Negotiating Otherness? Mission Discourse of Difference among the Swiss and German Schooling Projects in 19th Century Japan

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Abstract: This article explores the personal encounters between the Swiss–German missionaries and their Japanese students through their school projects in the late nineteenth century, as a fresh approach to disclose an entirely new analytical angle to mission education and the production of otherness. By examining the personal encounter of missionaries with their students, it problematizes scholars’ reliance on the concept of otherness as a unidirectional transfer of knowledge from West to non-West. Instead, this study argues, that the process of “othering” should be looked at as a negotiation beyond an East–West hierarchical divide, in which new forms of beliefs and practices for Japanese converts emerged. An analysis of relevant missionary sources reveals that in the period 1885 to 1893 the missionaries’ work with the Japanese students evolved into a seemingly contradictory state. On the one side, the missionaries devoted a great number of resources and time in educating their Japanese subjects into what they perceived to be true Christians. On the other side, they repeatedly expressed deep doubts about their students’ potential to become the type of Christians they envisioned. Focusing on three cases of missionaries’ encounters with Japanese students, this article argues that the attempts and results of negotiating otherness in the Swiss–German mission school projects opened new possibilities for identity formation among Japanese Christians.

Keywords: modern Japanese religion; liberal Christianity; indigenous Christianity; mission education; self-colonization; postcolonial theory

1. Introduction

In 1887, a school protest involving several students took place at the German Studies Society School or Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō 独逸學協會學校, one of the most prominent and progressive schools in Japan at the time, located in the center of Tokyo. The leader of the school protest was the young Christian student Minami Hajime 三並良 (1869–1920), who later that year was expelled from the school due to the protest. The school protest and the consequent expulsion of several students of Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō was a tumultuous and emotional event for the school and for foreign educational projects in Japan in general.1

Curiously, at the moment at which Minami initiated the protest against his school he was receiving a widespread religious education in Bible Studies and ethics by the Swiss missionary Wilfried Spinner (1854–1918), who in contrast to the school administration of the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō saw lots of potential in the young students (TB-Spinner, 28 March 1886). If Minami was the voice of infidelity for the school administration of Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō, Minami was for Spinner the voice of the future for the German liberal mission in Japan. We know from primary sources that Spinner, since his arrival in Japan in 1885, had planned to build a theological academy for Japanese students to train Christian pastors in Liberal Christianity (TB-Spinner, 29 September 1885).2 The exclusion of Minami from Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō allowed Spinner to bring in a promising student under his own wings whom he could cultivate as he wished.3
In the larger contexts of mission education studies, the history of Missionary Wilfried Spinner’s encounter with Japanese students in the final decades of the nineteenth century suggests a remarkable case study from not only within the context of Japanese Christianity, but also on the world scale. Over the last several decades, scholars within mission studies have typically highlighted the significance of mission education as the only place where missionaries were able to operate as “conscious agents of cultural transformation” (Janiewski 1992; Ramen 1996; Gonzalez 2007; Prochner et al. 2009). This scholarship has analyzed the discourse and positions of the missionaries, governments and imperial citizens, and often characterizes the mission schools as “total institutions” through which students attained social knowledge that challenged the existing discourse (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Whereas these analyses have provided very valuable insights into the anatomies of mission education and the production of otherness (Spivak 1988; Thomas 1992; Kanitkar 2001; Chakrabarty 2007; Milanich 2009), there are a number of problems with these descriptions. First, the characterization of mission schools as purely places of “social transformation” has led to a somewhat exaggerated interpretation of the missionaries’ position in the mission field. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these studies do not explain how indigenous religious thoughts and ideas could develop independently out from these “total institutions”.

Similar critical questions have been asked elsewhere, particularly in the context of Japan. Mark R. Mullins (1998); John F. Howes (2005) and Ballhatchet (1996) have each offered excellent accounts of the indigenous Christian movement in Japan outside of missionary constraints (Mullins 1998; Howes 2005; Ballhatchet 1996). Still, considering these critical questions and the remarkable focus on mission education projects within mission studies in general, the Swiss and German missionaries’ understudied engagement with Japanese students forms a most pressing case, well worth our attention. This article attempts to answer the problems by looking at the phenomenon of mission education from a new analytical angle. Rather than considering the mission schools to be manifestations of social transformations, this article will examine the personal encounter of the missionaries and their students.

My motivation to focus on the theological work produced by Minami Hajime and other students within the compounds of the Swiss and German mission schools goes beyond the sole focus on mission education in its classical sense. More important is the relatively strong influence these education projects had on the Japanese Church in the last decades of the nineteenth century, as a place where a unique translation of German liberal theologian ideas in modern Japan took place. Established by Wilfried Spinner and continued by fellow missionaries in Japan, the education programs of the Allgemeiner Evangelischer Protestantischer Missionsverein (henceforth AEPM) taught German liberal knowledge to its students (Gensichen 1984; Hamer 1984, 1992; Mizutani 2010; Petersen 2021; Suzuki 1979). On first sight, this seems like a dynamic convergence between church and students. Yet, a closer analysis reveals that the Swiss and German missionaries’ work with Japanese students often evolved into a seemingly contradictory state. On the one side, the missionaries devoted a great amount of resources and time in educating their Japanese subjects into what they perceived to be true Christians—mainly so that they themselves could be seen as the “legitimization and authority for the development of Japanese Christianity” (Hamer 2002, p. 470). On the other side, protests against the missionaries’ authority transpired regularly within the Swiss and German schooling projects. These internal conflicts are often glossed over when examining the history of mission schools, but they are critical to understanding the nature of the mission field in Japan.

These observations problematize the prevailing characterization within post-colonial scholarship of mission education as being structured entities with great control of their surroundings. They also allow for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the actors involved in and around the mission schools. I argue that the mission education systems within the mission field of the AEPM were products of the dialectics of...
a knowledge exchange that worked beyond an East–West hierarchical divide. The production of knowledge relied on action and reaction, thought and discussion, definition, and redefinition, in which the process of “othering” was key to the development of new forms of beliefs and practices for Japanese converts.

To this end, the article problematizes scholars’ reliance on the concept of otherness as a unidirectional transfer of knowledge from West to non-West, whether in the form of direct influence, indigenization, or reconfiguration (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986; Fanon 1967; Stoler and Cooper 1997; Stoler 2002). Instead, I argue that this case study of the Swiss–German missionaries and their encounter with Japanese students allows us to reconsider the framing of “otherness” as a one-way discourse of colonial control and reposition it as a human dialectic that can open new possibilities for identity formation; and to focus on instances of personal interactions among individuals.

2. The Doitsugaku Kyōkai Gakkō

It is unclear what Minami Hajime was thinking or how he might have felt when he, together with his classmates, started the protest at the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō in 1887. Whether he felt excited about his protest against the school, or whether his frustration was founded on a feeling of injustice, or even whether he had anticipated or feared response of the school administration. Minami’s protest might initially just have been a wish to get away from a dull and repetitious school life. It is difficult to know for sure.

