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Religion, Nation, Art:
Christianity and Modern Japanese Literature

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Religion, Nation, Art:
Christianity and Modern Japanese Literature

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Preface

As a Japanese individual living in the predominantly Judeo-Christian country of the United States, I became interested in the relationship between religion and literature, and their connection to national identity because I began to realize that the many "cultural" differences I experienced derive from the distinct worldviews of Japanese and Christian religions. Having been brought up in an environment where occasionally going to shrines and temples was a natural part of our life without considering they may or may not be "religious" activities, I, like the majority of Japanese people, do not consider myself particularly religious. But I came to understand that such "religious" practices and traditions nurture Japanese people's worldview and constitute the essential part of our sense of national identity. My encounter with Endō Shūsaku's essay entitled "Religion and Literature" in which he explores the relationship between religion and literature from metaphysical point of view also stimulated me to pursue this topic, and as an avid reader and researcher of literature, I wanted to probe more about the ways religion can influence one's national identity and literature and vice versa.

Although I am not Christian, upon hearing about my dissertation topic, many people assume I am and that was why I chose the topic of Christianity and modern Japanese literature. This affirmed my suspicion that somehow there is a tendency to believe that only those who are religious are interested in exploring the issue of religion in literature. In fact, many literary scholars who have worked on the topic, like Sako

Junichirō and Kubota Gyōichi are themselves Christians, and predominantly focus on the "religious" aspect of a given literary work when they discuss the issue of religion in literature, such as the influence of creeds or theology, or, in the case of Christianity, whether the authors or the texts are "Christian" in nature. This dissertation attempts to go beyond the confines of such strictly "religious" readings of literary text that have Christianity as their theme. Following the path that Endō set out, I demonstrate how the metaphysics of religion is also extremely important in order to understand the construction of our identities – religious, cultural, national, and even artistic. What I have found is that because such metaphysical worldviews are so deeply enmeshed within our lives and activities, especially in the case of Japanese religion which is known for low-level self-acknowledgement, they often remain unrecognizable until challenged or even threatened by other religions. This is why Christianity is important in my research; this "foreign" religion helped the Japanese authors of my case studies, and me too, to realize, recognize, and even actively shape our perceptions of Japanese religion, identity and the nature of art. I hope to shed light about the ways religion can represent not merely a source of creeds or faith, but even the essential fiber constituting one's broader worldview.

Religion, Nation, Art:
Christianity and Modern Japanese Literature

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My dissertation aims to uncover the complex relationship among religion, literature, and national identity by considering the case of Christianity in modern Japan. Although Christianity was never successful in propagating its religious messages to the masses in the history of Japan, the re-introduction of Christianity in the late nineteenth century left a surprisingly powerful impression because, for many Japanese writers, it presented the "Western spirituality" against which they defined their religious, national and even artistic identities. By examining the works of two non-Christian authors, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927) and Yokomitsu Ri'ichi (1898-1947), and one Christian author Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996), I show how the encounter with Christianity was often crucial to sculpting perceptions of Japanese identity, religion, as well as art in the twentieth century.

For the cosmopolitan Taishō author Akutagawa, Christianity was one of the motifs that stimulated his artistic production. Juxtaposing Christianity's "power that destroys," he celebrated Japanese religion's "power that re-creates," likening it to the

process of artistic creation. A devotee to art throughout his life, Akutagawa maintained his unfaltering belief that the ultimate creator is art, and not God: he even re-created Christ into an artist in his final essay. Yokomitsu's last novel, *A Traveler's Sadness* demonstrates how Christianity acts as the catalyst for the establishment of Japanese national identity. Written mostly under Imperial Japan, the novel showcases the fear for the loss of Japanese identity in the face of overwhelming Western influence, as well as the urge to establish one, utilizing Ancient Shinto as the source. Ironically, however, it is discovered only when pitted against Christianity, the foreign religion.

Endō began his career as an author because he wanted to reconcile his conflicting Christian and Japanese identities. Even though he initially scrutinized his native country of Japan and its religion with his internalized, critical Catholic gaze, his artistic endeavor gradually transformed Endō into what I call a "catholic" Catholic: he came to embrace Japanese religions and heritage without denouncing his Catholic faith. Even though these three authors had different motivations and issues to tackle, their negotiations illuminate how complex and interconnected are the relationships among their religious, national and artistic identities.

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Introduction

In the history of Japan, Christianity was never quite successful in propagating its religious messages to the masses as evidenced by its Christian population of less than one percent today.[1] Yet, the re-introduction of Christianity in the late nineteenth century after it had been banned by the xenophobic shōgunate for nearly three centuries left a surprisingly powerful impression on the modern Japanese literary scene. A succession of literary works by Christian authors, from the famous highbrow novels of Akutagawa Prize winner, Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996), to popular fiction by contemporary writers like Miura Ayako (1922-1999) are the clearest examples of such influence. Even more intriguing is the impact of this imported "Western" religion is on many works of famous non-Christian authors. One of the most celebrated and renowned Japanese writers, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927) wrote a number of so-called "Christian stories" (*kirishitan-mono*) over the course of his career, and Yokomitsu Ri'ichi (1898-1947), another prominent writer from experimental New Sensationalist school, left an unfinished, lengthy novel in which Christianity is juxtaposed with Ancient Shinto in his attempt to define Japanese national identity. For many Japanese writers from the late 19th century, Christianity presented the "Western spirituality" against which they defined their cultural, national, and artistic identities. In this dissertation I examine the works of two non-Christian authors, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Yokomitsu Ri'ichi, and one Christian author, Endō Shūsaku to demonstrate how Christianity affected the creation of modern

[1] Mullins 2006, 118.

Japanese literature among authors who were Christian converts and non-converts alike.

My examination of the interaction between Christianity and modern Japanese literature also provides a new perspective on the relationship among religion, literature, and national identity. Although only a limited amount of interactions between the studies of religion and literature exist in modern Japanese scholarship today,[2] there has been an enduring concern among practitioners themselves regarding the relationship between religion and literature from as early as the ninth century. For instance, a famous Buddhist monk Kūkai (774-835) discussed how art contributed to religious enlightenment.[3] Those who engaged in literary activities were oftentimes apprehensive that too much engagement with literature interfered with their religious vows, and this required theorizations asserting the compatibility of literature and religious practices. Such debates regarding the relationship between religion and literature took a fascinating turn in the Edo period (1603-1868) when Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), the renowned nativist scholar, suggested that literature was a means to shore up national as well as religious identity. Out of apprehension that the Japanese were losing their sense of national identity in a society where "non-native" Buddhist and Confucian principles penetrated, Norinaga asserted that classical literature was the most useful means to retrieve a native, and

[2] Scholar of Japanese religion, Robert E. Morrell (2006) notes in his article "Literature and Scripture" that students of Japanese literature and students of Japanese religion do not generally go beyond the confinement of their respective disciplines. In *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature* (2006), Japanese literary critic, Philip Gabriel indicates the lack of interest in the relationship between religion and literature in modern Japanese literary scholarship, saying "as if there is unspoken agreement among scholars that, with the spiritual 'vacuum' following the Second World War and the rise of Japan as the premiere consumerist, materialist – and in many ways postmodern – society, literature that reflects any spiritual elements is largely peripheral" (4).

[3] Ueda 1975, 29-30.

specifically Shinto identity.

In the late 19th century when Japan resumed ties with the world beyond its national borders, the relationship among religion, literature, and national identity becomes more complex. The overwhelming importation of Western literature played the central role for the inception of modern Japanese literature, of "bungaku." Most, if not all, authors eagerly received Western literary works and were inspired by them as well as by Western theories that advocated literature should exist for its own sake, not as a means of other ideological or social purposes, as best exemplified by Tsubouchi Shōyō's (1859-1935) "The Essence of the Novel" (1885-86).[4] While the autonomy of literary activity was being actively asserted among those who engaged in artistic production, the relationship between religion and national identity were becoming quite tense. Since the establishment of the Meiji government in 1868 was buttressed with the slogan of "Restoration of Imperial Rule," Shinto with its connection to the Imperial house was elevated to a religion that represented a "pure" and "original" Japanese identity. As a result, even Buddhism, which had been state-sponsored in the Edo period, was under scrutiny. Anti-Buddhist sentiment was already visible in the late Edo period, but it drastically intensified, and especially with the new government's decision to separate Shinto and Buddhism, violent oppression to Buddhism called *haibutsu kishaku* (abolish Buddha and destroy Shakyamuni) became widespread, destroying or closing a great

[4] There are some exceptions, such as proletarian authors for whom literature was still a means for their ideology.

number of temples.[5]

If the situation surrounding native religions like Buddhism and Shinto was tense, Christianity was even more complex. First, Christianity was more "foreign" to Japan than Buddhism, and second, Japan's relationship with Christianity was not a friendly one, in particular during the Tokugawa period; it was Christianity that triggered Japan's closed-door policy in the early 17th century.[6] And yet, the early Meiji government had to "allow" and "tolerate" this religion now specifically because it was the religion of the West from which Japan at that time desperately wanted an approval in order to protect the nation under the threat of Western colonizing power. Indeed, the tension posed by the re-introduction of Christianity in the late 19th century had a long history that dated back three hundred years, which affected how the relationship between nation and religion was figured in the Meiji moment.

Japan's first encounter with Christianity goes back to the mid 16th century when the Jesuits came to propagate Catholicism to Japan. It was in the midst of the warring state period with no real central government that was in total control of the country. Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), the most powerful warlord at that time, welcomed those Europeans because he found the guns brought by them extremely useful for his unification purpose. His successors, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), grew much more cautious about the implication of the spread of

[5] Even artistic works or texts related to Buddhism were burned or sold cheaply, and monks and nuns were secularized or transformed into Shinto priests. See Ketelaar's *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (1990) for more detail.

[6] Except for the period which is now referred to the "Christian Century" of Japan, from the mid 16th century when the Jesuits first arrived in Japan.

Christianity, however. Hideyoshi launched several expulsion policies at the end of the 16th century, and the Tokugawa regiment in the early 17th century not only banned Christianity but also closed all ports, almost completely blocking Westerners from entering Japan.[7] By this time, all foreign missionaries were expelled or executed and all Japanese Christians were pressed to renounce their faith, or they would be tortured and/or persecuted. Clearly, the Japanese unifiers saw Christianity as a very serious threat to reigning the country. In contrast, under the Tokugawa regiment, Buddhism and Confucianism flourished in part because the former was used as a watchdog for Christianity, and the latter to enforce codes that supported the Tokugawa rule.[8]

With U.S. Commodore Perry's gunboat diplomacy in 1854, however, Japan had no choice but to enter into a treaty with the US and eventually with other European nations; the Japanese leaders realized that Japan would be quite easily conquered by the western power otherwise. Massive importation of technologies from the West was imperative in order to remain on equal footing with the West. Rapid modernization (or "Westernization") in political, social, and economic – virtually all – spheres of society promptly took place. The leaders of the new Meiji government were acutely and painfully aware of Japan's militaristically and politically inferior position, and were quite apprehensive about being seized by Western powers unless Japan westernized. "Westernization" was their first priority; any seemingly backward customs and traditions

[7] With an exception of the Dutch at the port of Nagasaki, and the relationship was strictly business oriented.

[8] Maxey (2007) argues that there has been an enduring fear in the mind of the Japanese leaders that Christianity would invade the Japanese spirituality as well as political sphere. For more details, see Maxey 2007.

were abolished. In the hopes of rectifying the unequal treaties and demonstrating Japan's "civilized" status to the West, the ban on Christianity was also lifted in 1873.[9] Many, especially those from ex-samurai class who were not on the winning side of the Meiji Restoration became attracted to Christianity because they thought it was a useful tool to understand the West as well as the means to better their social positions in the new Meiji society.[10] A number of authors also became attracted to its liberal views and became Christian, even if only temporarily.[11]

While such an enthusiastic undertaking to re-create Japan into a pseudo-Western nation was ongoing, however, simultaneously, "beginning in the mid-1880s, a drive to preserve or revive a so-called traditional Japanese culture emerged in a mood of confrontation with Western-oriented reformers."[12] The questions of "what is Japan" and "who are we Japanese" would persist from this time on both in the minds of Japanese leaders and intellectuals. The famous Meiji slogan of *wakon yōsai,* or "Japanese spirit, Western knowledge" illuminates the tension between the two seemingly opposing tactics; on the one hand, Japan needed to become like the West, but on the other hand it did not want to lose its cultural or national identity. The slogan emphasizes that it was only the "technical" information or "knowledge" that the country needed to obtain from the West and not its "spirituality." Under this circumstance, Christianity was in an awkward position because it represented Western spirituality; even though it had to be tolerated,

[9] For more detail about how the lift of ban only meant "toleration" of the religion, see Abe 1978.
[10] Scheiner 1970.
[11] Kubota 1992, 7.
[12] Gordon 2009, 107.

the adoption of this religion posed problems even for eager reformers. Those who converted to Christianity were received suspiciously as Japan became increasingly imperialistic and as Shinto was being re-invented as the epitome of national identity by the state. In this climate, Japanese Christians had to prove that they still retained their "Japanese spirituality" by the way of Emperor worship.[13] For many Christian converts, the conflict between Christianity and national identity was unavoidable.[14]

The relationship between modern Japanese literature and Christianity was equally complex. Because most, if not all, authors enthusiastically received imported Western literary works, there is no denying the strong influence of Western literature over the development of modern Japanese literature.[15] Quite a few authors became Christian during this time, even though many of them would renounce their faith later. Moreover, since Western literature had been founded upon Christian worldviews, the metaphysical aspects of Christianity were inevitably incorporated into the creation of modern Japanese literary works. According to the renowned Japanese literary critic Karatani Kōjin, for instance, the inception of the I-novel, the genre often considered to be the Japanized

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[13] Uchimura Kanzō's (1861-1930) Lese Majeste Incident in 1891 exemplifies such a climate. Because Uchimura hesitated to vow to the Imperial Rescript of Education, he was vilified as a "traitor," even though he was, in fact, quite a patriot. For more information about the situation of Japanese Christians from the mid 19th century until the end of the war, see Abe 1978, 107-138; Ion 2003, 69-123.

[14] This situation contrasts quite sharply with Norinaga during the Tokugawa period. He too was concerned about the loss of national identity in the face of foreign influence, which in the case of Norinaga was Chinese. While Norinaga suggested that the Japanese should reject Buddhist and Confucian principles and go back to pre-China (pre-Confucian/Buddhism) classical texts in order to retrieve its national identity, in the late 19th century there was no option of simply getting rid of what was considered "foreign" because Japan was in dire need of adapting herself to become like the West for its own survival. As I elaborate in Chapter Three, Yokomitsu Ri'ichi's *A Traveler's Sadness* indicates how one needs to seek a way to incorporate foreign religion instead of rejecting it.

[15] Morris 1993, 9-32.

version of Western naturalist novels, was also a by-product of the re-introduction of Christianity in the late 19th century.[16] Historian and literary critic, René Girard opens up his essay entitled "Literature and Christianity: A Personal View" by saying that "Christianity has been so foundational for modern literatures and its influence so pervasive."[17] The impact of Christianity is, therefore, not only on those authors who personally embraced this foreign faith, but also on the very foundation of modern Japanese literature both thematically and structurally. In this dissertation, my goal is to shed a light on the complex three-way relationship among religion, literature, and national identity using the case studies of Japanese authors and their literary works in which Christianity figures prominently as a way for these authors come to terms with their often competing artistic, national, and religious identities.

Before examining how this three-way conversation is articulated in the selected literary works, Chapter One starts with a explanation of the major differences between Judeo-Christian traditions and Japanese religion, providing essential background information for the analysis. It is not simply that Japanese religion and Christianity are different "religions," but more importantly, the conceptualization of what "religion" means for the Japanese is quite distinct from those in the Judeo-Christian tradition. I also provide a brief overview of how the relationship between religion and literature was perceived from the medieval to the early modern period in Japan in order to situate my discussion of the relationship among religion, literature and national identity in modern

[16] Karatani 1993. (See especially Chap 3 "Confession as a System.")
[17] Girard 1999.

times. For example, the fact that the famous 11th century *The Tale of Genji* was received both critically and deferentially throughout history suggests a deep concern about the proper relationship between religion and literature. The examination of the philosophy of the Edo period scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) is also critical, because it was Norinaga who advanced a foundational theory of literature that combined literary analysis with the studies of national identity and religion. Norinaga seems to have come to believe that the most important role of literature is to promote the sense of Japanese identity, which, in his mind, was equivalent to Shinto. Although Norinaga is now most famous as a pioneer of National Studies (Kokugaku), his theories of the role of literature in evoking national or cultural identity inspired many later authors and thinkers.

From the beginning of the Meiji period, due to the heavy influence of western literary Realism, literature began to gain a position of an independent form of art and the idea that it should be valued only in terms of "art" and nothing else became a major trend. There was, however, a tendency to overemphasize the art-for-art's sake and to deny the relationship between literature and other social aspects such as education and religion. The famous author, Natsume Sōseki (1867-1917) attempted to nuance this tendency by asserting that literature could be simultaneously educational and artistic. A comparison between Sōseki and an English author, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), who displays a remarkable similarity with Sōseki in their perception about the relationship between literature and morality, underscores, again, fundamental differences in the concept of

"religion" in different cultural milieu: Eliot is very clear that morality has to be based on Christianity whereas Sōseki hardly mentions religion in his discussion about morality.

In Chapters Two through Four, I examine case studies of Japanese authors both converts and non-converts, and analyze their works that reveal their philosophies about religious, artistic and national identities. In Chapter Two, I trace what is generally known as the "Christian-related stories" or *Kirishitan-mono* of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927). Despite the transformation of his interest in Christianity, Akutagawa held an unfaltering belief of the supremacy of art, using the religious motif as a convenient tool to celebrate his artistic identity, which is most clearly demonstrated in his 1922 short story "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" (Kamigami no bishō). By juxtaposing Japanese religion's "power that re-creates" with Christianity's "power that destroys," Akutagawa reveals his view that Japanese religion and cultural traits are superior to Christianity specifically because the Japanese religious environment, as he saw, echoed the process of artistic creativity. Due to the fact that Akutagawa had the Bible by his bedside when he committed suicide, and because his last essay is about Christ, some argued that Akutagawa sought Christian salvation at the end of his life. Yet, I show how his final essay, "The Man of the West" (Saihō no hito 1927), undermines such reading because it is a testimony to Akutagawa's view that his concerns were primarily artistic rather than religious even at the end of his life. For Akutagawa, the ultimate creator was an artist, not God.

Chapter Three focuses on the controversial, unfinished novel called *A Traveler's Sadness* [*Ryoshū*] (1937-1946)[18] by Yokomitsu Ri'ichi (1898-1947). In contrast to Akutagawa who was never very concerned about the "national" identity of the Japanese, Yokomitsu's writing in the time of imperial Japan clearly shows his urge to establish Japanese national identity against the overwhelming influence from the West. The novel was harshly condemned immediately after the war due to its "nationalist" elements.[19] And yet, it actually indicates the possibility of a peaceful cooperation of Western and Japanese spirituality as symbolized by the marriage between a Catholic girl and a man who endorses Ancient Shinto. Here again we see Christianity signifying Western spirit pitted against Japanese identity, which is, ironically, defined only by juxtaposing it with the foreign religion. Although Yokomitsu's approach is reminiscent of the Edo period Scholar Norinaga in terms of seeing religion as a useful tool for the establishment of national identity, far from advocating the elimination of foreign influences, Yokomitsu instead proposes the holy matrimony of different spiritualties. Another significant difference between Yokomitsu and Norinaga is that, while literature ended up becoming a means for the retrieval of lost national identity for Norinaga, the very act of writing *Traveler's* indicates Yokomitsu's desire to assert his artistic identity above all, as an author to revive modern Japanese literature by producing what he calls the "pure novel," with which he believed to be the savior of modern Japanese literature. In this sense,

[18] Henceforth, *Traveler's*.

[19] Yokomitsu was one of the 25 writers, along with other prominent literary figures including Kobayashi Hideo and Kawakami Tetsutarō, who were publicly listed and accused of bearing responsibility for the war by the New Japanese Literature Association (Shin nihon bungakukai). See Shimada 1980, 167; Dower 1999, 237-238.

Yokomitsu more closely resembles Akutagawa because, for both, religion as well as national identity ultimately serve as the motif in their artistic creations.

In sharp contrast with these two authors, literary production was the very means of grappling with personal conflict between his religious and national identities for Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996), a Catholic author. Chapter Four examines the essays and three of his representative fictional works *The Sea and Poison* (1958), *Silence* (1966), and *Deep River* (1993) in order to trace the way his views of Japan and Christianity evolved. Initially, his religious identity as a Catholic offered him a lens to scrutinize his native country of Japan with quite critical eyes; Japanese religion was presented as the source of the "defects" of the Japanese culture, people, and even literature. Gradually, however, Endō's perception transformed, and he came to embrace a pluralistic religious view, which I call "catholic" Catholicism. This transformation was as much literary/artistic as it was religious. It was the result of Endō's constant struggle to define what he believed to be the essential responsibility of a writer. Although Endō took up a pen and chose the path of a fiction writer in order to seek a way to reconcile his religious and national identities, in the end, it was his pen, his artistic identity, that transformed his perception toward religion and nation.

Chapter 1

Religion, Literature, and Nationalism in Japan

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke characterizes Christianity as possessing the "power that destroys" and juxtaposes it with what he calls the Japanese "power that re-creates" in "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" (1922). The protagonist of Yokomitsu Ri'ichi's *A Traveler's Sadness* (1937-1946) turns to Ancient Shinto, a Japanese religion, as he begins to consider his marriage to his Catholic girlfriend. The Catholic author, Endō Shūsaku initially regarded Japanese religion as deficient and lacking strong moral principles in contrast to Christianity, and even went so far as to suggest that Japanese religion was the source of the shortcomings of Japanese national, cultural as well as artistic identities. Why did they hold these views? What kinds of differences between Christianity and Japanese religion caused them to react in these ways? In order to analyze how and why these authors inject their works with Christianity, I first examine the fundamental differences between Japanese religions and Christianity, focusing on the following three major aspects that are essential for my examination of modern Japanese literature. One, Christianity is monotheistic and exclusivist whereas Japanese religion is both polytheistic and syncretistic. Two, while Christianity emphasizes the notion of faith, Japanese religion tends to be practice-centered. Three, people in Christian cultures consciously acknowledge their religious identities, but Japanese people are far less cognizant or conscious about their relationship with "religion." This chapter first defines my use of the

term "religion" and explains these three major differences between Christianity and Japanese religion. Then, it briefly reviews the ways in which the relationship between religion and literature had been historically perceived in Japan, how and when the issue of national identity entered this debate, and in what manner the three-way conversation among religion, literature and national identity developed in 20th century Japan.

1. THREE MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND JAPANESE RELIGIONS

The Japanese equivalent of "religion," or *shūkyō*, is a term that was newly coined at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japan's era of modernization and westernization.[20] Prior to that, there was no Japanese equivalent of the English term "religion." This does not, of course, mean that no "religions" had existed. Starting from folk native religions of pre-historic time to imported ones like Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism from China, multiple religions had a long history of co-existing.[21] The fact that the term that distinguishes these "religions" from other activities did not exist, however, indicates how fundamentally different the perception of "religion" was (and perhaps still is) in Japan from that of the West.

When the concept of "religion" was introduced in Japan in the late 19th century, Japanese religion, and more broadly religions in Asia, were considered anomalies from a

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[20] According to Shimazono Susumu, the term *shūkyō* was fixed as the translation for "religion" around 1873. (Quoted by Robert Kisala, in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religion* 2006, 6). Hardacre (1989) mentions that "its first use outside the treaties is in 1877; its first appearance in a book title comes in 1880" (177). Hardacre also notes that (quoting Suzuki Norihisa), when the term *shūkyō* was used in an 1867 government document, it referred to Christianity and was not a generic term indicating religion in general.

[21] For more detail, see *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions* (2006) especially in the History section, 131-232.

western perspective where the norm of religion was Judeo-Christian. The question of what constitute a religion is a tricky one. As Max Weber (1963) aptly notes, however, "defining religion is fundamentally problematic because religious behaviors are so diverse that understanding can only be achieved by focusing on the subjective experiences and interpretations of those involved, by considering how individuals interpret the meaning of religious behavior."[22] Scholars today are much more receptive of both the complexity and ambiguity of what is generally labeled as "religion," and religious studies are conducted with the awareness of the diversity. Because a broad range of phenomena are now under the rubric of "religious studies," it is impossible to come up with a perfect definition of religion that satisfies everyone. In order for me to discuss the relationship among literature, religion, and national identity in this dissertation, however, I follow the definition of "religion" by Reader and Tanabe, and use the term "religion" as:

> an inclusive term that has elastic frontiers readily intermingled with cultural social themes in which belief and doctrine can play a part but are not essential. Under the rubric of "religion" we include such things as visits to shrines and temples (locations that cannot be classified other than as religious institutions), participation in festivals that are focused on shrines, temples, and deities, the acquisition of amulets and talismans, and the seeking, through petitioning of deities, of worldly benefits. We treat religion as a matter that includes not only of doctrine and belief but of participation, custom, ritual, action, practice, and belonging.[23]

In my comparison between Christianity and Japanese religion, I am therefore including practices such as going to shrines and temples even though the Japanese people may not

[22] Quoted in Traphagan 2004, 18.
[23] Reader and Tanabe 1998, 5-6.

necessarily consider them as "religious activities" or a part of their "religious" traditions. It is important to recognize that their engagement with these activities are oftentimes not perceived as "religious" by most of the Japanese. This is one of the most distinctive differences between Judeo-Christian tradition and Japanese religions that prompted the authors (as well as many others) to first consider and even define their religious identities when dealing with Christianity in their works.

Statistics today still indicate that the majority of the Japanese people consider themselves as having no religion at all (*mushūkyō*).[24] They show "low-levels of self-acknowledged affiliation to a religious group" despite "almost universal participation in certain rites and customs."[25] Going to Shinto shrines and attending Buddhist rituals for certain occasions are part of their everyday activities for the majority of the Japanese without identifying themselves as "religious" or having "faith"; Japanese religion tends to focus more on participation and practice in contrast to Christianity for which identification and having "faith" are essential.[26] A scholar of Japanese intellectual history Ama Toshimaro explains this tendency of the Japanese identifying themselves as "non-religious" by distinguishing what he calls "folk (natural) religions" (*shizen shūkyō*) from "founded religions" (*sōshō shūkyō*). He suggests that the Japanese have been practicing more of the former style of religion while the notion and term *shūkyō* (religion) signifies

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[24] Ama 1996. Most of the survey shows at least 70 % of the Japanese consider themselves as having no religion (*mushūkyō)*.
[25] Kisala 1990, 3.
[26] Traphagan notes, "it is this ritual and ceremonial activity itself that matters most for Japanese, rather than a set of specific beliefs related to gods, spirits, or other entities" (2004: 11).
See also Reader and Tanabe 1988.

founded religions like Christianity, and this is why the majority of the Japanese consider themselves non-religious.[27] Along with Ama, a historian of Japanese religion, Yamaori Tetsuo also notes that the Japanese tend to see "religion" with suspicious eyes, and their distrust in "religion" intensified especially after the infamous Aum sarin gas attack in 1995.[28] These explanations suggest that the Japanese do not think about themselves as "religious" partly because the term has a negative connotation due to its association with new religions, especially after Aum's culpable activities, and also partly because their engagement with religion is largely participation orientated and remains on a somewhat unconscious and "folk" level.

Perhaps because of their "unconscious" relationship with religion, unlike in the Christian culture where religion is predominantly considered to be the source of morality, in Japanese context morality is not often viewed as something related to religion. There is even an unwillingness to attribute the source of morality to religion at times. In the article "Could Religion Support the Victims of the Earthquake: Seven Months after 3.11 ~ Earthquake Disaster and Religion" in *Weekly Asahi* (2011), the author notes that Buddhist priests usually try to avoid identifying themselves as Buddhist monks when involved in their volunteer works to aid the victims of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that hit the region in 2011. Although none would deny that they are Buddhist

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[27] Kisala 2006, 8-9. For more detail, see also Ama's (1996) *Why Are the Japanese 'Non Religious'?* (*Nihonjin wa naze mushūkyō nanoka*)

[28] Ibid., 10. He also points out that, the term "religion" (*shūkyō*) for the Japanese signifies Christian-style, established "religious organization" and therefore "[t]he Japanese have been forced to 'examine their own psyches through Christian eyes … they have observed the innermost Japanese soul through the lens of foreign concept of religion' and so … they have no belief corresponding to that image of religion.

monks if asked, some of them make conscious efforts to conceal their identities while some others simply try not to publicize it. In contrast, one Catholic interviewee states that he made his religious background known as Catholic because it was due to his religion that he participates in the volunteer activities. The reasons for why the Buddhist monks did not want to reveal their identities or they did not want to emphasize that Buddhist identity vary; some mention that they volunteered simply because such support is only natural as human beings, and it has little to do with their "religion," and some others explain that it was because they did not want their religiosity to interfere with their activities or to seem as if that they are trying to use the opportunity to promote and rehabilitate their religion in the wake of the Aum attack. Whether their preference of anonymity in conducting moral activities is truly based on the religious climate of Japan or not is beyond the topic of this dissertation, but there seems to exist a Japanese culture or tradition that emphasizes the "act" itself and not where the act came from. Like "going to the shrines and temples and participating in the rituals" themselves constitute their "religion," the actual act of "helping" is far more important than why they do it.

In contrast, self-identification as a Christian is essential in Christianity. In the West, "religion is more than attitude, aspirations, emotions, speculations and imitations. Although it can include all these things, it includes them within a way of life *consciously* accepted in obedience to what are felt to be imperatives from without the self that are binding."[29] The fact that Japanese people have low self-acknowledgment of their

[29] Gardner 1971, 133. Emphasis mine.

"religious" activities does not, however, mean that the presence of religion is limited. On the contrary, religious elements are quite widespread and deeply permeated within social activities. James H. Foard appropriately called this penetration "endemic religion" in Japan, which he defines as "a kind of minimal religious practice that absolutely every Japanese participates in to some degree and which helps bind the Japanese together."[30] Foard uses the term "endemic religion" as a post-modern phenomenon disseminated through mass media, but it can also be applied to the way Japanese religion has been practiced throughout history, just like Reader and Tanabe who defined "common religion" of Japan including the activities that involve "the customs, beliefs, and practices that are broadly accepted within a culture."[31] Even if people's self-awareness of their relationship with religion in Japanese society is not overt, the role of religion, as we see in the following chapters, becomes quite central and visible especially in contrast to Christianity.

Another significant difference between Christianity and Japanese religion derives from the concept of monotheism. While the notion of faith in one absolute God is cardinal in the former, the latter allows for the coexistence of multiple religions such as Buddhism, Shinto, Ancestor-worship, Confucianism as well as other religious practices. The great majority of Japanese people go to both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, some households have both a Buddhist altar and a Shinto altar, and participation in multiple religious activities does not cause any feelings of conflict; it is the norm. Not

[30] Foard, 1994, 10.
[31] Reader and Tanabe. 1998, 29.

only the co-existence but also the mixing of different religions has also been quite commonly practiced by participants as well as the religious institutions themselves, most notably between Buddhism and Shinto.[32] It has been a historically common practice for a Shinto shrine to have a little Buddhist temple called *jingūji*[33] as well as little Shinto shrines in Buddhist temples, and, as I will show shortly, "Buddha" and "kami" often appear together in literary texts throughout Japanese history.[34] Even today, many religious institutions allow or even encourage cooperation between different religions. In contrast, Christianity in general adheres to a very strict exclusivist approach; once you become a Christian, you are prohibited or at least discouraged from attending other religious activities. Monotheism and exclusivism have been one of the most serious sources of conflicts for the Japanese who become Christians from the late 19th to early 20th century because (often foreign) missionaries demanded them to abandon traditional practices of ancestor veneration.[35]

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[32] Allan Grapard (1992) argues that the "combinatory" nature of Buddhist and "Shinto" is the norm of Japanese religion, by using the example of what he calls the multiplex system of Buddhism and Shinto of Kasuga shrine and Kōfukuji.

[33] "Shrine temples" (*jingūji*), sometimes also called *miyadera*, began to appear in the late 7th century. These temples were built adjacent to shrines to protect kami. Many "shrine temples" were abolished or separated from the shrine forcefully by the state at the beginning of the Meiji period when the state was trying to establish State Shinto, but a number of them still remain today due to the effort of local priests to restore them.

[34] There were times when different "religions" had conflicts against one another. For instance, there was a brief moment of contest from a group of clans to accept Buddhism when it was first introduced to Japan in the mid 6th century. Also, as I discuss shortly, Buddhism was severely attacked at the wake of the Meiji period. In the majority of time including today, however, the Japanese have had multiple deities in their lives as a natural part of their everyday life.

