</sup> However, Elder Nara was apparently overwhelmed by the new, somewhat “foreign” instructions from Salt Lake, for the Church never did return to the full priesthood programs under Nara as it should have by virtue of his new calling.

Nevertheless, MIA meetings seemed surprisingly healthy by the end of 1927. Tokyo and Sapporo Christmas parties were each attended by twenty people or more, and Osaka wrote to say that they had officially sustained Nara and had even sent some donations to Salt Lake.<sup>30</sup>

The Winter 1928 *Shuro* came out with some exciting news. Not only did it contain the recently acquired letters from Heber J. Grant, Franklin S. Harris, and Takeo Fujiwara, but it also contained—for the first time since the closing—news from Kofu. In response to a request from Kofu, Nara had sent a nonmember friend, Mr. Kubota, to organize an MIA. They held their first meetings in several years on 19 October 1927, at which officers were appointed. They met again shortly afterward for a farewell party for one brother going into the army and had a Christmas party at Brother Renji Yoneyama’s house. A “fresh and pure” spirit was felt there.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of this period of rejuvenation, the support of all but the most faithful gradually declined. In 1928 all we know is that a few members met briefly with some visiting students from Utah; in November Brother Nara visited Brothers Katsura and Watanabe in Osaka and discussed the Church organization; and in December a small Christmas party was held in Tokyo.<sup>32</sup>

After this there is no clear record of what happened. We know that two issues of *Shuro* came out, but do not know their contents. Near the end of 1933 Elder Nara was transferred to Manchuria with his railroad job. Later records tell us that little if anything was going on in the Church by 1933. What happened to the Church and Elder Nara from 1929 to 1933 is one of the mysteries of the history of the Church in Japan. The presumption is that as Nara received gradually less and less support and enthusiasm he may have just let things go. Alma O. Taylor later wrote to the First Presidency about Nara and his new calling, “Nothing came of this assignment. Elder Nara dried up and blew away to Manchuria before any preaching activities got going.”<sup>33</sup> This may have been a little harsh. Nara, before his official appointment, had been responsible for the publication of *Shuro*, and had been the motivator behind most MIA activities. Nevertheless, it is true that within twenty months of Nara’s call to be Presiding Elder, knowledge of all activities in Japan, and most of the activities themselves completely ceased. The records are blank until the end of 1933, and after that time Nara was in Manchuria and out of the picture until the end of the war.

### **The Fujiwara Era: 1934 to 1936**

Nara was soon replaced by Japan's second Presiding Elder, Takeo Fujiwara, the student who had gone to BYU in 1927. If the last years of Nara were the most vague, the first years of Fujiwara were the most clear—we have almost a daily account of his activities. If Nara had run the Church on his own and received his appointment almost as a surprise or afterthought, sustained and set apart by mail (if that's possible), with a load of somewhat foreign instructions thrust upon him, Fujiwara received the actual "laying on of hands" by the First Presidency, had lived and been trained in the heart of the Church, and had received explicit instructions which he fully understood. Perhaps this different background accounts for the different manner of and results achieved by the two men. As for those results, if the "light" under Nara gradually dimmed and faded through the years, the "new bulb" of Fujiwara lit so brightly that it burnt itself out in a flash.

Takeo Fujiwara was born in Hokkaido in 1905 and was baptized on 10 May 1924, just before the mission closed. He lived in America from 1927 until he received his master's degree from BYU in 1934. (He supported himself by explaining Japan through song, dance, dress, and martial arts to paying audiences.)<sup>34</sup> As he spoke fluent English and was an unwavering Church member,<sup>35</sup> he must have seemed to the brethren to be a logical replacement for Nara. On 7 July 1934, President Grant released Nara and set Fujiwara apart as Presiding Elder and a special missionary (an added responsibility Nara had not had). The Church would send him \$35.00 a month so that he could afford to travel and communicate with the other Saints. On 27 September 1934, he reached Yokohama after spending a few weeks in Hawaii and having written to Alma O. Taylor about the total lack of missionary work among the Japanese in Hawaii.<sup>36</sup>

For the next nine months Fujiwara did everything humanly possible to restore the faith and activity of the members. He experienced both failure and success—ex-members hiding from him and his vigorous restoration activity campaign as well as a new mission magazine and the first priesthood ordinances in the ten years since the closing. During this time Elder Yoshijiro Watanabe (formerly of the Osaka MIA Presidency, but now moved to Tokyo) and his daughter Tazuko were Elder Fujiwara's constant companions and greatest supporters.

