

Why are Japanese Christians so few?*

Hiroshi Suzuki[†]
International Christian University

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1 Introduction

As a Japanese Christian, I am often asked the following question.

Why are Japanese Christians so few?

It depends on statistics, but it is true that Japanese Christian population is less than 1 percent in Japan. An International Friendships Incorporation (IFI) staff member commented that the Japanese have the least percentage of Christian population among the so-called ‘open’ countries accepting missionaries. Some ask about the difference from our neighbor Korea, where it is about 25 percent of Christian. A Korean pastor told me that Korean churches are sending almost the same number of overseas missionaries as the U.S.

Some point out the lack of prayer, the lack of praise and too much intellectual discussion. Some people say that Japan is under God’s curse because of our country’s sin in the past especially during World War II.

As a Japanese Christian, I always feel guilty as it sounds that our kin are under curse or Japanese Christians are lazy for the mission of God. On the other hand I feel that I need to be humble to listen to any comments, opinions, and suggestions of those who are concerned about Japanese souls. I try to calm myself to answer as follows:

Please pray for the salvation of Japanese souls. I also pray that the time may come

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[†]*Email:hsuzuki@icu.ac.jp*

for Japanese to open our hearts to the Lord.

In any case I feel responsible to consider the reason why Japanese Christians are so few.

I had two other related issues to consider.

I came to the United States last August. Just as we had settled in our house, and my children started to go to their schools, a tragic terrorism attack occurred on September 11, 2001. I thought about each precious life of victims and their families. I also thought about the fury that drove the terrorists to suicide mission to murder thousands of people. Wasn’t there any other choice left to the terrorists to protest? Since I experienced campus riots when I was a high school student, we argued a lot then under what condition we decide to take action against law to protest some issue. I believe that a similar issue worried the delegates from colonies in this country when they signed the declaration of independence as it was treason as citizens of England. I thought about the controversial policy of the U.S. in middle east but there was no way we can justify such a brutal act. It seemed like a show played for fun by those who never thought of the value of each person’s life.

The news that came in through media struck me more. The news casters talked about retaliation from the beginning without reviewing the history and policy of the U.S. in the middle east. They compared it with Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. That meant that they were not concerned about the problems hidden behind but they were interested in the fact that the ‘liberty’ was threatened. Though there were some reviews in the history

in journals, after a moment of silence at the National Cathedral, this country waged war against a country before they examined the degree of involvement of each group Al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Ladin, and the people in Afghanistan. In this country, is it enough with this evidence to sentence thousands of people to death? Why don't Christian leaders stand up to protest against such an action? They should know the value of each person's life in Afghanistan. On the contrary, in most churches patriotic prayers and healing messages were given, and they supported, or at least they didn't openly criticized, the government to start air raid Afghanistan. I had an impression that to most American Christians the life of refugees in Afghanistan weigh much less than the life of Americans. I also could not understand what kind of 'liberty' was threatened by the people in Afghanistan.¹

It reminded me of the irresistible pessimism I had before, towards the end of my stay in the U.S. as a graduate student from 1977 to 1980.

Under such a great difference between the opinion and the feeling of American Christians and Japanese Christians, is it ever possible for us to unite our heart to pray together or work together for the glory of God? Can we truly love each other?

My English was extremely poor when I arrived in the U.S. in 1977. I attended a Lutheran Church. I was welcomed by warm hearted Christians there, I joined the choir and I felt very happy. I was convinced that we can share anything as Christians. But as my English gradually improved and as I had more chance to have discussions with American Christian friends, I lost my confidence. I could not agree with them or find the same standpoint to start with on the topics such as the view

¹One of my American friends pointed out that the terrorism on September 11 is a crime and not a declaration of war. That is one of the major difference from the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. President Bush and some government officials utilized the event politically by taking it as war.

of communism, socialism vs capitalism, colonization of European countries in Africa and Asia, slavery, treatment of native Americans that some people call genocide, Vietnam War and the use of harmful defoliant, nuclear weapons, still continuing tragedy in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, etc. Although I accepted differences in opinions, and tried to think the differences as diversity of people giving glory of great God, I sometimes felt uncertain whether we had the same hope in Christ.

The other issue is the so-called 'returnees problem'.

I was informed of very bad statistics of returnees among Japanese Christians who accepted the gospel in the U.S. They have great difficulty finding their place in Japanese churches. I started to review my case. I realized that the culture shock those returnees would encounter in their home country may have the similar source I felt when I came to the U.S., the difference of Japanese Christianity and American Christianity. I concentrate my talk only on Japanese returnees, but the problem of returnees are not just for Japanese and there may be some points relevant to other returnees having difficulty adjusting back in their home countries.

Therefore, I chose three topics to consider in this talk.

- A. Why are Japanese Christians so few?
- B. Do Japanese have to change first to understand the gospel?
- C. What is the role of Japanese Christians who experienced cross cultural evangelism?

2 Why are Japanese Christians so few?

2.1 Historical Background

Let us review the history of Japan. It is also a history of Japanese souls. Japan appeared in history as a nation in document in the 3rd century. At least from 6th century one family ruled Japan, it

was the imperial family. But after 1192, the chief of warriors, i.e., *Bushi* controlled political affairs. They were nominated as the General, *Shogun* by the emperor. But from the middle of the 15th century, Japan was under confusion until 1585 or so for more than 100 years. It is called *Sengoku Jidai*, i.e., the Warring State Period of fighting and disorder. There were many feudal lords, called *Daimyo* fighting each other to expand their territories or to achieve unification of the country.