[35] See, for instance, Nishiyama "Indigenization and transformation of Christianity in a Japanese rural community" (1985), Reid "Japanese Christians and the Ancestors" (1989), "Remembering the Dead: Change in Protestant Christian Tradition through Contact with Japanese Cultural Tradition" (1981) for

2. Religion and Literature in Pre-Modern Japan

From early to pre-modern Japan, the most persistent issue that seems to have occupied the minds of those who engaged in literary activities was whether these activities would interfere with their religion, particularly with their Buddhist vows. Writing or reading literary works was sometimes considered and even condemned as deviating from Buddha's teachings. The history of the reception of the early 11th century *The Tale of Genji*, one of the most respected and well read literary works in Japanese history to this day, serves as the best example to illuminate this point.[36] Written by a female court lady named Murasaki Shikibu (978-1015?), it was an instant success from its birth. Its continued popularity has been testified to by a number of later written texts including *Sarashina Diary* (*Sarashina nikki*, 1020-1059), in which the author, the daughter of Sugawara no Takasue, describes how she became extremely excited when she finally obtained an entire copy of the tale, and that she was absorbed in reading the text without doing anything else. But she also mentions that she "had a dream in which a priest in a yellow surplice came to [her] and said 'Learn the Fifth Book of the Lotus

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more detail. Also, some Japanese Christians dealt with this by simply downplaying this particular aspect of Christianity. For instance, one of the most famous Japanese Christians, Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930) clearly did not endorse such an "exclusivist" approach of Christianity. He encouraged his students to study about Buddhism and Confucianism when he was a teacher, offending the foreign missionaries who worked at his same school. Even though Christianity was his choice of religion and he considered that it was the best religion for him, Uchimura still maintained respect for other religious practices. Endō Shūsaku, another devout Christian, also shares a similar stance with Uchimura in terms of respecting other religious traditions even if he remained a devout Catholic.

36 *The Tale of Genji* is still very popular in 21st century Japan. There are numbers of adaptations of this works in the forms of comic books, animation, movie, dramas, as well as several modern translations.

immediately!'"[37] Obviously, this indicates her sense of guilt in indulging herself into reading fiction, because "falsehood" was considered one of the four sins of words in Buddhist teachings back then.[38] Fictional tales called *monogatari* were often blamed as the source of evil as early as the late tenth century; the preface of *An Explanation of the Three Treasures* (984) warns the reader that "there are the so-called *monogatari*, … do not let your heart get caught up even briefly in these tangled roots of evil."[39]

In the case of *Genji*, the criticism was particularly stringent probably because of its popularity. Repeatedly, the author, Murasaki, was said to be suffering in hell because of her literary creation full of fabrications. In the late twelfth century, for example, she was described as having been "berated for producing such a dreadful book that misled and corrupted the minds of the young" in *A Sutra for Genji* (1168).[40] In the thirteen century, she appears in a Noh play as a ghost languishing in hell who laments her "assemblage of that multitude of untruths, and for leading people's heart astray."[41]

As much as those who condemned *The Tale of Genji*, however, there were also plenty of "scholars and poets for whom the *Genji* was the essence of Japanese culture."[42] Those who worshipped the tale assiduously attempted to make the story agree with Buddhist teachings. One way to do this was to suggest that the author repented of her wrongdoing, thus she should be forgiven. There is evidence for "the commissioning of

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[37] Bowring 2004, 78.
[38] Ibid. See in particular "Murasaki in Hell" 80-84.
[39] Quoted by Bowring 2004, 81.
[40] Ibid., 82.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 83.

services to pray for the repose of Murasaki Shikibu's soul."[43] And in the Noh play "Genji kuyō," Murasaki appears and asks that these service be performed for Genji, the main character of her story. Another way was to attach some religious values to the story and to its author. The historical tale called *Mirror of the Present* (Imakagami, c. 1170) explains that Murasaki was in fact an avatar of Kannon Bodhisattva, and that *The Tale of Genji* was *hōben*, a kind of temporary expedient means used in order to transmit to people Buddhist truth. Murasaki was also equated with the prominent Chinese poet, Po Chu-I (772-846) who was credited with successfully unifying his religious and literary activities. Others suggested the similarities between fiction and Buddhist parables, especially their shared purpose of moving people's hearts. Clearly, these are attempts to justify the act of reading fictional stories by suggesting that stories are a great tool of religion and therefore compatible with religious practices.

Those who were engaged in the creation of literary works were the most invested in trying to reconcile the perceived incompatibilities between their own religious and literary activities. A prominent medieval literati Fujiwara Shunzei (1114-1204) wrote that writing poetry and Buddhist activities must be compatible because of the very principles of Mahayana Buddhism, its "rejection of any bifurcation of the holy and the profane."[44] In discussing the relationship between the poem and the sutra, Shunzei believed that because Mahayana Buddhism holds the "fundamental absence of discrimination (*wakezu*) or hierarchy in the dharma, any sense of the poem as derivative or subordinate is itself

[43] Bowring 2004, 83.
[44] LaFleur 1983, 91.

subverted and disallowed."[45] In spite of those who considered that poetry was incompatible with religion owning to its "profane" nature as opposed to "sacred" religion, Shunzei's point is that such a division should be useless from the very viewpoint of Mahayana teachings. In other words, "profane" literary work and "sacred" Buddhist activities are one and the same after all.[46]

Shunzei, a distinguished poet and critic, not only defended the value of literature during his time, but also offered a solution for those who, in later periods, were apprehensive about being involved in literary activities. One such instance is the case of the Rinzai Zen monk Shōtetsu (1381-1459) who used Shunzei to buttress his belief that literary practice should be regarded as highly as religious practices. In *Conversations with Shōtetsu* (*Shōtestu monogatari* 1448), there is an episode in which Shunzei appears and begins to worry that he may have neglected the proper practice of Buddhism because of his passion and enthusiasm in poetry. So, he goes to Sumiyoshi shrine, secludes himself and offers intense prayers to kami, and asks kami if poetry should merely be considered leisure. If it is, he pledges to kami, he will immediately discontinue his engagement with poetry and will devote himself to the practice of Buddhism for the rest

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[45] Ibid., 95.

[46] The idea of rejecting dichotomies echoes what another literary scholar Ueda suggests as one of the characteristics of Japanese literature: the collapse of the subject and the object. Comparing Japanese versus Western literary traditions, Ueda suggests that Japanese artists tended to use the method of becoming one with the object in order to depict reality. In western artistic traditions, on the contrary, realistic depiction is achieved by means of the observer becoming as objective as possible by separating the subject from the object completely. Endō Shūsaku also expresses a similar idea about the fuzzy borderlines between different entities (God, humans, animals, etc.) in contrast to the Christian rigid boundaries between these categories, which seems to be connected to the idea of "oneness" and the collapse of the subject and object. I will come back to this issue in Chapter Four.

of his life. He then sees a dream in which kami appears and assures Shunzei that religion and literature are one and the same, therefore he does not have to worry. Hearing this, Shunzei is relieved; he can now engage with writing and reading poetry even more passionately than before.[47]

The appearance of these kinds of tales is a clear indication of the anxiety that plagued religious and literary practitioners from the premodern period. In the face of this anxiety, there were, certainly, many who gave up literary activities when faced with the choice between religion and literature as well, such as Yoshishige Yasutane (? – 1002), a famous court poet stopped his literary activities when he took a Buddhist vow.[48] The legendary Zen master, Dōgen (1200-1253), was said to have believed that "writing poetry was a dangerous deviation for those who really ought to be single-mindedly sitting in meditation."[49] And yet, there were also those who attempted and succeeded in finding ways to reconcile their religious practice and literary activities. As we will see in the case of modern authors like Endō, these struggles and negotiations continue well into the modern period.

While it was mostly between Buddhist principles that interfered with literary activities in the medieval times, Confucian ideas of morality came to play an important role in the relationship between religion and literature in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868). After the proliferation of popular literature during the Genroku period (1688-

[47] Ueda 132-133. This also indicates that the relationships between Buddhism and Shinto was clearly harmonious, because the Japanese deities (*kami*) encourage him to practice both Buddhism and poetry.
[48] LaFleur 1983, 7.
[49] Ibid., 8.

1704), the Tokugawa government's reform programs such as the Kansei Reform in the late 18th century promoted didactic stories with the "encourage good and punish bad" (*kanzen chōaku*) theme as a means to instill moral austerity to the populace.[50] In this climate, *The Tale of Genji* was again reinterpreted with moral yardsticks largely in terms of Buddhism and Confucianism, the principles of which deeply penetrated within Japanese society not only in politics and academia but also in other fields including literature by this time. There emerged, however, scholars who began to question such emphasis on Buddhist and Confucian doctrines in the 18th century, and the most notable and relevant in my discussion among them is Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801).

3. Religion, Literature, and National Identity: The Beginning of the Three Way Conversation

Best known as the harbinger of National Studies (Kokugaku) today,[51] Norinaga was also a respected scholar of Japanese literature and classics who first advanced theories of religion, literature, and national identity. In particular, Norinaga's theory of *mono no aware* (the pathos of things) as the essence of Japanese identity also connects Shinto religion with premodern literature, leaving a lasting impression not only in the field of literature but also sociological and anthropological work on Japan.[52]

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[50] Ueda (1975) also mentions that the masses preferred "kanzen chōaku" moral stories whereas the intellectuals were more inclined to appreciate "aesthetics" in literature (215-216).

[51] Along with Norinaga, Kada no Azumamaro (1669-1736) is also considered to be the one who first started the National Studies.

[52] Norinaga's idea of Shinto is associated with what is often referred to as "Ancient Shinto" (koshintō) or Restoration Shinto (Fukko shintō) later. Norinaga, however, never used these terms.

Norinaga's fascination with literature, both reading and writing it, started while he was studying medicine in Kyoto, and intensified even after he returned to his hometown to start practicing medicine. In particular, he had a special liking to waka poetry and *The Tale of Genji*. His first text written immediately after retuning home, *A Little Boat Breaking a Path Through the Reeds* (*Ashiwake obune* 1757), advanced a theory of the autonomy of poetry that resembles today's "Art for art's sake" approach to literature. Firmly rejecting the then-commonly held idea that the role of poetry was to aid political causes, he asserts that poetry is spontaneous human expressions that should be valued by its own right.[53]

In his regularly offered lectures on *The Tale of the Genji* at that time, Norinaga rejected the way that Confucian and Buddhist values had deeply penetrated many spheres of Japanese society leading Japanese literature, even his favorite *Genji,* to be evaluated with the yardstick of Buddhist and Confucian morality.[54] Because Norinaga believed that the role of literature was not moral education, he insisted that "neither Confucianism or Buddhism is the essence of this story [Genji] or poetry. Their essence is the pathos of things."[55] His first advanced most famous concept of "pathos of things" here or in *The Essentials of the Tale of Genji* (*Shibun yōryō*) in 1763, and later developed into a much

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[53] At that time, poetry was commonly considered as a part of political expression (Sagara 1978, 26-27, Tahara 1968, 47). "哥の本体、政治をたすくるためにもあらず、身ををさむるためにもあらず、ただ心に思ふことをいふより外なし" (Quoted in Tahara 1968, 47.)
See also *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000 Part I: 1600 to 1868 Vol 2* 2006, 418.
[54] He continued this lecture over thirty years while practicing medicine as a professional doctor.
[55] *The Essentials of the Tale of Genji*. "此物語も哥道も儒仏の道を本意とはせず、物のあはれが本意なれば" (Quoted in Tahara 1968, 69.)

more elaborate theory. What is the "pathos of things" or *mono no aware*? Norinaga explains it in the following terms:

> When we speak of knowing *mono no aware*, we refer to the cry of wonder that comes to our lips when our mind is moved by the realization that something we have seen, heard, or touched in *aware*. Even in our common speech today, people say *aa* or *hare*. When they have been impressed by the sight of the moon or the cherry blossoms, they say, "*Aa*, what splendid blossoms!" or "*Hare*, what a lovely moon." *Aware* is the combination of the two cries of *aa* and *hare*.[56]

Norinaga explains that the expression "*aware*" actually came from the coalescence of two interjections, that mean the sense of "pity" or "pathos." Combined with "*mono no*" where *mon*o refers to "things" and *no* a possessive marker, *mono no aware* refers to the idea that there is a sense of pathos or sadness in the realization that all living things are ephemeral in the end and nothing lasts forever. Using the beauty of cherry blossoms and the moon, things that can be appreciated only briefly, Norinaga underscores the fleeting nature of all things.[57] To know *mono no aware* therefore means that one has a heart that can understand and feel such pathos of things. It is important to underscore that, although translated as "realization" above, to know *mono no aware* does not refer to logical or rational understanding of such nature of things but it is about how one has a sensibility of being spontaneously "moved," how one's heart is capable of being touched by the ephemeral nature of things. It is the matter of "heart" not the "brain," it is about "feeling," not "thinking." This distinction is the key to not only Norinaga's perception toward literature, but also to his views of religion and national identities. He admired *The*

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[56] *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000 Part I: 1600 to 1868 Vol 2* 2006, 418-419. Original from *Tamano Ogushi*. Trans Donald Keene.

[57] Ueda (1967) considers *mono no aware* as a mode of perception (202).

Tale of Genji because it contains and evokes *mono no aware* in people.

Norinaga's *mono no aware* theory that emerged from his literary discussion of *Genji,* but soon began to expand and merge with his Shinto theory in *Personal Views on Poetry*, which was written immediately after *The Essentials of the Tale of Genji*.[58] Although Norinaga had mentioned "Shinto" in his earlier texts, there was no explicit connection between literature and religion.[59] In these earlier texts, Norinaga used the term "Shinto" or "Kami no michi (神道)" primarily to distinguish it from Buddhism and Confucianism, which were at that time commonly described as "the way of Buddha" (Butsu dō 仏道) and "the Way of Confucius" (Ju dō 儒道) respectively.[60] Norinaga also sometimes used the expression "natural Shinto," or *Shizen no Shinto* in some of his earlier works. Because of the syncretistic nature of Japanese religion, the infusion of Shinto and Buddhism was quite common, if not the norm, and what was generally called "Shinto" had a syncretic characteristic, especially with Buddhism. Norinaga's use of the term "natural Shinto" was therefore his attempt to clearly distinguish his perception of pure, original "Shinto" from syncretic Shinto. Norinaga explains: "Natural Shinto is the Way which has existed since the beginning of heaven and earth and the age of kami. It

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[58] Both *The Essentials of the Tale of Genji* (*Shibun yōryō*) and *Personal Views on Poetry* (*Isonogami no sasamegoto*) were written in 1763 (Sagara 1978, 93-151). Sagara also explains in detail how it is specifically from Volume three of *Personal Views* that Norinaga begins to show a strong reliance to Shinto in explaining his literary theory.

[59] According to Sagara (1978) Norinaga does not mention Shinto in relation to literature in his earlier 1761 essay (*葬庵随筆*) or even in *The Essentials of the Tale of Genji* (117-121).

[60] Tahara 1968, 104.

differs from so-called Shinto as present-day Shintoists speak of it."[61] Later, Norinaga simply began to use the term Shinto to refer to what he earlier called "Natural Shinto," but it is important to underscore that his idea of Shinto remained to be the one that had to be a "pure," not syncretistic, Japanese religious tradition, before it was "tainted" by foreign, especially Chinese, influences. With this understanding of Norinaga's concept of Shinto, how does it relate to *mono no aware*?

Norinaga argues that *mono no aware* is the very means with which people can get close to kami; in other words, when one feels *mono no aware*, one is in pursuit of the way of Kami, that is his Shinto. He argues that the authentic Japanese spirituality was lost in his time specifically because of the importation of the thoughts of Chinese origin, and that the only way for the Japanese people to retrieve Japanese spirituality was through the texts that could convey the pre-Chinese Japanese heart.[62] In other words, he identifies the critical factor distinguishing native from foreign, Shinto as opposed to Buddhism and Confucianism, to be the very idea of "*mono no aware*."[63] Instead of his initial view that literary works are the natural expression of human emotions, here we begin to see the transformation of Norinaga's theory of literature that connects religious and national identity through *mono no aware*. He is now suggesting that the role of literature is the vehicle to transmit a traditional and pure Japanese spirituality, or *mono no aware*.

Norinaga's growing interest in the origin of Japan is most evident in his project of

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[61] Motoori Norinaga *Ashiwake obune* quoted in Matsumoto 1970, 63.
[62] Sagara 1978, 116, 121.
[63] It is ironic, though, that the concept of *mono no aware* in fact echoes the idea of impermanence of things in Buddhism.

the examination of the Japan's oldest extant chronicle, *The Record of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki* 712). He believed that it held the key in search for Japanese identity, and began writing *Commentary on the Kojiki* (*Kojiki-den*), an extensive interpretation of *Kojiki* in 1764, which would be completed 34 years later, resulting in a massive 44-volume scholarly masterpiece still considered to be the cornerstone of the study of *Kojiki* to this day.[64] Both in *Commentary on the Kojiki* and other texts written during this time, Norinaga also started to emphasize the importance of the Japanese Imperial house and the Emperor, obviously believing in what is written in *Kojiki* literally. His nationalistic perception in connection with the Imperial house developed too, as clearly stated in the following texts.

> Our country's imperial line (sic), which casts its light over this world, represents the descendants of the Heaven-Shining Goddess. And in accordance with that goddess's mandate …, the imperial line is destined to rule the nation for eons until the end of time and as long as the universe exists. That is the very basis of the Way. … It is also why foreign countries cannot match ours and what is meant by the special dispensation of our country.[65]

Along with literature that conveys and evokes *mono no aware*, Norinaga considered the Emperor important because both are unique to Japan, and both work as "a conduit for the deities" through which people can communicate with kami; in other words, the Emperor transmits Japanese identity from kami to people, just like some "good" classic literature

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[64] Along with the compilation of *Commentary on the Kojiki*, Norinaga began to emphasize the role the Emperor as the mediator between kami and people, and argued that this "unbroken" imperial line was the essence of national unity. Whether Norinaga intended it or not, his thought about the Emperor and the role of imperial line became a useful tool for those who wanted to undermine the Tokugawa government and establish a new political order in the time of the Meiji Restoration. Later, it also provided theoretical basis for the rule of Imperial Japan until the end of WWII.

[65] "Precious Comb-box" (Tamakushige, 1786) in *Sources of Japanese Tradition 1600 to 2000 Part I: 1600 to 1868 Vol 2* 2006, 411.

does.[66] After all, Norinaga's ideal was the age of ancient – when "deities" existed and *Kojiki* was written. Both the Emperor and classical literature were therefore the conduits to retrieve the goodness of ancient times.

> If we constantly devote ourselves to the Way of poetry and constantly read *The Tale of Ise*, *The Tale of Genji*, *The Pillow Book* … and other works of pathos [awaré], our heart will naturally become polished and gentle and will become one with the heart of the ancient. … The virtue of poetry, then, is not just to express emotions and give vent to feelings but also to assimilate the ancient elegance, to come to possess the heart of the ancient, and to compose poetry like the ancients.[67]

Here, in addition to his earlier view of literature as "spontaneous expressions of human emotions," Norinaga underscores that the role of literature is also "to assimilate the ancient elegance" and "to possess the heart of the ancient." Both spontaneity and human emotions remain quite important, however, because Norinaga saw that the essence of Japanese identity stemming from the "spontaneity" and the emphasis on the "feeling," and not from the good-versus-bad type of moral principles or the judgment based on rational thinking.

The dichotomy of "feeling" versus "thinking" is therefore the key to understand how and why literature, religion and national identity are deeply interconnected to one another in Norinaga's perception. Norinaga was a big aficionado of literature, and emphasized the importance of *mono no aware* from the very beginning. In his appreciation of classic literary works, and in opposition to the trend of his time in which

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[66] Burns (2003) considers that "for Norinaga, the emperor, whom he viewed as a direct conduit to the deities, became a kind of icon of the primal Japanese community" (76).
[67] Shirane 2002, 615-616.

rational thought and knowledge were emphasized, he began to associate Japanese cultural and national identity with *mono no aware*. He began his search for the origin of Japanese identity and found *Kojiki*, which lead him to the idea of the Emperor as another conduit for the transmission of national identity in addition to literary works. His idea of Shinto represents not "religious" doctrines, but as something that teaches the importance of "feelings" which he saw was the basis for Japanese identity.

It is also important to remember that the category of "religion" which would put Buddhism, Confucianism and Shinto into the same group today did not exist in Norinaga's time. For Norinaga, Buddhism and Confucianism belonged to the same category as moral education and even politics because they all derived from the realm of "thinking." Literary activities, such as reading classic literature and composing poetry, along with the pursuit of the way of kami, belonged to another realm, which was based on the importance of one's emotions and feeling. This is why Norinaga's literary theory of *mono no aware* is strongly connected to Shinto. Whether it is labeled as "religion" or "national studies" or "literature" did not matter to Norinaga; for him, the matter concerning one's heart was the heart of the matter, and therefore literature with *mono no aware,* literature that evokes *mono no aware*, is simultaneously a good piece of literature and a way to Japanese kami, helping the Japanese retrieve their national identity.

This division of "feeling" versus "thinking" as the symbolic representation between Japan versus foreign recurs even after Norinaga's time. The famous Meiji slogan, *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western knowledge) is the prime example that

shows such dichotomy: it displays the perception that as long as one can keep Japanese spirituality, it is acceptable or even commendable to learn foreign "thinking." As I discuss in Chapter Three, Yokomitsu Ri'ichi recognizes but challenges this simplistic dichotomy in his novel *A Traveler's Sadness*. Even in the 21st century, a Japanese diplomat still explains that "Japanese ideas are better conveyed by being translated into cultural products through the mediation of feelings than by being translated into logical strings of words through the mediation of language,"[68] emphasizing that the "feeling," and not "logical thinking," is the core of Japanese culture. Norinaga's perception of "feeling" versus "thinking," along with his theory *mono no aware* seem still quite alive in the sphere of Japanese literature and on the minds of many later intellectuals. One of the earliest literary authors and theories who borrowed Norinaga's argument, although not without some misunderstandings, was the Meiji literati, Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) whose essay on Japanese modern novel became the cornerstone of Japanese literary studies.

4. MODERN JAPAN: LITERATURE FOR LITERATURE'S SAKE

In the Meiji period, along with radical transformations in political, industrial and social spheres, the concept of "literature" was also born due to the importation of Western literature. Many authors espoused literary realism, in particular, the naturalism of 19th century Western literature. The most exemplary enthusiast was Tsubouchi Shōyō

[68] Quoted in Napier 2007, 193, 231. Comment made by Sei'ichi Kondō, a Japanese Diplomat in 2005 at the conference "Japan's Soft Power and Public Diplomacy."

who, in his foundational essay of modern Japanese literary criticism "The Essence of the Novel" (Shōsetsu shinzui 1886-1887), criticized the ethical or moralistic orientation of literature while promoting the "realistic depiction of human nature" in novels. Shōyō notes,

> The novel attempts to describe human nature and social conditions. It should reveal what is obscure, and give a realistic portrayal of the mysteries of destiny in man's life by spinning the thread of an original idea into a skillful web of emotions and cleverly devising innumerable denouements from a myriad of mystery-shrouded beginnings.[69]

Shōyō repeats enthusiastically that the "realistic depiction of human nature" must be the utmost importance of the modern Japanese novels and that the author should, by all means, avoid didacticism, because if a novel tries to deliver moral teachings, it will inevitably present distorted, or false, human nature.

While blatantly endorsing Western style realistic novels, Shōyō also mentions that earlier Japanese literature already featured such realistic depictions, exemplified by *The Tale of Genji*, crediting Motoori Norinaga as the first to discover its real value through his recognition of the importance of *mono no aware*. Quoting the following statement from Norinaga, Shōyō attempts to make his point:

> The general yardstick against which the characters and actions of the persons in a story are measured is the degree to which they possess *mono no aware* and are compassionate and in harmony with their fellows. The presence or absence of these qualities is what commends or condemns them. *Not so far removed from the concepts of good and evil in religion, we might think; but looked at more closely, what is or is not in harmony with man's nature is not always consistent with*

[69] Tsubouchi 1981, 8.

> *religious ideas of good and bad*. The definition of morality is softened, instead of being rigidly propounded as in Confucian debates.[70]

Because Shōyō believed that "human nature" is what an author should depict, and *mono no aware* is part of human nature, he endorses Norinaga and his emphasis on *mono no aware*. From this point of view, Norinaga does seem to be the predecessor of Shōyō; in his earlier work, Norinaga stressed that literary works should not be used as a means for politics or moral education, but it should deliver "spontaneous expressions" of human emotions. As discussed above, however, Norinaga emphasized the importance of *mono no aware* because it was the means for one to retrieve the ideal, ancient Japanese identity. Norinaga disapproved the literature of his time, but it was not because they did not depict human nature, but because the human nature of his time was corrupt and unworthy of such attention. For Norinaga, the actual "depiction" was less important than the transmission of good human nature in the end. In contrast, the purpose of Shōyō's "The Essence of the Novel" is specifically to encourage the novelists of his time to write "realistic" novels; whether people's minds were corrupt or not is not an issue, but how one can depict human nature accurately and faithfully is the point of, or, the "essence" of, the novel for Shōyō.

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[70] Tsubouchi 1981, 30. Emphasis mine.
Even though there are two English words indicating "religion" – "religion" and "religious" – appear in this quote, in the original text of "The Essence of the Novel," the actual Japanese term used here is, in both cases, "jyubutsu (儒佛)," specifically referring to Confucianism and Buddhism. I agree with the translator who judged it appropriate to use the term "religion" to illuminate the point that Shōyō was trying to make. The Japanese term *shūkyō*, which is now commonly used as equivalent to the English word "religion" did not exist in Norinaga's time.

Thus, even though Shōyō endorses Norinaga and they share the common view that literature should not be the means for moral education, there is a fundamental difference in what "literature" meant to these two. Shōyō attempted to establish a much more independent status of literature. Even if he endorsed Norinaga and his *mono no aware* theory, Shōyō did not see *mono no aware* as a means to get closer to ancient kami but as one part of human nature, the depiction of which is the ultimate goal for the author. It is evident that for Shōyō religion was only a possible institution providing moral standards, and it is from this point of view that he rejected the interaction between morality and literature.

There seems yet another reason for why Shōyō referred to Norinaga and Japanese classics such as *The Tale of Genji*: a certain degree of national pride. By crediting Norinaga for his discovery of the significance of *mono no aware*, Shōyō seems to be suggesting that it was not that Japanese literature was utterly inferior to Western literature but the fault was in the "early modern" literature of the preceding Edo period that demised the beauty of classical Japanese literature. Both rejected Edo period literature, but again, for different reasons: for Norinaga it was because they represented corrupt human nature and for Shōyō because they were not a realistic depiction of human nature.

Shōyō endorsed Western realistic literature in the late 19th century, when modern Japanese literature was just being formed. Many Japanese authors followed suit, advocating literary realism and naturalism, believing that true literature should not be "moralistic" works. As the popularity of the I-novel in the early 20th century indicates,

many authors even seem to have believed that depicting "immoral" human nature was the highest goal of literature. Yet, there were also those who were quite cautious about the tendency to completely separate the issues regarding morality and literature. Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), one of the most prominent authors in modern Japanese literature, believed that literature should be able to accommodate both art and morality. In his 1912 talk entitled "Literature and Morals" (Bungei to dōtoku), Sōseki implicitly argues against Shōyō's viewpoint by criticizing those who endorsed the idea that literature and morality are separate issues.

> Just like a blind man who has no prudence or true certainty, a recent man of letters in Japan confuses the public profoundly by foolishly insisting that morals are unnecessary in literature. Although it is appropriate to say that the purpose of literature is not to instill moral senses, if the events pertaining to the moral assessment are woven into the woof and weft of the literary tapestries, and if they stimulate our moral senses of good and evil, then how possibly can we assert that morals and literature have no relationship?[71]

Clearly, Sōseki was rejecting of the contemporary literati who tended to altogether deny the relationship between literature and morality. Although he did not approve of purely didactic literature, Soseki still maintained that separating literature and morality was too simplistic an approach because, after all, both of them belonged to human society, and he believed in the social function of literature.

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[71] Sōseki 1973, 108. Translation mine.
近来の日本の文士のごとく根柢のある自信も思慮もなしに道徳は文芸に不必要であるかのごとく主張するのははなはだ世人を迷わせる盲者の盲論といわなければならない。文芸の目的が徳義心を鼓吹するのを根本義にしていないことは論理上然るべき見解ではあるが、徳義的の批判を許すべき事件が経となり緯となりて作物中に織り込まれるならば、またその事件が徳義的平面において吾人に善悪邪正の刺激を与えるならば、どうして両者を以て没交渉とする事ができよう。

In the essay entitled "Religion and Literature" (1935), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) writes about the relationship between literature and morality with a remarkable resemblance to Sōseki in his belief of the role of literature to convey morality as well as artistic beauty. Both of them appear to have recognized the changes of moral codes over time and were concerned about the deterioration of contemporary morality. There is, however, one striking difference between them; Eliot was absolutely certain about the Christian origins of morality whereas there is little indication in Sōseki's talk that suggests any kind of relationship between religion and morality.

In order to demonstrate the reciprocity between literature and moral issues, Sōseki first shows that these two issues have a lot more in common than they first appear. He suggests that the moral standard common in pre-Meiji Japan can be called "romantic morals" and the morals of post-Meiji Japan "naturalistic morals," and they correspond to literary Romanticism and Naturalism respectively. According to Sōseki, "romantic morals" are the morals of the past and tend to create an ideal, virtuous human archetype that one is supposed to emulate, whereas "naturalistic morals," morals of the contemporary Meiji period, are much more lenient because they presuppose human flaws and allow for the depiction of realistic human figures. These moral types correspond to literary trends, Sōseki maintains, because Romantic literature often depicts idealized characters who embody pre-Meiji style moral values whereas in Naturalist literature, characters are portrayed with many human flaws, reflecting the somewhat deteriorated moral standard of the present day. Even though Naturalist novels seem to lack morality,

however, they in fact showcase "honest" accounts of human flaws, thereby still posing questions about moral issues.[72]

While acknowledging that there seems to be a general transition from "romantic morals" to "naturalistic morals" from the Tokugawa to the Meiji perioda, Sōseki also cautions that it is not the case that everyone endorsed "romantic morals" in pre-Meiji Japan and now "naturalistic morals," nor vice versa. Instead, as he correctly points out, people adeptly change their moral yardstick depending on the situation. Thus, people still have ideals of "Naturalistic morals" in the contemporary Meiji period; it is just that the standard of the "ideal" or "sage" figure is lower than in the pre-Meiji periods. Similarly, there is at least an implicit "ideal" moral standard woven in the story in the literature depicting more "naturalistic" human behaviors. In short, Sōseki debunks simplistic dichotomies of morality and literature and shows that even though Naturalist novels are often considered lacking in moral values, they are in fact closely tied to moral issues. Sōseki's point is that literary works do not have to be divided into either didactic or aesthetic; the same text can be interpreted as educational as well as artistic depending on the quality of literary works, skills of the author, which part of the story one is looking at, and how it is approached. As Dennis Washburn accurately summarizes, "Sōseki explicitly argues against both a separation of art and ethics and the narrow notion for art

[72] Sōseki 1973, 110.

for art's sake and looks for a synthesis of the two as a way to define the social function of modern literature."[73]

In Eliot's case, he was most concerned with the "secularization" of the novel of his time, noting that the "whole of modern literature is corrupt by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over natural life: of something which I assume to be our primary concern."[74] Dividing morals into Christian-based and non-Christian based morals, Eliot considers the former far more important than the latter because Christian-based morality is founded upon the "supernatural" world, which is beyond the reality that people face in society.[75] He laments that literature is becoming "secularized" and as a result people only think about "temporal, material, and external nature" of morals. Although literary realism is not unimportant for Eliot, he believes that the morality derived from religion is superior, and that is why literature should convey the Christian-based morality.

Eliot is not, however, suggesting literature be turned into religious propaganda. He clearly distinguishes "propaganda literature," which is designed to "convert" people to Christian faith, from what he calls "literature"; he stresses that "religious literature" (propaganda literature) is not even "literature," and explains that literature needs to be "*un*consciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian."[76] It is not the doctrines

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[73] Washburn 1995, 167.
[74] Eliot 1974, 108.
[75] As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this perception of "supernatural world" seems to correspond to Endō idea of Christian metaphysics. Endō also considers that "supernatural world/the world beyond reality" as important element that helps fictional works more powerful.
[76] Eliot 1974, 99. Emphasis in the original.

or principles of Christianity that Eliot suggests to be the basis of morality or expressed in the literary works, but the realization that there is something beyond reality is what he means by saying Christian-based morality, and the presupposition of such supernatural world should "unconsciously" provide good moral guidance through literary works.

Indeed, Sōseki's ideas of "romantic morals" and "naturalistic morals" seem to roughly correspond with Eliot's division of morality into "religious" and "secular." In their explanations of the relationship between literature and morality, both emphasize the importance of literature that does not merely depict what "reality" presents but goes beyond the present time and offers an idealized model for readers to emulate. When they basically seem to share a similar opinion in terms of the relationship between morality and the role of literature, why is the religion, Christianity, cardinal for Eliot to make his point whereas the source of morality little concerned Sōseki? One may certainly argue that it was because of their religious background; Eliot was a devout Christian whereas Sōseki did not have any religious orientation. But more importantly, their respective relationships to religion seem to reflect broader cultural differences between Japanese religion and Judeo-Christian traditions in terms their perception toward religion and its relationship to morality. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Japanese people are generally less cognizant or conscious about their relationship with religion. They are, at times, even unwilling to acknowledge the relationship between religion and morality, as the example of the Buddhist monks in their volunteer work for the 2011 Tohoku earthquake indicated. Perhaps in a similar vein, where the morality came from did not

concern Soseki whereas it was essential for Eliot. This unwillingness to make a clear connection between religion and morality may partly have been the reason why Endo Shūsaku, a Catholic, charged that the Japanese lack any sense of morality. I stress this difference between Japanese religion and Christianity again because it explains in part why authors in early 20th century Japan had to first identify or define what "Japanese religion" was in their respective works, often by juxtaposing it against what it was not: Christianity. In the process, artists needed to grapple with not only religious but also their cultural, national, and even artistic identities in their literary works.

