DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH?
BRITAIN AND THE PERSECUTION OF
CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN, 1867–1873

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On January 5 and 6, 1870, the new government of Meiji Japan began to deport an estimated three thousand Japanese Christians from Urakami Village, near Nagasaki, to other parts of Kyushu, in an event known as the Urakami kuzure (‘destruction’).¹ This was the culmination of Japan’s most significant persecution of Christians in two hundred years, made all the more surprising in light of the presence of foreign representatives in the treaty port of Nagasaki and the apparent close interest taken in the subject by the Western consuls in Yokohama. It was indeed thought at the time that it was the constant clamor of protest taken up by the European and American diplomats in Yokohama and Nagasaki that finally halted the persecutions, and no Westerner was seemingly more active on behalf of the Christians than British Consul-General Harry S. Parkes. Parkes happened to be in Nagasaki when the deportation began and personally intervened on behalf of the Christians with local Japanese officials; he continually brought up the subject with high-ranking Japanese ministers while at the imperial court in Osaka, and in his correspondence with London regularly kept the Foreign Office informed of the course of anti-Christian activities.²

Most of the available sources, then as now, are united in pointing to Western intervention as the major factor in the cessation of persecution, and in noting particularly the role of Parkes and the British. This conclusion is partially the result of common sense: the British would be expected to take a strong interest in an attack on Christianity, especially as their trade with Japan was at the

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time significantly greater than that of any other Western power.\(^3\) Closer examination, however, reveals that domestic factors, rather than British scrutiny, were most important in the termination of persecution. The British were in Japan to trade, not to proselytize, and their chief aim was, by Harry Parkes’s own admission, the success and stability of a friendly Japanese government. Knowing this to be the case, the Japanese were able to successfully manipulate Parkes and the other Western consuls in order to carry out their desired religious policy.

**THE DESTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

By the time of Japan’s official opening to the West in 1854, Christianity had been prohibited in the empire for nearly two hundred fifty years, and the story of its suppression was relatively well known to Foreign Office officials.\(^4\) The religion was introduced to Kyushu by St. Francis Xavier in 1549, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century had spread throughout that island as well as, to some extent, the main island of Honshu. Adherents included the daimyo\(^5\) of Omura, Arima, and Shimabara, and while Jesuit reports of more than six hundred thousand converts may be exaggerated, it is nevertheless clear that Christians comprised a significant minority in the western han.\(^6\) The dedicated ministrations of Jesuit priests were abetted by indirect support from contenders in Japan’s ongoing civil wars, most notably Oda Nobunaga, who attacked the establishment Buddhist priesthood as part of his efforts to establish a new unified government.\(^7\) This support came to an end after Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu succeeded in reestablishing central control. Ieyasu, in particular, was extremely hostile toward the Christian faith, and it was he who between 1612 and 1614 banned the practice of the religion, ordered the expulsion of all Western priests, and authorized the destruction of Christian churches.\(^8\) Those Jesuits not driven out were put to death, and the only significant act of native resistance, the Catholic rebellion at Shimabara, was crushed by 1636. Christianity remained officially
extinct in Japan for the next two centuries. In trying to understand the mindset that stories of the seventeenth century persecutions produced in Parkes and his compatriots, it is important to emphasize their unanimous agreement that the extermination of Christianity was, above all, the Jesuits’ own fault. To most nineteenth century Britons, the Jesuits were guilty of treasonously plotting to overthrow the Japanese government. Protestant minister the Rev. Hamilton A. MacGill, writing to Foreign Secretary Lord Granville in 1870 to advocate a more forthright policy in defense of Christianity, admitted that he was “well aware that the crime and calamity of persecution against the Christian religion in Japan . . . were precipitated by the discovery that the Romanish missionaries aimed at political as well as Christian results.”

British diplomats concurred: Harry Parkes (falsely) claimed that “the civil struggles of the commencement of the seventeenth century”—meaning the wars by which the Tokugawa shogunate had been established—“were religious in their character.” Even historian J. J. Rein, while admitting that “no support for [the] accusation” that Catholic priests were fomenting rebellion “can be found in the writings of the Jesuits,” nonetheless held that Ieyasu’s extermination of them was in some sense rational or justifiable.

Ieyasu’s attack on Christianity was most likely caused by a need for support from the vehemently anti-Catholic Buddhist priesthood, and by suspicion of Christians for having largely sided with his rival Toyotomi Hideyori in the civil war, as much as by supposed Jesuit scheming. The contextualization of the Tokugawa extermination of Christianity in British minds with anti-Catholic attitudes—it will be remembered that the anti-Catholic Test Act had been repealed only in 1829, and it remained illegal for a Catholic to ascend the throne of Great Britain—was to have crucial ramifications during the next major episode of persecution in Japan.

Despite the intensity of shogunal repression of Christianity in the first half of the seventeenth century, some Christians managed to survive. These so called hidden Christians (kakure kirishitan) were able to preserve their beliefs using the traditional Buddhist method of secret worship, onando buppo (itself developed
during periods of persecution of Buddhism). Christian villages would employ a secretary to keep the religious calendar, a “watering-man” to baptize infants, and a “hearing-man” to pass information along to the believers, who would then worship in private houses without the knowledge of the authorities. Incredibly, this technique worked sufficiently well that when Catholic priests finally returned to Nagasaki in the early 1860s, they quickly discovered the existence of several thousand Christian believers. Some of these refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new ministers, but many others eagerly flocked to the French cathedral and sought instruction from the long-vanished keepers of the true faith.

THE FIRST URAKAMI PERSECUTION, 1867

During the opening of the country in the 1850s, the shogun, under Western pressure, consented to the abolishment of the practice of *fumi-e* (by which Nagasaki residents were required to trample on Christian icons in order to prove they were not believers), but the harsh laws against practice of Christianity remained on the books. French priests were supposed to be in Nagasaki only to provide for the needs of the small foreign community, who under the treaties between Japan and the Western countries were permitted to engage in Christian worship. But, faced with the opportunity to contact survivors of one of the greatest Christian persecutions since Roman times, the priests proved unable to resist. They began to receive Japanese worshippers in their homes and travel to Christian villages, including Urakami, in order to preach and give Mass. Upon becoming aware of this proselytization, the shogunal governor of Nagasaki, Tokunaga Hisamasa, initially did not react. Following protests by the anti-Christian daimyo of Omura, however, the governor ordered the arrest of Urakami residents in July and August 1867. Altogether more than sixty were imprisoned.

