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Frederick R. Brady

By the time Mormon Apostle Heber J. Grant and his three companions arrived in Yokohama to begin their missionary labors in August of 1901, other Christian denominations had been proselyting actively in Japan for over thirty years. The entire Bible had been translated into Japanese nearly fifteen years earlier, and a native clergy had arisen. Influential, though few in number, the Christians were firmly entrenched in Japan, and they were both curious about and apprehensive of Mormonism.

Heber J. Grant had never been a missionary before, so he had chosen two experienced men as his companions: Louis A. Kelsch and Horace S. Ensign. The fourth elder, Alma O. Taylor, was barely nineteen. None of the four could speak Japanese, and none knew much—if anything—about the land or people of Japan.¹

The press soon learned of the arrival of the Mormon party and Apostle Grant found himself the center of much attention. His notoriety increased when he and his companions were denied rooms in a foreign-owned boardinghouse. The landlord's excuse was that Elder Grant was a polygamist.² The incident was reported in several English and Japanese newspapers, and at about this time Elder Grant was interviewed by reporters from two leading papers, the *Jiji Shimpō* and *Niroku Shimpō*. Both interviews were highly informative and relatively free of bias, but they, like the articles in the other newspapers, focused on polygamy.³

Many of these articles and letters in the newspapers exhibited great animosity towards the Mormons, mainly because of the polygamy issue. In order to lay to rest some of the rumors about himself and the church, and to actively begin his labors, Elder Grant met the editors of some English-language newspapers. He also had calling cards which were printed in Japanese and bore his portrait.⁴ A major activity was replying to letters and editorials. Although Elder Grant and the others could do this by themselves in English, when it came to working with the Japanese language it was difficult to find a teacher. Many qualified teachers were missionaries of other churches and were hostile toward Mormonism. Finally the Mormon elders were fortunate to find two Christian Japanese gentlemen who willingly gave them assistance. One of these was Takahashi Gorō.

Takahashi was a teacher and scholar of renown who had participated in the translation of the Bible into Japanese.⁵ Impressed with a magazine

article in which Takahashi defended the Mormons, Elder Grant decided to invite the scholar to dinner. Takahashi spoke fluent English, and during his weekly dinners with the elders he learned a great deal about the history and doctrines of Mormonism. He offered to write a book about the Church, finance its publication from his own pocket, and receive his reimbursement from its sales. Elder Grant was very enthusiastic, and he lent Takahashi a number of books and photographs to use in research.⁶

Takahashi's book, *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyōto* (Mormonism and Mormons), was published in August 1902.⁷ It is a thick tome, filled with philosophizing about polygamy and speculation about the origins of the American Indians. It might have sold better without this padding; as it was, the poor sales were to prove disillusioning. But the basic material about the history and teachings of the Mormon church, illustrated with photographs, is excellent. For one thing, the first translation of the Articles of Faith into Japanese is found here.⁸ The modern version differs only slightly from Takahashi's version in some articles and not at all in others. Another strong point is the fine translation of Joseph Smith's personal account of the First Vision. The viewpoint of the entire work is that of an admiring nonmember.

Takahashi eventually had a falling out with the missionaries late in 1903, several months after Elder Grant's release from the mission and return to America. The circumstances were very tragic, and in order to relate them we must backtrack to March 1902.

Shortly before leaving to attend the Church's general conference in Salt Lake City in the spring of 1902, Elder Grant baptized his first two Japanese converts. The first, Nakazawa Hajime, was a Shinto priest who spoke no English.⁹ Nakazawa began to be disaffected when Elder Grant refused to lend him money to start a new vocation.¹⁰ Finally, he was caught red-handed in an attempt to burglarize the mission headquarters. Elder Ensign, who became mission president in Grant's place, and the other elders excommunicated Nakazawa on the spot and then turned him over to the police. News of the arrest caused a small sensation, and Takahashi wrote a disgruntled letter to Elder Ensign. Following are excerpts from the letter as well as Elder Taylor's comments on it:

My dear Rev. Mr. Ensign,—

I am very sorry to learn that Nakazawa has become a thief on account of his poverty. You know the fact better than any other in the world. I heartily sympathize with him. . . . Everybody knows that Nakazawa lost his lucrative profession for sympathizing with "Mormonism." You cannot forget it, as no one can. But Mr. Grant quite cold-bloodedly, has left him destitute of help. . . . Mr. Grant's sudden change of his proceedings have contributed more than any other to check your progress, or rather to annihilate your prospects. . . . The public has forgotten you, and my book has sold only a few copies. . . .

In short, some persons are now very angry with you for this unhappy issue of one of your “brothers,” and ready to assail you to crush your prospects trumpeting your cold-bloodedness in respect to Mr. N. Of course, I shall and will endeavor to defend you, the consequence is to be much feared. I believe you remember what I have often spoken about Nakazawa’s future. I was right to my great grief. I cannot write any more. Adieu!

Yours truly
Takahashi Goro

The purpose for inserting this letter here [in Taylor’s journal] is to record the sentiments of a soured friend. This man, Takahashi’s name, appears many times in this journal of my mission to Japan. He was our closest and most daring advocate just as long as the phantomistic idea he had formed concerning the wealth and position he would obtain by befriending and writing about us, lasted. In my opinion he is a man who loves foreigners so long as he can make a fat living off them and turns traitor . . . as soon as he find they cannot be duped neither by his flattering speeches nor by his tears. His remarks concerning Bro. Grant’s cold-bloodedness and non-fulfillment of promises are a reflection upon his own dishonesty and breach of promise.¹¹

Elder Taylor was saddened by what he saw as Takahashi’s duplicity, but apparently not surprised. The rest of the journal entry quoted above indicates Elder Taylor was used to such treatment, though he deeply regretted it. It is also obvious from this incident why he did not ask for Takahashi’s help when translation of the Book of Mormon into Japanese began in 1904.

The missionaries lent and sold *Morumonkyō* as a proselyting tool, and they may have thought it the first book about Mormonism ever published in Japanese. If so, they were mistaken. Eight months earlier, in January 1902, a writer named Uchida Yū published a booklet entitled *Mormon shu* (The Mormon sect.).¹² There is almost no information available to use about the author, but he was probably a young scholar—perhaps Christian.¹³

Uchida’s book is brief and to the point, but a wealth of misinformation suggests careless scholarship, prejudiced sources, or both. He never cites a source (in contrast to Takahashi) but occasionally refers in passing to “accounts by Joseph Smith’s enemies” and “Smith’s own history.” Though he continually asserts his objectivity, Uchida does express frank distaste for certain aspects of Mormonism in some instances and guarded admiration in others. Still, in spite of its flaws, *Morumon shu* is an adequate introduction to Mormonism so long as the reader does not stop there. It is certainly sufficient to arouse curiosity and raise questions.

While we know that Takahashi spent many hours with Heber J. Grant, the extent of Uchida’s contact with the Mormon missionaries is not at all clear. He never mentions meeting the elders, but he does note the death of President Lorenzo Snow in October 1901, and it is possible he learned about it from Elder Grant. On their part, the missionaries experienced a

steady stream of callers, many of whom seemed to want only to practice their English.¹⁴ If Uchida were among these callers, he would not have stood out much. Also, his clumsy renderings of Mormon and American names show that he must not have spoken long with the elders, if at all.

The matter of terminology shows another great difference between the scholarship of Takahashi and Uchida and the extent of contact with the Mormon missionaries. Uchida's translations of Mormon terms are at great variance with the term used by the Church in Japan today; some are from the Protestant lexicon and others are merely translated badly. In contrast, Takahashi's translations show that he had discussed the meanings with Elder Grant before giving interpretations. He seems even to have coined a few new words. In helping the Mormons in Japan to thus develop a lexicon of their own he did the Church a great service, and most of his terms are still in use by the Church today.