5. Modern Japanese Literature and Christianity

The ban on Christianity was officially lifted in 1873 because the Meiji oligarchs realized that it was necessary in order to demonstrate to the West that Japan was a "civilized" nation now and, ultimately, to rectify the unequal treaties. Since Christianity had been branded "evil" during the previous Tokugawa regime of nearly three centuries, however, even after the ban was lifted, strong antipathy toward Christianity persisted both within the government and in the populace. At the same time, because Christian-related institutions provided the venue in which one could learn "Western" ideas and knowledge in addition to religious doctrines, a high percentage of the former-samurai attended these institutions and many converted to Christianity, believing that they could

obtain useful knowledge and skill to rebuild their careers and nation.[77] A considerable number of writers also became interested in Christianity, including famous authors such as Shiga Naoya (1883-1971), Kitamura Tōkoku (1868-1894), Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943), Kunikida Doppo (1871-1908), and Arishima Takeo (1878-1923), to list just a few; some of them even officially converted to Christianity. Like many former-samurai converts, however, the authors were not necessarily attracted to the "religious" teachings of Christianity per se but to the new thoughts that Christianity (re)presented, such as egalitarianism, humanism, liberalism or even democracy. Even though Christian views are considered to be conservative today, they were quite revolutionary to the Japanese back then especially in comparison with the feudalism of the Edo Japan. Two popular magazines in the early Meiji period, *Jogaku zassi*, and *Kokumin no tomo* were both heavily influenced by the Protestant ideas of liberalism and humanism,[78] and "many of the leading prose writers, poets, and critics of the most prominent journal of Japanese romanticism, *Bungakukai* … were either converts to or strongly influenced by Protestant Christianity."[79] One fascinating fact in regard to these author-converts' relationship with Christianity is that, despite their early fascination, many of them renounced their faith before too long. For instance, Tōson was baptized in 1888 at the age of twenty but left the church only five years later. Arishima entered the church of Uchimura Kanzō (1861-

[77] Yonekura 1983, 14-15. According to Scheiner (1970), about thirty percent of the Protestant converts in the Meiji period were former samurai (8). Best (1966) also notes that, although the percentage of the upper class converts gradually declines, still thirty percent of the church members were ex-samurai by 1889 when they made up only 5.7 % of the population (99).
[78] For more detail, see Yonekura 1983, 72-95.
[79] Varley 2000, 277.

1930), the famous Christian thinker of early 20th century Japan, at the age of twenty-one and followed the teaching of Uchimura enthusiastically, but less than a decade later, he too renounced his faith.[80] Another famous author, Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1962) became Christian at the age of eighteen, again influenced by Uchimura, but left the religion only four years later. Shiga was never baptized but frequented Uchimura's church from the age of eighteen. He stopped going there seven years later, however, and disassociated himself from Christianity permanently.

It is indeed quite remarkable that this many authors in the beginning of the modern period were attracted to Christianity but unable to keep their enthusiasm for long. Why was their interest short-lived? Was there a common cause for their disillusionment with this religion? The author and Catholic convert Endō Shūsaku considers that it was partly because the Christian image of God was an "angry," "fatherly" God with whom they could not feel an affinity. He also points out the fact that many of these converts were Protestant not Catholic, speculating that it might have been easier for them to leave Protestantism because it emphasizes an "individual" relationship with God as opposed to Catholicsm's emphasis on communal relationship among the adherents.[81] Several literary critics who examined those converts' cases came to similar conclusions. They further

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[80] When Arishima committed (double) suicide, the act infuriated his former mentor, Uchimura. Uchimura wrote an essay entitled "Arishima Takeo as an Apostate" (背教者としての有島武郎 1927). Quoted in Kubota 1992.

[81] Endo speculates that such "individualism" of Protestantism may also have helped the birth of the Japanese I-novel trend, which focused on a personal problem with the form of confession. I elaborate on Endo's interpretation in depth in Chapter Four.

note that Christianity, especially the kind of Protestantism popular at that time in Japan, demanded very strict asceticism which many authors in the end found unbearable.

Another key factor for both their initial enthusiasm and eventual disappointment with the religion seems to be the personality and teachings of the aforementioned Uchimura Kanzō, a devoted Christian who founded the non-church movement (*mukyōkai* 無教会) in 1901.[82] Uchimura demanded very strict Puritan discipline including a complete abandonment of the pursuit of pleasure, especially sexually oriented one. For instance, Masamune Hakucho who left Uchimura wrote,

> From some time ago, I began to think Christianity was a merciless religion. I felt like I was asked a martyrdom. … all pleasurable things had to be abandoned. … Eventually, priests' skillful sermons, theologians' theory of atonement, all of them began to sound fake.[83]

Masamune's interest in Christianity stemmed from attending Uchimura's passionate lectures, particularly those about Western literary figures such as Carlyle, Dante, and Whitman. As Masamune explains above, however, the strong demand of the asceticism interfered with what he considered to be important elements in artistic creation such as the pursuit of beauty and pleasure, and he could no longer follow Uchimura's teachings.

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[82] Mullins 1998, 25. Uchimura was also known for being a strong anti-war advocate. For instance, Miura (1996) mentions Uchimura as one of the representative anti-war Christians during the Taishô era in *Taisho Bunka* (36). Gonoi (1990) also refers to Uchimura as one of the few who publicly protested against the Russo-Japanese war (289-290). Uchimura actually once supported the war during the Sino-Japanese war because he believed that Japan was trying to help Korea to be independent. But as he realized that Japan was actually colonizing Korea, he regretted that he had supported the war, and from that point on, Uchimura firmly kept his position of anti-war advocate for the rest of his life.

[83] Quoted in Kubota 1992.
"私はキリスト教を苛烈な宗教だといつの間にか思う様になっていた。殉教をしいられていることに気付くようになった。… すべての快楽は捨てなければならぬ。… 牧師の言葉巧みな説教も、キリスト教学者の贖罪の理論も、そらぞらしく聞えるようになった。"(20).

Masamune stopped going to his lectures and eventually completely left Christianity, devoting himself into literary activities wholeheartedly. This kind of problem was not limited to Masamune; a number of other writers left Uchimura due to similar reasons.[84]

In addition to his personality and his asceticism, Uchimura's view toward literature also seems to have contributed to the dissatisfaction and disagreement of the authors, and prompted the authors' eventual abandonment of the religion. Uchimura considered literature only as a tool to convey thoughts and ideas; good literature means those ones that express "grand" ideas for him. From his point of view, Japanese literature is inferior because it always pays too much attention to "small matters," and not anything grand. In his 1897 lecture, Uchimura expresses both his depreciation for Japanese "authors" and poor quality of Japanese literature.

> There are people who call themselves writers among us. People may think anyone who takes up a pen and writes something or some criticism in the magazine are writers. So, literature became a toy of lazy students. … When we go to an art store, there is a picture where a beautiful woman is sitting in front of a desk and looking at the moon, raising her brush up. This is the chamber of the Genji of Murasaki Shikibu. This is the image of Japanese author. But such literature is not a beacon for the future but a threat. It is probably true that *The Tale of Genji* was written in beautiful language. Yet, what did *The Tale of Genji* do to inspire the morale of Japan? Not only did it do nothing, but it actually made us sissies. I want to completely eradicate this kind of literature within us.[85]

In sharp contrast to Norinaga or even Shōyō who believed in the value of one's emotions and the spontaneous, honest expressions of such feelings, for Uchimura, if an author does not have great "ideas," then the work is unworthy. From his point of view, emotional

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[84] Other writers too left the church for similar reasons. For instance, Arishima Takeo who also could not follow the very strict Puritan ethics of continence. Kubota 1992, 57-58; Yonekura, 1983, 221-222.
[85] Uchimura 1967, 204-205. Translation mine.

sensibilities such as *mono no aware* would be what made the Japanese "sissies"; whose literature does not inspire "morale." For Uchimura, *The Tale of Genji* is the epitome of Japanese weakness, the opposite to Norinaga who valued *The Tale of Genji* as the epitome of Japanese literature and *mono no aware* the essence of Japanese identity. Whereas Shōyō insisted literature take primacy over morality, Uchimura valued literature only as a tool that cultivates people's mind and instills "moral" values. It seems, therefore, only natural that many authors who were once drawn to Uchimura became disillusioned eventually with his "self-righteous view toward literature and austere ethics," and left him without much struggle in their decision to renounce their faith,[86] even if there is no denying that Uchimura had huge impact on many authors in the early 20th century Japan.

The Taishō era (1912-1926) witnessed the wide spread of cosmopolitanism, universalism and liberalism on the one hand, and the growing sense of imperial identity of the Japanese on the other hand. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, one of the most celebrated authors in modern Japanese literature, became fascinated with foreign, exotic cultures including Christianity and wrote a number of short stories. As we see in the next chapter, although Akutagawa's view of Christianity was initially a simple infatuation with Western exotic culture and religion, his sharp eyes did not fail to observe the fundamental

[86] Kubota 1992, 18. Shimazaki Tōson was baptized because he thought Christianity was a mystical, romantic foreign religion. Just as easily as he became a Christian, he quickly renounced his faith when he fell in love with one of his students. For more detail, see Kubota 1992 8-9, 37- 42. The way the writers came and left him affected Uchimura, too. According to Yonekura (1983), Uchimura became increasingly critical and skeptical toward writers, and he later set a strict condition for those who wished to attend his lectures. As a result, more law school students came under the wing of Uchimura from the mid-Taisho, instead of literature or philosophy students (252).

differences between Christianity and Japanese religion, and he later developed a fascinating theory of literary creation that depended on making such cultural and religious comparisons. In complete opposition to Uchimra's belief that the role of literature is to convey much grander (religious) messages, Akutagawa used the motif of religion for his artistic creation, and at the end of his life, he even converted Jesus Christ into an artist.

Chapter 2

Aesthetics of an Atheist: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927) committed suicide on July 24th 1927 at the mere age of 35.[87] One commonly circulating explanation for his famous suicide might lay in his final essays about Christ. On the night before he killed himself, Akutagawa completed an essay called "The Man of the West II" (Zoku saihō no hito 続西方の人), the sequel to "The Man of the West" (Saihō no hito 西方の人) written two weeks earlier about Christ. Along with the fact that the New Testament was at his bedside when he committed suicide, some scholars argue that these essays indicate Akutagawa's desire for Christian salvation at the end of his life.[88] Although ascertaining his religious orientation is not the focus of this chapter, it will become clear that Akutagawa was far from

[87] In one of his suicide letters (*isho*) entitled "A Note to a Certain Old Friend" (Aru kyūyū e okuru tegami, 1927), Akutagawa famously explains that his suicide is the result of "a vague sense of anxiety" (*bonyari to shita fuan*). Scholars also offered possible alternative motivations for his suicide including his fear of becoming insane, his brother-in-law's suicide just six months prior to his own which intensified his financial burden, and Akutagawa's apprehension about his literary career, as well as the future of modern Japanese literature.

[88] One of the headlines reporting Akutagawa's death reads "Mr. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke committed suicide by taking poison … retreated to his last sleep with the Bible" 芥川龍之介氏／劇薬自殺を遂ぐ…聖書を読みつつ最後の床へ Tokyo Asahi Newspaper July 25th 1927. As Aikawa mentions, this type of news story may have contributed to the impression that Akutagawa was religiously interest in Christianity at the end of his life. See Aikawa 1999, Kubota 1992 for more information about the interpretation of "The Man of the West" as his manifestation of Christian interest.

converting and embracing Christian faith:[89] he was in fact converting Christ into an artist in his last essays, manifesting his belief that religion was only a small part of art.

In the following, I start with a brief overview of the transformation of Akutagawa's interest in Christianity over time and trace this evolution as it appears in his literary works. By examining selected works from what is generally referred to as "Christian related stories" (*kirishitan mono*), I will demonstrate Akutagawa's unfaltering belief in the supremacy of art over religion throughout his life, even though his perception toward Christianity changed considerably. In his last essay "The Man of the West," Akutagawa explains how his interest in Christianity evolved.

> I used to love Christianity, Catholicism in particular, from an artistic point of view. This was about ten years ago. … Then, several years ago, I also had a certain interest in Christian martyrs who died for their religion. Just like the mind of the fanatic, the psychology of the martyr almost morbidly interested me. It is only recently that I finally began to love a person called Christ whom the four biographers passed down to us.[90]

Although he describes here how his interest in Christianity changed from an "artistic" fascination to a psychological interest in Christian martyrs, and finally, to a personal interest and emotional investment in the human figure named Christ, the following two important aspects should be added. One, starting from the writings in the early 1920s, Akutagawa began to show a distinctly critical attitude toward Christian dogmas, particularly in comparison with Japanese religious and cultural values. Two, the phrase

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[89] There are also scholars who firmly reject such a "religious" reading of the suicide. For instance, Nakamura Shinichirō states, "it is absolutely impossible to interpret the texts as his religious confession" (Cited in Aikawa 1999, 41).

[90] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 195. English translation mine.

that he "began to love a person called Christ (*kurisuto to iu hito*)" should not be taken as an indication of his religious interest in the figure of Christ, but rather a rejection of it because the "person called Christ" that Akutagawa began to love is not a religious figure, but an artist who could not even follow the religion called Christianity.[91]

1. EARLY INFATUATION

One of the best examples that illustrates Akutagawa's earlier, positive perception about Christianity is his 1918 short story called "The Death of a Disciple" (Hōkyōnin no shi), in which his interest in the act of martyr is clearly displayed. The story is about an orphan named Lorenzo who is brought up by the Jesuits in a small village in Japan.[92] He grows up as a devout and model Catholic, but one day a woman accuses him of impregnating her. Despite his repeated denial of such a charge, no one believes in Lorenzo's innocence; his reputation suffers and he now lives as a beggar. One day, there is a fire and "Lorenzo's" baby is trapped inside the house. Unable to save the baby, the mother cries frantically outside the burning house. Then Lorenzo appears from nowhere, goes into the flame and saves the child in exchange for his life. While Lorenzo is dying, the woman confesses that the baby is not Lorenzo's. This further confirms Lorenzo's real identity, which is now revealed:

> Behold! ... As the exquisitely beautiful boy lay silently before the portals of Santa Lucia, illuminated by the reflection of the flames, redder still than the blood of

[91] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 20. "Christianity is a poetic religion with many contradictions which even the Christ himself could not follow." クリスト教はクリスト自身も実行することの出来なかった、逆説の多い詩的宗教である。

[92] Although many characters use baptismal names, all characters appearing in the story are Japanese.

> our Lord, the holes in his burned upper garment revealed two pure, pearl-like breasts. Even in his fire-seared face, there was an unmistakable and now undisguised tenderness and sweetness. Ah! Lorenzo was a woman, woman![93]

Thus, Lorenzo's innocence is proven, and it is shown that she died for those who accused her wrongly. The way Lorenzo's selfless deed and her eventual martyrdom are delineated suggests that Akutagawa applauds such an altruistic act of martyrdom, which is also clearly attested to in the description of Lorenzo's death.

> Presently amidst the desolation was also the trembling voice of the padre, his hand raised high over Lorenzo, as he intoned a solemn, mournful chant. … she [Lorenzo] now looked up into the still dark night sky and then beyond to the glory of Paradise. With a peaceful smile upon her lips, she breathed her last.[94]

Lorenzo is depicted as a model human being who died gracefully, with a "peaceful smiles upon her lips." Considering the fact that human egoism was one of Akutagawa's favorite themes, which he seems to have inherited from his respected mentor, Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916),[95] it makes sense that the act of martyrdom – the polar opposite of human egoism – is presented beautifully and prasingly.[96]

The story is not, however, without a critical portrayal of Christianity. While Lorenzo is depicted as a model Christian, all other Christians are shown to be quite cruel and hypocritical in the way they treat Lorenzo when he (she) is suspected of misconduct. Even Simeon, who grew up with Lorenzo like a brother, or the priest who took care of Lorenzo, failed to believe in Lorenzo's innocence. It is, therefore, doubtful that

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[93] Akutagawa "The Death of a Disciple" 2007,124.
[94] Ibid.,125.
[95] Sōseki dealt with the problem of human egoism in many of his works, such as *Kokoro* (1914).
[96] Akutagawa often used the motif of "human sacrifice," which is the opposite of human egoism. See Keene 1984, 562-563; Yonekura 1983, 236, for more detailed discussion on this point.

Akutagawa's intention was to praise Christianity itself, but rather his focus seems to be on the human act of dying for the sake of others, and the "beauty" engendered from such an act. The narrator of the story appraises Lorenzo by saying that "I have heard it said that this is all that is known about her life. But what of it? That which is most precious in a human life is indeed found in such an irreplaceable *moment of ecstasy*."[97] Many critics including Miyoshi Yukio (1967), a renowned Japanese literary critic, believe that the central theme of the story is the "moment of ecstasy" (*setsuna no kandō* 刹那の感動) created by Lorenzo's martyrdom.

The nature of such a "moment of ecstasy," however, has been a subject of much debate. Some, including Miyoshi, assert that there is no religious implication in it, whereas others consider that such a "moment of ecstasy" is religious in nature.[98] Although we cannot ignore the fact that the faith of Lorenzo is central in the story, it is probably accurate to say that Akutagawa believed less in the beauty of religious faith than in any extraordinary moment that moves one's heart. The comparison with "Hell Screen" (Jigokuhen), which was written in the same year as "The Death of a Disciple," clarifies this point.

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[97] Akutagawa "The Death of a Disciple" 2007, 125. Italics mine.

[98] For instance, Miyoshi strongly argues against the religious reading of the "moment of ecstasy" by saying that "the feeling is neither created by Christian faith nor an accolade for the martyr who endured persecution. There is not even a fragment of religious sentiment." キリスト教信仰への宗教的感動でもなければ、迫害に耐えた殉教者の賛美でもない。ここには宗教的感情の断片さえ発見できない。(Cited in Imanishi 2004, 111). On the other end, Kasai (1993) argues that it was solely due to religious motivation 宗教的感動.

There is a very similar moment of rapture in "Hell Screen," yet it is situated in an almost opposite setting. In "Hell Screen," a painter, Yoshihide, aids and abets the murder of his own daughter in order to draw a perfect picture of hell. When Yoshihide is made to watch his daughter burned alive in a carriage, of course, he at first desperately wants to stop this atrocious act; he truly and profoundly loves his daughter. Yet, Yoshihide is also a devoted artist who has been making every attempt, without success, to draw a picture of hell. Apparently, his artistic side wins out over his fatherly side at that moment, since Yoshihide does not interfere with his daughter's murder: he knows that by watching the scene, he can paint the perfect picture of hell. Yoshihide's turmoil transforms from "the shock, the terror, and the sorrow" to "an inexpressible radiance – the radiance of religious ecstasy," and even to a "joy beyond measure" as he stares at his daughter's execution.[99] Although Yoshihide's act is the complete opposite from Lorenzo's from a moral standpoint – the former basically kills his daughter for the sake of his art, whereas the latter let herself be killed to save those who wrongly accused her – the same kind of rapture is seen in both acts. What is common is their power to move the human heart either by extreme selflessness or extreme selfishness. Importantly, in the case of Yoshihide, it was for the sake of "art" that he became "selfish" and eventually let his daughter be killed; if he was not a devoted artist, he would have stopped it

[99] Akutagawa "Hell Screen" 2006, 69, 71.

immediately.[100] Evidently, therefore, it was not just the "Christian martyrdom" that Akutagawa found intriguing, but any extraordinary moment of human life.[101] Still, it is undeniable Akutagawa was fascinated with Christian martyrs and admired to those who could conduct such an act of self-sacrifice, which is worthy of a "moment of ecstasy."

2. LEAVING CHRISTIAN EXOTICISM

From the *kirishitan-mono* written in the early 1920s, Akutagawa began to show much more critical views toward Christian dogmas, especially in comparison to Japanese cultural or religious practices. For instance, "Ogin" (1922) illuminates Akutagawa's emerging skepticism about the tenets of Christianity that deny the values of Japanese cultural and religious tradition. After little Ogin is orphaned, a kind and devout Christian couple, Joan-Mokichi and Joanna-Osumi, adopt her and bring her up as a Christian, and they live quite happily for a while. But the government persecution of Christians tightens; they are caught and pressed to renounce their Christian faith. All of them endure harsh torture, but when they are about to be executed, Ogin all of the sudden tells the persecutor that she is going to renounce her faith. Hearing this, her stepparents are extremely saddened and beg her to pray to God and to keep her faith. Ogin explains tearfully that she decided to renounce her faith because she just realized that her real parents must be in hell since they were not Christians, and she cannot dare to go to heaven by herself and

[100] Immediately after completing his masterpiece "Hell Screen," Yoshihide kills himself. This can be the result of his sacrifice of "humanity" – that is, the triumph of his "artist" side over his "human" side. Once the art is created, Yoshihide could not keep living as a human being since he sold his soul to art.
[101] There is a similar type of a sudden, and very brief, moment of joy in his other stories, such as in "Mandarins."

leave her parents in hell. Ogin apologizes to her stepparents and tells them that they should go to heaven without her, but after undergoing emotional conflict, Mokichi and Osumi also end up renouncing their faith, following Ogin.

A quite satirical piece, the story questions what is "heaven" as opposed to "hell" in Christian teachings. It challenges the Christian idea of heaven being where "good" people go after death, to happily be with God, by asking whether it is God or your family that constitutes heaven. Could it be that, perhaps, "heaven" is where your family is, and not where God is? It also asks whether such kind of individual-based pursuit of salvation accords with Confucian notions of filial piety. In other words, is not "going to heaven" a rather egoistic desire? This way of evaluating the act of martyrdom contrasts quite sharply with the way Lorenzo's martyrdom was delineated in "The Death of a Disciple," which was written only four years earlier. Evidently, Akutagawa's perception toward Christianity changed from a favorable to cynical one beginning from the early 1920s.[102]

This transformation may have been a natural outgrowth of Akutagawa's keen observation of Christianity. As many scholars, as well as Akutagawa himself, describe, he was initially interested in the external – "foreign, occidental, exotic" – aspects of Christianity, and this means that he was probably not very familiar with the theological principles of Christianity. It is not surprising if Akutagawa eventually came to realize, after observing and learning about this foreign religion more, that it demanded faith and commitment on an entirely different level from the way Japanese religion operated.

[102] Other stories, including "Black Robe Maria" (Kokui seibo 1920) and "Christ in Nanking" (Nankin no kirisuto 1920), display a sense of mockery toward those who believe in Christianity.

Kamogami Hisa (1978), Japanese literary scholar, considers that Akutagawa was never interested in the "essence" of Christianity, but only in the external, exotic culture of the religion especially at the beginning; thus it is only a natural consequence that such "superficial" interest would eventually wane and that he becomes more critical of it as he learns about the teachings and principles of Christianity.[103] Stories like "Ogin" clearly suggest Akutagawa's perception that Christian beliefs or principles are not necessarily superior or a good fit for the Japanese.

While "Ogin" nicely exemplifies Akutagawa's acute observation in evaluating Christianity in comparison to Japanese religion, a short story called "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" (Kamigami no bishō 1922) not only illuminates religious discrepancies between Japan and the West but also underscores Akutagawa's cultural, artistic, and nationalistic views, symbolically represented by the juxtaposition between what he calls Christianity's "power that destroys" and Japanese "power that re-creates." As discussed in Chapter One, Christianity – at least at that time – strongly required one's total submission to the religion at the price of all other possible alternative religious practices. Akutagawa saw this aspect as a destructive power of Christianity, and contrasted it with Japanese religion's polytheistic and syncretistic tendency, which does not reject or destroy the new elements but, instead, incorporates and re-creates them within the native practices. What is more, he embraces this "power that re-creates" as the basis of artistic creation.

[103] Kamogami 1978.

The main character of "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" is Organtino, a Catholic priest from Lisbon who resides in 16th century Japan. His aim is to convert Japan to a Christian country, and he has been successful in disseminating the Catholic faith. One day, he meets an old man, who introduces himself as one of the Japanese deities, or kami. The kami warns Organtino that he should not misunderstand the seemingly "successful conversion" of the Japanese to Catholicism nor underestimate the power of Japanese religion. When Organtino retorts that he is confident about the power of Deus and that many Japanese will soon turn to the Catholic faith, as he just witnessed a few samurai convert earlier that day, the old man concedes:

> Probably any number will convert. But if it is just "conversion," most of the natives of this land have converted to the teachings of Siddhartha. But ours is not *the power that destroys*. It is *the power that recreates*.[104]

The "power that destroys" (*hakai suru chikara* 破壊する力) mentioned here refers to the monotheistic and exclusivist nature of Christianity that destroys Japanese religion by demanding that those who become Christian not participate in any other religious activities, including going to the temple or the shrine. The kami is aware that Christian propagation entails destruction of other religions, but questions the nature of "conversion" (*kie*), and the effectiveness of this "power that destroys." He also implies that those whom Organtino believed to have "converted" to Catholic faith may not have left Japanese kami. For instance, the old man tells Organtino, Buddhism entered Japan before Christianity, but did or could Siddhartha (the Buddha) destroy Japanese native

[104] Akutagawa "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" 1999, 126. Emphasis mine.

kami? The answer is clearly "no," since the kami is right there talking to Organtino. Indeed, the kami continues, both Buddhism and Confucianism were naturalized as Japanese religions rather than taking over the country, and such is the "power that re-creates," a superior power to the Christian "power that destroys." The kami is warning Organtino that even if the Jesuits think that they are making Japanese Catholics, perhaps the Japanese are actually making Catholic Japanese.

The kami's examples of "re-creation" go beyond the confinement of religion. Something even more fundamental such as Japanese orthography, the old man explains, also shows the effectiveness of this power: Japanese orthographies are originally from imported Chinese characters, but the Chinese characters never succeeded in conquering the land of the kami. The borrowed Chinese characters are read with Japanese pronunciation, and the Japanese even created their own orthographies of kana from Chinese characters. In other words, according to the old man, Chinese characters became only a convenient tool for the expression of the Japanese language, as exemplified by the *Manyoshū* poet Kakinomoto Hitomaro of the late seventh century who used Chinese characters merely for the way they are pronounced, as opposed to their meaning, in writing his poems.

So powerful and prevalent is the Japanese kami's "power that re-creates," the old man also assures Organtino, even "Deus Himself will be transformed into a native of this land."[105] Fittingly, Akutagawa transcribes Deus as 泥烏須,[106] which consists of three

[105] Akutagawa "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" 1999, 127.

Chinese characters, respectively (but not respectfully!) denoting "mud," "crow," and the last character possibly from the first Chinese character of Susanoo (須佐之男),[107] one of the most important deities of Japanese mythology. This transliteration is a clear indication of Akutagawa's cynical perception toward Deus, the almighty God of Christianity.[108]

In addition, Deus is even shown to be a tool for the Japanese to discover their real identity. Before his encounter with the old man, Organtino has a dream in which he witnesses Japanese "Bacchanalia," where many kami are having a drinking and dancing party outside the cave where the mythic Sun Goddess hid herself. Organtino does not know the reason behind the festivity, but he hears one kami shout "We are celebrating because a new God has come, superior even to you," and thinks that "the 'new God' probably refers to Deus." Thus "inspired by this feeling, [he] fixed his eyes with interest on the change in this mysterious phantasm."[109] Organtino's expectation that the native kami may be referring to Deus as the "new, powerful God" is completely crushed, however, when he witnesses the Sun Goddess coming out from the cave:

suddenly, just as the mass of roosters crowed as with one voice, the slab of rock

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[106] There are several Japanese transcriptions for Deus; 提宇子、大宇子 (in the Daijirin Dictionary). Akutagawa himself uses different transcription for Deus; for instance, he uses提宇子 in "Lucifer" (1918), 泥烏須 in "Tobacco and the Devil" (1916).

[107] Traditionally, there are two different sets of Chinese characters for the transcription of Susanoo: one is "須佐之男" and the other is "素戔嗚尊." The former was used in *Record of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*, 712), the latter in *The Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*, 720).

[108] Further, Seiji M. Lippit points out that the missionary's name goes through the transformation from the original, roman character "Padre Organtino" into the Japanese phonetic reading with katakana "オルガンティノ," then, in the final scene, to a combination of katakana and Chinese characters "ウルガン伴天連," obviously symbolizing Organtino's "eventual assimilation into the Japanese landscape." (Lippit 2002, 65)

[109] Akutagawa "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" 1999, 120.

> like the door to a cave, which had been holding back the night mist in the distance, slowly opened to the right and left. And from the cleft a thousand paths of hazy light beggaring speech poured like a flood.[110]

Seeing this, Organtino cannot move or speak; he is struck by the greatness of the Sun Goddess. It also becomes clear that there is no such "new God" who is supposed to be more powerful than the Sun Goddess; it was merely a lure to make the Sun Goddess curious and bring her out from where she was hiding. Akutagawa deftly conveys that "Deus" is used only as a tool to uncover the true kami of, and perhaps the identity of, the Japanese.

Although the transliteration of "Deus" showcases a rather negative re-creation, the central aspect of the power of re-creation lays in the idea of production of new beauty. The kami explains how calligraphy was imported from China.

> The philosophers of China introduced calligraphy as well to this land. Kukai, Dofu, Sari, Kozei – I always went secretly to wherever they were. Their models were all calligraphy by Chinese, but, gradually, a *new beauty was born* from the tip of their brushes. Without their realizing it, their characters were neither Wang His-chih's nor Ch'u Sui-liang's; they had begun to exist as Japanese characters.[111]

Initially, the calligraphies were an import from China but eventually "re-created," becoming no longer Chinese but beautiful Japanese writings. The re-creation is therefore not merely a process of indigenizing foreign elements, but also the production of new artistry and new beauty.

This re-creative power could be perceived as heresy in the case of religion,

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.,124. Emphasis mine.

however, especially for those who consider any "re-creation" of religion a kind of deviation from the original. Most notably, Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996), a writer and Catholic, criticized the "power that re-creates" in the story as a shortcoming of Japanese culture, writing,

> What is scary about "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" is that, borrowing the words of the old man, Akutagawa points to the Japanese spiritual climate and says that the root of any foreign religion or philosophy would get *rotten* once implanted to Japan. The exterior would certainly remain the same but the substance disappears and transforms into *falsehood*.[112]

Endō's choice of negative words to describe the ability of Japanese religious milieu is striking: Christianity becomes "rotten" (*kusaru*) and "false" (*ese*) when imported to Japan.[113] Akutagawa, however, never describes the transformation of Christianity, or any other imported elements, with negative expressions in "The Faint Smiles of the Gods." As we just saw, he even praises the capability of Japanese religious environment as a positive power. Their different evaluations derived quite possibly from their religious background. As a Catholic from a very young age who also spent nearly three years in France and studied Catholicism, Endō must have been instilled with the notion of the "true" or "original" form of European Catholicism. Endō therefore considers that it is no longer a "true" version of the religion when the essence of a given religion is changed. That is probably why Endō maintains that Akutagawa remained ambiguous about the

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[112] Endō 1975, 108. Translation and emphasis mine.

[113] Endō's negative opinion about the way the imported religion is changed in Japan is most clearly seen in *Silence* (1966), in which Japan is described as a swamp where the root of any foreign religion would be rotten.

evaluation of this "power that re-creates."[114]

The very nature of this expression – the "power to re-create," or *tsukurikaeru chikara* in Japanese – seems to have further heightened Endō's concern; the "change" here seems to imply more than just a simple superficial change. The Japanese verb *tsukurikaeru* (造り変える) is a combination of two verbs, *tsukuru* (to make) and *kaeru* (to change). The first word, *tsukuru* is critical. There are three Japanese words that are generally used to describe the act of making something; "作る," "造る," and "創る." They are all pronounced as "tsukuru" and basically mean "to make." The first "作る" is the most general term, and refers to the act of "making" a meal, a clothing, etc. The second "造る" is used when describing the act of making, creating, or constructing something large in scale, such as the construction of a garden, a ship, or some big architectural structure. This word also indicates the construction of something with a form, rather than the creation of something abstract. The last "創る" is specifically used when something is created from nothing, such as the creation of the earth, universe, or creative acts of artistic works. That Akutagawa chose the second *tsukuru* (造る) is quite telling because it suggests the fundamental and substantial change of form, especially when combined with "kaeru" (to change). With the expression of "造り変える" (*tsukuri-kaeru*) then, Akutagawa is not talking about a simple or superficial change but a structural change that involves the reconstruction of the very foundation of Christianity.

[114] Endō 1975, 109. Endō admired Akutagawa and his works so greatly that he named his own son "Ryūnosuke." Because he was such a big fan of Akutagawa, I suspect that, perhaps, Endō did not want to recognize that Akutagawa actually embraced this power which Endō considered to be pernicious.

As mentioned above, the fact that Endō was a Catholic while Akutagawa an atheist, contributes to their almost opposite evaluations of the transformation of religion imported from foreign countries. Yet, we also have to remember that Akutagawa was not merely talking about the importation of religion but also about cultural and, most importantly, artistic adaptation. From this perspective, their different evaluations of the act of re-creation reveal how Akutagawa and Endō perceived the concepts of "authenticity" and "imitation" differently.