Some historians point out the possibility of Nestorians, a unitarian, influence via China even in the 6th century, the gospel was first preached in Japan in 1547, in the midst of the Warring State Period by a Jesuit priest Francisco Xavier. He went up to Kyoto the capital at the time. Many became Christians including many feudal lords, and soldiers, and many churches were built. Spanish trade ships first arrived in Japan in 1543. Since then Spain and Portuguese brought guns and other European products. Especially guns and other weapons attracted feudal lords. In the latter half of the 16th Century, many feudal lords were very enthusiastic to foreign trade. Since those Catholic traders came with priests, and Christianity seemed to be against the feudal system and Shogun's dominance, Shogun Iemitsu Tokugawa banned all foreign trade and allowed only Dutch and China traders to visit one port in Nagasaki in Kyushu, the western most main island of Japan. Dutch continued to serve as a link, because they were Protestants and to them trade and ministry were two different things. The government established the policy of national seclusion, expelled priests and Christian feudal lords and killed more than 100,000 Christians who refused to abandon their faith. There was one big war for resistance, but most Christians were martyred with prayer and praise without any resistance. The persecution lasted more than 250 years.

In 1853, Commodore Perry and his squadron of American ships appeared in Uraga Bay to press for the opening of ports for whale catching ships and trade ships. It brought Japan a domestic crisis over whether to open up or "revere the emperor and expel the barbarians." In 1854, we made a so-

called 'unequal treaty' to open ports in Japan and gave special rights to Americans. This also made the transition from a military regime to monarchism and to a capitalist economy and the establishment of a modern Japanese state system. The new government launched in 1868. Soon, Protestant missionaries came to Japan to start evangelism. Lots of Japanese became Christian, especially those who had connections with the west, mostly those who had high level education. Kanzo Uchimura, Inazo Nitobe, Masahisa Uemura, and Toyohiko Kagawa were among them. Some of them were disappointed with the formal churches and started non-church movement. Some became presidents of universities, such as the University of Tokyo.

Christianity made great influence in education by establishing many schools with the aid of mission boards. Many churches had kindergartens and Sunday schools for children. Many Japanese learned English and other foreign languages at churches or from missionaries. Christian churches have been the doors to the western world.

Many Christians protested militarism and wars. During World War II, the Japanese government forced Japanese churches to have emperor's photo for respect, sometimes in place of the cross. Some accepted to maintain church activities and some refused and they were put into prison. The Japanese government forced Japanese churches to be in one group and made the United Church of Japan.

Historically, Japanese churches tend to be against government and the use of military power. In some occasion, Japanese churches cooperated with communists or socialists to work against the government.

To Japanese, history is not what we can change by an effort of individual, but rather a stream people have to watch its current and find better place to stand.

2.2 Some Reasons

Religion is opium: After World War II, Japanese had an allergy, or at least very negative

feelings to strong government, military, and religion. Many Japanese thought that they were misled by these three to imperialism in Asia and the war against much too big and strong a country, the United States of America, without knowing the country very well.

I should better give a historical background on this feeling. In European countries, the wall is made to surround the city to protect the people of the land. Since the time of ancient Greek, to become a soldier has been a right of a citizen. Most of Japanese, however, until recently, say up to 100 years ago, were farmers or fishermen and wars were battle of feudal lords and Samurai warriors fighting for them. In many cases, farmers or fishermen were hired or forced to join the army to fight for feudal lords, but it was not to protect their land. Japanese castles were only to protect feudal lords and Samurai warriors. For people like farmers or fishermen, in many cases they did not care which side won and just wanted war to cease. In modern Japan, we elect representatives to send to the parliament, which is called the Diet, people are not very enthusiastic, and many do not care which political party wins the election. Some do not trust government, though they like government authority to decide issues.

New Constitution of Japan was made after World War II based on the draft made by General MacArthur and the general headquarters of the allied forces. It prohibits Japan to have military power in Article 9.

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.²

²The translation was taken from [6].

The article, when interpreted straightforwardly, means that Japan can never possess any type of military forces. However, the Self-Defence Force came into existence in 1954, right after Korean War. Now it spends 1% of the national budget each year. Though lots of Asian neighbors are afraid of Japan's military power, conservatives support to increase the power of Self-Defence Force insisting that the right of self-defense is not implied in the article and try to amend the Constitution to have military force legally. Other Japanese insist on seeking world peace without depending on any military forces by protecting Article 9 of the Constitution. Most Japanese Christians are in the latter group.