Parkes was aware of the arrests, as revealed in a later letter to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Stanley, and probably informed London about them at the time. Parkes’s secretary, Ernest Satow, was in Nagasaki when the persecution began, and heard “a good deal”
about them from local officials. He notes that those imprisoned were threatened with capital punishment under Japanese law. Yet unlike the French, Prussian, Portuguese, and American consuls in Nagasaki, no British representative protested to the Japanese about the arrests. Satow merely advised a Japanese friend that “England would not be pleased” to hear of the persecutions, and added that he would not object to the daimyo of Omura advocating more stringent attacks on Christians if their only aim was to embarrass the shogunate. The French representative in Yokohama, Léon Roches, was by contrast hyperactive in the defense of the Japanese Christians. He personally petitioned the Shogun for the prisoners’ release, which seems to have hastened the end of the persecution in October 1867. On the American side, meanwhile, the Secretary of State William Seward was interested enough in the matter to cable American Consul Van Valkenburgh encouraging him to cooperate with the other representatives in the moderation of the anti-Christian laws.

In Britain itself, meanwhile, the Urakami incident was barely reported. Only the *Birmingham Daily Post*, of the dozens of sources examined, carried a story on it; an October 5, 1867 article that relates the discovery of the Christians by Catholic priests in greater detail than their persecution. It even claimed that “all the Consuls [sic] have been to the Emperor, and he is much embarrassed,” suggesting that most Britons were unaware of the inactivity on the part of their representatives in Japan. The more frequent reports of the later Urakami incidents after the Meiji Restoration do not display any awareness of the persecutions of July and August 1867.

Why was there such apathy of the key British players in Japan—Parkes, Satow, Parkes’s other secretary A. Bertram Mitford, and Nagasaki consul Marcus Flowers—during the last shogunal persecution of Christians, given the interest taken in the matter by all the other foreign representatives? The records suggest that a number of circumstantial factors reduced British willingness to protest to the Japanese government of the time. For one, Parkes was more concerned with the recent murder in Nagasaki of two British sailors from the HMS *Icarus*. The Japanese official to whom French
Nagasaki consul M. Lèques protested about the Christian persecution had in fact been sent to the city by the shogun to investigate the British case.26 For another, the very groups advocating more stringent action against the Urakami Christians—the daimyo of Omura and Satsuma, local Nagasaki officials—were allied with the Emperor, who the British were inclined to support in the looming civil war between Emperor and Shogun. Satow openly supported the western daimyo against the shogun and and explicitly wrote in his memoirs that he tolerated the Kyushu officials’ hostility toward Christians insofar as it was “of course intended as a general manifesto against the Shogun’s government.”27 The success of French Minister Roches, whose policy in Japan was one of coziness with the shogunal government, in obtaining the Christians’ release reveals how closely protests on behalf of native Christians were tied up with local politics and intra-European power rivalries in the Far East.28

THE MEIJI RESTORATION AND REVIVAL SHINTO

Shortly after the release of the imprisoned Urakami Christians, in January 1868, the shogunate was overthrown. Samurai from the western han of Choshu and Satsuma rallied around the Emperor, seized Osaka, and effected the last Tokugawa shogun’s submission to imperial rule. This event, though it enabled the advance of modern science and economics, was to have dark implications for the Christians around Nagasaki. The new oligarchs who surrounded the young Meiji Emperor knew that their position was precarious; they represented the same faction geographically that had fallen before Tokugawa Ieyasu at Sekigahara in 1600, and even their dramatic early success in the civil war did not give them control of Edo (modern Tokyo) or the northern han, which remained in the hands of Tokugawa retainers. The crumbling of the shogun’s rule did not automatically give the new rulers a power base of their own. In order to create a new basis of support for control over to the country, the Meiji oligarchs turned to religious institutionalization—just as Ieyasu had—in this case by rallying around the
semi-mythical figure of the Emperor and proclaiming the reestablishment of the ancient Shinto rites.29

This in itself almost constituted a revolution, as Buddhism, not Shinto, had been patronized by the Tokugawas. Shinto as it existed in Japan by 1868 was less a separate religion than a syncretistic mix of Buddhist ceremonies and older, traditional practices and beliefs. To divide the two, as the Revival Shinto scholars surrounding the Emperor now proposed to do, required less a "restoration" than the creation of an entirely new religious system. Yet on April 4, 1868—even before the promulgation of the famous Charter Oath outlining the aims of the new government—came the order for Buddhist monks to return to secular life, and a few days later for the removal of Buddhist objects from Shinto temples and the renaming of Shinto temples that had Buddhist names. These orders were issued by the Department for Shinto (Jingimuka), which, under the initial Meiji system of rule, supposedly ranked even higher than the executive arm of the imperial government (Dajokan).30 There followed a widespread outbreak of disorder in which groups of hooligans torched Buddhist temples and assaulted priests. This persecution of Buddhism indirectly furthered hostility toward Christianity because Buddhist priests, desperate to escape official disfavor, became the loudest voices in condemning the influence of the foreign sect.31 Moreover, rather than being an isolated incident as it had been under the bakufu, the persecution of Christians at Urakami was now part of a pattern of state hostility toward any non-Shinto religion, which helps explain why the Urakami persecution of the Meiji period was so much more severe than its precursor.