While Endō's concept of "authenticity" seems to have been, at least partly, nurtured through his exposure to the Catholic faith, for Akutagawa, as an artist first and foremost, "imitation" indicates a distinct concept in terms of artistic production. In the section called "Imitation" (Mohō 模倣) in his 1927 essay "Literary, All-Too-Literary" (Bungeitekina amari ni bungeitekina*)*, Akutagawa writes,

> The Westerners are disdainful that the Japanese are good at imitating. …The Japanese are good at imitating. I won't dispute that our works are the imitations of the Westerners' works. But, just like us, they are also good at imitating. Didn't Whistler imitate Japanese ukiyoe in his oil painting? Certainly, they imitate one another after all. … They may call their imitation "digestion." If so, our imitations are "digestions" as well. Even though we both use water and ink, Japanese nanga-style water painting is different from Chinese nanga. [115]

Here, he makes two points. One, the Europeans, too, have borrowed many things from foreign countries; such borrowing is not limited to Japan but universal. Two, what matters is not the act of "imitating" or "digesting," but how it is done. Although the artistic style of nanga (南画) was originally imported from China, as Akutagawa remarks,

[115] Akutagawa "Bungeitekina amarini bungeitekina" 1971, 151.

it developed into a very distinct Japanese style of "nanga" painting. There is nothing wrong with starting from imitation just as long as it evolves into something artistically worthy. Nothing came from nothing, Akutagawa seems to be saying. In the end, it is not the act of "imitating" itself that matters, but *how* one creates, or re-creates, a new beauty from it.

Indeed, Akutagawa frequently used Western, Chinese and Japanese classics as his source materials, and was thus often criticized as "lacking originality." Akutagawa's conviction is unmistakable, however. Getting sources from somewhere else and "imitating" or "digesting" them in a skillful manner is not only necessary but also praiseworthy. As Lippit notes, for Akutagawa the "unlimited access (through gestures of imitation, citation, and rewriting) to all other cultures and historical periods" is the very point of literature.[116] If we look at Akutagawa's numerous masterpieces generated from old tales, the value and art of re-creation is apparent. For instance, "In a Grove" (Yabu no naka 1922) was written based on a 12th century work in *Tales of Now and Then* (*Konjaku monogatari)*.[117] Not only is this one of his most successful pieces, but it even inspired another re-creation into the acclaimed Kurosawa film, *Rashōmon* (1950), which itself has spawned countless adaptations worldwide. By the act of re-creation, literature serves as the medium between different worlds, be it different cultures, different languages, different mediums or even different times. Just like the Japanese old kami, Akutagawa

[116] Lippit 2002, 42.

[117] The aforementioned "Hell Screen" is also Akutagawa's skillful recreation based on a tale from *A Collection of Tales from Uji* (Uji shūi monogatari) of 13th century. In this case, however, only the character Yoshihide, the painter, and the scene of the burning house where Yoshihide's wife and daughter are trapped inside, are reminiscent of the original.

was an active agent of this transformation; he was a professional author who often used old tales as source materials and created a new beauty.

Akutagawa was, therefore, quite appreciative of foreign imports naturally. In "The Faint Smiles of the Gods," while cherry blossoms are mentioned as giving the creeps to Organtino despite their beauty, the kami appreciates the beauty of the roses, which are presented as the flowers from Europe blooming in the Southern Barbarian Temple amongst other (Japanese) flowers. During his conversation with Organtino, the old man casually plucks a European rose and enjoys the delightful scent. Markedly, there still is the rose on the branch after it has been plucked. The rose in the old man's hand, obviously representing the West, has the exact same color and shape as the original, yet looks somewhat hazier. Once taken by the hand of the kami, the rose has now become Japanized. It has to be stressed that there is no rejection of the beautiful foreign flower; the kami enjoys and appreciates it, but changes, or re-creates it, highlighting that the Japanese kami's power is not about destruction but rather about the creation of new beauty.

In fact, the narrative structure of "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" is also a remarkable manifestation of such power of re-creation. The story consists of four sections;[118] the first three sections make up a coherent story of Organtino in the 16th century Japan, which is told with an omniscient point of view. This is the part of the story that we have been examining thus far. The last section, however, is quite different

[118] There are clear divisions into four parts in the Japanese original, but unfortunately these divisions are absent in the English translation.

because it suddenly has a distinct narrative voice and also because the time frame is now set sometime in 20th century Japan. In this final section, the narrator, no longer an omniscient voice, announces that the first three sections are a story he just recounted by looking at a 16th century old panel painting depicting the arrival of a Southern Barbarian ship. This last section begins with the narrator's internal voice,

> Padre Organtino of the Temple of the Southern Barbarians – but not just Organtino. The red-haired men with proud noses, calmly dragging the skirts of their robes, returned to a panel of a screen painting from amidst the imaginary laurels and roses floating in the glow of twilight. To an old screen painting of three centuries ago depicting the arriving of a Southern Barbarian ship.[119]

The narrator here abruptly reveals that the story of Organtino and kami is itself another instance of a beautiful "re-creation," in this case, from a painting to a story. Thus, the "power that re-creates" is not just told in the story but also exercised by the narrator by the very act of telling the story.

The nationalistic stakes of reclaiming this "power that recreates" for Akutagawa also seems evident in this final section. The following speech of the narrator suggests Akutagawa's view toward the West, and his belief in the power of Japan.

> Good-bye, Padre Organtino! …Whether Deus wins or the Sun Goddess wins – this may still not be an easy question to answer at this time. But it is something that our project will soon determine. You just quietly keep watching us from the shore of the past … certainly *our black ships* will appear on the horizon, and the sound of our cannons will shatter *your obsolete dreams*.[120]

There are a number of blatant allusions to the relationship between the West and Japan. His use of "black ships" (*kurofune*) is the most obvious one that refers to Commodore

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[119] Akutagawa "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" 1999, 127.
[120] Akutagawa "Kamigami no bishō" 1971, 11. Emphasis and translation mine.

Perry's black ships of 1853-1854 symbolizing the powerful Western threat which eventually changed Japan's future. By prefacing black ships with "our" (*ware ware no* 我我の), however, Akutagawa reverses the positions of the West and Japan; it is now the Japanese black ships that will appear on the horizon, and the Westerners including Organtino are the ones who are watching the Japanese black ships in awe. What is more, they will destroy the Westerner's "obsolete dreams" (*furumekashii … yume* 古めかしい（君等の）夢). Here again, we see an ironic twist; the West, typically the symbol of modernity, is now described as having "old" dreams. What could these obsolete dreams be? Since this monologue is addressed to Organtino, it is most likely the Jesuits' dream of converting Japan into a Christian county by destroying Japanese kami and replacing them with the Christian God. As we saw, the story is about how such Western "power that destroys" is not effective in the presence of the Japanese "power that re-creates." In this last section, Akutagawa may be implying that this power is applicable not only to religious, cultural or artistic spheres, but also political or even militaristic ones since he uses the metaphor of "black ships" and "our project" (*wareware no jigyō* 我我の事業). Considering the fact that the 1920s was perhaps the height of Japan's optimistic, liberal period, Akutagawa appears to be hopeful of the strength and development of Japanese national strength based largely on the supremacy of Japan's "re-creative" power over the West's power of destruction. Contrary to Akutagawa's hope, however, Japan would soon take up the "destructive" power and move away from Akutagawa's utopian Japan, which, fortunately or unfortunately, Akutagawa would not be able to see.

3. RECREATING CHRIST INTO ARTIST

In his last essay "The Man of the West," Akutagawa mentions that he "finally came to love the human being called Christ" after his initial fascination with "foreign, exotic" aspects of Christianity and the psychology of the martyr. Indeed, the portrayal of "Christ" in these last essays testifies that Akutagawa admired Christ and his accomplishments greatly. This, however, does not mean that his critical attitude toward Christianity in the early 1920s changed back to a positive one. Nor did he embrace Christianity at the end of his life, as some critics have suggested. Akutagawa espoused Christ but not Christianity, and the "Christ" that he loved is a far cry from the religious icon Jesus Christ. What he does in these last essays is, indeed, completely separate Christ from Christianity and re-create him into an artist. Christianity is described as nothing but "a poetic religion with many contradictions that even Christ could not follow,"[121] whereas Christ is repeatedly referred to as a "poet and journalist," which I argue is equivalent to the "author." By converting the religious icon into an artist, Akutagawa effectively demonstrates art's supremacy over religion. In the following, I first show how Akutagawa recreates Christ into an artist by both downplaying Christ's "religious" aspects as well as illuminating how "artistic" Christ was. Then I consider the question of why he chose Christ as the last motif of his literary career. Utilizing Christ and his relationship to the Holy Spirit and Maria, Akutagawa manifests his philosophy regarding

[121] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 200. クリスト教はクリスト自身も実行することの出来なかった、逆説の多い詩的宗教である。

the relationship between art and life. It is also possibly because Christ was an ideal template for Akutagawa to justify his suicide.

One of the most peculiar features of his last essays is the fact that, while Christ is described in a variety of ways, there is not a single description of Christ as a religious figure, not to mention his role in the establishment of Christianity. Christ is described as a "genius," a "poet," a "journalist," a "bohemian," an "egoist," and a "cultured person," but never as something related to a religious establishment. Amongst the numerous descriptions, the characterization of Christ being a journalist and poet stands out. Not only are there sections specifically referring to these two occupations – Section 19 titled as "Journalist" and Section 22 "Poet"[122] – Akutagawa repeatedly and emphatically asserts that Christ was an excellent journalist and poet.[123] By referring to him in this way, Akutagawa is basically indicating that his "Christ" is an author, just like Akutagawa himself.

In the following excerpt from the section entitled "Journalist," Akutagawa suggests that the most distinguished aspect of Christ is his journalistic skill and insight.

> We cannot see things that are far from us. To say the least, only those close to us can move us. Like all other journalists, Christ intuited this fact. He never preached without making use of things right in front of our eyes – the bride, grapevine, donkey, and workman. "The Good Samaritan" and "The Return of the Prodigal Son" are the masterpiece of such poetry. Later Christian journalists, the priests, used only abstract words and never understood how to be as effective as Christ's

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[122] Akutagawa "Zoku saihō no hito" 1971, 201, 218.

[123] For instance, he writes that Christ "was a first-rate journalist who was not inferior to Roman poets" (212) and "what Christ loved most was his extraordinary journalism" (212). Translation mine.
There is also a section entitled "A Person Who Believes in the Supremacy of Journalism" (*jānarizumu shijō shugi sha* ジャアナリズム至上主義者).

> journalism. Compared to them … Christ was not at all an inferior journalist. His journalism rivals the Western classics. Indeed, he was a journalist who added new firewood onto an old flame.[124]

There are two critical points in this excerpt. One, Christ is described as a brilliant journalist whose means of communication was poetry. Two, the best tool for journalism is said to be the use of concrete examples, and Christ was a brilliant journalist specifically because he was excellent at using them. Christ was a superior journalist to Christian priests because the former used concrete subject matters with which the audience could identify whereas the latter's use of "abstract ideas" can never reach the hearts of people. Significantly, therefore, Akutagawa seems to be alluding that stories and poetry are far more effective than abstract religious axioms in transmitting messages, because, again, the latter does not "move" the audience. In Akutagawa's view, then, "journalism" is not merely the transmission of facts or news, but it also has to impact the audience emotionally. This evidently goes beyond the typical definition of "journalism." What is Akutagawa's notion of a "journalist"?

In his 1927 essay entitled "Literary, All-Too-Literary," Akutagawa declares that "all literature is journalism" and that he himself "was, is, and will be a journalist," [125]

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[124] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 201.我々は唯我々自身に近いものの外は見ることは出来ない。少なくとも我々に迫って来るものは我々自身に近いものだけである。クリストはあらゆるジャアナリストのようにこの事実を直覚していた。花嫁、葡萄園、驢馬、工人—彼の教えは目の当たりにあるものを一度も利用せずにすませたことはない。「善いサマリア人」や「放蕩息子の帰宅」はこう云う彼の詩の傑作である。抽象的な言葉ばかり使っている後代のクリスト教的ジャアナリスト—牧師たちは一度もこのクリストのジャアナリズムの効果を考えなかったのであろう。彼は彼等に比べれば勿論、後代のクリストたちに比べても、決して遜色のあるジャアナリストではない。彼のジャアナリズムはその為に西方の古典と肩を並べている。彼は実に古い炎に新しい薪を加えるジャアナリストだった。

showing his conviction that authors are in essence journalists. When he says "Christ was a journalist," therefore, he is in fact saying that Christ was an author. Although Akutagawa in one instance also calls Christ an author explicitly,[126] his extensive use of the term "journalist" seems to indicate that an author being a journalist was an issue Akutagawa grappled with at the time.

Literary critic, Karatani Kōjin (1990) believes that Akutagawa's expression "Christ was a journalist" indicates his awareness of the emergence of the new readership, the popular audience, of early 20th century Japan.[127] Especially after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, the mid 1920s witnessed a drastic transformation of the publishing industry. As in the "*enpon* boom,"[128] publishers produced similarly inexpensive books and complete works (*zenshū*) that were affordable for the masses.[129] Like Yokomitsu Ri'ichi (1898-1947) who would later propose in his "Theory of the Pure Novel" (1935) that the revival of modern Japanese literature depends on how well the Japanese authors could combine the elements from pure literature and the popular novel,[130] Akutagawa was quite possibly already aware of the inevitable future trajectory of modern Japanese

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[125] Akutagawa "Bungeiteki na amarini bungeitekina" 1971, 147. あらゆる文芸はジヤアナリズムである。… 少なくとも僕はジャアナリストだった。今日もなほジャアナリストである。将来も勿論ジャアナリストであらう。

[126] Akutagawa "Zoku saihō no hito" 1971, 215. "[Christ] was the author of the novellas called 'metaphor.'" クリストは…「譬喩」と呼ばれている短編小説の作者だった。

[127] Karatani 1990, 22.

[128] The publication and distribution of the *Complete Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature* from Kaizōsha in 1926 triggered this boom. It was called "*en-pon*" because each installment was priced only one yen.

[129] For a more detailed account of the change in the publishing industry in the early 20th century Japan, see Mack 2010.

[130] Yokomitsu 1982.

literature: it could not simply remain in the domain of "high art" but had to change to appeal to a popular audience. Akutagawa's belief of "poet" and "journalist" being essential attributes for an author is probably equivalent to Yokomitsu's attempt to combine "pure" and "popular" literature in creating his own "pure novel." Simultaneously, however, Akutagawa also seems to have had anxieties over the direction of such a literary trend. Admitting that "Japan today demanded mass production even in the field of literature" and it was "difficult even for authors to earn a living unless they participated in mass production," he lamented that such a situation would "usually induce the deterioration of quality."[131] Literary works, he believed, were the work of journalism, an enterprise that targets a large number of people, and yet, it has to be done without sacrificing its artistic quality. This is why Christ's attribute of being a "poet" had to be also underscored.

Thus, Akutagawa stresses that stories such as "The Good Samaritan" and "The Return of the Prodigal Son" are referred to as the "masterpieces of his poetry."[132] Another telling anecdote that showcases how Christ was more a poet than a religious figure (if he was at all) appears in the chapter entitled "The Poet" (Shijin 詩人), in which Christ is described as having appreciated the beauty of a lily far more than the "the apex of prosperity in Solomon,"[133] one of the greatest kings who flourished in 10th century

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[131] Akutagawa "Bungeiteki na amarini bungeiteki na" 1971, 152-52. 今日の日本は芸術さへ大量生産を要求している。のみならず作家自身にしても、大量生産しない限り、衣食することも容易ではない。しかし量的向上は大抵質的低下である。
[132] Akutagawa 1971, 201.
[133] Ibid., 202.

B.C.E Israel, the home of Christianity. Furthermore, Christ is said to be superior to John the Baptist because John was unable to understand Romanticism whereas Christ could.[134] Again, no "religious" value comes into play in his appreciation of Christ; Akutagawa's criteria in judging Christ are always "artistic" and never "religious." His intention is unmistakable: his Christ is not a religious figure but, instead, a talented author, a journalist with a sensitive heart of a poet. It is evident that Christ in his essays is none other than Akutagawa himself, as many critics have pointed out.[135]

To be more precise, however, Akutagawa's Christ refers not only to Akutagawa himself but also a group of first-class artists. The expression "Christ*s*" (*kurisuto-tachi*) frequently appears throughout the essays, and writers such as Goethe and Whitman are referred to as Christs. By creating multiple Christs, Akutagawa defies the monotheistic principle of Christianity. Simultaneously, such a configuration also serves as a necessary step for him to elaborate on his philosophy about art, life, and himself as an artist because what mattered to him was not a single religious icon, but the relationship between authors/artists, their life, and their artwork.

The most important scheme that Akutagawa seems to have adapted from Christianity is the notion of trinity. Even though he does not specifically mention the word "trinity," the way he delineates the relationship among Christ(s), the Holy Spirit, and Maria suggests Akutagawa's familiarity with the Christian notion of trinity, and his

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[134] Historically speaking, John is regarded to have baptized Christ: John is therefore usually considered equally important as Christ in terms of their religious significance.
[135] See, for example, Yoshida 1990; Takeuchi 1934.

adept utilization of it. In contrast to the Christian trinity of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, Akutagawa's trinity consists of Christ, "the Holy Spirit" (*seirei*),[136] and "Maria" the latter two are also described as Christ's father and mother respectively.[137] It can, therefore, be shown in the following diagram.

Father Mother
Holy Spirit (聖霊) ------ Maria (マリア)
|
Christ

In his liberal re-configuration of the Christian principle of the Trinity, the most essential figure, "God," in the original is completely absent; there is almost no mention of God in the essays, while both "the Holy Spirit" and "Christ" still play important roles, albeit with very different implications. "The Holy Spirit" seems to have taken the place of "God" since it signifies the Father, the almighty.

I propose that what Akutagawa calls the Holy Spirit actually represents "art," and Maria "life." Considering the fact that Akutagawa is also projecting himself onto Christ, the diagram can be rewritten in the following way:

Father Mother
Holy Spirits (聖霊) = Art ------ Maria (マリア) = Life
|
Christ = Akutagawa (artist)

[136] For instance, it is mentioned in sections such as "3. Holy Spirits," "10. Father," and "26. Like a Child" and many more chapters.
[137] For instance, it is mentioned in sections such as "2. Maria," "33. Pieta," and "36. Life of Christ."

Or, more simply:

Father Mother
Art ------ Life
|
Akutagawa (artist)

The heart of the matter is that Akutagawa uses Christ and his relationships with the Holy Spirit (father) and Maria (mother) to symbolically express his philosophy of art and life, and explain why he has to follow his father – Art – but not his mother – Life. The following is the description of the Holy Spirit (*seirei* 聖霊).

> We will feel a little Holy Spirit in the wind, and also in the flag. The Holy Spirit is not necessarily "holy." It is "what one eternally aspires to surpass" (*eien ni koen to surumono*). Goethe not only always called it "Daemon," but was also always cautious not to be captured by it. Yet, the children of the Holy Spirit – all Christs – share the risk of eventually being captured by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is neither an angel nor a devil. Of course, it is not God, either.[138]

Notably, Akutagawa's Holy Spirit (*seirei*) closely resembles the Japanese kami that we saw in the discussion of "The Faint Smiles of the Gods." The Holy Spirit is everywhere, it is not necessarily holy, it is neither an angel nor the devil, and it is "beyond good and bad." The last attribute of the Holy Spirit even echoes one of the basic principles of Buddhism which denies the dichotomy of good and evil. In other words, the characteristics of the Holy Spirit correspond to the characteristics of Japanese religion, as opposed to the Christian worldview of God being "holy" and "good" as opposed to "evil" and "bad." Although I translated the Japanese term "*seirei*" into the singular form of "the

[138] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 196. Translation mine.

Holy Spirit," it too, like kami, can quite easily be plural since *seirei* is ambiguous in terms of its numeric status.

Most importantly, however, this description, along with other parts of the essays, suggests that the Holy Spirit symbolizes "art." We can replace the word "the Holy Spirit" with "art," and the correspondence is striking. We can find art everywhere such as in the wind and nature; art is not necessarily holy, it is not God, neither an angel nor a devil, and art cannot be measured with the moralistic judgment of good or bad. This interpretation also provides a clue to understand the puzzling expression of the Holy Spirit being "what one eternally aspires to surpass."

Because the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit is that of the son and the father, and since Akutagawa is Christ and the Holy Spirit is art, it then means that art is the father of Akutagawa, just as I suggested in the revised diagram. This makes sense because Akutagawa must have been inspired by a number of works of art before he became an artist; in other words, we can say that art is the father of Akutagawa. Art gave birth to the artist Akutagawa. Like any other artist, Akutagawa must have aspired to emulate and to surpass the previous artists and artworks by producing something even more beautiful than his predecessors, hence the expression that the Holy Spirit (art) being "what one eternally aspires to surpass." This analysis also confirms our previous discussion about his perception of the relationship between "original" and "imitation." When Akutagawa used source materials for his production, the "source materials" can be

considered a kind of the "father" of his production. Certainly, as an artist producing his own artworks, he must have aimed to surpass this "father."

In the section entitled "Resurrection," Akutagawa writes, "the children of the Holy Spirit always left something beautiful behind … that is, 'what one eternally aspires to surpass.'"[139] Since the Holy Spirit is the father of Christs, this basically means that Christs – that is, the first-rate artists – always leave "something beautiful" when they die.[140] Now, because Akutagawa's Christ is not just one man, but included Akutagawa and many other acclaimed artists such as Goethe, "something beautiful" that artists leave suggests the creative works of art that the artists created during their lifetime and leave behind when they die, be it novels, poetry or painting. Art bears artists, and artists in turn bear art. After his death, Akutagawa too would leave behind something beautiful, his literary works. And, as mentioned above, Akutagawa's artworks indeed inspired prospective artists, and their artworks bore even more artists and so on. Thus, the Holy Spirit, the father, is art for Akutagawa, and this also means that even Christ was created by art, not by God. Art is God, or rather, God, the ultimate creator, is Art.

The last question to be considered here is why Akutagawa had to choose between Art and life. Why could he not simply choose both of them when obviously he considered Goethe as the one who found a balance between art and life? There is no clear answer to this question, but his struggle between "life" and "art" is symbolically expressed as the competition between the father, the Holy Spirit, and the mother, Maria, throughout these

[139] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 208.
[140] He mentions this after describing "life" as something like boundless plain.

essays. It was not that Christ-cum-Akutagawa did not love his life, Maria. On the contrary, Akutagawa clung to it by struggling with the overwhelming power of the father: "Christ attempted to fight against the Holy Spirit – that is, himself – using utmost of his dying energy."[141] And yet, "[Christ] was much more under the control of the Holy Spirit, his father, than Maria, his mother" and "the tragedy of him on the cross originates from this."[142] In another instance, Akutagawa also explains that his path toward death was set by a power beyond his control:

> [H]e couldn't help but feel that his imminent death. … Christ probably couldn't help but feel nostalgic about his life on the earth. But his path was inevitably set toward the direction of deserted heaven. … The Holy Spirit that bore Christ never gave him peace.[143]

Akutagawa's inevitable death may be a little reminiscent of Yoshihide, the painter, in "Hell Screen." Yoshihide kills himself once he completed his masterpiece, an excellent painting of "hell." His suicide may be due to his sense of guilt over letting his daughter to be brutally killed in the fire, but it may also possibly be because, after completion of his masterpiece, he thought he was no longer worthy of living. Likewise, perhaps, the artist Akutagawa could not but follow the Holy Spirit, art, because it was ultimately more important than life. Tellingly, in the essay, Christ is described as having no choice but to make his life just one of the entries of his story: "Christ … was one of those who could

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[141] Akutagawa "Saihō no hito" 1971, 205.
[142] Ibid., 208.
[143] Ibid., 203.クリストも…かう云う下界の人生に懐かしさを感じずにはいなかったであらう。しかし彼の道は嫌でも人気のない天に向かっている。…彼を生んだ聖霊は彼に平和を与えようとしない。

not help but add an entry of his entire life in the indexes of his [artistic] works."[144] Akutagawa's later works such as "Spinning Gears" (1927) and "Fool's Life" (1927) may be seen as his attempt of making his life into his artwork instead of making his works a part of his life. Art is larger than life. To complete this operation of injecting his life into his artwork, however, Akutagawa might have considered that timely death was needed in order to promote his theory of art – journalism – as the supreme power, just like Christ who "sacrificed everything in order to be crucified – in order to promote his theory of journalism as the supreme power."[145] Markedly, he also asserts that Christ was "certain that his journalism was going to be admired by a large number of readers some day."[146] Indeed, Akutagawa's death would secure his position as one of the most prominent modern Japanese authors. The establishment of the "Akutagawa Literary Prize" by Kikuchi Kan in 1935, which is still the most prestigious literary award in Japan to this day, cemented the legacy of Akutagawa permanently. The role of his death in this "rebirth" could be what Akutagawa saw in Christ; Christ was the perfect model for Akutagawa to justify his suicide as an act of dedicating his life to his art. The conversion of religious Christ into artist Christ was Akutagawa's manifestation of art's supremacy, in which even life itself was made into a mere index in his artwork.

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[144] Akutagawa "Zoku saihō no hito" 1971, 215. クリストも彼の一生を彼の作品の索引につけずにはいられない一人だった。
[145] Ibid., 218. 彼は十字架にかかる為に、―ジャアナリズム至上主義を押し立てる為にあらゆるものを犠牲にした。
[146] Ibid., 213. クリストは彼のジャアナリズムのいつか大勢の読者の為に持て囃されることを確信していた。

Despite the seeming final turn to religion, therefore, throughout his entire life Akutagawa was consistent with his belief in the supremacy of art over anything, including religion and even life. Christianity was instrumental because it was by juxtaposing Christianity with Japanese religion that he began to see his native cultural and religious environment with a new perspective, and came to see the benefit of such religious milieu. It was also through this comparison that he identified what he calls the "power that re-creates," which constituted his philosophy of artistic creation. It is quite possible that his positive view toward Japanese religion stemmed from its affinity for the process of artistic creation. It is, however, both ironic and unfortunate that this "power that re-creates," that Akutagawa embraced most, was what killed him in the end.

Chapter 3 The "Pure Novel" of the Lost Home: Yokomitsu Ri'ichi's *Ryoshū*

As seen in the previous chapter, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke writing in the early 20th century celebrated the "power that re-creates" as the foundational strength underpinning not only Japanese cultural and religious heritage, but also its art. Akutagawa did not seem to have feared the loss of cultural identity; he welcomed and appreciated foreign imports, including religion, culture, and art, as essential resources for his re-creation. First and foremost, Akutagawa lived the life of an active agent of such (re-)creation, as an artist, who trusted and embraced the re-creative power of Japanese culture.

Akutagawa's confidence in Japanese cultural identity is largely lacking in the case of fellow writer Yokomitsu Ri'ichi's (1898-1947) *A Traveler's Sadness* [*Ryoshū*][147] (1937-1946), an unfinished lengthy novel that began serializing a decade after Akutagawa's suicide. By the late 1930s, issues of modernity, Westernization, and Japanese identity were being hotly debated among authors and intellectuals under increasingly imperializing Japan, perhaps most famously in the roundtable discussion entitled "Overcoming Modernity" (*Kindai no chōkoku*).[148] Yokomitsu too was clearly apprehensive about the overwhelming importations from the West and feared that they could destroy Japanese identity. As one of the leading writers in the early 20th century

[147] Henceforth, *Traveler's*.
[148] This discussion was held in 1942 and was subsequently published in the literary magazine, *Bungakkai* in the same year.

Japan, he was also acutely concerned about the stagnation of modern Japanese literature, and lamented that Japanese writers knew more about European literature than that of Japan. His frustration is most clearly expressed in his 1935 essay entitled "Theory of the Pure Novel" (*Junsui shōsetsu ron*), in which he writes sarcastically: "The tradition of Japanese literature is French literature and Russian literature. If we cannot produce a pure novel written by the Japanese, writers should altogether quit writing."[149] What he calls the "pure novel" is, as he defines, a combination of "pure literature" and "popular novel" that offers the only way to revive modern Japanese literature.[150] Since it is my contention that *Traveler's* is Yokomitsu's attempt to create his "pure novel." Below, I first briefly examine the historical milieu that gave birth to the idea of the "pure novel," followed by an examination of *Traveler's* in which Yokomitsu explores the intertwined issues of religion, national identity and art through the protagonist's search for his national identity in the early 20th century Japan.

1. YOKOMITSU'S "PURE POPULAR NOVEL"

Beginning from the 1920s, the Japanese literary scene was changing drastically. The publication of the *Complete Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature* (*Gendai*

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[149] Yokomitsu 1982, 245.
日本文学の伝統とは、フランス文学であり、ロシア文学だ。もうこの上、日本から日本人としての純粋小説が現れなければ、むしろ作家は筆を折るに如くはあるまい。

[150] There has been a distinction between "pure literature" (*jun bungaku*) and "popular literature" (*taishū bungaku*) throughout the history of modern Japanese literature, where the former connotes highbrow, artistic literary works and the latter much more entertainment-oriented, popular works. This divide is still present today; the fact that there exists two most influential literary awards, the Akutagawa Literary Prize for "pure" literature and the Naoki Literary Prize for "popular" works, attests to this on-going divide. For more discussion on this "pure" versus "popular" division, see Strecher 1996.

Nihon bungaku Zenshū) from Kaizōsha in 1926 triggered what is often referred as the "*enpon* boom,"[151] making books much more accessible to the emerging new middle-class consumers. To have the *Complete Works* at home became a mark of one's social status; "not only did this series make a single image of contemporary literature available to a much larger audience than ever before – including consumers throughout the country and Japanese speakers living abroad – but it also invested that literature with a prestige it had not previously enjoyed."[152] As literary critic Karatani Kōjin aptly put it, this phenomenon heralded the "popularization of intellect" (*chi no taishûka* 知の大衆化), [153] making literature reach beyond the confines of intellectuals.

Along with the changes in the publication industry and the readership, the revival of literature (*bungei fukkō* 文芸復興) was one of the most urgent issues in the Japanese literary guild (*bundan*) in the 1920s and 30s. Because proletarian and popular literatures thrived especially after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, those writers who believed in the value of "pure literature" (*jun bungaku*) grew increasingly apprehensive about the future of Japanese literature. According to literary historian Matthew Strecher:

> writers of *taishūbungaku* [popular literature] were monopolizing serialized publication in newspapers, and there was confusion among members of the *bundan* about what direction *junbugaku* [pure literature] was ultimately to take. In 1933, however, the proletarian movement withered … Around this time, the atmosphere of confusion into which the *bundan* had been plunged suddenly lifted.

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[151] These books are called "en-pon" because each installment was priced at only one yen, which was much cheaper than the price of the books prior to the period. Prompted by Kaizōsha's Complete works (*zenshū*), many other publishers similarly started to produce inexpensive books and other collections of complete works.
[152] Mack 2010, 93.
[153] Karatani 1990, 19.

> Kawabata Yasunari published a piece in *Bungakukai* in which he noted that 'a literary renaissance' was beginning.[154]

Following Kawabata's article, debates about how to revive modern Japanese literature and about the "pure" and "popular/vulgar" divide abounded among a number of authors, critics, and journalists.[155] Yokomitsu's 1935 essay, "Theory of the Pure Novel" was, without a doubt, in keeping with this trend. In his call for the "pure novel," one can sense an unmistakable tone of urgency to include elements of the "popular." He starts his essay with the declaration: "If a revival of [Japanese] literature is ever possible, it can never be achieved other than through a literature that is simultaneously "pure literature" (*jun bungaku*) and "popular novel" (*taishū shōsetsu*) – I believe this even now."[156] Attributing the downfall of modern Japanese literature to advocates of Realism, who mistakenly believed that reporting the facts was the only way to deliver reality, Yokomitsu insists that the direction of modern Japanese literature should be rectified by the creation of the "pure novel" that combines "pure literature" and "popular novel."

Yokomitsu maintains that one of the most serious offences of the Realist writer is the misconception that including "coincidences" (*gūzen*) and "sentimentality?" (*kanshō*) would only make literary works vulgar, when, in fact, they do not necessarily ruin the

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[154] Strecher 1996, 362.

[155] As Strecher elaborates in his article, we need to be careful with the Japanese words such as *tsūzoku* and *taishū*, where the former generally translated as "vulgar" or "mundane" and the latter "mass" or "popular." Yokomitsu in his essay "Theory of the Pure Novel" specifically uses the term "tsūzoku" as in his expressions of "tsūzoku shōsetsu" (popular novel – although he is not using the term "taishū," it is usually translated as 'popular' as a genre in this case) as well as the description of the element of "vulgar/mundane" in literary works.

