American Protestant Missionaries in Meiji Japan and their Struggles Caused by Japanese Nationalism: An Analysis of Two Case Studies

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Professor: Dr. Angelina Koch

Student Name: Hero Kharma

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Christianity was first introduced to Japan in the year 1549, when the French Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier arrived in Kagoshima Prefecture, an event which would become the catalyst for over 450 years of evangelizing in Japan.[1] Christianity was then banned in 1614 by the Tokugawa government, with nearly 3 decades of persecution following this decision, during which both Japanese Christians (*Kirishitan)* and Western missionaries were tortured and martyred.[2] During the years 1615 to 1643, over a hundred missionaries had returned to Japan in the hope of evangelizing as many Japanese as possible as well as give strength to the heavily persecuted Kirishitan community, only to eventually be faced with the choice of having to either give up their mission or be martyred.[3] Western missionaries would not return to Japan until the year 1844, when the French missionary Theodore-Auguste Forcade (1816-1885) arrived in Okinawa, where he was retained until the year 1862 because the Japanese government distrusted him.[4] He was then succeeded by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox missionaries in a raging wave of evangelization, with the Protestants clearly taking the lead, sending around 47 different denominational and non-denominational missionary bodies to Japan between the years of 1859 – 1945.[5] After nearly 2 centuries of exile, Western missionaries were extremely eager to spread the gospel in Japan, and ultimately their efforts led to there being around 90,000 converted Protestants in Japan by the end of the Meiji Era in 1912.[6] What is interesting however, is that these numbers seem rather unimpressive when compared to the population size of Japan at the time. In 1912, Japan had roughly 50 million inhabitants, and if carefully calculated, that would mean that Protestant missionaries had successfully converted less than 0,2% of the

[1] Michael Ipgrave, "Christianity in the World of Japan's Religions: Reception, Incorporation, Separation," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 16, no. 3 (2016): 197.
[2] Mark Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan* (Leiden, Boston: BRILL; 2003), 12.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 39.
[5] Masaya Yamamoto, "Image Makers of Japan: A Case Study in the Impact of the American Protestant Foreign Missionary Movement, 1859-1905" (PhD. diss, The Ohio State University, 1967), 1.
[6] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 57.

population in Japan during the Meiji era. As a result of the missionaries only being able to convert a relatively low number of Japanese natives, Protestant Christianity never really got integrated into mainstream Japanese society as a major religion and was increasingly marginalized. It begs the question: what could have been some of the underlying factors influencing this development of the Protestant evangelization mission and so strongly holding back the acceptance of the message the missionaries brought with them to Japan?

To be more specific, this thesis thus seeks an answer for the question: "In what ways did an increase in nationalistic sentiment in the late 1880s in Japan cause difficulties for North American Protestant missionaries evangelizing there?" This thesis will aim to answer this question by delving deeper into the wave of nationalism that engulfed Japan during the 1880s and 1890s, as well as the experiences of American Protestant missionaries in Japan during this specific time period. Ultimately, the main argument this thesis makes is that the sharp rise of Japanese nationalistic and anti-Christian sentiment in the late 1880s right after the promulgation the Meiji Constititution (1889) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) caused problems for American Protestant missionaries in the form of conflicts between them and the locals they tried to convert, as well as between them and their Japanese colleagues who turned their backs on them.

this thesis will support its main argument by analyzing two case studies: the first case study is a collection of private letters and other documents written by the North American Protestant missionary couple Belle Marsh Poate and Thomas Pratt Poate who resided in Japan from the year 1876 to 1892. The letters and reports that they wrote during this period reflect the overall progress of the Protestant evangelization mission during the Meiji era's crucial years from a more personal point-of-view and also show in more detail how nationalism proved to be stumbling blocks for the missionaries. This part will thus aim to give a real-life example of Protestant missionaries who first encountered great optimism amongst the Japanese locals, but were then met with animosity and hostility after the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education. The second case study is a collection of letters written by the *Meiji Gakuin*, a group of North American Protestant missionaries who are considered one of the most important Protestant missionary groups to have evangelized on Japanese soil as they founded the Meiji Gakuin University in 1863 and were considered to have an authoritative status among Protestant

missionaries during the Meiji era. Furthermore, their writings reflect the state of evangelization during the Meiji era as they encompass several decades. This part thus aims to give a real-life example of Protestant missionaries who were embroiled in conflict with their Japanese colleagues, mainly as a result of the increase of nationalistic sentiment after the promulgation of the aforementioned two documents.

Since the primary sources discussed in this thesis do not go any further than the year 1900, this thesis does not discuss the years after. Furthermore, the 1880s and 1890s were also the most crucial and dramatic years for the spread of Protestantism in Japan since the country witnessed a great turn-around in the attitudes towards Christianity during this period, namely from a very welcoming attitude to an increasingly rejecting one, so the focus of this thesis should logically go to these two decades. Since over 70% of the Protestant missionaries present in Japan during the Meiji Era were North American, this thesis will also deal with only North American missionaries as they were undeniably the leaders of the evangelization movement in Japan during that time.[7] Lastly, the majority of Protestant missionaries in Japan belonged to the Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist and Baptist denominations.[8] However, the subjects of the primary sources belonged to the Presbyterian and Baptist denominations respectively, therefore, this thesis will mainly show these denominations' responses to the rise of nationalism and anti-Christian sentiment in Meiji Japan. This research is important because a lot of research has already been done on the general history of Christianity in Japan, as well as missionary activities there, but since this thesis focuses specifically on the relationship between Protestantism and Japanese nationalism during the Meiji era by showing two real-life examples, it contributes to the library of knowledge concerning anti-Christian sentiment in Japan during the Meiji era, and gives a deeper explanation for the lack of willingness of the Japanese people to convert to Christianity in large numbers.

[7] Yamamoto, "Image Makers of Japan," 86.
[8] Ibid, 88.

Modern Day Scholarship on Protestant Missionaries, Religion and Nationalism In Meiji Japan

Much has been written on the arrival of Protestantism in Japan and the missionaries' efforts to evangelize there. Mark Mullins give a short overview of the entire Protestant mission during the Meiji era in his book *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, where he talks about how Protestantism was steadily growing in Japan up until the 1890s, when in-fighting between Christian groups and a rise in anti-Christian sentiment caused many troubles for the evangelization mission.[9] Mullins also discusses the various conflicts between Western missionary groups and Japanese Christian leaders, such as the battle between the Japanese Congregational Church and the American Board over who should be in control over all evangelization work in Japan: the Japanese or the foreigners?[10] Mullins work is rather superficial as it gives the reader a brief overview of the entire Protestant mission rather than a detailed analysis of its progression, and it makes use of mainly secondary sources to support its arguments. Since this thesis deals with the Protestant mission in the early 1890s, right after the rise of anti-Christian sentiment, Mullins' book serves as a good secondary source for background information on that specific time period, but not necessarily for any deeper analysis.

A more in-depth look at why the Japanese suddenly became more reluctant to accept Protestantism during the 1890s is given by Kiri Paramore, who has written a lot on the relationship between Christianity and Confucianism, as well as the connection between Japanese nationalism and the rise of anti-Christian sentiment in the Meiji Era, namely in his article *Anti-Christian Ideas and National Ideology*. In this article Paramore takes a closer look at the works of nationalist philosophers Inoue Tetsujirō and Inoue Enryō, who were very outspoken towards Christianity and argued that Buddhism and Confucianism where better fits for Japanese society.[11] The philosophical debates they led were crucial to the creation and promulgation of both the Imperial Constitution in 1889 and the Imperial Rescript on

[9] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 52.
[10] Ibid, 45.
[11] Kiri Paramore, "Anti-Christian Ideas and National Ideology: Inoue Enryo and Inoue Tetsujiro's Mobilization of Sectarian History in Meiji Japan," *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 112.

Education in 1890, which were put in place to increase nationalistic sentiment and also battle foreign influences, such as Christianity.[12] Paramore's article adequately explains the circumstances in which the intensely nationalistic Constitution and Rescript were written, and the debate surrounding the philosophers discussed in his work could also partly explain the sharp rise of anti-foreign sentiment in the early 1890s, which is crucial for this thesis.

