

Introduction of the Nineteenth Century American Civilization into Japan

—the Case of John Ing in the Tsugaru District—

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It is almost universally agreed that the modernization of Japan depended on Western culture. Among the carriers of Western culture to the old Japan were many Christian missionaries. Their contributions to the progress of Japan cannot be overemphasized too much.

It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of missionaries came from the United States—primarily from the New England states. Their object in coming to Japan of course was to engage in mission work. To the Japanese in general, however, American missionaries were, so to speak, windows into the Western civilization.

But Western civilization through Christianity was not new to Japan. In 1549, when St. Francis Xavier came to Japan, she brought with her a favor of Western civilization. Xavier's stay of about two years in the Western part of Japan gained many converts, though soon Tokugawa Bakufu prohibited this faith. Bakufu was afraid that Christianity would disturb the feudal system and that those foreign-sent missionaries would colonize Japan by spreading Christianity. After a long period of extermination and persecution of Catholic converts, the doors of Japan for foreign trade were open. But interdiction of the faith was still alive.

During the ban of Christianity until 1873 some missionaries like James Curtis Hepburn came into contact with Japanese people through medical service. Others, such as James Hamilton Ballagh and Samuel Robbins Brown, taught English to young Japanese. The sphere of their activities, however, was usually in the large cities. Two important exceptions were William Smith Clark in Sapporo and Leroy Janes in Kumamoto.

John Ing, who settled in the Tsugaru district (now called Aomori Prefecture), was not as famous as above mentioned though he was second to none in his contribution to the modernization of Japan. This was probably in part due to his activity in a local district, part due to no published biography and only a few articles about him.

Tsugaru has been at a disadvantage in some respects. It lies at the north end of the main island of Honshu, and the weather is cold and snowy in winter. Historically the Tsugaru clan took the side of defeated Tokugawa shogunate eventually in the civil war just before the

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Meiji Restoration. Thus, the Tsugaru people had few chances of entering the Meiji government, which was occupied only by great clans of Satsuma and Choshu. The only course open to them was to take the initiative in adopting the advanced Western technological knowledge. Such was the setting when John Ing began to play an important part in modernizing Japan.

John Ing was born in Greencastle, Indiana in 1840. After serving as a captain of the Union army, he attended Depauw University to make preparations for the foreign missions. In 1870 Ing and his newly-married wife were sent to central China. But his four-year long missionary work there seems to have produced no appreciable results.

On his way home from China Ing met Honda Yoichi at Yokohama. Honda, from Tsugaru, was one of the early Christian leaders in Japan. Tsugaru wanted to hire an English teacher to found a new school. People believed that English would promise their sons an advantage to improve their chances for the future. So Ing stayed.

Ing's works in the Tsugaru district can be roughly grouped into three fields: his contribution to agricultural development, to local education, and to the mission of Christianity itself.

During the reign of the feudal lord, rice was the only agricultural product in this area. Because of cold climate, Tsugaru had suffered from severe famines several times. On top of that came a grave unemployment problem. The return of the land and people to the Emperor created unemployment for more than three thousand former samurais (retainers of the feudal lord) in the Tsugaru clan. Something had to be done as a relief work for them.

Finding similarity of climate to that of the state of Indiana, Ing introduced apple seeds into this area. He encouraged samurai farmers in cultivating apple trees. At present more than 50 % of the apple output of Japan is from the farms in this prefecture. He played the part of "Johnny Appleseed".

With the Restoration in 1868, the new government employed engineers, including agricultural engineers, from foreign countries. But Western methods of agriculture conferred little benefit upon the Japanese farmers on the whole. It was due to the geographical restrictions. Division of the farm land into small land was not fit for large-scale machinery cultivating after the manner of the United States. Farmers kept engaging in small-scale farming.

In 1885 there appeared an apple orchard named the Garden of Eden in Tsugaru. This was run by the farmers under the influence of John Ing. Those apple producers organized themselves into the Keigyo-sha Society. The members of the Society cooperated in the difficult tasks of finding markets and improving the method of apple production. That

Society later developed into the Fujisaki Methodist Church.