During World War II, Shinto was used to promote the emperor centered nationalism. Shinto was established and developed in connection with rituals of the imperial family, supporting the historical legitimacy of the emperor's authority. But in history, Shinto is mixed with Buddhism or some other religions. Before World War II, it was emphasized that the emperor is the descendant of gods, and Japanese are all subjects to him. Through education, all kinds of myth were taught to have loyalty to the emperor. Actually, in the war, lots of Japanese fought for the emperor and died, though there were not much choice left to each individual. After World War II, the emperor claimed himself a human and not a god. Most Japanese, especially those who had education under militarism, lost the basis of life and ideal. In order to get out of poverty they worked hard and made full use of Japanese virtue of diligence and loyalty to renovate Japan. By the help of Korean War prosperity, Japanese economy quickly recovered in late 50s and 60s just aiming for better life by working hard with loyalty to their company. In one sense they were freed from the bond of religious illusion and they devoted themselves to their jobs without recovering from spiritual emptiness they experienced by defeat. Most Japanese in 60s and 70s thought they can be successful even without religion and emphasized bad influences of religion by quoting Karl Marx's word 'Religion is the

opiate of the Masses.’ Communism and Socialistic view prevailed especially among young people. Campus riots and general strikes had been very popular in those days.

Recent Omu cult problem also convinced Japanese of this idea.

Critical thinking and common sense: In Japanese society we seldom hear the term ‘critical thinking’ but in the U.S. this is one of the key words in education. In the U.S. led by frontier spirit, people always encounter new things, and it is important to exhibit careful, precise and evaluations by themselves to analyze the problems or to understand the situation to make decision. But in Japan, especially for farmers, everything in front of them happened before and it is much more practical to study the past, history, or learn from someone who knows things better. People try to avoid making decision by themselves and try to depend on others. So it is sometimes difficult to persuade Japanese by appealing to their own judgments.

The term used frequently among Japanese is ‘common sense’. People could live on this sophisticated ‘common sense’ of the society they belong to until recently. This was the term to shut up any opposition to the tradition or criticism to more experienced elders.

The word ‘logical’ is often used in negative sense to mean sophistries. They try to avoid argument and try to negotiate almost from the beginning. Japanese are not aggressive in general. It may be because of the origin of people and also their pessimism over the years that the things cannot change by a person’s decision or effort. This type of attitude is also used to avoid taking responsibility, though everyone in the world would avoid taking final responsibility anyhow.

In modern society, when we have better chance to be involved in new problems in which the ‘common sense’ cannot be shared with one of the groups of people involved in, they become aware of the need of this skill, i.e., ‘critical thinking’. Though it is still in very limited level, this new attitude, method of analysis, and decision making

process is developing among the business front or those experiencing cross-cultural encounter.

I strongly believe that as a world citizen it is important to exhibit careful, precise judgments and evaluations by each individual to analyze the problems to make decision among diverse people. It is becoming a key term at our university as well.

I also believe that it is easy to relate the gospel if Japanese are equipped with this attitude. But a new question also arises in my mind. Do Japanese have to change our way of decision making process before they accept the gospel?

Not individual but a group involved in: One typical question they make is the following:

What happens to my relatives? Do they go to hell? What happens to my ancestors who died already without listening to the gospel?

Because family bonds and the connection with relatives are still strong, they cannot decide by themselves. That is the way they express love to those people. To share the gospel is very difficult, because in most cases they understood the gospel message by adopting western way of thinking and individualistic view of life. They cannot relate to their families who are not yet exposed to the west.

Busy: It is often said that many Japanese are workaholic. There are many business people who care about their family trying to leave their offices early, but it is difficult. They do not want to stick out by leaving the office while others are still working. So even if that person’s work for the day is completed, he or she would not leave until the others finish their work. They go out together to eat late dinner over alcohol. As a result, working hours become very long and to come to office very early and leave office late would be the symbol of hard workers. Thus most business people are too busy to think about spiritual need. Even on weekends they are expected to play golf with business partners or drink alcohol over meals.

Christians in the business world have to struggle in that atmosphere. Each day is a battle and it

wears them out. So even to their close friends to live as a Christian looks like too much of a challenge.

In 1993, Mr. Kazuo Ichimura, a staff member of the Navigators and Mr. Robert Holmes, a manager of United Airlines in Japan started a group called the International VIP Club, very important person in God's eye club, at the business center of Tokyo, using Mr. Holmes' luxury apartment for a meeting place. Three years later, Mrs. Holmes suffered from cancer and Mr. and Mrs. Holmes decided to go back to Texas. From that time on the International VIP club spread out to many places and now they meet in 24 places regularly in the Tokyo metropolitan area and there are some meetings in other cities as well. The International VIP club is now serving as a place for businessman Christians to have fellowship or to share difficulties. They are given opportunities to meet 7,000 as God allowed Elijah to see in I King 19:18. It also provides a good place for them to invite their non-Christian colleagues. It is vital to Japanese to have a community of colleagues they can belong to even after the conversion, the change of life style and life itself.

Recently many women are working. For house wives their hope is to give children good education by sending them to *juku*, i.e., cram schools or employing tutors. Since many men do not have time to take care of home, it is house wives job to take care of various problems such as those of teenagers. Jehovah's witness visits door to door to get converts by threatening with the urgent preparation for the last day. The group is growing.

Working women are sometimes busier than men, as they often have to take care of home chores as well on top of their own job. They are very stressful. The number of single person is increasing these days and the number of children are decreasing.

Are Japanese too busy to think about spiritual problems? I believe it is just an excuse to escape from persistent recruiter. They are thirsting for purpose of life, true love, and the truth that shall set them free. I believe they will be attracted by

Jesus Christ, if they have a chance to meet him.