[156] Yokomitsu 1982, 233.
もし文藝復興というべきことがあるのなら、純文学にして通俗小説、このこと以外に、文芸復興は絶対にあり得ない、と今も私は思っている。

quality of the work as long as they are accompanied by the author's philosophy (*shisō*) and the reality that underpins it. Regarding works such as Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) as the epitome of the "pure novel," he emphasizes the importance of "mundane human activities" and writes,

> The more one gets closer to the truth of human activities, the more one realizes that human activities are full of some kind of mundane things … and therefore world's first-rate writers never fail to include them. What's more, the "mundane" becomes less commonplace when these writers depict the truth of the fascinating "commonplace" activities.[157]

Yokomitsu believes that "mundane" (*tsūzoku*) elements in life do not make the novel "mundane" because activities normally considered mundane, such as sentiments and coincidences are actual realities of our everyday life. Japanese realist writers were too afraid to include the description of mundane activities, however, because they mistakenly believed that writing about them makes their writings too "mundane." He declares: "We need to abolish the real mundane. In order to achieve this, we need a spirit not afraid of mundane human activities."[158] As discussed below, the most salient motif of *Traveler's* is the romance between the two main characters, Yashiro and Chizuko, a typical "mundane" aspect of human life and filled with many "coincidences" and "sentimental" feelings. It attracted a very wide readership and became the most popular novel among Yokomitsu's

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[157] Ibid., 243-244.
人間活動の真に迫れば迫る程、人間の活動というものは、実に瞠目するほど通俗的な何物かで満ちているとすれば、この不思議な秘密と事実を、世界の一流の大作家は見逃す筈はないのである。しかも彼らは、この通俗的な人間の面白さを、その面白さのままに近づけて真実に書けばかくほど、通俗ではなくなったのだ。

[158] Ibid., 244.
真の通俗を廃しなければならならぬ。そのためには、何より人間活動の通俗を恐れぬ精神が必要なのだ。

works when first serialized in the newspaper then in magazines.[159] This is clearly because the development of Yashiro and Chizuko's romantic relationship appealed to the mass audience. Hints of triangular relationships and jealousy among the characters are also common. Particularly in the first part, there are many tantalizing moments to be anxious about whether the love between Yashiro and Chizuko can survive through several obstacles; the thrill was probably even more enhanced because the story was serialized and the reader could uncover how their romance develops only little by little. Notably, their relationship remains "platonic," which is because, as Kamei Katsuichirō correctly points out, Yokomitsu was a strong anti-Realist writer who detested the I-novel trend where physically oriented love (or "lust") was considered and praised as true and realistic.[160] By setting one of the mundane human activities of "romance" in the center of the novel, Yokomitsu achieved inclusion of the element of "popular" and succeeded in attracting a very wide audience.

But *Traveler's* is not a mere love story. It is also full of ideas and thoughts that cover a very wide range of topics from national identity, modernity, tradition, science, history, and religion. Its ideological content is most clear during the constant debates between Yashiro and Kuji, a good friend of Yashiro's. If the "romantic" elements of the story are designed to appeal to the masses, the exchanges of "philosophy" (*shisō*)

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[159] It was first serialized in Tokyo Nichinichi newspaper and Osaka Mainichi newspaper in 1937. Then, the following parts are published in the literary magazine *Bungei Shunjū* from 1939-40, 1942-43, and in *Bungakkai* from 1943-44, and again in *Bungei Shunjū* from 1944-45. Finally, after the war, the very last part (unfinished) was published in *Ningen* in 1946.
[160] Kamei 1955, 50.

between the two friends help it retain the "pure" literature quality. As I will elaborate, Yokomitsu weaves these two motifs of romance and ideology into *Traveler's* by juxtaposing the two relationships of Yashiro and Chizuko on the one hand, and Yashiro and Kuji on the other hand.

One other crucial component of *Traveler's* that qualifies it as a pure novel is its use of multiple points of view. In his discussion of the "pure novel," Yokomitsu also points out that it should demonstrate the human reality by providing the viewpoints and thoughts of multiple characters, instead of just a single character's perspective.[161] He also notes that even though it would be impossible for the author to elucidate all thoughts behind each and every character, the author should "at least face each character, grasping their thoughts through their relationships, and keeping these in balance with the ideas of the author."[162] In *Traveler's*, even though Yashiro is clearly the most prominent character, there are several major characters such as Chizuko and Kuji whose relationships with Yashiro are essential to depicting issues such as modernity and the search for national identity. The author's thoughts are not expressed via a single character, but through various characters and the interactions among them. Thematically and stylistically, therefore, there is no question that *Traveler's* is Yokomitus's "pure novel." With its central story of romance, the author's thoughts are orchestrated with

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[161] Yokomitsu 1982, 241. 作者は、萬難を切りぬけて、ともかく一応は幾人もの人間と顔を合わせ、さうして、それらの人物の思ふところをある関係に於いてとらへ、これを作者の思想と均衡させつつ、中心に向つて集中して行かねばならぬ。

[162] Ibid. 登場人物各人の尽くの思ふ内部を、一人の作者が尽く一人で摑むことなど不可能であってみれば、何事か作者の企画に馳せ参ずる人物の回転面の集合が、作者の内部と相関関係を保って進行しなければならぬ。このときその進行過程が初めて思想というある時間になる。

many characters who participate in the discussions of wide ranging topics from the search for national identity, religion, as well as the issue of modernity, clearly featuring both attributes of "popular novel" and "pure literature," as he defines them.

2. THEMES IN *A TRAVELER'S SADNESS*

One of the most important themes of the novel is the search for Japanese identity. The title of the novel, *Ryoshū* (旅愁), most clearly attests to this: *ryoshū* refers to the feeling of longing for home while traveling. The protagonist, Yashiro, already starts to miss home when he is on the ship to Europe and this sense of homelessness continues not only during his stay in Europe but also after coming back to Japan. As exemplified by the famous essay "Literature of the Lost Home" (Kokyō o ushinatta bungaku, 1933) by the renowned Japanese literary critic Kobayashi Hideo (1902-1983), the sense of cultural homelessness was one of the most discussed topics that occupied the minds of intellectuals at that time. Yokomitsu himself had travelled Europe in 1936 and written about it in *European Travelogue* (*Ōshū kikō*, 1936-1937), just before he started writing *Traveler's*.[163] As Lippit (2002) observes, this travelogue reveals Yokomitsu's own reactions and observations about Europe, which seems to have served as the springboard for his ideas about national identity and the sense of lost home in *Traveler's*.

[163] See Lippit 2002, 212-215 for more detailed information about Yokomitsu's trip to Europe.

Even in its unfinished form, *Traveler's* is a lengthy novel of over five hundred pages,[164] consisting of two parts: the first part is staged mostly in Europe and the second part in Japan. The novel opens with Yashiro and Kuji, the two male characters, talking about the young and beautiful Japanese girl Chizuko with whom they became acquainted on the ship to Europe after she wrote Kuji and informed him that she is coming to Paris from London soon. After Chizuko's arrival, the three of them spend time together while Kuji and Yashiro frequently debate at length their differing views toward European as opposed to traditional Japanese values. Kuji loves and admires European culture and technology, whereas Yashiro is very skeptical about embracing values originating from the West, and constantly misses and longs for Japan. During their time together in Europe, Yashiro and Chizuko's romance also begins to bloom, but it is in the second half of the story, after Yashiro and Chizuko (and eventually all the other characters as well) come back to Japan, that the focus shifts from ponderous ideological debates between the two men to the development of the romantic relationship between Yashiro and Chizuko. While there is no question about their earnest affection for each other, Yashiro begins to feel anxious about Chizuko's religion, Catholicism, as he sees her religion as a potential obstacle for their relationship. At this point, he becomes interested in Ancient Shinto, an earlier form of Shinto,[165] because he believes that it will help him overcome his anxiety over their religious differences. Since the author, Yokomitsu, passed away due to illness

[164] Kawade Shobō 1967 Nihon bungaku zenshū II-13 has 511 pages. Currently, there is no English translation available.

[165] Ancient Shinto, or *Koshintō*, is usually considered an earlier form of Shinto, but Yashiro has his own theory about what Ancient Shinto is. I will elaborate on this point in my discussion of Yashiro and Chizuko's relationship.

in 1947 without completing the novel, the reader does not witness Yashiro and Chizuko actually getting married. Yet, because the couple overcomes several obstacles and completes the formal ceremonial exchange of betrothal gifts called *yuinō*, it is quite likely that Yokomitsu intended the successful marriage between the two in the end.

Yashiro's search for Japanese identity is exhibited in two ways; a spiritual search and a more practical one, which deals with the question of how to handle knowledge and technologies imported from the West. In terms of spiritual issues, religion plays a central role because it is predominantly through the juxtaposition between Catholicism and Ancient Shinto that Yashiro attempts to establish his sense of national identity. Most importantly, Yashiro discovers Ancient Shinto because his girlfriend Chizuko is Catholic and he needs something to help him deal with it. In terms of more practical issues, Yashiro and Kuji's constant debates about most clearly illuminate Yashiro's concerns about how to handle modernization and the massive importation of science, technologies and rational thinking from the West without losing one's Japanese identity. Kuji values rationalism and believes that there is "a universal logic" (万国通年の論理 41) that Japan should also follow, whereas Yashiro insists that Japan should value its own morality over Western rationalism. Unlike the successful marriage of Yashiro and Chizuko and resolution spiritual difference, the two men never reach an agreement on the ideological issues of national difference.

2-1. The Marriage between Ancient Shinto and Catholicism

The story centers around the development of Yashiro and Chizuko's romantic relationship; the element of romance, its "popular novel" component, is essential to keep the reader engaged in the progress of their love. It is, however, extremely important to underscore that Yashiro and Chizuko's romantic relationship is not merely a love story, but deeply connected to the issue of one's search for national identity: only when Yashiro successfully finds or establishes his confidence with his national identity, can he marry Chizuko, a Catholic girl. In other words, the arc of their love story is superimposed onto Yashiro's search for Japanese identity for which the dichotomy between Catholicism and Ancient Shinto holds the key. As the scholar of nationalism and ethnicity, Anthony D. Smith persuasively demonstrates, religion is one of the most essential and powerful elements that could buttress the sense of national identity.[166] Given Chizuko's Catholicism, it seems, therefore, quite natural that Yashiro sought some form of Japanese religious traditions to ensure his Japanese identity. By situating the issue of religion – Chizuko's Catholicism – as the most prominent obstacle to their romance and marriage, Yokomitsu ensures that the quest for spirituality is tied to national identity. Their "love story" is simultaneously about Yashiro's search for how to accommodate Western versus Japanese spirituality, a search that is inevitably tied to nationalistic sentiments throughout.

[166] See, for instance, *Chosen People* (2003), *National Identity* (1991) by Smith.

The love between Yashiro and Chizuko develops slowly but steadily while traveling in Europe. They come to trust and care for each other and "marriage" is naturally on both of their minds. In the earlier stage of their relationship, however, Yashiro is at first quite doubtful that this affair will eventually bear any fruit because of their families' different social status; Chizuko is from a very wealthy and renowned family whereas he is middle class. Even though he is increasingly attracted to Chizuko, Yashiro often speculates that "it is better for them not to see each other once they return to Japan," because he fears that she will inevitably change when faced with "the central core of Japan -- social status, rank, wealth, pedigree, family traditions."[167] Once they are actually back in Japan and start seeing each other again, however, Yashiro discovers that what he feared – the difference in their social standing – does not pose much problem. Instead, Chizuko's religion, Catholicism, becomes a serious issue for Yashiro in considering their marriage, and he starts searching for something he can rely on as the source of his Japanese identity: this is why he seeks out Ancient Shinto. While Chizuko does not worry about their religious difference, Yashiro is impelled to find a way to overcome his apprehension about Chizuko's religion. But why is Catholicism so problematic for him?

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[167] Yokomitsu 1967, 252.
どちらも帰って会うよりも、会わない方が互いのためだと思った。地位、身分、財産、血統、家風などという、日本の内部を形造っている厳然とした事実の中へ帰っていって、なおそのまま二人の幻影を忍ばせ、支えつづけて行くためには、二人は今のうちにひらりと変り、互いにこのまま会わない方が変わらぬことにもなっていく。

Yashiro knew that Chizuko was Catholic from early on, but he did not pay much attention to it initially. After the trip to Europe, however, Yashiro, a semi-professional historian, becomes increasingly interested in the history of Japan as well as of his own family, and learns that the first Jesuits who came to Japan in the 16th century had a fatal role both on the national and personal scales. He was particularly disturbed by the fact that when the Jesuits attempted to convert Japan into a Christian nation, they completely rejected Japanese cultural heritage as heretic. Furthermore, his own ancestors – an old samurai family – were killed by the first Catholic-convert Lord with the artillery that came along with the Jesuits. "When Yashiro thought that he … was finally going to marry Chizuko, he heard the groan of his ancestors from behind, who were destroyed by it [Catholicism], attacking him much more strongly."[168] Thus, for Yashiro, marrying Chizuko feels like betraying his ancestors.

Yashiro's apprehension about Catholicism, or, more broadly about Christianity, does not only stem from these past histories, however.[169] Yashiro is also an intellectual concerned about the issue of modernity and Japan's position in relation to the West today in 1930s Japan. He cannot separate Christianity, which is a foreign, Western religion, from other Western imports, including the guns that killed his ancestors and values like

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[168] Yokomitsu 1967, 345.
矢代は…自分がいよいよ千鶴子と結婚するのだと思うと…それに滅ぼされた自分の先祖たちが、自分の背後から立ち襲って来る呻きの方を強く感じた。

[169] Although several distinctive differences exist amongst different Christian traditions, such as Catholicism and Protestantism, in this novel sectarian difference does not seem to be an issue. The fact that Chizuko believes in a form of Christianity, rather than Catholicism per se, is important. Therefore, I use the terms "Catholicism" and "Christianity" interchangeably when comparing Yashiro and Chizuko's religiosity.

science. Despite his awareness that Christianity and science have a long history of violent conflict in Europe, they are still strongly tied in his view, because, first, the spirit that engendered natural science had been fostered within the cultural and religious milieu of Christianity in Europe,[170] and, second, Christianity and guns entered Japan together and his ancestors were killed by the combination of the two. Yashiro's strong skepticism toward modernity, Western science, rationalism, which constitutes the major sources of numerous, heated debates with Kuji, the pro-European Japanese, are not unrelated to his distrust of Christianity.

Another factor fueling Yashiro's apprehension about Christianity is the fact that it is a religion based on strong monotheistic and exclusivist principles. He learns that the first Jesuits condemned Japanese cultural and religious heritage such as ancestor worship as evil, and demanded those who became Christian to only worship their God. He worries that these principles of monotheism and exclusivism might conflict with Yashiro's mother's affiliation with the Hokke Buddhism sect, a rare monotheistic Buddhist sect in Japan. He fears that Chizuko's Catholic faith will interfere with their relationship, although, ironically, in truth it is Yashiro, and not Chizuko, who pays excessive attention to their "religious differences." Chizuko never shows any concern for Yashiro being non-Catholic even though Catholicism usually demands their marriage partners to be

[170] The issue regarding the relationship between religion and science is a fascinating topic; a given religion's compatibility with science seems to have been an important factor at that time. For instance, in *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (1992), Thomas Tweed argues that Buddhism appealed to some Americans in the early 20th century precisely because Buddhism was seen much more compatible with science than Christianity. In the novel, too, Yashiro often postulates that Ancient Shinto has some scientific value.

Catholic. It is the agnostic Yashiro who feels threatened by Chizuko's religion, and begins to search for something he can rely on. Yet, his love for her is so strong that he decides to come up with something to help him overcome this anxiety: Ancient Shinto.

> But even so, Yashiro thought, he didn't particularly believe that Catholicism was bad. Yet, considering the history of his house, he had misgivings that it might interfere with their marriage. Yashiro felt like he needed some appropriate power from outside in order to get rid of his qualms. Where could he find such an outside power? Indeed, he really wanted a peaceful, generous, supportive power that would allow, or even justify Chizuko's Catholicism. But, Buddhism wouldn't do. Shinto was even worse. Yashiro could not find anything but Ancient Shinto [Koshintō] among things available in Japan. In this way, Yashiro began to shop for the books related to Ancient Shinto here and there whenever he had time.[171]

Like the majority of Japanese people both in the past as well as in the present, Yashiro himself is not particularly "religious";[172] he does not specifically think about Japanese religion or identity until he goes to Europe. But as the prospect of their marriage becomes more and more real, he begins to feel a certain amount of fear for Christianity, and that is why Yashiro has to find an "outside power" in order to confront Catholicism and that is how he becomes interested in Ancient Shinto.[173]

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[171] Yokomitsu: 1967, 298-299.
しかし、こんなに思っても、それならカソリックを悪いと思っている自分ではないと、矢代は思った。ただ、自分の家に限っては、二人の結婚に邪魔になる危惧がある。その危惧を取り払う努力をするには、何か適当な外の力をかりねばいられぬときが来そうな気持ちがした。そうして、その外の力とは、いったいどこからそれを探し出せば良いのだろう。実際、矢代はそんな千鶴子のカソリックをも赦し、むしろそれを援ける平和な寛大な背後の力を欲しかった。しかし、それには仏教でも駄目だと思った。また神道でもなお悪かった。そうしてみると、日本の中にあるものでは、古神道以外に先ず矢代には一つも見つからなかった。このようにして、矢代は暇を見てはだんだん古神道の書物を買い漁るようになるのだった。

[172] I am using the term "religious" here in terms of whether one consciously identifies oneself as a believer of a particular religion.

[173] Yashiro's fear toward Catholicism, or more generally Japanese people's fear for foreign invasion, can be placed within a much wider historical perspective. For instance, National Studies (*Kokugaku*) emerged and flourished in the middle of the Edo period (1600-1867) because scholars such as Motoori Norinaga

What is *Koshintō* (古神道), or Ancient Shinto? Ancient Shinto is generally considered to be the equivalent of Restoration Shinto (*Fukko shintō* 復古神道), which refers to "a major movement among scholars, beginning in the 17th century and culminating in the 19th century, that sought to determine the true form of Shintō in ancient Japan before the introduction of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism."[174] There was a little confusion in discussing the use of this term among Japanese literary critics,[175] but it seems that the way the term was used in the novel is not exactly same as the current use of it. Indeed, quite contrary to the way today's definition of *Koshintō* or *Fukko Shintō*, Yashiro stresses the inclusive nature of Ancient Shinto in the novel.

Emphasizing how it is "different from Shinto" and that it is "not a religion," Yashiro explains Ancient Shinto to Chizuko in the following way: "In my opinion, [Ancient-Shinto] is a peaceful wish of the Japanese people from the ancient times that

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(1730-1801) became anxious about the domination of Confucian and Buddhist teachings. The ban of Christianity in the 16th century was clearly the result of the fear of Christian invasion. Maxey (2007) suggests that there has been constant fear of Christianity since when it was first introduced because "Christian conversion posed a threat precisely because 'religious' identities and practices were deemed inseparable from political loyalties and boundaries" (4).

[174] Japan Knowledge: Kōdansha definition.
Even today, though, scholars use this term Koshintō rather differently. For instance, Emi Mase-Hasegawa (2008) uses the term Koshintō in her discussion of Endō Shūsaku, and although she does not provide its definition, it seems to be the equivalent of what the Shinto scholar Inoue Nobutaka sees as one branch of Shinto, a kind of "folk religion," which is "a generic term for popular beliefs and practices that are not directly controlled by a shrine, temple, or church or led by a religious professional such as a priest, a monk or a minister" (2).

[175] In the 1970 article entitled "Wartime Literature" (Senjika no bungaku), literary critic Yasunaga Taketo cites Hoshō Masao's research about the term *koshintō* and states that this term was non-existent in 1942 when Yokomitsu first used it in the serialization of *Traveler's*. This claim has been proven false, however. The word *koshintō* had been used in Watsuji Tetsurō's *Koji junrei* (1919), as well as in Shimazaki Tōson's *Yoake mae* (1932-35). (Japanese language encyclopedia (*Nihon kokugo daijiten)*. Thus it is improbable that Yokomitsu actually created the word. Nonetheless, the fact that Hoshō, a reputable critic known as a Yokomitsu specialist, mistakenly believed that this term was non-existent at that time and that the use of the term began in the early 20th century suggest that the term was probably not well-circulated at that time.

doesn't allow any oppositions. So, unlike Christianity or Buddhism, for example, it doesn't have any prejudice against other religions nor reject them."[176] Yashiro stresses the non-exclusivist nature of Ancient-Shinto in contrast to Christianity and Buddhism because it resolves his dilemma and allows for his peaceful marriage with Chizuko. As we saw above, Yashiro claims "Shinto" is disqualified as especially ill-fitted ("Shinto was even worse") for his needs, because it is linked to the early 20th century infamous State Shinto, an imperialist ideology of the government. By saying that Shinto is particularly inadequate, Yashiro attempts to disassociate his Ancient Shinto from both State Shinto and the political ideology it entails. He also rejects Buddhism as a bad fit, because, as his mother's Hokke Buddhism exemplifies, Buddhism has an exclusivist side to it. More importantly, however, Buddhism "wouldn't do" because, after all, it is a foreign religion and cannot fulfill Yashiro's need to find something "Japanese." Although sounding contradictory, Yashiro looks for something "purely Japanese" that would be tolerant of foreign religions, including Chizuko's Catholicism.

Ironically, however, Yashiro's idea of Ancient Shinto resembles the political, imperialistic ideology of State Shinto (*Kokka shintō*) in the early Meiji period precisely because of his assertion that Ancient Shinto is not a religion, in other words, Ancient Shinto transcends "religion." Yashiro reassures Chizuko that "Ancient Shinto is also within you," making it sound like it is a racial attribute, as if it was something

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[176] Yokomitsu: 1967, 338.
一切のものの対立ということを認めない、日本人本来の非常に平和な希いだと僕は思うんです。ですから、たとえばキリスト教や仏教のように、外の宗教を排斥するという偏見は少しもないのですよ。

physiologically contained in the blood of the Japanese "from the ancient times."[177] From the late 19th century, State Shinto was declared as a non-religion but a government institution; it was a strategy employed by the Meiji state in order to conveniently make it obligatory for all Japanese subjects to observe and attend shrine rites without violating the Western ideologies of "freedom of religion" and the "separation of church and state."[178] "Shinto" at that time was more a political ideology, and it is precisely because of this reason that Yashiro distinguishes "Ancient Shinto" from "Shinto" and rejects the latter as a candidate for Yashiro's ally, the "supporting power," in his attempt to face and embrace Chizuko's religion of Catholicism. Still, Yashiro's idea of Ancient Shinto ends up showing a strong nationalistic conception similar to State Shinto, because, even though Yashiro does not mean to be "political," by suggesting that Ancient Shinto is a biological attribute of the Japanese and therefore transcendent of religion, the logic seems very similar to the way the state was asserting that the Emperor was the source of Japan's national unity. Despite this similarity, however, we still need to remember that Yashiro's motive for relying on Ancient Shinto is to bridge the gap between himself and Chizuko; he never, even once, considers asking Chizuko to give up her religion throughout the story. Thus, even though Yashiro's Ancient Shinto unwittingly becomes similar to a

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[177] Yokomitsu: 1967, 338-339.

[178] The Meiji era Japanese government did not want the West to consider Japan a backward nation, so it was important to display that Japan followed the ideas of "separation of church and state" and "freedom of religion," but at the same time they did not want anyone refuse participating Shinto rites because of their personal religious beliefs. By making Shinto a non-religious entity, they could make it obligatory for even Christians to participate in the Shinto rites, because Shinto rites were not "religion." For a more detailed account of the government's strategy to re-establish "Shinto" as a government institution in the early Meiji period, see Hardacre 1989.

certain aspect of State Shinto, his purpose was never to reject or destroy foreign spirituality but to accommodate it. It is the means by which Yashiro conceives the spirit of Japanese identity.

2-2. Endless debate over Western knowledge - Is Yashiro a Nationalist?

While Yashiro and Chizuko's relationship illuminates his attempts to create a Japanese spirituality which can marry the imported western religion of Catholicism to Japan's native religion of Ancient Shinto through their eventual marriage, Yashiro and Kuji's debate over how modern Japan should accommodate western knowledge while retaining Japanese cultural values can never find a point of reconciliation. Despite Kuji's repeated insistence that European science and rationalism are universal and Japan should readily adapt these, Yashiro never agrees with him but keeps showing a strong skepticism toward such "universal values."

For instance, Kuji attempts to persuade Yashiro that science offers a "universal principle" (*bankoku tsūnen no riron*) and that the current prosperity of Paris is the result of valuing science. Yashiro, however, disagrees with Kuji and says that "science only means no one knows anything yet" and that it can be the cause of wars.[179] When discussing "humanism," Kuji asserts that there should be no difference between Western and Eastern varieties, but Yashiro continues to believe that they are differences between them, and Japan should go along with its own version of humanism, rather than following

[179] Yokomitsu 1967, 41-42.

the western model.[180] Kuji also regards rationalism highly and often insists that the Japanese should understand its importance as well. To this, Tōno, another character who shares similar opinions with Yashiro, points out that modern Europe also has Skepticism (*kaigi shugi* 懐疑主義), denying Kuji's insistence that "rationalism" should be treasured universally.[181]

From these discussions, it is indeed not difficult to surmise why *Traveler's* was considered to be extremely nationalistic especially immediately after the war: Yashiro repeatedly displays strong skepticism toward European values and regards Japanese traditions and values very highly. The most typical critique of the novel's "nationalism" stems from the characterization of the protagonist, Yashiro, and the equation of the author Yokomitsu with him. For instance, in the 1947 article entitled "On Yokomitsu Ri'ichi: Regarding *A Traveler's Sadness*," Sugiura Minpei fiercely attacks this novel for promoting imperialism and nationalism and supporting Japan's war effort through Yashiro, whom Sugiura believes to be the spokesperson of the author, Yokomitsu. He maintains that the pro-European character, Kuji's role is only to emphasize Yashiro's nationalist sentiment. By portraying Yashiro's distrust in European science and rationalism, Sugiura argues, Yokomitsu was preparing the ground for the reader to support imperial Japan as well as the Emperor. He even considers the loss of Yokomitsu's "sophisticated" writing style to be the result of his desire to promote nationalist sentiment. According to Sugiura, Yokomitsu "sold his entire literature to the devil and

[180] Yokomitsu 1967, 95.
[181] Ibid., 47-48.

blew the military trumpet triumphantly."[182] For Sugiura, and a number of other critics, Yokomitsu's abandonment of his modernist writing style in this work was strongly connected to his nationalist sentiment. Sugiura wrote critically,

> Yokomitsu's persistent quest in psychological and character-based schematic structuring, with which he succeeded in conquering the Shōwa literary scene, has been sacrificed in this novel. What for? In order to show Yokomitsu's theory of the Eastern versus the Western cultural comparison, and to endorse Yashiro's claim of 'my country is the happiest country in the world' at all costs.[183]

Sugiura's criticism was probably the most stringent one, but other prominent critics such as Odagiri Hideo and Nakamura Shin'ichirō were similarly reproachful particularly about the novel's "nationalistic elements." Yokomitsu was one of the 25 writers, along with other prominent literary figures including Kobayashi Hideo and Kawakami Tetsutarō, who were publicly listed and accused of bearing responsibility for the war by the New Japanese Literature Association (Shin Nihon Bungakukai).[184] In the immediate postwar climate, Yokomitsu's reputation fell from the "god of literature" to a "war criminal."

Many later critics came to defend Yokomitsu, however, realizing that such iniquitous reading of *Traveler's* must be seen within a special post-war literary climate, where the responsibility for the lost war was perhaps too fiercely pursued as a reaction to wartime oppression. As early as 1955, Yoshida Sei'ichi backed Yokomitsu by saying

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[182] Sugiura 1980, 52.
自分の文学を一切悪魔に売り渡して進軍ラッパを吹き鳴らしたのである。
[183] Ibid., 45.
この作者がこれまで幾多の短篇長篇においてひたすら追求し来たったところの、かつてそれを以て昭和文壇を制覇しえたところのあの心理や性格の図式的構図すらここにおいては犠牲に供せられているのが見られる。何のために？それは、横光の東西文化比較論を展開し、矢代の「自分の国は世界で一番幸福な国だ」という主張を是が非でも裏書きせんがためである。
[184] Shimada 1980, 167. Dower 1999, 237-238.

that, as reckless as it may have been, *Traveler's* was still a valuable attempt to accurately describe the reality of wartime intellectuals.[185] The simplistic equation of the author and the protagonist has also been mostly rejected in later criticism. Seiji M. Lippit, for example, correctly points out that the embodiment of the author is not merely with Yashiro but also with Kuji and other characters; other critics such as Yoshida also consider that it is the relationship between the characters, and not individual characters themselves, that occupies the center of the novel. This is particularly true when we consider Yokomitsu's beliefs about what makes a good "pure novel." In early 1960s, Shinoda Hajime also defended *Traveler's* by saying that the schematic opposition of Japan versus the West cannot be taken as the author's endorsement of the war; after all such juxtaposition was the key issue for all intellectuals at that time and Yokomitsu simply utilized this opposition in the novel, which does not mean that he used it for political purposes of endorsing the war or nationalism. Shinoda further notes the importance of recognizing the very strong friendship between Kuji and Yashiro, which implies not just antagonism but symbolize a certain type of unity between the West and Japan.[186]

Indeed, the relationship between Yashiro and Kuji is as important as that of Yashiro and Chizuko, even though their ideological differences are never reconciled like the couple's. Does the different outcomes of the two relationship mean that the author, Yokomitsu, considered it important to accept Western spirituality but not Western

[185] Yoshida 1955, 104-109.
[186] Shinoda 1981, 50-66.

science or rationalism? The answer is not that simple. Even when Yashiro displays a little excessive "nationalistic" sentiment by praising Japan's virtue, he admits the importance of science and rational thinking to some degree. For instance, when the Japanese group receives a compliment from a foreign reporter that Japan is healthy in contrast to France, Yashiro feels very pleased with the comment. Still, he thinks, "but we do need to incorporate natural science" (229). Yashiro further notes in his letter to Chizuko that despite the fact that his ancestors were killed by the first artillery, the importation of western weapons was an important and necessary sacrifice for modern Japan.[187]

In contrast with Kuji, who submits completely to the supremacy of Western science and rationalism, Yashiro's position is more equivocal. He does not necessarily deny the importance of these entirely, but is very cautious of adapting everything from the West because he believes that the West and Japan (or the East) are fundamentally different based on their own unique historical and cultural backgrounds. Thus he advocates that the adaptation of Western knowledge should proceed, but very cautiously with the understanding of such foundational differences. In the face of Kuji's enthusiastic admiration for Western values, he fears that Japan is excessively and recklessly importing and adapting Western knowledge, and that is why he could never agree with Kuji.

[187] Yokomitsu 1967, 447.

2-3. Juxtaposing the two relationships: Yashiro and Chizuko versus Yashiro and Kuji

The relationship of Yashiro and Chizuko, and the relationship between Yashiro and Kuji are two avenues for Yashiro's search for his national identity; both relationships seem to juxtapose Japan versus the West. By placing these two relationships side by side, it also becomes clear that there is another type of juxtaposition: the issues of knowledge versus spirituality.

	(Pro-)Japan		(Pro-)West
Spiritual Issue	Yashiro		Chizuko
Knowledge issue	Yashiro		Kuji

In sharp contrast to the "spiritual" conflict between Yashiro and Chizuko, Yashiro and Kuji's conflict is ideological in the sense that their point of argument is how the Japanese should handle the "knowledge" imported from the West. In each of these, Japan is pitted against the West with Yashiro representing Japan and Chizuko and Kuji representing the West. While Yashiro is willing to accommodate Western spirituality, he is very cautious about the reception of Western technologies or knowledge.

Notably, this contrast between the two relationships seems to show criticism toward the popular early Meiji slogan of *wakon yōsai*, or "Japanese Spirit, Western Knowledge." Contrary to the *wakon yōsai* slogan, which represents the idea that Japan should eagerly learn Western "knowledge" but refrain from being tainted by Western

"spirit," *Traveler's* rejects this possibility in the context of 1930s Japan. The majority of the first half of the story, set in Europe, focuses on the issue of rationality and knowledge through a number of intense debates between Yashiro and Kuji, suggesting that the reception of Western knowledge should be discouraged or at least accepted only cautiously. In the second half of the story, on the contrary, the story evolves mostly around the development of Yashiro and Chizuko's romantic relationship, focusing on the issue related to the matter of the "heart" or "spirituality" through their religions of Catholicism and Ancient Shinto, endorsing accommodation of Western spirituality. With this schematic juxtaposition in the novel, Yokomitsu demonstrates a faulty "Japanese Spirit, Western Knowledge," tackles both spirituality and political ideology, suggesting that reconciling Japanese and Western in these spheres is crucial to constructing a viable national identity in 1930s Japan.

In discussing this novel, many previous critics focus on the West versus Japan relationship, especially Yashiro and Kuji's debates, and simply interpret the author as equal to Yashiro. I believe, however, it is also important to look at how these two key relationships address the perspective of spirituality versus knowledge in order to uncover the underlying message of the novel – that spiritual matters are more important than knowledge-based rationalism, and that even this does not necessarily entail the Japan versus the West dichotomy. For instance, there is a scene in which the enemy of spiritual beauty is deemed "modernity," not necessarily the West. When Yashiro enters a Catholic church in Florence, he is extremely moved by the singing of a choir. He feels a sense of

envy and admiration for the "golden singing" (*ōgon no gasshō*), he is impressed by "the true beauty of the West that doesn't contain any taint of modernity."[188] This clearly suggests that, first, Yashiro does appreciate the "beauty" of Christianity, or the spirit of the West, and second, he appreciates it because the choir has not been spoiled by "modernity." Obviously, what ruined the beauty in the western religion of Catholicism is "modernity" and not "the West." What exactly does Yashiro mean by the taint of modernity? Yashiro appears to consider that modernity includes the advancement of science, technology, rational thinking, as well as the trend of artistic Realism, as indicated in the following example.