Paramore looks at the Christianity vs. Japanese nationalism debate during the Meiji era from a Japanese point-of-view, as he looks mainly at primary sources written by Japanese philosophers. Ion Hamish however seems to focus more on the experiences by Western missionaries in Japan themselves, having written numerous works on the Canadian, British, and American Protestant missionary movements in Japan during the Meiji era. In his book *The Cross and the Rising Sun*, Hamish delves further into how the Canadian Protestant missionary movement was affected by Japan's aggressive imperialism and argues that Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 caused many Western missionaries in both Korea and Japan to grow wary of the Japanese government and thus create discord between them.[13] Hamish argues that when the Japanese government occupied Taiwan in 1895, this did not cause discomfort among the missionaries as this takeover was more peaceful and they were simply relieved at the fact that Taiwan could finally modernize.[14] However, the annexation of Korea was a different story, and even though many Japanese Christian leaders would continue to support the army's war efforts, Western missionaries stopped supporting the Japanese government, leading to even more distrust on the side of the government.[15] Since a big portion of Hamish's work discusses the Canadian mission it might at first glance not seem too useful for this thesis, however, Hamish does provide us with the very interesting argument that the annexation of Korea caused discord between Japanese Protestants and Western Protestants in Japan, which provides us with yet another example of how Japan's nationalistic endeavors only continued to create strife between the two groups even in the early 1900s. Unfortunately, this thesis only discusses the Western Protestants experiences in Japan up until the year 1900, so Hamish's article could prove useful for a continuation of the research presented in this thesis. Furthermore, Ion Hamish

[12] Ibid, 111.
[13] Hamish Ion, *The Cross and the Rising Sun: The Canadian Protestant Missionary Movement in the Japanese Empire, 1872-1931* (Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), 179.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

gives a rather detailed analysis of the Canadian experience of this turbulent time, but the American perspective is absent, which is unfortunate since over 70% of the Protestant missionaries present in Japan during this time were from the United States, and were seen as the leaders of the whole Protestant mission.[16]

Fortunately, there have been a multitude of scholars who have focused on the American missionaries as well, such as Yukikazu Obata, who did extensive research on the American missionary J. M. McCaleb (1861–1953), a missionary from the US Churches of Christ who served in Japan from 1892 through 1941. In his dissertation on McCaleb Obata uses primarily secondary autobiographical sources and the Church of Christ's own monthly Japanese periodical called *Michishirube*, which is translated as "guidepost" in English.[17] In this dissertation Obata analyses McCaleb's opposition to the emperor and Japan's wartime aggression, and he argues that McCaleb's high morality and universal understanding of the Gospel had the potential to create a Trans-Pacific network of Christians, but that Japan's wartime aggression obstructed him from doing so. Obata gives us a good look at an American missionary who had lived in Japan for many decades, but he does not include much personal letters and documents as he depends more on Japanese-language and secondary sources. Since this thesis aims to analyse primary sources for its case studies, a work containing secondary sources might only serve as a source for background information, but nothing more than that.

Peter Lang does manage to provide is with primary sources in his book called *The Japan Experience: The Missionary Letters of Belle Marsh Poate and Thomas Pratt Poate, 1876 – 1892*, which is actually a compilation of many letters written over a 16-year-period by an American Protestant Missionary couple living in Japan during the Meiji era. Lang gives useful commentary and introductions to the letters at the beginning of each chapter, leading to a clear and coherent overview of the personal experience of the Poates.[18] The only downside to the book is the fact that they left quite early, namely in 1892 when anti-Christian and anti-Western sentiment was on the rise in Japan, as it would have been

[16] Yamamoto, "Image Makers of Japan," 86.
[17] Yukikazu Obata, "Against the Odds: J. M. McCaleb's Missionary Vision of Universality in the Context of Imperial Japan, 1892-1945" (PhD. diss, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 10.
[18] Belle Marsh Poate, Thomas Pratt Poate, and Richard Poate Stebbins. *The Japan Experience: the Missionary Letters of Belle Marsh Poate and Thomas Pratt Poate, 1876-1892*, ed. Richard Poate Stebbins (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 1.

interesting to read how their opinions on evangelizing in Japan would have changed during this period. However, the book does give a good and in-depth look at how missionaries felt they were received during the early years of the Meiji period. The primary letters compiled in this book shall therefore also thoroughly be analysed for the case study.

Other primary sources that shall be analyzed are given by Harold Hayes Henderson in his thesis on a group of Protestant missionaries who founded *The Meiji Gakuin*, a Christian university in Japan that was founded in 1863 in Tokyo. In this thesis he gives in-depth analyses of a collection of the missionaries' private letters that were sent to each other over a period of 23 years, namely from 1877 to 1900.[19] Throughout the letters we can see how the missionaries often disagreed with Japanese Protestant leaders on who should be in charge of the evangelization mission. This thesis foregoes secondary sources and focuses primarily on primary sources, as Henderson was intent on giving an unbiased analysis on the letters and documents written by these missionaries. The one thing the thesis lacks is an analysis of the works of the Japanese Protestant leaders the missionaries of the Meiji Gakuin had conflicts with in order to provide the reader with both views of the debate and thus make for a more well-rounded thesis.

Some scholars give a more in-depth look at the main Japanese scholars at the time who led the debate on Japanese nationalism vs. Christianity. Zibo Lin and Hanyang Lu explain how Katō Hiroyuki, a leading scholar during the Meiji era, proposed to have the nations moral guidelines be based on religion instead of the ethics as described in the Imperial Rescript on Education promulgated in 1890, which led to a huge scholarly debate.[20] Katō is a perfect example of a scholar who provoked nationalist scholars and even the government itself through his suggestion of including religion in the government's moral guidelines, but the authors fail to give a good overview of the full scope and intensity of this debate which lasted for the entire 1890's. Yosuke Nirei does give a rather detailed overview of the Japanese Protestant scholars who led the debate on Protestantism vs. Japanese nationalism, often trying to combine the two by creating a form of Protestantism which did put the Japanese nation first. Nirei mentions such Protestant leaders as Uchimura Kanzō

[19] Harold Hayes Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900: American Missionaries' Response to Japan" (PhD. diss, University of Hawaii, 1985), 8.
[20] Lin, Zibo and Hanyang Lu, "In Search of a Moral Standard: Debates over Ethics Education and Religion in Meiji Japan," *History of Education (Tavistock)* 49, no. 1 (2020): 39.

(1861–1930), Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933), Ōnishi Hajime (1964–1900) and Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944).[21] Nirei claims that these leaders reformed Christianity up to the point that it was no longer conceived as it being incompatible with Japanese nationalism, somewhat saving it from the disastrous years of the 1890s in which the government was cracking down on Protestantism.[22] Nirei gives a well-rounded overview of the main Japanese Protestant leaders who led the struggle of making Christianity more viable for evangelization in Japan, as well as an overview of the development of this process.

Atsuko Ichijo tries to give an explanation for the Protestants' difficulties during the 1890s and afterwards by laying the blame entirely on *kokugaku*, a type of scholarship which became popular among Japanese scholars in the 19th century and focused on finding a true "Japan" while being faced with the oncoming expansion of Western powers. Ichijo argues that kokugaku is the precursor to the intense Japanese nationalism found during the Meiji era, and that nationalistic symbols such as the Imperial Rescript on Education and the founding of State Shinto really are the result of kokugaku's teachings.[23] Ichijo does this by comparing the kokugaku movement to Europe's Romanticism, and says that kokugaku did bring about major social change in Japan whereas in Europe Romanticism did not.[24] Ichijo does indeed make an interesting case, and the societal upheaval that Japan experienced as the result of the nationalistic sentiment that took over had a major impact on the Western missionaries living there. As this thesis will mainly focus on how religious and nationalistic sentiment caused problems for Western missionaries living in Japan during the Meiji era, it attempts to combine the scholarly works that have focused on each topic individually and analyses them in order to arrive at new conclusions.

[21] Yosuke, Nirei, "Toward a Modern Belief: Modernist Protestantism and Problems of National Religion in Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 153.
[22] Ibid, 154.
[23] Atsuko Ichijo, "Kokugaku and an Alternative Account of the Emergence of Nationalism of Japan," *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 263.
[24] Ibid, 279.

Methodology

This thesis will firstly focus on the state of religion in Japan during the Meiji era. It focuses on how the Meiji government's promoting of State Shinto caused many problems for Western missionaries during their stay there. It will then discuss the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education in order to give the reader background information on these two very impactful events. The latter part of this thesis is the main part which includes the analysis of the two case studies. This part will mostly contain references to primary sources, combined with my analyses in order to support the overall argument of this thesis of the sharp rise of nationalism in the late 1880s causing conflicts between American Protestant missionaries and the locals as well as between them and their Japanese colleauges.