There are many important similarities and differences between the two books *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyō to* and *Morumon shū*, but we will here confine ourselves to two major subjects: the character of Joseph Smith and the polygamy question. They show more clearly than any others the differences between Takahashi's point of view and Uchida's.

In Uchida's opinion, polygamy and Joseph Smith's character cannot be considered separately. His book begins with a denunciation of polygamy, and he plainly saw Joseph Smith as an undisciplined, irresponsible charlatan and country boor whose natural abilities were obscured by a taste for adultery. Of polygamy he says,

If a man hears the word "Mormonism" he immediately associates it with polygamy. . . . However, at present, due to legal prohibitions against polygamy in the United States, where Mormonism arose, and also because of society's condemnation of polygamy as an immoral practice, the Mormon Church abolished the doctrine sanctioning polygamy ten years ago. Nevertheless, while appearing outwardly to conform, we see that the Mormons are in fact continuing to adhere to this evil practice.

Polygamy is a barbaric custom. . . . Even so, . . . strange religious customs still exist in . . . uncultured lands. But Mormonism has appeared in an enlightened society, in . . . America! . . .

Since the American government abolished polygamy, the Mormons have ceased to preach it publicly as a doctrine; still, even now it is practiced privately. Of course the Mormon scriptures prohibit it too, but it originated when Smith received a so-called revelation about it on July 12, 1843, in Nauvoo. Smith from the first had affections for many women besides his legal wife Emma, but when that fact began to be openly and loudly criticized in public, Smith said he had received a revelation stating that polygamy was a divine mystery approved by God, and he ignored the rage of his wife and the reviling of society. But it was not until 1852 that polygamy was announced publicly. . . .

. . . within the sect there are those who oppose polygamy and have formed a new, monogamous faction within Mormonism. . . .

There is no other single reason for the Mormons' having been ostracized.¹⁵

Such an attitude may seem hypocritical to those familiar with the ancient practice of concubinage in Japan, but Uchida is speaking for those Japanese who had accepted traditional Christian morality as their standard. Almost since the opening of their country, the Japanese had felt that a certain amount of Westernization (often confused with "civilization") was necessary in order to gain acceptance among the industrialized Western nations. Internal and external pressures had forced a number of political and social reforms, and forward-thinking Japanese—many of whom were greatly influenced by Christianity—were ready to repudiate anything looked at with disapproval by the "Christian" nations. This is the view finally taken by the *Jiji Shimpō* and the *Niroku Shimpō* articles concerning polygamy and Mormonism, though these newspapers had at first treated Heber J. Grant with great kindness.¹⁶

Uchida took an antagonistic view of most of Joseph Smith's deeds and was as ready as anyone to believe and pass on various rumors and exaggerations:

His parents were so poor that they were subjected to suspicions of being stupid, lawless, and given to thieving. Of course, one need not hesitate to state that Smith's lack of education was due to his disadvantaged childhood. According to accounts by his enemies, he was given by nature to idle fancies and was, though deluded, a good person; and when we refer to Smith's own history of his life we find that this is true. . . .

Smith was from among the illiterate masses and was not a polished speaker. Whenever he was cornered during a discussion it was his custom to assume a dignified attitude, open his mouth in the manner of a holy proper of God, and expound a didactic conclusion convincing to the simple-minded. He also managed all of the church's internal and external affairs, suppressing any internal discord, through the use of these revelations. . . .

Because Smith was an uneducated prophet with no self-control nor morals, because these flaws became known to some people, and because among the Saints some influential members were loudly criticizing him, some gradually began to forsake him, and even his inner circle of associates started to show evidence of a coming rift. At the same time, the brethren of the church's rank and file were being persecuted by the Gentiles and there was a movement in Missouri to throw the Saints out of the state. Being anxious about the sect's prospects during this time, . . . Smith's faction set up a secret clique called the Danites in October 1838. Their sworn purpose was to protect Smith and his doctrine from enemies and to make him governor of the state, then president of the United States, and finally ruler of all the world. . . .