Despite the dramatic changes in Japan's religious policy after 1868, there is no evidence in the records that the British were especially concerned by the contemporary attacks on Buddhism, much less that they drew any connection between it and the government's hostility toward Christians. The only near-contemporary reference is in F. V. Dickins's biography of Harry Parkes, which makes passing reference to "the abolition of Buddhism in Satsuma," but adds that it "was accepted, without a murmur, even by the Buddhist
priests themselves,” and only ten pages later arrives at the attacks on Urakami Christians.32

Only three days after the decree against Buddhism, the Da-
jokan decided to repost throughout the empire the triple-edict boards33 condemning Christianity, and notified Westerners to that effect through its officially published gazette. This time, the British minister did protest against the anti-Christian policy, although not before the minister from the United States had done so.34 Parkes reported to Lord Stanley his remonstrances concerning the triple edict in a dispatch dated May 30, 1868. He explained that he spoke informally on the matter to de facto foreign minister Date Mun-
enari35 and two other high officials, emphasizing to them that the effort to “bring about a good understanding between foreign nations and Japan, might be entirely defeated if the Mikado’s Government declared itself actively hostile to the faith which all the nations having Treaty relations with Japan professed.”36 He also reported, however, that he convinced the representatives of France, Holland, Italy, Prussia, and the United States not to send letters of protest to the Japanese ministers at Yokohama, and included translations of the new edict to determine if it “compares favourably with that of the old Government.”37 It is evident from the very beginning of news of fresh Japanese undertakings against Christians that Parkes took a far milder approach in the Christians’ defense than that to which his colleagues, particularly the French and American consuls, were inclined. He cannot have felt too strongly about the threat of persecution, as his dispatch declined to substantiate rumors of new imprisonments around Nagasaki, and was written on the same day (May 30) that he sent off a report to Lord Stanley on the Japanese celebration of Queen Victoria’s birthday.38

THE SECOND URAKAMI PERSECUTION, 1868–1873

Though Parkes as of May 30 thought that “the threatened persecution had not then set in,” hostile action against the Christians of Nagasaki had in fact been ongoing for several months.39 The Meiji government established itself in Kyushu in February
1868, and at the end of that month appointed Sawa Nobuyoshi, a staunch nationalist and dedicated opponent of the Shogun—he had spent five years in exile in Choshu following a failed 1863 coup attempt—governor of Nagasaki. He and his staff were opposed to Western influence in Japan, dedicated supporters of the government’s religious policy, and more hostile to Christianity than the Emperor or his ministers. They found on their March 1868 arrival in Nagasaki that most of the local officials, having been restrained from their earlier eagerness to crush the Urakami Christians by the orders of the Shogun, shared their enthusiasm for a fresh persecution. On March 14, 1868 came the arrest warrant for Christian leaders in Urakami village. There is little evidence that the British were aware of these measures, arising not from the central government but from local officials supporting the broader aims of the Meiji Revival Shinto policy. There are no reports in British newspapers of any Urakami persecutions before October 1868, and the mere “rumors” that Parkes ascribed to Nagasaki consul Flowers at the end of May were apparently only “several days” old. By that point, however, arrests were well underway, and the Dajokan had discussed the issue nearly a month earlier (on April 25, 1868).

After submitting its infamous decree ordering the dispersal of 4,010 Christians throughout the western han (June 7, 1868), the Dajokan waited several months before taking action, which suggests its awareness that attacking the Western religion would have a negative impact on the government’s foreign relations. That it felt it could nevertheless get away with issuing the decree in the first place testifies to the perception, even on the part of the Japanese, of the relative apathy toward Christianity of the country’s largest trading partner. The French, stalwart defenders of the Catholics around Nagasaki, had fallen out of favor due to their support of the floundering shogunate; the British, who had at the very least observed a highly benign neutrality that aided the imperial forces, were evidently not thought to care as much about what the Japanese did to their Christians. They were, after all, hardly unaware that the anti-shogunal forces in the western han also tended to be those that were most hostile to Westerners and Christianity;
Parkes makes regular referrals, even in his earliest dispatches on the subject, to the need of the Meiji oligarchs to show some degree of unfriendliness toward Christianity in order to appease the more rabid nationalists in their midst. Even Consul Flowers, generally more eager to intervene in favor of the Urakami Christians than his superior in Yokohama, recorded in a July 1868 letter to Parkes the feelings of an official in Nagasaki that “it was not so much against Christianity they were acting, as to preserve order in the country.”

Upon first learning of the plans for exile of native Christians in June 1868, Parkes wrote to Lord Stanley expressing his opinion that the decree was the result of “the anti-foreign party [having] propose[d] to make Christian proselytism a source for hostility to foreigners.” Although explaining that those affected “may be condemned to capital punishment,” he did not record any protest on his part to the Japanese against such treatment, and in the dispatch merely expressed the hope “that the conduct of foreign missionaries at this juncture will not increase the agitation.” This is a remarkably tepid response to the threat of a massacre of Christian believers, and Parkes’s instinctive reaction to blame “the conduct of foreign missionaries” rather than the Japanese authorities is consistent with his attitude throughout the Christian persecutions. One month later, apparently forced to make some remonstration to the Japanese government by the demands of the other Yokohama ministers and the joint protest of the French, British, Portuguese, Dutch, and American resident consuls in Nagasaki, Parkes wrote to Lord Stanley that it was “satisfactory” to be told by foreign affairs advisor Date Munenari that “the decree under which upwards of four thousand native Christians were sentenced to banishment, has as yet been enforced in this case only of one hundred twenty.” He again blamed the conduct of the Catholic missionaries in Urakami for the difficulty of the persecution.

In August 1868, the desire of the French minister in Japan, Léon Roches, to submit a note signed by all the consuls to the imperial government protesting the deportation of Christians from Urakami prompted a remarkable and lengthy dispatch from Parkes to Lord Stanley offering a qualified defense of the anti-Christian
policy. He told the Foreign Secretary that he immediately rejected the idea of a joint protest, and convinced the representatives of the United States, Holland, Italy, and Prussia to refrain from one. For his reasoning he cited “the excited state of the country” and that “no extreme penalty . . . has yet been inflicted on the converts,” and repeated Munenari’s “the sentence of banishment . . . which appears to have passed upon four thousand persons, has yet been carried out in the case of 120 only.”

Parkes improbably argued that “the decree itself is not conceived in a tone of rigid intolerance” and here made his reference to the delicacy of Christian relations in Japan due to the supposedly religious character of the Sengoku jidai. He emphasized that “the present Mikado’s Government cannot be held responsible” for antagonism toward Christians, and even went so far as to impugn the standing of the Christians themselves, wondering “whether the objections to their conduct can be said to be confined solely to their religious professions” and noting that “in a printed account of the arrest of the Christians in the summer of last year . . . it is stated that they opposed the police sent to arrest them.”