The primary sources which will be used for the case studies deal with two different missionary groups; one focuses on letters and mission reports left behind by two American missionaries who resided in Japan from 1876 to 1892, the other focuses on letters and other handwritten documents left behind by members of the missionary group that founded the *Meiji Gakuin*. The first case study is that of Belle Marsh Poate and Thomas Pratt Poate, an American Protestant missionary couple who resided in Japan during the years of 1876 to 1892. Their personal letters and other handwritten documents are compiled in a book by Stephen Lang called *The Japan Experience: The Missionary Letters of Belle Marsh Poate and Thomas Pratt Poate, 1876 – 1892*. Their letters will be used to show how Western missionaries in Japan felt the effects of the Meiji government's and other nationalist groups efforts to crack down on Christianity on a more personal level, and thus serve as perfect case studies for this thesis.

The second case study is that of the American missionaries who founded the Meiji Gakuin. Their primary sources are pulled from a dissertation called *The Meiji Gakuin, 1877 – 1900: American Missionaries' Response to Japan* and is written by Harold Heyes Henderson. It includes dozens of primary sources written by Protestant missionaries who ended up establishing the Meiji Gakuin University in Japan. They serve as a perfect case study for the overall progress of the North American Protestant mission in Japan, since as Presbyterians

they belonged to one of the main Protestant groups active in Japan and the Meiji Gakuin was one of the first missionary schools to be set up there.[25] Moreover, the Meiji Gakuin had a lot of influence over the Protestant mission as a whole. This can be seen from the fact that nearly all the other Christian missionary schools set up in Japan also showed solidarity to the Meiji Gakuin when they were fighting with Japanese protestant leaders, as well as the fact that most Christian missionary schools copied the Meiji Gakuin's leadership structure by also assigning a board with an equal number of Western missionaries and Japanese Protestant leaders.[26] Since the struggles of the Western leaders of the Meiji Gakuin thus bare many similarities with those of other missionaries at other mission schools, the Meiji Gakuin serves as a good illustration of the Protestants missionaries' conflicts with different groups in society. Whereas the Meiji Gakuin's letters show more of the conflict between Western missionaries and Japanese Protestant leaders, the Poates' letters show how Western missionaries increasingly became marginalized as a result of the nationalistic propaganda of the 1890s.

The Rise of State Shinto and its Relationship with Christianity

The reason State Shinto is discussed is perhaps an obvious one; it was the religion/ national ideology that was heavily promoted by the Meiji government in an effort to increase nationalistic sentiment as well as destroy the influences of "outside" religions such as Christianity. State Shinto is a government-led, highly regulated form of *Shinto* which is the indigenous religion of Japan. Shimazono Susumu recognizes 2 traditional forms of Shinto; *Shrine* Shinto, which is the traditional form of Shinto practiced at local shrines and temples all over Japan by officiated Shinto priests and priestesses, and *Court* Shinto, which is the form of Shinto practiced at the court of the emperor mainly during court ceremonies and was of a lesser influence on regular Japanese people's lives, and will thus not be the focus of

[25] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 67.
[26] Ibid.

this thesis.[27] These forms of Shinto existed long before State Shinto was created during the early Meiji era. However, the Meiji government ended up regulating and adjusting Shinto so intensively that during the "formative" period of State Shinto (roughly 1868 – 1890) a new religion was created that was unlike the traditional, regular Shinto of the past. This creation of a nationalism-driven religion was part of Japan's search for a "national identity" during the highly competitive 19th century when European powers were invading countries worldwide in an attempt to colonize them.[28] Atsuko Ichijo explains that during this time, a radical movement started in Japan in which scholars were searching for an uncorrupted essence of "Japaneseness", and the Meiji government adopted this same mentality when confronted with the arrival of Western Protestant missionaries.[29] The Meiji government took the oncoming threat of "Western" Protestantism very seriously, however, and thus created a form of Shinto which was to invade the Japanese populace's minds and block out any outer influences. State Shinto is characterized by the state's selection of roughly 200,000 Shinto temples and shrines all over the country, which were then placed in a very strict hierarchy with the Imperial Ancestral Shrine of Ise at the very top.[30] This system was extremely organized, with the National Association of Shrine Priests being founded in 1898, consisting of shrine priests working at "local shrines", which were managed by local, prefectural Shinto groups and "state" shrines which were directly managed by the government.[31] It is believed that the government created this association because they felt that shrines were the perfect place to "edify" the population and spread the state's nationalistic ideology among the people.[32]

Shinto was originally quite poorly structured; its priests were not trained in specific doctrine, and its structure mostly consisted of village communities who did nothing more than participate in certain Shinto rituals. However, this would all change in the early Meiji era, as Shinto was forcefully and carefully transformed by the government from a loosely

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[27] Shimazono Susumu and Regan E. Murphy, "State Shinto in the Lives of the People: The Establishment of Emperor Worship, Modern Nationalism, and Shrine Shinto in Late Meiji," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009): 95.
[28] Ichijo, "Kokugaku and an Alternative Account of the Emergence of Nationalism of Japan," 270.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Naoki Azegami, "Local Shrines and the Creation of 'State Shinto'," *Religion (London. 1971)* 42, no. 1 (2012): 71.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

structured native cult to a national religion with a strong structure, much financial backing and a clear spiritual hierarchy with the emperor at its top. The Meiji political leaders took very careful steps in making sure this could happen, and they did so by marking a clear distinction between "public" and "private" religion. Western powers and missionaries were consistently requesting the Meiji government for religious freedom in Japan since Christianity was banned until the year 1872, and even afterwards the missionaries were still meeting resistance from many different groups of society. By the time the Meiji Constitution entered into effect in the year 1890, they had spent over two decades formulating a certain law that would allow religious freedom in Japan for every citizen, yet allow a form of state Shinto that did not legally invade the citizens' rights. The Meiji government did this so they could make it look to the outside world as if Japan was a country of total religious freedom, satisfying the needs of Westerners while at the same time heavily promulgating Shinto as the state religion in order to advance their nationalistic goals. This basically gave the government the freedom to promote Shinto as much as possible in the political sphere. Shinto slowly but surely gained an increasingly political character. Several important shrines, which had not been visited in years by the emperor were nationalized, such as the Ise Jingū Shrine in Mie Prefecture which honours the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. These were suddenly assigned as "state shrines", and became an important part of yearly rituals worshipping the emperor. Furthermore, the state had set up a Department of Divinity in 1869 which would organize Shinto rituals and be the overseer of Shinto shrine activity. And finally, the sacred status of the emperor itself was to be constitutionalized in 1889, as it declared the emperor to be the "fountainhead of sovereign power – a sacred personage", sealing State Shinto and its cultlike obsession with the emperor as the official state ideology.

According to Suzumu, State Shinto was not only heavily promulgated by the government, it was also widely accepted by the people, and scholars believe that the government was able to do this by gradually and systematically introducing it to the Japanese people.[33] Suzumu observes four different periods in which State Shinto was solidified as the country's official political ideology. The first period is the "formative" period of State Shinto, which lasted from 1868 to 1890, and this is the period when the

[33] Shimazono, "State Shinto in the lives of the people," 101.

government was setting up State Shinto related matters such as the designation of national shrines.[34] The second period is the "establishment" period (1890 1910), and it was during this time that State Shinto was established as the nation's official ideology after it had been sealed in the Imperial Constitution (1889) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890).[35] Furthermore, it was during this period that the ideal of *Kokutai*, which is translated in English as "system of government" or "national body" and means the concept of the state as one coherent unit with the sacred emperor on top, was forcefully promoted to, and largely accepted by, the Japanese population, which led to the cult surrounding the emperor to grow in intensity.[36] The third and fourth periods are the "penetration" period (1910 – 1931) and the "fascist" period (1931 – 1945), but since these surpass the Meiji era, this thesis will only focus on the first two periods, arguably the most important ones in terms of State Shinto's relationship with Christianity since in later years this conflict between them would be overshadowed by the debates surrounding Japan's wartime efforts.[37]

State Shinto's relationship with Christianity is an interesting one as scholars have pointed out that even though they were rivals of each other and seemingly incompatible, much of State Shinto's formal organization was actually modelled on that of Protestant Christianity's. Isomae Jun'ichi explains how Japan lacked an official term for the word "religion", which was seen as a Western or foreign concept during the Tokugawa era.[38] The biggest difference in the Western concept of religion and the Japanese one was that Christianity, and especially Protestant Christianity, was extremely doctrine-based, whereas in Japan Buddhism and Shinto were originally centered on a multitude of rituals and festivals.[39] However, as the Meiji government was faced with the oncoming threat of Western powers who did have a highly organized religious institution, namely Christianity, they were faced with the reality that they too needed a doctrine-based religious institution that could simultaneously strengthen the nationalistic sentiment of the people. Therefore, the Meiji government set out on creating a form of Shinto which was more doctrine-based

