Pulpits as Lecterns: Discourses of Social Change within Tokyo’s Protestant Churches, 1890–1917

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Beginning in the 1890s, Protestant churches in Tokyo offered a new kind of social space that encouraged an open, verbal communication of ideas about a modern and improved Japan. Such churches differed dramatically from the majority of Japanese secular and religious gathering spaces that were directly influenced by their strong ties to state authority. At church, pastors and respected lay speakers told listeners to individually imagine the nation and their appropriate places within it. Speaking and listening with the men were many educated, socially minded women who had just been barred from various forms of public life. These men and women used the church space to imagine and realize alternative versions of a new Japan. To analyze the discursive distinctiveness of Tokyo’s Protestant churches, this paper examines laymen’s speeches made before the Women’s Group of Tokyo’s most socially active church, Hongo, sermons in Tokyo’s two largest Kumiai (Congregationalist) churches, Hongo and Reinanzaka, and the accounts of attendees influenced by both.

It is not surprising that Imperial University Philosophy Professor Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944) gave a lecture on neo-Confucianism in December of 1891. It is surprising, however, that the staunch anti-Christian literary scholar gave this talk from the pulpit of one of Tokyo’s fastest growing Kumiai (Congregationalist) churches, Hongo Church.¹ The type of event that brought this figure and many like him to speak at Hongo and other relatively large Protestant churches in Tokyo during the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–1926) periods were in fact quite common. Free from the direct state regulatory supervision that constricted the majority of Japanese social and religious spaces, Protestant churches in Tokyo were able to offer an alternative type of gathering space that encouraged the open verbal communication of ideas.

While the newly centralized modern state utilized other gathering spaces to instill approved forms of patriotism and citizenship in the minds of the Japanese, individuals used the Protestant church space to hold their own discussions on the most pressing issues of the day and their personal and collective social responsibilities. Pastors and lay speakers, from professors to scientists to National Diet members to novelists, frequently told large groups of attendees to individually imagine the nation and their appropriate places within it and left indelible marks on listeners. Speaking and listening alongside the men were many educated and socially minded women who, recently barred from

¹Although this Japanese Protestant denomination originated and developed with the support of US Congregationalist missionaries working with the American Board for the Commission of Foreign Missions, its leaders deliberately chose the name ‘kumiai’ or ‘joined together’ rather than the literal translation of congregation ‘kaishū’ and sought to create a truly Japanese form of Protestant Christianity. For Kozaki’s explanation of the denomination’s name, see Barrows, The World’s Parliament, 1012.
various forms of public life, were first finding their activist voices. Together, they came to imagine a Japan that looked considerably different from the Meiji government’s models.

In Meiji and Taishō Japan, Protestant Christians formulated original strands ‘of nationalism . . . [that] differed from prevailing ideas in the country at large’. Several historians have examined Japanese Protestant periodicals, articles by Christians in popular magazines and various local and national newspapers in an effort to better understand the basic elements of Japanese Christians’ public identity. While these scholars have demonstrated the tremendous historical and social significance of Christian periodicals, they have also made it possible and necessary to examine the various types of as yet unexplored verbal communication as well. For presenters and their listeners, the church constituted a gathering space for modernist individuals concerned with reforming a national society of which they were becoming increasingly aware.

Sociologists Sumiya Mikio, Ernest Best, and Kudō Eiichi, historians Irwin Scheiner, Sugii Mutsurō, and Dohi Akio, Takeda Kiyoko and other scholars of Japanese Christianity have identified and examined many of the considerable, bilateral impacts that Japanese Protestant Christians and Japanese society had on one another. Scheiner, Best, Kudō, and Sumiya have all described the impact that Confucian education and samurai backgrounds had on pre-war Japan’s most prominent Protestants. Takeda and Dohi, on the other hand, stand out among the historians who have also emphasized the impacts of these churchgoing men and women upon the shape of various aspects of modern Japan. Due to their discoveries, the names of nationally significant Japanese Protestants and church attendees appear in the works of intellectual and social historians of Japan. Building on this considerable body of scholarship, this paper analyzes the social interactions occurring between church attendees and the importance of the church as their gathering space.

Anthropologists from Emile Durkheim to Clifford Geertz have effectively destroyed the theoretical walls separating religion from society. Their insights, however, have seldom been brought to bear on the physical walls separating religious space from social space. This study of Protestant churches in Tokyo demonstrates that religious space can at times also fulfill a social purpose, and the Kumiai churches that attracted the largest segment of the educated elite in Tokyo provide an excellent case in point. By December of 1900 in Tokyo, there were some 1600 Kumiai church members, in addition to the unquantifiable passers-through, and that number had risen to 4375 by 1926. Although the Kumiai Church was only slightly larger than the other two major Protestant denominations in Japan before 1941, the Presbyterian-Dutch Reformed and Methodist, the group’s presence in Tokyo was unmatched. This study, therefore, examines laymen’s speeches given before the Women’s Group at Hongō Church,
Tokyo’s most socially active church, and pastors’ sermons in Tokyo’s two largest Kumiai churches, Hongo and Reinanzaka.8

Christianity, Space, and Discursive Freedom

From the first years of the Meiji period, the new national administration faced an array of unprecedented challenges surrounding the relationship between religion and the nation-state. All over Japan, the four decades straddling the Meiji Restoration (1868) brought men and women face to face with a very modern identity crisis. Confronted with these unprecedented ‘mental agonies’ surrounding the individual, the family, the community, and the state, the Japanese also saw the erosion of the moral comfort and stability of the physical and spiritual Pax Tokugawa.9 More than perhaps ever before, the years following Commodore Perry’s arrival in 1853 saw Japanese men and women turning to the realm of religion for suitable answers. Certain Meiji statesmen hoped to employ the reverence for the Japanese imperial institution, fostered by the Mito Ideology and its adherents, to harness Japan’s indigenous folk religion as a religious panacea and tool of national unification.10 This new, Japan-centered ethics and national consciousness, however, proved incapable of elevating existing Shintō to the task of giving meaning to Japanese lives.