Hired out as an English teacher, Ing taught natural history, mathematics, science, and history. His students were eager to learn about the West not only because they wanted to succeed in life but also sought to catch up with the western standard. They loved their country.

It goes without saying that efforts made by the central government were made to improve the Japanese educational system. The government was quick to adopt policy to import Western culture. Here America supplied a model educational system. David Murray (former professor of Rutgers College) was superintendent of schools (1873–1878). M. M. Scott helped establishing normal schools. Text books used in the early primary schools were translation of Wilson's Readers.

Ing established a class for girls, too. Most people in those days thought them unworthy to be educated. Above all, the idea of women's inferiority to men was still prevalent. Christian missionaries noticed this. And they founded as many as forty-three schools for girls within a short period of two decades⁽¹⁾.

Five of the best among Ing's students were sent to study at DePauw University in 1878.

His third major contribution was the establishment of Christianity in Tsugaru. Indeed, today Tsugaru is considered one of the four main Christian bases in Japan.

On settling in Tsugaru, Ing opened his private house to the townspeople to give lectures on the Bible. In Bible classes for the English students this American teacher encouraged them to memorize passages in the Bible as literal words of God. Honda was generous in his collaboration for the huge task. The reward of their labor was received at last. In a terrible persecution as many as fourteen students were converted in 1878.

Townspeople curiously saw converts from former samurai families frequent to the community of the discriminated people. Ing's letter to the Mission Board said that the social rank-system was being abolished there.

The spread of the new religion exerted influence on the moral and social way of thinking. Some women broke the old custom of dyeing their teeth black after marriage. This is only one of many instances. Puritan influence from America could be seen in the manner in the rejection of idol worship, the practice of monogamy, and teetotalism and an abstinence from smoking. These three principles were accepted among the early converts.

It is, indeed, amazing to know that from that time on, the churches in this area produced more than two hundred ministers or preachers.

(1) Sumiya Mikio, *Kindai Nippon no Keisei to Kirisutokyo* (Tokyo, 1974), p.105

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It may be summed up by saying that John Ing introduced what we call Evangelicalism into Tsugaru, rather than orthodox Puritanism. John F. Howes's comments on the five American missionaries will illuminate the matter. He writes :

“these five men (Hepburn, Ballagh, Janes, Clark and Davis) brought a specific kind of faith with them. It had grown originally in New England and was spreading rapidly in the American West. It emphasized personal conversion, implicit faith in the Bible, moral rigor, and a sense of mission”⁽¹⁾.

Those words fitly apply to John Ing, too.

During the first two decades following the Restoration people were eager to introduce Western civilization into the culture or their lives. Everything occidental was accepted without question. Some optimistic missionaries, therefore, in the Third Christian Convention held in 1883 had an illusion that the Christianization of Japan would only be a matter of time⁽²⁾. This proved to be merely an illusion because soon the extreme enthusiasm for favoring all things Western was suddenly brought to a halt. The Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890 determined the course of Japan after that. Nationalism arose in as a reaction against Westernism. This inflicted great hardship upon Christians and churches.

What was the meaning of this sudden change? This writer thinks that a popular Japanese saying “Wakon Yosai”, which means ‘Japanese spirit with Western knowledge, reveals the whole situation. Meiji imperial government took advantage of Western civilization to modernize Japan, exclusive of their morals and religion.

Ing had left Japan before this tendency became pronounced. During the time of John Ing he stood on the upper stream of culture. As water flows from a high to low place, so American culture had an almost one-sided influence on the underdeveloped Tsugaru. This was quite natural of things.

It is, indeed, amazing to look over the works made by one American missionary in the brief period of three years and a quarter. Thus, American civilization planted by John Ing had slowly penetrated through the Tsugaru district.

(1) Howes, J.: “Japanese Christians and American Missionaries”, *Changing Japanese Attitude Toward Modernization*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (Princeton University Press, 1965), pp.344-345

(2) Ohoki Hideo, “Nippon ni okeru Pyuritan Shukyo no Juyo”, *AMERIKA NO BUNKA*, Vol. I ed. Ohoshimo Shoici (Tokyo Nan'undo, 1971), pp.367-368

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