Moral oriented: Japanese do not decide by logical thinking but they judge by fruit. The number one reason Japanese react negatively to Christianity is the dark part of history of the western world. First reaction of the westerners may be to distinguish between Christian faith, Christianity and Christendom. I do not know how many of them are careful with the terms, Islamic faith, Islam, and the country of Muslims. But what Japanese see is the fruit of the society in which Christians are in influential positions.

After the 1994 Hanshin earthquake that killed more than 5000 people, under rubble no crime was reported and the reporters from the west were amazed by the patience of people waiting in a long line for a bottle of water to be distributed. Especially in a group minded society, selfish action is abominated. No one want to be saved by oneself leaving other members of the community.

Though the standard of moral for Japanese sometimes differs from that in the Bible, Japanese respect a person with high moral standard. This tendency may be an influence of Confucianism. Many Japanese heroes are patient, sacrificial to others, humble, and wise, kind to the poor and mentally strong character in crisis. They are faithful to their ideal even to death or defeat³. They also prefer a sad and unfortunate character to a simple success story, partly because such a bad luck and difficult circumstances would cover up his or her deficiency. These traits make up so-called Japanese aesthetic. Japanese also assumes that everyone is under authority which is often intolerably evil.

Lots of Japanese are attracted by charity work for the poor and people in need by missionaries, or Catholic sisters, like Mother Teresa, or Dr. Schweitzer, though these days there are some crit-

³Every characteristic of heroes described above fits well to Jesus. Some groups of people present Jesus from humanistic view point using these characteristics. But still difficulty remains to present deity of Christ, original sin of human beings, and the redemption of it by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

ics against Dr. Schweitzer. Japanese do not like the attitude of self-justification as they can tell only by its fruits. Lots of Japanese do not like the recent history of Japan during World War II, because our country was not humble and imitated the colonialism of the westerners. So many feel sorry for Asians Japanese tortured but they do not feel sorry for fighting against the U.S., they view it was not wise to fight against such a strong country.

For example, Japanese respect a person who works for public for many years without being recognized or by refusing honor by others. Japanese like tragic life of Jesus, but do not like the history of the West, where Christianity is a major religion. Japanese like the beatitudes in Matthew 5, or high standard of morality exhibited in the same Chapter, especially verse 38:

If someone strikes you on the right cheek,
turn to him the other also. (Matthew
5:38b [NIV])

But they respond negatively when they see atrocity of the westerners to Asians or Africans or among themselves, judging that a religion which cannot change the characteristic of the society the believers belong to cannot be a good religion.

In any case, Japanese do not know the Bible itself. They just react negatively to the fruit of the weakness of human beings. It takes much time but I believe the keys are the following. To study the Bible together and to become humble by accepting the weakness of human beings including Christians.

Jyodo-shinshu: There are some strong religious movements in Buddhism and new religion. The largest group is 'Souka Gakkai', they say there are about 10 percent of Japanese in the group. It has grown very rapidly in 60s and 70s. They use very strong and pushy evangelism and there are many Japanese who have strong opposition to that group. The group has strong connections with one of the political parties. The connection of that party with a particular religion always become one of the controversial issues for election.

Let me introduce another Buddhism denomination whose origin is in 14th century, before Christianity was introduced in Japan. It is spread by a priest Shinran and is often compared with Christianity. The denomination is called *Jyodo Shinshu*, the literal meaning is the true way to enter paradise. Its gospel is that Amida allows us to enter paradise if we just believe and accept Amida's mercy. Most Buddhism priests are not allowed to marry, but in Jyodo Shin-shu it is allowed. Two famous principles of it are complete dependency (*Kanzen-tariki*), which can be the counter part of Christianity's 'only by grace', and the other is summarized in the following saying.

If the good person goes to paradise,
Amida will save the evil person more eagerly,
because he is merciful.

This reminds us of Mark 2:17.

It is not the healthy who need a doctor,
but the sick. I have not come to call the
righteous, but sinners. (Mark 2:17
[NIV])

As for complete dependency, there is a following illustration.

One day a disciple of Shinran came to him asking a question. "I have a worry in my heart and do not have peace. One of my elder disciples told me that everyone who is saved has a perfect peace. By that perfect peace one can tell whether he or she is truly saved or not. Teacher, is it true? If so, I am not saved." Then Shinran replied, "If one takes one's feeling, perfect peace as a basis of one's salvation, it is not complete dependency. Because feeling, and reasoning belongs to that person. Those may change as we are mortal and cannot guarantee your eternal salvation. Only Amida can guarantee your salvation. What is allowed to us is to pray humbly to Amida to save us who are so helpless."⁴

⁴The direct source of this story is from *Shukke-to-sono-*

The major difference with Christianity setting aside the redemption by the blood of Christ, is that in Jyodo Shinshu they do not mention about who are not saved. So some Japanese criticize Christianity being not generous. They also do not have strong basis to exercise good deeds or love.

What is love: Confucius says:

Do not do anything you would not have others do to you.

Jesus says:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12 [NIV])

In the Christian world, sometimes these verses are quoted to illustrate the difference between the negative or passive attitude of Asian who do not know the will of God or what is absolutely good, and the positive way of living of Christians.

