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## Hirai Kinza and Unitarianism\*\*

In 1893, the World's Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago together with the World Columbian Exposition. Both events received much attention and had a great influence both contemporarily and afterwards. During the Parliament, Japanese Buddhism was introduced to the American audience by a delegation of Japanese Buddhists. One of the Buddhist delegates, Hirai Kinza, criticized Christian missionaries for contributing to the imperialistic cultural invasion of Oriental nations. Hirai's criticism was motivated by national consciousness aiming to build an equal relationship between Japan and Western nations. However, Hirai later became one of the early members of the Unitarian Church in Japan, and after that even became engaged in occultism. Why did his attitude change? This article provides an account of the transitions in his thought. By focusing on Hirai Kinza's life, thoughts and activities this study attempts to shed new light also on the broader social, cultural and religious situation of the Meiji Period. It is indeed during this period, which was characterized by rapid modernization and Westernization, that Hirai's viewpoint underwent significant transformations.



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### *The First Japanese Encounter with Unitarianism and Early American Interests in Oriental Religions*

As early as 1843, a certain Japanese Buddhist joined the Unitarian Church in Fairhaven, Massachusetts: he was the first Japanese to visit America, Nakahama Manjirō 中浜万次郎 (1827-1898). Whereas previously he was rejected by other local Protestant churches because of racism, the Unitarian Church accepted this "heathen." (Beasley 2002: 52) In 1844, the next year after Nakahama Manjirō joined, a Unitarian writer Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) published a translation of a Buddhist scripture as "The Preaching of Buddha" in *The Dial*, a magazine edited by Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). Peabody ran a bookstore

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and publishing business in Boston, and provided Unitarian friends with a gathering and conversation place. Her friends included Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), and Henry David Thoreau, who were known as “Transcendentalists.”<sup>1</sup> They were attracted by Buddhism and other Oriental religions. For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson was influenced by Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833), who was a co-founder of Brahma Samaj.<sup>2</sup> Emerson’s idea of “Over-soul,” a kind of cosmic unity between man, God and nature, was understood as an idea similar to the Brahman of Hinduism. Emerson became a leader of the Free Religious Association founded in 1867 and studied Oriental religions as he searched for a universal religion. In 1872, a member of the Free Religious Association, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, wrote an article titled “The Character of the Buddha” for the magazine *The Index*. Samuel Johnson, a Unitarian minister who later left Unitarianism in order to pursue a “universal religion,” wrote the treatise *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion* between 1872 and 1885. In this book he defended an evolutionary history of religions, which underwent a transition from primitive to universal religion. In such ways, Unitarians played a key role in the encounter of Americans with Buddhism and other Oriental religions during the nineteenth century. (Tweed 2000: xvii)

#### *Introduction of Unitarianism to Japan*

A Unitarian mission was introduced to Japan by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835-1901), the famous opinion leader of the Meiji Period. Though Fukuzawa himself was a rationalist and often had expressed a negative attitude to Christianity, through Unitarian missionaries he sought a connection with Harvard University for the management of his Keio University. In 1889 he accepted three scholars at his school who were recommended by Unitarian delegates, and he hoped to make a tie with Harvard University through this channel. The American Unitarian Association (AUA) sent the missionaries Arthur May Napp and Clay MacCauley to Japan. Already before their arrival Fukuzawa Yukichi suggested that Unitarian missionaries must express tolerance and be prepared for coexistence with traditional religions in Japan. When these missionaries came to Japan, they declared that Unitarians would

1. Transcendentalists are a group of people with new ideas led by Unitarians in the nineteenth century. They thought human beings can attain unity with God and nature without church or the Biblical canon. They sought enlightenment within themselves and not salvation from outside.
2. Brahma Samaj is a Brahman movement founded 1828 in India. Its members believe that there is one eternal supreme being who is omnipresent and omniscient. This movement deeply influenced the religious, educational and social reforms of the Hindu community in the nineteenth century.

respect Buddhism and other religions, that they only hoped for exchange with other religions and for mutual understanding, and that even conversion to Christianity was probably not necessary. This religious liberalism gained great popularity among Japanese intellectuals and some Buddhist groups. (Cooke 2006: 240)