The religious landscape of Meiji Japan was colorfully dotted with a host of competing belief systems and groups. Those religions that purported to offer better moral guidance and relevance for Japanese audiences made the implementation of Shintō as a national religion a difficult assignment. By the 1880s, Protestant Christianity had gone from proscription to prosperity among the urban educated elites.11 Buddhism, shorn of the privileged position it enjoyed during the Tokugawa period, nonetheless remained popular until the 1890s.12 Popular new religions, legitimately or baselessly posing as branches of Shintō, had begun to attract large, dynamic followings as well. Only the modern arsenal of manpower and national laws possessed by the state could make State Shintō competitive.

The government soon availed itself of a specific tool set that was particularly conducive to both religion-building and supervision. Meiji authorities sought to

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8 Several highly important Tokyo churches are excluded from this case study in the interest of saving space, avoiding repetition, or focusing attention on significant church spaces and their uses rather than on influential church leaders: Uemura Masahisa’s overflowing Presbyterian Fujimicho Church; Banchō Church, the third largest Kumiai church in Tokyo; Mita’s Unity Hall, the principal Unitarian church in Tokyo; and Uchimura Kanzō’s Mu-kyōkai (Non-Church Church).

9 Pyle, The New Generation; Pyle details the widespread moral confusion of young Japanese born in the years bracketing the Meiji Restoration.

10 The Mito Ideology refers to a philosophy, formulated and propagated by the Mito School, during the Tokugawa period, which advocated nativism, isolationism, and reverence for the Emperor. In particular, the writings of Aizawa Seishisai galvanized adherents of this ideology towards political action at the end of the Tokugawa period and facilitated the construction of State Shinto during the Meiji period. See Koschmann, The Mito Ideology. For more on the state’s interest in nationalizing Shintō, see Hardacre, Shintō and the State, as well as Burns, Before the Nation; Harootunian, Things Seen and Unseen; and Gluck, Japan’s Modern Myths.

11 On this transformation, see (in English) Cary, A History of Christianity; Iglehart, A Century of Protestant Christianity; Drummond, A History of Christianity; Best, Christian Faith and Cultural Crisis; and (in Japanese) Dohi, Nihon Puotesutanto Kirtsutokyō shi; Dohi, Nihon Puotesutanto kyōkai; and Ono, Nihon Puotesutanto kyōkai shi.

12 On Buddhism’s relegation, see Ketelaar, Of Heretics and Martyrs; and Thelle, Buddhism and Christianity. On Buddhism’s continued prevalence, see Hardacre, ‘Creating State Shintō’, 32, 34.
legitimate state-endorsed Shintō before the increasingly literate and connected Japanese public through propaganda, education, and entertainment. While this so-called Great Promulgation Campaign (1870–1884) ended largely in failure, it paved the way for the subordination of religion to the national government.  

13 Meiji officials aimed to place religion within the purview of the national bureaucracy by regulating the religion-related activities and spaces available to citizens. From the Great Promulgation Campaign to the Constitution of 1889 to the Conference of the Three Religions in 1912, Meiji bureaucrats exercised the state’s authority over religious organizations with increasing efficiency. By the 1890s, through a variety of ordinances and laws, the government had managed to establish its nominal control over the existence and practices of all religious groups.  

The state appropriated the rights of Buddhist and Shintō priests in two crucial areas that affected their ability to appeal to the growing number of Japanese who were dissatisfied with the religious status quo. First, Buddhist and Shintō priests were forbidden from speaking on certain themes and required to speak on others. The sermons by Buddhist and Shintō evangelists during the Great Promulgation Campaign taught ‘a common set of values’.  

15 The message was invariably one of ‘obedience, diligence, respectful humility, [and] satisfaction with one’s lot in life’.  

16 Many Japanese, unsurprisingly, found such sermons ‘boring’.  

17 Buddhists, by far the most interesting and relevant group of lecturers among the evangelists, ‘were the frequent targets of cautionary remarks regarding their lecture styles and contents’.  

18 Taking such advice further, the first Conference of Buddhist Chief Abbots in 1890 instructed ‘Buddhist priests to keep aloof from politics and to avoid using temples for political meetings’.  

The Buddhist temple, like the Shintō shrine, was a space whose usage and very existence were subject to the national government’s approval.  

Buddhist and Shintō leaders also acquiesced to state supervision over their religious gathering spaces. The construction or closing of any shrine or temple required government approval after 1870.  

20 In 1897, the Law for the Protection of Ancient Shrines and Temples (Koshaji hozon hō) brought under the aegis of the national government the restoration of Shintō and Buddhist religious structures over four hundred years old, associated with the emperor, or otherwise nationally significant.  

21 In the early twentieth century, the government curtailed Shintō religious space brutally by cutting the number of shrines in Japan from 190,000 to 100,000 over five years.  

22 Buddhist temples, not directly targeted by this shrine-merging policy, suffered from an increasingly acute display of government neglect. Christian religious space, however, prospered in the absence of state interference.  

When Christianity became an official religion in 1899, the Home Ministry allowed this group to operate ‘under a somewhat looser system of regulation than that imposed

13See Hardacre, Shintō and the State, ch. 2; Thal, Rearranging the Landscape, 204–206.  
16Dore, Education in Tokugawa Japan, 237–238.  
17Ibid., 46.  
18Ketelaar, Of Heretics and Martyrs, 123.  
19Thelle, Buddhism and Christianity, 117.  
20On the constricting religious ordinances of Prime Minister Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), see Hardacre, Shintō and the State, 124–125.  
21Wendelken, ‘The Tectonics of Japanese Style’, 34  
22Fridell, Japanese Shrine Mergers; Iroka, The Culture of the Meiji Period, 286.
on Shintō and Buddhism. This leniency formalized a stance that the Meiji government had been developing since the 1880s in response to native and foreign demands for the special privileging of Christianity in Japan. For Meiji elites, Christianity in general and Protestant Christianity in particular bore strong associations with the bulwarks of a successfully modernizing West. The West that Japanese ministers and officials hoped to emulate made the centrality of tolerance towards Christianity unambiguously clear in their diplomatic relations with the Japanese. In both Europe and the United States, the Iwakura Embassy (1871–1873) met with strong opposition as they sought an end to extraterritoriality on Japanese soil, due to the treatment of Christians in Japan. In response, signs banning Christianity were removed and the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (1889) guaranteed religious freedom.