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Jun'ichi Isomae, "The Conceptual Formation of the Category "Religion" in Modern Japan: Religion, State, Shintō," *Journal of Religion in Japan* 1, no. 3 (2012): 7.
[39] Ibid, 8.

than its predecessor. Having that said, the Meiji government also made huge efforts in making sure that State Shinto was not officially deemed a "religion" in the same vein as Christianity and Buddhism solely for the purpose of not having to compete with them. With the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution in 1889, Shinto, which was so extremely closely linked to the emperor, became the official moral code of the nation, allowing it to thrive as a de-facto national religion in a country which promised religious freedom.[40]

As the introduction and establishment of State Shinto was seen as a direct attack on Protestant Christianity, the first and second periods were therefore marred with political and philosophical debates between scholars who were pro-State Shinto and adhered to kokutai ideals, and Japanese Protestants who felt torn between their faith and their love for their home country. The greatest example of such debates is the one initiated by the Japanese Protestant leader Uchimura Kanzō (1861 – 1930), who refused to bow down in honour of the emperor's sovereignty in 1891 during a ceremonial recitation of the Imperial Rescript on Education at a high school.[41] He was then forced to bow afterwards by Japanese nationalists who he had upset, and he did do so, only to claim afterwards that he did it since it was a customary bow for Japanese on formal occasions. This enraged nationalist hardliners and Buddhist groups all over the country, leading them to call Christianity a "foreign religion" in a wave of criticism. This was followed by a series of publications in the following years which can be best described as an intellectual battle between Protestantism and Japanese nationalism. Japanese Protestants declared through newspapers such as "We Dare to Declare to the Public Intellectuals" *(Aeteyo no shikishani kokuhaku su)* that they would continue to resist bowing down during imperial rites, inciting their right to religious freedom as written down in the Meiji constitution.[42] This led to much backlash from the nationalist groups, who would continue to portray Christianity as a religion that belongs to foreigners, and not to the Japanese.

Other Japanese Christians, such as Ebina Danjo (1856-1937), aimed to solve this problem by forcibly syncretizing Christianity with Shintoism, a concoction which would ultimately be called "Shintoistic Christianity". Ebina was a Japanese theologian who

[40] Ibid, 14.
[41] Nirei, "*The Ethics of Empire,* " 43.
[42] Ibid, 45.

converted to Christianity at the age of 21 and eventually became a pastor and the president of Doshisha University.[43] Ebina was also known as a fervent Japanese nationalist, and he ended up preaching a form of Christianity which included his own Christian beliefs as well as his devotion to the imperial family.[44] As the nationalistic sentiment pervading throughout Japan grew in intensity in the 1880s, Ebina saw more and more Western missionaries reject Japanese nationalism, which in his eyes was seen as rejecting Japanese culture, so he strived to create an independent Japanese church with no influence from these Western missionaries.[45] His Shintoistic Christianity saw God as the one-and-only supreme deity in Heaven, but the emperor as a symbolic figure which represented the heart of Japan and had thus every right to be admired by Christians as the sovereign leader of their nation.[46] He also rejected Jesus as God himself, but viewed him as an intermediary between God and human beings, which naturally caused strife between him and the Western missionaries. As we can see from the examples given by Uchimura Kanzō and Ebina Danjo, virtually all Japanese Protestants were given 2 choices as a result of the state's propagandizing of State Shinto: either reject Protestantism in its pure form to some extent, or reject the emperor. Some chose the former, which we will see in more detail later in this thesis. But before we do that, let us first look at the two legal documents that ended up boosting State Shinto greatly and led to many hardships for Western missionaries in Meiji Japan: the Imperial Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education.

Imperial Constitution & Imperial Rescript on Education

One of the most impactful and widely discussed documents that stem from the Meiji era is the Imperial Constitution that was promulgated in 1889. The Imperial Constitution was the first constitution created by the Japanese government that was based on the Western model, and it is said that they chose to do so in order to gain legitimacy in the

[43] Shuma Iwai, "Japanese Christianity in the Meiji Era: An Analysis of Ebina Danjo's Perspective on Shintoistic Christianity," *Transformation (Exeter)* 25, no. 4 (2008): 196.
[44] Ibid, 198.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid, 199.

international political sphere.[47] The Meiji government chose to emulate mainly the Prussian model for their constitution as they saw it as the most authoritative.[48] The need for an authoritative constitution was high during the early Meiji period, especially in the 1880s, as the emperor and his Imperial family faced criticism from nationalists who opted for a more liberal government, especially from populist groups such as the Popular Rights Movement (which even offered up its own constitutions guaranteeing protection for civil rights and freedom of religion).[49] So, a constitution was finally provided to the people in February of 1889 which not only gave the full legal authority to the emperor but also the infamous clause 28, which promised his people freedom of religion, a constitutional right which was consistently asked for by both Western advisors who were hired by the Meiji government as well as the aforementioned liberal nationalist groups.

Interestingly, this was not always the case, as earlier drafts of the constitution included clauses that outright prohibited Christianity, such as the draft written in 1973.[50] However, in that same year, not long after the draft was written, the ban on Christianity in Japan was uplifted, and the authors of the constitution then wrote a new draft that would promise its citizens religious freedom in compliance with this new change in the law.[51] This was followed by many more revisions in the following 16 years, most of which contained the same basic principle of religious freedom but slightly differed on precisely how much of this religious freedom the citizens got to enjoy.[52] Eventually, the authors of the constitution and the Meiji government settled on a constitution that promised religious freedom to its subjects as long as it fell "within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects".[53] Yijiang Zhong even argues that it was precisely because the Meiji government included a clause which separated religion from the state and promised religious freedom, that they were able to construct a state which could create

[47] Yoshiya Abe, "Religious Freedom under the Meiji Constitution," *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 9, no. 4 (1968): 57 – 97.
[48] Fumiko Fukase-Indergaard and Michael Indergaard, "Religious Nationalism and the Making of the Modern Japanese State," *Theory and Society* 37, no. 4 (2008): 364.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Abe, "Religious Freedom under the Meiji Constitution," 61.
[51] Ibid, 62.
[52] Ibid, 64.
[53] Yijiang Zhong, "Freedom, Religion and the Making of the Modern State in Japan, 1868-89," *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (2014): 54.

loyal subject-citizens and get more people to follow the emperor and adhere to State Shinto.[54]

As the Imperial Constitution had officially laid the groundwork for a state in which the emperor's authority was unrivalled by naming his as the highest authority and religious freedom was vaguely conditional and could thus be regulated, another imperial announcement was made in the following year which had a direct impact on the lives of both Western and Japanese Protestants in Japan. The Imperial Rescript on Education was promulgated in the year 1890, and it was sent to schools all over Japan together with a picture of the emperor which were to be hung up in all classrooms, serving as a sort of symbolic substitute for the emperor which students and teachers were to worship.[55] While the Imperial Constitution was very effective in its job of legally sealing the emperor's authoritative status as well as provide legal space for State Shinto to thrive, it lacked one thing: an official proclamation on the role of traditional values and customs in Japanese society.[56] In the years leading up to the promulgation of the document, the phrase "Japanese spirit, Western technology became very popular among Japanese intellectuals and government officials, since there were worries that Japan would become too Westernized in its modernization.[57] To counter that development, the writer of the Imperial Rescript, Inoue Kowashi (1844 – 1895), who also had a hand in writing the Imperial Constitution, aimed at writing an Imperial Rescript on Education would include traditional Confucian morals but yet gave way to the embracing of Western technology.[58] His rival and colleague, Motoda Nagazane (1818 – 1891) had also written a draft, but as he was a conservative and his version of the Rescript was overpoweringly Confucian and ignored Western sciences, his draft was ultimately denied in favor of Inoue's.[59]

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[54] Ibid, 72.
[55] Emily Anderson, "Christianity in the Japanese Empire: Nationalism, Conscience, and Faith in Meiji and Taisho Japan" (PhD. diss, University of California, 2010), 43.
[56] Benjamin Duke, "The Imperial Rescript on Education: Western Science and Eastern Morality for the Twentieth Century, 1890," In *The History of Modern Japanese Education*, 348-70. (Ithaca, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 348.
[57] Ibid, 358.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid, 361.