One more reason why Unitarianism could earn favor in Japan was because it criticized some Christian dogmas and creeds which some Japanese intellectuals considered as superstitious beliefs. For example, William Ellery Channing rejected the Calvinistic doctrines of human depravity and election by grace, and he believed in human goodness and the use of reason. Ralph Waldo Emerson rejected the Lord's Supper and the rituals developed in the history of Christianity, and emphasized ethical morality and good conduct. Theodore Parker (1810-1860) used "higher criticism" to evaluate the Bible and denied its infallibility. He advocated that the Bible could be studied as a historical document like, for example the Iliad. In general, Unitarians were greatly interested in social justice and reforms according to their understanding of the moral ethic and humanity of Jesus. (Dorrien 2001: 35-43) They accepted the evolution theory and Social Darwinism, advocated evolution-based theology, and wished to harmonize religious beliefs, science and reason. For Fukuzawa and other supporters in Japan, these Unitarian features were more easily understandable and acceptable than the narrow mindedness and fundamentalism of other Christian missionaries.

#### *Hirai Kinza*

Hirai Kinza 平井金三 (1859-1916) was one of the early members of the Unitarian Church in Japan, but he was also known as a lay Buddhist preacher who criticized Christianity at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. He was born in Kyoto in 1859.<sup>3</sup> Hirai studied English very hard from his youth, but at the same time he complained that Western countries suppressed Oriental countries because of their colonial policy. He thought Christian missionaries were the advance troop for an invasion of Japan's culture. He often criticized Christianity in public in order to counterattack the Western cultural invasion. He became a lay Buddhist preacher proclaiming Zen Buddhism in America. At that time, the Japanese government was trying to revise the unequal treaties imposed by Western powers. So Hirai's criticism of Christianity was also motivated by a national consciousness aiming at an equal relationship between Japan and Western nations.

At the World's Parliament of Religions, Hirai met with Unitarian leaders such as Jenkin Lloyd-Jones and associated with many other religious leaders. When he became aware of the multicultural and religious diversity in the world, he gradually

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3. If not indicated otherwise, the information on Hirai provided in this article relies on source material from the Hirai Archive in the DVD included in Yoshinaga *et al.* 2007.

transcended his own exclusive attitude. Hence he appreciated the religious syncretism in Japan, and advocated the unity of world religions.

### *Hirai and Anti-Christian Movements in Kyoto*

In 1881 Hirai Kinza organized an anti-Christian movement called Kiyū-kai 杞憂会 (The society for warning against foreign aggression) and published the magazine *Kiyū shigen* 杞憂私言 (The Warning) in Kyoto. In this magazine, Hirai wrote an article “Yaso-kyō wa ze ka hi ka” 耶蘇教は是か非か (Christianity: Yes or No?) in which he claimed that the aim of Christian missionaries was to brainwash and control credulous people and to attempt to take over the country without military power. In addition, Hirai attacked Christianity as follows:

If Christianity entered the country and spread, it would harm the country and hinder its development. Christian missionaries ought to be expelled immediately, because keeping the independence of Japan and enhancing the wealth and military of our country is the great aim of this [our nationalist] movement. (Hirai 1881: 4)

At the same time, Nijjima Jō 新島襄 (1843-1890) established Dōshisha 同志社 in Kyoto, a school of higher learning, which later developed into one of the major Christian universities in Japan. This school was supported by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Also a School of Theology was established at Dōshisha. In this school, students studied the Bible and theology, and they often held meetings for preaching Christianity in Kyoto. However, since Kyoto is traditionally the center for many Buddhist head temples, the Buddhist clergy felt threatened by the establishment of this Christian school; therefore they supported Hirai's anti-Christian movement. Because of the dispute with Christianity, Hirai even studied Biblical higher criticism from books written by theologians such as Abram Kuenen (1828-1901) and members of the Tübingen school. In 1883, Hirai wrote the book *Shinyaku zensho danbaku* 新約全書弾駁 (Criticism of the New Testament). The preface of the book was written by the chief abbot of Shōkoku-ji 相国寺, the Zen Buddhist temple located next to Dōshisha. In this book, Hirai took a very skeptical attitude toward miracles written in the New Testament. For example, Hirai denied the virgin birth of Jesus, explaining that when Mary, the mother of Jesus, went to meet her pregnant relative Elizabeth, Mary had sexual relations with Elizabeth's husband Zecharia and conceived Jesus. But Mary could not tell the truth about the conception, so she fabricated a story of a virgin birth. Based on his apologia for Buddhism, Hirai attempted in this way to criticize the miracles and supernatural phenomena of the Christian teaching. Interestingly, in this period Hirai and Dōshisha students stood on opposite sides and criticized each other's religious viewpoints, but later, as we shall see, Hirai and some of the Dōshisha graduates would shake hands as fellow Unitarian members.