Parkes concluded to Lord Stanley that he intended to “lose no opportunity of impressing upon influential members of the Mikado’s Government” the need for a friendlier policy with regard to Christianity, but would not issue formal protests of the sort desired by the French minister (and which had proved effective during the last persecution under the shogunate), feeling that “much more can be urged on these and similar points in friendly conversation than in a formal note.” If the Foreign Office records can be assumed complete, this is Parkes’s last dispatch to the Foreign Secretary on the subject of Japanese Christians until November 1872.

Regardless of arguments relating to its expediency, Parkes’s complacency on the subject of Christian persecution is astonishing. His own adjectival summary, “friendly,” is an apt one, echoed by all the British diplomats in records of their remonstrations with the Japanese. A. Bertram Mitford, in a May 28, 1868 letter to Harry Parkes from Osaka, noted approvingly in conversation with the Prince of Uwajima (Date Munenari) that the prince “appeared to attach great importance to the opinions expressed,” even though
“he could not pledge himself in any way to rescue the prisoners from their fate.” In another letter Mitford explained that the Japanese kindly “do not profess to deny the excellence of the Christian teaching,” as if this made their persecution of it less offensive. In the same letter he cited the Taiping rebellion, “founded on a few Christian tracts,” as apparent justification for the suppression of the religion. The Foreign Secretary himself, in a July 1868 dispatch to Parkes in Japan, wrote that “the evidence of these despatches of the generally friendly disposition of the Japanese Government is highly satisfactory,” even though he was replying to Parkes’s first reference to the anti-Christian edict of May 30! When he instructed Parkes to act against the “obnoxious edict respecting Christianity,” he told him only to pressure the Japanese government to revoke the edict “in a friendly way.” These are all remarkably sanguine stances for a British government to take regarding the explicit persecution of its state religion.

BRITISH VIEWS ON THE PERSECUTIONS

The demonstrated willingness of British officials, in Japan and at home, to extenuate Japanese maltreatment of the Urakami Christians requires some explanation. In the first place, it must be admitted Japan’s treaties with the West did not give Parkes legal authority to intervene in its policies toward Christians. The religious freedom clauses of the American, Dutch, Russian, British, and French treaties of amity and commerce signed with the Japanese in 1858 only read that neither party should meddle in the other’s religious affairs. Those missionaries that were present in the empire were supposed to operate only in the treaty ports for the benefit of lapsed foreign believers, rather than for Japanese converts. However, this did not prevent Léon Roches from speaking to the Shogun on behalf of Christian converts in 1867, and there was nothing illegal about applying something more than merely “friendly” pressure on the Japanese government to stop imprisoning its Christians or threatening them with execution. Had Parkes cared to speak more emphatically on the subject, there would have
been nothing to prevent him doing so.\textsuperscript{60}

Furthermore, that a certain degree of apathy toward Japan's treatment of its Christians was shared by both government officials and the British press suggests that more than institutional or legal factors were at work. The opinions of some scholars on this subject—namely, that the British public was well informed of and highly angered by the Urakami persecutions, and that hostility toward Japan created by news of the persecutions was a major factor in the failure of the Iwakura mission—do not bear scrutiny.\textsuperscript{61}

Discussion of Japan in Parliament or the British press was rare in the early years of British involvement there (1858–83); of Japanese persecution of Christians, rarer still. In the London \textit{Times}, for example, months if not years could pass between mentions of the country.\textsuperscript{62} One of the mere three reports carried by the \textit{Times} on Urakami between 1870 and 1872 refuted an earlier article, of March 6, 1872, describing torture and crucifixion of Japanese Christians, on the basis of inaccuracy.\textsuperscript{63} Another article on the persecution, in the London \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} of March 16, 1872, declined to publish accounts from the \textit{Nagasaki Gazette} because “it seems that the paper in question is under the influence of Roman Catholic priests at Nagasaki.”\textsuperscript{64} Most of the other published stories on Japanese attacks on Christianity fell along similar lines, although they were less overtly anti-Catholic. They were universally short, and tended to be sandwiched between longer articles on different (often mundane) subjects, or combined with other information on Japan of a less inflammatory nature.\textsuperscript{65} Often they placed rumors of persecution in Japan and China within the same article.\textsuperscript{66} In all the accounts, details were slight (scarcely better than hearsay), and because of the time involved in between Nagasaki and Britain, the news was published many months after the events described.\textsuperscript{67}

While there is not space here for an exhaustive survey of articles in the British press on Japanese persecution of Christians, the trend of general disinterest is clear.\textsuperscript{68}

Nor, in contrast to what might be expected, were the missionary societies in Britain a very effective pressure group in urging the Foreign Office to intervene more strongly on behalf of the Urakami
Christians. The Methodist “General Religious Intelligence” of November 1870 included a copy of a report by the Nagasaki Shipping List on the subject of persecution, but noted that such Western missionaries as were employed by the Japanese government “are left almost entirely untrammeled in regard to what they teach.” The official appeal to the Foreign Office by the United Presbyterian Church’s Board of Missions only tried to impress upon Lord Granville (who became Foreign Secretary in July 1870) the vague “importance of securing the full toleration of Christianity” in the future. The church delegation—from the Council of the Evangelical Alliance and British Missionary Societies—sent to the Foreign Secretary to remonstrate on the matter during the Iwakura Embassy’s sojourn in Britain was met by Harry Parkes himself, then on leave, convinced of the fairness of the Japan’s government’s position, and persuaded that force should not be used to stop Japanese hostility toward native Christians even if this impeded evangelization in the country. In short, the attitude of the evangelical societies in Britain was similar to (and often directly informed by) that of the Foreign Office.

