

# CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICS IN MODERN JAPAN: A CONNECTED HISTORICAL APPROACH TOWARDS RELIGIO-POLITICAL WELLBEING\*

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**Abstract:** When examining Christianity in Japan, establishing a relationship with the state became a vital ideological challenge, especially as the collaboration of churches with the government during World War II raised profound moral and spiritual dilemmas for Japanese Christians. Historically, like other religions such as Buddhism, Japanese Christianity minimized its doctrinal elements in state interactions, seeking recognition by aligning with state-driven goals such as morality, education, and national ideology. This paper explores how modern Japanese Christianity navigated these complexities and developed a global relationship with the state, using a connected historical approach to religio-political wellbeing. By employing this framework, we trace how Christianity balanced political entanglements with preserving its religious integrity, reshaping its mission to align with state objectives. This research provides a compelling case of how religion and politics intertwined in Japan, giving rise to distinctive characteristics that helped cultivate a vision of a global

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family among Japanese citizens. Ultimately, the article highlights how Christianity in modern Japan sought both survival and influence, contributing to a more integrated understanding of religio-political wellbeing and global interconnectedness.

**Keywords:** Japanese Christianity, Samurai Class, Emperor System, Connected History, Westernism, The Constitution of the Empire of Japan, Freedom of Religion.

## 1. Introduction

'Religio-political wellbeing' is a 'democratic powerhouse' that envisions the harmonious coexistence of religious communities and governing bodies without compromising their core principles. It involves maintaining the integrity of religious traditions while engaging constructively with political power to promote common good. In Japan, achieving religio-political wellbeing posed a challenge, as Christianity and other religions had to adapt their spiritual missions to align with state priorities. The Japanese government, which began constructing a modern centralized state 'from above' during the Meiji Restoration in 1868, declared the *Saisei Itchi* (unity of ritual and government) and positioned the Emperor as the *Kokutai* (national body) of Japan. This unique political system, known as the emperor system, concurrently adopted various economic and military policies aimed at both maintaining national independence and achieving successful modernization to compete with Western powers.

In the process of modernization, Christianity, which had been introduced to Japan, inevitably encountered challenges due to the longstanding stigma of "*Kirishitan* (Christian) *Jashūmon* (heresy)," which had persisted for over 250 years since the Tokugawa shogunate. The term '*Jashūmon*' referred to a 'heretical religion that deceives people's minds and harms society,' a label used during the Tokugawa period to describe Christianity (Lee, 13). The Meiji government continued the Tokugawa policy of prohibiting Christianity, issuing a nationwide edict in March 1868 through the *Dajōkan* (Great Council of State), stating: "The *Kirishitan* heresy is strictly forbidden. If there are any suspicious

persons, report them to the nearest government office. Rewards will be given” (Ebisawa and Ouchi, 157). The Meiji government maintained this ban because they believed that Christians blasphemed against Japanese gods, corrupted morals and created discord among families.

For the Meiji government, which promoted ‘Shinto as the national religion’ to establish a governance structure with the emperor at its head, Christianity was fundamentally at odds with this goal (Dohi, 37-38). Ouchi Saburo, a historian of Christianity in Japan, noted that the notion of ‘Christianity as a heresy’ was partly fabricated by the Tokugawa shogunate to reject Christianity. However, he also pointed out that when Japan’s political system became absolute, Christianity was perceived as a threat to it, casting Japan as a divine nation (*Shinkoku*) while positioning Christianity as its polar opposite. He further observed that this ‘perception of Christianity as a heresy,’ while varying in intensity depending on historical circumstances and individual awareness, consistently clung to Christianity in Japan like a specter (Ebisawa and Ouchi, 293).