In order to counter the Christian influence of Dōshisha, in 1885 Hirai established an English school in Kyoto called The Oriental Hall (Orientaru Hōru オリエントナル ホール) which was supported by Buddhist groups. In this school, students were taught David Hume, Herbert Spencer, and also Henry Steel Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* (published in 1881 in Colombo) in English. At the same time Hirai sought cooperation with H. S. Olcott (1832-1907), who was a founder of the Theosophical Society and who had played a major role in the Buddhist revival movement in Sri Lanka. Under the flag of anti-colonialism and anti-Christianity both aimed at unity and cooperation among Buddhists in Asia in order to fight colonialism and the Christian mission.

In 1890, Hirai began to publish the magazine *Katsuron* 活論 (The Opinion) for debating religious matters in public. In this magazine, Hirai (1890: 3) wrote a review entitled "Yunitarian-kyō ni tsuite" ゆにてりあん教について (About Unitarianism), in which he stated that Unitarianism was the most developed form of Christianity. Although Hirai thought that its worship of God was a vestige of superstitious belief, in his understanding its concept of a deity was very similar to the Buddhist idea of "dharma." In this period, Hirai thought that Unitarianism was a transitional form between Christianity and Buddhism, the latter being the highest stage in the evolution of religions.

#### *Hirai in America*

In 1892, Hirai went to America in order to preach Buddhism and to appeal for revision of the unequal treaties between Japan and America. In fact, he was one of the earliest Zen Buddhist lay preachers who went to America. Patriotism and nationalism stimulated Hirai to dispute colonialism and racial prejudice against Oriental people. In Los Angeles Hirai was invited twice as a lecturer by the Unitarian pastor J.S. Thomson. On 12 April 1893, Hirai lectured on "Recent Political Revolution in Japan" at the Unity Club in Los Angeles. On 3 July 1893, Hirai lectured on "The Real Japan Uncolored and Explored" at the Church of the Unity where J.S. Thomson was pastor. Here Hirai said:

Now, Japan has had her own peculiar environment, different not only from the Western but also from the Oriental countries from which she has developed her present form of society. Her astronomical and meteorological phenomena including all climatic and tidal changes; her being surrounded by the sea; her distance from other countries; the manner of distribution of her mountains, hills, level lands, rivers and lakes, her fertile and barren soils; her fauna and flora; her mineralogical resources and geological features including earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, by which Japan is very often visited—these are her natural environment and have had great influence on the formation of her civilization. And her communication with other nations; her internal historical phenomena; her religions and literature; all added to the natural

factors stated above, combined in an indescribable complexity to evolve the present state of Japan.

To those who desire to know Japan, the investigation of these above factors is prerequisite; but a mere knowledge of them does not throw much light on the topic; the precise analytical study of their commingled influence is necessary. The foreign tourist who visits us destitute of such preparation can never get real insight into our customs and ideas; he carelessly casts a hasty glance and then boldly undertakes his criticism. It is no wonder that to such a person Japanese conditions appear very unintelligible and as if they sprang up without a cause, by accident or impulse. I am very sorry to say that many of the works and descriptions about Japan written in English are generally the observations of such careless and impulsive tourists, and there is no foreigner yet who has explored our ideal Japan. (Hirai 1893a)

In 1893, Hirai took part in the World's Parliament of Religions held on September 11-27 in conjunction with the Columbian World's Exposition at Chicago. The Columbian World's Exposition was held to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World. (Seager 1993: 8-10) In connection with this fair, the World's Parliament of Religions was held for the first time; it had also the purpose to display spiritual evolution. It became an event which received much attention and exerted great influence.