When the group including Yashiro arrive at Marseille and enter the basilica of Notre Dame de la Garde, Yashiro is taken aback upon seeing the realistic sculpture on the floor, which seems completely covered in blood.

> Although it was partly because his eyes were not accustomed to the darkness inside after stepping in from the brightness outside, Yashiro couldn't help but felt irritated by the setting that tricked and jolted him this way. What's more, as he looked at it more carefully, Yashiro realized that the corpse was actually the sculpture of Jesus Christ. … He thought, sure enough there was a time in the culture of this country too when they were this barbaric. … *This civilization of [the West] must have been nurtured by the psychology of Realism*. … "Aha. Then, *Realism killed Christ* here." Yashiro left the building feeling as if he had successfully unveiled a little secret of Europe. [189] (emphasis mine)

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[188] Yokomitsu 1967, 415.
そのとき眼に映った一瞬の聖衣の揃った見事さは、近代の混らぬ西洋の真の美しさを始めて見たと思わせた。

[189] Ibid., 19.
外の明るさから急に踏み這入った暗さに、矢代の眼は狼狽していたとは云うものの、いきなり度肝を抜くこの仕掛けには矢代も不快にならざるをえなかった。それもよく注意してみるとその死体はキリストの彫像である。…この国の文化にもやはり一度はこんな野蛮なときもあったかと矢代は思った。… このリアリズムの心理からこの文明が生まれ育ってきたにちがいない。

Yashiro is displeased by the realistic sculpture of Christ; he considers the artistic "Realism" as ruinous of its artistic beauty. When he speculates that the "psychology of Realism" is what advanced Western civilization, Yashiro seems to be referring to the mentality that demands uncovering the truth by depicting everything realistically, the mentality that also pursues scientific truth. "Realism" not only spoiled the artistic beauty of the sculpture by an overly "realistic" depiction of it, but also undermined the religious spirit by such a pursuit. Again, what Yashiro seems to consider most problematic is the mindset that Realism advocates "uncovering everything realistically." Here we see echoes of the way the author, Yokomitsu, was concerned about the faulty influence of Western literary realism on modern Japanese literature. Yashiro depreciates the "barbaric" sculpture not because it is a product of the West but because it is the product of Realism.

Thus, it is not the "West-ness" per se but the idea of "realism" and its companion "modernity" that is deemed to be the source of the problem. This is illuminated by another example in which similar artistic beauty is appreciated across the border of the West versus East dichotomy: the architecture of the Cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris and the Japanese haiku. One day, a group of people from the tour take a leisurely walk to visit the Cathédrale, and on the way, they start composing haiku for fun. When they arrive, everyone is impressed by its supreme beauty, and Tōno, a former-writer who often sides

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…「ここじゃ、リアリズムがキリストを殺したのだなァ、つまり。」と矢代は、一つヨーロッパの秘密の端っぽを覗いてやったぞという思いで建物から外へ出た。

with Yashiro in his debates with Kuji, notes that the Cathédrale represents "the pure form of the West, when 'modernity' wasn't at all existent,"[190]and mentions that he sees in it something similar to haiku. When Kuji asks Tōno about his comment, Tōno answers that "the admirable beauty that transcends science" is something that the Cathédrale Notre Dame and haiku share.[191] Here, the beauty of one of the oldest religious architecture in the West and Japanese haiku poetry are connected through the "beauty that transcends science." Again, this is the kind of beauty not spoiled by the taint of modernity, and this kind of beauty is shown to exist both in the West and in the East. The key comparison is, therefore, not the West versus the East but between art and religion on the one hand, and science, realism, and modernity on the other hand.

With these passages Yokomitsu seems to view that religion and art belong to the same domain of spirituality, as opposed to "modernity," which emphasizes rational thinking, science, and the pursuit of the truth in the form of "realistic" depiction of artwork. As mentioned above in the Introduction, the relationship between religion and art has been continuously discussed from the time of Kūkai in the ninth century Japan. It is not uncommon for religious institutions to utilize artistic production as a part of their practice. For instance, Deguchi Onisaburō of the Japanese new religion Ōmoto utilizes artistic production such as calligraphy and painting, and wrote an essay entitled "Art is the Mother of Religion" in 1924.[192] As we saw, however, art was often conceived as a

[190] Ibid., 170. 近代のまだ全く生じていない、西洋というものの純粋の形
[191] Ibid., 172. 科学を超越した詠嘆の美
[192] For more detail, see Stalker 2008.

"tool" to achieve religious enlightenment in pre-modern Japan, and even those who endorsed artistic activities had to justify their engagement with art by saying that art helped religious activities. Onisaburō's idea of the relationship between art and religion is similar, as he "viewed art as a pleasurable activity that incidentally provided a route to God, though this route was alternate and inferior to the true practice of religion. For Onisaburō, art was a path mediated by the senses, culminating in a mere transitory state of bliss, whereas religion sought eternal beauty of character and spirit."[193] In the case of Yokomitsu, however, it is ultimately art that offers salvation, not religion.

2-4. Art as the savior

Although Yashiro discovered Ancient Shinto and thought it would help him overcome his anxiety about Chizuko being Catholic, it is shown to be not as effective as he hoped. Even after extensively studying it and explaining to Chizuko their shared native heritage of "Ancient Shinto," Yashiro's uneasiness continues, and one day he becomes extremely disheartened when he learns the lyrics of Chizuko's Catholic prayer; in particular, he is struck by the word "heretic" (*itansha*) in it. "As he was called a heretic for the first time, the ominous feeling thrust his heart like a blade and never disappeared."[194] Although it was upon Yashiro's repeated request that Chizuko transcribes her prayer in a letter, he is in agony for an entire day upon receiving it.

[193] Stalker 2008, 113.
[194] Yokomitsu 1967, 344.
彼は初めて異端者と呼ばれた無気味さが胸に擬せられた刃となって消えなかった。

Various efforts to dismiss it from his mind, or to rationally persuade himself that he should not be affected by a mere word all fail. Yashiro keeps thinking about the word "heretic" as if Chizuko was personally and directly pointing at him; he even becomes uncertain if he can marry her. Ancient Shinto, which he has been studying, is proven to be no help for Yashiro; it never even enters his mind during this state of agony. Significantly, what saves him at this critical moment is a simple sound of the *tsuzumi*, a traditional Japanese hand drum.

> It happened exactly when he was suffering from his heartache. Dull and heavy sounds of the *tsuzumi* came from the direction of the inn. Although the sound simply continued for a while … eventually, it functioned to push out the bad fluid accumulated in his stomach … and as his stomach felt lighter, the sound also became more crystallized. …Yashiro felt peculiarly uplifted. It was surely a prophetic sound, like the sound of salvation for Yashiro now.[195]

The simple, primitive sounds of the *tsuzumi,* which is described as "having long been Yashiro's favorite musical instrument,"[196] completely dissolve his anxiety.

It is quite significant that while Yashiro's chosen religion of Ancient Shinto cannot subdue his agony created by the lyric of Catholic prayer, the sound of the *tsuzumi* does. The sound of the *tsuzumi* is clearly the embodiment of an artistic power. It is the actual "sound" that "function[s] to push out the bad fluid accumulated in his stomach" and as the result Yashiro feels "peculiarly uplifted." The stimulus, the sound, works

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[195] Ibid. ちょうどそうしている胸苦しい時だった。…宿の方から鈍く重い鼓の音が弾んで来た。鼓はしばらくは何気なくただ、「ぽん、ぽん、──ぽぽぽんぽん」とつづいていただけだったが、そのうちに腹に溜まった悪液を押し出す作用をして、一音ごとに首が延び上がり、軽くなる腹部とともに鼓の音も冴えていった。… 矢代は奇妙に気持ちが明るくなるのを感じた。たしかに今の矢代にとってそれは救いの音のような啓示のある打音だった。

[196] Ibid., 345.

directly upon his physical body, which in turn also affects his spirit positively. The sound of the *tsuzumi* underscores the power of sensory stimulus produced by a musical – artistic – instrument, to directly affect the human body as well as the spirit. This interpretation particularly makes sense when we consider the fact that Yokomitsu was well known for his writing style as a New Sensationalist (Shinkankaku-ha) author. He was a craftsman capable of creating prose that directly appeals to the senses of the reader, and was praised for his "highly polished style marked by careful attention to rhythm and imagery, by conscious use of symbolism, and by ways of looking at and describing things that were startling to the Japanese readers of his day."[197] Even though Yokomitsu did not employ this particular writing style in *Traveler's*, the way Yashiro is affected by the sound of the *tsuzumi* attests to Yokomitsu's continued faith in the sensory power of artistic production.

Furthermore, the fact that Yashiro considers that the *tsuzumi* "must probably be the only musical instrument that has passed down from ancient times, without any interruption"[198] indicates the importance of this particular musical instrument's tie with national history: the art serves a means of providing the sense of national identity.[199] This does not mean, however, that religion does not participate in rescuing Yashiro, because the *tsuzumi* can also be seen as an instrument of rituals. There is no specific description in the novel that the *tsuzumi* is an instrument used in religious rituals, and yet the sound is

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[197] Kodansha Encyclopedia (Japan Knowledge).
[198] Yokomitsu 1967, 345. おそらく古代の遠くから伝わり流れて来て、まだそのまま途絶えぬ唯一の楽器の音にちがいないものだと思った。
[199] As Stalker (2008) discusses, there has been "the broader discourse on art as an important means to enhance and embody Japanese spiritual identity" (117).

described as that "of revelation" by Yashiro. The word "revelation" (*keiji* 啓示) has a very strong religious flavor; it is a divine revelation, suggesting that the sound of the *tsuzumi* possesses a divine power. After hearing the sound of the *tsuzumi*, Yashiro starts to think that he should perform another ritual, the *misogi* (purification ritual) and walk around Japan before marrying Chizuko.[200] The *misogi* is a Shinto ritual and even his desire to "walk around Japan" can be seen as performing some kind of pilgrimage; the sound of the *tsuzumi* prompts him to conduct ritualistic activities in preparation for his marriage.

That the *tsuzumi* is an artistic instrument with some connection to religious ritual is also confirmed with Yashiro's mentioning of the Noh drama in relation to the *tsuzumi*. Later in the story, there is a scene where Yashiro and Chizuko take a walk side by side after attending a social gathering. Because of the uncertainty surrounding their prospective marriage and relationship, they are both feeling a little melancholic. Then, as he listens to the sound of their footsteps, Yashiro suddenly recalls the sound of the *tsuzumi* that he heard in the mountain. The sound of their footsteps and the *tsuzumi* in his imagination overlap, and it again works to dissolve Yashiro's anxiety. Markedly, Yashiro also imagines the Noh stage in this instance, and "he waits to see when the sound of their footsteps would change into the sound of footsteps on the Noh stage."[201] The *tsuzumi* has been one of the traditional musical instruments often used in the Noh and kabuki plays, and the Noh play traditionally has a strong link to Zen Buddhism. Indeed, the Noh play is

[200] Yokomitsu 1967, 345.
[201] Ibid., 352. いつ靴音が能舞台を踏みすすむ音のように変わるか、彼は待った。

often referred as the best example epitomizing how religious ritual and art has been tightly connected in Japanese cultural tradition.[202]

The *tsuzumi* is shown to possess both artistic as well as ritualistic power, where its artistic power is perhaps even more important than its religious power. Still, both art and religion are potential saviors for Yashiro who is trying to establish his national identity, or more broadly, for modern man in dealing with the overwhelming power of modernity that included the promotion of Western rationalism, acquisition of knowledge, intellectualization and the introduction of new types of spiritual belief systems. Even if Yashiro is a man who believes that the sensibility of the Japanese "heart" and Ancient Shinto are the essence of national identity, he is in the end a modern man. Yashiro values spiritual matters more than "knowledge" and often questions "rationality" especially when talking with Kuji, but he is in fact quite rational most of the time in his behavior and thinking; Yashiro is as a modern intellectual man who likes to study and explore; in doing so, he necessarily relies on, and values "knowledge."

When Chizuko first asks Yashiro what Ancient Shinto is and what one does with it, he explains that it is just a "peaceful wish" (*heiwa na negai*) of the Japanese and it only involves a simple uttering of three sounds, i-u-e, which directly affect the "heart" (*kokoro*) of the Japanese. It was shown to be something rather "primitive" in the beginning. Yet, through the process of Yashiro's study of Ancient Shinto, it eventually

[202] As Ueda (1967) explains, however, the Noh should be considered not merely derived from Zen but a mixture of various elements; the Noh "had absorbed many heterogeneous elements from the outside, such as Chinese operatic drama and Japanese folk dance, Shinto rituals and Buddhist ceremonies, and popular mimetic shows and aristocratic court music, eventually integrating them all into a single, harmoniously unified art" (55).

becomes decorated with philosophical explanations, and he even begins to explain it in terms of mathematical theory in order to show that Ancient Shinto may possibly have a theoretically advanced foundation. Deep in Yashiro's mind, there seems to be a sense of competition with Western thinking, especially with science, and in order to show the superiority of the spirituality of Ancient Shinto, Yashiro begins to defend it with scientific explanations, perhaps, without himself realizing it. In this process, Ancient Shinto is transformed from a simple act of uttering i-u-e into a much "deeper philosophy." This explains why it does not rescue Yashiro from his affliction when he reads Chizuko's Catholic prayer; Ancient Shinto is tainted by Yashiro's intellectualization from its original, "primitive" form. As we just saw, it is the "primitive" sounds of the *tsuzumi* that dissolved his anxiety. This is quite ironic because such intellectualization is what Yashiro is most ardently against throughout the story; he was impressed with the beauty of the Catholic choir because it was "untainted by modernity" but he himself is doing similar harm to Ancient Shinto.

There is yet another instance in which art, this time the act of production rather than reception, is shown to have a purgatory function: haiku composition. Tōno, a former writer, is fond of composing haiku, so many members of the trip learn how to compose them during the trip. Even Kuji, the pro-European representative, comes to like haiku composition and becomes well versed in it. When a group of people are walking to Notre Dome, they almost start a discussion about politics because they all notice that the cafes on the street are closed due to the strike occurring in Paris. At this point, Kuji deliberately

brings up the topic of haiku because, by this time, he has learned that conversations about politics always create a hostile atmosphere, and by changing the topic to haiku, he knows that he can divert people's attention and maintain a friendly conversation, which he indeed succeeds in doing. "But Kuji wonders why everyone becomes cheerful and soft whenever talking about haiku, even though they may not realize it. Now and again, he feels puzzled by such an odd predisposition of the Japanese."[203] Markedly, in this instance it is Kuji, the very pro-European figure who (much to Yashiro's annoyance) at one point even exclaims "why wasn't I born in Paris?" that recognizes the soothing, purgatory effect of composing haiku. Thus, in each of these cases, the sound of the *tsuzumi* and the act of haiku composition, art functions almost like "religion" in the sense that it gives peace to the confused or agitated mind. In fact, it is immediately after this scene that Tōno comments that haiku and Gothic architecture such as Notre Dome share the same kind of beauty that transcends science. Religion and art are, therefore, considered to belong the same realm that can touch one's heart and produce beauty as opposed to the ruinous effects of science or modern intellectual thoughts on such beauty. The beauty of the Catholic Choir "before it is tainted by modernity," the *tsuzumi*'s sound and the composition of the haiku are all forms of art showcased as the better solutions for the stranded modern man, and possibly the source for one to identify their national origin.

[203] Yokomitsu 1967, 167-168. 話が俳句のこととなると、知るも知らぬも、どうしてこんなに皆の心がにこにこと柔ぎそめるのか、妙な日本人の体質だと久慈は今さらのように首をひねるのだった。

2-5. Return to Norinaga?

By illuminating the attempts as well as contradictions of Yashiro in his relationships with Chizuko and Kuji, *Traveler's* shows the complexities of the issues and the struggles of modern man in early 20th century Japan in the context of overwhelming waves of modernity, which include various forms of importation from the West such as knowledge, technology, science, rational thinking, Christianity, as well as the artistic movement of "realism." As I demonstrated above, the contrast between "spirit" and "knowledge" seems to be an equally, if not more, important issue for Yokomitsu as the dichotomy between Japan and the West. This is quite reminiscent of the approach of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) in the Edo period. Norinaga rejected Buddhism and Confucianism because he believed that the knowledge-based disciplines from these teachings ruined the mind of the Japanese; he emphasized that the "feeling," especially what he called *mono no aware* (pathos of things), was the foundation of Japanese identity, and saw classical Japanese literature as one of the ways to retrieve "lost" Japanese identity.

Yashiro, the protagonist of Yokomitsu's novel, likewise insists that heart-related matters are the essence of the Japanese. They are also similar in the way that they both utilized some form of Shinto: Norinaga proposed Natural Shinto (*shizen no Shintō*) whereas Yashiro discovers Ancient Shino, and both are supposed to be something that offers a foundation of Japanese national identity as something shared by blood. Moreover, both of them rejected official "Shinto" despite the difference between what the

term "Shinto" referred to during their respective times. In spite of their similarities, however, there is one very fundamental difference: their solutions. While Norinaga insisted that the Japanese had to get rid of foreign elements and go back to ancient times when there was no foreign "pollution," Yokomitsu seems to be suggesting that a modern Japanese man no longer has such an option. Yashiro is well aware that getting rid of "foreign" elements is impossible partly because of historical situations of Japan and partly because the "foreign" elements had long been internalized and are already part of Japan.[204] Yashiro never even thinks about asking Chizuko to leave Christianity despite his apprehension about it because "accommodation," not "rejection," is what he seeks. His solution suggests an ideal Japanese national identity is predicated on a uniquely Japanese spiritual (both religious and artistic) foundation that accommodates but does not become subsumed by Western forms of knowledge and spirituality.

In the end, though, Yashiro appears to come to realize that such "national identity" does not exist. The feeling of loss in his search for national identity never stops even after Yashiro comes back to Japan from Europe. Even when he goes to a small town in Kyushu to bring the ashes of his deceased father to their ancestor's grave – which can be seen as a part of his search for his identity – Yashiro never feels at "home."[205] Instead, he is struck by the strong sense of lost home just as he leaves his father's hometown after completing his task. Again, he turns not to religion but to art to salve his aching.

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[204] See Lippit 2002, 227.

[205] As Lippit (2002) correctly points out, the death of Yashiro's father signifies the death of the Meiji, and Yashiro's travel to their ancestor's grave is another attempt to find his "home."

Remembering Bashō's haiku, "the real world is the wandering heart itself,"[206] Yashiro begins to realize that there is no such thing called "home" in the real world, only in his imagination. Or, perhaps, home exists only in the search itself. In this sense, the title of the novel "a traveler's sadness" or "a traveler's sense of missing home," *ryoshū* in Japanese, is quite fitting. Perhaps, Yokomitsu was even suggesting that the act of searching itself constitutes the identity of modern man rather than any essential "Japaneseness."

In comparison, the Edo scholar Norinaga's ideal Japan was set in the ancient times when there was no "foreign" (Chinese) influence. Primarily a scholar, Norinaga attempted to revive the ancient times by relying on "natural" Shinto and by encouraging people to read classical literature such as *Manyōshū* poetry and *The Tale of Genji*. Although Norinaga, too, was quite aware of the power of art in instilling the sense of national identity, especially at the end of his life, he progressively became much more reliant on religion than art, which he perceived as a mere means, not end. Yokomitsu's approach is different. Most importantly, as an author, his ultimate goal was the revival of modern Japanese literature, which he considered to be heading in the wrong direction after imitating the European "Realism" and "Naturalism." Unsurprisingly given the context of 1930s wartime Japan, the issue of "national identity" was important for him, but his most urgent task as a writer was to produce his own "pure novel" to show the "proper" direction of modern Japanese literature. In this sense, Yokomitsu's most ardent

[206] Yokomitsu 1967, 480. さまよう自分の旅ごころこそ実の世界

expression of his patriotism can be considered the very production of *Traveler's* as his attempt to revive Japanese literature, or as he put it, to "produce a pure novel written by the Japanese."[207]

3. THE WRITING STYLE OF *TRAVELER'S*

Whether he succeeded in doing so is a question that has occupied critics since the 1930s. As noted above, some critics considered *Traveler's* an utter failure, not just because of its "nationalist" content but because Yokomitsu lost his brilliant writing style.[208] There is no question that *Traveler's* is written in a style distinct from his earlier, so called "New Sensationalist" writing style. I contend, however, that the writing style Yokomitsu employed in writing *Traveler's* should not be considered a failure or the result of his "return to Japan" (日本への回帰) sentiment, as some critics argue. For one, Yokomitsu was always an experimental writer and he consistently employed various, distinctive writing styles.[209] *Traveler's* could yet be another experiment, a new attempt, and does not have to be labeled as the "loss" of his sophistication. More importantly,

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[207] Yokomitsu 1982, 245.
日本文学の伝統とは、フランス文学であり、ロシア文学だ。もうこの上、日本から日本人としての純粋小説が現れなければ、むしろ作家は筆を折るに如くはあるまい。

[208] Some critics, such as the aforementioned Sugiura Minpei, argued that the failure of his writing style is also the result of Yokomitsu's nationalist sentiments.

[209] Lippit (2002) suggests that *Shanghai* (1928-29), one of the most famous modernist works of Yokomitsu, is written in a style that is designed to evoke "corporeal sensation." Also, "The Machine" (Kikai 1930) is often referred to have the style of "new psychologism" (*shin-shinrishugi*).

however, the choice of his writing style is clearly the result of Yokomitsu's conscious choice to make *Traveler's* a "pure novel."

Its length at over 500 pages unfinished might have dictated the shift in his style as well. Mishima Yukio (1959), one of the most prominent modern Japanese writers, notes that the writer needs to employ different writing styles depending on the length of the novel and certain techniques that pay too much attention to details will not work in a long novel.[210] For instance, if the text is too sophisticated or too detail-oriented, the reader would not be able to keep their attention too long. Mishima recognizes that some great novels may look tedious at first sight, but just like the way big waves undulate, it slowly reveals itself as the story progresses.[211]

The earlier "modernist" works of Yokomitsu are short stories, whereas *Traveler's* is the longest novel he ever wrote. His former modernist writings style, which utilized each sentence, each word to function as a tool to destroy old senses and create new sensations, would be unsuitable for a long novel. Yokomitsu chose a suitable prose style that would work for its length from when he started serializing this "pure novel" in Tokyo Nichinichi newspaper and Osaka Mainichi newspaper in 1937. In his "Theory of the Pure Novel," Yokomitsu notes that "short stories cannot be a 'pure novel'," and that

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[210] Mishima 1973, 77-84.
長篇の文章が粗雑であっていいというのではありませんが、それにはおのずから呼吸の長さと、感情と思想とが、延々と読者の胸のうちに流れ込むだけの持続力がなければなりません。あまりに鋭敏な感覚で、しかもあまりに詩的に洗練され、あまりにも集中的効果が続けざまにあらわれ、あまりにも美しい自然描写が凝らされ、あまりにも細部にこだわりすぎた文体は、長編小説には適さないし、気質的にそういう文体をもった作家が、長編小説を書くということは、難行苦行に類することであります。

[211] Ibid., 79.
一見退屈な流れをもちながら、大波のようにうねって、ゆっくりと思想を展開していきます。

100 or 200 pages is not long enough.[212] The change of his writing style was, therefore, not because he "lost" his previous artistry, but because he intended to create a "pure novel" that would appeal to the masses, not just the literati. Despite the harsh criticism by literary critics, *Traveler* successfully attracted a large, popular readership, and became the most popular among Yokomitsu's works.

CONCLUSION

Traveler's was written from 1937 to 1946, over nearly a decade during which Japan's imperialism and nationalism peaked and were followed by devastating defeat. The dichotomy of the West versus Japan, and how and where to find, or protect Japanese national identity was undoubtedly one of the pressing issues for many intellectuals and Yokomitsu was not an exception. *Traveler's* is a novel about one modern man's earnest search for national identity in which, through the romance with his Catholic girlfriend and the endless debates with his pro-European friend, he eventually comes to realize the sadness and, perhaps, futility of such a journey. And yet, by reading this "pure novel" of the lost home, the reader can see Yokomitsu's view that the issue of modern Japan was not merely the opposition between Japan and the West, but more fundamentally "spirituality" juxtaposed with the "perceived" modernity in Japan such as the wholesale belief in imported knowledge, science, rationalism and the "realism" trend. There is no absolute solution for the search for national identity, nor does he offer any answer to the

[212] Yokomitsu 1982, 237. 短編小説では、純粋小説は書けぬ

question of how best to handle the imported "modernity." Religion and art are shown, however, to have potential as saviors for those who undertake such a journey. In particular, it is ultimately the power of art that modern intellectual man most needs, as it provides a relief from their intellectual entanglement and leads to a realization of the futility of such a pursuit. Like the sound of the *tsuzumi* drum or the lines of a haiku, Yokomitsu himself might have attempted to unravel his own anxieties by the very act of writing *Traveler's*. With no destination for Yokomitsu's journey of the lost home, that *Traveler's* was never completed may in fact be apropos.

When *Bungei*, a literary magazine, issued a special edition dedicated to Yokomitsu in 1955, they surveyed many authors and literary critics about their interest in Yokomitsu's works, which work was most memorable, and their opinions about his literature. Endō Shūsaku, one of the respondents, commented that Yokomitsu was a "tragic author who misunderstood the fundamental difference between the West and Japan, who in the end was defeated after the fierce battle to tackle this issue."[213] And yet, Endō chose *Traveler's* as his most memorable work because he was very moved by Yokomitsu's relentless fight to answer these question,[214] a flight that Endō would also soon undertake.

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[213] *Bungei: Yokomitsu Ri'ichi tokuhon*. *Special Edition*. Kawade shobō. 1955, 263. ぼくは横光を…西欧と日本の地盤のちがいを誤解して、遂に屈した悲劇的文学者と見ています。その闘いに感動させられるわけです。

[214] Ibid.

Chapter 4 From "Catholic" to "catholic"

Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996)

For non-Christian writers like Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Yokomitsu Ri'ichi, the issue of Christian faith was less a personal matter than fodder for their fictional writing. In contrast, Endō Shūsaku, a Catholic from an early age,[215] chose the career of a fiction writer in order to grapple with the conflict between his religious and cultural identities. During his three-year long stay in France in the early 1950s, Endō became acutely aware of the discord between what he called "Japanese sensibilities" (*Nihonteki kansei*) and European Catholicism, and decided to pursue writing fiction because he believed them to be the best medium to express and explore his own conflicted identity. Inevitably, Endō's Catholic upbringing shaped his initial views toward Japanese cultural heritage as well as Japanese literature; from his "Catholic" eyes, Japan looked morally defective and its literature structurally weak. He therefore attempted to improve Japanese literature by adopting and applying Christian metaphysics to his own works, while utilizing his personal struggles between his incompatible religious and national identities as the central themes in many of his novels.

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[215] He was baptized at his mother's instigation at the early age of eleven. In this sense, it was not his conscious choice to become Catholic. He describes in a number of essays that he seriously considered leaving Catholicism several times but was never able to do so. Thus, in the end it was his own decision to remain Catholic throughout his life. See, for instance, "Unfitting Clothes: Why I Write Novels" (*Awanai yōfuku: nan no tame ni shōsetsu o kakuka*) in Endō Bungakuron shū I: 304-305, or, "My Literature: In My Case" (*Watashi no bungaku: jibun no baai*) 248.

Ultimately, however, after his persistent striving as a writer to understand and depict human beings, Endō's "Catholic" perception was replaced with a newly found worldview, a "catholic" world view in the sense that it is all-embracing and inclusive.[216] Although he never abandoned Catholic faith throughout his life, Endō's religious identity – what it meant for him to be Catholic – metamorphosed. I contend that this transformation is the result of his life-long endeavor as a writer; it was the author's keen eyes that transformed his own religious identity from Catholic to catholic. Ironically, however, when he finally reconciled his religious and national identities, his "author's" eyes that had long focused on depicting "human struggles" seem to have been weakened and overtaken by the eyes of a believer that valued religious over artistic perspective.

Below, I investigate Endō's essays and three of his representative works that span nearly half a century: *The Sea and Poison* (*Umi to dokuyaku* 1958), *Silence* (*Chinmoku* 1966), and his final novel *Deep River* (*Fukai kawa* 1993) with the following questions in mind. How did Christianity influence his view toward Japan, modern Japanese literature, and his theory of literary creation? What were the main causes of his discomfort with Catholicism? As he matured as a writer, how did his perceptions of Christianity, Japanese culture, and literature change, and what kind of issues and problems did he have to grapple with in this process? And finally, how did Endō's achievement in reaching a religiously enlightened state affect the quality of his last major literary work?

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[216] I am using the word "catholic" defined by the Oxford dictionary as "including a wide variety of things, all-embracing."

1. ESSAYS

From the very beginning, Endō was interested in exploring the relationship between religion and literature. He studied French Catholic writers such as François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos in college, and already in his earliest essays such as "Gods and God" *(Kamigami to kami to,* 神々と神と1947) and "The Problems Confronting Catholic Authors" *(Katorikku sakka no mondai*, カトリック作家の問題 1947), he explored the characteristics of Japanese religious traditions in contrast to Judeo-Christian ones, and examined how the Japanese religious milieu affected the production of modern Japanese literature. Believing that "Japanese sensibilities" (*Nihonteki kansei*) engendered the most significant difference between Japanese and Western cultures and literary traditions,[217] he insisted that Japanese pantheistic religions are the faulty foundation of Japanese sensibilities and of modern Japanese literature.

According to Endō, the Christian worldview is founded upon the "order of existence" (*sonzai no chitsujo*) which are divided into humans, God, angels, and "other creatures." Those belonging to a certain category remain fixed, never crossing the boundaries or merging into another; for example, humans can never become God or angels, or vice versa. On the contrary, there is no such "order of existence" in the Japanese religious tradition, Endō argues. Because there is no division between humans and deities, gods can easily be seen as an extension of human beings; the Japanese do not

[217] Endō mentions these ideas in many other essays, such as "A Reflection on the Night of My Birthday" (*Tanjōbi no yoru no kaisō* 1950), which he wrote at age 27 right before going to France.

have to fight against gods since they conceptually conceive themselves as belonging to the same category, as a part of nature-cum-deities.[218] Naturally, then, the Japanese lack a conscious relationship with supernatural beings. In contrast, Christians have much stronger and conscious relationship with God whether they believe in God or not, because even the act of rejecting God requires a certain degree of recognition of Him.[219] He claims that what exists in the mind of the Japanese is a "yearning to be absorbed" (*kyūshū e no akogare*, 吸収へのあこがれ); the proclivity to become "part of the whole" withers the sense of "self," "subjectivity," and even the "competitive spirit," making the Japanese lazy.[220] Endō's critical assessment of Japanese religion is also evident in his statements such as,

> I began to feel and fear the *unfathomable pantheistic spell* of Japanese sensibilities (*Nihonteki kansei*) when I thought about the fact that many Japanese authors such as Sōseki, Kafū, Tanizaki and even Hori [Tatsuo] all "returned to Japan" eventually, even though they were influenced by Western literature when they were young. … The aesthetics of the mysterious power of Japanese sensibilities has been well focused so far, but perhaps we should also start recognizing its *dreadful, ominous power* (*ozomubeki bukimina chikara*).[221]
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> (emphasis mine)

From Endō's point of view, Japanese sensibilities have "spells" to lure, and their mysterious power "dreadful and ominous." He even went so far as to suggest that

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[218] A number of sociologists and religious scholars as well as literary specialists have shown that the Japanese people's relationship with "religion" is qualitatively different from those in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For instance, see *Wonders In Christianity* (2011) by Japanese sociologists Hashizume Daisaburō and Ōsawa Masamichi, *Practically Religious* (1998) by Reader and Tanabe, also Kamogami (1978).

[219] For example, Endō explains, the Renaissance artists rejected God by competing with and/or attempting to overcome God. Kamogami (1978) also displays a similar view in her analysis of Akutagawa's Christian related stories.