Beginning in the mid-1870s, Protestant Christians took advantage of their favored status to erect their own facilities, increasingly removed from state purview. When the earliest Protestant missionaries and other Protestant experts arrived in the 1860s, local authorities determined their working spaces. All were housed in Buddhist temples near or within treaty ports. By the 1870s, however, Japan’s Protestant Christians and their missionary mentors had obtained permission to build various educational facilities throughout Japan and, finally, church buildings. Both types of gathering spaces afforded lay and religious speakers an arena in which to share ideas openly. When the verbal exchange function of the religious space was threatened, some Meiji statesmen with ties to Protestants offered their protection. Soejima Taneomi (1828–1905), a pupil of Dutch Reformed missionary and teacher Guido Verbeck, rescued Christianity from a set of potentially fatal orders making Sunday a workday and prohibiting government college students from listening to Christian oratory in 1873. Protestant Christianity in particular came to benefit from an empowering freedom of speech that distinguished it from other state-approved religions in their respective religious spaces and allowed it to make itself relevant.

Lay Discursive Space

Tokyo’s Protestant churches offered spaces in which individuals could think about how Christianity could improve Japan and its future. At church, Japanese often learned about the usefulness of Christianity for the nation and their daily lives. The increasing popularity of Protestant Christianity among the educated elite went beyond the consumption of the literature that has held scholars’ attention. Hiratsuka Raichō (1886–1971), trailblazing feminist and founder of Japan’s first all-women literary magazine, Seitō, encountered Christianity in print but also at church. She read “Tolstoy’s views on life and religion, … Rikugō zasshi, published by the Unitarian Church, and Shinjin, put out by the Hongō Church”. But she also remembered that, at the Hongō Church:

23Garon, ‘State and Religion’, 278.
24Sumiya, Gendai Nihon no keisei, 74–84; Best, Christian Faith, 84.
26See Kume, The Iwakura Embassy.
27Cary, A History of Christianity in Japan, 80; Drummond, A History of Christianity in Japan, 163–164; Iglehart, A Century of Protestant Christianity, 47.
28Iglehart, A Century of Protestant Christianity, 30–34.
30Ibid., 102.
31Hiratsuka, In the Beginning, 75.
After the service there were talks by famous people. I vividly remember one guest, the writer Tokutomi Roka, who spoke on Higuchi Ichiyō. Another guest was Kinoshita Naoe, the author of *Confessions of a Husband* who spoke passionately about Tanaka Shōzō and the scandal surrounding the pollution caused by the copper mines in Ashio. Only dimly aware of the incident, I was much disturbed to hear the details.\(^{32}\)

Although Hiratsuka never became a Christian, she frequently attended Hongō Church throughout 1904 as a student of nearby Japan Women’s University. She experienced an awakening of social consciousness at Hongō that was significant enough to merit inclusion in her memoirs. It must have also been encouraging to hear the well-known journalist and writer Tokutomi Roka (1868–1927) talk about Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896), one of the very ‘few women [who] had managed to achieve critical recognition in literature’, and a hero for Hiratsuka.\(^{33}\) Tokutomi was in fact one in a long line of invited speakers at Hongō.

From the church’s first years in its newly erected building, Hongō’s lectern hosted some of Japan’s most illustrious thinkers. From November 1891 to January 1892, Rev. Yokoi Tokio (1857–1928) invited various speakers from the Imperial University to lecture on topics that ranged from religion to science and philosophy.\(^{34}\) At each month’s Science Lectures, members of the Imperial University faculty spoke to two to three hundred listeners. Philosophy professor Motoraya Yūjiro (1858–1912) spoke on Japanese folkways, and Political Science professor Taguchi Ukichi (1855–1905) lectured on Japanese history. Science professor Misaku Kakichi (1858–1909) talked of the world of nature, and Political Science professor Terao Tooru (1859–1925) illuminated the relationship between morality and law. Sophia University President Murai Naojiro, another featured speaker, summarized Japanese Buddhism. On 12 December 1891, one of Christianity’s strongest opponents, Inoue Tetsujiro, explained to his audience the importance of studying the Neo-Confucianism of Oyōmei (Wang Yang Ming).\(^{35}\)

These sessions, held just before the *seinenkai* or Young Men’s Group, drew crowds that ranged from two to four hundred and consisted primarily of young adult male students. By giving such lectures inside a church, these speakers demonstrated to the young audience that the so-called religious space of the church was meant for more than ritual. They evinced that Protestant Christianity was the religion of enlightenment rationality, capable of bringing together dissimilar individuals for socio-political discussion. One couldn’t hear such lectures in temples and shrines. The church remained a student hub for discursive exchange until the 1920s. From the late 1890s, however, the Women’s Group (*fujinkai*) took on the role of hosting the type of monthly lectures that had first made Hongō so popular.

**Hongō Church *fujinkai***

The church was in fact a vibrant lay discursive space. The *fujinkai* of Tokyo’s Protestant churches, and of Hongō in particular, were actively engaged in forums and debates on how to best put their interpretations of pastoral discourse and Christian values into

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\(^{32}\)Ibid., 77.

\(^{33}\)Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*, 169.

\(^{34}\)Rev. Yokoi was the eldest son of Yokoi Shōnan (1809–1869), a Confucian scholar and political reformer who was assassinated on the false suspicion that he was a Christian.

\(^{35}\)Kyōkai Ran’, *Kirisutokyo shimbun*, 20 November 1909.
action. Ogino Ginko (1851–1913), Japan’s first licensed female doctor, was drawn towards Christianity by such meetings at Hongo and through them founded the Japan Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Later, founder of Japan’s first public kindergarten Noguchi Yuka (1866–1950) attended the same Hongo fujinkai with journalist Kogawa Hama (Tsukamoto Hama) and Maeda Sonoko, another in the first generation of female physicians. Kaide Sumiko and Kathleen Uno have both described Noguchi’s church attendance, church social connections and their importance to her personal and professional life. “This study adds to their works by investigating the content of the church group and activities that attracted Noguchi and other prominent women to Hongo and kept them coming back.