How was Christianity perceived in early modern Japan? A deep-rooted perception of Christianity as a heresy fostered widespread wariness. This sentiment is evident in the fact that Christianity was referred to as “magic” or “sorcery” (Shichiichi Zappō, March 17, 1876), reflecting vague preconceptions. Critics argued that Christianity undermined morals and value systems, citing teachings such as “worshiping ancestors is evil” (Shichiichi Zappō, January 30, 1880). From the perspective that Christianity caused social disruption by damaging the existing moral order, the widespread rejection of it throughout Japanese society was significant. However, under pressure from foreign diplomats and Western powers, the government lifted the ban on Christianity in February 1873, though this was more of a diplomatic concession than a recognition of religious freedom. In reality, as missionary activity increased, social opposition to Christianity grew stronger (Dohi, 37-39).

In this context, Japanese Christians actively positioned themselves as bearers and representatives of Western culture,

arguing that the introduction of Christianity would promote the country's civilization and enlightenment. Historically, Christianity has played a crucial role as a pioneer of modern civilization, significantly contributing to education, social work, and having a profound influence on morality, thought, culture, and society (Ohama, 1). This focus on the 'utility' of Christianity is a distinctive characteristic of Japanese Christianity, which often emphasized its political and ethical dimensions while lacking spiritual depth. In this context, the Japanese political structure hindered the development of genuine religio-political wellbeing. This phenomenon is reflected in the concept of 'Connected History' (Subrahmanyam, 1997, 2005), a valuable framework for enhancing our understanding of global interconnectedness and illuminating the interactions that take place on a supra-regional level.

## **2. Demographic Embrace of Christianity**

During the Meiji Restoration, a period marked by significant social upheaval, many young people, particularly from samurai families, converted to Christianity as they faced 'acute anomie' – a state of social disorder stemming from the collapse of traditional social norms and values. This acute anomie was especially severe for those whose status and life purpose were destabilized by the transition from the feudal system to a modern state. For many of these individuals, Christianity provided a means to rebuild their lives and find new direction amid the chaos (Morioka, 9-12).

Yamaji Aizan highlights that the early church consisted mostly of young people, particularly those from defeated or marginalized backgrounds. For example, Uemura Masahisa, the son of a shogunate retainer, experienced the deep bitterness shared by those on the losing side of the Meiji Restoration. Similarly, Honda Yoichi, from Tsugaru, faced hardships due to his region's difficult position during the Restoration. Others, like Ibuka Kajinosuke from Aizu and Oshikawa Masayoshi from Matsuyama, also came from regions associated with the shogunate that experienced significant adversity. These young men, shaped by the adversity of defeat and social change, were drawn to Christianity as they

sought to challenge the prevailing social order and "swim against the current of the times" (Yamaji, 27-28).<sup>20</sup> In essence, the samurai class, particularly its youth, found in Christianity both a personal refuge and a form of resistance during a time of profound transformation and social instability.

During the early Meiji period, those who converted to Christianity were predominantly young samurai, many of whom had been supporters of the Shogunate (*Sabakuha*). These individuals, having lost their social and economic standing due to the Meiji Restoration, turned to Christianity as a way to rebuild their lives by acquiring new Western knowledge. Kozaki Hiromichi highlights that this dynamic was unique to Japan, as Christianity was often embraced by the lower classes in other regions. For instance, Brahmin conversions in India were rare, and Chinese intellectuals seldom converted to Christianity. In contrast, in Japan, it was the samurai class that led the way in accepting Christianity, driven by their loss of status and the need to adapt to a rapidly changing society (Kudo, 37). For these former samurai, encounters with foreign missionaries were especially significant. One of the career options available to them was to learn about Western culture, thus positioning themselves ahead of others in Japanese society. At a time when civilization and enlightenment were key goals, they gravitated toward missionaries not out of religious devotion, but out of a desire to study the knowledge that underpinned the advanced Western powers. Their conversion to Christianity was less about spiritual or religious motives and more about the pursuit of new truths and practical knowledge that could help them overcome the sense of loss and crisis they experienced due to the Meiji Restoration.

