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*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING CHRISTIAN FAITH AND  
SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN JAPAN: A HISTORICAL REVIEW  
OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

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**The challenges of integrating Christian  
faith and social work practice in Japan:  
A historical  
review of Christian spirituality**

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# Focus and Purpose

Focusing on the feature of faith and practice in social work from a historical review of Japan.

Showing some examples of the integrating model of Christian faith and social work in Japan.

Sharing the Japanese spiritual experiences on Christian social work with the NACSW's members.

Reconsidering of Nouwen's spiritual concept , "creative weakness" .

# Weakness : Biblical message

- And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

( II Corinthians 12:9 ,NIV)

# Henry Nouwen : creative weakness

- “There are many people who, through long training, have reached a high level of competence in terms of the understanding of human behavior, but few who are willing to lay down their own lives for others and make their weakness a source of creativity. For many individuals professional training means power. But the minister, who takes off his clothes to wash the feet of his friends, is powerless, and his training and formation are meant to enable him to face his own weakness without fear and make it available to others. It is exactly this creative weakness that gives the ministry its momentum.”  
(Nouwen,1979:112)

# Prohibition of the Christian faith : Government and Christianity

Prohibition of the Christian faith since 1587

→ “hidden Christian” appear (Edo Era)

→ national isolation(seclusion)for 300 years

The Government abolished the Prohibition of the Christian policy in 1873(Meiji Era) with modernization (Westernization) policy.

But .....

# Prohibition of the Christian faith signs in Japan



一切支丹宗門之義ハ是迄御制禁之通  
固ク可相守候事  
一 邪宗門之義ハ固ク禁止之事

慶應四年

太政官

# Christian missionaries since 1873

- Christian missionaries came from North America and Europe into Japan since 1873
- They worked for
  - Not only churches,
  - but also, schools, hospitals,
  - and social work field.
- That gave a strong influence on Japanese society and emergence of social work.
- see: example Doshisha Univ.



# Doshisha University and Neeshima\*①

- “Joseph Hardy Neesima was born as the son of a *samurai* in 1843, and he studied hard to become both a good warrior and a good scholar. Gradually gaining awareness of Western culture and Christianity, he had serious concerns about the future of Japan and realized the importance of studying in Western countries. Neesima left Japan for the United States in 1864, defying an overseas travel ban. Filled with anxiety and hope, he had begun his adventure. In Shanghai, he boarded a ship, the *Wild Rover*, bound for Boston.

# Doshisha University and Neeshima②

- Under the benevolent support of A. Hardy, the owner of the *Wild Rover*, Neesima was baptized and studied at Phillips Academy and Amherst College. As he learned advanced Western science and technology and adapted to American life, he realized that there was a deep-rooted spiritual background of Christianity in the States. He decided to become a minister himself, entering a seminary after graduating from college. His eight years of study at Christian educational institutions in the States taught him the importance of conscience and liberty according to Christian values, which emphasize living according to the will of God and exercising one's freedom only within the realm of the conscience. Neesima returned to his homeland after ten years with a strong ambition to establish a Christian university as well as to spread Christianity.

# Doshisha University and Neeshima③

- Upon returning to Japan, Neesima established Doshisha Eigakko (Academy) in 1875. He wished not only to nurture individuals with diverse skills and abilities but also to nurture those who would put their conscience into practice, by cultivating a decent character with strong morality and mentality. He believed that a real democratic society could be established by respecting each person's individuality and that, simultaneously, each person must have conscience and liberty. In his last days, Neesima said, "Those who teach students must treat them respectfully." His educational policy of respecting each individual student has been maintained at Doshisha over the years.

## Doshisha University and Neeshima④

- Neesima died in 1890, at the age of 46, without fulfilling his dream. However, his students and others who shared his ambition passed on his legacy and established Doshisha University in 1912.”