Beginning in the late 1880s, female attendees of the newly established Hongo Church met regularly and shared ideas. What began as 15 to 20 women congregating monthly at the home of Rev. Yokoi Tokio had risen, by 1897, to a monthly gathering of more than one hundred men and women with male and female featured speakers inside the actual church building. During the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, as Japanese increasingly voiced opinions on womanhood and its service to the nation, Hongo’s fujinkai gained unprecedented popularity. The list of illustrious and knowledgeable speakers also grew. Pastors from Hongo and other churches were the most common speakers, but they were joined by a variety of other key figures of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Tokyo. As mentioned earlier, novelist Tokutomi Roka was often invited, as was Meiji Women’s University Principal, Iwamoto Zenji (1863–1942), also the founder and editor of Jogaku zasshi [Girl’s Education Magazine]. The fujinkai frequently also asked Waseda University Social Policy professor and Vice Chairman of the Lower House of the National Diet, Uchigasaki Sakusaburo (1877–1947), to give talks. In contrast to the vast majority of gatherings in the Meiji period, women speakers were especially solicited. Female industrialist Hirooka Asako (1849–1919) and Girls’ Higher School teacher Okonogi Matsuko came to speak to the group on several occasions. Dean of Tokyo Women’s University, Yasui Tetsuko (1870–1945), was one of the women who made the most frequent appearances as a guest speaker.

The Hongo Women’s Group brought in speakers who could help them to think about and discuss the ‘fujin mondai’, the difficult questions surrounding the modern woman’s appropriate place in the home, community, and nation. On 9 May 1903, Tokutomi Roka spoke on ‘A Page in Women’s History’. A year later, it was at the invitation of this women’s group that he also gave the talk on Higuchi that Hiratsuka recalled so well. Two speeches given on 28 February 1909 shed light on just what the presenters were saying during these well-attended meetings.

In ‘Some Words on Chinese Women’, Yoshino Sakuzō gave an in-depth description of concubinage among the aristocracy in China. The Imperial University Law professor and democracy theorist based his analysis almost entirely upon his experience in the household of General Yuan Shikai (1859–1916). His topic and substance were

37On Noguchi Yuka, see Kaide, Noguchi Yuka; and Uno, Passages to Modernity.
38Kyōkai Ran, Kirisutokyo shimbun, 5 July 1895 and 14 January 1899
39On Iwamoto Zenji, see Patessio, ‘The Creation of Public Spaces’; and Brownstein, ‘Jogaku zasshi’.
40These speakers are featured in Kyōkai Ran, Kirisutokyo shimbun, 24 September 1911.
41Yuan also held the position of Viceroy of Zhili and Minister of Beiyan. See Spence, The Search for Modern China.
particularly reminiscent of the woman-related themes that ran throughout most lectures at the Hongō fujinkai. Yoshino explained the legally binding relationship of the secondary wives to their lord, narrated the initiation process, and even offered a descriptive tour of the household where he had worked as Yuan’s tutor and seen these things. In his speech, however, Yoshino also drew attention to certain inequities. For instance, he lamented the situation of these secondary wives after the passing of the husband:

The second wife, while the master is alive, receives favor and influence. After the ruler’s death, however, she suddenly becomes the object of the legal wife’s jealousy and terrible ill treatment . . . Even if she is not being poorly treated at the moment, it is common that she commits suicide, in expectation of such treatment. In China it is becoming popular to praise this so-called ‘martyrdom of the favored wife’ in newspapers and the like . . .

For his listeners, Yoshino’s detailed glimpse into the huis clos of China’s first family was accompanied by the short tale of this ‘tragic extreme,’ which warned them of the possible repercussions of polygamy.

Although to any reader today this story sounds few bells of moral alarm, the case was quite different for Yoshino’s audience. The decades before and after 1900 in Japan saw the galvanization of both men and women around the issue of licensed prostitution and the greater question of women’s rights with which it was so clearly intertwined. The Japan Women’s Christian Temperance Union was particularly active in calling for the criminalization of prostitution, enforcement of existing prohibitions against concubinage, and procurement of legal rights for women. Thus for Japan WCTU members in the audience, like Iwamoto Zenji, women’s reform movement leader and journalist Kubushiro Ochimi (1882–1972), Ogino Ginko, and Ebina Miya (wife of Hongō pastor Ebina Danjō), the observations offered by Yoshino held a specific and powerful relevance.

When Yoshino had finished, the audience heard from Dean Yasui Tetsu. In ‘Modern Women’s Cultivation’, Yasui expressed her concern for the moral cultivation of young magazine and newspaper readers in general and of young girls in particular. By 1909, modern Japanese women had found their voices, some through male mouths and others through their own, in a variety of publications. Since 1895, when Iwamoto Zenji’s Jogaku zasshi initiated the trend, several magazines had begun to feature literature composed by women. During the early twentieth century, the popularity of women authors and the recognition of the literate teenage female public led to magazines such as Shōjokai (1902) and Shōjo no tomo (1908). For many, the new popularity of teenage girl magazines and women-oriented publications indicated that Japanese women were becoming highly literate, better educated, and in general more sophisticated.

Yasui Tetsu, however, advised caution to these publications’ young female readers in her speech ‘Modern Women’s Cultivation’. Yasui likened Japanese women to the ‘bird that imitated the peacock’ by ‘simply attaching beautiful feathers on the outside’ The adult women, and the young women that in turn mimicked them as idols, had not the slightest idea of true intellectual and spiritual cultivation. Largely to blame was the recent trend in Japanese education that leaned towards the exterior and away from

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42 Yoshino, ‘Seikoku fujin no zatsugo’, 8.
43 Ibid.
character development. To remedy this situation, she called upon parents, teachers, and both magazine and newspaper authors to set better examples and to inform themselves more fully about girls’ education. Instead of accusing the government objectives, ‘an irresponsible society’, or journalists, she instructed parents and teachers, ‘those directly responsible for education’, to ‘study how we must cultivate ourselves to best deal with this world’. In the midst of a nation that was institutionalizing collective responsibility, Yasui emphasized the necessity of male and female individuals better equipped to raise and educate Japan’s teenage women.

