

Garrett L. Washington

Church Space and the Capital in Prewar Japan

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Despite only 2 percent of the population identifying as Christian, the religion is pictured prominently in the soft culture of manga and in many of Japan's largest institutions, including its health care system, higher education, and government. *Church Space and the Capital in Prewar Japan* explains just how this came to be by focusing on four key Protestant churches in Tokyo over a half century from the 1870s to the 1920s. Garret L. Washington depicts four church communities that took advantage of the new capital of Tokyo and governmental changes instituted by the Meiji reformation to construct churches in key urban spaces attractive to Japan's political and academic elites. This began first with the Reinanzaka church in 1879, followed by the Bancho and Hongo churches of 1886, and finishing with the Fujimicho church in 1887. In a span of just over a decade, some of Japan's most prestigious Protestant names, including Ebina Danjo (1856–1937), Yokoi Tokio (1857–1927), Kozaki Hiromichi (1858–1938), and Uemura Masahisa (1857–1925), made their way from higher learning at the Doshisha in Kyoto to Tokyo's Tsukiji and Kojimachi wards. Their life stories intertwine with those of these church congregations in seven chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for why the proximity of Tokyo was important to the promulgation of Christianity, only five years after it was banned. Instead of placing churches in the countryside, easily accessible urban spaces were chosen to attract students, bureaucrats, and businessmen. Chapter 2 explains how these pastors built their churches in Western and Japanese architectural styles, with large worship halls with moveable walls and chairs to cater to larger crowds. In these spaces, chapter 3 analyzes forty-five sermons in five themes such as “eyes ahead” (toward a Christian future), “brotherhood,” “equality in theory,” “gender equality in practice,” and “Eastern morality” that shaped the discourse of these congregations. Sermons proved harder to be regulated than written text, making them ideal for these pastors to influence society. They did so in myriad ways, shows chapter 4, as Uemura critiqued Japan's occupation of Taiwan and Korea as being contradictory to the Christian idea of brotherhood (145),

while Ebina felt the country had a moral imperative to push its *bushido* spirit onto the rest of Asia (152).

Chapters 5–7 shift discussion from the pastors of these churches to their communities. The *enzetsukai* were public lectures hosted by experts from diverse fields of medicine, literature, psychology, science, and even Buddhist and Shinto philosophy. If physical attendance was difficult, those interested could learn about various issues in church journals that boasted wide readership. Other than famous speeches, church groups such as the *fujinkai* (elder women's society) and the *seinenkai* (youth organization) became important avenues the lay utilized for social action. At a time when it was illegal for women to participate in political assembly (185), these churches pushed the limits of equality between the sexes. Reinanzaka's elder women's society, for instance, was vocal in its opposition to prostitution and concubinage and fought for underprivileged urban children (191), and the youth society engaged in fundraising after disasters like the flooding of the Arakawa River in 1910 (197). The wide participation in these churches' activities shows that "belonging at church was not the same as belonging to the church" (203). In the end, parishioners and participants at these churches would go on to become some of Japan's most famous lawyers, judges, teachers, and nurses, who would help reform the country's education, public health, and criminal justice systems.

By the mid-1920s, the illustrious era of Protestantism came to an end with the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 that displaced 1.38 million Japanese and destroyed three of these four churches. By the time these edifices were rebuilt, wars in Asia were in full swing, punishing criticism toward the war effort with imprisonment or death. Public lectures and participation in church events were also severely scaled back. Rather than jeopardize losing the acceptance they fought hard to gain, these Christian congregations and the pastors that led them fell in line with the war effort until its end in 1945.

Overall, Washington's work makes an important contribution to Christianity in Japan by detailing the life work of some of its most notorious pastors and the mark they left on Japan. I must admit, even as a graduate of the Doshisha theology department myself, I knew few of the many names cited in this work. Thus, readers unfamiliar with the Meiji period of Japan or the history of Christianity in this east Asian country may find the lists of names and places daunting. Regardless, there are many rewards to be discovered as Washington brings the reader back a century to understand why Protestant Christianity continues to claim a larger influence in the present. There continues to be a veritable absence of Christian history written in English in this critical period of Japanese development, and for this reason alone the reader, whether academic or not, will not be disappointed. Unfortunately, it is probably such lack of research and readership that has contributed to the book's relatively costly price tag. Nevertheless, if one shops directly at the publisher's website they can find a much more reasonable cost in paperback, hopefully encouraging a wider circulation this book no doubt deserves.

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