What we do know with certainty, however, is that Minami Hajime was one of 470 students attending the classes at the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō in 1887. The school had been established in 1881, modeled after the Prussian education system by a group of prominent, pro-Western, and reform-friendly Japanese. Among them were the Japanese Christians Hirata Tōsuke 平田東助 (1849–1925), the politician Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之 (1836–1916), the Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane 西周 (1829–1897), and the Foreign Minister and former ambassador of the Japanese Empire in Germany, Aoki Shūzō 青木周蔵 (Hori 2012). What all these eminent men had in common was the fact that they had spent several years studying abroad in Germany. Especially, Aoki Shūzō had been functioning as a central member of the Meiji leadership’s policies of strengthening Japan’s position in the West (Breen 1998; Akashi 1995). To receive international recognition and Western idealism in Japan’s future leaders, Aoki and the rest of the board members had established the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō in Tokyo, Kanda district, to promote western ethics and teach German knowledge simultaneously. The school had originally been given the name Verein für deutsche Wissenschaften or Doitsugaku Kyōkai 独逸學協會 but changed its name to Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō in 1883, and early on intended to be a linkage point between the national future of Japan and Western science and knowledge imported from Germany (Hamer 2002, pp. 451–54).

At the time, this also included Christianity. Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō was seen by the German Kaiserreich as an important school for promotion of “German values and norms,” who during the period 1881 to 1891 donated no less than 100,000 yen to the founding and running of the school (Shingu 2012; Hamer 2002). Aoki planned for the school’s students to study German science and foreign languages in combination with character training built on Christian virtue. Spinner seemed to be able to teach all three subjects. In accordance with the schools ideal, Spinner was therefore invited to be an integral part of the project “to transform the school into a Christian one” after his arrival in Japan in September 1885. Spinner was aware of his assignment to teach ethics and philosophy, but as can be read in his diary entry from 12 October 1885, he also had expectations that he could influence the school and “direct the school into a true Christian direction”.

My birthday present today was the offer from the Doitsu gakkō (aka Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō) which I received from Aoki. I must teach 9 h weekly (from February, 12 h weekly) for 30 Yen a month and free accommodation in Surugadai (Kanda district of Tokyo). This allows me to (1) Get connected with the circles of leadership and thus be acquainted with some of the leading Japanese. (2) The school will be a very favorable point of contact for the missionary activity. (3) It
allows for a partial change of scenery from our mission club. (4) It allows for the continuing communication with Aoki, who probably also is behind my employment at the school, as he intends to transform the school into a Christian one. (5) I can live in the city [Spinner until then lived with the German teacher Otto Hering in Yokohama]. (6) This is the best opportunity to learn about practices at a Japanese preschool (Vorschule) and study the application of pedagogy among the Japanese youth. (7) I can learn why the school is filled with Catholic Austrian and anti-religious Germans. (8) In this case, I might be able to better direct the school into a true Christian direction.

(TB-Spinner, 12 October 1885)

“Transferring” German values and norms was, in other words, a central element of most education programs run or supported by the AEPM at the time, and the transfer of norms was incorporated into efforts to foster and develop a particular set of Christian competences in the young students’ minds. From the perspective of the AEPM, the financial support from the German Empire was seen as a helpful contribution to their project of developing christliche Persönlichkeiten (Letter in ZASP No. 91, 51).

Thanks to the work of scholars such as Peter Van der Veer, among others, historians have gained an understanding of how in the modernizing project of the secular state the meaning of religion became coupled with Western modernity and in this way held a strong authority (van der Veer 2001). James Ketelaar has equally shown how Christianity served as the unifying tool by lending credibility to the nation state—especially to new nations such as the Japanese Empire at the time (Ketelaar 1993).

The students at the Doitsu-gaku kyōkai gakkō were put into an educational system that was rooted in some of the most dominant tropes of Western modernity. This was achieved by incorporating Christian ideology and Western modernity into a strict curriculum. The students were given lessons in German, Japanese, and English. They were taught in general history, Japanese history, ethics (incl. religion and Bible teaching), arithmetic, geometry, geography, and botany. The students were taught to write and speak German and occasionally, drawing and music lessons were added. The curriculum was composed of elements typical of a German (and particularly Christian) education, but also contained subjects obligatory in schools in Japan such as Japanese and classical Chinese.

Scholars and postcolonial theorists have often stated that the protestant missionaries’ motivation to educate and “improve” non-Christian people was representative of a particular modern phenomenon of colonial power. By attempting to shape their students according to the norms and practices of their own Christian background, the missionaries practiced what post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha, for example, has described as “a desire for a reformed, recognizable other” (Bhabha 2004, p. 122). During the transformation of colonialism, the particular nature of it shifted from what Michel Foucault has identified as “pre-modern” colonialization—a system reliant on intimidation and physical domination—to a seemingly softer “modern” form of colonialism, which was dependent on a multifarious system of development, education, and welfare, etc. (Foucault 1979; Stoler 1995, p. 3). According to the missiologist David Scott, the modern expression of missionary power was less about punishing and disciplining than about regulating and controlling certain forms of behaviors. In his book Refashioning Futures Criticism after Postcoloniality, he, for example, argued that modern concepts of political representation, community, rights, justice, obligation, and the common good did not apply universally but were entangled in a net of various power battles and thus require reconsideration (Scott 1999). Drawing upon such a distinction between old and new colonial mentalities, anthropologist Nicholas Thomas has argued that:

“The distinct character of nineteenth century Protestant missionary activity is itself an index of this change that seeks a kind of willful inner rebirth on the part
of the colonialized individual, . . . a relation of hegemony and compliance rather than brute dominance”.

(Thomas 1992, p. 385)

The mission methods of the AEPM in many ways symbolize this change within the nineteenth century missionary movement. The general goal, that the AEPM Home Board stated in a protocol letter from 1886, was to “spread Christianity with maximum impact . . . to the individuals and the nation as a whole,” by combining it with the objective of establishing a system of liberal social reforms in education and welfare (Protocol Letter in ZASP No. 91, 50).

Spinner would fulfill his duty as a teacher at the school and inspire German idealism among his students as an instructor in ethics and philosophy. During his time as a teacher at the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō, Spinner developed extensive relations with a group of students he called Sol Oriens or the Morning Sun. These students were a small group who had already been baptized to Christianity or had expressed wishes to be so. Within a few months Spinner would organize small Bible study groups for the students. One of the most prominent of those with whom Spinner likely related was the foremost leader of the group, Minami Hajime.

In their private interactions with Spinner, members of the study group provided him with a unique source of knowledge about the religions, and especially Japanese Christianity at the time. In fact, much of Spinner’s understanding of Japan would depend both on his direct observations and on his private relations to his students. Spinner described his extraordinary dependence on his students to guide him in developing his knowledge of Japan, “I have begun baptism classes with the students: Mūko, Okazaki, Fujisawa, Nagami, Fujishiro, Kayama, Kikusaki, Minami, Takada. These youngsters give me joy with their attentiveness and (their) regular visits and help” (TB-Spinner 1 June 1886). His relationship with his Japanese students, however, was not non-hierarchical. Spinner constantly in his interactions with his students, saw it as his duty to improve the student’s spiritual side. He wished to shape their knowledge of the world as a development from within, entrenched in liberal Christian ideas of autonomous thinking, historical awareness, and the relationship of the individual and his faith. In this way, Spinner’s original idea of Japanese Christianity, formed from the claims of German liberal Christianity, fused with the actualities of his teaching duties at the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō and was further shaped by interactions with his student group.