[220] Endō "A Reflection on the night of my birthday" 2009, 20. Originally published in 1950. "Truly, Japanese sensibilities are lazy." まことに日本的感性は怠惰である。

[221] Ibid., 16-17.日本的汎神性の…底知れぬ魔力

feudalism long flourished in Japan because of such uncanny power of Japanese religion.[222]

This kind of stringent assessment of Japanese culture and literature became both intensified as well as more complex after his three-year long stay in France from 1950 to 1953. On the one hand, Endō's perception toward Catholicism grew noticeably more critical during this time. This is at least partly because of the historical situation of Japan just having lost the war. When Endō went to France, there was not even a Japanese embassy there, and he experienced racial discrimination and repeated frustrations over the misunderstanding of Japanese culture, accompanied with a strong sense of cultural inferiority.[223] Endō also began to realize that Catholicism was very "Euro-centric," despite its self-claimed universality, and he had to admit that it did not completely agree with his own Japanese sensibilities. It is at this point that Endō began to consider the career as a novelist rather than becoming an academia because he deemed fictional writing was more fitting to express his own struggles between Catholic and Japanese identities.[224]

Although his religious outlook strove to accommodate his Japaneseness at this point, his literary stance became even more critical. Endō maintained that modern Japanese literature needed some modification, especially Japanese Naturalist novels that

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[222] Ibid., 18.
[223] See, for example, Furuya's 1975 article "Endō Shūsaku ni okeru ryūgaku no imi."
Endō also mentions that his short story "Summer in Rouen" (Rūan no natsu) is based on his own experiences during his stay in France.
[224] Endō and Miyoshi 1991, 244.

he deemed structurally weaker than European literature. Even the importation of Christianity affected many Japanese writers unfavorably, according to Endō. He asserted that most Japanese literati who became interested in Christianity from the late 19th century to early 20th century were drawn only to the surface of Christianity; namely, the individualistic search for faith (*kojinteki kyūdō ishiki*) which was particularly emphasized in Protestantism, and the impulse of confession (*kokuhaku shōdō*) that gave rise to the birth of the Japanese I-novel.[225] Because this genre adapted only these "superficial" aspects of Christianity, the I-novel could never become as powerful as European Naturalist novels.[226] Endō suggested that Japanese authors should delve deeper into the Christian metaphysics that enriched European literature.

Endō recognized two important axioms of Christian metaphysics that could strengthen Japanese literature. One is the assumption that a supernatural world exists beyond the real, physical world, which could sharpen and widen artists' eyes and equip their works with more depth. The other is the antagonistic spirit that stems from and is inherent in the Christian theological scheme that posits dichotomies of opposing forces such as God versus humans, good versus evil, or body versus spirit; these oppositions

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[225] Endō "Kirisuto-kyō to nihon bungaku" 2009, 50-51. Originally published in 1955.
彼らの信仰はまず教会という精神共同体をもたぬ個性意識にとらえられたものであったが、その棄教後、基督教に代って宗教の役割をした彼らの文学にはプロテスタンティズムのもつあの個人的求道意識と告白衝動とが、都合よく持ちこまれたのである。… これらの日本作家たちは新教の「抗議（プロテスト）する」たくましい精神をいつか骨抜きにして、いわゆる「愚痴しかこぼさぬ」逃亡奴隷的文学の芽種を創り、また「超自然的への視力」を失って日常的現実世界しかながめえぬ日本的自然文学の土台を築きあげたからである。Although "confession" is practiced in Catholicism, Endō considers that the way those two are the most notable components those writers utilized from Protestantism.

[226] Ibid.

would creation the dynamism of the novel.[227] Japanese I-novels were weak because they narrowly focus on the mundane everyday life without drawing on anything beyond that reality, and lack competing forces that would make the work more exciting. In this vein, he criticizes one of the most well-known Japanese I-novels, Tayama Katai's *The Quilt* (1907), for instance, because though it deals with the issue of "body" in terms of flesh and hidden desires, it lacks an opposing force of the "spirit," and it narrowly focuses on the reality of this world without any consideration of the world beyond its own.

While Endō advocates that Japanese writers tap these metaphysical aspects of Christianity, he also cautions that using Christian dichotomies such as good versus evil, or God versus humans will not create meaningful oppositions in the Japanese context because, after all, Japan never had a monotheistic, absolute "God" of Judeo-Christian tradition and pretending that there is something absolute in the Japanese world view would not work, with its the deep-rooted and long-standing Japanese sensibilities. Endō proposes that there is a certain type of dichotomy that is meaningful in the Japanese context; that is, the juxtaposition between a world with God with a world without God.[228] Indeed, this is the very strategy that Endō employed in his earlier works, such as *The Sea and Poison* and *Silence*.

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Endō 1963 "Literature and Christianity."

2. QUESTIONING THE JAPANESE: *THE SEA AND POISON* (1958)

Endō's 1958 novella *The Sea and Poison* exemplifies his earlier, critical view toward the Japanese. The story is based on a real incident that took place in Kyushu University medical school during World War II, where Japanese doctors conducted cruel medical experiments on living POWs, such as excising portions of their lungs to learn how long one can survive.[229] Although the story development and all the characters are fictional, the very act of writing about this incident indicates Endō's desire both to criticize this immoral act by the Japanese and also to investigate what might have impelled them to commit such a crime. Since this incident took place during the war when people were both physically and mentally in an aberrant state, one may attribute this atrocious act to the harsh environment of the war. The novella seems to suggest, however, that the tragedy occurred not merely because of the war, but at least partly due to the psychological defects of the Japanese; the Japanese inherently lack the strong sense of morality possessed by Western Catholics. At the same time, Endō is not merely condemning the Japanese nor praising the virtues of Christians or advocating its adoption in Japan. Instead, it is indicated that even though the Japanese lack a proper sense of right and wrong, they may still be redeemed as they suffer another kind of pain caused by this very inability to feel the sense of morality, along with the consequent inability to act

[229] The actual incident is called Aikawa Incident that took place from May to June 1945. Including those from the military and from the University of Kyushu medical school, 30 people were prosecuted. The head of the department, Professor Ishiyama, committed suicide while imprisoned, five were executed by hanging, four sentenced to imprisonment for life, and except for seven people who were declared not guilty, all other were sentenced from 3 to 25 years of heavy labor. Because of the suicide of Professor Ishiyama, the details of the experiments still remain unclear.

accordingly. Endō creates a work of literature, examining both the possibilities of how pantheistic religious environment can be responsible for such a devastating outcome, and at the same time if there is any way to save those "immoral" Japanese.

Blaming the Japanese for their lack of morality

The story starts with the description of present day Japan, around the late 1950s when the novel was written. An unnamed narrator describes his encounter with the doctor named Suguro and explains how he discovers that Suguro participated in the infamous wartime medical experiment. The reader also learns that even though the leading professor of this experiment committed suicide and most of the 12 participants were punished severely, three members, including Suguro, escaped such significant consequences: they were imprisoned only two years. The story then flashes back to the wartime period, detailing the hospital experiment.

Endō's critical view toward the Japanese is most evident in the fact that, throughout the entire novella, the majority of Japanese characters are shown to lack a strong sense of morality. Most are not villains, but indifferent about moral issues at best. Further, as the novella's table of contents suggests, the focus is clearly on the three individuals who escaped severe punishment: Part Two, "Those to Be Judged (*Sabakareru hitobito*)," focuses on two interns, Toda and Suguro, and a nurse, Ueda. Toda is an elite student who is quite cunning and good at politics in the hospital. Suguro is far from shrewd, and he is inept at handling the practical and political situations within the

department In Part II, Ueda and Toda are spotlighted as the most culpable with their own sections “The Nurse” and “An Intern” respectively.

Part One: The Sea and Poison
    Prologue
    Untitled sections 1-5
Part Two: Those to Be Judged
    1. The Nurse
    2. An Intern
    3. Three O’clock in the Afternoon
Part Three: Before Dawn Breaks
    Untitled sections 1-2

Notably, the other participant, Suguro does not have his own individual section like Ueda and Toda. Although he appears as the most focused character in the third section “Three O’clock in the Afternoon,” there is a distinct difference between the first two sections about Ueda and Toda, and the third section. The former are written in first person narrative with titles clearly indicating they are specifically dedicated to Ueda and Toda, whereas the latter section is written in the third person narrative. This section is not only about Suguro but about all those who participated in the experiment.

It is important to stress that the sections entitled “The Nurse” and “An Intern” in Part Two are written in the form of memoranda (*shuki*) by Ueda and Toda respectively. They are “confessions” in the sense that they tell their past, seemingly attempting to explain why they have committed such a crime.[230] Markedly, despite their style of

[230] In their confession-like memoranda, Ueda and Toda mostly talk about their past, but they also include expressions that indicate that they are asked to write the memoranda in order to explain to the prosecutors why they participated in the experiment. For instance, Ueda mentions at the very beginning of the memorandum that she will avoid mentioning her married life because it “doesn't have anything to do with this matter” (83), which seems to suggest that she has been directed to focus on writing about the experiment. She also writes, “I don't feel like writing anything which might seem to be in my own defence

"confession," neither shows any sense of remorse in participating in the experiment. Their stories are the strongest evidence that, even though the incident took place during the extreme situation of the war, it is not simply the war but very possibly because of something inherent to the Japanese mind. In Toda's section, for instance, he records several anecdotes in his upbringing that all indicate his lack of morality since childhood. Toda was always an elite student and a cunning child, who never really had a strong sense of morality. He knew how to pretend to be a good pupil in front of the teachers, but never felt any sympathy toward his classmates. In primary school, he ignored a fellow student being bullied; in high school, he had his first sexual intercourse with his married cousin without any sense of guilt. When he became a medical student, he impregnated his maid and conducted a very dangerous abortion on her because he feared the possible outcome of social disgrace if their relationship was exposed. All these anecdotes show that Toda cares only about what others might think of him, and not the actual meaning or consequence of his acts. Toda himself acknowledges: "For me the pangs of conscience … were from childhood equivalent to the fear of disapproval in the eyes of others."[231] Even after he participated in the vivisection that killed an innocent American POW, Toda never feels a sense of remorse.

(sic)"(91), implying that she is merely trying to explain, as oppose to making an excuse for her involvement with the crime. Toda does not make any remarks of this kind. Nonetheless, he refers to the readers of his memorandum as "you (*anata-tachi*)" a few times, clearly showing that he is conscious of them. For instance, after listing up numerous misdeeds and stating that he never felt a sense of guilt over them, he directly asks: "There is something I would like to ask *you*. Aren't *you* too, deep down, unmoved by the sufferings and death of others?" (emphasis mine, 124) Since both Toda and Ueda's sections end immediately after describing how they came to agree to participate in the experiment, it is not difficult to surmise that their "memoranda" must be some form of written testament that they were made to write after having been taken into custody for the trial.

[231] Endō1972,118.

Indeed, Toda is the perfect example of the famous thesis proposed by the eminent anthropologist Ruth Benedict: the Japanese has a "shame culture" and not a "guilt culture." In her 1946 *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Benedict proposes that the Japanese do not have a sense of guilt and care only about shame because of their cultural traditions. Endō is obviously in conformity with Benedict's proposition here but he seems to consider the cause to be much more specifically the Godless tradition of Japanese religion rather than just culture, as Toda, a typical agnostic Japanese, clearly showcases.

The nurse Ueda, another agnostic Japanese, too lacks a strong sense of morality. Unlike the case of Toda, however, Ueda's problem seems to stem from her sense of resignation because she constantly feels that no matter what she does, everyone is dying because of the war, and that in the end nothing matters any more. The apathy of Ueda is most clearly demonstrated in her confrontation with Hilda, a German Christian woman who is the wife of one of the Japanese doctors. One day, Ueda is ordered to inject anesthesia into a patient as an act of euthanasia. She knows this is an act of "killing," but does not care and decides to follow the order. Since the patient would die soon anyway, Ueda thinks, there is no point in trying to prolong her life. Hilda happens to pass by, and, having been a nurse herself, she realizes what was going on. Banging on the nearby desk violently, Hilda shouts at Ueda, "You're not afraid of God? You don't believe in the punishment of God?"[232] It is evident here that Hilda's morality and strength come from her belief in Christianity. Regarding Hilda and her anger, though, Ueda's attention is

[232] Endō1972, 98.

elsewhere and she only comes to feel "funny" (*okashiku natte kitmashita*) and eventually "begins to feel tiresome" (*mendōkusku natte kimashita*) insofar as having to deal with Hilda.[233] In the context of Japanese religion, Ueda lacks the concept of an almighty God or punishment at his hands. Although it is possible to consider that her apathetic attitude is in part due to the devastating situation of the war, her apathy is shown to have originated from something deeper. After beginning to feel tiresome, she starts to hear "the thudding drumbeat of the sea roar [she] heard at night" which is "getting louder and deeper."[234] The image of the sea and its loud noise are quite symbolic of Japanese religion that swallows everything, what Endō describes as the "dreadful, ominous power" of the "unfathomable pantheistic spell" of Japanese sensibilities. In her memoranda, Ueda writes,

> To tell you the truth, I wasn't interested in whether my country won or whether it lost. About this time, when I opened my eyes at night in the dark, it seems to me somehow the sound of the sea was getting louder. As I strained my ears in the darkness, it seems that last night more than the night before and tonight more than last night the noise of the waves was getting louder and louder. I thought of the War only at those times. As the sound, big and heavy like a bass drum, got louder and deeper, I thought: 'Japan's going to lose. And then where will we all be dragged off to?'
> Dragged off anywhere, it didn't matter. [235]

Ueda does not participate in the experiment for "the advancement of medical science" or for "Japan." Nor does she do so because she was forced. It is because she is apathetic, the attributes of the Japanese who do not have "fighting spirits," or strong moral principles of

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[233] Endō1972, 99. The second phrase's translation is mine, since the original English translation seems inadequate.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid., 95-96.

good versus bad. In this sense, Ueda resembles Toda both of who are under the "unfathomable pantheistic spell" of Japanese sensibilities.

In contrast to Toda and Ueda, Suguro is portrayed as having a strong sense of morality. He is, in fact, the sole character delineated as a compassionate human being among the many Japanese characters. Unlike all other doctors or medical staff who are only concerned about department politics, Suguro sincerely wants to save the lives of his patients. Yet he is also naïve, lacking the strength to stand firm with his own sense of morality. His indecisiveness and weakness are most clearly showcased in the course of his involvement with the vivisection. When asked to participate in the experiment, he cannot decline even though he is completely aware that it is a heinous crime. Knowing Suguro well, Toda even suggests the night before the experiment that Suguro could still refuse if he so decides, but Suguro ends up participating. And yet, when he actually goes into the operating room on the day of the experiment, he immensely regrets not having declined, and cannot even prepare the anesthesia mask for the American POW who is soon going to be killed. During the entire operation, he merely stands there, totally useless, his eyes tightly shut because he is afraid to even look at the act of murder in the name of medical experimentation. In order to distract his thoughts, Suguro forces himself to imagine that they are actually trying to save the life of the patient, just like any other operation. When the experiment is over, Suguro experiences a hallucination that someone is whispering in his ear: "You killed him." Clearly, this is his sense of guilt, but Suguro is

unable to transform this remorse into any action. Even though he did not actually participate in the operation, he is complicit, and is well aware of that fact.

Notably, Toda and Suguro are shown to be good friends even though Toda represents an unscrupulous, immoral individual and Suguro, in contrast, possesses a conscience. Toda and Suguro's bond derives from each other's awareness that the other has what they lack and yearn for. Toda sees in Suguro a strong sense of morality and guilt, while Suguro desires to be strong and decisive like Toda. Combined, they symbolize the problem of the Japanese according to Endō: either they lack a sense of guilt or morality, or have it but are unable to stand firm. Despite their seeming dissimilarities, therefore, they are actually the two sides of the same coin symbolizing the "defect" of the Godless Japanese.

In contrast, the self-righteous Hilda possesses exactly what Toda and Suguro lack. She is very certain about what is right and what is wrong, and openly protests against any actions that she considers immoral, as shown in her scolding of Ueda for following an order to kill a patient as an act of euthanasia. By juxtaposing Hilda with Toda, Suguro, and Ueda, Endō seems to suggest that the tragedy was, at least in part, caused by the absence of the almighty God.

Simultaneously, however, Endō attempts to defend the Godless, "sinful" Japanese, using the unambiguously most evil character, Toda. He is the epitome of immorality, but strangely, he agonizes over his lack of the sense of guilt. In the later part of his memoranda after listing his numerous misdeeds, Toda asks himself, "Then why do

I bother writing? Because I'm strangely ill at ease. I, who fear only the eyes of others and the punishment of society, and whose fears disappear when I am secure from these, am now disturbed."[236] It is important to remember that this is written in the form of a "memoranda [*shuki*]" in the first person narrative. No one seems to be asking him to expose his previous wrongdoings[237] but he seems compelled to disclose them. Because there is no mention of any form of "regret" or asking for forgiveness from higher powers, calling it a "confession" in terms of Christian practice is inadequate. Still, Toda is not entirely indifferent toward his "sins," either. He never feels remorseful about his misconduct, but he feels the fact that he does not feel a sense of "remorse" (*kashaku*) to be "ominous" (*bukimi*). It even seems that Toda joins the experiment because he hopes that, with this, he may finally be able to feel guilt. "After doing this will my heart trouble me with recriminations? Will I shudder fearfully at having become a murderer? Killing a living human being. Having does this most fearful of deeds, will I suffer my whole life through?" – as he consents, Toda wonders.[238] He wants to test if, by participating in the vivisection experiment, he could finally feel the sense of guilt that he yeans for.

Toda's attempt to make himself feel guilty by participating in the experiment fails miserably. He even returns to the operating room after the experiment is over, to see if he can feel remorse. Standing in the center of the room, remembering the innocent victim,

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[236] Endō 1972, 123.
[237] Even though this is probably a statement that Toda is expected to write when taken into the custody, still, the request from the judges would be how he was involved with the experiment, not about all of his past misconducts.
[238] Endō 1972, 126.

an American POW, what Toda "wanted now was a feeling of bitter self-recrimination. A sharp pang that stabs at the breast, the remorse which rips and tears at the heart. But even though he had returned to this operating theatre, no such emotions welled up within him."[239] Disappointed, he now feels he has fallen to the lowest depths. The literal translation describing Toda's emotional state at this point is "the feeling that he had fallen to the very depths constricted his chest."[240] The word *mune* used here literally means "chest" but in Japanese *mune* is where the heart – human emotions and feelings – is supposed to reside, and the squeezing of the chest results in causing pain in one's heart. A tricky yet critical question here is: could we call this pain a kind of guilt? Is Toda actually capable of feeling guilty even if he does not recognize it as such?

Endō seems to distinguish Toda's pain from the sense of guilt. Earlier, Toda explains that what he desires to feel is "bitter self-recrimination"(*kashaku*), "sharp stabbing" (*hageshii itami*), or "remorse" (*kōkai no nen*). These represent the sense of "guilt" which Toda was never able to feel. Yet there certainly is sadness in Toda that stems from his inability to feel the pain and remorse he so longs for, and this is, I contend, Endō's defense of the Japanese. The Japanese may lack a sense of guilt, but they still feel a pain; it may not be as "sharp" as it is supposed to be, but they are not entirely heartless either. Endō's view toward the Japanese is, therefore, quite complex. They are

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[239] Endō 1972, 157.

[240] In Michael Gallagher's translation, this sentence is translated as "the only emotion in his heart was a sense of having fallen as low as one can fall" (157). However, in this translation, the part describing that there is a sense of squeezing of the chest (*mune o shimetsukeru*) is missing. The Japanese sentence reads 堕ちる所まで堕ちたという気持ちだけが胸をしめつけた。(Endō 1960, 148)

depicted as incapable of having a strong sense of morality or the strength to act upon it, but at the same time they are not without pain and their own kind of suffering because of their very awareness of these shortcomings.

Endō's view toward Christian principles is also ambivalent. Even though Hilda represents the moralistic Christian and her actions are depicted as honest expressions of her effort to help others, at the same time, there is a distinct gap between what she deems "good" and the way the recipients of her charity feel. For example, Hilda makes it a routine to come visit the hospital once every few weeks and almost forcefully collects the patients' dirty clothes to do the laundry for them. As Ueda describes in her memoranda;

> The fact is that we nurses didn't appreciate [Hilda's] goodness very much. I think it was a lot of trouble to the ward patients too. The ward was filled with old men and women who had lost everyone they could depend on in the air raids, but to have a Western woman like this talk to them would cause them to freeze up. On top of it, when Mrs Hilda would pull out of their old cloth packs and wicker baskets their dirty underwear, they would get all upset and come crawling out of their bed. … The funny thing is that the patients' embarrassment didn't worry her a bit.[241]

Hilda does not notice the patients' feelings of painful embarrassment, because she has such a strong – perhaps, too strong – conviction in her "good" act. She can only see the matter from her own perspective; she is a good, yet headstrong individual who is shown to be insensitive to others' feelings. The portrayal of Hilda therefore suggests Endō's

[241] Endō 1972, 93.

critique of the Western form of Christianity. Hilda, or Christianity, cannot be the absolute solution for the Japanese.[242]

Japanese religiosity that underlies the mentality of those three culpable Japanese is also symbolically presented through the image of the sea, or *umi*, which is not only a part of the title *The Sea and Poison* (*Umi to dokuyaku*), but also recurs throughout the story. At the beginning, the sea is not necessarily tied to negative qualities:

> To the west of the Medical School, one could see the ocean. Whenever Suguro climbed to the roof, he looked out at the sea. Sometimes its blue brilliance was painfully dazzling. At other times its dark surface was subdued and melancholy. Then he could forget to some extent the War and the hospital and his empty stomach. The changing colours of the sea gave rise to variety of day-dreams.[243]

The sea here illuminates its capability to change colors and to soothe the pain of Suguro, with a touch of tension implied by words such as "painfully dazzling," "dark surface," and "melancholy." Considering the importance of nature in Japanese religions, especially in Shinto, the sea here offers an embodiment of Japanese religion: it is a part of nature, it accepts anything, and it is protean.

But as the story progresses, the way the sea appears becomes more and more allusive of the Japanese people's moral depravity; the description of the sea turns increasingly ominous with the images of "dark" or "black." As mentioned above, Ueda's

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[242] In his fascinating analysis of *The Sea and Poison*, Japanese literary scholar Hagiwara Takao suggests that Hilda "overlaps with Endo's mother in that both are dedicated to Western Christian values which are antithetical to what Endo perceives to be the indigenous pantheistic Japanese sensibilities" (135). Hagiwara further proposes that Dr. Hashimoto, Hilda's husband who leads the vivisection, is the figure representing Endō's father because Dr. Hashimoto is only concerned about mundane activities, like Endō's father. See Hagiwara (2000) for a more detailed analysis on the tension between these figures representing Japanese as opposed to Western sensibilities.

[243] Endō1972, 44.

recollection of her past is often accompanied with the memory of a "dark sea" or the "heavy sound of the waves." After being asked to participate in the experiment, Suguro dreams of himself as a piece of wood drifting on the dark ocean in whatever way the waves take him.[244] Whereas Hilda's God would scold and punish her if she commits an immoral act, the sea never condemns but simply accepts. It may help one to daydream, or to forget something unpleasant, but it does not offer any moral guidance in the way the Christian God does, and neither does it stop the crime from happening. These image of the sea seem to reflect Endō's sense of Japanese weakness that he proposed in his 1950 essay: the Japanese religion's "dreadful" (*ozomubeki*) power and "unfathomable pantheistic magic/spell,"[245] as well as the Japanese people's "yearning to be absorbed" (*kyūshū e no akogare*, 吸収へのあこがれ).[246] The title of the novella, *The Sea and Poison*, then perhaps symbolizes how the sea can be poisonous, or a drop of poison can spread throughout the entire sea making it toxic.

The ending scene suggests, however, Endō's tiny hope for the Japanese may lie in this very sea. Suguro and Toda are having a short conversation on the roof of the building after the experiment; when Toda leaves, Suguro, "alone on the roof gazed out at the sea shining amid the blackness." The "shining" quality of the dark sea is in fact repeated twice in this very last scene.[247] Despite the bleakness of the story and of its view of Japanese religion, therefore, there is an inkling that it may be the very religiosity that

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[244] Endō 1972, 76.
[245] Endō "The Recollections on the Birthday Night" 2009, 16-17.
[246] Ibid., 18.
[247] Endō 1972, 165, 167.

could save the Japanese, which indeed turns up to be the case after 40 years, when Endō writes his last work. At this stage, however, *The Sea and Poison* exemplifies the author's earlier, ambivalent view toward the Japanese as well as Christianity. With an attempt to explain and to redeem them with a special kind of suffering, the Japanese are still mostly depicted as morally deficient, whereas Christianity is shown to offer strong moral principles even though they may not be a perfect fit for the Japanese.

In *Silence*, written twelve years later, the image of the dark sea continues, along with Endō's ambivalent perceptions toward Christianity and Japan. The negative assessment of the Japanese people's moral sense in *The Sea and Poison* is replaced with an even more severe interpretation of Japanese cultural and religious milieu as a "mud swamp" that deteriorates Christianity. At the same time, the story also reveals the emergence of a different type of Catholic faith for Endō. Instead of accepting European Christianity as the norm, Endō begins to actively construct his own Catholicism. Although Japan is still portrayed negatively in terms of its "swamp"- like religious environment, it is from this work that Endō begins to transform Catholicism to one that fit his own Japanese body.

3. DEPARTING FROM EUROPEAN CATHOLICISM: *SILENCE* (1966)

Silence, perhaps the most well known work of Endō both inside and outside Japan, caused quite a controversy when first published in 1966. Despite its accolades

from literary critics such as Etō Jun and Kawakami Tetsutarō as well as winning the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Literary Prize, it offended Japanese Catholic churches because they considered the story to be about the defeat of Christian faith. Some Christians in Nagasaki became indignant because "Mr. Endō had been less than fair to the indomitable courage of [our] heroic ancestors."[248] Christian followers were told not to read the novel, and schools in Nagasaki and Kagoshima banned it.[249] The criticisms were predicated on the notion that the protagonist, a Portuguese priest named Rodrigues' loses his faith by stamping on the *fumie*, which is a tablet bearing Christian figures, usually of Christ or Mary, that was used to discover hidden Christians under the persecution of Christianity in the17th century Japan.[250] Endō expressed elsewhere, however, that what he attempted to depict was the victory of Christian faith, not its defeat. Why this discrepancy? How could the author interpret the story as one of a priest overcoming adversity and retaining his faith against many odds while many Christians thought the protagonist lost his faith? It is because Endō's version of "Christian faith" was beginning to depart from European Catholicism.

Silence is the story about the Portuguese priest, Rodrigues, who enters Japan in the 17th century. The novel opens up with the news that informs Rodrigues that his former mentor Ferreira apostatized in Japan. Unable to believe it, Rodrigues' decision to go to Japan is in part to find out the truth about Ferreira and to help hidden Japanese Christians

[248] Endō 1980. In William Johnston' s "Translator's Preface" xvii.
[249] Endō and Gessel 1994, 98.
[250] In order to prove that they were not Christian, those suspected were ordered to trample on *fumie (*踏絵).

retain their faith. Even though they are well aware that a stringent ban is enforced on Christianity and all Christians, and that they will be severely punished and persecuted if discovered, a group of Jesuits including Rodrigues manage to arrive in a small village in Nagasaki. They successfully make contact with hidden Christians and conduct their priestly activities quite contently for a while. But soon, the hunt for Christians begins to intensify. They flee but are eventually captured and put in a dungeon. Contrary to his expectation that he will be killed immediately, the district magistrate attempts to convert Rodrigues because they consider it more effective to show foreign priests' apostasy to prompt the Japanese Christians to renounce their faith. Rodrigues' will is resolute, but the magistrate set up a meeting for Rodrigues with Ferreira, who tells Rodrigues that Japan is a "mud swamp in which Christianity" can never grow. Ferreira also tells Rodrigues that he apostatized not because of the torture but because it was the only way for him to protect Japanese Christians from being persecuted. Rodrigues' resolve begins to falter. Combined with the agony of witnessing many innocent peasants being killed because of his refusal to convert, Rodrigues finally steps on the *fumie* of Christ, indicating, at least officially, that he has apostatized. At the time he steps on the *fumie*, Rodrigues for the first time hears God speaking to him, encouraging him to trample on Him.

Endō's negative perception about Japan's religious environment is voiced by the character Ferreira, whom Endō created by utilizing historical information about the real individual Fr. Christóvâo Ferreira (c.1580-1650). In their first meeting under the

supervision of Japanese authorities, Ferreira tells Rodrigues that keeping Catholic faith in Japan is futile because,

> For twenty years I labored in the mission. … The one thing I know is that our religion does not take root in this country. …This country is a swamp. … Whenever you plant a sapling in this swamp the roots begin to rot; the leaves grow yellow and wither. And we have planted the sapling of Christianity in this swamp.[251]

In his attempt to re-convert Ferreira back to the Catholic faith, Rodrigues pleads with Ferreira -- was not there a time when the religion bloomed specifically because of the efforts of the Jesuits like Ferreira himself? Yet, Ferreira only scornfully laughs at Rodrigues and asks, "when?" dismissing the notion that the religion ever flourished in this land. Ferreira tells Rodrigues that he came to realize that, after spending over twenty years in Japan, what he thought he was achieving – the transformation of Japan into a Christian country – was never real. He now believes that the "Japanese till this day have never had the concept of God; and they never will"[252] because they:

> twisted God to their own way of thinking in a way we can never imagine. … It is like a butterfly caught in a spider's web. At first it is certainly a butterfly, but the next day only the externals, the wings and the trunk, are those of a butterfly; it has lost its true reality and has become a skeleton. In Japan, our God is just like the butterfly caught in the spider's web: only the exterior form of God remains, but it has already become a skeleton.[253]

Despite the dangers of equating characters with the author, here it is important to consider how the author's ideas are possibly revealed through Ferreira. For one, there is no clear answer to, or refutation against, Ferreira's claim that Japan is a swamp. Although

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[251] Endō 1980: 147.
[252] Ibid., 149.
[253] Ibid.

Rodrigues attempts to deny Ferreira's assertions, he cannot, and actually he begins to doubt God. Furthermore, even though Rodrigues convinces himself that "stepping on the *fumie*" does not mean real apostasy, this act seems to indicate that, perhaps, he is accepting that Japan is a swamp and that is why he needs to transform the figure of God from the beautiful European one into an ugly Japanese one that can survive in this swampy environment.

The way Endō characterize Ferreira in the novel also strongly indicates that Ferreira is a spokesperson of Endō in this aspect. According to Endō's research, the historical Ferreira most likely renounced his faith due to his inability to tolerate the torture, having given up after only five hours after he was tortured.[254] Endō's Ferreira, on the contrary, "was hung in a pit of foul excrement, but [he] did not say a single word that might betray [his] God."[255] By transforming Ferreira into one who apostatizes because of his disbelief in God and not because of physical pain, Endō reflects his own religious doubts that Christianity was never real in Japan and that Japanese climate is indeed too "swampy" for Christianity to flourish.

Ferreira's description of how a beautiful butterfly becomes a *skeleton* because in the Japanese "mud swamp" corresponds exactly with the way Endō critiques in reference to Akutagawa's 1922 short story "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" for suggesting the superficial aspects of imported religions to Japan remain the same but their substance

[254] Endō "Ichimai no fumie kara" 2000.
[255] Endō 1980, 167.

disappears and transforms into *falsehood*.[256] Endō considered what Akutagawa called and celebrated "the power that re-creates" (*tsukurikaeru chikara*) a negative attribute of Japan. The essay, written in 1970, just four years after he had written *Silence*, suggests that Endō, like his character Ferreira, also considered Japan's religious environment a "swamp" that distorts Christianity.

The sea serves as yet another strong evidence of Endō's negative assessment of Japanese religion. It is described as bleak throughout the story, and is strongly associated with death. The ominous deathlike image of the sea is particularly compelling when the Japanese Christian peasants and Rodrigues's fellow Portuguese priest are executed by being tied to cross-shaped woods set at the water's edge. They are left dying slowly in the sea several days and devoured by big waves. When the tide comes in, "the black, cold color of the sea deepens; the stakes seem to sink into the water. The white foaming waves, swirling past the stakes, break on the sand, a white bird, skimming over the surface of the sea, flies far, far away."[257] When they finally die, they are burned into ashes and thrown into the sea. Even then, the sea "only stretches out endlessly, melancholy and dark, while below the grey clouds there is not the shadow of an island."[258]

The sea becomes the grave of those who were executed, and those executed Christians are, in a sense, returned to the sea and to nature. As mentioned earlier, Endō

[256] Endō 1975, 108. Emphasis mine.
[257] Endō 1980, 59.
[258] Ibid., 60.

often discussed in his earlier essays about the Japanese yearning to be embraced by nature. If one looks at the sea as their peaceful resting place, it does not have to be seen as ominous but comforting. Nonetheless, Endō's description of the sea conveys little sense of peace. Instead, the sea is "eerie," "unfathomable," and "cold." Rodrigues stresses how very oppressive the sea is. For instance, while he is on the run, he conjures up his past experiences since arriving in Japan,

> There arose up within my heart quite suddenly the sound of the roaring sea as it would ring in my ears when Garrpe and I lay alone in hiding on the mountain. The sound of those waves that echoed in the dark like a muffled drum; the sound of those waves all night long, as they broke meaninglessly, receded, and then broke again on the shore. This was the sea that relentlessly washed the dead bodies of Mokichi and Ichizo the sea that swallowed them up. The sea that, after their death, stretched out endlessly with unchanging expression. And like the sea God was silent.[259]

Like it did for the nurse Ueda in *The Sea and Poison*, the sound of the sea engenders a sense of uneasiness. Furthermore, the sea's indifference is explicitly likened to God's silence. The silence of God here is symbolic of the absence of God in Japan. The sea swallows the dead bodies of the peasants with a cold unchanging expression. This is what Endō sees in Japanese religiosity: barren without God, it is a mud swamp, or a dark sea, that swallows deaths and deteriorates what is planted from outside.

Like in *The Sea and Poison*, Endō again stresses the negative aspects of Japan, especially Japanese religion. Both Ferreira's description of Japan and the death-related images of the sea underscore Endō's perception that Japan has dreadful pantheistic spells. Instead of showing a critical view toward Western Christianity as in *The Sea and Poison*,

[259] Ibid., 68.

however, in *Silence* Endō goes a step further and suggests a different type of Christian faith, one that can survive and even thrive in Japan's mud swamp. Whether he realizes it or not, then, Endō is executing the "power that re-creates," the very power that he fears and depreciates in his criticism of Akutagawa's essay.