From Japan came the following participants and attendees: Ashitsu Jitsuzen 蘆津實全 (1841-1921) of the Tendai school, Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1859-1919) of the Rinzai school, Yatsubuchi Banryū 八淵蟠龍 (1848-1926) of Jōdo Shin-shū, Toki Hōryū 土宜法龍 (1834-1921) of the Shingon school, Shibata Reiichi 柴田禮一 (1840-1920) representing Shintō, the Buddhist layman Noguchi Zenshirō 野口善四郎 (1865-?) who was a good friend of Hirai, Kozaki Hiromichi 小崎弘道 (1856-1938) of Dōshisha, and Kishimoto Nobuta 岸本能武太 (1866-1928) who was a graduate of Dōshisha and studied at Harvard University at the time.

During the Parliament, the Japanese Buddhist delegates introduced their form of Buddhism to the American audience. In his presentation "The Real Position of Japan toward Christianity" Hirai Kinza criticized Christian missionaries for contributing to the imperialistic invasion of Oriental nations. (Hirai 1893b: 444-450) At that time, the Japanese government was trying to revise the unequal treaties imposed by Western powers, and Hirai's criticism of Christianity was motivated by national consciousness which aimed at building an equal relationship between Japan and Western nations. (Snodgrass 2003: 181) Hirai also said that in Japan Buddhism, Shintō and Confucianism were synthesized, a combination which he called "Japanism." Since the mid-nineteenth century the term "Japanism" had emerged as an attractive word for the audience, because some Western artists and impressionist painters were influenced by Ukiyo-e 浮世絵 and other Japanese arts, and their style had come to be called "Japonisme." Therefore, the audience associated with "Japanism"



an admirable image of an ethnically unique Japan; this term indicated the advanced place of Japan in the spiritual and religious evolution. Hirai said:

... it is a fact that from the beginning of our history Japan has received all teachings with open mind; and also that the instructions which came from outside have commingled with the native religion in entire harmony, as is seen by so many temples built in the name of truth with a mixed appellation of Buddhism and Shintoism; as is seen by the affinity among the teachers of Confucianism and Taoism, or other isms, and the Buddhist and Shinto priests; as is seen by the individual Japanese, who pays his other respects to all teachings mentioned above; as is seen by the peculiar construction of the Japanese houses, which have generally two rooms, one for a miniature Buddhist temple and the other for a small Shinto shrine, before which the family study the respective scriptures of the two religions; as is seen by the popular ode:

Wake noborn  
Fumoto no michi ioa  
Ooke redo  
Ona ji taken no.  
Tsuki wo mini kana,<sup>4</sup>

Which, translated, means: "Though there are many roads at the foot of the mountains, yet if the top is reached the same moon is seen," and other similar odes and mottoes, which are put in the mouth of the ignorant country old woman, when she decides the case of bigoted religious contention among young girls. In reality Synthetic religion, or Entitism,<sup>5</sup> is the Japanese specialty, and I will not hesitate to call it Japanism. (Houghton 1893: 158)

Hirai's speech was delivered in fluent and attractive English. (Snodgrass 2003: 183) A newspaper article described the reaction of the audience as follows:

Loud applause followed many of his declarations, and a thousand cries of 'Shame' were heard when he pointed to the wrongs which his countrymen had suffered through the practices of false Christianity. When he had finished, Dr. Barrows grasped his hand, and the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd-Jones threw his arm around his neck, while the audience cheered vociferously and waved hats and handkerchiefs in the excess of enthusiasm. (*Chicago Herald* September 14, 1893)

4. This is the version as appears in Houghton (1893: 158). The correct verses read: *Wake noboru* 分け上る/*Fumoto no michi wa* 麓の道は/*Ökeredo* 多けれど/*Onaji takane no* 同じ高嶺の/*Tsuki o miru kana* 月を見るかな。
5. According to Hirai many Japanese think that religions were different in outer form, but were the same in entity and aim.