Within just two months Fujiwara had visited all four cities with members in them. On his first visit to his home, Sapporo, a welcome home party had to be canceled because no one attended. On the other hand, seven members attended the first Osaka meeting at Elder Katsura's house, and Fujiwara learned some valuable information—Nara had never reinstated priesthood functions, and MIA meetings were still being held every month or two. At this and other meetings Fujiwara asked for the raising of the

right hand to release Nara and sustain himself (he always did and recorded everything very precisely).<sup>37</sup>

Seven also attended the Kofu meeting in November 1934 (which means there was just the Yoneyama family of five in addition to Fujiwara and Sister Tazuko Watanabe—by now set apart as mission secretary). The Kofu Saints reported that they had been left out of all communication since the closing of the mission. If we are to understand how the closing affected the lives of the average Saints, then the Yoneyamas of Kofu are our best documented example—not that they are necessarily average, but, as they both stayed true to the Church and yet had several problems about which Fujiwara wrote in detail, we can look into their feelings deeper than into any others.

Renji Yoneyama and his wife, baptized in 1908, were the first married couple to join the Church in Japan. Kofu had once been a thriving branch, but as members gradually lost interest and few new converts were made, the elders were withdrawn about two years before the official closing of the mission. From that time until 1934 the only real contact Kofu had had with the Church was the visit by Nara's nonmember friend, Mr. Kubota, in 1927.<sup>38</sup>

In Fujiwara's first semi-official handwritten approximation of a quarterly report to Alma O. Taylor, he mentioned that at the November meeting he had asked Brother Renji Yoneyama to be branch president, that Yoneyama had at first refused but then later accepted. He further wrote:

We understood that Brother R. Yoneyama (father) blamed the conduct of the church for the closing of the mission and seemed to have stood against the church and changed to his old Buddhist religion.

Fujiwara also noted that a month after the first meeting in Kofu, Morizo Yoneyama, a son, had written to Fujiwara telling him that they had canceled a Christmas party they had planned for their home because "there will be no earnest and faithful saints who do come to a church meeting." Fujiwara, therefore, decided to postpone Yoneyama's appointment.<sup>39</sup>

By the time Fujiwara and Taylor exchanged letters again, however, Fujiwara was seeing a different picture. On 18 January 1935 Morizo had written to Fujiwara stating that Morizo's own wife and his younger brother were both sick. Fujiwara and both the Watanabes (father and daughter) went to Kofu two days later to comfort and pray for the sick. Morizo's sick wife, a Christian but not a Mormon, prayed with them. On 3 March, however, Kenji, the younger brother died.<sup>40</sup>

About this time Taylor wrote with some understanding to Fujiwara:

If Ren Yoneyama has definitely joined the Buddhist Church, he should probably be dropped from the rolls of our church, however, we do not recommend any hasty action in these matters. We must remember that the saints were, as you say, left without organization, leadership, church building, church literature, etc. and it is a wonder that any of them kept the faith. We too are proud of their loyalty.<sup>41</sup>

Because Morizo had refused to allow the Christmas party in his home, Taylor also recommended that Fujiwara not ordain him a priest as Fujiwara had requested.

On 28 April 1935, nine attended a meeting where Fujiwara presided over the first sacrament in over twelve years in Kofu. Renji Yoneyama was again appointed branch president. As Fujiwara later explained, Yoneyama had not lost faith in the Church, but had become somewhat embittered. He believed he and his whole family had given their utmost devotion to the Church in Kofu, and yet, just as they were getting going, the Church was pulled out of Kofu suddenly, and without any explanation.

His whole-hearted devotion was nothing. Brother Yoneyama blames the church for this insincerity, negligence, and impatience in doing the mission activities among the Japanese people.

Although he had been hurt, he had not rebelled against the Church or broken the commandments. He refused his calling at first only because he felt he was not capable and too old and feeble.<sup>42</sup>

Due to the lonesomeness of his mind he often goes to the font of the Buddha shelf where ancestors were worshipped and gives prayer. It is the natural habit of the Japanese old people.<sup>43</sup>

Fujiwara stressed that he did this out of habit, not belief, and stated:

We must pity, indeed, on the lonesomeness of his heart without the church, its leaders, its meetings—in fact, there was nothing of the church affairs except the members were drifted in the wandering path. He was, I understand, one of the most faithful saints who the Japan Mission had ever had . . . [his is the only family] all of whom (but last girl) joined the church.