For historians, many questions remain regarding the shape and nature of women’s discursive space during the second half of the Meiji period. Concerning men, David Ambaras, among others, has shed light on the groups of male ‘[j]ournalists, social workers, civil servants, and other professionals’ who ‘formed a variety of study groups and journals devoted to analyzing the social order and the possibilities for its amelioration’. If we turn to the new and increasingly visible class of educated women, scholars have yet to fully grasp the non-state forums in which they engaged in the ‘articulation of a middle-class consciousness and social vision’. The Meiji era also witnessed the growth of an urban female teaching core that sought answers to the fujin mondai as well as to a plethora of other questions. By the 1890s, faced with fewer legal means of accessing the public sphere than ever before, they sought new venues for gathering and expressing their opinions.

The educated Meiji woman had few choices for activism and assembly. After almost two decades of speeches by major public figures on the need for women’s rights and education, the Meiji government erased women’s official political existence overnight with its 1890 Law on Political Assembly and Association. Denied legal access to political gatherings and confined by the early calcification of the ‘good wife, wise mother’ construct or ‘ryōsai kenbo’, women found themselves excluded not only from the Imperial University but from other organized forums for intellectual exchange as well.

In the social space hosted within Tokyo’s Protestant churches, however, these women were encouraged to come and participate. As historian Sheldon Garon has noted, publicly minded women did have access to membership in moral reform organizations such as the Japan WCTU or patriotic associations such as the Aikoku Fujinkai in the Meiji and Taishō periods. Historians Elizabeth Dorn and Rumi Yasutake have rightly given specific scholarly attention to the Japan WCTU and shown the need for a more thorough examination of the church-based women’s groups that furnished the organization with some of its most illustrious members. From the Japan WCTU annual meeting held at Reinanzaka Church in 1893 to the weekly local meetings that coincided with the fujinkai, the Protestant church provided the principal meeting space for this reform organization. Recognizing the existence and importance of church fujinkai, and the related forms of socio-political interaction that they fostered, is in fact essential to understanding the appearance and success of women-led reform organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

46Ibid.
47Mackie, Creating Socialist Women.
48See Garon, ‘Women’s Groups and the Japanese State’.
49See Yasutake, ‘Transnational Women’s Activism’; Moriya, Nihon Kirisutokyō Fujin Kyōfukai gojūnen shi; Dorn, ‘Crusading Against Prostitution’ and ‘For God, Home, and Country’.
50Moriya, Nihon Kirisutokyō Fujin Kyōfukai gojūnen shi, 93, 360.
The other significant form of large, group-based verbal communication occurring inside Tokyo Protestant churches took place weekly rather than monthly. These churches’ pastors were not only the most common speakers at *fujinkai*, but also gave sermons each Sunday before even larger audiences than the women’s groups. Ebina and Rev. Kozaki Hiromichi of Reinanzaka Church were part of a small but influential group of pastors, including Uemura Masahisa (1857–1925) and Tsunajima Kakichi (1860–1936) of Banchō Church, who highly valued the church as a social space and the social responsibility of the churches’ religious leaders. Unlike independent pastor Uchimura Kanzō (1861–1930) and evangelical activists such as Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960), these pastors used their sermons to nurture a fixed gathering space in which they might themselves offer possible solutions to the numerous difficulties of morality and identity facing listeners. As members of the oft-mentioned Kumamoto Band of young Japanese samurai, Ebina and Kozaki had observed and imbibed a particularly liberal and social-reform oriented brand of Christianity at Captain Leroy Lansing Janes’s School for Western Studies in Kumamoto between 1871 and 1877. With this background, they were particularly well equipped to speak to the spiritual and moral needs of Tokyo’s educated elite. Their sermons provide clear examples of the threads of social consciousness that ran through so much of pastoral discourse among Protestant church pastors in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Tokyo.

**Religious Discursive Space**

With his Sunday sermons at Hongo, Tokyo’s largest *Kumiai* church, Rev. Ebina Danjō (1866–1933) brought national issues into that religious space and left a lasting impression on listeners. Non-Christian Hiratsuka Raichō and temporary Christian/Anarchist Osugi Sakae (1885–1923) both wrote of the strong impact that Ebina made on them from the pulpit. For Hiratsuka, Ebina was ‘an eloquent and polished speaker with a commanding presence’ who was ‘very popular among the young students’. Osugi, a well-known anarchist author and activist, was drawn weekly by ‘Ebina’s contention that religion was cosmopolitan, that it superseded national boundaries’. Such messages set his words apart from the moral instruction that was either approved or initiated by the state.

The most important and enduring impression that they each kept of Ebina, however, was his emphatic nationalism. Ebina’s apparent ‘compromise with the nationalistic state ideology’ was one of the factors that led Hiratsuka to sever her ties with Hongo. After two years of membership at the same church, Osugi withdrew from the congregation as well. He recalls that

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51 For more on Uemura’s role in establishing the Presbyterian congregation of Fujimichō, actively leading the membership body, and speaking on important themes each Sunday, see Saba, *Uemura Masahisa*, vols 1–3, and Satō, *Uemura Masahisa*. For the content of Uemura’s sermons, see Uemura, *Uemura zenshū* vols 1, 2. For the limited available content of Tsunajima’s sermons, see Tsunajima, *Gyakkyō no fukuin*. The dissertation-in-progress by the author provides detailed evidence of Uemura and Tsunajima’s socially relevant pastoral discourse.