The Rescript on Education brought about major changes to the curriculum and textbooks of educational institutions all over Japan.[60] Students were to follow its orders on the nature of relationships, particularly the one between sovereign and subject, with the goal of increasing their obedience to the state and the emperor.[61] In this excerpt from the document we can see how it defines the ideal relationships that are needed to be maintained in order to preserve and defend the nation:

> Imperial Rescript on Education
> Know ye, Our subjects:
> Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and had deeply and firmly implanted virtue. Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein lies the source of Our education.
> Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation, extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance the public good and promote common interests; always respect the constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.
> The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may all attain the same virtue.
> October 30, 1890.[62]

[60] Yoshimitsu Khan, “The History and Influence of the Imperial Rescript on Education on Moral Education in Contemporary Japan” (PhD. diss, The Pennsylvania State University, 1994), 105.
[61] Anderson, “Christianity in the Japanese Empire,” 43.
[62] Duke, "The Imperial Rescript on Education," 348.

As we can see from this excerpt, it is clear that the state expected Japanese students to obey the emperor and the state, and this led to there being a focus placed on Christian educational institutions who more often than not taught their students about God's sovereignty, and not the state's. We have already seen one example in the case of Uchimura Kanzō in a previous part of this thesis, who refused to bow in front of the Imperial Rescript on Education, but that was only the first in a series of philosophical and political conflicts the Rescript unleashed between hardliner nationalists, fundamentalist Protestants and Japanese Protestants who chose a middle way. Inoue Tetsujiro, who was professor of Philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University, claimed that Christianity was incompatible with the Imperial Rescript on Education after he was tasked by the Ministry of Education with giving further and more detailed explanations on the nature of relationships as written about in the Rescript.[63] His radically nationalistic interpretation of the Rescript was known as the *Chokugo engi*, and he often referred to it to justify his anti-Christian statements.[64]

Afterwards, Inoue also released several publications which directly attacked Christianity, and he then became the most outspoken critic of Japanese converts to Christianity. He argued that Christianity was not fit for Japanese society as it had no mention of the nation, nor did he feel that Jesus stressed the importance of filial piety.[65] He even compiled a list of "incidents" in which Christian Japanese students and/or teachers disobeyed the state, such as an incident in Kyoto in 1889 when teachers did not display a worshipful attitude during a Shinto ceremony at school, and another incident in 1892 in Kumamoto when students disobeyed their teacher and started evangelizing fellow students.[66] Inoue also claimed that Christian students were impossible to turn into good subjects, as they were raised from birth by Western missionaries to believe in a God which transcended the emperor, and were also educated deeply on Christian matters but simultaneously lacked knowledge of Japanese learnings.[67] His radical and extremely anti-Christian statements, which the Meiji government gave ear to, caused problems for Christian schools and teachers, since now the government started placing regulations on them in the hope of stopping the spread of Christian ideology. As we will see in the next part

[63] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 38.
[64] Khan, "The History and Influence of the Imperial Rescript," 106.
[65] Anderson, "Christianity in the Japanese Empire," 47.
[66] Ibid, 54.
[67] Ibid.

of this thesis, the overall anti-Christian sentiment that was caused by the promulgation of both the Imperial Constitution and the Rescript on Education caused many problems in the personal lives of Western missionaries residing in Japan during this tumultuous period.

Western Protestant Missionaries' Struggles Caused by an Increase in Nationalistic Sentiment

The one group that felt the biggest impact of the Meiji government's pro-State Shinto policies and the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution and the Rescript on Education were undoubtedly the ones that brought Christianity to Japan in the first place: the Western missionaries. With the introduction of the Rescript, the government and local officials received moral justification to suppress Christianity.[68] To illustrate this, I am going to refer to the experiences of Belle Marsh Poate and Thomas Pratt Poate, an American Protestant missionary couple who evangelized in Japan from the years 1876 to 1892. Their case is a perfect example of Protestant missionaries who felt the effects of the Meiji government's push for State Shinto to be the de-facto national religion as well its attacks on Christianity and foreign influences since they were in Japan right during the period when these major developments happened. The year of 1889 was the high period of evangelism in Japan, with the influx of missionaries to Japan as well as new Japanese converts being at an all-time high.[69] There were roughly 61,000 Japanese Christians belonging to the three major denominations (Roman Catholic, Protestant & Orthodox) at the time, with the Protestants considering themselves dominant as the other denominations counted also "half-converts" or converts who were not formally added to the church as members.[70] Having that said, the missionaries were very well aware of the fact that Christianity was still a minority religion in the country, making up just over one-fourth of one percent of the country's population of 40,000,000.[71] But since the period of 1888 – 1889 saw an intense growth of Christianity all over the country as well as an increase of missionaries active in the

[68] Khan, "The History and Influence of the Imperial Rescript," 101.
[69] Poate, Poate and Stebbins, "*The Japan Experience,*" 188.
[70] Ibid, 189.
[71] Ibid.

field, optimism among all Protestant denominations was high. Mark Mullins describes this optimism as well in his book *The Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, wherein he says that the late 1880s saw a huge slump in growth as a result of Japanese church leaders breaking away from the grip of Western missionaries in an effort to become more independent and thus gain power, as well as an overall worsening of Christianity's image in a time of growing nationalism.[72]

Thomas and Belle Poate were members of the Baptist denomination, and this group focused more on the evangelizing of people from lower social classes; their denomination even translated the New Testament into "simple" Japanese using pure *Kana* so the uneducated could read it as well.[73] They resided in Japan from the years of 1876 – 1892, after which they moved back to New York as Belle's health was severely deteriorating. we begin this case study with an overview of Belle Poate's experience in her years evangelizing in Japan. It must be mentioned that as the caretaker of the house, Belle spent a considerable amount of time at home taking care of the children while Thomas was out in the Northern Field gaining converts. Furthermore, her letters are written between the years of 1876 – 1879, during a time when the missionaries still noticed a relative optimism among the locals, whereas Thomas' letters were written during the years of 1880 – 1892, and vividly describe the turnaround in attitudes of the locals as the result of the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution and the Rescript on Education. Furthermore, Belle's letters are more personal and deal with everyday life in Japan, whereas Thomas' letters deal more with the mission itself, therefore this case study mostly focuses on Thomas' letters instead of Belle's. Having that said, a couple of Belle's letters are interesting to some degree since they show the initial optimism towards the mission present amongst both the locals and the missionaries during the late 1870s. The majority of her letters are written during her time working at an all-girls school in Yokohama founded by the legendary American missionary James Curtis Hepburn.[74] This school was known as the Hepburn school, and it would eventually become the Meiji Gakuin University, the university that will be at the center of the second case study for this thesis.[75] In this excerpt from a letter written by Belle on April

[72] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 47.
[73] Poate, Poate and Stebbins, *"The Japan Experience,"* 189.
[74] Ibid, 21.
[75] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 9.

2nd, 1878 to Mr. and Mrs. John Alfred Means, senior members of the Means family who were close friends with Belle, she speaks of her time teaching at this school:

> "I received the package from Mr. Findlay and the two new singing books, for which I am very thankful. I am teaching the children some songs from them for the last day [of school], and dear old Dr. Hepburn and I have had a good time singing. The same mail brought me a package of picture books for my children and a roll of basted work from the Ashtabula. The latter was most acceptable. Do you remember in my last letter I asked your prayers especially for my Hana? Well, she was sent to the Government school in Tokio soon after, and my faith almost failed, but she came back this morning. How I hope that the dear Lord will make her His own, before she is taken again. My school increases slowly but surely. And as each new girl comes, I feel that I cannot be satisfied till I see her brought into the fold of Christ. I am daily growing more attached to my work. It has many trials and discouragements, it is true, but I am trying to learn to cast all the care on Him who so tenderly careth for us."[76]

We can know from this letter that enrollment in the Hepburn School was growing strong and steadily during the year of 1876 - because Belle directly mentions it. Furthermore, we can also infer this to be the case as this same school later transformed into the Meiji Gakuin University during the 1880s, having thus evolved from a simple educational institution into a full-blown university. Nearly all of Belle's other letters are similar in nature, either speaking of simple culture shocks experienced by the author while travelling about the country or working with Japanese colleagues, or of her daily life at work and how the Japanese locals seem to be absorbing Christian doctrine and traditions, therefore it will not be necessary to discuss them in much further detail, but focus more on her husbands' writings instead. In a series of letters written by Thomas Poate, we can see how he too shared in the aforementioned optimism present among Protestant missionaries in the closing years of the 1880s. Thomas started his mission in in the late 1870s, in an area the missionaries would call the "Northern Field", stretching all the way from Sendai, right above Tokyo, up until Aomori.[77] In his first letter written to the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU), the board of missionaries to which he was aligned, we see him speak of an eagerness present