He is rather frank, honest, and faithful. That is perhaps a reason why he blamed the sudden action of the church in the withdrawal of the missionary activities from Japan, especially from Kofu before the closing of the mission. Since then the saints in Kofu were left alone without any instruction and some of them did not know why it was withdrawn. . . . So we cannot after all blame Brother Ren Yoneyama who is, I am sure, far better than the average saint in Japan. If we will excommunicate him, we must excommunicate most of the members in Japan.<sup>44</sup>

Fujiwara also explained that they had refused to use their house for the Christmas party only because of disease (which later took the lives of Kenji and Morizo's own baby). He also explained that Morizo was the first member to write him upon his return to Japan and at that time he had written:

I joined the church when I was eight years old . . . so I could not understand much of the gospel. . . . I always thought I would do something for the church. Therefore we are very glad to have you here in Japan . . . we shall cooperate and assist you as much as we can. . . .

Fujiwara also mentioned that, "Sister Hana Yoneyama (wife of Brother Ren) is still much faithful. She worries much about her husband's changing

mind and attitudes.” And the oldest daughter, now married as Tsuneko Kitai, often sent Fujiwara cards and greetings.<sup>45</sup>

Although we don’t know what happened to the Yoneyamas or their attitude toward the Church, or the Church’s attitude toward them during the next fourteen years, Edward L. Clissold, the first mission president after the reopening, felt that the Lord still had a work to perform through them. In trying to reestablish Kofu as a branch in 1949, he had spent the day with a Brother Yajima searching for old members, especially a photographer named Yoneyama. Having failed, President Clissold offered a silent prayer just before they were to return to Tokyo, in a last desperate hope. He was impressed to return to the military translation office he had just come from. When he asked if anyone knew a Mormon named Yoneyama, one man asked if they are the people who use the Book of Mormon. He then said he had seen a Book of Mormon many years ago in the house of a school teacher named Yoneyama. Within minutes they were in contact with Renji and Morizo. The Yoneyama’s greatly helped in the reestablishment of the work thereafter.<sup>46</sup>

Fujiwara worked diligently to locate and reactivate the Saints. Using the addresses printed in *Shuro* he sent out greetings and invitations for meetings and parties. Of thirty-three invited to a 1934 Tokyo Christmas party, only seven attended; but the party was so enjoyable that all “sighed with pleasure.”<sup>47</sup> By this time Elder Watanabe had been sustained as Tokyo branch president with Sister Reiko Mochizuki as clerk. Twenty-two people attended a Christmas party at Sister Kumagai’s in Sapporo, but she was most likely the only member there.

By March 1935, Fujiwara had located six Sapporo members who agreed to help in varying degrees, and he organized a branch there. Nine attended the previously mentioned April sacrament meeting in Kofu. Also in April Osaka held its first testimony and sacrament meeting in over ten years. On 19 May 1935, two children of Sister Reiko Mochizuki (eleven and seventeen years old) were baptized by Elder Fujiwara and confirmed by Elder Watanabe—the first such ordinances since the closing. As Fujiwara later expressed it, “I am very happy to have two new members within a year of my mission in Japan. May the Lord continue his favor and blessings upon me.”<sup>48</sup>

Also in May, the first and last issue of *Hattatsu* (*The Progress*)—a magazine fashioned after *Shuro*—was published. It was printed in both Japanese and English, so that friends in Hawaii and America could be made aware of the happenings in Japan. It contained mission history and news as well as letters between the Japanese Saints and friends overseas. One letter from Brother Takagai Tomigoro (who had studied in America) to Senator Thomas and Alma O. Taylor pleaded, “with my ardent desire for PEACE of

the whole human kind on the earth I do earnestly point out that NOW is the best and finest chance for restoration of the Japan Mission of the Church."<sup>49</sup> Fujiwara and Takagi and others had a strong nationalistic feeling for Japan,<sup>50</sup> and felt that the reestablishment of the mission was the best way to solve the growing differences between Japan and America. This is especially true since Chojiro Kuriyama, a member, was working for the Japanese government in New York, and former mission president, Senator Elbert Thomas, was in Washington.<sup>51</sup>

The variety of comments and people that Fujiwara ran into testifies of the varieties of religious experience and needs. Some members really wanted and needed the Church to keep them strong. As a Brother Nakagawa commented to Fujiwara, "We are generally less faithful, and could not continue our faithful with some reasons, but we are still Mormons."<sup>52</sup> Others felt close to the gospel, without any apparent need for the Church. The name of Fude Tai (sister to Tsune Nachie of Hawaii) is not on any of the lists of those who attended meetings yet, when Fujiwara located her in February 1935, she was reading the Book of Mormon with her son and his family. Others, like Sister Kumagai, were always holding church-type meetings whether there was anyone from the Church there or not.