(\*<http://www.doshisha.ac.jp/english/information/overview/about.php>)

# Neeshima and Doshisha



# Some examples of integrating faith and social work.

Most social work textbooks in Japan recognized “4 Japanese giants of social workers” as Jane Addams or Mary Richmond in US in history. They are

Jyuji Ishi

Gunpei Yamamuro

Kosuke Tomeoka

Toyihiko Kagawa

# Kagawa



# Kagawa ①

- Who was Toyohiko Kagawa? That is a tough question because of his widespread activities such as a social reformer, a social worker, a poet, a writer (candidate of Nobel Prize in literature) and a pastor, an evangelist.
- He was born in Kobe in 1888.
- He was the illegitimate son of a wealthy man and a *Geisha*. His father adopted him but before Kagawa was five, both his parents had died. The stepmother hated him and his life was loneliness and misery. As a teenager Kagawa learned the Christianity at an English Bible class by Henry Myers (Presbyterian minister). He was converted to Christianity when he was 17-year old.



## Kagawa ②

- Kagawa said, “While I was suffering from tuberculosis, most people distanced themselves from me. But Dr. Mayas slept next to me to his bosom over three nights, and I was completely moved. Such an act of warm love taught me what the love of Christ was all about. Following such an example of Dr. Mayas, later I had occasions to have slept with killers and arsonist. Those who had never received love could not comprehend how joyful it is to love others” (Kagawa, Why I Become a chrisitan,1984 rep:106)

# Kagawa ③

- As he said, “To work with the poor I must be poor.” He took a header into the slums at *Shinkawa* and for around 20 years he lived in a small room (cubicle six feet by six feet). As one of the lowest even by “slum standards”, even so he shared his living quarters and for 4 years he helped a murderer that couldn’t sleep alone. A fierce eye disease was from a lot of visitors day by day. By that he moved him closer and closer to blindness. The slum rioters robbed him with violence, knocked his teeth out and challenged. The crowd roared with laughter, but he was back the next day in the same place preaching Gospel of Jesus at the same street day by day.

# Kagawa ④

- Not only the passion of faith, but also Kagawa learned theology at Meiji Gakuin (Presbyterian), Tokyo and Kobe reform theological seminary in Japan and the Princeton univ. in US.
- When he returned to Japan, he became involved with rather the labor movement and with social work, continuing to live in the slums. While studying there, Kagawa was troubled by the theological concerns for technicalities of doctrine and dogma.

# Kagawa ⑤

- Kagawa took part in the campaign for universal adult male suffrage (achieved in 1925), and helped organize the Japanese Federation of Labor as a charismatic leader. In 1921 and 1922 he was imprisoned for his labor activities.
- After his release he began to conduct another new project of great evangelistic campaigns (KAMINOKUNI UNDO) in the chief cities of whole Japan as a charismatic evangelist.

# Kagawa ⑥

- The common people almost respected him as a true leader while the government, the capitalists, and the radical nationalists hated or feared him. Even most “normal Christians and churches” excluded as a kind of “heresy”. He was in prison for orchestrating a vast non-violent strike in the docks.
- He had not been valued in Japan, but has been valued with Albert Schweitzer or Mohandas Gandhi after his death in the world.
- But finally just now, he has been revaluated by some Japanese scholars.

# Yamamuro



# by Yamamuro

- **“PERSECUTION:** At the beginning The Army was not at all understood in Japan. The people ridiculed, despised, and often opposed us. On several occasions the authorities imprisoned me for conducting Open-Air Meetings. Frequently many hundreds of people attacked and almost killed us. The newspapers were not at all favourable, and if they wrote about us at all what they wrote was sure to be against us.

- [http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www\\_sa.nsf](http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/www_sa.nsf)

# Spiritual experience by Yamamuro

## ①

- Six months after this I was granted three days' summer furlough, and went to the seaside. From morning until night during those three days I prayed and read my Bible and pleaded with God to give me a Clean Heart. On the third morning I rose early and went to the shore and, kneeling down by the water's edge, I pleaded with God to give me that for which I was seeking. I promised to give up every doubtful activity and thought. He sanctified me wholly, and then, in the simple faith of my early experience, I rededicated myself and all that I had and hoped for to His service.