My youngest daughter came to me asking questions, "Can I share this candy with my friend?" I said, "Do you want your friend to share her candy with you?" She said, "Sure, if it is my favorite, but if she gives me something I do not want, I do not know how to refuse it without offending that person's kindness." "Then why don't you ask her if she likes it first."

If we know the other person very well in a small or homogeneous community, we can tell what that person wants us to do or what that person does not want us to do. But if it is in a diverse ethnic group, it is very difficult to tell. We need to judge by ourselves and do what we would have others do to us. But we also have to be careful because 'we know in part and we prophesy in part'. (I Corinthians 13:9 [NIV])

It is difficult to love others. But the essence is to love your neighbors as ourselves.

When Japanese people listen to the teachings in the Bible, they try to evaluate the level of morality

deshi by Hyakuzo Kurata, who was greatly influenced by Christianity.

by comparing those words with the words they already know. Then watch the person whether that person is living on those words. So in many cases it takes time and often times they cannot reach conviction to accept the truth in the Bible.

No need: The most frequent response to the gospel in Japan is "I don't think I need it now. Japanese people lived without Christianity for thousands of years." There is great spiritual need but most Japanese believe that they can overcome difficulty and need by adopting some skills, or learning a part of the wise living style of others. Many times, western missionaries messages list problems gives diagnosis and teaches, for example, five keys to overcome those difficulties and everything sounds like one of the 'how-to's' of western businessman. 'Wise' Japanese learn only practical part of the message as new medicine made in the West. Unless Japanese truly meet Jesus Christ through the Bible and are touched by God's love so that they would share it with family and the society they belong to, they cannot have firm root to reproduce new life.

Japanese Churches: When I was in the United States for the first time in 1977 to 1980, one of the major issues in churches in this country was the generation gap. The young people were having difficulty finding their place in the church. After 20 years I notice a great change in worship style in many churches. Many large churches have two different types of services, traditional and contemporary. It seems that now the churches are well accommodating young people by this change, though some people belonging to the older generation are just tolerating its style.

In Japanese churches, it is just about in the situation in this country 20 years ago. Some churches are struggling to accommodate younger generation but most of them still cannot change its style. Japanese churches are small and if the size of the congregation is 50 or more, it is considered to be large. There is no way to split the churches to have two different services.

Japanese workers salary is mostly determined by the years of experience and their ages. Right now, the average annual income of the university graduate is about 30,000 USD and the overall average of annual income of workers in Japan is about 60,000 USD. There is no statistics but I believe that the average salary of pastors are around 30,000 USD, though most of them are university graduates and receive extra education at seminaries. It is not easy to live on that amount of money if they have family. The average size of congregation is about 25, and there are many churches having less than 10 members. They are all divided into small denominations and I believe that there are as many denominations in Japan as in the U.S.

In most Japanese churches pastors take initiative in everything. Layman activity is not allowed or popular yet. Membership is very important in most churches. Official document including the date of baptism is transferred when one transfers membership to another church. Hence in Japan to become a Christian is to become a member of a new community. This makes the hurdle even higher.

There are many interdenominational Christian organizations but the history is not long and until recently the leaders of those organizations are very young and unable to give impact on Japanese churches. Sometimes they just wanted to convey western style to Japanese churches and it caused great conflict. These days some cooperations are at work but still very limited. In some cities, there are cooperation among churches to celebrate Christmas together at city hall and some other attempts have been made recently. But the cooperation is still difficult and far to enjoy unity in Christ though it was Jesus' prayer for us in John 17:21. Even if they are divided in small and weak groups, they still seek cozy and comfortable atmosphere only homogeneous group of people having similar tastes in worship style or special way to display their faith may enjoy.

Education: If you meet some Japanese open to the gospel, in many cases they have some connection to Christianity before. For example, they

attended mission schools when they were at junior high or senior high or they went to kindergarten run by churches.

2.3 What can I do?

Seminary: I believe the first and the most important strategy in Japan is the cooperation or unity among Christians. Christians, especially protestant Christians tend to separate in groups by choosing their favorite worship style, ways to confess their faith, etc. We cannot stand if we continue this attitude in Japan. Because of their strong adherence to their denomination and difficult experience in late 60s and 70s arguing on liberal theology and conservative or fundamental theology. Some of the groups from each side claimed themselves to be evangelical. Still they refuse to accept others as brothers and sisters in Christ. In order to keep their doctrine tight, each denomination has tiny seminaries and professors there are pastors in local churches. As a result, the academic level of each seminary cannot be very high and it is very difficult to develop theology like contextualization of the gospel in Japan.

Because in Japan pastors are the key to churches, I think the cooperation among seminaries is significant. It may be difficult in the beginning. So I propose the following steps.

1. To construct first the network of students in seminaries.
2. To develop unit transfer system and cooperative curriculum.
3. To unite some of the seminaries and establish Bible college to raise layman workers.
4. In all these try to develop unity by studying together about the kingdom of God and diversity of the mission of Christ.

I believe I can start the first step by using mailing list, discussion groups, Bible study and web pages.

Cross Cultural Ministry: For the next generation, cross cultural ministry is significant. Not only to accommodate returnees or international students but also to Japanese to understand the diversity of His mission.

I would like to start a Bible study right away and a monthly meeting in near future for a multi-cultural group.