In turn, Spinner’s teaching would contribute with knowledge about German liberal theology to the eager Japanese students. Spinner’s job as a teacher at the school was followed by firstly, a change in reception of liberal theology in Japan. For example, in his book Free Christianity in Japan and its Pioneers (Nihon ni okure jiyu kirisutokyo to sono senkusha 日本に於ける自由基督教と其先駆者), Hajime Minami describes how the thoughts of Spinner among many Japanese were first rejected as heresy, then as rationalism, and finally seen as free Christianity and new theology (Minami 1935, p. 454). Secondly, Spinner’s work with the students would result in a series of student protests, the most infamous incident being the protest of Minami Hajime mentioned at the introduction of this article. Interestingly, the participants of the protest all seemed to have been linked to the student group of Spinner.

What for Minami Hajime, a Christian student, initially could be seen as an unstructured domestic problem of faith and school life became enfolded and structured as a critique of the schools’ approach to religion and Christianity in general, which especially seems to have been cultivated through his continued Bible study groups with Spinner. Minami’s concern with the lack of focus on Christianity in the classes had assumed, by virtue of his activities with Spinner, a whole new meaning of individual progress and civilization. In other words, it can be said that the novel meeting between Spinner and his student arose in the historical juncture of the beginning of liberal theology in Japan and the birth of Japanese Christianity in the wider context, which initially was set into motion with the
student protest which led to the establishment of the Shinkyū Shingakkō 新教神学校, the theological academy.

3. The Shinkyū Shingakkō

It has been made clear in the previous section how the Swiss missionary Wilfried Spinner, the lone missionary of AEPM at the time, played a significant role in the school protest which would give a major impetus for the advancement of the formation of a Japanese theological academy, the Shinkyū Shingakkō, based on the principles of liberal Christianity. The emerging idea of a Japanese Liberal Christianity progress emphasized individual religious experience, rejection of dogmatical competition, and spontaneous free association of peoples as the foundations for the rational inquiry of human actions. It would be based on the tolerant premise that religious difference existed everywhere, but also that there existed an inherent truth in all religions, providing a possibility for a modern Church that incorporated the individual and the collective simultaneously.

It took his encounter with his Japanese students for Wilfried Spinner to refashion his mission approach from the classical focus on quantity, i.e., the number of students in his classes, to a qualitative approach focusing on cultivating a few true Christian subjects who were to be the foundation of the liberal Christian movement in Japan (August Kind 1901). Spinner identified in Japan a dynamic model among his Christian students that transcended the provincially bounded idea of the Church.

Spinner saw the potential in his students. He noted his students’ consciousness and pride in their contribution to the larger society in Japan, and he observed how this capacity was indicated in the intensity of learning from and interacting with the outside world. It would be this ethic that Spinner would see as the foundation for the establishment of a schooling regime which could enable the development of liberal Christian identities in Japan. The developing vision of progress and civilization inspired by the ideas of liberal Christianity would later, as has also been shown by several scholars, become an intellectual base for many Christian leaders of Japan at the time (Yasuo Furuya 1997; Dohi 1997; Mullins 1998).

Not only does Spinner’s encounter with his Japanese students serve as a reminder of the openness and unpredictability of the early encounters of Christianity in modern Japan, but it also gives voice to the silent process of the negotiations of mission education at the time. In personal letters to the AEPM Home Board, Spinner repeatedly expressed his wish to combine Japanese culture and education with the newest developments of German Liberal Christianity. These were to be put in a specific schooling regime to instruct a specific christliche Persönlichkeiten and liberal character in his students. To him, the education of his students had to be understood in a broader sense: as a process which could affect how an individual understands the world and behaves in it, as one which could become the leader of the Japanese Christian community both inside and outside of the formal walls of the mission institution:

[.. .] Real religious education, the development of christliche Persönlichkeiten, can neither be acquired by a single person, nor by the school. The individual student depends on a congregation, so that he stays within the experience of religious warmth in the union of like-minded people and eventually becomes an active upholder and advocate of his own belief.

(ZASP No. 91, 51)

To accomplish this, Spinner believed that his students had to be placed in a different schooling system than that of Doitsugaku Kyōkai Gakkō. Instead, he encouraged the coexistence and cooperation of the schools and the local Christian community, where the “like-minded” would be able to receive its “religious warmth”. Noticeable also is that Spinner, as has been pointed out by Rolf-Harald Wippich as well, did not start with the schooling of students, and thereafter establish a Japanese Christian community. Instead, neither
of these seemed to happen before the other, as both were attributed to Spinner’s wish to enable liberal Christian identities (Wippich 2002, p. 273).

In a second letter to the AEPM Home Board, Spinner directly expresses his wish “to educate Minami for a theological profession” (ZASP No. 91, 51). Spinner felt obligated to educate liberal Christian individuals in Japan. But his teaching at the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō made him realize that a few hours of teaching during the week would not allow for a complete transformation of his students into liberal Christian individuals. To achieve his goal of converting Japan into liberal Christianity, he was undoubtedly in urgent need of employees who would understand his liberal thoughts and attitude, and who could successfully transcribe these into Japanese. In other words, he needed the assistance of local employees who, in the long run, would be able to exercise a theological profession in the community and perform the services of a qualified pastor. Therefore, with the expulsion of Minami from the school, Spinner had suddenly been presented with a highly qualified and obvious candidate.

At the time, there already existed several theological schools in Japan that educated Christian workers; in the year 1887, and we know of fourteen such schools with a total of 260 students (Arndt 1888, pp. 238–39). But Spinner wanted to establish a new theology based on German liberal Christian values, and therefore was in need of assistants trained in this theology, should his mission have any chance to succeed. So, when Minami started the school protest at the Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō in September 1887, it gave Spinner the impetus to establish a new school, the Shinkyū Shingakkō.10

When Minami Hajime became the first student of the Shinkyū Shingakkō, Spinner described him as having a “peaceful and pure Johannes-nature” (TB-Spinner, 28 March 1886). This description surmises that Minami as a person was a loyal believer and follower of Spinner’s words. Looking closer, however, we see the contrary, for Minami’s actions and words expressed the discrepancy of the Japanese theological environment in Meiji Japan at one end of its intellectual spectrum. “Christianity” was an evolving project in Meiji Japan and Minami’s story very much reflected this. An examination of Minami Hajime’s time within the Shinkyū Shingakkō here in the following section requires reading outside a strict missionary/student ramification. In this way, I hope to make sense of the conversion of a German liberal Christianity into Japanese subjects.