[76] Poate, Poate and Stebbins, *"*The *Japan Experience,"* 45.
[77] Ibid, 83.

among young Japanese individuals who were willing to get baptized and convert to Christianity:

> "Chogo is about thirteen miles from Yokogama. The work here was started by one of Miss Sand's Bible-women. There are three candidates for baptism, and a spirit for earnest inquiry is shown by several others. One of the candidates is the village magistrate. I spent two days with them in November, and was greatly delighted. I promised to spend a week with them this month, but I shall be obliged to give it up in consequence of a more urgent call; but I hope that my wife and Miss Sands will pay them a visit..."[78]

This letter was written on January 3rd, 1880, at the very beginning of Thomas's apostolate, and we can see here that he writes very positively of the developments in the town where he was busy evangelizing, Chogo, since he speaks proudly of several individuals who have come to faith. His positive outlook on the mission becomes even more obvious in the rest of the letter, as he speaks of dozens more individuals who have fully embraced Protestantism:

> "Some six or seven months ago, a man came to Yokohama from Morioka, met with one of our members, and came with him to our services. He had already embraced Christianity, and was a member of the Greek [i.e., Russian Orthodox Church]. When he went back home, he took with him a supply of the Scriptures, and read them with his friends: he found in them a great many things which he did not expect to find, and in company with several others separated from the Greek Church, and sought admission to ours. Dr. Brown sent him another and larger supply of the Scriptures, but did not think it well to take any further action in the matter till he saw how things went on. Three of them, much bellowed by the people, have gone on by themselves holding meetings, and now they write that forty persons desire to enter the church; some of them, how many I do not know, have seceded from the Greek Church. They have written repeatedly to ask that a foreign teacher might be sent to them to baptize converts, form a church, and instruct them more perfectly. The work has grown much; for a month ago they reported but thirty, now they tell us of forty, candidates.

His optimism for the mission is clear in this letter, and this is something inherent to Thomas' character, as most of his letters contain a sense of enthusiasm and rejoice about every single Japanese convert to the faith, even if in later years the number of converts altogether

[78] Ibid, 82.

were to drastically decrease. In this letter written by Thomas on November 22, 1887, roughly 7 years after the previous one, to the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU), he speaks very highly of the attitudes of the Japanese people in the Tōhoku region of Northern Japan, mainly in the cities of Sendai, Morioka and Hachinohei:

> Sendai has now become a great rallying point for all the missions, and brother Jones ought to be re-enforced. The field is so inviting, that for a time it seemed almost advisable to remain there, and labor with him; but we decided that Morioka and Hachinohei needed me still more, so we came on to this city. We have met with the greatest kindness, and that from a class with which I have had very little to do, - the officials. Some of my old pupils are teaching here; and they, too, have called on us. I hear good accounts of the Hachinohei believers, and hope to visit them soon. I am amazed at the change which has taken place in the attitude of the people toward Christianity.[79]

In 1883, a prayer meeting was held in Yokohama in 1883 which involved all of the Protestant denominations present in Japan at the time and was mostly responsible for the stark increase in interest in Protestant Christianity as it was attended by many Japanese locals.[80] In this letter we can see how widespread the effects of this prayer meeting was, as only a few years after it was held people from all over the Northern Region were flocking to the Protestant churches. This optimism was however quickly destroyed by a rising wave of anti-foreign and anti-Christian attitudes found all over Japan as a result of the Meiji Government's pro-State Shinto policies. In another one of Thomas' reports to the AMBU written in 1890, almost 3 years after he wrote the previous letter, he speaks of a full turnaround in Japanese attitudes that were present in Morioka, the capital city of Moriake Prefecture where he spent most of his time evangelizing:

> "The year just ended began with the fairest prospects. The Constitution gave Christianity a legal standing, and the new treaty negotiated with the United States, by which the country was to be thrown open to travel and residence, promised the utmost facilities for work and richer harvests than we had ever yet reaped. God's ways, however, are not our ways; and thus the year which opened so hopefully closed in storm and trouble. The anti-foreign spirit, never entirely gone, has once more come forth in great strength; the cry is, "Japan for the Japanese! Away with foreigners!" In many largely read journals we are described as bears,

[79] Ibid, 188.
[80] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 46.

> wolves, tigers, only intent on selfish ends, scheming up to buy the land and oppress the simple-hearted native; but it is only fair to state that a section of the press takes a different view. If we are to believe some of our native brethren, as voiced by the leading Christian paper of Tokyo, the time has passed when foreigners can profitably engage in evangelistic work; for though at one time the presence of a foreigner drew crowds of sympathetic hearers, now it awakens hostility."[81]

What is interesting about this letter is Thomas' clear enthusiasm about the fact that the Meiji Constitution promised religious freedom, but yet it shows his awareness of the strong increase of anti-foreign sentiment that came along with it, with him sounding somewhat surprised by this turn of events. This letter is a clear example of the fact that even though the Meiji Constitution gave Christianity legal standing, it ended up only making missionaries' work even harder as State Shinto was being promoted by the government and anti-Christian sentiment simultaneously increased. He mentions how "the time has passed when foreigners can profitably engage in evangelistic work", noting how he feels as if there is no more point in evangelizing in Morioka anymore as the atmosphere has become too hostile to actually gain converts. Thomas ends his series of letters with one written from Morioka in 1891, shortly before he had been transferred to Tokyo by the ABMU to help translate the New Testament into Japanese. Considering the uncanny timing of this transferal by the ABMU, we can infer that he was asked to do so not only because of his exceptional linguistic skills, but also because the mission in Morioka was growing increasingly slower as a result of the anti-Christian sentiment and it was thus seen as a waste of time by the ABMU for his talents to be wasted there. In this final letter written by him that sort of sums up his experience in the past couple of years, we can clearly read how he tries to stay optimistic about his experiences there, even though it was clearly marred by a lack of willingness to convert by the Japanese towards the end:

> "Yesterday I had the joy of baptizing a young woman who had been interested for some time. Others appear not far from the kingdom of God, but are not yet ready to confess Christ before men. The work in the jail is encouraging. Released prisoners come to the various workers every now and then to express their gratitude for the message delivered. The Sunday schools, though they have diminished during the hot weather, are in good condition.

[81] Poate, Poate and Stebbins, *"The Japan Experience,"* 212.

> The four years during which we have labored in this city have not been stirring ones. No great ingathering has marked them. Only thirty have been baptized; and owing to deaths, removals and exclusions, the church to-day is not much stronger numerically than it was at first; but it nevertheless stands, thank God, in a far better position than before. We have a commodious chapel, a band of earnest, loving-hearted women who labor in the gospel, and a few brethren who shine as lights. The growth in grace is specially marked. Women who, a year ago, dared neither speak nor pray in the sisters' meetings, now do both with freedom. The hour which was once so difficult to fill is now sometimes all too short. On a recent occasion no less than twelve took part."[82]

Once again, we see Thomas' unwavering and optimistic character shine through his writing as he tries to look at the positive aspects of his four-year mission in Morioka, even though he does reluctantly admit that the results have been quite disappointing, - only 30 converted members remain -, and with the increase of nationalistic sentiment around town, the prospects of growth were very weak. Eventually, the Poate's returned back to Tokyo after Thomas had been called back from his mission by the ABMU, and as Mrs. Poate health slowly deteriorated, they were forced to return to the U.S. not shortly afterwards.[83] It is unknown from what disease Belle Poate died, but what is clear that she passed away in 1896 after an operation performed on her by a local doctor in the small town of Sherman, Western New York State.[84] Thomas died in 1924 in Rushford, New York, where he had served as a Baptist preacher for the years after Belle's death.[85] In Belle and Thomas we find a perfect analogy for the overall progress of the Protestant Mission during the Meiji era: a strong start followed by an immediate increase in hostility towards Christianity during the early 1890s. Their withdrawal from Morioka and their subsequent total withdrawal from the overseas mission in Japan serve as proof of the hardships and turmoil described by Thomas in his final letters to the ABMU. Unsurprisingly, we can see how Thomas' letters were quite optimistic right before the promulgation of the Constitution and the Rescript, whereas from the year 1890 the overall mood expressed in his letters drastically changed as he was faced with increasing hostility from the locals. In the next part of this thesis we will look at a group

[82] Ibid, 224.
[83] Ibid, 232.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid, 235.

of Western missionaries who created one of Japan's oldest and most well-known universities, the Meiji Gakuin, and how the sudden increase of nationalistic and anti-foreign sentiment within the country caused major conflicts between them and their Japanese Christian colleagues.