In his second address at the parliament, entitled “Synthetic Religions,” Hirai said:

The relation of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Shintoism, and all the other religions of the world and their believers is like that of many lines of different railroads and their passengers. Each starts from a different point and direction, passing through different country scenes, but the final destiny is the one and the same World’s Fair, which will also be differently viewed by the mental situation of the visitors. Do not dispute about the distinctions of the different lines of railroad. The World’s Fair is not in the trains and cars, but it is in Chicago, right before you. You are in the fair. Stop your debate about the difference of religion. Kill Gautama—he is only a conductor of the train; burn his scripture—truth is not in it, but right before you. You are in truth. Do not mind Christ—He is only a brakeman. Tear up the Bible—God is not in it, but right before you. You are in God. (Houghton 1893: 802)

Hirai quoted the famous Chinese Zen master Linji 臨濟 who is said to have stated “When you meet the Buddha, kill him!” This expression means that one’s own direct perception should not be prevented by emotional or intellectual dependence on anyone. But such a thought was so radical that many in the audience could not accept Hirai’s real intention. Even many Japanese Buddhists never understood his challenge of the conservative and traditional structures of religions.

#### *Hirai’s Activities after the Parliament*

At the Columbian Exposition Japanese art and architecture was prominently displayed in the Japanese Pavilion. The Japanese government entrusted Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908) with the publicity for Japanese art at the Columbian Exposition. Fenollosa had graduated from Harvard in 1874, then he had studied theology at its Divinity School under the Unitarian scholar Charles Carroll Everett. However, Fenollosa left the Divinity School soon and entered the Fine Arts School affiliated with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Through introduction by Edward Morse (1838-1925), in 1878 he was invited as professor of political economy and philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University. Fenollosa was fascinated by Japanese arts and converted to Buddhism. He expressed his hope for harmony between West and East. At the Columbian Exposition, Fenollosa, like Hirai, proclaimed that Christianity and Buddhism would be synthesized. (Fenollosa 1893: preface) Such discourse was influenced by the “Orientalism” of this exposition.

Hirai and Fenollosa probably never met each other until the end of the Columbian Exposition, because in the Hirai archive two unopened letters of introduction to Fenollosa and Morse dated 6 March 1894 were discovered. These letters were written by Samuel Greene Wheeler Benjamin, an art essayist in Boston. The letters indicate that Hirai intended to meet Fenollosa about one year after the



Exposition. It is uncertain that Hirai actually met with Fenollosa at that time, but we know that both established a friendship after Hirai returned to Japan.

At the World's Parliament of Religions Hirai met the Unitarian minister Jenkin Lloyd Jones (1843-1918) who was the executive secretary of the Parliament. Jones was the pastor of the All Souls Church and editor of the magazine *Unity*. From 1875 to 1884 he was the secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference, which greatly influenced the Free Religious Movement.<sup>6</sup> His nephew was the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959), who had designed the Transportation Building at the Columbian Exposition. Later at the fair, Wright was influenced by the Japanese architectural display of the Hōō-den Palace 鳳凰殿 which was built in the Wooded Island section of the Japanese Pavilion. (Nute 2000: 195) Wright had worked earlier with the famous architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee (1848-1913), who again was a relative of Ernest Fenollosa. They all were inspired by Japanese arts and architecture and were known as great collectors of Japanese art. The specific influence of Japanese art style can be seen in some buildings designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, such as the Unity Temple at Oak Park in Chicago and the Unitarian Meeting House in Madison. It meant that the ideal of the unity of religions at which Jenkin Lloyd Jones and Hirai Kinza aimed was concretely implemented in Wright's architectural designs.

Hirai also met Paul Carus (1852-1919) at the Parliament. Paul Carus, the publisher of the journals *The Monist* and *The Open Court*, claimed that Monism was a system of philosophy which could be a rational synthesis of science and religion. Inspired by the Japanese Zen Master Shaku Sōen at the Parliament, Carus wrote the book *The Gospel of Buddha*. (Verhoeven 2004: 55-57) Four years after the Parliament, Shaku Sōen introduced Suzuki Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎 (1870-1966) to Carus' Open Court Publishing Company in order to translate Zen Buddhist texts. About twenty years later, Suzuki's wife Beatrice would visit Hirai in Japan and practice Zen together with him.