In this way Smith was using his sect at Nauvoo as the gateway to power, . . . and thus the seeds of his evil and immoral actions began to blossom and bear fruit.¹⁷

Takahashi did not believe Joseph Smith was a prophet either, but he did believe in his sincerity. He also did not hold the view that polygamy was a relic of barbarism, and he took the Mormons at their word when they said they would not preach it in Japan.

Polygamy is the characteristic by which Mormonism is known throughout the world, but Mormonism is not alone in the practice. In Buddhism, too, polygamy—or, rather, concubinage—is allowed under some circumstances. And India is a polygamous country. Tibet is a polygamous country. Concubinage is practiced in China. Is not concubinage practiced in Japan? . . .

. . . over ten years ago, President [Wilford] Woodruff, in accordance with federal law, abolished plural marriage. Are the Mormons going to preach it in Japan? Though suffering cowardly slander, they have determined not to preach it, in keeping with Smith's spirit of submitting to governmental authority. Some continue to loudly attack the Mormons concerning this matter of polygamy, but they are wasting their arrows without a target.¹⁸

Because of polygamy's long history and considerable prevalence throughout the world, including Japan, Takahashi saw no reason why the Mormons should not be allowed to practice it. But here he is sidestepping an issue: does popularity alone make concubinage or polygamy right? And the adversaries of Mormonism might have replied that Elder Grant was indeed preaching polygamy in Japan, for that was how they saw his futile attempts to explain the practice when it was attacked in the newspapers.¹⁹

Takahashi included in his book a brief summary of the doctrine of plural marriage as it appears in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 132, but this summary does not do the subject justice. When one considers his excellent translations in full of the Articles of Faith and the First Vision account, his treatment of the plural marriage revelation is a keen disappointment.

Takahashi makes fewer judgmental comments about Joseph Smith and his character than Uchida does; he was frankly admiring and obviously considered Joseph Smith a great man. He continually gives Joseph the benefit of the doubt. In his introduction to his translation of the First Vision, he reminds the reader that Joseph Smith was "only an artless youth," asks how "such a one [could] sinisterly aspire to take advantage of the confusion of society and deceive the whole world," and then says with emphasis, "However much we want to call Smith an impostor and a deceiver, it is yet too early to make such a statement."²⁰ He is neither for nor against Joseph's claim to prophethood:

It is claimed that Peter, James and John appeared to Smith and Cowdery in June of 1829 and ordained them to . . . the priesthood of Melchizedek. Earlier, John the Baptist had ordained them to the priesthood of Aaron. . . . Though Smith did not belong to any church, it is claimed that—like Saint Paul of old, who received the apostolic witness directly from Christ—Smith was given the power of the highest priesthood directly from this ancient

group. Of course, this is hard for an outsider to accept. But if it is true that Christ appeared to Paul, is it unreasonable for Peter, John and others to have appeared to Smith?²¹

Through Heber J. Grant had reported happily on the upcoming publication of Takahashi's book at the April conference in 1902, *Morumonkyō* was not able to do as much good as had been hoped. Uchida's book probably did not do much harm, either; Japan was a hard mission for all Christian missionaries during that period.²² Polygamy continued to be, or to be used as, the major reason for Japan's cold reception of Mormonism. And the missionaries continued to protest the accusation that they were preaching polygamy:

We here forcefully reaffirm that no missionary, officer or member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Japan is permitted to practice polygamy, nor is authority given to preach this doctrine to the inhabitants of any part of the Empire. Enemies of our religion who claim in writing or speech that the Mormon Church is anywhere in the world preaching, urging or allowing its members to practice plural marriage are guilty of falsehood.²³

The Mormon elders eventually learned Japanese well enough to begin producing their own literature; the history noted previously, translated by John W. Stoker, was a significant early effort which owes much to Takahashi's *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyōto*. At present, the Translation Department of the Church is vigorously working to produce Japanese translations of Church literature. Native Japanese Mormon literature is at this point nonexistent, but the time is fast approaching when Mormons in Japan will not have to rely on others to produce books about the Church and the gospel of Christ for themselves and their neighbors.