53 Hiratsuka, *In the Beginning*, 77.


55 Ibid.
Ebina Danjō’s nationalistic Christianity, filled with the living spirit of Japan, became clearly visible to me. He held prayer meetings for victory. He sang hymns that were like army songs. He preached on loyalty and patriotism.\textsuperscript{56}

Like so many socially and culturally displaced young men and women in Tokyo during the early 1900s – the so-called ‘agonized youth’ or hamon seinen – Ōsugi thought that he might be able to make sense of his world through religion.\textsuperscript{57} While finding religious answers unsatisfactory, through the process of religious experimentation Ōsugi further solidified his own developing ideology and his appreciation for social consciousness.\textsuperscript{58}

In addition to these passers-through, church members left many indications that their church experience and, in particular, sermons by pastors at Hongō, had greatly affected them. For Yoshino Sakuzō who began a lifelong membership at the Hongō Church while studying at the Imperial University, Ebina’s words helped shape the way he came to see the world and his role in it.\textsuperscript{59} Ishikawa Sanshirō (1876–1956), prolific socialist author and co-editor with Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911) of the Heimin shimbun, placed Ebina Danjō’s sermons at the core of his beliefs and motivations for social reform.\textsuperscript{60} He wrote, ‘I learned to devote my life to social justice. I was inspired to give my entire being enthusiastically to mankind. This spirit of devotion I learned from Ebina’s teachings about Christ’.\textsuperscript{61} From his arrival in Tokyo in 1905, Suzuki Bunji (1885–1946), founder of Japan’s first labor union, the Yuakai, was also in the audience for sermons and speeches by Ebina because he was employed to take detailed notes on each Sunday’s sermon.\textsuperscript{62} According to historian Matsuo Takayoshi, for Suzuki the job ‘was more than just a means of procuring food and shelter; it revealed to him the way he should live’.\textsuperscript{63} At Hongō former Kumiai pastor, Socialist Diet member, and social activist Abe Iiso, founder of Japan’s Salvation Army Yamamuro Gunpei (1872–1940), political thinker and prison reformer Oyama Tosuke (1879–1918), and Japan’s first licensed female doctor Ogino Ginko all sat through the sermons that Suzuki was paid to write down.\textsuperscript{64}

Ambaras and Sumiya both assert that the messages of Protestant Christianity were integral to the formation of an urban middle class consciousness in Meiji Japan.\textsuperscript{65}

Taking their insights further, the final section of this study examines the actual content of the ‘messages’ to which these individuals listened each Sunday. Buddhism’s best speakers in Tokyo, Chikazumi Jokan (1870–1941) and Jōdoshinshū official and Imperial

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., 184–185.
\textsuperscript{57} The term hamon seinen 慮悶青年 refers to the shock and confusion faced by youth born around the time of the Meiji Restoration. See Bernstein, Japanese Marxist, 29.
\textsuperscript{58} See Stanley, Ōsugi Sakae; on Kawakami Hajime, see Bernstein, Japanese Marxist, 22.
\textsuperscript{59} Yoshino, ‘Shakaishugi to Kirisutokyō’, 12–15; on the influence that Yoshino attributed to both his Christian faith and Ebina’s lessons, see Dohi, ‘Christianity and Politics’, part 1; Dohi, Nihon Purōsutsuotto Kirisutokyō shi, Takeda, Tennōsei shisō to kyōiku, Duus, ‘Yoshino Sakuzō’; Ion, The Cross and the Rising Sun.
\textsuperscript{61} Ishikawa, Ishikawa Sanshirō chōsakushū, vol. 8, 63.
\textsuperscript{62} Large, The Rise of Labor in Japan.
\textsuperscript{63} Matsuo, Taishō demokurashi no kenkyū, 142.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.; Oyama also attended and, for a short period, pastored Reinanzaka Church.
\textsuperscript{65} Ambaras, ‘Social Knowledge’, 3; Also see Sumiya, Gendai Nihon no keisei, 54; Kudō, Meiji-ki no Kirisutokyō; Kudō, Nihon Kirisutokyō shakai, and the articles in Kega, Kumano, and Matsumura, Gendai Kirisutokyō kōza, vol. 3 and vol. 4.
University professor Murakami Senjō (1851–1928) drew crowds that ‘seldom exceed[ed] one hundred’ in the early twentieth century.66 Tokyo Protestant pastors preached words that could attract audiences of over six hundred, and, as the following section will demonstrate, such preaching was not limited to the sensational pulpit of Hongō.

**Themes in Pastoral Discourse**

By redefining words such as ‘class’, ‘authority’, ‘citizen’, and even ‘Japan’, Protestant pastors in Tokyo sought to explain religion’s applicability to the secular realm. The Ivy League-educated Kumiai pastors of Hongō and Reinanzaka both implored their listeners to think about the nation and citizenship in terms beyond those being propagated by or in accordance with the state. This complex mixture of sacred and secular discourse was a key factor in these pastors’ ability to offer listeners useful elements for their individual worldviews and courses of social action and interaction. The sermons attracted numerous members and passers-through, and often impacted their lives. Dohi Akio, Takeda Kiyoko, Sekioka Issei, Kumano Yoshitaka, and many others scholars, in works on Meiji Protestant theological developments, have accurately painted Ebina in stark contrast to Kozaki. Despite their vast differences, the similarity of their general messages helps explain the similar type of socially conscious Japanese individuals who attended their two churches.

**Eyes Ahead**

Tokyo Protestant pastors emphasized the future and the assertive role that each listener should take in shaping it. On 5 July 1908, just two months before the Boshin Rescript propagated the ideal society of the national polity (kokutai) centered upon Confucian filial piety, Rev. Kozaki Hiromichi (1856–1938) of Reinanzaka Church, promoted a different ideal.67 His ideal challenged the Meiji government discourse and encouraged listeners to assume both individual agency and a reflexive outlook. The filial piety that formed the core of Tokugawa morality was based on reverence for one’s elders, but also on a less useful reverence for an idyllic past. Unlike Neo-Confucianism, which idealized Tang China (618–906) and other teachings ‘planning for [the] revival’ of the real or mythical past, Christians looked towards the future for their ideal society.68 Kozaki insisted that Christians must fix their eyes towards the front instead of towards the rear.