#### *Hirai's Activities in America after the World's Parliament of Religions*

After the World's Parliament of Religions, Hirai spend some more time in America to give lectures and to meet people he was interested in. On 15 October 1893, Hirai lectured at Hinsdale Unity Church and on this occasion he also spoke with two delegates of Hinduism from India, Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, and Nagarkar of Brahmo Samaj. On 28 October 1893, Hirai lectured at the Hillside Chapel near Spring Green, Wisconsin. This chapel had been designed by Jenkin Lloyd Jones and built by Joseph Lyman Silsbee and Frank Lloyd

6. The Free Religious Movement was a movement pursuing religious freedom in the Unitarian Church. In this movement, some Unitarians opened the mind to other religious beliefs.

Wright. On 16 May 1894, Hirai delivered a paper titled “Buddhist theology and the liberal movement in Japan” for the Western Unitarian Anniversary at the First Unitarian Church of Chicago. In May 1894, Hirai attended also the first American Congress of Liberal Religious Society which was held in Chicago at the Sinai Temple. Also Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Emil Gustav Hirsch, a rabbi of reform Judaism, and other liberal religious leaders, participated in this meeting. Hirai held here a speech with the title “Inter-racial co-operation in the interest of religions.”

#### *Hirai’s Activities back in Japan*

In June 1894, Hirai returned to Japan because of his father’s illness. After his return, Hirai reopened the Oriental Hall in Kyoto. In 1896, Fenollosa visited the Oriental Hall and learned Chinese poetry from Hirai. Fenollosa noted down some translations of Chinese poetry. After his death, his wife Mary McNeil Fenollosa handed the notebook over to Ezra Pound. (Kenner 1973: 193) Pound made good use of this material when he produced his own translations of Chinese poetry. In September 1896 Hirai and Fenollosa went to Osaka, and Fenollosa made a speech about Japanese art with the assistance of Hirai’s translation. Together with Hirai, Fenollosa and his wife Mary went to Mii-dera 三井寺, where Mary vowed to follow the precepts as a lay Buddhist.

Another American student of Hirai was Henry Pike Bowie (1848-1921)<sup>7</sup> who studied Japanese language with Hirai and learned Japanese art from Kubota Beisen 久保田米遷 (1852-1906), a Japanese art painter who had attended the Columbian Exposition. Hirai himself was very interested in Japanese art painting. When Bowie (1911) wrote the book *On the Laws of Japanese Paintings*, Hirai wrote its preface.

In summary of this section, Hirai and Fenollosa both tried to synthesize the religions of East and West in various ways, and their thought inspired artists and succeeded in influencing literature, architecture and painting in America.

#### *Hirai in the Unitarian Church*

In 1899, Hirai gave a lecture about synthetic religions for Unitarians in Kyoto. However, because of this lecture he was criticized as a betrayer of Buddhism and expelled from the Buddhist temple in which he had lived in Kyoto. Saji Jitsunen 佐治実然 (1856-1920), the superintendent of the Japan Unitarian Association (JUA), persuaded Hirai to join this association. Before Saji himself became a Unitarian, he had been a prominent Jōdo Shin-shū Buddhist priest. He converted to Unitarianism because he was disappointed by corruption in Jōdo Shin-shū; he also was disturbed

7. Henry Pike Bowie was an American businessman, lawyer, artist, and Japanologist. He introduced Japanese paintings, gardening, and culture to America.

by the contradictions between science and religious belief. Subsequently, Kishimoto Nobuta, who by now also had become a member of the Unitarians, offered Hirai the post of an English professor at the Imperial Normal School in Tokyo. Hirai left Kyoto and his Oriental Hall and moved to Tokyo with Saji's and Kishimoto's support.