In addition to the great distance involved and lack of good reports, much of the apathy amongst British Christians must be due to the very small numbers of Protestant missionaries and converts in Japan at the time. No significant British Protestant missionary activity took place in Japan before 1873. The first English missionary of any kind, one George Ensor, an Anglican minister from London, reached Nagasaki only in January 1869 and did not baptize his first convert until April 1869. He may have pressed Parkes and Flowers for a more active defense of the Urakami Christians, but he himself was concerned about the proselytizing of his French Catholic rivals. Ensor was the only British churchman in Japan until 1871. That the persecutions at Urakami touched neither Western missionaries—whose preaching the Japanese scrupulously avoided noticing, even to the extent of allowing them to escape police raids—nor Protestant converts (of whom there were still only ten in 1872, scattered between Nagasaki and Yokohama) surely explains to a great extent the lack of close attention paid to
the Urakami incidents in Britain. This is made even more apparent when one considers that the much closer interest in the persecutions by the United States and especially France were probably the result of the presence of a much greater number of missionaries from both countries and, in the case of the French, the involvement of co-religionists. The Catholicism of the priests and their converts seems to have played into rampant British suspicions of Catholic unscrupulousness well into the nineteenth century. In the writings of Parkes, Mitford, and Flowers, as well as in the British press, suggestions that French Catholic rapacity for converts irresponsibly provoked the persecutions, that the priests were deliberately flouting the laws of the Japanese government, and that the priests were, in any sense, following in the steps of their Jesuit forebears in plotting something vile against the rulers of Japan, are all consistent explicit or underlying themes. Mitford, in particular, declared the priests to “have preached sedition and treason.”

There was also, it must be said, general suspicion on the part of the skeptical British officials in Japan that the Urakami Christians were not the saintly, miraculous survivors of ancient persecution that the French priests presented. In addition to the fairly self-serving argument by Harry Parkes that the Christians may have attacked police officers sent to arrest them, British reports gradually suggest as the persecutions went on that the very identity of the Urakami residents as Christians was under question. Mitford recorded without comment the contentions of Japanese elites that “the school of Urakami is but a bastard form of Christianity,” and that the “converts have but little in common with true Christians.” In fact, the hidden Christians had, in their centuries of hiding, created a syncretistic religion of the sort common in Japanese history, which combined a Christian framework with elements of traditional Japanese ritual. St. John the Baptist was viewed as a water-god, St. Francis of Assisi a wind god. These unorthodoxies proved difficult for even the French priests to root out. It is not entirely surprising that the British refrained from raising much alarm in support of a bastardized form of Catholicism, especially when the Japanese did not harass native Protestant
converts. The latter also tended to be of a higher social class than the largely peasant Urakami Christians, with whom the British had no opportunity for regular contact. 

But all that the above proves is that there was less public pressure upon Harry Parkes to do something about the attacks on Christians than there was upon his French and American colleagues. He was still free to act if he had cared to do so. That he did not is—perhaps—partially due to his own lack of religious fervor, but more directly due to his understanding of his purpose in Japan. Parkes was not a missionary, but a resident representative of the British Empire, the perceived ambition of which was—in the words of historian Ronald Hyam—to “organis[e] the entire world for the purpose of satisfying the needs of the expanding British economy.” His position more than anything impelled him to supervise and encourage British trade with Japan. All other concerns were secondary to that end, and its attendant requirement: a stable, friendly Japanese government. Parkes was unwilling to pressure the Japanese government on the subject of Christianity if doing so would weaken its standing in the country—his dispatches on the progress of the civil war, which are longer and more frequent than those on the Urakami persecutions, indicate that he was well aware of the uncertain position of the Meiji oligarchs—or result in Japanese resentment toward Britain. He knew that France's assertiveness on the Christian matter had, by irritating those Japanese opposed to foreign influence, returned to haunt them after the collapse of the bakufu. Parkes may even have deliberately taken a softer stance than that of Britain's colonial rival, France, in order to gain more influence over the Meiji government: sources on the persecutions tend to present all the European powers acting in concert against Japan, or as part of a group led by Parkes, but intra-European competition persisted overseas as much as it did on the continent in the era of New Imperialism. While acting in defense of the Urakami Christians to the extent required in order to forestall potential criticism in Britain, Parkes hardly considered spreading the faith to be part of his mandate, and was more concerned with containing an incident that could negatively
impact trade than he was with keeping the Japanese from imprisoning their own citizens. As the various British Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries of the period were not terribly interested in the distant outposts in Japan—worth much less to Britain than the concessions in China—they gave Parkes very wide authority to make decisions on his own: Lord Granville’s instructions to Parkes on his 1873 return to Japan following home leave explained that “Her Majesty’s Government fully rely on your ability to judge what the interests of British subjects require.”

Policy thus tended to be determined in Yokohama and approved in London only later. Parkes’s disinclination—driven by trade concerns—to prod the Japanese on the issue became the chief factor in Britain’s lackluster response to the Urakami incidents.

**JAPANESE STRATEGY TOWARD THE BRITISH**

The Japanese were not simply lucky in being handed a British minister who did not care to cross them on a matter far from his heart. Particularly between 1868 and 1870, they were determined to persecute the Urakami Christians as part of the policy of Revival Shinto and skillfully handled the foreign consuls in order to be able to do so. The month and a half that the government spent deliberating before issuing the deportation decree shows that the Japanese were not blithely unaware that attacks on Catholic converts might antagonize Western governments. They were careful to employ claims and methods that would placate the foreign representatives even as support for Revival Shinto helped quiet ultranationalist critics. For example, in response to the July 1868 protests by the Yokohama consuls to the de facto Japanese minister for foreign affairs, the minister Date Munenari blamed local officials in Nagasaki for a policy that had been sanctioned by Dajokan decree and promised to personally intervene to stop their excesses. He did not, of course, do so. The August 7, 1868 Dajokan order postponing the exile of the remaining Urakami Christians, following the deportation of the first hundred-twenty, of which Harry Parkes made so much in his dispatches to the Foreign Office, was in fact sent out because the
rebellion by former bakufu admiral Enomoto Takeaki in Hokkaido had made it impossible for the authorities to transport the remaining three thousand some Christians. As soon as the rebellion had ended in June 1869, the deportations resumed. By that point, however, Parkes had already obtained approval from the Foreign Office to pursue a very mild course in the hopes of influencing the Japanese government to alleviate its treatment. It took six months before the consuls succeeded in obtaining a meeting with the chief Japanese ministers. At that meeting the ministers (including future ambassador Iwakura Tonomi) improbably managed to convince the foreigners that the persecutions were their fault, because the Catholic missionaries' ministrations to native Japanese had been in violation of the 1858 treaties. No official protests were made. Instead, on February 9, 1870, Western missionaries were instructed by the combined foreign powers to restrict their activities to foreign zones within the treaty ports. At around the same time, in March 1870, the subject of the Urakami persecutions was brought up for the only time in the British Parliament, and the public was mollified by Parkes' presentation of the Japanese position.