Research also suggests that the samurai class's initial interest in Christianity can be attributed to two key factors. First,

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<sup>20</sup> The English translation of Yamaji Aizan's original text uses the following translated version (However, page references follow Yamaji Aizan's original text). Aizan, Yamaji, Graham Squires, and A. Hamish Ion. *Essays on the Modern Japanese Church: Christianity in Meiji Japan*. University of Michigan Press, 1999.

understanding the classical Chinese translations of the Bible and other Christian texts that had entered Japan at the time required a background in classical Chinese studies, a knowledge base typically found among the samurai class. Second, since the *Tokugawa shogunate's Sakoku* (isolationist policy), those with less prejudice against Christianity were often individuals with some understanding of foreign affairs and international knowledge. This group primarily consisted of samurai or those of similar status (Kudo, 24). In other words, young men from the *Bakushin* (shogunate retainers) or the *Sabakuha* (supporters of the Shogunate), who had received a samurai education, found their prospects for political advancement blocked after their defeat during the Meiji Restoration. Faced with this situation, they developed an interest in Western culture, including Christianity, as well as international affairs. They eagerly read the Bible, compiled by missionaries active in China, along with other texts on Western culture, science, and technology. This intellectual curiosity and exposure to foreign ideas eventually led many of them to convert to Christianity.

As it is well known, the first Christian church in Japan, the *Nihon Kirisuto Kōkai* (Church of Christ in Japan), was established in Yokohama in March 1872, prior to the official lifting of the ban on Christianity. Leadership within this church was predominantly taken by members of the samurai class, as outlined earlier. Specifically, the composition of the church's baptized and transferred members up to August 3rd of Meiji 6 (1873) was as follows:

Total number of baptized individuals and transferred members: 58  
(45 men and 13 women)

Former samurai or their family members: 18 (16 men and 2 women)

Presumed to be of former samurai origin: 9 (8 men and 1 woman)  
(Kudo, 27).

In short, former samurai constituted about half of the *Nihon Kirisuto Kōkai* congregation—a strikingly high proportion compared to their representation in the overall population. This suggests that a disproportionately large number of former samurai were drawn to Christianity, demonstrating their significant involvement in the early Christian movement in Japan

despite their relatively small representation in the total population.

It is also important to consider the type of Christianity that these individuals embraced during this period. Early missionaries, faced with the animistic and polytheistic worldview of the Japanese and the strong opposition from Buddhism, emphasized the existence and power of a singular, just, and loving creator and ruler – God. Works like *Tendō Sogen* (Evidences of Christianity), a Christian doctrinal commentary written in Chinese by William A. P. Martin, played a vital role in making Christianity more accessible to Japanese audiences (Dohi, 48). Those who experienced profound conversions through encounters with this God were compelled to renounce practices such as idolatry and ancestor worship. They were called to worship only the one God and adopt an ethical, disciplined life befitting to “children of God” (Miyata, 279).

Instead of exploring the theological meaning of monotheism, many converts focused on the practical aspect of believing in God as a father, realizing their identity as God’s children. This faith enabled them to escape the confusion of multiple beliefs and to concentrate on living a rigorous ethical life. For them, the stricter the adherence to monotheism, the more rigid their ethical standards became. They were particularly influenced by the Puritan life ethics modeled by the missionaries and strove to emulate this way of life. For instance, Ibuka Kajinosuke, who came from an Aizu samurai family, endured the deep sorrow of defeat in the Aizu War and initially harbored feelings of hostility and revenge against the *Satchō* (Satsuma-Chōshū) forces. He aimed to restore the Aizu domain through the study of Western learning. However, while reading the Chinese translation of the *New Testament*, he was profoundly moved by the high ethical standards and particularly by Jesus’ teaching to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” This teaching, which he found shockingly noble, marked a turning point in his outlook (Kudo, 43-44).