## By Yamamuro ②

- I felt Him working in my heart, and realized a deep consciousness of His indwelling Presence. Just then I opened my eyes and looked out to sea, and saw the bright, beautiful sun rising to light our part of the world, and realized that in just as great reality the Sun of Righteousness had arisen in my soul. It was a wonderful experience. There have been 'ups and downs' in my spiritual life, but I have never altogether lost the experience that I found that morning. By the help of God, I was now able to believe and grow in grace.

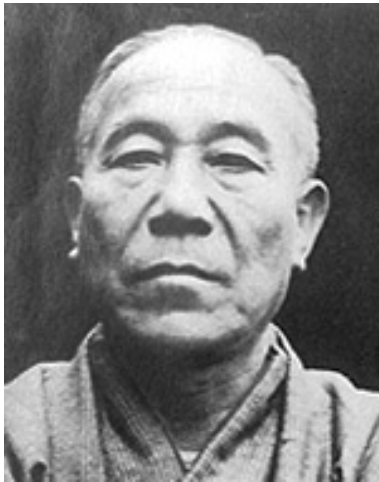
## By Yamamuro③

- I obtained with this experience a very sensitive and clear conscience, which made it much easier for me to overcome every kind of temptation. That morning I was spiritually vaccinated and inoculated, so that afterwards, when any 'spiritual disease' came along, it had no effect on me. The experience of sanctification set me on a higher platform. Just as an army which has strife and division within its ranks cannot successfully fight against an enemy, so I, with inward battles, was unfit and unable to meet the opposition that came from without”.

# Ishi



# Tomeoka



# Comparative analysis of 3 “Giants”

| Name                              | Known as                                  | Denomination<br>And age of<br>Baptized      | position                               | Weakness:<br>Hardship of<br>young age           | personal<br>spiritual<br>experience | encounter with<br>supervisors                       | theology  | social work<br>practice                                 | graduation                    |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <b>Toyohiko Kagawa, 1888-1960</b> | <b>Social reformer</b>                    | <b>Presbyterian<br/>17-year</b>             | <b>pastor, evangelist</b>              | <b>Lost parents while infancy, tuberculosis</b> | <b>near-death experience</b>        | <b>Henry Myers (Presbyterian minister)</b>          | <b>criticize traditional churches, liberation</b> | <b>settlements, Labor movements, consumer movements</b> | <b>Meiji Gakuin</b>           |
| <b>Jyuji Ishi, 1865-1914</b>      | <b>Founder of a orphanage</b>             | <b>Congregation<br/>19-year</b>             | <b>head of orphanage</b>               | <b>cholera, venereal disease, arrest</b>        | <b>Strange or spiritual Dreams</b>  | <b>George Muller (Brethren)</b>                     | <b>Criticize modern liberal theology</b>          | <b>orphanage</b>  | <b>Okayama medical School</b> |
| <b>Gunpei Yamamuro, 1872-1940</b> | <b>Founder of Japanese Salvation Army</b> | <b>Methodist Salvation Army<br/>15-year</b> | <b>head of Japanese Salvation Army</b> | <b>poor boy, running away</b>                   | <b>holiness</b>                     | <b>Neeshima (Doshisha) George Muller (Brethren)</b> | <b>Criticize modern liberal theology</b>          | <b>salvation army</b>                                   | <b>Doshisha</b>               |

# Analysis: Common pattern

- 1) Becoming a Christian when they were teenagers (very rare case)
- 2) Encounter of a missionary as their parents
- 3) Holding Personal or special spiritual experience
- 4) Experience of special personal trial, hardship, and weakness.
- 5) Became a great leader through overcoming their weakness. → “creative weakness”

(Nouwen)

# Conclusion : “Creative weakness”

In Japan many textbooks of social work history told there were “4 Giants of social workers,” who became a pioneer of each field. Interestingly they were all Christians in spite of the Buddhist country or a country of prohibition of the Christian faith. When they were young they all became eager Christians through missionaries. And they overcame their special trial, painful hardship and weakness by their faith into “creative weakness”.

- And they integrated his faith into their social work practice by their personal spiritual experience.
- We can learn from their lessons and should have a good model even now.

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