Hongō Church pastor Rev. Ebina Danjō, Kozaki’s long-time colleague and friend, agreed entirely on the importance of looking forwards. Ebina told his congregation in 1902 that they could expect a bright future if each Japanese continued to question and interpret the true Japanese spiritual essence for him or herself. In this future, the strength of ‘not only the former warrior class but also of the scholar, the merchant, the craftsmen, the farmer’ would be required to make a new Japan.69

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66 Kozaki, *Reminiscences of Seventy Years*, 216.
67 On the connections between Christianity and Confucianism that Kozaki drew, see Ballhatchet, ‘Confucianism and Christianity in Meiji Japan’; Lande, *Meiji Protestantism in History*, 46; Ebisawa and Ouchi, *Nihon Kirisutokyō shi*; Dohi, ‘Christianity and Politics’, part 1, 1–6.
68 Kozaki, *Kozaki Hiromichi zenshi*, vol. 5, 32.
Equality and Equally Significant Spheres

Kozaki and Ebina imagined a Japan built upon the equality of all men before God. Kozaki preached in 1908 that the Bible’s best description of God’s ideal society called for four essential characteristics, of which one was ‘unity under the authority of God’ for all men.70 Again, in February 1920, as the world recovered from the Great War, Kozaki spoke on ‘Brotherhood’ (Kyōdai-shugi). From the Analects of Confucius to the cries of the French Revolution, this virtue was praised. But ‘True brotherhood is difficult to see outside of Christianity’ because of Christianity’s ‘recognition of a single [heavenly] father’.71 And this brotherhood extended beyond all men.

Just as the possibility of women’s suffrage in Western Europe and the United States gained currency, Ebina and Kozaki emphasized the value of the woman. In 1916, Ebina concluded that only Christianity taught ‘that all men and women are children of God, linked together as one’.72 And in 1920, Kozaki decried many of the invented and unjust distinctions made between men and women.73 As early as 1902, speaking on New Bushido, Ebina had argued that the Meiji Restoration rejected ‘the differentiation between man and woman’, and thus offered all women the opportunity to become active and dutiful warriors. They too could embody the warrior ethic of a more modern Japan.74

For Ebina, however, it was clear that women could best exercise this ethic in the their own separate but equal sphere. Ebina explained that his female followers were just as important as Jesus’s male disciples during his time on earth. They were ‘partners in Christ’s ministry from start to finish’, and Ebina provided examples of their distinctive contributions. It was indeed the women who went to see Christ’s ‘last moments and prepared the body for burial’, while Jesus’s disciples mourned or fled. In the final moments, upon opening Jesus’s clothing, the soldier found ‘seamless undergarments’, a sign of high quality craftsmanship. Only Jesus’s female followers could have made such ‘precious’ clothing.75 Ebina also approved of men like John Stuart Mill who contradicted a tradition of male chauvinism found widely among English authors including William Shakespeare. He praised Mill who ‘paid woman a great deal of respect and contributed to the female emancipation movement’.76 Despite a very Victorian conceptualization of the woman’s sphere, sermons by pastors such as Kozaki and Ebina explained to women, and the men listening as well, that women could hold places of leadership and should consider their capacity to significantly impact the nation.

Religion is Life

These pastors encouraged listeners to work towards personal renewal and internal reflection in order to realize a more egalitarian and forward-looking nation. In other words, Kozaki and other Tokyo pastors believed that beneficial civil morality was tied to

70 Kozaki, Kozaki Hiromichi zenshū, 240.
71 Ibid., 348–329.
72 Ebina, ‘Joshi no tomo’; reprinted in Ebina, Ebina Danjō no sekkyōshū, 182.
73 Kozaki, Kozaki Hiromichi zenshū, 348.
74 Ebina, ‘Shin Bushidō’; reprinted in Ebina, Ebina Danjō no sekkyōshū, 83.
75 Ebina, ‘Joshi no tomo’; reprinted in Ebina, Ebina Danjō no sekkyōshū, 183.
76 Ibid., 187.
a personally reflexive religious morality. They were in fact weighing in on a lively debate about the cure for the nation’s decaying morals, in the face of unprecedented foreign knowledge and contact. Unlike the state’s attempt to merge the two through State Shintō, most Meiji intellectuals considered true national morality to be the result of individual moral improvement. Japanese Protestant pastors wholly agreed. In his critique of Japanese spirituality in 1908, Kozaki explained that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintō had fallen with the Tokugawa Bakufu. For the nation’s youth, he recommended a religion capable of rebuilding Japan’s moral principles, currently so damaged by materialism and other harmful philosophies. He and his fellow Tokyo pastors believed strongly that Christianity was that religion.

In several sermons, Kozaki aimed to demonstrate the importance of social action and reform driven by individual religious morality. In 1908, Kozaki chronicled the failures of various utopian Christian movements in the West, from ‘Noyes’s Oneida Community’ to the Mormons to Cromwell’s Roundheads, that ended in failure because without changing ‘from the inside ... [such] institutions that have sought to realize [reform] have often failed’. If each Christian did not change within his or her heart, the greater society would never achieve the ideal. The state had offered ample maxims and rules on the appropriate behavior and morality of the Japanese people. Kozaki, however, argued that individuals needed to ‘think hard’ on the validity of the ready-made answers with which they were so often provided. In February 1907, Kozaki informed his congregation that it was their ‘urgent task’ to reflect on how to ‘deal with moral education in schools ...; family morality ...; the morality of society ...; the inertia of the feudal era’s morality’. They were to lead their fellow countrymen to a new morality based on true and personal religion.

For Ebina, he lamented that traditional Japanese religion was seldom applied in daily life. In 1916, Ebina criticized Japanese religiosity by demonstrating the difference between the placement of Japanese altars in Japanese homes and Christian symbols in Christian homes. Located in the tatami room, Japanese altars (Shintō kamiza or Buddhist butsdan) constitute ‘a family’s sacred place, [and thus] the family members naturally act with restraint’. The daily interaction that Christians have, however, with Christian symbols and the spirit of Christ is very different. Christians hang Christian symbols in the unglamorous dining room, which brings the family together as they welcome ‘someone very close to the family’. In this sermon, Ebina told listeners to apply religion to even the most unsacred elements of their everyday lives.