From its earliest years, Shinkyū Shingakkō, where Minami Hajime was trained, identified itself by its difference from conservative missions. The early success of the school in Japan that Wilfried Spinner founded in 1887 created excitement among some in Germany because of its symbolic achievement of universal humanism rooted in liberal theologian ideals. For example, the mission represented Schleiermacher’s understanding of the way in which Christianity would provide freedom from doctrine and the church and replace religious miracles with rational faith in God and the moral autonomy of the individual (Hahn 1984; Sekioka 1985; Petersen 2021). In 1876, Ernst Buss, who would become the first director of AEPM in 1884, wrote the book Die christliche Mission, ihre Principelle Berichtigung und praktische Durchführung (The Christian Mission, its Principal Authorization and Practical Implementations). In the book, Buss attempted to develop a universalist approach to mission that unified elements of liberal Christianity while at the same time being tolerant towards all religious traditions (Buss 1876). “Christianity”, he stated, “should not necessarily be tied to any certain ecclesiastical archetypal and specific cultural system of the West but must go hand in hand with the universal ethical advancement of the individual as well as all people, whose collective fruit is a higher civilization and culture” (Arndt 1886, pp. 194–95). This passage exemplified Buss’s liberal approach to other religions and how closely his ideas of mission politics and Liberal Christianity intertwined. The mission’s overwhelming success in its founding years in Japan suggested to German observers the universal possibility of Liberal Christianity as a religion that did not seek dogma, but rather argued for the rational inquiry of human actions. A problem for the mission however remained, if the vision of a universalistic progress of humanity lay with the privileging of the individual religious experience as the definition of all truth, that vision remained penned
within the powerful institutional authority of the nation state. This issue, as we will see, was later to create significant problems for the missionaries.

In the early years, however, Ernst Buss’ vision played a tremendous role in forming the particular ideological framework of the Shinkyū Shingakkō, a framework that made it unique in a number of ways among theological schools in Japan. The school’s policy was to “live up to the demands of the common Japanese educational system”, while at the same time “meet the levels of our philosophical and theological education in Germany as well” (ZASP No. 91, 51). This was a unique position that reflected Spinner’s wish to equip each of his students with sufficient legitimacy and authority to allow him to develop his own interpretation of Christianity. In this context, the students were to be given considerable autonomy to define Japanese Christianity and the meaning of its purpose for Japan in the future. This opened up an intellectual space for various debates, practices, and intellectual developments within the school borders (Petersen 2021, pp. 206–8).

In a similar vein, Spinner’s vision of the school was to lay the framework for a unique Japanese Christianity, which accepted essential aspects of Japan’s religious thoughts and cultural traditions. The historicity behind this conceptual development was rooted in part in German idealism’s acceptance of religious pluralism and the progress of culture (Graf 1992). Religious life, according to liberal theologians, was to be guided not by dogma, but by moral action and practical reason (Masuzawa 2012, pp. 312–13). Only this way, so Ernst Buss argued, could religions “be fulfilled and demonstrate their universal validity and perfection” (Buss 1876, p. 123). For Spinner, students of the Shinkyū Shingakkō were to be fueled by religious faith as a source of their ethical and religious progress. Instead of changing and transfiguring his students into a Western model, the students were to bridge themselves between the traditions and existing ethical foundations of the Japanese society in which their Christian education was to take root. In order to adequately facilitate the transformations and merging of religious faith among his students, Spinner quit his job as a teacher of ethics and history at Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō in October 1887, and in the same month began to teach Minami as well as the two students Mūko Gunji 潮軍治 (1869–1945) and Maruyama Michikazu 丸山通一 (1869–1838) for four hours daily in “preparatory disciplines of theology”. Both Mūko and Maruyama had been students of Spinner’s Bible Study group and accepted the invitation from Spinner to join the Shinkyū Shingakkō with Minami.

The establishment of Shinkyū Shingakkō was accompanied by the arrival of the second missionary of the AEPM in Japan, the German Otto Moritz Schmiedel (1858–1926) on 13 October 1887. Together, he and Spinner placed a note on the bulletin board of the newly established Christian community center which read: “Theological, philosophical, and philological (Latin and Greek) lessons for theology students: every morning from 8:00–12:00” (TB-Spinner, 30 October 1887). From Spinner we know that the two missionaries shared the teaching load at the school. Spinner took care of the lessons in philosophy and church history, while Schmiedel taught the students in Latin, Greek, and Exegesis. Dr. Otto Hering, an experienced oyatoi gaikokujin, i.e., foreign government advisor and language teacher at Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō, voluntarily gave classes in German (Buss 1888, p. 249).

Together, Spinner and Schmiedel may also be considered some of the first religious comparatists in Japan. With their students, they searched for points of religious union and common language between liberal Christianity and Buddhism, as well as Shintoism. They also encouraged their Japanese Students at Shinkyū Shingakkō to write comparative religious essays in the newly established journal Truth (Shinri 真理) to introduce a perception of Christianity’s rootedness in existing Japanese religious traditions. This approach was reflected in several articles authored by Minami Hajime and Mukō Gunji in the journal (Mizutani 2010; Petersen 2021, pp. 197–200).

In line with liberal Christianity’s acceptance of religious pluralism within their churches, the church community of the AEPM was established to develop into Japan’s national church. From its earliest years, while the new church community was in its making, it was called
the Fukyū Fukuin Kyokai（普及福音教会）—thus implying in its name something shared with all churches. Under Spinner, the church mirrored his pluralistic vision of parallel religious developments and national progress. Authority could not be defined from abroad but was found locally within each national church. In this vision, the Fukyū Fukuin Kyokai was to be understood as an institution to ultimately serve the nation under the authority of the Japanese emperor. It was this last point that brought Minami and the other students to protest against the missionaries.

Spinner instilled in his students the idea that the church in Japan was to be independent of the church in Germany. Japanese Christianity would be the national church, which, as a hybrid new religion, would incorporate and express Japanese cultural and historical tendencies along with universalistic aspects of Christian teachings. It was not to be a product of the West, but rather was identified in terms of its difference from the Western traditions. In an expression of the church's orientation, students of the Shinkyū Shingakkō were encouraged to also study their own religious tradition (Buss 1889, p. 248).

The liberal religious approach to Fukyū Fukuin Kyokai, however, also presented itself with an identity problem for the missionaries. Before coming to Japan, Spinner had believed that he presented a universal religion, and the most advanced branch of that—the German liberal Christianity which could easily be adopted to other branches of Christianity in Japan. However, the more time he spent in Japan, the more he differentiated himself from the original idea of Buss. Identity became difference, and difference turned into identifications of otherness. The production of knowledge in his theological academy became increasingly a discourse of us and them.

Out of this environment emerged Minami Hajime as one of the leading students at the school. Minami attended the Shinkyū Shingakkō for six years (1886–1892) and was, after graduation, directly hired as a pastor for the Japanese Christian community Fukyū Fukuin Kyokai. Highly trained in German liberal theology and German language, he was a student of everything that made AEPM unique. Yet Minami would turn from the AEPM to initiate the formation of a national church discourse that countered not only the authority of the missionaries, but also its close connection to the nation-state in which it participated. In what follows I will discuss the wavering support of Minami Hajime as a case of the emergence of otherness in the Swiss–German mission field.