In their conversations with Parkes and his secretaries, the Japanese demonstrated a clear awareness of the British minister's desire to find sympathy for their position. The views Parkes and Mitford ascribed to Japanese officials were echoed again and again: “he laid great stress upon the difficult position in which the Japanese Government found themselves”; “it is remarkable how little sympathy these people [Christians] find with any class of their countrymen”; “they felt themselves deterred by a fear of consequences from advising toleration of the open profession of the Christian religion.” By expressing a (partially sincere) belief that they were persecuting Christianity due to popular demand, the Japanese knew that they could bring the British, wary of doing anything that might destabilize a government they favored, on board with their Shinto Revival policies. They successfully gambled that British concern over hostility toward their religion would be outweighed by a desire to support the Meiji government and embarrass the French.
END OF THE PERSECUTIONS

Having succeeded in playing off both the Western powers and native extremists, however, the Meiji government began to bring the campaign against the Christians of Urakami to a halt. After February 1870 there were no more deportations.94 The Japanese kept their promise to Parkes to send officials to the han to which the Christians had been deported in order to monitor their treatment, and permitted the British to do the same. In June 1871 this even led to a public reprimand for some officials in the Kaga han who had been overzealous in their brutalization of the Urakami exiles.95 At around the same time, the Shinto Revival movement that was a major impetus for the Urakami persecutions began to wind down. The government had by this time defeated most of its internal enemies and successfully imposed central rule from Edo; it no longer needed the support of the revolutionary Shinto priests, who in the event were generally less successful than their Buddhist predecessors in drumming up support for the government among the population.96 The gradual trend toward de-emphasis of nationalist religious rhetoric is hinted at in the evolution of the names of the religion department, from the Jingikan (“Office for Shinto”) in 1868, to the Jingisho (“Ministry of the Shinto Religion”) in 1871, to the more innocuous Kyobusho (“Ministry of Religion”) in 1872. At the last date, authority for Shinto temples was also transferred from the important Ministries of Civil Affairs and of Finance, where it had formerly resided as evidence of state support for Revival Shinto.97 The decision to end the persecution of Buddhism was made in 1873, the same year as the Urakami Christians were allowed to return to their homes.98 Parkes was lionized back home and in many subsequent publications for having ensured their release; yet the mortality rate among the returning Christians was about 17 percent.99

Frequently pointed to as a cause for the end of the harassment of Japanese Christians is the experience of the Japanese ambassadors of the Iwakura mission as they traveled the world in 1871 and 1872. It does seem that the U.S. Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish,
used the Urakami persecutions as one of his many excuses for not then signing on to the plan for treaty revision with the Iwakura ambassadors.\textsuperscript{100} It is also true that the matter was twice brought up by Foreign Secretary Lord Granville in his three meetings with Iwakura, and that the Embassy included several men, including Iwakura himself, who, once fervent opponents of the Christians, adopted more tolerant views after their travels in the West.\textsuperscript{101} Most dramatically, Ito Hirobumi, having returned to Japan in June 1872 from the United States to obtain higher diplomatic credentials, addressed a cabinet meeting in the Emperor’s presence to advocate benign treatment of Christians in order to obtain revised treaties with the West.\textsuperscript{102} But the claim that the end of Japanese persecution of Christianity came as a direct or sole result of the treatment of the Iwakura mission does not hold water. Lord Granville did twice ask Iwakura about the Japanese government’s treatment of its Christian subjects, but in the context of much longer discussions on other issues—the third meeting between the two dealt almost entirely with the Shimonoseki indemnity—and, as shown, he was very willing to use Parkes’s testimony to mollify any direct pressure on himself or Japan from British Christian groups.\textsuperscript{103} Freedom of religion was not included among the twelve points outlined by Parkes for Lord Granville in November 1872 as prerequisites for any revision of the 1858 treaty with the Japanese. He did refer to it in an addendum, but only to say that the Japanese government had not at the time shown any inclination to cease persecuting its Christian subjects.\textsuperscript{104} The large protests reported by some sources for better treatment of Christians following the arrival of the Embassy in London are not substantiated by any contemporary British news reports, nor by Kume Kunitake’s (admittedly sanitized) account of the Embassy’s travels in Britain.\textsuperscript{105} On the contrary, it would appear that the Embassy was well received in Britain, and the press reports that do exist tend to extol the achievements of the Meiji Restoration and the heroism of the ambassadors.\textsuperscript{106} While Kume’s description of the Embassy’s travels and the improved opinion of Embassy members regarding Christianity do suggest that the Embassy’s travels had some effect on its members’ person-
al opinions on the faith, these were in line with the general trend toward ending Christian persecution evident in Japan, and by the time the mission returned home in late 1873, the important decisions had already been made.107

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

The return home of the Urakami Christians in June 1873 and the removal of the triple-edict boards in February 1873 did not officially legalize Christianity in Japan. Indeed, the Japanese claimed that they had removed the boards only because the edicts were by that time so well known to the people as to make their publication unnecessary.108 Sporadic persecutions continued, with less frequency and intensity, until the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, and even that granted freedom of religious belief only “within limits not prejudicial to peace and order.”109 Complete religious freedom in Japan did not come until after the Second World War.110 Moreover, the end of official persecution of Christianity did not result in a sudden wave of Christian converts. By 1885, there were only eleven thousand Protestant Christians in Japan, perhaps twice that number of Catholic converts, and an unknown but not substantial number of Hidden Christians, in a total population of about thirty four million.111 To the irritation of the missionaries, many young Japanese feigned an interest in Christianity in order to learn English,112 or for the entertainment value of Christian sermons as was recorded by Meiji convert to Christianity Uchimura Kanzo.113