However, it is important to recognize that this tendency to embrace Christianity primarily as a “moral religion,” with an

overemphasis on its practical and ethical dimensions, often led to a simplistic and superficial faith. This approach risked neglecting a deeper understanding of key Christian spiritual doctrines, particularly the concepts of sin and atonement—central to the gospel message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Additionally, while Confucianism initially served as a useful framework for interpreting and accepting Christianity, it is essential to note that, starting in the 1890s, the Meiji government began promoting Confucian ethics as the spiritual foundation of the emperor-centric state. This led to a growing confrontation between Christianity and Confucianism.

### **3. The Adoption of Christianity as a Political Device**

Early Christian converts in Japan primarily came from the former samurai class, or *shizoku* (warrior class). According to Honda Yoichi, their adoption of Christianity filled both personal and social voids left by the collapse of the old order during the Meiji Restoration. While the general populace held onto superstitions and shallow beliefs, the samurai, being educated, independent, and proud, sought deeper meaning and a new sense of purpose. Christianity's monotheism and teachings of devotion resonated with their values of honor and righteousness, as well as their belief in a higher, supreme force. As they became more aware of global affairs, they saw Christianity as key to Western civilization's success and adopted it to elevate Japan's standing among world powers. This desire for national progress and personal fulfillment made Christianity particularly appealing to the former samurai (Takagi, 116-117).

As these young former samurai transitioned from a Confucian to a Christian belief system, their Confucian background provided them with a nationalistic perspective. Although they had lost their previous status, they believed that through Christianity, the spiritual foundation of Western civilization, they could lead the common people toward a spiritual revolution, essential for the birth of a new Japan. This vision was rooted in their desire to save the nation through Christianity, considering themselves as spiritual elites. Their conversion was not merely an



individual spiritual choice but was deeply connected to their awareness of Japan's political challenges. A notable example of this mindset is the *Hōkyō Shuisho* (Declaration of Reasons for Embracing Christianity), also known as the *Hanaoka Pledge*, proclaimed by the *Kumamoto Band* in January 1876.

We have gained some understanding from our learning of Christianity. As we read the Bible, we became increasingly moved and could not help but rejoice. Finally, we wish to spread these teachings in our imperial nation and greatly enlighten the minds of the ignorant people. However, there are still not a few who do not know the profound beauty of Christianity and are steeped in stubborn old theories. How can we not lament this? In such times, those who harbor intentions of serving the country should, we hope, awaken to this truth in their hearts, rise up with determination, and consider their lives as dust, clarifying the fairness and righteousness of Christianity. This is what we must devote our utmost efforts to (*Hōkyō Shuisho* 30 January 1876).

As demonstrated, these individuals viewed Christianity as a way of ‘serving the country.’ Their commitment extended beyond a personal, spiritual encounter with God and evolved into a broader engagement with the historical and societal context of their time. Christianity became a foundation for their social thought, national ideology, moral philosophy, and political views, reflecting their desire to contribute to Japan's progress and transformation (Shinoda, 6). This is clearly evident in the following writing by Honda:

In addition to this simple faith in Christ, my strong motive in embracing Christianity was for the sake of my own country. Finding our country was so behind, compared with the western nations in many respects, we were very anxious in bringing our country to the same level with the advanced nations (Takagi, 5).

A notable characteristic among the first generation of Christians was that the strong patriarchal system of the time often led to entire families converting when the heads of households embraced Christianity (Hara, 30). This indicates that the focus was not solely on individual salvation; rather, families collectively sought to transform their practical lives in the context of civilizational enlightenment. This highlights the functional aspect

of early Christian conversion, as many converts viewed Christianity as a means to address their practical challenges rather than engaging deeply with its spiritual or doctrinal elements. Consequently, this trend suggests that the exploration of the foundational aspects of Christianity was often lacking among the converts.