4. The Wavering Support of Minami Hajime

From October 1886, the two missionaries Wilfried Spinner and Otto Schmiedel invested precious resources and time in educating Minami at the Shinkyū Shingakkō. Minami was one of only three young Japanese seminarians to attend the school in its first year. (Buss 1889, p. 248) Minami, together with the other students, was to study elements of German liberal theology and create a Japanese Christianity that would unify essential aspects from Japanese traditional religious practices with the universal faith of liberal Christianity. While Minami was at the school, he discovered in a series of articles the apparent point of unification: the connection between moral theology and the nation-state. This for him became the best point to develop Japanese Christianity as something unique. Minami’s search for a moral religion relevant to Meiji Japanese experience in Christianity was his attempt to express religious subjectivity independent of a German church. At the Shinkyū Shingakkō he set about introducing Christian moral theology and its relation to the nation-state for his audience in the Japanese-language journal Shinri. In his essay “How can the Government consider about people’s religious life?” he argued for the need of Japan’s modern leaders to have spiritual and ethical abilities founded in Christianity (Minami 1889a). Later the same year he expanded these ideas of the connection between Christianity and the nation-state in his essay “Nationalism and Christianity”（国粹と基督教）, Minami’s discussion incorporated the theological and social aspects of Christianity into a populist, moral thought that was critical towards the trends among larger groups of society who used religion as a tool for patriotic rhetoric and for veneration of the tennō (Minami 1890b).
For Minami, the connection between the nation and religion had gone wrong. He expressed these ideas further in another article titled, “The Nation and the Church of Christianity” (kokuka to kirisuto-kyōsō 国家と基督教). Here he argued for the universality of Christianity and its ability to go beyond national borders. Like Buss, Minami understood the moral and religious development of a people as something that could only be gained by accepting it as inherent in the individual. It could not be controlled from within the state. This was a direct critique of Inoue Tetsujirō’s 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944) concerns about religion expressed in his “Clash of Education and Religion”. The moral theology thus presented in “Nation and the Church of Christianity” provided another strong critique against governments, scholars, and missionaries who ignored the universal moral values of Christianity.

Unfortunately, Minami’s strong position on the relationship between the nation state and Christian theology also led to internal conflicts between him and Spinner. In 1889, the Japanese Government renewed the Meiji Constitution’s Article 28 (teikoku kenpō dai 28-jō 帝国憲法第 28 条) assuring all religions “freedom of faith” (shinkyō no jiyū 信仰の自由). Article 28 was important for the missionaries because it meant that for the first time in Japanese history Christian faith had been granted the same status as the two traditional religions Buddhism and Shintoism. As a response to this new law, Spinner, together with Schmiedel, sent a personal letter to the Meiji Emperor to congratulate him and express their gratitude for the reform.

“As representatives of Christianity and preachers of its peaceful message in Japan, we join the jubilation of the Christians of the nation and Christians all over the world, praising Your Imperial Majesty’s wisdom and justice”. (Spinner 1889, p. 187; Schmiedel 1897; 1920, p. 198)

The letter was presented to the Foreign Minister Okuma Shigenobu 大隈重信 (1838–1922) to an official audience. Shortly after, the two missionaries received a letter in return from the emperor in which he personally thanked them for their peaceful work in Japan. This is recorded in a letter from 8 March 1889, submitted by Okuma himself to the two missionaries. Below is a translated quote of the emperor’s letter in which he stated:

“The fact that you as Christians, through your letter of thanks, have shown the religious spirit of peace and harmony has given me great joy”. (Schmiedel 1920, p. 198)

What is intriguing about this quote is the ambiguity of the emperor’s words “religious spirit of peace and harmony”. Spinner, Schmiedel, and the AEPM surmised that this statement referred to the emperor’s acceptance of Christianity and thus an indication of a promising future for Christianity in Japan. This was one possible interpretation of the letter, and if true, the letter could be seen as the concrete indication of the influence of Christianity in Japan at the time. Indeed, the AEPM was so grateful for the letter that they published it in its entirety in both of their German-language journals at the time (Spinner 1889, pp. 186–87).

On the contrary, the willingness of the missionaries to accept the letter of the emperor at face value was seen by Minami as an act of demonstrative submissiveness to authority. Minami protested the missionaries’ response to the letter and demanded a clearer rejection of the tennō’s Shintō rule. One of the first things he published following the event was a lengthy article titled “Discussing the world of National Politic and Education through the Rejection of Tennō Worship”. (Goshinpitsu raibai jiken o ronjite kokka seitō kyōsō seiraiku ni oyo by 御親筆禮拝事件を論じて國家政畧と教曾政畧に及ぶ) (Minami 1890a). In here, Minami, inspired by Uchimura Kanzō’s 内村鑑三 (1861–1930) majesty incident, demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the missionary’s pro-governmental submission. For Minami, the view of the virtuous human interiority in Christianity expressed a selfhood independent of the state.
Consequently, Minami’s objections towards the missionary’s pro-governmental stance transfused into the wider Japanese Christian community of the AEPM, and as a consequence seven church members, according to several reports from Missionary Schmiedel, left the church (Schmiedel 1897, p. 13; 1920, p. 217). Minami’s writings on the nation state and moral theology had reduced liberal Christianity to a familiar religious idea of divine virtue for all. In the process it had completely transformed Christianity by removing the essential idea of the church and the authority of the church itself. Despite their irreconcilable differences over the relation of the church to the tennō, however, Minami remained in the school due to his respect for Spinner and his lifetime devotion to the development of moral life in Japan, even though this, as in the current case, went against the political interest of Minami’s own understanding of the Japanese church.

The controversy, however, ended up placing the missionaries in a peculiar situation. As a smaller foreign enterprise in Japan, they could not please its church community by taking a strong stand against the Shinto State. Instead, they attempted to differentiate between a religious and a political allegiance, and interpreted the submission to the emperor as a political necessity and not as a religious stance. In the end, however, this balancing act between pleasing the government and pleasing the community members of Fukuč Fukuin Kyokai proved quite difficult, and several conflicts arose in subsequent years.

5. Expectations and Reality: Two Cases from the Shinkyū Shingakkō

The importance of the Shinkyū Shingakkō for the mission work of the AEPM in Japan was pointed out in a pamphlet titled *Our mission work in East Asia (Unser Missionswerk in Ostasien)*, which the AEPM published after Spinner’s return to Europe. In the pamphlet, Spinner vigorously stated that the school was “the future of our whole Mission” (Spinner 1893, p. 244). But however important the school might have been for the future of the AEPM, the success of both the Shinkyū Shingakkō and the Mission in general seems to have been based on too high expectations of its theological students. Indeed, the gap between the missionaries’ expectations and the reality in the mission field proved to be a major problem as the following two cases shortly will prove.