In his memoirs, Uchimura explains that he was transiently interested in Christianity because of “its music, its stories, [and] the kindness shown me by its followers,” but hesitated to convert because of its “stringent laws” and status as the once-proscribed “evil sect.” While in his case these objections were eventually overcome, many another young Japanese was unwilling to become “a traitor to [his] country, and an apostate from [his] national faith by accepting a faith which is exotic in origin.”114

The Meiji government ceased persecuting Christians in the
1870s as part of a broader movement of “civilization and enlightenment” (bunmei kaika), in which Japan tried to reconstruct itself on the model of the advanced Western countries. Enthusiasm for this policy among the oligarchs began to slacken in the 1880s and 1890s due to the emergence of the People's Rights movement and other democratic forces, often abetted by Christian converts. Concerned at losing control over the population, toward the end of the century the government began again to promote the old Confucian and Shinto elements of Japanese tradition, which stressed respect for the Emperor and the rulers of the country.115 Buddhist leaders, meanwhile, continued their vehement intellectual attacks on Christians in an effort to restore themselves to the authorities' good graces. Uchimura Kanzo was himself famously condemned in 1891 and forced to resign as an educator for paying insufficient homage to the Imperial Rescript on Education, a case that was taken as a sign of increased disfavor toward Christianity.116 By the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the prominent Japanese Christians were generally those who supported the government and conservative strains within Japanese society. Buddhist priests Kuroda Shindo and Maeda Eun joined with Honda Yoichi and Kozaki Hiromichi, both Christians, and Shinto scholar Shibata Reiichi in a May 1904 Religionists' Meeting in Tokyo that tried to justify Japan's war aims against Russia.117 More revolutionary Christians, such as Ueki Emori, had by then, disillusioned, generally reconciled to Buddhism.118 Thus, the “large hopes” written of by the Rev. W. Fleming Stevenson and other British Christian leaders regarding a “Christian conquest” of Japan were to be disappointed. To this day, Christians comprise a tiny proportion of the Japanese population: at the last census, around three million out of a total population of 127 million, or about 2 percent.119

It would thus appear that the traditional narrative of the 1867–1873 Urakami incidents is inadequate in several respects. The old story does not adequately account for the internal tensions that prompted the first Christian persecutions. Nor does it explain the very surprising degree of tolerance and understanding exhibited by the British when faced with the persecution of members of their
own religion, especially when compared with the wrath and horror that followed the Japanese extermination of Christianity in the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{120} Though part of the more tepid response must of course be accounted for in the much smaller number of persecuted, the difference in British attitude cannot solely be ascribed to a difference of scale. Trade concerns and the overarching policy goal of a stable, pro-British Japanese government caused Parkes to combat the persecutions with as little vigor as possible, encouraged by the absence of significant interest and latent anti-Catholicism back home. Moreover, while the traditional narrative presents the case of Urakami as a British victory over “Japanese jealousy and bigotry,” closer examination reveals that the Japanese did not end the persecutions until they had satisfied their domestic aims, and deftly played off the (relatively unenthusiastic) Western objections before that time.\textsuperscript{121} Far from another instance of Oriental defeat in the power struggles of the nineteenth century, the Urakami incidents were actually an occasion on which the Japanese outmaneuvered the Europeans and Americans. They negotiated Western demands for religious toleration in such a fashion as to be able to satisfy domestic opponents and eventually avoid any sweeping occurrence of proselytization. The Urakami persecutions are, like Commodore Perry’s 1854 arrival in Edo Bay, an occasion on which an Orientalizing narrative of Western victory over weak or duplicitous Easterners proves insufficient.\textsuperscript{122}

Notes

3 In 1885, for example, its exports to Japan were four times those of the United States. Ellen P. Conant, ‘Japan “Abroad” at the Chicago Exposition, 1893,’ in Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Art, edited by Ellen P. Conant (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), 258.
4 For my account, I follow J. J. Rein’s Japan: Travels and Researches, fact-checked by modern sources. Rein’s history (included as part of a survey undertaken on behalf of the Prussian government) makes use of Jesuit documents and was reviewed by Ernest Satow; I
take it to be fairly representative of the attitude of contemporary British elites.

5 Japanese feudal lord.

6 J. J. Rein, Japan: Travels and Researches (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1884), 274, 304. Yosaburo Takekoshi in The Economic Aspects of the History of the Civilization of Japan gives the figure of 2,000,000, including children. The word han refers to administrative divisions of Japan during the early modern period. They were equivalent to feudal fiefs.

8 Ibid. 108; Rein 1884, 305 – 6.
9 Ibid. 308 – 9.

11 The shogun was the military ruler of Japan between 1192 and 1868. The position was controlled by the Tokugawa family from 1603 until its abolition as part of the Meiji Restoration.


13 Rein 1884, 310.


15 Ibid., 101.


17 Abe 1978, 112.


19 Sir Harry Parkes to Lord Stanley, Despatch, F. O. 1727/119, 11 June 1868, in Documents 1989, 204.


22 Satow 1921, 276.


24 Ibid., 161.

25 Birmingham Daily Post (Birmingham, England), Saturday, October 5, 1867; Issue 2872.


27 Satow 1921, 276.

28 Burkman 1974, 165.

29 Ibid., 167 – 9.


31 Saburo Ienaga, ‘Japan’s Modernization and Buddhism’, in Contemporary Religions in Japan, Vol. 6, No. 1 (March 1965), 12


33 These boards listed three permanent edicts: the first prohibited murder, arson, and robbery; the second prohibited the ‘formation of coalitions’; and the third prohibited the evil sect of Christianity. Burkman 1974, 209.

34 Abe 1978, 120 – 1.

35 Parkes actually spoke to a figure referred to repeatedly in the British sources as ‘the Prince of Uwajima’. I was not able to establish with certainty that this refers to Date Munenari,
who had in fact been forced to retire as head of Uwajima domain by the bakufu in 1858, but because Date was an authority on foreign relations during the early Meiji period and his successor, the actual daimyo of Uwajima during the Urakami incidents, was not a significant figure, I feel justified in assuming that Parkes’ ‘Prince of Uwajima’ is indeed Date Munenari and not his successor Date Munee. Also, while an official Minister of Foreign Affairs was not appointed until 1885, Date was the acknowledged spokesperson for foreign policy in the early years of the restoration.