Pray for Confession of Faith of Asians:

We come back to the original question. Do Japanese have to change first to accept Jesus Christ? In 100 and odd years of history we Asians still do not have our confession of faith. Christianity is still in the circle of meeting the west. Among Japanese, students studying in the U.S. may be the easiest group of people who are ready to accept the gospel, because they are open to the western culture and do not have to distill gospel from Christianity in the U.S. The second group of people is those in Japan who are interested in the western culture or English. It was often said that the most difficult group of people is farmers living in rural areas, where local society band is still very strong. Japanese Christians are aware of this most difficult group of people and they established a seminary to minister farming villages. I know a couple of graduates of this seminary moved to farming villages to bring the gospel. But they say that in order to be accepted to the community it requires at least one generation. I have never heard successful evangelism among farmers.

There is not only one way for our people to accept the gospel. God may reveal himself to farmers and village people by special way, or they will be exposed to multi-cultural society in the future to understand gospel. We do not know yet. But unless the gospel reaches farming villages, the most difficult part, we cannot say that the gospel is preached. Honestly, I do not have any clue to reach these people in Japan

It is difficult for life of one person to change completely but it is more difficulty for a country to change.

3 To an American Christian friend

Lots of my Japanese Christian friends living in the U.S. expressed that September 11, 2001 was the day they realized that they were aliens. A Japanese Christian couple left a famous Church hosting international students ministry for many years because they could not tolerate the atmosphere in the church after September 11. Even American citizens, some Japanese felt that their legal basis of staying in the U.S. may not be stable and they can be deported if Americans do not want them to be there. In the time of crisis, anything can happen. Some said that September 11 was the day to remember that they do not belong to this country. Though to Americans it was the day to stir up their patriotism.

But it does not mean that the U.S. is a bad country. It still attracts many and relatively open to refugees and immigrants. And it is a great and unique country influenced by Christianity.

History Review: As I reviewed Japanese history and its influence to their souls in order to understand why Japanese Christians are so few, I also realized that I am very much influenced by the history of Japan. In the beginning I mentioned about my response to September 11, I believe that many of you have something to say. But I also believe that you have noticed that my opinions are very much influenced by the following.

1. The ideal presented in Article 9 of the Constitution.
2. Japanese negative and passive view of the government.
3. Japanese Christians history to work against war and government.
4. Negative view of liberty as those living in a society in which one must cooperate to survive.
5. Japanese reasoning of the cause of Pearl Harbor, and World War II.

6. Japanese tendency to stand for the weak Asian side and hate justification of strong regime.

I could even quote some of the Bible verses to support some of my reasoning. But I need to be very careful whether it gives glory to God.

If I can find evidence that I am influenced this much by the way God has been leading Japan or Japanese Christians in history, there should be its counterpart for the people in this country.

I believe that to review history is an important part of our spiritual life. Because it is the way we understand how God has been leading us. The Old Testament is the book to convince us that we are rebellious people by showing many examples of stubborn Israelites. That is why the Cross of Jesus Christ the Son of God was the only way to save us. It is important to review rebellious history of ourselves as well.

I could not love most of Americans, because I could not understand the heart of the people in this country, or the way our Lord led them. But as I studied the history of this country, I began to understand why Americans respond to such and such way. For example,

1. Why don't Christians make comments on political issues except abortion and evolutionism?
2. Why don't Christians argue Biblical definition of 'liberty'?
3. Why do most churches have very homogeneous people? We seldom see mixture of white, black, Hispanic, Asian, though at universities or state government they try hard to balance their population in work place.
4. Why don't American Christians review the relation with Native Americans, while German Confession Churches and Japanese Churches made statements on atrocities during World War II?
5. Why don't Americans walk one block or two blocks when the earth itself is suffering

from so-called green house effect of carbon-di-oxide and energy crisis.
and so on...

I do not want to say that we can tell everything through history, but that is His Story and the way He led us here is manifested.

I believe that the difficulty of evangelism we have now in Japan is not just the curse of God to what Japanese had done in the history but He is preparing the best way for Japanese to repent. I see that our country is very blessed in some way and that the blessing can only come from God.

Who is close to heaven? Recently I often ask to myself the following question.

Is a baby born in an evangelical Christian home in the U.S. closer to heaven than one born in a family of Islam fundamentalists or Japanese farmers?

I want to study a view given to a person who experienced cross cultural evangelism by studying Romans, or struggles of a Jew by studying Acts 10:9 – 35. What does the word of the Lord mean given to Peter?

Do not call anything impure that God has made clean?

Who is my neighbor?

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

(Luke 10:25–29 [NIV])

Jesus responded with ‘The parable of the Good Samaritan’, and ‘At the Home of Martha and Mary’ follow. It is not easy to love our neighbor who is the creature of one and only one God. We can see that Martha failed to love God and failed to love her neighbor, Mary. As Abraham Lincoln said,

We began by declaring that all men are created equal, but now from that beginning we have run down to the enslave others is ‘a sacred right of self-government. This government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.

By the Emancipation Proclamation, this country acknowledged African Americans as God’s creature not just as property. And Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.,

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character, when all God’s children, black men and white men, Jewish and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: ‘Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last. (Martin Luther King, Jr., at Lincoln Memorial, August 28, 1963)

I also pray that one day each one acknowledges others as God created individual for whom Jesus Christ ransomed with His life for redemption. I hope that this Christian country, the United States of America would be a leading nation humbly to help create society to accept each individual in all nations as God’s people.