Some, feeling neglected by the Church, returned to old life styles, and were bothered by Fujiwara's persistence in trying to reactivate them. Such was the case with the Nakazawas and the family of a Brother Kitagawa (Nara's former MIA counselor and coeditor of *Shuro*), who kept trying to give Fujiwara "the slip." "The family of this brother are very ignorant or funny, as they told us wrong places of this brother's business and they told us just wrong things." And of course others, like the Yoneyamas, felt inwardly hurt, as if God had turned his back on them.<sup>53</sup> Fujiwara summarized the feeling of many former Saints to Taylor:

If we investigate the Saints in Japan, we will find no saints who can be said to be really faithful and real members of the church of Christ. Many of them will say that they are not interested in religion any longer, for religion does not give them anything spiritually and, of course, nothing materially. So they say they are in changing their mind, "Shinkyo no henka" . . . I always send them cards. . . but only five or six Saints have ever answered my greetings.<sup>54</sup>

Alma O. Taylor served in a position something like what is today called a regional or mission representative—a go-between for Fujiwara and the general authorities, translating and advising concerning letters that went both ways. The letters between him and Fujiwara are fascinating. Over and over he tried to get Fujiwara to classify donations from the members, but he just kept saying, "the money is for the Church. That's all." (Fujiwara recorded over sixteen people donating to the Church, although over half the total amount came from Fujiwara himself.) They corresponded about

many things: about Fujiwara's getting a regular job, his stewardship, advancements in the priesthood, spreading rumors that Taylor was going to begin missionary work among the Japanese in Hawaii, and about money for a permanent building (and how the Church doesn't need "rice Christians," who only join the Church for its fancy buildings, although Taylor did admit the need for a building).<sup>55</sup> However, what happened next superseded all these matters in importance.

In March Fujiwara was confined to his bed for two weeks, seriously ill, until he was nursed back to health by Sister Watanabe's constant care. In the summer he became ill again and finally returned to his home in Hokkaido for a complete rest and recovery in August. For this reason the September *Hattatsu* was never published. From his home in September, and then from a hospital in November, he dictated letters to Taylor apologizing for not doing more work. Finally, in February 1936, Taylor received a letter from Fujiwara's father stating:

With words of regret upon his lips that he had done so little for the church, uttering words of deep gratitude to all who had helped him . . . he went to what he calls heaven. Not knowing much about his religion, it is all very strange to me.

Fujiwara had died of pleurisy (and possibly tuberculosis) on 27 January 1936.<sup>56</sup>

Taylor reported all this in a long letter to the First Presidency in March 1936, and then asked, "Now what is to be done about a successor to Elder Fujiwara?" Yoshijiro Watanabe seemed to be the only one who could be trusted, although he was an unlearned ivory carver, and rather elderly. Watanabe had just written Taylor asking the same question, saying that he had tried to substitute for Fujiwara but was not able and was not very capable and had not been set apart so was limited in his authority. He concluded,

. . . we wish that you do not abandon the work in Japan, but that you continue it, in that connection I suggest you send someone from America or designate some desirable Japanese to carry on. Please let us know.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Dark Ages: 1936 to 1945**

There is no record of an answer to Watanabe, and we know very little about what happened in Japan for the next ten years. Elder Nara later called this period, "the absolute dark ages" ("Mattaku sono ju nen wa ankoku no jidai de atta").<sup>58</sup> But a few Saints in each city had been meeting somewhat regularly before Fujiwara's death, and there is no reason to suppose that these meetings stopped, at least for two or three years. Sister Kumagai still held her meetings, and at least one member, Brother Ono, came for a while.<sup>59</sup>

It would be interesting to know the details of this period when there was no presiding elder, for the Brother Katuras and Watanabes may prove

to be the real heroes of this period. They were never the great initiators, but they endured through it all humbly and faithfully, giving constant support to whomever the leaders might have been. As Taylor once described Watanabe, “he has always confessed his membership in the Church and one who had, in this feeble way, supported every movement attempted for the Saints since the closing.”<sup>60</sup>

In April and May of 1939, Hilton A. Robertson made an official visit to Japan on behalf of the Church. With only inaccurate addresses, he began searching for Nami Suzuki, an old sister who had once lived in and cooked for the mission home. Of all the millions in the Tokyo-Yokohama area, a young girl emerged from a public bath, saw the foreigner and asked what he wanted. When Robertson told her, she said, “That’s my mother.” She took him right to Sister Suzuki’s, and Robertson got other addresses from her. He visited the Tokyo, Sapporo, and Osaka Saints, and assured them that they had not been forgotten and that missionaries would return some day. While in Japan he baptized several new members—the two surviving children<sup>61</sup> of Sister Suzuki (with Elder Watanabe confirming) and Elder Katsura’s daughter (with Katsura confirming), among others.<sup>62</sup>