In the mission journal *ZMR* from 1892, the German Missionary Otto Schmiedel described the main tasks at the Shinkyū Shingakkō as a place:

“[where] we want to teach German theology and science to the Japanese youth. The ambition is both to achieve intellectual enlightenment as well as the cultivation of the spiritual and moral life [of the Japanese].”

(Schmiedel 1892, p. 57)

In other words, the missionaries expected more than running a school in which they could educate theologians. They imagined a “total” transformation of the spiritual life of not only their students but of Japan as a whole. However, as the case of Minami shows, some in the Japanese Church strongly disagreed with the pro-governmental approach of the missionaries. These conflicts reflected the diversity in opinions about Christianity within the liberal Church. It also reflected the degree to which the Swiss and German missionaries lacked understanding for the local culture in which their students existed. Through his five years in Japan, Wilfried Spinner quickly realized the discrepancy of his own expectations of his students and the reality at hand. In the following section, I examine the source of disappointment by drawing on the case of two disquieting experiences of Wilfried Spinner with his students. The first with Mukō Gunji, one of the original students from Spinner’s Bible study group, and the second with Paul Tsutome, a Japanese scholarship holder, who had been send abroad by the mission to study abroad in Heidelberg, Germany for three years, and by the AEPM Home Board was considered to be Spinner’s future assistant for his work within the Japanese Church community in Tokyo.
5.1. The First Case: Mukō Gunji

Let us look at the first case of Mukō Gunji. A glance into Wilfried Spinner’s diary tells us how much Spinner wanted to build a special working relationship with his student. Particularly the fact that Spinner chose Mukō and not Minami—the more promising candidate—as his companion during a trip to Kyoto in the summer of 1888 supports this. At the same time, he had chosen him as his language teacher for the Mission School. Yet, the several weeks they spent together in Kyoto did not lead to the deepening of their relationship that Spinner had hoped for. Even the meeting between Spinner and Mukō’s blind mother towards the end of their visit in Kyoto did not further the bond (TB-Spinner, 26 June 1888).

While in Kyoto, Spinner had felt let down by Mukō who, according to Spinner, proved to be a “unreliable” language teacher. There is no explanation in the diary about what happened between the two, but we know that Spinner left Mukō for the rest of his stay and instead used the two students Kayama Shinjirō and Nakarai Sunao as his interpreters (Minami 1935, p. 188). The disappointment about Mukō’s behavior in light of Spinner’s expectations was expressed in his diary. Here Spinner wrote towards the end of his trip: “There is not much to be done with Mukō and his laziness” (TB-Spinner, 21 June 1888).

After returning to Tokyo, Mukō dropped out of Shinkyū Shingakkō. When Mukō left the school, he did so on very poor terms with Wilfried Spinner. Spinner reported in his diary on Mukō during his final year at the school:

“Mukō, who continues his destructive tendencies, attends the classes but does not visit the church. He chatted much uselessly, the similar [attitude] came from Maruyama [Michikazu]. Finally, as Mukō interrupted me with laughter, I corrected him sharply. His arrogance and lack of ambition does not make him suitable as a theologian”.

(TB-Spinner, 15 October 1888)

Mukō subsequently became a German language teacher at a foster school before obtaining a position as a language teacher at the Methodist university Kwansai Gakuin in Osaka, where he continued to use the German language to translate several theology books into Japanese (Spinner 1888–1889, p. 5; Minami 1935, p. 183).

Spinner’s relationship with Mukō proves how his own expectations had run counter to the reality of the student. It highlights the cultural differences between the two. The fact that Mukō’s “laziness” alone could cause such disappointment in Spinner is an indication of how a specific German-national and religious discourse of otherness manifested itself in his work and influenced the way he perceived his Japanese students.

5.2. The Second Case: Paul Tsutome

One way to overcome these cultural differences would perhaps have been to allow the Japanese students to be taught German culture and language in Germany or Switzerland in order to become exposed to the ideas of Liberal Christianity there. They then could have brought these ideas home and introduced them to Japan upon their return. Spinner considered this himself while he established the Shinkyū Shingakkō. In his diary, he had originally considered employees to be allowed to attend a two-year university course in Germany after their graduation from the Academy: “For our students, a two-year course at a German university should be a prospect when completing their studies,” he wrote in his diary for example (TB-Spinner, 25 June 1886). In this way, the students could fully concentrate on their studies and at the same time be fully introduced to the liberal Protestant background behind the activities of the Swiss–German Mission, previously only known to them from Japan. Spinner expected that once they returned, such a stay would not only minimize the cultural differences between him and his students, but also give them further motivation and a fresh impetus for their continued work for the AEPM in Japan.
These well-meaning intentions, however, were soon forgotten upon the return of Paul Tsutome. Returning to Japan in 1889, he joined the Shinkyū Shingakkō after a three-year study program in Germany sponsored by the AEPM. However, he only participated—as a discouraged Spinner writes—for “a few hours” in the teaching at the school. The returnee did not even prove able “to keep up with our two other students” (Spinner 1888–1889, p. 10). Already within days, Spinner concluded: “For this young and supercilious person, no help is really possible”. Spinner’s experience with Paul Tsutome—this young Japanese Christian who during his three years in Germany had been held up as a beacon of hope and who had been recommended to Spinner by other members of the AEPM as his future employee—led Spinner to reach a devastating verdict about these “Japanese abroad”. According to Spinner, Japanese students like Tsutome were:

“Guided by the sense of adventure, without attracting sufficient means or support, playfully move to foreign countries to acquire whatever skill that will make them great men at home. In the foreign countries they turn to Christian clubs or personalities and seek all kinds of promises for financial and, above all, moral support”.

( Spinner 1888–1889, p. 11)

Spinner almost categorically felt that, due to a lack of structure in their education in Germany, the returning students were of no use as preachers or helpers to the Mission. The disillusioning experience with Tsutome caused Spinner to conclude that “Japanese theologians must first be educated in the country [Japan] and may eventually be sent abroad only after they end their studies” (Ibid., p. 11).

I cannot, within the sources available to me, say whether Spinner ever recommended a prolonged stay abroad to a trained Japanese theologian again, or whether he feared a negative influence from the liberal Europeans on the young Christians from Japan, or from the high living standard in Europe, which he regarded as hazardous. But as correct as Spinner’s warning and cautioning against sending unqualified young Japanese (with their exaggerated opinions of themselves) to Europe may have ultimately been, he did misjudge the situation at one point. The young Tsutome’s competence and aptitude may have been overestimated in Germany, but in his defense, it must be said that Spinner may simply have been expecting too much. A liberal Christian identity is not formed within only three years, as was Spinner’s expectation and subsequent source of disappointment.