Western Missionaries' Conflicts with Japanese Protestants

With the promulgation of both the Imperial Constitution and the rescript, Japanese Protestants were left in a very peculiar and vexing situation. As the government had made it clear to them that they should obey the emperor alone, many Japanese Protestants naturally felt the need to do so out of love for their home country, but yet their new-found faith in Christ also told them to worship nobody but the Lord, which led to several of them trying to reconcile their faith with their nationalistic sentiment, such as the aforementioned Ebina Danjo who created the syncretic religion "Shintoistic Christianity". Others, plainly went into an all-out intellectual and spiritual war with their nationalistic Japanese counterparts, such as the aforementioned Uchimura Kanzō who initiated the decade-long debate on whether Christianity is a good fit for Japanese society or not through his rebellious antics. However, there was also a large group of Japanese Protestants who, in their eyes, found a rather simple yet radical solution for the predicament that they found themselves in: break ties with the Western missionaries who brought Christianity to them in order to create an independent Japanese church that could simultaneously serve as the beacon of Christianity as well as a one of Japanese nationalism in their homeland. Mark Mullins mentions one of the greatest conflicts between Western missionaries and Japanese Protestants in his book *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, where he describes how the American Board (who were the authoritative Western missionary board based in Kobe) and the Nihon Kumiai Kyōkai (the Japan Congregational Church) fought head-to-head over who should be in charge of Doshisha University all throughout the 1890s, as the Nihon Kumiai Kyōkai felt that that the Western missionaries were behind on the times and often did not have the Japanese' best interests at heart.[86] This conflict between the two biggest Christian

[86] Mullins, Handbook of Christianity in Japan, 45.

groups in Japan thus formed part of the larger conflict which dealt with the question of whether Western missionaries or Japanese Protestant leaders should be in charge of all of the evangelization activities on Japanese soil, including things such as the establishment, and especially the running of, educational institutions.[87] Unsurprisingly, these conflicts also began right after the promulgations of the Constitution and the Rescript in 1889 and 1890, which as previously mentioned directly tied-in to the increase in nationalistic and anti-foreign sentiment within the country and led not only to many locals turning away from the Protestant religion, but also to many Japanese Protestants to turn their backs on their Western colleagues, and vice-versa.

Perhaps the most famous of these conflicts is the one surrounding the *Meiji Gakuin*, a university that started out as a private boys & girls' school founded in Yokohama in 1963 by dr. James Curtis Hepburn (1815 – 1911) and his wife, Clara.[88] James and Clara were members of the "New England Puritan" wave of missionaries that promoted very strict and rigid lifestyles, including practices such as the abstinence from alcohol and tobacco entirely.[89] James C. Hepburn is also known for being one of the first six Protestant missionaries to arrive in Japan in 1859, and also for spearheading the gargantuan project of translating the Bible into Japanese, which ended up becoming the Committee New Testament which was published in 1880 and was one of his greatest achievements.[90] The school the Hepburns had founded was at first simply called Hepburn's school, but after some temporary closings and renovations the school eventually reopened as the Tokyo Union English-Japanese school in 1883.[91] The Tokyo Union English-Japanese school was eventually to be merged with the Union Theological School which was initially run and founded by Samuel R. Brown of the Dutch Reformed Mission.[92] Samuel was also a part of the New England Puritans, and was very well acquainted with the Hepburns.[93] James C. Hepburn and Samuel would become the leaders of the Meiji Gakuin after its merger, so a large portion of the primary sources discussed in this thesis are written by them, but there

[87] Ibid.
[88] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 9.
[89] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 43.
[90] Hamish Ion, "James Curtis Hepburn and the Translation of the New Testament into Japanese," *Social Sciences and Missions* 27, no. 1 (2014): 57.
[91] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 9.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 43.

are also many other letters written by their colleague educators and missionaries whom they closely worked with at the university and were under their supervision. Such as this one by J.B. Porter, a member of James C. Hepburn's clique of missionaries who led the Meiji Gakuin, written by him in 1886 describing his perception of the Japanese' attitude towards Christianity:

> We are welcome wherever we go. The best classes of people are seeking Christianity. The Government is most favorable. There is every prospect that the treaties will soon be revised and the country thrown open. Our schools are crowded and students must be turned off. There is not a thing to stand in the way of the Gospel, but everything to urge it forward.[94]

The reason this particular passage of the letter written by Porter is so noticeable is because most of the earlier letters written by the Presbyterian missionaries attempting to found the Meiji Gakuin University were rather negative and fearful concerning the reception of Christianity by the Japanese. So did James C. Hepburn write in 1877 that the union of churches "is in the interest of Presbyterianism in Japan [and] the rescue of the so-called union native churches form disorder, disintegration and heresy." The explanation for Hepburn's rather negative perception of the state of the church at the time can be explained by his experience of the Christian church's growth in Japan, which was perhaps more dynamic than that of his colleagues who arrived during the early-to-mid 1880s. As one of the first Protestants missionaries to arrive in 1859, he experienced the complete ban on Christianity, with him and his colleagues not being able to evangelize openly on Japanese soil, and also not being allowed to travel any further beyond the foreign concession areas, namely Yokohama, where the Hepburn school and the Union Theological School were also founded.[95] However, as the Japanese were aiming to get a reconsideration of the unequal treaties signed between them and the U.S., the Meiji government urged people to adopt Western ways and lifestyles. This eventually led to the ban on Christianity being lifted in 1873, with many young Japanese converts heading out of the foreign concession areas into mainland Japan in order to evangelize there.[96] This led to Protestant Christianity to spread outside of the foreign concession areas quite steadily during the years that followed, and optimism for Protestantism was particularly high during the mid-1880s after a prayer

[94] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 16.
[95] Ibid, 12.
[96] Mullins, *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, 46.

meeting was held in Yokohama in 1883 which involved all of the Protestant denominations present in Japan at the time.[97]

This compelled James C. Hepburn to state in 1885, only a few years after his previous negative remarks on the state of the church, to make the following statement in which we can see how his opinions have starkly changed since then: "I have been a long time in this country and ought to know something about it, but it seems to me the longer I have Lived here the less I know about it and the less inclined to advance my opinions concerning it.''[98] Here he's alluding to the fact that he previously spoke too soon, as the positive change in attitude of the Japanese populace surprised him greatly. As the Western missionaries had a newfound confidence in both the Japanese people and the Meiji government, they decided to move the schools founded by the Hepburns and Samuel L. Brown out of Yokohama into Tokyo and merge them into the Meiji Gakuin in 1886.[99] George Knox, who became the first chairman of the board of directors of the university listed 3 reasons for their decision to relocate the schools to Tokyo in a letter to the Presbyterian board:

> The reasons may be briefly stated as (1) the success attending the moving of the preparatory school into the city, (2) the unanimous opinion and advice of the Japanese, (3) the urgent need of more land than can be procured in Tsukiji that sufficient room may be had for a well-equipped college.[100]

The first and third reasons are simply practical and do not require much explanation. The preceding experiment concerning the moving of the preparatory schools into Tokyo were quite successful with a high level of enrollment. Furthermore, since more land could be acquired in Tokyo, this would be befitting for their plans of creating a university with several departments. The most interesting reason given by Brown here is the second one, namely the fact that the Western missionaries actually listened to the Japanese members and advisors of their church in this grand decision. As we have seen previously through James C. Hepburn's comments on the Japanese members of the church, the overall opinion of the Japanese churches was not all too high, with him claiming that they were "disorganized and

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 16.
[99] Ibid, 22.
[100] Ibid.

heretic", whereas now the situation has changed so much up to the point that they are actively making decisions with them on very serious matters concerning the mission.