Whatever the Church activities there were during these years, they probably ended with the war. Cards and letters were exchanged, but formal meetings were not allowed. Police precautions were very strict.<sup>63</sup> It would be interesting to know the thoughts of the Saints during the war—how they resolved the conflict that may have arisen in their minds when they found the country they loved fighting against a country closely aligned with the Church they loved. Sister Kumagai, at least, claims there really was no conflict. She thought that both the Japanese and Americans fought because they loved their countries, and therefore had no hatred for either side. Her only prayer during that time was for peace and the reestablishment of the mission. She also said that all who worked with her at a local newspaper knew of her Christian affiliation, but never gave her any persecution or abuse because of it.<sup>64</sup> Thus the members sat out the war years without any outward activity or signs of Church membership. In spite of the lack of activity in Japan during these years, a mighty work was being accomplished among the Japanese elsewhere.

### **The Hawaiian Era: 1936 to 1950**

Although the First Presidency neither appointed a replacement for Fujiwara after his death in 1936, nor sent a “high apostle” to reopen the mission (as Tomigoro Takagi had suggested), they had not ignored the work among the Japanese. Rather, they gave heed to another suggestion Fujiwara had sent before his death:

I am sorry to tell you that the older members are mostly unenthusiastic at my work. . . . Better make new members than struggle to help the old ones. It would take less energy, effort and courage.<sup>65</sup>

Within eight months after receiving Taylor's report about Fujiwara's death, they called ex-mission president Hilton A. Robertson to reestablish the Japanese Mission, but with headquarters in Honolulu, "from which base of operations the president and missionaries will work among the Japanese people of Hawaii and also the established branches of Japanese members in Japan."<sup>66</sup>

A great deal of the credit for the initiation of the work among the Japanese in Hawaii goes to one person, Sister Tsune Nachie, who had been working among her people since 1923.

She went out each morning with her Church books and a few pamphlets in Japanese language, tied in a large handkerchief, and visited diligently among her people and preached the Gospel to them.<sup>67</sup>

Because of her efforts, in the spring of 1934, a Japanese Sunday School class was started as a separate unit of Kalihi Branch. When Elder Fujiwara passed through in August on his return to Japan, about thirty Japanese were attending. The brethren that came to organize the Oahu Stake in 1935 were so impressed with the class that they organized it as a special unit in the stake under new first counselor, Edward Clissold.<sup>68</sup>

They began to talk of a special mission for the Orientals in Hawaii on 24 February 1937. In October three missionaries arrived, and by the end of the year there were eighteen baptized members, all active.

The environment, results, characters and condition of the mission in Hawaii were so different from those in Japan that it should be a subject for a long paper in itself. Briefly, we can simply say that with fewer language and social barriers, the Japanese in Hawaii had a different attitude towards Mormonism than did the Japanese in Japan. The mission was immediately successful, more missionaries were sent, and baptisms increased, until the war came and missionaries had to be withdrawn. Year end totals more easily show the mission progress:<sup>69</sup>

#### MISSIONARIES

1937	'38	'39	'40	'41	'42	'43	'44	'45	'46	'47	'48
5	19	32	54	55	18	13	7	4	34	66	89

#### BAPTISMS

1937	'38	'39	'40	'41	'42	'43	'44	'45	'46	'47	'48
4	13	26	37	48	156	72	48	34	30	15	52

## TOTAL MEMBERSHIP

1937	'38	'39	'40	'41	'42	'43	'44	'45	'46	'47	'48
17	30	60	101	150	302	375	437	484	522	532	604

Not only were they numerically successful, but if tithe paying is any indication, the converts were the most faithful in the world. In 1954, for example, over 97% were tithe payers, which compares with only 61% paid in the non-Japanese Hawaiian Mission, and less elsewhere.<sup>70</sup>

The mission definitely progressed. When aged Sister Nachie died in December 1938, President Robertson stated that the Lord had left her until he had twenty-five missionaries to replace her.<sup>71</sup> In 1939 Robertson made his trip to Japan. In 1940 he was replaced by J. C. Jensen, who became ill at the end of 1942 and was replaced by Edward L. Clissold. When Castle Murphy took over in 1944, there were just seven missionaries because of the war; and also, because of the bad connotations of the word "Japanese" during the war, the name of the mission was changed to the Central Pacific Mission.<sup>72</sup> Melvyn Weenig became mission president in 1946 and, with the end of the war, dozens of missionaries were sent to the mission, several of whom were later transferred to Japan itself in 1948.

The greatest contribution of the work in Hawaii is just being seen today in Japan. Almost every major mission leader in Japan from the mid-1960s until now was converted or served as a missionary in Hawaii under the Japanese Mission.