The questions from these two cases thus remain: What do the two cases tell us about the nature of religious education at the Shinkyū Shingakkō? And why would Spinner judge his young Japanese students so uncompromisingly without reflecting on their social background first? Had his impaired awareness and obliviousness to Japanese social customs and culture not been the actual cause for the disappointments he experienced with, for example, Mukō? After all, Spinner must have known of the difficult family situation Mukō found himself in, and after three years in Japan, he must have been well aware of the important role the family played for young Japanese. Why could he not appreciate Mukō taking care of and supporting his poor family? If Spinner felt disappointed about his students quitting their studies at the Shinkyū Shingakkō, thereby lessening the AEPM’s potential to recruit educated staff, the cause for this most probably must be found in Spinner himself, or in the nature of the Shinkyū Shingakkō.

Both Mukō’s and Tsutome’s examples point to another interesting fact about the nature of the theologian education at the Shinkyū Shingakkō. The Japanese theologian students seems to have been caught in a Christian training regime that was conditioned on otherness i.e., the difference between a German and a Japanese way of Christianity. Indeed, Spinner’s inability to appreciate the agency (independent ambitions and goals) of his students given the opportunity to study in Germany and the career paths beyond the theological illustrates the theme of othering and its ramifications within the Swiss-German Mission.
6. Discussion: Negotiation Otherness?

The cases of Minami, Mukō, and lastly Tsutome, allow us to return to the question listed at the beginning of this article concerning the production of otherness: In what way was the process of “othering” key to the development of new forms of beliefs and practices for the Japanese students?

It cannot be denied that the students at the mission schools belonging to the AEPM were put into some kind of regime of otherness. The Swiss and German missionaries voiced more frustrations than delight about the individual improvements of their Japanese members, which could perhaps be expected in light of what they ideally wanted to achieve. They saw the students as projects of transformation whom they wished to turn into independently thinking, righteous, and self-reflective liberal Christians, with an appropriate understanding of personal faith. This, however, was destined to be disappointing. Generally, the students at the Shinkyū Shingakkō were subservient: they did what the missionaries expected of them, they acted and performed as they were supposed to, and they tolerated the high turnover of missionaries in charge. Though, whether they were compliant or particularly when they were not, they were subjected to the missionaries’ discourse about otherness. The slightest behavioral deviation from the expected Christian norms and values was taken as an affirmation that they indeed were different from the West. The young Japanese students of the AEPM were, in the words of the recognized father of postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha, “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 1997, p. 453). This mental blueprint inherent in the missionaries’ discourse towards their students contained the reason for the missionary’s own failure. In the end, the Japanese students would often reach a situation in which they disputed the missionaries’ values. The missionaries may have had their reasons for feeling frustrated, but among the Japanese students, being compliant to their teachers’ hopes and expectations ensued a dissatisfaction and frustration as well. According to the missionaries, they could not become “true” Christians, but on another level, the one more important to them, they at least could affect the course of their own Christian life, be it “truly” Christian or not. It is in this dialectic dynamic that I believe the idea of otherness became a marker for identity formation among the Japanese students. Let me explain briefly.

The phenomenon of otherness can be observed in two levels. On one level, a discourse of otherness—understood in its classical context—was achieved in the mission literature which was permeated by the Mission’s need of securing support and funding for their projects. Consequently, the missionaries had an incentive to widely elaborate in their texts on what they perceived as problematic and troublesome features of their Japanese students. Spinner in 1888, for example, described his students in the following negative terms:

“This academy still causes us much distress and trouble, brought about partly by the destructive tendencies of the students. I do not believe that arrogance and ambition make them suitable as theologians”.

(TB-Spinner, 15 September 1888)

Constant disappointments such as lazy or even destructive behavior were brought to the fore, more admirable qualities or commonalities between Japanese and Swiss–German values and interests generally were left out, and while there existed a discourse of religious tolerance towards other Christian denominations in the missionaries’ writings, they still mostly emphasized the difference between the two categories of Christians. This level supports the classical post-colonial scholarship of Karen Sánchez-Eppler and the like, who has suggested, that missionaries conveyed a message of universality, while in reality “fully support[ed] an ethnocentric cultural imperialism” (Sanchez-Eppler 1996, p. 206). Whether this was intended or not, we cannot ignore that these negative written evaluations of the Japanese students benefited the mission in that it helped to frame moral education as a domain for legitimate interference of the missionaries abroad.
The second level of otherness was the indigenous Christians’ response to the missionary’s discourse. Several works such as Mark Mullins’ *Christianity Made in Japan* (1998) and John Howes’ *Japan’s Modern Prophet: Uchimura Kanzō 1861–1930* (2012), have from the point of Uchimura Kanzō and other larger figures in Japanese Christianity shown how enthusiastic acts of self-conversion to liberal Christian ideas challenged Japanese Christians to refigure their own response to the Christian missionaries’ ideas of religious education and civilization (Mullins 1998; Howes 2005). These acts of rethinking Christianity in Japan were a conscious practice that aimed not to import expression of Western modern subjectivity through the missionaries’ teachings, but to use a thought on universal religious virtue in which knowledge no longer belonged to a privileged group of Western missionaries. In this way, this article can be compared to Helen Ballhatchet’s analysis of Japanese Christians response to evolution in the late nineteenth century. Here, Ballhatchet suggests that the introduction of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* allowed Japanese writers, critics, and professors to reject the missionaries’ message and adapt their own unique response (Ballhatchet 1996).

The Japanese student’s collective response to the missionary’s discourse altered the meaning of Christianity to mean a virtue that everyone equally possessed from within. Minami’s writing on “Japanese Christianity” (nihon no kirisuto-kyō 日本の基督教), published in *Shinri* in 1889, for instance, argued for the acceptance of Japanese Christianity on equal terms with Western Christianity (Minami 1889b). This dynamic phenomenon of negotiating otherness in Japan was based on the transfiguration of knowledge obtained at the mission schools and the resulting promotion of selfhood. In the process of countering the missionaries discourse Japanese Christians removed the Western authority of the Church. To argue in the line of Talal Asad: to be Japanese Christian in the late nineteenth century was to up-root some of the major tropes of Western modernity, including the colonial ideas of moral order, and the hierarchical structure of otherness (Asad 2003).

In response to the missionary’s production of otherness, a new production of otherness emerged which expressed a new possibility for Japanese Christianity to be imagined equally to the West. The translation of liberal Christianity and subsequent practices at the Shinkyū Shingakkō thereby made a simultaneous negation of authority by departing from the idea of Christianity as represented by the West. The new religion represented by Minami and other Japanese Christians provided an ontological basis for a subjectivity independent of Western missionaries in modern Japan. In this way, the othering process, can be seen as having been a key to the development of new forms of belief and practices, not just to Japanese students at the Shinkyū Shingakkō but to Japanese Christianity as such.

7. Conclusions

The cases of Minami, Mukō and Tsutome and their personal encounter with Swiss missionary Wilfried Spinner at the theologian academy, Shinkyū Shingakkō, is in many ways symptomatic of the underlying difficulties of the missionary schooling projects in the 1880s and 1890s Japan. Their experience within the school reflected the Swiss–German missionaries’ intention to transfer social knowledge and to inculcate in their students a particular way—a Christian way—of thinking, behaving, and feeling. Spinner aimed to eliminate all undesirable traits while nurturing those which he deemed desirable. He worked at delegitimizing “old” dispositions, instincts, and expectations in his Japanese students and replacing those “negative” attributes with positive, respectable Christian ones. To achieve this, he employed methods that were as simple as verbal encouragement, to developing specific schooling curriculum based on Christian ethics and critical thinking. Yet ultimately, the national and ethnocentric views of otherness also permeated his approach to his students which led to several conflicts between him and his Japanese students.