Re-creating Christ: Endō's Version

Endō's re-creation process of Christianity is most clearly reflected in the way the face of Christ that Rodrigues imagines transforms throughout the story. The first visual image of Christ comes from "the picture preserved in Borgo San Sepulchro" in which "Christ has one foot on the sepulchre and in his right hand he holds a crucifix. He is facing straight out and his face bears the expression of encouragement."[260] This is what Rodrigues always imagines before departing for Japan. At this point, Christ's face is "filled with vigor and strength," just like Rodrigues himself who is also full of vigor with even the naïve belief that he might somehow successfully preach Catholicism in Japan without getting caught. Even after arriving in Japan, Christ's face in Rodrigues' imagination remains beautiful and glorious, until he becomes a fugitive and his life becomes increasingly difficult as the hunt for Christians escalates.

While on the run, Rodrigues begins to show signs of weariness especially after witnessing the severe persecution of the Japanese Christians who sheltered him; he is overcome by shock, grief, and helplessness. Rodrigues also begins to doubt God and

[260] Ibid., 22.

questions why He is silent when these faithful Christians are brutally murdered. One day he catches a glimpse of his own face in a small pool of water; he is surprised to see a reflection of a face that is "thin and dirty."[261] The face of "glorious" Christ begins to overlap with the "fatigued, dirty" face of Rodrigues. After being caught by the district magistrate and put in the dungeon, Christ becomes an "emaciated man" in Rodrigues' imagination.[262]

The most drastic change comes at the moment of his "apostasy." When Rodrigues is about to step on the *fumie*, he for the first time sees "the ugly face of Christ, crowned with thorns and the thin, outstretched arms" in the *fumie*.[263] It is the figure of Christ curved in the copper medal that has been trampled on by hundreds of Japanese Christians. Later, as Rodrigues recalls what happened,

> The remembrance of that *fumie*, a burning image, remained behind his eyelids. The interpreter had placed before his feet a wooden plaque. On it was a copper plate on which a Japanese craftsman had engraved that man's face. Yet the face was different from that on which the priest had gazed so often in Portugal, in Rome, in Goa and in Macao. It was not a Christ whose face was filled with majesty and glory; neither was it a face made beautiful by endurance of pain; nor was it a face filled with the strength of will that has repelled temptation. The face of the man who then lay at his feet was sunken and utterly exhausted. … It was this concave face that had looked at the priest in sorrow. In sorrow it had gazed up at him as the eyes spoke appealingly: 'Trample! Trample! It is to be trampled on by you that I am here.'[264]

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[261] Ibid., 67.
[262] Ibid., 124.
[263] Ibid., 170.
[264] Ibid., 175-176.

The image of "European," "beautiful," and "glorious" Christ is completely replaced with "ugly," "fatigued" Christ's face in the Japanese *fumie*. Importantly, it is this "ugly" Christ, and not the "beautiful, glorious" Christ of the church that speaks to Rodrigues. Since the time he witnessed the brutal persecutions of the Christians, Rodrigues began to doubt God's existence, asking God why He was silent, to which God never answered. When he steps on the *fumie*, Rodrigues finally hears God's voice, but it is not of the beautiful Christ, but of the ugly Christ in the Japanese *fumie*. In other words, Endō rejects, or, as the literary critic Etō Jun aptly puts, "silences," the "beautiful and glorious" God in European Catholicism who does not speak to those in Japan.[265]

This distinction between the European versus Japanese Christ also seems to correspond with the difference between the church and a more personal God, which is foreshadowed from the very early part of the novel. The Prologue begins with the description of how Ferreira betrayed the "church."

> News reached the Church in Rome. Christovao Ferreira, sent to Japan by the Society of Jesus in Portugal, after undergoing the torture of 'the pit' at Nagasaki apostatized. … It was unthinkable that such a man would *betray the church*, however terrible the circumstances in which he was placed.[266]

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[265] Etō Jun interprests the European glorious Christ and the Japanese fatigued Christ to respectively represent the father and the mother, who are irreconcilably placed against each other. According to Etō, this incongruous relationship reflects Endō's feelings for his parents. Endō indeed agrees with Etō's interpretation and explains that his choice of the "mother" – the ugly Christ – over the father might have been because of his sense of guilt and regret toward his mother. Specifically, Endō considers that his choice to live with his father when he entered university, and the fact that he could not make it to her deathbed when his mother died are two major reasons why he holds the sense of guilt regarding his mother. Etō believes that the father cum God is being "silenced" (*chinmoku saserarete iru*) in the novel, and the whole purpose of this silence is to create the situation in which the mother figure – fatigued God – can say "Go ahead, step on me," thereby bringing victory to the fatigued God who is to become the chosen one. See Etō (1991).

[266] This is William Johnston's translation except for the part "the church." Emphasis mine (3)

It is critical that Endō specifically uses the word "kyōkai," (the church) in the original Japanese. He is drawing an important distinction between God and the church, or personal faith as opposed to the institution. After stepping on the *fumie* and hearing God talking directly to him, Rodrigues considers that his "Lord is different from the God that is preached in the churches."[267] This distinction between God and the church allows for the possibility that in stepping on the *fumie*, even Ferreira, and certainly later Rodrigues, are not abandoning God even while they abandon the church. In this way, *Silence* is, as Endō claimed, a story about the triumph of Christian faith, but it is also why those who equate the church with God could not accept Endō's interpretation.

To sum up, Endō's assessment of Japan was still stringent, as exemplified by the bleak images of the mud swamp that deteriorates the imported religion and the ominous sea, but he began to seek and create a different kind of Catholicism that is survivable in such a "swamp." In this process, Endō obviously had to re-create the ill-fitting Western clothes called Christianity into much more appropriate Japanese clothes for his Japanese body, even if it means liberally altering the accepted norm. That God finally speaks to Rodrigues only when the "beautiful and glorious" God of Europe is replaced with the "fatigued, ugly" God in Japan is a strong indication that Endō's view toward Christianity begins to transform. Endō is now an agent of re-creation, just like Akutagawa. Even though he may not have realized, or might have denied that he was re-creating the given

[267] Endō 1980, 175.

form of Catholicism when he wrote *Silence*, Endō consciously chose to wear "catholic," not "Catholic" clothes, when writing his final novel *Deep River*.

4. ARRIVING AT HIS "CATHOLICISM" : *DEEP RIVER* (1993)

When Endō conceived the ideas for *Deep River*, he was already battling a serious health problem and wanted to complete this novel as his last major work.[268] It did become Endō's last major work, with which he concludes his journey of reconciling his Catholic faith and Japanese sensibilities. While it is packed with his newfound interest in Jungian psychology and religious pluralism, most importantly, it is in this work that his former Catholic eyes that used to critically observe the "flaws" of Japanese people and cultural traits are completely replaced with the newly developed "catholic" eyes of a Japanese author. The fact that the major part of the novel is staged in India – rather than in Japan, or the West, or in a location with Biblical associations like Jerusalem – is most telling of Endō's desire not to limit his perspective to either Japan or the Catholic world. Religion still occupies an important place in the story; India, or more specifically, the mother Ganges, appears to represent the ideal form of religion for Endō at the end of his life, because the river is "catholic" in the sense that she accepts anyone, anything, and rejects nothing. Like the river, the novel also attempts to accommodate a variety of topics including multiple religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, as well as

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[268] Endō *Composition Notes for "Deep River"(Fukai kawa" sōsaku nikki*「深い河」創作日記*)* 2000.

other social and political issues that surround them. With the all-embracing icon of the Ganges in the center of the novel, Endō no longer focuses on the negative characterization of Japan, and discards, both thematically and structurally, the dichotomies that he had regularly employed in his fictional works. Instead of concentrating on his usual issue of religious versus national identities, he attempts and succeeds in delineating universal, human problems beyond the boundaries of different nations or religions, using India as a microcosm of the world.

This, however, is not tantamount to saying that *Deep River* achieved literary success. Ironically, because Endo had finally and firmly established his religious identity, and had a very strong desire to express his newfound philosophy, the novel's focus shifted away from human struggles – the essential ingredient in literature – to the philosophy itself, causing the novel to lose its literary appeal.

4-1. Discarding dichotomies

The most distinct feature of *Deep River* is the use of multiple perspectives, and its complete lack of a dominating character or a single issue shared by all the major characters. It is not that such a method is uncommon in writing stories, as we saw *The Sea and Poison* contains sections that are specifically focused on different individuals, such as Ueda and Toda. Yet, while their sections are still tied to one specific theme of the lack of morality of the Japanese, *Deep River*'s structural, as well as thematic, multiplicity is striking. The story has five main characters: Isobe, Mitsuko, Numada, Kiguchi, and

Ōtsu, who are given their individual chapters named "The Case of Isobe," "The Case of Mitsuko," etcetera. The first four characters listed participate in the same tour to India and that is how they become acquainted, while Ōtsu, Mitsuko's old friend, lives in India and she encounters him there. Although there are chapters that describe the main characters' interactions during the trip in India, but they do not become particularly involved with one another. Each has his or her own reason to join the tour, and their independent pursuit of it is separately delineated in their sections.

For instance, the novel starts with Isobe's chapter where he has just found out that his wife has cancer and how the couple spends her last days at the hospital. He later undertakes the trip to India because his wife told him at her deathbed that she would be reborn into this world and she wanted him to find her. Isobe does not truly believe in reincarnation, but he cannot ignore his wife's last wish; after getting some information that there is a girl in India who claimed that she was a Japanese reborn, Isobe decides to participate in the tour to find the girl, to fulfill the wishes of his late-wife. There is another chapter in which the reader is introduced to Kiguchi, a war veteran, who travels to India to console the spirits of his deceased war comrades. Kiguchi's story reveals how his friend, who saved Kiguchi's life during the war, harbored a strong sense of guilt from committing the act of cannibalism and later died from psychological affliction resulting from it. Kiguchi, now a Buddhist, joins the tour and eventually finds solace by the Ganges where he conducts a personal ritual reading Buddhist sutras for his deceased friend and war comrades. Each of the characters differ in their personality, past

experiences, age, gender, religious orientation, class, and occupation; the only common thread is that they have a painful past to deal with and have come to India to find some kind of closure. Even though their stories sometimes overlap, and some characters are given a little more detailed description than others, each character's stories are narrated independently, in an equally objective manner. By stringing together such seemingly disjoined stories, Endō's intention seems to spotlight the complexity and multiplicity of the world. In other words, the diversity itself, instead of each individual's issues, is the central theme of the novel.

4-2. No longer critical of the Japanese

Another notable change when compared with the previous two works is the fact that Endō's criticism toward the "Japanese" seems to abate. In his earlier works, there was frequently at least one prominent negative characteristic of Japan that is central to the story. In *The Sea and Poison,* for instance, the three main characters share the Japanese flaws of lacking a strong sense of morality or the willpower to act with conviction. In *Silence*, Japan was described as a "mud swamp" that deteriorates foreign religions. In *Deep River*, however, characters do not share these kinds of "Japan specific" flaws. Although the main characters are all Japanese, they are not presented as the representatives of the Japanese but rather human beings who are grappling with problems that are universal in the sense that they can happen to anyone, regardless of race, nationality, or religion. As mentioned above, Isobe's case exemplifies someone who

deals with the death of one's spouse, and Kiguchi, a war veteran grapples with his wartime memories and experience.

Even though most of the major characters are depicted as conscientious people, this does not indicate that Endō is now trying to show that Japanese people are necessarily all "virtuous." One of the main characters, Mitsuko, unmistakably possesses the side of a cold-hearted woman. An important secondary character, Enami, the tour guide, describes his contempt toward the Japanese tourists who are always busy buying souvenirs and only "superficially" interested in the Indian culture. At the same time, however, Enami himself is portrayed as an example of a self-absorbed, arrogant Japanese intellectual who believes that he is better than the Japanese tourists. Another secondary character, a Japanese photographer named Sanjō, is an extremely shallow, fame-oriented, and quite egocentric individual. Endō's intention is, therefore, not to reverse the image of Japanese people from "evil" to "good," but rather to illustrate a more nuanced and heterogeneous picture of the Japanese, or, just people – some sincere, some shallow, some pursuing fame and money, and some trying to deal with their painful past. Out of such diverse human beings, Endo chooses those who struggle with their painful past and endeavor to find an answer for their pasts as essential components to construct his story.

4-3. No longer worried about European Christianity

Just like Endō's criticism of Japan and the Japanese becomes lessens in this work, the conflict between Christianity and Japanese identity is also deemphasized. There is

one character, the ex-priest Otsu who briefly talks about the familiar issue of the conflict between religious and cultural identities, but it is just one of many elements of the novel. Furthermore, while it was often the struggle itself that used to be the focus in Endō's previous works, Otsu is shown to have reconciled his own Catholic faith and his Japanese identities; even though European missionaries do not approve, Otsu still considers himself Catholic, and he no longer cares what others think of him. Unlike Rodrigues in *Silence* who was preoccupied with the question regarding God's existence and silence,[269] Otsu does not speculate on theological questions because he believes that what one *does* with his chosen God, and not whether God exists or not, is far more important. His conviction that "God is not so much as existence as a force"[270] is also clearly demonstrated by his choice of living in Hindu āshram and carrying the bodies and corpses to the cremation ground. This perception toward religion seems to correspond with how "religion" usually operates in the Japanese context. As discussed in Chapter One, one of the characteristics of Japanese religion is that it is practice-centered, instead of faith-based.[271] There is a strong sense of certainty in Otsu and his actions as he believes that it is his given task to help those who came to the Ganges to die, as he confides this to his old friend, Mitsuko, "in the end, I've decided that my Onion [God]

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[269] Even in *Silence*, the theological question regarding God's existence ultimately becomes less important. At the very end of the story, Rodrigues says that "my life until this day would have spoken of him," indicating that Rodrigues' life is more important than the theological question regarding God's existence. He also describes that God should be seen more as *hataraki* (force/work) than *sonzai* (existence), a theme/an assertion/an idea which is revisited and emphasized in *Deep River*.

[270] Endō 1994, 64. 神は存在というより、働きです。(Endō 1993, 99)

[271] Even the way Otsu does not care about his religious affiliation in carrying out what he believes to be his mission seems to echo how the Buddhist monks did not want to reveal their identities in their volunteer works in the aftermath of the Tohoku earthquake in 2011, as mentioned in Chapter One.

doesn't live only within European Christianity.[272] He can be found in Hinduism and in Buddhism as well. This is no longer just an idea in my head, it's a way of life I've chosen for myself."[273] Otsu, clearly Endō's double, no longer falters in his own chosen religion.

4-4. Replacing the dichotomy

With this novel, Endo dispenses with the two themes of his earlier works – his conflict between Catholic and Japanese identities and the negative assessment of Japanese cultural attributes. What becomes central in this novel, instead, is the multiplicity of the world, which Endo illuminates by underscoring the "catholic" nature of the Ganges along with the related Buddhist concept of *zenaku funi* which basically means that "good and evil are but two faces of the same coin." The only female character, Mitsuko, most clearly exemplifies this. Even though she volunteers at a hospital and takes care of those who are ill or in need, simultaneously she is cruel and even base at times.

> As she watched the unresisting figures of elderly women sleeping in their beds, Mitsuko would suddenly be gripped by a nebulous urge, and at times she would pretend to forget to change their undergarments or to give them the medicines they were supposed to take. On those occasions, she heard another voice identical to hers saying: *This invalid isn't going to get better whether she takes her medicine or not. This old woman isn't doing anybody any good; in fact, she's a*

[272] Otsu begins to use the term "onion" (*tamanegi*) to refer to Christian God because Mitsuko is an atheist and dislikes even to hear the word God (*kami*) in their conversation. Endō mentions in his *Composition Notes* that he believes that "onion" is an apt word to describe his idea of God because there is no actual core in an onion but the layers are what constitute the onion. Likewise that not the "central core" is what is important in Catholicism but each layer, how an individual has their way of dealing with, or doing with, the religion is important.

[273] Endō 1994, 184.

> *burden to her family, and it's a far better thing to put her at ease sooner rather than later.*[274]

The doctors and nurses praise her and her devotional work, but Mitsuko herself is quite aware that her "good work" is nothing but a façade, a mere "play-acting" and that she actually does not care about the patients from the bottom of her heart. This awareness is partly why she joins the tour to India; she identifies herself with the Indian Goddess of Kalī who also has two faces: Kalī is shown to be compassionate with her eyes brimming with gentleness but at the same time "the smiling Kalī sucked warm blood from the blood-soaked demon Raktavija. She held up a freshly severed head, and blood flecked her lips as she poked out her long tongue."[275]

The dual character of Mitsuko is something that is also shared with the Ganges because the river accommodates what seem to be polar opposites, such as life and death, or, purity and dirt. In the Ganges,

> The women were placing flower petals they had bought at a stall … On the stone steps the yellow-robed Brahmin beneath his large parasol was blessing a newlywed couple. … the ashes of the body that had just been cremated were being shoveled into the river …Even though the waters bearing the ashes of the dead came flowing towards the bathers, no one thought it peculiar or distressing. Life and death coexisted in harmony in this river.[276]

The living gather to be blessed and purified and the dead gather to be received by the great river that encompasses all aspects of humanity and beyond. Even if it sounds contradictory, its capability to accommodate even filth is the essence of its holiness,

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[274] Ibid., 124.
[275] Ibid., 115.
[276] Ibid., 210.

which is, interestingly, opposite to Shinto purity that is usually described with qualities such as transparent, clear, and free of dirt. Here, the Ganges' capacity to accept all kinds of humanity including the filth and perhaps, even evil, is underscored as "holy" and "catholic."

Mitsuko also embodies "catholicism" in the way that she threads together the disparate stories of other characters in the novel: she is the only character who has direct contact with all other main characters. She took care of Isobe's late wife while she was dying of cancer and that is how she becomes acquainted with Isobe. Mitsuko also tends Kiguchi who falls ill during the tour, and even though she dislikes Otsu's sentiments, she still reads Otsu's letters to her. Like the Ganges, she ultimately accepts everyone, and it is quite symbolic when Mitsuko enters the river and truly becomes part of the Ganges in the later part of the novel. As her entire body is submerged in the river, she comes to the realization that,

> *What I can believe in now is the sight of all these people, each carrying his or her own individual burdens, praying at this deep river. …I believe the river embraces these people and carries them away. A river of humanity. The sorrows of this deep river of humanity. And I am a part of it.*[277]

The only thing Mitsuko, the self-proclaimed atheist, believes in is the "river of humanity" embodied by the Ganges, and that, regardless of their religious or political orientations or race or anything, all human beings are part of it in the end. This "river of humanity" is deemed to be bigger than any established religion such as Christianity and to possess its

[277] Ibid., 211. (Italics in the original.)

own all-encompassing logic that even goes against Shinto prohibitions of purity.[278] While there is a very strong indication at the end of the novel that Otsu will die soon, Mitsuko, who becomes one with the Ganges, one with "the river of humanity," survives and keeps living, even swallowing Otsu's story.

Because Endō was by this time an established author, and *Deep River* was written with the expectation of becoming his last major accomplishment,[279] there are not many critics who blatantly criticize this novel, and it even received the Mainichi Art Award in 1994, a year after its publication. But as literary critic Shimizu Masashi severely but aptly describes, the novel ends up being a "Shallow River."[280] Despite his final reconciliation between his religious and national identities, and the success in delivering this message in this novel, it does not seem to have achieved literary excellence. Why? The biggest reason seems to be Endō's too strong desire to convey his belief about life and religion, and perhaps because of this, the characters in the novel become mere puppets, failing to show depth as human beings.

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[278] In the novel, "something great and eternal that could not be limited to the Onion" (211) – here, "Onion" is the term referring to Christ.

[279] The publisher, Kodansha, advertised it as "Endō Literature: Masterpiece 遠藤文学の最高傑作," "Pure literature, full-length novel written for this publication 純文学書下し長編小説" in the band of its first hardcover edition.

[280] Shimizu 2004.
この小説は緊密度に欠けた「浅い河」にとどまっている。『深い河』を絶賛するものがおり、遠慮があって中途半端にほめる者がいる。特に 遠藤周作と生前交友関係を持った人達にそれを指摘することができる。Critic and novelist, Nakamura Shinichiro correctly points out that although Endō successfully conveys his idea about religion in this work, he is quite doubtful that this work succeeded as a literary work. 宗教的には、言いたいことは言い切っているけれども、そのプロセスが、文学的に説得的なまでには表現されていない。 (Quoted in Shimizu 2004)

The way the novel is structured, with five major characters in it, seems to have contributed to the lack of character development. While *Deep River* is not much longer than *Silence* which had only one protagonist, Rodrigues, whose psychological and physical journey is detailed, the five major characters in *Deep River* are given only one chapter each devoted to them. Because of the limited space, each one's story is delineated as if it is a summary of their problems, lacking depth and intimacy to get to know how exactly each of these individuals tackle their problems under their specific circumstances. Mitsuko is probably the most developed character; her chapter is the longest and she appears most frequently throughout the novel as she is the only individual who has some connection to everyone in the story. Still, even Mitsuko is far from being the "protagonist."

Another reason that may have contributed to the shallowness of this novel is the fact that everyone's stories seem to be, in one way or another, rehashes of Endō's previous stories. For instance, Numada's story resembles Endō's earlier work called "Forty Year Old Man" in which, just like Numada, the protagonist's bird dies while he went through a very difficult surgery, and he thinks that the bird died in place of him. Numada's purpose of joining the tour is to release a *mina* bird as a form of his gratitude. Likewise, in the Chapter of Kiguchi, we see Gaston, the main characters from Endō's *Wonderful Fool*. And Otsu is the most familiar figure that repeatedly appears in Endō's fiction as the one who is caught between the Western monotheistic belief system and Japanese polytheistic culture. It is not, however, merely because of the fact that Endo is

reusing his previous stories and characters that *Deep River* lacks freshness. As Akutagawa illustrated, stories are after all re-creations of something that had already existed, but it is *how* one does it that determines the quality of the artwork. *Deep River*, Endō's last major work, could not achieve the kind of ingenuity of his previous works.[281] One of the most well-known Japanese novelists Mishima Yukio, in his conversation with another novelist Takeda Taijun, notes that one's religious faith would destroy the form of the novel, and Takeda agrees with Mishima by saying that "religious faith can never be a novel."[282] It is most probably Endō's too strong desire to deliver his philosophy about religion that spoiled the quality of *Deep River* as a work of literature.

CONCLUSION

To say that Endō's writing career began because he was Catholic is not an exaggeration. He was drawn to French Catholic writers because he wanted to find some form of answer to his increasing sense of conflict between his religious and national identities. His early academic interest was eventually replaced with an acute desire to reconcile his Catholic and Japanese identities through fiction writing. In the earlier

[281] It is also possible that it was in part due to his deteriorating health condition and that Endō was short of physical and probably mental strength to develop characters, along with his strong desire, especially with the recognition that this may well be his last work, to leave the fruit of his life-long journey in the form of text.

[282] Mishima and Takeda 1970, 148.
「信仰が介在してくると、小説の形象を破壊しちゃうしね。それから、描写は無意味になるしね。」(Mishima)「信仰そのものでは、絶対に小説にはならない。信仰そのものだったら書かないわけだ、ほんとうは。書くということはすでに裏切ったことなんだからね。」(Takeda)

essays, Endō famously describes this struggle in terms of "reforming ill-fitting western clothes into Japanese clothes."[283] While this expression seems to indicate that he was trying to change his "western clothes" into something more fitting for his Japanese body, our examination of Endō's literary works revealed that he was in truth questioning whether it was the Japanese body, rather than the western clothes, that was at fault and needed some re-formation.[284] Endō often juxtaposed Japanese religion with Catholicism and interpreted the former as negatively influencing Japanese culture in his earlier works. He also blamed Japanese religious heritage for deforming the Japanese people's psychological makeup. Specifically, Endō suspected that the pantheistic Japanese religious climate that lacked an absolute God and "the sense of competitiveness" (*taikō ishiki*) was responsible for not only the Japanese's lack of subjectivity but also the weakness of modern Japanese literature. At the same time, however, he was unable to accept the European style Catholicism wholesale because it conflicted with his own "Japanese sensibilities." *The Sea and Poison* (1958) and *Silence* (1966) illuminate these earlier discords and represent his struggle to find some form of reconciliation.

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[283] For instance, Endō uses the term in his "Unfitting Clothes: Why I Write Novels" (1967). Also, he often explains this process in terms of "reforming the unfitting western clothes into Japanese clothes (*awanai yōfuku o wafuku ni naosu)*."

[284] Literary scholar Furuya Kenzō points out that one of the most important discoveries of Endō's stay in France is the realization of his "yellow" skin. Endō's debut fiction "To Aden" (*Aden made* 1954) has a scene in which a Japanese man in bed with a French woman sees their naked bodies in the mirror and realizes his skin is "yellow," dark and somber in sharp contrast with his girlfriend's white skin. Furuya suggests that Endō decided to "accept the [Japanese] body as ugly, and confront it" (268) during his stay in France, and some of his novels, such as *Silence*, can be seen as the way to justify this "ugliness." For more detail, see Furuya (1975).

In his last major work, *Deep River*, written just three years before his death in 1996, Endō no longer had a problem with polytheistic and syncretistic Japanese religious heritage; his "catholicism" resembles very much Japanese religiosity, and even though he would still call it his own version of Catholic faith, it is more accurately described as "catholicism" with a lower case "c." Having experimented with various ideas and philosophies such as religious pluralism, Buddhism, as well as psychoanalysis, he ceased using the system of dichotomies as an organizational method in writing novels because he realized that "the dichotomy he learned from European Christianity is no longer of any use for observing human beings."[285] Instead of structuring the two opposing poles of God versus no-God, his final work, *Deep River* consists of multiple stories and perspectives. No longer is there a struggle between his national and religious identities. His renewed perception toward religion, with which he confidently rejects orthodox "Catholicism" as narrow and embraces his more inclusive brand of "catholicism," is unmistakable.

Does this then mean he was, in the end, following the path of typical "return to Japan" (日本への回帰), which Endō himself recognized and critiqued in other writers. Although he considers this possibility and wonders whether he lost his "fighting spirit" due to his old age, still, Endo believes that it is not merely because of such a simple nostalgia for his own cultural traits,[286] but because "throughout the acts of writing and

[285] Endō 1989, 116. 少なくとも今の私には西欧基督教から学んだ二分法はもう小説家として「人間観察」には役にたたないとはっきり言えるのだ。
[286] Ibid.

reading novels, [he] came to know about human beings."[287] In other words, it was the act of constant reading and writing, his professionalism and striving as a writer that transformed Endō's perception not only about literature but also about human life, and, about his own religious as well as national identity. Discarding the Christian system of dichotomy does not mean Christianity became unimportant for Endō. As he writes in 1989, "despite the gulf between Christianity and me, modern Catholic literature left deep imprints … on my literature,"[288] and he remained a devout Catholic, as he defined it, until the end of his life. Endō's long journey that he started as a Catholic concluded with his catholic identity that can accommodate both his Japanese and Catholic selves. Without a doubt, this is a great accomplishment, even if it is a little unfortunate that Endō seems to have become less an author and more a believer when he finally arrived at his destination.

[287] Ibid. 私は小説を書いたり読んだりする行為を通して多少は人間を知るようになった。
[288] Ibid., 117.

Conclusion

Why does Christianity matter in a nation where less than one percent of the population are converts? It is because, from the late 19th century when concepts of "religion" and "literature" were both new constructions, the influence of the West to Japan was overwhelming, and many Japanese saw Christianity as representative of the Western spirituality against which they shaped their own religious, national, and even artistic identities. As we saw in the case studies of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Yokomitsu Ri'ichi, and Endō Shūsaku, even though they lived under different historical circumstances – Akutagawa writing mostly in the cosmopolitan Taishō period, Yokomitsu at the height of Imperial Japan, and Endō as a post-war author – each showcased a strong sense of urgency to establish their national, religious, and artistic identities when pi t t ed against Christianity, the "Western" religion.

Yokomitsu's *Traveler's* most clearly illuminates how Christianity acted as a catalyst for the establishment of Japanese national identity. Writing in the time period when Japan was actively waging wars in East Asia and eventually with the West, the establishment of national identity was of the utmost importance for many Japanese intellectuals, including the non-convert author Yokomitsu. As we saw, the protagonist of *Traveler's* discovers Ancient Shinto, the source of his national identity, because his girlfriend is Catholic: the ancient religion of Japan becomes visible only when confronted with Christianity. The eventual holy matrimony between the Catholic girl and the man endorsing Ancient Shinto also manifests Yokomitsu's ideal form of Japanese identity that would incorporate and even surpass Western ideology: "purely Japanese" and yet simultaneously capable of accommodating foreign spirituality.

Traveler's does not, however, merely show Yokomitsu's concern about national identity. This novel is also the actualization of his concept of the "pure novel," the combination of "pure literature" and "popular novel." An experimental writer throughout his career, Yokomitsu believed that the revival of modern Japanese literature depended on the creation of this "pure novel," which would add a "popular" element to the "pure literature" that was critically renowned in Japanese literary circles at that time. Setting up the religious difference between Catholicism and Ancient Shinto as the obstacle for the romantic relationship between the two main characters, Yokomitsu successfully utilized the motif of religion as a device for enticing a popular audience and for rejuvenating what he saw as excessively "Westernized" modern Japanese literature.

Christianity also shaped Endō's concept of Japanese religious and national identities. Brought up as a Catholic, Endō regarded Japanese identity as flawed, due to Japanese religion's syncretistic tendency and its failure to provide strong moral guidelines. He characterized Japanese religion negatively in part perhaps because of his experience of humiliation and an inferiority complex during his stay in France soon after Japan's lost war, but more importantly because of his faith, his internalized Catholic eyes. At the same time, however, he was also unable to completely abide by the norms of Western Catholicism; Endō kept using his fiction writing as the means to explore possible ways to reconcile the discrepancies between his national and religious identities.

Endō's background as a Christian also provided him with a unique perspective to view how religion and literature are interconnected: he saw Christian metaphysics as the source of the strength of Western literature. Considering modern Japanese literature structurally weak due to the faulty foundation of Japanese religion, he advocated that

Japanese authors adopt Christian metaphysics, as he himself did in *The Sea and Poison* and *Silence*.

What is interesting in the case of Endō is that, while literature was initially a tool for him to solve his personal conflict between his religious and national identities, his writing actually ended up altering both. Endō came to embrace Japanese religious tradition without denouncing his own Catholic heritage, and his earlier stringent perception toward Japan also disappeared. He became what I call a "catholic" Catholic, accommodating both his national and Catholic identities. This is the most illuminating example of how it is not merely a person's religion that influences their national identity and artistic development, but how one's artistic discipline can transform his or her views of nation and religion.

Christianity also influenced Akutagawa's perception toward art and nation, although in his case, not on the personal level of religious belief but on the artistic level. This non-convert, Taishō cosmopolitan author used the motifs of Christianity in many of his Christian-related stories (*Kirishitan mono*) because he was attracted to the superficial, exotic Christian culture. Admittedly, Akutagawa, who quite literally dedicated his life to art with his suicide at age 35, had many sources of inspiration other than Christianity, including Chinese and Indian old stories and Japanese classic tales, to list just a few. And yet, Christianity was extremely important to his writing because it was from his recognition of Christianity's exclusivist principle, which he labeled as the "power that destroys," that Akutagawa discovered and celebrated Japanese religion's, and ultimately, Japan's "power that re-creates" as something akin to artistic creation. Japanese kami's power to re-create new beauty parallels Akutagawa's philosophy that "creation" is not an act of God but an act of an artist, like himself. Quite fittingly, just like the martyrdom of

the Christ/artist figure in his last essay, Akutagawa's suicide can be seen as the act of re-creating himself into the ultimate creator, the artist, who would forever be remembered for his artistic creation.

Each author was propelled to explore these themes in their lives and in their works for differing reasons: Akutagawa was primarily interested in art, Yokomitsu in national identity, and Endō in refashioning his religious as well as national identities. Nonetheless, each demonstrates the importance of acts of writing for configuring new relationships among the spheres of religion, nation, and art.

Although I limited my case studies to these three authors, many other authors from the late 19th century were likewise influenced by Christianity directly or indirectly, whether they personally became converts or not. Among non-converts, for instance, the shadows of Christian themes can be detected in the works of prominent authors such as Dazai Osamu (1909- 1948), Ōoka Shōhei (1909-1988), Ōe Kenzaburō (1935–present) and many others. Popular Christian authors such as Miura Ayako (1922-1999), Ariyoshi Sawako (1931-1984), and Sono Ayako (1931-present) are just a few examples of how Christianity asserts its presence, sometimes aggressively, sometimes quietly, both on the personal level as well as artistically. Beyond the field of literature too, popular entertainment today often carries unmistakably strong religious implications; the famous TV animation series, *A Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996) is infused with the symbolisms of Christian mythology, and Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* (2001) is full of Japanese kami's imagery. In Japan, even with only one percent of the population as Christian and even with a reputation for being "unreligious" (*mushūkyō*), Christianity or, more broadly, religion clearly continues to matter.

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