**The Reopening: 1945 to 1948**

In 1945 when the war ended, the few members in Japan had been waiting for twenty-one years for the reestablishment of the mission. Meanwhile, in Hawaii, Japanese people had been joining the Church in exciting numbers. It was now time to join these two elements and let the fusion bring forth a new era of missionary work among the Japanese people.

LDS servicemen, who began entering Japan in late August 1945 along with occupation forces, immediately began sharing the gospel with the native Japanese they met. Edward L. Clissold also entered Japan as a member of MacArthur's staff in 1945, and ran an ad in the *Mainichi* newspaper asking all Tokyo Saints to come and meet him at the Dai Ichi Hotel. Brother and Sister Nara (recently returned from Manchuria) and Sister Watanabe met with him at once and requested the restoration of the mission.<sup>73</sup>

By the time Clissold left Japan in 1945, local servicemen, especially *nisei* like Brothers Komatsu and Horiuchi, who had been converted in Hawaii, had begun aiding the Saints and conducting small Sunday Schools in their homes. As the group grew they moved from meeting in a small

room in Nara's niece's house, to a school in Roppongi to a large home in Gotanda. By 1948 about fifty were meeting in Ogikubo. The Saints in Hawaii were sending a lot of goods to help destitute Saints in Japan, and servicemen brought young war orphans to Sunday School classes.<sup>74</sup>

On 6 March 1948, Clissold returned as mission president, and the mission was officially reestablished. Due to his particular assignment on MacArthur's staff (an assignment he had not desired at the time), he had the exact connections he needed to get the Church going again.<sup>75</sup> The first thing to do was to get a permanent building. In April 1948 a partially burnt house in Azabu was obtained. Renovation began in May, and on Thanksgiving Day 1948 the building was dedicated. The mission in Japan would be permanent this time.<sup>76</sup>

Among the very first baptisms of the new mission, was that of Nara's wife Motoko, on 6 April 1948, performed by President Clissold.<sup>77</sup> Another group was baptized in November. The first five missionaries finally got permission and entered the country on 26 June 1948. By the end of that year there were seventeen missionaries (six *nisei*), twenty-two baptisms, and several different Sunday Schools being held with over 900 attending the various areas.<sup>78</sup>

Missionary numbers increased and they were sent out into all the old areas and many new ones. Elder Matthew Cowley saw a bright future for Japan when he dedicated the mission home and said, "there will some day be many church buildings and even temples built in this land."<sup>79</sup> Members and missionaries became numerous, and communication with the Church became a daily affair. It was a different place indeed. As of 1974 there are six different missions in Japan and three stakes.<sup>80</sup> As an indication of this success, during his first general conference as President of the Church, Spencer W. Kimball challenged Japan to, ". . . furnish its own 1,000 missionaries and then eventually 10,000 more for Mongolia and China."<sup>81</sup> But that is another story.

### Some Observations

The history of the Church in Japan in the period between missions is not a history involving great movements or controlling forces, but is rather a documentation of how individual people reacted to a particularly hard situation.

Perhaps this type of subtle adversity brings out a person's true character—in all its diversities. Some members may have actually been made stronger during the Church's absence. Others fell away all the more quickly. Some hung on, barely, and others did not have the strength to make it alone. Some were insulted, some hurt, and others basically unaffected. Nara reappeared after World War II as enthusiastic as the day the first

*Shuro* came out, and as recently as 9 September 1973 was set apart as a stake patriarch by Elder Thomas S. Monson. Brothers Katsura and Watanabe seemed to have pursued a steady course throughout the years regardless of the external conditions of the Church. Some members never supported the Church during the interim, but came back enthusiastically once the Church proved its devotion to Japan. Others, perhaps longing for a more intimate and simple organization, served less valiantly after the reopening of the mission and the subsequent successes. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the closing and interim period was that some who truly loved the Church felt deserted and disappointed by the closing, and ended up “in the Church” but less than they might have been otherwise.

How do we judge the effect this period has had on the future of the Japan missions? Why is all the research, interviewing, translating, and corresponding that still needs to be done if we are to truly understand the many mysteries of this period really necessary? The Hawaiian period is obviously important in that it produced so many of today’s leaders. But what difference do Fujiwara’s life and death, Yamaide’s poetry, Kuriyama’s inactivity, Kumagai’s enthusiasm, Watanabe’s steadiness, Nara’s initiative and Yoneyama’s hurt make on the future of the Church in Japan? Perhaps their lives can teach us a few things: like an essential quality of both Japanese culture and Mormonism—true endurance. In their lives we can see the complex effect a simple act like closing down an area can have on faithful Latter-day Saints. But more important, in this day when we are striving to be a worldwide church, their lives serve as prime examples of the fact that one can be a good Mormon without being an American or Utahn. The Japanese who joined the Church in large numbers—in Hawaii and in post-war Japan—were those partially made, or ready to be partially made into Americans. But the fact that a few endured faithful to the Church at a time in Japan’s history when being truly Japanese was everything, proves that one can still keep his culture and be a good Latter-day Saint. For two decades they had nothing to sustain them—nothing but the true essence of the gospel without any external organizational or cultural reinforcements, and yet some still made it. The numbers of those who didn’t make it untouched shows that this may be extremely difficult—perhaps harder than it should be. But it is possible.