Do Japanese have to change first to understand gospel?

I want my friends to know more about our country and our people. The most of the history of evangelism to Japanese is for Japanese to meet the West. But I want the westerners to meet Japanese and to know the work of God manifested in our history and people.

Once I worked as a typewriter salesman and I never wanted to be a salesman. A salesman tries his best to be kind and show his concern to the client just in order to sell goods. But it is up to the time the person buys the good that person is selling. We saw many missionaries who are interested in the number of converts they are making. They are kind and love people only to get converts. Even people know that salesman is kind in order to sell goods, they respond to it if the good is the one they need or it is actually a good one.

Is it the goal to increase the number of converts? We can tell whether we are disciples of Christ, as we love each other (John 13:34,35). I wish that our love and kindness is not like the one of salesman.

But in your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Always prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, (I Peter 3:15 [NIV])

We Japanese Christians have not reached our own form of confession of faith yet. For Europeans lived in the northern part may have expressed their faith through the Reformation. If this is the case, it took more than 500 years to reach this point. I pray that the day will come that we express our faith in our own words and in our own way of living and that it is not just for our nation but the glory of God.

It takes time. To accept the truth in the Bible and have spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ is truly a life changing experience. Each individual has lived some years already in completely different circumstances, and all those circumstances, cultural background, language, way to communicate things in our heart have much longer history

and very heavy in each person's life. Please be patient with each individual to seek their way to respond to the word of God. It may take enormous amount of time. In order to reap harvest, it may take more than one generation. But I believe the following.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (I Corinthians 15:58 [NIV])

3.1 Returnees

Many people realized that it is not easy for returnees to keep their faith in their own countries.

I have only two short comments to international students or visitors who would bring the gospel back to their own countries.

Biblical vs cultural: One of the most important process we need is to distinguish what is Biblical and what is cultural. When we study the Bible together, we need to be alert to distinguish them. It is not easy but one of the ways is to understand the text of the Bible without depending on cross references or the teachings we heard at churches or meetings, though it is important to know many examples in the Bible not to deduce something irrelevant to other parts of the Bible. To stick with the portion of text can avoid overlooking some importance or concluding something we know already. In many cases we may be able to learn different way God leads His people by listening to comments of each individual regardless of his or her length of period as being a Christian.

Distilling Biblical fact is important but if we apply this policy too much we can easily become separatists and split. One major difficulty in Protestantism is this phenomena. If we disagree, we split. We should rather see these difference as the different ways God leads His loved ones. Sometimes it is not easy to see the consistency. But I believe God allows us to express our faith in dif-

ferent way. As we know each individual better, we can see God's hand working on that person.

Language barrier vs cross cultural communication: Young students have better adaptability in language and other things. But it is not still easy for foreigners to share spiritual problem cross culturally in a language which is not their mother tongue. I recommend to have Bible study with a group of people who can communicate in their own tongue. But I also recommend to find all chance to experience cross cultural communication and evangelism. Because if one brings back the gospel to their own country, he or she has to share the gospel cross culturally. The gospel that person received is the one expressed by different person. God is one. He is the creator of the heaven and earth. If we are ready to go for cross cultural evangelism, we can share the truth in the Bible wherever we go. Cross cultural does not mean cross ethnic groups. It can be between men and women, husband and wife, or cross generations. I pray that cross cultural learning may lead us to something universal about God.

From surviving to serving: We are new creation in many ways. It is better not to seek the way to adjust yourself for soft landing onto your home country, but to seek the way to serve the Lord as a unique and special individual. No one has the same experience with you and each of us has something special to share about God, which is our life. I pray that returnees may seek the way to serve the Lord. It is not easy but to give glory to God by the life of each individual has eternal value.

4 Concluding Remarks

I am very thankful of being here with IFI for almost one year. I had the opportunity to attend about 20 churches and 25 different services. I was impressed by the active and vivid atmosphere in Christian churches in this country, or in Columbus. I liked very warm atmosphere of Linworth

Baptist Church and the pastor Rev. George Hattenfield, and All Nations Christian Fellowship. I do not know any other successful multi-cultural church in this country. I was attracted by the pastor's humbleness and enthusiasm at ANCF. One sad thing was that partly because I moved one church to others, partly because of the language barrier, my children could not find their places in the church. Please pray for them.

I believe that international students ministry is a great spiritual frontier in this country. I also got interested in community ministry as well in Columbus, Ohio and Denton, Texas. International students ministry and community ministry are very different in the group of people ministering to but both have chance to meet individuals who have different and diverse background.

I learned a lot from IFI, how to plan the event, run an organization, finance, sincere heart and concern for each individual, volunteers, and their recruitment and training. I think I was shown a path to serve the Lord in the rest of my life. I thank each one of you.

Finally I would like to give special thanks to Dave Sertl, who visited me at Jones Graduate Tower when I did not have any friends in this country, choir members of St. Luke Lutheran Church, the first IFI staff members, Phil Saksa, Mable Bahler, Ron Ornsby, Scott Kisslinger, Debbie Hughes. Without them I may have ended up with very negative feeling toward the people and Christians in this country.