*Imagining Community*

Tokyo pastors were as busy as any other public speaker or scholar searching to define Japan and Japanese-ness at the turn of the century. The nation played a decisive role in nearly every sermon that Ebina and Kozaki gave. Neither of them used ‘Japan’ (Nihon or Nippon) nearly as often as the terms for ‘our nation’ (wagakuni, wagakokumin, or wagakokutai). This trend also is easily visible from many of Kozaki’s sermon titles such as ‘The Great Weakness of Our Nation’ (wagakokumin no daihetten) and ‘The Terrible

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79 Ibid., 31.
80 Ibid., 16.
Spectacle of Our Nation’s Spiritual State’ (wagakuni seishinkai no sanjō). From Ebina’s sermon titles, such as ‘The New Warrior Ethic’ (shin bushidō) and ‘Warrior Class Religion’ (shi no shūkyō), one can also infer that Japan was the subject. In these sermons, both made criticisms and suggestions about their nation as a whole and encouraged Japanese Christians to act as catalysts for change.

The nation and its destiny were at the heart of many Tokyo pastors’ sermons. Such words on the one hand brought some youth such as Hiratsuka and Osugi to the realisation that they were fed up with conservative nationalism, and on the other pushed individuals from Suzuki to Yoshino to Abe to Yamamuro to work to better ‘their’ nation’s future. In October, the very month after Suzuki began to attend the Hongo Church in 1905, Ebina gave the sermon ‘Now It’s Time to Pray’. Dealing with the brand of increasingly frequent civil unrest that had culminated in the Hibiya Riot of 1905, Ebina warned that the new government should respect the people. After all, ‘the nation is a unified human whole. If [the pieces of] that whole are separate, there is no nation’.

A significant element in the nation-related rhetoric of these two Tokyo Protestant pastors, however, contained clear statements of nationalism. The audience of Hongo was told by Ebina in the aforementioned 1902 sermon ‘New Bushido’ that ‘if farmers don’t cultivate the type of guts typical of warriors and plan expeditions, our national agricultural policy . . . is just useless talk’.

In particular he targeted ‘the backwards wastelands’ of ‘Hokkaido, Taiwan, Manchuria, Korea’. Thus Ebina engaged in the construction of rhetorical borders, in both imagery and distance, to create these territories as the ‘other,’ while calling for a stronger Japan and redoubled evangelization. For listeners, this and similar ‘othering’ processes could have served in the much sought-after construction of Japanese self and national identity. Many Protestants were indeed inspired by the combined effects of such words, government rhetoric, and other sermons and writings on evangelizing to Japan’s East Asian brothers.

Although Kozaki’s nationalism appeared less feverish, he too believed in Japanese cultural distinctness and often superiority. Kozaki preached in 1907 about Japan’s defunct spiritual morality, but only after highlighting areas in which Japan excelled. By his reckoning, as the world’s second strongest infantry and naval power, with some of the world’s quickest progress in education and science, ‘the Japanese people will never lose to another nation’. With the addition of the spiritual ingredient, it was only a matter of time before ‘we will surpass other nations’. In fact, he declared, ‘not only are we not inferior to whites, but it seems that in fact we surpass them’.

The ‘othering’ practiced so widely by Western nations’ citizens towards the non-West found its reflection in the Japanese Protestant church as Japanese Christians sought to emphasize their religion’s inherent Japanese-ness and their own pride for country.

The nation occupied one of the seats at the center of these pastors’ religious worldviews. That nation, they both hoped, would be a departure from the class and sexual inequality of the Japanese past. Kozaki and Ebina believed that their

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82 Ebina, ‘Ima wa kitō toki nari’.
83 Kozaki, Kozaki Hiromichi zenshū, 239.
84 Ebina, ‘Shin Bushidō’, reprinted in Ebina, Ebina Danjō no sekkyōshū, 86.
86 Kozaki, Kozaki Hiromichi zenshū, 15.
fellow citizens could build a new Japan and even East Asia based on Christian morality. But it was eventually this aspect in particular that colored both Hiratsuka’s and Osugi’s opinions of the church so negatively. These pastors’ belief in the strength and historical significance of their nation and its destiny continues to draw criticism from scholars writing evaluative histories. Such discourse, along with the Japanese Protestant participation in the government’s imperial project overseas, has heavily shaded the history-writing on Japanese Christianity. Despite the indisputable validity of their conclusions, this nation-centered discourse also played a sizeable role in the construction of a separate and open discursive space within the church. It was the ensemble of these elements, exchanged within the church space, that made a considerable impact on the minds and hearts of attendees and helped create the distinctive gathering space within the Protestant church.

Conclusion

Attending a sermon or a lecture at the Hongō, Reinanzaka, or any of a number of Tokyo Protestant churches in the Meiji and early Taishō periods was to think about and take part in constructing a modern Japan. Speakers offered new points of departure for national identity and nation-views. They asked their audiences to embrace modernity and the individuality, individual responsibility, and subjective reasoning that came with it. They welcomed men and women inside, and explained why they should all exchange ideas as equals. Listeners absorbed the rhetoric of lay and religious speakers and moved towards more active reflection and assertive action in the public sphere. Some attendees saw Christianity as a belief system too closely tied to the gender and political status quo and then went off to change both. Some applied Christian principles and objectives to avoid, challenge, or work within the state’s framework. Others simply used Christianity to make practical, non-controversial interpretations of the government’s vague rhetoric of moral suasion. In these cases, Christian leaders influenced men and women in Japan and overseas, and their church experience emboldened them to take on the problems of their time and place.

As the volume edited by John Breen and Mark Williams in 1996 has demonstrated, historians in and beyond Japan continue to debate the significance of Christianity to Japanese history. Today, several historians agree that Christianity mattered in modern Japanese history. Irwin Scheiner, Frederick Notehelfer, Carlo Caldarola, John Howes, Dohi Akio, Matsuo Takayoshi, and many others have demonstrated that Protestant Christianity was an important social movement during the 40 years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. They have provided clues as to the elements that made this religious movement so different from other secular and religious movements in modern Japan. This article has offered evidence that the church space and the discourse that attendees were able to circulate inside were important factors in bringing the individuals and ideas together that made Protestantism so socially active and relevant. Protestant Christianity did in fact play a significant role in the history of modern Japan, and in the case of Tokyo, the spaces that it offered were central to the movement’s contribution.

87See Dohi, *Nihon Purotesutanto Kirisutokyō shi*, 241; and Ion, *The Cross and the Rising Sun*, 70, for instance.
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