In short, early Christian converts in Japan envisioned their faith as a means to contribute to the construction of a new nation during a period of rapid change. They believed that their personal aspirations aligned closely with national objectives (Ebisawa and Ouchi, 172). This perspective has led to assessments suggesting that Japanese Christianity was caught in an illusion of being a “pioneer” of modernity (Ohama, 1-2) and that converts adopted Christianity with a sense of pride, believing they understood the essence of Western modernity. Essentially, from the Meiji era onwards, Japanese Christian leaders viewed Christianity as a “Political/ideological device” representing Western modernity. The notion of Western superiority they upheld stemmed from the strength of imperialistic powers, a context that many converts failed to fully comprehend. Consequently, their understanding of history was superficial, leading them to unconditionally endorse the imperialistic expansion policies of modern Japan, mirroring the logic of Western imperialism and political wellbeing.

#### **4. Christianity in the Era of Westernism**

As previously discussed, the Christian community sought to overcome longstanding prejudices against their faith by asserting that Christianity was essential for fostering a communitarian spirit, advancing civilization and promoting enlightenment—revaluing it as an acceptable religion for the new era. Their efforts to highlight the positive aspects of Christianity, particularly by associating it with Western enlightened civilization, appeared to gain some traction. This pursuit of legitimacy and official recognition from the government was closely linked to the government's Westernization (*Ōkashugi*) policy at the time.

Treaty revision had troubled the minds of our political leaders for a long time. About 1883 or 1884, public opinion once again turned

toward this problem. In 1887, when it looked as though the Inoue plan would be successful, popular emotion concerning this issue reached a peak. If you look at this simply as a political problem, it has no connection with intellectual history. We cannot doubt that the policy of the government at the time, however, was to enact laws in accordance with Western principles, encourage the study of foreign languages, and encourage contact between Japanese and non-Japanese in order to achieve a smooth conclusion to the revision plan. As much as possible, the government wished to dress up the Japanese as Westerners, and the result of this was that the so-called Westernization policy came into being (Yamaji, 110).

During this period, the Meiji government was focused on establishing a modern nation-state modeled after Western countries, with the immediate goal of revising treaties. To demonstrate Japan's comparability to Western nations as a modern state, the government aimed to westernize various aspects of national life, including politics, education and religion, to strengthen its position in treaty negotiations (Yoon, 111-112). This push for Westernization under the Westernism policy created a degree of favorable sentiment towards Christianity. The extent of the influence that the wave of Westernism had on Christianity can be inferred from the following text:

Tokyo University's Toyama Masakazu, who had introduced Spencer's thought to Japan, changed his thinking. In contrast to his former sarcastic criticism of Christianity, he expressed goodwill toward it. A political insider, Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru, often showed respect to important people among the Christian missionaries, inviting them to his mansion and thus tacitly showing favor to them. For Christians, this situation was similar to a nightingale coming out of a stony ravine and singing triumphantly as it sits among luxurious foliage. They could see only the broad prospects ahead. They were like Moses seeing the promised land open up before his eyes. Many young people were moved by this intellectual current, and they gathered at the door of the church of their own will. There were more people at a meeting of the Christian church than at a meeting of a political party (Yamaji, 112-113).

During the Westernism era, Christianity gained widespread acceptance and favorable views among the Japanese intellectuals. It became increasingly common for members of the upper

echelons of society, who had previously shown little interest in Christianity, to regularly attend church services (Yoon, 113). Notably, Fukuzawa Yukichi, once a critic of Christianity who believed its growth threatened Japan's national sovereignty and advocated for Buddhism as the country's essential religion, shifted his stance around 1884. He published an editorial calling for Christianity to be established as the state religion, suggesting that Japan should adopt Christianity, the religion of the Western civilized nations (Sumiya, 69, 87). This period saw remarkable growth in the number of Christian believers, indicating a significant expansion of the church's influence in Japan. Examination of statistics from this era shows a sharp increase in the number of adherents following 1884, reflecting the profound impact of Westernism on the acceptance and growth of Christianity in Japanese society.