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1. Gordon A. Madsen, comp., *A Japanese Journal* (N.p., n.d.), pp. 6–7, 11. Excerpts from the missionary diary of Heber J. Grant. See also Alma O. Taylor, "About Japan and the Japan Mission," *Improvement Era* 10 (November 1906): 1–9.

2. *The Japan Times*, 22 August 1901, p. 3; F. Staniland to the Editor, *The Japan Weekly Mail*, 31 August 1901, p. 226; *Hōchi Shinbun*, 19 August 1901, p. 3; *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 19 August 1901. The above are translated by and quoted in Frederick R. Brady, "The Japanese Reaction to Mormonism and the Translation of Mormon Scripture into Japanese" (Master's thesis, Sophia University International College, 1979), pp. 94, 97–98, 126–27.

3. See Brady, "Japanese Reaction to Mormonism," chap. 5.

4. One of Grant's autographed calling cards is in Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

5. Otis Gray, *A History of Christianity in Japan: Protestant Missions* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1976), 1:149.

6. Heber J. Grant, Address, 4 April 1902, Conference Reports, 1901–1904, pp. 47–49; see also Murray L. Nichols, “History of the Japan Mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1901–1924” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1957), pp. 19, 34.

7. Takahashi Gorō, *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyōto* (Mormonism and Mormons) (Tokyo: Published by author, 1902). A copy is in Special Collections, Lee Library, BYU. Translations by Brady of significant portions are in Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” chap. 7.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–22.

9. Nichols, *History of the Japan Mission*, pp. 25–26.

10. Heber J. Grant, Address, 4 October 1903, Conference Reports, 1901–1904, p. 13; Nichols, “History of the Japan Mission,” pp. 25–26.

11. Entire account in Alma O. Taylor, “Journanl C,” 17 December–20 December 1903.

12. Uchida Yū [Akira?], *Morumon shū* (The Mormon sect) (Tokyo: Bunmeidō, 1902). A translation by Brady of most of the contents is in Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Moromonism,” chap. 6.

13. An Uchida Akira wrote a book entitled *Jidai no dōryoku* (Efforts of an era) in 1938. I identify him wiht Uchida Yū because it was and is common for Japanese writers to use pseudonyms, and scholars prefer Chinese-sounding names, which are often adapted from their given names, The character for “Yū” is the same as one of the characters in “Akira.”

14. Nichols, “History of the Japan Mission,” p. 17.

15. Uchida, *Morumon shū*, pp. 1–3, 68–69, 91–92; see Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” pp. 140–41, 158–59, 161 for translations.

16. Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” pp. vii, 126–68.

17. Uchida, *Morumon shū*, pp. 9–10, 21–22, 26, 28; see Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” pp. 142, 145, 147–48.

18. Takahashi, *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyōt*, pp. 221, 233–34; see Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” pp. 178–79.

19. Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” pp. 109–10.

20. Takahashi, *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyōt*, p. 33; see Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” p. 168.

21. Takahashi, *Morumonkyō to Morumon kyōt*, p. 172–73; see Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” p. 172.

22. Grant, Address, 4 April 1902, Conference Reports, 1901–1904. See also Nichols, “History of the Japan Mission,” p. 64.

23. Alma O. Taylor, “The Mormon Church and Polygamy,” appendix to John W. Stoker, trans., *Matsujitsu Seito lesu Kirisuto Kyōkai ryakushi* (A brief history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), by Edward H. Anderson (Tokyo: Japan L.D.S. Mission, 1907), pp. 24–25; see Brady, “Japanese Reaction to Mormonism,” p. 116.