I also thank many of my Japanese Christian friends for helping me with various opinions on my questions. My wife Setsuko has been a discussion partner to prepare this manuscript always.

Thank you very much.

5 Statistical Data

The following data are taken from [5].

People: Population: 126,549,976 (US: 275,562,673)

Age distrib. (%): 14.8 % of age less than 15

17.0 % of age at least 65 (US: 21.2%, 12.6%)

Pop. density: 867 per sq. mi. (US: 74 per sq. mi.)

Urban: 79% (US: 76%)

Principal Ethnic Groups: Japanese 99.4%

Principal Language: Japanese (official)

Chief religions: Buddhism, Shintoism shared by 84%

Geography: Area: 145,882 sq. mi. (US: 3,717,796 sq. mi.)

Location: Archipelago off E coast of Asia.

Neighbors: Russia to N, South Korea to W.

Topography: Japan consists of 4 main islands: Honshu ("main land"), 87,805 sq. mi.; Hokkaido, 30,144 sq. mi.; Kyushu, 14,114 sq. mi.; and Shikoku, 7,049 sq. mi.

The coast, deeply indented, measures 16,654 mi. The northern islands are continues into southern islands, the ranges meeting in the Japanese Alps. In a vast transverse tissues crossing Honshu E-W rises a group of volcanos, mostly extinct or inactive, including 12,388 ft. Mt. Fuji (Fujiyama) near Tokyo.

Capital: Tokyo.

Cities (1996 est.): Tokyo 7,967,614; Osaka 2,599,642; Nagoya 2,151,084; Sapporo 1,774,344; Kyoto 1,463,822.

Government: Type: Parliamentary democracy. (US: Federal republic, strong democratic tradition)

Head of state: Emp. Akihito; b. Dec. 23, 1933; in office: Jan. 7, 1989.

Head of government: Prime Mini. Koizumi

Local divisions: 47 prefectures.

Defense: 1.0 % GDP (US: 3.2% GDP)

Active troops: 242,600 (US:
1,402,000,000)

Economy: GDP (1998 est.): \$ 2.90 tril
(U.S.: \$ 8,511 tril)

Per capita GDP (1998 est.): \$ 23,100
(U.S.: \$ 31,500)

Arable land: 11% (U.S.: 19%)

Imports (1998): \$ 319 bil; partners: U.S.
24%, SE Asia 14%, EU 14%, China 13%
(U.S.: \$ 912 bil; partners: Canada 19%,
West Europ. 18%, Japan 14%)

Exports (1998): \$ 440 bil; partners: U.S.
30%, EU 18%, SE Asia 12% (U.S.: \$
633.1 bil; partners: Canada 22%, West
Europ. 21%, Japan 10%)

Budget (FY 1999-2000 est.): \$ 711 bil
(U.S.: \$ 1,653 tril)

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Postscript

1. It is often said that American churches emphasize the ‘joy’ side of the gospel, while Japanese churches stay with the ‘suffering’ side. American society enjoys its approving culture and is very good at encouragements. This seems to be one of the reasons young Japanese are attracted by the gospel and respond to it in the United States. But when I reviewed the topic in this article, I felt that it can be too superficial if we choose this difference in emphasis as a technique to present the gospel.
2. For Japanese returnees, Japanese Christian Fellowship Network (JCNF) in Denver–Tokyo is at work building network of Japanese Christians in the U.S. and returnees, hosting nationwide conferences, regional meetings, returnees retreats in Japan, and various work for follow-ups. See the web pages at <http://www.jcfn.org/>.
3. I recommend [3] written by a Christian novel writer who passed away a few years ago. The gospel is beautifully presented in an impressive story.
4. [4] is another famous novel written by a well-known Catholic Christian. It focuses on the backsliders during the persecution. Towards the end, one backslider, a former priest Feleila, says the following:

Japan is a marsh of mud. We seeded there. Even if it sprouted, it would start rotting right away from its roots.

If this were true, we have to replace its soil first or at least cultivate it before we sow seeds. (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15) ‘Do Japanese have to change first to understand gospel?’ I want to believe the answer is ‘No’. But it is still difficult for me to have clear understanding of this part along

the line of the history of the rebellious Israelites and God's promise to re-create our nature. The only solution may be God's direct intervention.

5. As I studied the problem discussed in this article, I felt urgent need to review the gospel on cross-cultural background. There seems to be many good articles on this topic. See [7] and the related websites.
6. I learned a lot from [1]. Firstly, I re-assured that there are a lot of characteristics we, Japanese, share with Chinese and reviewed the viewpoints of Americans in many places as they recognize some of the characteristics of Chinese different from theirs. Secondly the warm heart of authors who have experienced cross cultural evangelism among Chinese for many years. I quote only two parts.

Jesus came to demonstrate the full extent of the Father's love to humanity. Since Mainland Chinese are nearly 20 percent of humanity, one of the obvious aspects is that we can learn more of the Father's love for them. Learn to see His delight in the Chinese people and His passion for them. Let learning to love people different from you deeply impact your understanding of God's expansive love for all men and His specific love for you. Many have discovered new insights into God's character through the unique qualities in this culture. (p.56)

Just as you are thankful for the blessings that you had to be born in your home country, each Chinese can and should count it a privilege that God determined that they should be born Chinese. (p.59)