Table 1 (*Nihon Kirisutokyōdan Senkyō Kenkyūjo* 106-107)

Year	1879	1880	1881	1882	1885	1888	1891
Number of Believers	1617	1895	2114	5092	9536	23026	31361
Percentage of Believers in Total Population			0.0057%		0.025%	0.061%	0.077%

Table 2 (Ritter 155)

Year	1878	1879	1881	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889
Number of Churches	44	64	83	N/A	120	169	193	221	249	274
Number of Believers	1617	2701	3811	5591	7791	10775	13269	18019	23564	28977

However, following the ultimate failure of the treaty revision, sentiment toward Westernism began to wane, giving rise to a reactionary mood that fueled the rise of nationalism. This shift led to the emergence of a 'nationalist spirit' or 'conservative spirit' that characterized the era, with slogans such as 'We must not imitate,' 'We must preserve the national essence,' and 'We must

cultivate the unique Japanese spirit of loyalty and patriotism’ becoming dominant in the country (Yamaji 143-144). In this context, criticism of the Christian community, which had previously flourished, intensified significantly. Yamaji described this situation as follows:

When society grew tired of elitist progressivism, of imitated Western civilization, and of English-style political debating, a time of prosperity for the reactionaries came. There is a proverb that says: “A little cloud on the mountain peak indicates a torrential rain at the base of the mountain.” Statism was like a cloudburst that poured down on the Japanese intellectual world. It was the church, however, that experienced the greatest pain (Yamaji, 142).

The acceptance of Christianity during this period served as a spiritual driving force for constructing a new, civilized Japan and was inherently patriotic from the outset. However, this also revealed the inherent limitations of Japanese Christianity. Kumano Yoshitaka characterized this era of Japanese Christianity as possessing a “church-forming character,” which tended to avoid deep theological debates, focusing instead on edification, evangelical efforts, common-sense ethics, humanitarian work, and political consciousness (Kumano, 11-12). This emphasis on the ‘utility’ of Christianity became a defining feature from its early adoption, leading to a concentration on political and ethical issues at the expense of spiritual depth. This tendency reflected a mission to assimilate Western culture selectively into Japan, rather than aligning Japan's modernization with Western paradigms (Kano, 87). Thus, both the Westernization that aimed to equate Japan with the West and the nationalism that positioned Japan against it contributed to the rationale for Japan's ambitions of dominance in Asia (Kano, 96).

## **5. The Constitution of the Empire of Japan and Freedom of Religion**

In February 1889, the Meiji government enacted the *Dainihon Teikoku Kenpō* (Constitution of the Empire of Japan), which established the emperor system as a legally guaranteed institution, placing everything under the emperor’s authority. Article 1 (The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by a line of

emperors unbroken for ages eternal) and 3 (The emperor is sacred and inviolable) of the constitution affirmed the emperor's sovereignty as an immutable doctrine linked to a divine lineage, emphasizing his sanctity and inviolability. This positioning made the emperor the central spiritual and political authority in Japan. As a result, the constitution did not recognize universal human rights for the people, instead acknowledging rights solely as those of *Shinmin* (subjects). These rights, granted by the emperor's grace, reinforced the notion that the constitution itself was an expression of the emperor's benevolence (Miyata, 271).

The Meiji government launched efforts to solidify the emperor system and instill national ethics, while simultaneously promoting capitalist development. To restore and strengthen the weakened feudal ethics, they established the emperor system as the moral foundation of society. A key element of this was the *Kyōiku ni Kansuru Chokugo* (Imperial Rescript on Education), issued in 1890, which aimed to create a hierarchical order with the emperor at its apex. The Rescript emphasized the emperor's authority in guiding the people's lives, promoting loyalty and filial piety as core values of the *Kokutai* (national polity). It sought not just outward obedience but voluntary devotion from subjects to preserve the Imperial Throne's eternal prosperity. This philosophy became the cornerstone of Japan's educational system (Dohi and Tanaka, 18). The constitution and Rescript reflected a spirit of 'absolutism disguised as Western modernity' (Sumiya, 111), and in doing so, subtly rejected Christianity's influence.