37 Ibid., 202.
39 Parkes, F. O. 1727110, 201.
40 Abe 1978, 121 – 2.
41 Parkes, F. O. 1727110, 201.
42 Abe 1978, 122 – 3.
43 Ibid., 123. Parkes’ copy of the decree to Lord Stanley was not sent until 21 August 1868, but as the degree was referred to in a July letter from Marcus Flowers in Nagasaki, we may take that to be an oversight on his part.
44 Burkman 1974, 165.
45 Parkes, F. O. 1727110, 201.
48 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Parkes, Despatch, F. O. 1727/162, 238.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 239.
54 Ibid.
55 See footnote 32.
59 Abe 1978, 133 – 4. The 1866 treaties signed with Prussia and Italy state the same. Although to threaten the Japanese with armed attack, as Roches is attributed to have done in 1868, would probably have been to go too far. Burkman 1974, 187.
60 See, for example, Olive Checkland, Britain’s Encounter with Meiji Japan, 1868 – 1912 (Houndmills, England: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), 116 and Fox 1969, 498; also to a certain extent Abe 1974.
61 Ibid., 535 and fnnte.
63 The Pall Mall Gazette (London, England), Saturday, March 16, 1872; Issue 2212.
64 For an example of the first, see the 24 February 1869 Glasgow Herald, which placed
a brief report on 'Religious Persecution in Japan' after a four or five times long analysis of 'The Convent Scandal Case.' Glasgow Herald (Glasgow, Scotland), Wednesday, February 24, 1869; Issue 9094. For one of the second, see the Birmingham Daily Post (Birmingham, England), Thursday, Oct 15, 1868; Issue 3194.

66 Ibid.
67 For example, Parkes’ despatch of 30 May 1868 was not received by the Foreign Office until 27 July. Parkes, F. O. 1727/110, 200.
68 While I could regrettably not locate any articles from the famous Japan Weekly Mail relating to persecution of Christians, and therefore cannot tell how news of the persecutions were received by British citizens within the country, the tone of reports from a publication based in Yokohama would have little bearing on the attitudes of the establishment press back home.
70 MacGill, F. O. 3744/41, 328.
71 Fox 1969, 497. ‘There was also a report of a deputation ‘headed by Lord Ebury’ visiting Lord Granville to discuss the matter, but being met by Parkes with a similar response. See The Leeds Mercury (Leeds, England), Monday, February 12, 1872.
73 Ibid. 505 – 6. I attribute the improbable escape of the French priest at Urakami, Father Laucaigne, during the first arrests in July 1867 at least in part to the connivance of the Japanese authorities. See Burkman 1974, 157.
74 There were at least 17 French priests in Nagasaki by 1867, and six American Protestant missionaries as early as 1859. See Ibid., 156 and Fox 1969, 502 – 3.
75 For just a few examples, The Pall Mall Gazette, March 16, 1872; Mitford, F. O. 1727/154(i), 234; Parkes, F. O. 1727/154, 233.
76 Mitford, F. O. 1727/154(i), 234.
77 It is important here to remember that the British consuls in Japan were generally better informed of developments in the country than their continental and American counterparts, as Mitford and Satow both spoke Japanese and had extensive local contacts.
78 Parkes, F. O. 1727/162, 239.
79 Mitford, F. O. 1727/154(i), 234. This was the same letter in which he made his derogatory remark about the Taiping Rebellion.
80 Yoshaburo 2004, 101 – 2, against Burkman 1974, 155, which claims, apparently based on Catholic sources, ‘surprisingly little deviation’ from mainstream Catholicism.
84 F. V. Dickins claimed that it was such ‘by the terms of [his] commission and in fact’. Dickins 1894, 170
86 Burkman 1974, 166.
87 It is impossible, for instance, to imagine that Prussia’s conflict with France in 1870 – 1 did not influence its minister in Japan to go along with Parkes in opposing French demands for group protest.
89 Abe 1978, 124.
90 Ibid., 124 – 5.
91 Ibid., 126.
93 Mitford, F. O. 1727/119(i), 208; Mitford, F. O. 1727/154(i), 234; and Parkes, F. O. 1727/110, 201, respectively.
94 Abe 1974, 127.
95 Fox 1969, 495.
97 Ibid., 210.
98 Fox 1969, 500.
99 Ibid. Most of the contemporary newspaper accounts and F. V. Dickins’ biography of Parkes were also quite laudatory.
102 Ibid., 130.
105 See Kume Kunitake, The Iwakura Embassy, 1871 – 73: A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary’s Journey of Observation Through the United States of America and Europe, Vol. II: Britain, trans. Graham Healey (Chiba, Japan: The Japan Documents, 2002). Abe 1978, 131, cites some Japanese Foreign Office documents for his claim, so there may have been some demonstrations, but they were most likely small and did not represent the totality of public opinion.
110 Ibid., 147.
111 Fox 1969, 520; Stevenson 1879, 325 fnote.
112 Fox 1969, 515.
113 ‘One Sunday morning a school-mate of mine asked me whether I would not go with him to a certain place in foreigners’ quarter, where we can hear pretty women sing, and a tall big man with long beard shout and howl upon an elevated place, flinging his arms and twisting his body in all fantastic manners, to all which admittance is entirely free.’ Such was his description of a Christian house of worship conducted in the language which was new to me then. Uchimura Kanzo, How I Became a Christian (Tokyo, Japan: Keiseisha, 1895), 10.
114 Ibid., 10 – 11.
115 Ienaga 1965, 12.
116 Ibid., 13 – 14.
117 Ibid., 15. Interestingly, Western Christians also generally supported Japan over

120 "...like a chapter out of Dante's Inferno," quotes Rein, with approval. Rein 1884, 308.
121 Dickins 1894, 156.

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Birmingham Daily Post (Birmingham, England), Saturday, October 5, 1867; Issue 2872.

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