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1. Although the mission was not officially reestablished until 1948, LDS servicemen began meeting with the Saints in late 1945. The isolation from the Church ended at this time. For a consideration of the original Japan mission, see R. Lanier Britsch, “The Closing of the Early Japan Mission,” in this issue of *BYU Studies*.

2. Hilton A. Robertson in *Conference Report of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, October 1924, p. 123.

3. Taped interview between Tamano Kumagai and Professor Seiji Katanuma, Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan, November 1973.

4. Interview with Hilton A. Robertson, Provo, Utah, 13 November 1973.

5. T. Katsura to Murray L. Nichols, 8 September 1956, quoted in Murray L. Nichols, "History of the Japan Mission of the LDS Church 1901–1924," Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1957, p. 97.

6. Kumagai interview.

7. Japanese names in this paper will follow the American rather than the Japanese style, that is, with family names last.

8. Interview with Fujiya Nara, Provo, Utah, 8 October 1973; Fujiya Nara, "Brief Record of My Conversion," a handwritten record of Church events in his life, with him; Form E Membership records, microfilm, Japan Mission Reel 1, Church Historical Department.

9. *Hattatsu* [*The Progress*], published by Takeo Fujiwara (1935), p. 16.

10. Thirteen different issues of *Shuro* published by the Japan Mutual Improvement Association exist in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, dating from 1 January 1925 to Winter 1928. I have looked at these briefly with the gracious help of Hiromi Ashizawa, Masa Watanabe, and Tetsuro Fujita.

11. *Shuro*, April 1925.

12. This suggests the interesting question of whether it is worse to go to no meeting at all or to another Christian church when one cannot attend an LDS meeting.

13. *Shuro*, 1 November 1925.

14. *Hattatsu*, p. 16.

15. Fujiya Nara, "The Joy of This Publication," *LDS Messenger* (December 1949), p. 2.

16. For example, *Hattatsu*, *LDS Messenger*, parts of the early *Seito No Michi*, and even in the former Japan East Mission (recently divided) was published, in addition to the Church Unified Magazine, *Sazanami*, written by and for Japanese Saints, and not dissimilar to *Shuro*.

17. *Shuro*, 10 May 1926.

18. *Hattatsu*, pp. 16–18.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Manuscript History and Historical Reports of the Japanese Mission: 1901–1924, 1946–1955, foreword to 1949, Church Archives; *Hattatsu*, p. 16.

21. Franklin S. Harris to his wife, 22 October 1926, Franklin S. Harris personal papers, Box 19, Folder 6, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library.

22. Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 125.

23. Kumagai interview; newspaper clippings located in alumni file, Alumni House, Brigham Young University.

24. *Hattatsu*, pp. 16–18.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, p. 29A.