The encounter of the Swiss and German missionaries and their Japanese Students lies behind or beyond the larger backdrop of German Japanese intellectual relations, beyond the divide of East and West categories. This article has argued that rather than understanding missionaries’ education projects as “total institutions”, as has been the tendency
in post-colonial research, we need also to look at the perspective of personal encounters between students and missionaries. These, I argue, allow us to view the activities beyond the two-way transactions of “colonizer” and “colonized”, or “East” and “West”, and permits us to discuss concepts like otherness beyond classical Foucauldian ideas of power. The historical cases specified in this article are a reminder here of the importance of examining transnational history, not only at an organizational/church level but also to look from the perspectives of personal encounters. Here, the source of individual religious thought can be identified from the start in terms of its difference from the authority of the missionaries, and they show how the Japanese students themselves often fully took an active and willing role of their own education outside the missionaries’ control. These cases also highlight another interesting point, namely that the negotiating process of “othering” was crucial to the development of new forms and practices for Japanese Christians. The classes taught at the Shinkyū Shingakkō helped prepare some of those best trained in German liberal theology in Japan to formulate their own understanding of the church, which led to the logical end of Japanese Christianity as the unifier of existing Japanese religious thought. In this way, it can be argued that although the production of otherness often in postcolonial literature is seen as a one-way discourse, it can when repositioned in a human dialectic open new possibilities for identity formation.

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Abbreviations

AEPM Allgemeiner Evangelischer Protestantischer Missionsverein
TB-Spinner Diary of Wilfried Spinner (from 8 September 1884 to 31 March 1891), see leavings of Wilfried Spinner in ZASP no. 180.20
ZASP Zentralarchiv der Evangelischen Kirche der Pfalz
ZMR Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft

Notes

1 Reconstruction of the event based on Minami Hajime, *Nihon ni okeru Jiyū Kirisitokyō to sono Senkusha* 「日本に於ける自由基督教と其先駆者」 (Minami 1935, p. 174).

2 The term Liberal Christianity represents a complex and multi-strand tradition of thought and worldview. In this article, I understand Liberal Christianity as a tradition of thought, which in particular German theologians actively engaged in during the long nineteenth century. The development of historical methods opened up church history and history of dogma to questions of social history, psychology, ethnology or “history of culture.” Inspired by Albrecht Ritschl and the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, the German liberal mission developed models of religious self-determination or religious freedom of the individual. Indeed, individual experience for the missionaries formed the basis for the definition of truth.

3 Wilfried Spinner’s first meeting with Minami Hajime is interesting, because we also get a sense of what kind of young Japanese Spinner was looking for in building his mission. In his diary he writes of the first meeting: “This afternoon two students from Dr. Hering’s school (Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō) visited us. They came to inquire about my mission: Minami and Okada. Both had received Christian teachings from the Albrecht Brothers missionary Vögelein [an American-based Evangelical Church founded by German immigrants]. It was beautiful, as Minami told me, that among the Japanese there are many like Nicodemus (hereby referring to the willingness of the Japanese to learn from Christianity). Minami had been baptized, while Okada had turned away from Vögelein. […] Both students promised to visit me more often and to bring others with them. So then, with God’s help, a beginning has been made. God bless the progress!” (TB-Spinner 29 September 1885). Okada was one of the five students who followed Spinner’s teachings at Doitsugaku kyōkai gakkō and who stayed in contact with the AEPM after the classes as well. But in contrast to Minami, he never became a part of the Shinkyū Shingakkō (Spinner 28 March 1886).

4 The mistrust towards Christian converts found in the Swiss and German mission has been investigated from various perspectives in (Petersen 2021), but it is by no means unique; rather, it exhibits the same bias of other contemporary missions in Japan.
Historian Irwin Scheiner has, for example, shown how both missionaries and Japanese converts questioned the sincerity of the efforts of Christian coverts (Schreiner 1970). According to statistics provided by Heyo Hamer (2002), the school, which began in 1881, had 83 students in 1883 divided into two programs. Two years later, the school registered 470 students. In 1888, the German teacher, Georg Michaelis reported that the school continued its explosive growth with the number of students totaling 561. In 1890, the introduction of the Imperial Rescript of Education affected the numbers of new students, and the school could only report 440 students (Michaelis 1886, p. 285; Hamer 2002, p. 454).

From 1883, the German Emperor officially donated 2400 yen annually over a ten-year period. In 1886, another donation of 10,000 yen was made by the cultural minister. In 1887, a donation of 20,000 yen annually by the German Finance Minister began. One yen was by the late nineteenth century equivalent to three Deutsch Mark. The German government’s support of the mission schools continued up until the First World War.

Otto Bernhard Hering, Dr. Phil from Thuringia; took his doctorate in Jena. Encountered Wilfried Spinner in Jena, Germany before Spinner traveled to Japan. The encounter probably also introduced Hering to Aoki Shūzō, who suggested that he teach in Japan at Doitsu-gaku kyōkai (TB-Spinner 8 February 1885).

Although the historical context and the nature of intellectual practices here differ the theme may be further explored in comparative perspective. For a re-examination of religious conversion in transcultural relations between India and Great Britain, see (Viswanathan 1998). In this way, the heart of the work of Wilfried Spinner and his AEPM colleagues also touches up against some of the important research that has been done in recent years, which problematizes the idea of “religion” as a universally valid and meaningful concept in Japan. See (Fitzgerald 1999; Isomae 2011; Hoshino 2012; Josephson 2012; Horii 2018).

Wilfried Spinner mentions his ideas of forming “die Theologische Akademie” in his diary, already a year before the protest. We can only wonder how much Spinner knew and supported the protest of Minami and the other students against his own employ, See (TB-Spinner 4 March 1886).

By emphasizing the patriotic duty of the Japanese, the missionaries tried to link Christianity with the Japanese’s duty towards the emperor. In this way, they hoped to overcome some of the difficulties they faced in the increasingly nationalistic climate of the 1890s, and to make Christianity look more suitable for proselytization in Japan. Mark R. Mullins has made a similar analysis concerning Japanese Christian’s relationship to the Shinto State. See (Mullins 1998).

Here referring to the idea of Bourdieu and Passeron’s “total institution” mentioned in the introduction.

The research results of this section have also been presented at the The International Association for Mission Studies Assembly in Sydney July 2022 panel titled “Sending Japanese Students Abroad or Not? And the Conflicting Nature of Religious Education.” Paul Tsutome was supported by the AEPM through a one-year scholarship for students of Protestant theology, “in order to be in the service of our association in the future” (Arndt 1887, p. 188).

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