Article 28 of the Meiji Constitution granted 'freedom of religion' but placed two significant limitations: religious practices were not to disrupt peace and order, nor conflict with duties as imperial subjects. The vagueness of the term 'freedom of religion' left its scope undefined, which effectively subordinated religious freedom to the imperial state's religious nature. This clause did not recognize religious freedom as an inherent right, but allowed it only within the confines of Japan as a religious state centered on the emperor (Murakami, 152-157). The Christian community at the time, however, viewed this provision as a victory, interpreting it as official acknowledgment of Christianity (Kirisutokyō

Shinbun, 13 February 1889). Even figures like Samuel H. Moffett mistakenly saw the clause as granting full religious freedom, overlooking the deeper implications of the emperor-centric system, which placed the state above all religious practices (Moffett, Chapter 23). Therefore, this era could be seen as a period that hindered the true understanding and realization of religio-political wellbeing within Japanese society.

## 6. Conclusion

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Japan unified politically under the Emperor through the Meiji Restoration, while maintaining the Tokugawa Shogunate’s policy of labeling Christianity as heresy. Christianity became linked to Japan’s modernization efforts but faced social and political challenges in shedding its heretical image. Many young samurai from the *Sabakuha* who converted to Christianity did so partly to restore their social status after the Meiji Restoration. Their conversion was driven more by practical concerns, viewing Christianity as a tool for Japan to modernize and keep pace with the West, rather than personal spiritual motives. Despite the recognition of religious freedom in the 1889 Constitution, the Christian community became absorbed into the state system, with followers pledging loyalty to the emperor as *Shinmin* (subjects of the state).

The acceptance of Christianity in Japan, as in neighboring countries like Korea and China, occurred under external pressure related to Western powers. Christian missions were allowed mainly for political reasons, rather than for promoting human rights or religious freedom. Each country's stance on Christianity differed, with Korea relying on Western support to counter Japan, while Japan had a strong government capable of controlling Christianity. In Japan, Christianity was accepted during the modern state's formation but was shaped by the emperor system, with its spiritual aspects largely suppressed and used to strengthen state control. Historically, Christianity was first introduced to Japan in 1549 by Jesuit missionary Francisco de Xavier and quickly gained followers, largely due to its connection with the *Nanban* trade, which played a key role in Japan's

unification. However, as the focus shifted from trade to evangelism, the religion faced growing persecution, ultimately leading to a systematic ban under the *Tokugawa shogunate*. This suppression persisted into the modern era, with the government enforcing strict national control and limiting true religious freedom.

Connected history is a valuable approach for exploring interactions between multiple phenomena by studying their complex relationships, revealing connections that cross temporal and spatial boundaries, often previously unnoticed (Douki and Philippe, XIV). In this context, examining the acceptance of Christianity in modern Japan sheds light on the unique relationship between religion and politics in the country. The religious policies of the modern state largely continued the practices of the *Tokugawa shogunate*, where religion, including Christianity, was reduced to a tool of state control, becoming a hollow institution that served the regime. Buddhism faced similar constraints during the *Tokugawa* period. Japanese Christianity developed within this framework. After World War II, the emperor system as a state religion was dismantled, and Japan's new Constitution granted 'unlimited' religious freedom, in contrast to the earlier 'limited' version used for state control. However, since this was a systemic change without deep social transformation, individual religious consciousness remained underdeveloped. The absence of a significant faith struggle within Japanese Christianity may explain why it continues to be a minority religion in Japan today.

As Japanese society proudly asserts its identity in an increasingly globalized world, the lessons learned from the historical interplay between Christianity and politics can shape future discussions surrounding faith, governance, and social cohesion. True religio-political wellbeing can only be achieved within a free and independent system that respects and acknowledges the contributions of all stakeholders. Both religion and the state aspire not for division but for unity, seeking to build global families rather than separate compartments. Ultimately, a connected historical approach enriches our understanding of the



past and offers valuable insights for contemporary society, highlighting the importance of mutual respect and collaboration between religious communities and political institutions in realizing genuine religio-political wellbeing.

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