27. First Presidency to Fujiya Nara, printed in *Shuro*, Winter 1928.

28. See *Hattatsu*, pp. 17–18; Fujiya Nara interview; Nara, "Brief Record of My Conversion," p. 1.

29. Alma O. Taylor to First Presidency, 31 March 1928, in Japan Mission General Files, 1901–1966, Church Archives.

30. *Hattatsu*, pp. 16–18.
31. *Shuro*, Winter 1927.
32. *Hattatsu*, p. 18.
33. Taylor to President Heber J. Grant, 14 March 1936, Japan Mission General Files.
34. Biographical sketch in the *Improvement Era* (September 1933), p. 655; newspaper clippings, Alumni House, Brigham Young University.
35. There were two other Japanese Saints who had come to Utah to study—Tomigoro Takagi and Chojiro Kuriyama. Takagi proved to be enthusiastic once back in Japan and supported Fujiwara in attempts to get the mission reopened. Kuriyama went completely inactive, but after the war became a member of Japan's Diet, and, as a government official aided the Church in his silent way, although never taking an active part in it himself.
36. Fujiwara to Taylor, 14 August 1934 and Japan Mission General Files, n.d.
37. *Hattatsu*, p. 19; Fujiwara, "Official Record of Church in Japan Until December 31, 1934," in Manuscript History, pp. 1–5.
38. Mr. Kubota turned out to be unscrupulous. According to Mrs. Nara, Elder Nara had appointed him mission treasurer, and he had stolen some Church funds.
39. Fujiwara, "Official Record," pp. 5–9.
40. Fujiwara, "The Official Report January 1–April 30, 1935," Japan Mission General Files.
41. Taylor to Takeo Fujiwara, 14 April 1935, Japan Mission General Files.
42. Yoneyama was 58, according to Form E membership records, having been born on 10 August 1876.
43. Fujiwara, "Official Report January 1–April 30, 1945," 28 April 1935, Japan General Mission Files, pp. 21–22.
44. Fujiwara, "Official Report, August 3, 1935," Japan Mission General Files, pp. 1–6.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Don W. Marsh, *The Light of the Sun* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 47–48; Interview with Edward Clissold, 8 November 1973, Salt Lake City, Utah; Nara interview.
47. Fujiwara, "Official Record Until December 31, 1934," pp. 6–9.
48. Fujiwara, "Official Report, January to April 1935," pp. 7–14.
49. *Hattatsu*, p. 27.
50. See the introduction to Fujiwara's master's thesis, "The Political and Military Policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate," Brigham Young University, 1934, pp. vii, viii.
51. On the occasion, Senator Thomas wrote to Chojiro Kuriyama in New York and advised him "as a friend and former teacher" to influence the Japanese government to renew its notice to withdraw from the League of Nations rather than actually withdraw. Thomas said that in view of the tense situation, such an act would do "immeasurable good." (Thomas to Kuriyama, 25 March 1935, in Japan Mission General Files)
52. Fujiwara, "Official Record until December 31, 1934," pp. 6–9.
53. Fujiwara, "Official Report, January 1–April 30, 1935," pp. 4–10.
54. Fujiwara, "Official Report, August 3, 1935," pp. 4–10.
55. See letters in Japan Mission General Files. Also included were several letters from Fujiwara to the First Presidency containing condolences at the deaths of Church leaders, congratulations at the times of general conferences, and reminders that there were still Saints in Japan who desired the reopening of the mission.
56. *Deseret News*, 29 February 1936, Journal History, Church Archives.
57. Taylor to Grant, 14 March 1936.
58. Nara, "Brief Record," p. 2; see also Nara, "Joy of Publication," p. 2

59. Kumagai interview.
60. Taylor to Grant, 14 March 1936.
61. Sister Suzuki had two other children who had died—one in the China War, and another of disease in 1935. This means that of the thirty or forty Saints during this period whose lives we know anything at all about, four died of disease in 1935–36: Suzuki’s daughter, Fujiwara, and the two Yoneyamas’.
62. Form E Membership Records; Marsh, *Light of the Sun*, p. 24.
63. During the war playing or singing of foreign hymns and even using Japanese forms of English words (such as the common “erebeitaa” for “elevator,” and “outo” for “out” in baseball) were all strictly forbidden. See Seiji Katanuma, “The Church in Japan,” *BYU Studies* 14 (Autumn 1973):21,22.
64. Kumagai interview.
65. Quoted in Taylor to Grant, 14 March 1936.
66. *Deseret News*, 27 November 1936, Journal History.
67. Castle H. Murphy, “A Brief Resume of the Organization of the Missionary Work among the Chinese and Japanese in Hawaii,” 30 March 1973. Typed manuscript in possession of the author.
68. Clissold interview.
69. Taken from the year-end totals in the Missionary Annual Reports, 1937–1948, Church Archives.
70. *Ibid.*, 1945.
71. Murphy, “Brief Résumé,” Addendum, p. 5.
72. From the annual summaries under the “Japanese” and “Central Pacific Mission,” Missionary Annual Reports, 1937–1950. In 1950, after much debate, it was decided to merge the Central Pacific Mission with the Hawaiian Mission in order to avoid dual Church organization over the same area.
73. Clissold interview; Foreword to 1949, Manuscript History.
74. Interview with Aiko Horiuchi, Provo, Utah, 11 October 1973.
75. Clissold interview.
76. For Clissold’s own detailed account, see Nichols, “History of the Japan Mission,” pp. 141–48.
77. Form E Membership Records.
78. Missionary Annual Reports, 1948.
79. Quoted in a letter from Harrison T. Price to Paul C. Andrus, 26 August 1958, Church Archives.
80. For an objective opinion of actual success in Japan in recent years (which looks beyond the mere increase in numbers), see Katanuma, “The Church in Japan,” pp. 16–28.
81. Spencer W. Kimball, “When the World Will Be Converted,” *The Ensign* (October 1974), p. 12, from a speech delivered on 4 April 1974.