With the opinion of Japanese Protestants now having changed for the better, the founders of the Meiji Gakuin decided that the university would be controlled by a board of directors consisting of seven Westerners and seven Japanese, in order to make sure the Japanese members of the church would feel heard as well.[101] With the announcement of the members of the board, the equal status of the Japanese became institutionalized. The only question that remained now was how much power the Japanese would have over the university. In the beginning of the 1880s, with public attitudes towards Christianity having changed for the better, Western missionaries were comfortable with the idea of giving more power and rights to the Japanese members of the board while maintaining the status quo, as can be seen in this mission report written by George Knox in 1891:

> We are trying to take the middle path and deal honestly as partners. That means we submit sometimes to decisions that do not commend themselves to foreign judgment, we do our fair part in giving way; and it equally means that we shall be accorded fair weight, and shall ever be permitted to join with Japanese in forming the policy and in making decisions.[102]

To the Western members of the board, balance was key. Unfortunately for them, this balance quickly disappeared as in less than a year after Knox's letter this resolution was written by the board of directors of the Meiji Gakuin:

> Gradually however natural causes increased the Japanese influence. Now something more than half of the instruction in the Theological Department is given by Japanese professors, and foreign professors are yet in the majority in the Academic Department chiefly because competent Japanese have not been available. The President too at present is a Japanese. This process it is agreed will continue and the foreign force will be still further reduced.[103]

In this excerpt from the resolution, we can sense worry and fear as the Western missionaries are truly unhappy with the amount of power and authority the Japanese are receiving at the University. In future letters written by other lesser-known members of the board, the negative sentiment towards this development only increases in intensity. For

[101] Ibid, 23.
[102] Ibid, 29.
[103] Ibid, 30.

example, Carrie Alexander, who was herself a Protestant missionary and school teacher as well as the wife of Theodore McNair, a professor at Meiji Gakuin, was just as her husband strongly opposed to the sharing of power with the Japanese members of the board:

> I presume you are aware that: the great question of our day for all missions in Japan is whether we missionaries or the Japanese are to be considered the better judges as to how our time and strength and the money entrusted to us shall be spent in the prosecution of missionary work. Few if any of us believe that we can, without risk, yield to the demands the Japanese are disposed to make.[104]

Her husband, McNair, was even more opposed to the idea of sharing power with the Japanese. He genuinely believed that there were certain "racial" characteristics of the Japanese that caused them to be less effective at their evangelizing mission, coupled with the fact that virtually all Protestant Japanese at the time were first-generation Protestants, whereas Protestantism was already ingrained in Western culture for quite some time, leading McNair and his Western colleagues to be deemed more "mature" Christians:

> Please do not think from what I am laying that I have no respect for the Japanese pastors and others who are influential in the church. They have much to render them attractive, and they are questionably doing good, but they do possess human nature like the rest of us, only theirs is modified by less than a single generation of contact with Christian influences.[105]

In an interesting turn of events, McNair ended up resigning from his position as professor at the Meiji Gakuin after a new rule was put in place by the Japanese President of the school at the time that allowed the foreign supervisors working at the school to be individually supervised.[106] Apparently, the institution of that rule was the last straw to McNair, and this was really the first big upset experienced by the staff of the Meiji Gakuin as a result of the increasingly deteriorating relationship between the Western and Japanese members.

Whereas McNair's resignation was definitely a big nuisance to the Western missionaries, an even more trifling event happened right after his resignation, in the form of a Japanese member of the board who decided to go rogue and directly attack the Meiji Gakuin. His name was Tamura Naoomi, a Japanese member of the board of directors who was

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[104] Ibid, 36.
[105] Ibid, 38.
[106] Ibid, 39.

simultaneously the director of two institutes that were subsidiaries of the Meiji Gakuin; the "Industrial Home" and the "Tokyo School for Evangelists", institutions built for the support of poor Protestant Japanese students as well as provide training for these students to become adequate evangelists.[107] Surprisingly, Tamura suddenly resigned from his position as director of Tokyo School for Evangelists and started writing a book called "The Japanese Bride".[108] While writing his theological book, he also moved to the US in an effort to raise funds for the establishment of his own theological school, a move that was seen by the Western missionaries of the Meiji Gakuin as a highly rebellious one.[109] By this point in time, the only foreigner that was left at the committee for the Tokyo School of Evangelists was Knox, and he was accompanied by several other Japanese members who all opposed to Tamura's plans for a separate theological school run solely by him.[110] The reason that the foreign members of the board opposed Tamura's plans were obvious, but perhaps the same cannot be said for the Japanese members, since they too were eager to have independence from the Western missionaries. However, we can find the answer in an excerpt from a letter written by an unknown missionary associated with the Meiji Gakuin:

> We are in the midst of stirring times here in Japan. Mr. Tamura has set the empire on fire with his 'Japanese Bride' if not the whole empire, at least the Church of Christ in Japan was set on fire by Japanese Bride. The book Tamura had published in New York criticized Japanese marriage practices and the family system in Japan. The first Presbytery of the Church of Christ in Japan investigated the publication of the book and asked Tamura to revise it. Tamura refused and appealed to the Synod. The Synod ruled against Tamura, and divested him of his status as a member of the clergy. Missionaries were sympathetic to Tamura, but many Japanese Christians regarded him as a traitor.[111]

It seems that Tamura was not only set on gaining independence from the Western missionaries, he also wanted to completely reshape the Japanese church from within as he felt that there were major problems with many of the practices of Japanese Protestants. This led him to become immensely unpopular with both foreign and Japanese Protestants,

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[107] Ibid, 41.
[108] Emily Anderson, "Tamura Naoomi's "The Japanese Bride": Christianity, Nationalism, and Family in Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (2007): 204.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Henderson, "Meiji Gakuin, 1877-1900," 42.
[111] Ibid, 44.

ultimately leading to him being banned from the Church of Christ upon his return to Japan.[112] Tamura's case is a rather extreme example but it clearly shows how the increased nationalistic sentiment that was present in the 1890s affected the Western missionaries in many different ways, not only between them and the locals, but also between them and their Japanese colleagues. Whereas McNair's resignation as a reaction to the takeover of power by the Japanese members of the board and the preceding dispute between them clearly shows the discomfort the Western missionaries felt because of the increasing authority of the Japanese Protestants, Tamura's sudden withdrawal from the Meiji Gakuin's board and his radical attacks on the Meiji Gakuin show just how far some individuals were willing to go in order to completely distinguish themselves from the people who brought Protestant Christianity to Japan in the first place.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis we have seen how the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education had several significant effects on society and thus on the Protestant missionaries' experiences. First of all, the Meiji Constitution led to there being a stark legal difference between State Shinto and Christianity; whereas the former was deemed a mere "set of ethics and morals" and was thus allowed to prosper, the latter was legally classified as a "religion" and could thus from that point in time on be strictly regulated by the Meiji government. This way of categorizing the countries' multiple religions was further cemented within the Imperial Rescript on Education in which State Shinto and the nationalistic ideal of the "kokutai" vaguely became the nation's official moral guidelines, with schoolchildren nationwide having to participate in Shinto rituals and show reverence for the emperor, who now attained somewhat of a deity-like status himself, with him symbolizing the unity and the spirit of the Japanese people in one body to which all Japanese were to bow down. This proved quite impactful, as the promulgation of these documents was immediately followed by a stark increase in anti-foreign, and especially anti-Christian sentiment, of which the Western missionaries evangelizing in the country during

[112] Ibid.

the 1890s could feel the direct negative effects of this in the form of conflicts that arose between both them and the Japanese locals as well as them and their Japanese Protestant colleagues.

This thesis attempted to show this by analyzing two case studies in which Western missionaries who were evangelizing during the 1890s in Japan were faced with such conflicts. It first showed how the stark increase in anti-foreign sentiment in the 1980s caused two Baptist missionaries working in the Northern Region to be met with immense amounts of hostility from the locals, even up to the point that they were forced to return to Tokyo, eventually leaving Japan altogether as there was seemingly no hope for their mission left. This thesis then showed how nationalistic sentiment among the Japanese members of the board of the Meiji Gakuin led to them to attempt a complete takeover of power. By the mid-1890s the Meiji Gakuin was now being run by a Japanese president, and the board consisted of mostly Japanese members, something which disgruntled the Western members so much that one of them even resigned in a fit of rage. Things became even more heated when one Japanese teacher at the school let his nationalistic fervor get a hold of him and resigned in order to write a book criticizing the Meiji Gakuin and create a separate theological school with no foreign influences whatsoever. Unfortunately for him, this did not work out well, as his actions were deemed a bit too radical and received little support from his peers. Even though the Poates' experiences in the Northern Region and the experiences of the Western missionaries at the Meiji Gakuin might seem like a world apart, they are connected by one underlying factor: they both involve Western missionaries whose missions were clearly negatively impacted as a result of the increase in nationalistic sentiment that was so prevalent during the entire 1890s. All in all, the negative experiences of the Western missionaries in the Northern Region and in the Meiji Gakuin can all be attributed to the Meiji Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education, since it was only after the effects of their promulgation seeped through society that the missionaries were faced with some of the toughest years of the entire Protestant ministry in Japan. Since this research focused only on the period up until 1900, follow-up research could focus on the period from the year 1900, mainly up until the end of World War II, and it could especially focus on the relationship between Western missionaries and Japanese locals during that time period.

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