Hirai's good associates in the Japan Unitarian Association were Abe Iso 安部磯雄 (1865-1949), Murai Tomoyoshi 村井知至 (1861-1944) and Kishimoto Nobuta. They had studied theology at Dōshisha, so to Unitarians they were known as the "Dōshisha trio." After graduating from Dōshisha, Kishimoto studied at Harvard University and attended the World's Parliament of Religions. (Ketelaar 1993: 176) Murai went to America and studied at the Andover Theological Seminary from 1889 to 1893. At Andover, William Jewett Tucker (1839-1926) had great influence upon him. Tucker advocated the "Social Gospel"<sup>8</sup> and founded a settlement house for the poor. In 1895 Murai studied Christian Socialism under George Davis Herron at Iowa College. Murai could not believe in Christian creeds such as the Trinity, the virgin birth, or the atonement, but he thought that the ideals of Christianity could be achieved by resolving poverty and social problems. Abe Iso studied at Hartford Theological Seminary and the University of Berlin. During 1898-99, Abe, Murai and Kishimoto joined one after another the Japan Unitarian Association. They often held meetings in the Unity Hall in Tokyo<sup>9</sup> to study socialism. Abe Iso and Murai were known as the earliest Japanese socialists. (Forman 1970: 92) Abe Iso founded the first Socialist Party in Japan 1901. Sometimes Hirai also attended the socialist meetings, but he had more interest in the spiritual world rather than in social reform. For the "trio" the Japan Unitarian Association was not a Christian sect, nor even a religious denomination, but a club or a salon of liberal and religious thinkers.

In May 1900, as delegates of the Japan Unitarian Association, Hirai Kinza and Murai Tomoyoshi attended the seventy-fifth anniversary meeting of the American Unitarian Association in Boston. However, Samuel Atkins Eliot, president of the AUA, refused to give Hirai the opportunity to speak at the meeting. Hirai became very angry with the attitude of the committee and left the meeting. However Murai attended the meeting and offered to mediate between Hirai and Samuel Eliot. As a compromise Hirai's draft of his speech entitled "An Address" was published in *The Christian Register*. Hirai wrote in this article:

Since I was old enough to be heard by the public of Japan, I have preached Synthetic Religion; and to this day I can find no other name that so perfectly expresses my changeless position. Buddhism narrows me, Confucianism, Shintoism, Christianity,

8. Social Gospel was a movement applying Christian ethics to social problems. In this movement many reformers tried to solve poverty and labor problems.

9. The Unity Hall was a center of the Unitarian Mission built in 1894. Hirai often attended the meetings held in this Hall.

Unitarianism, all narrow me, corraling me at once though an impassable cordon drawn between me and my possibilities of advance... Therefore, I must and will be understood, or I step down and out. Already have had the Buddhists cast me hence. From the moment I desire to make abstract Buddhism practical, they turned their backs. Shall I share the same fate at your hands? Will the name be a barrier between me and humanity? For, understand, it is not for Buddhism nor Unitarianism nor yet for Japan that I work, but for humanity. If I cannot be borne up on a principle too sacred for a name, if I have not nature and universal life as my book of inspiration, if in any way Unitarianism cheats me of these, then do I abandon it at once and forever. (Hirai 1900a: 12)

In the American Unitarian Church, some members opposed the liberals, they insisted that the Unitarian Church was a Christian sect, and they rejected tolerance against other religions. Hirai hoped that all Unitarian members would transcend the narrow sectarianism and exert a tolerant attitude toward other religious beliefs. Because Hirai was upset by the impoliteness of the Unitarian committee, he left the meeting and returned to Japan earlier than Murai. After the Boston meeting in 1900, Murai traveled to England to visit the “Fabian Society,” but Hirai did not accompany him.

After Hirai and Murai had returned to Tokyo, both worked at the Tokyo Foreign Language School as English professors. Hirai often lectured about the literature of Emerson in this school. In 1902, Hirai also advocated the theory of the identity of the Japanese language with the Aryan languages. Although this linguistic theory was introduced in the eleventh edition of *the Encyclopedia Britannica*, it was not accepted among Japanese linguists.

During his Unitarian period Hirai wrote some articles in the *Rikugō zasshi* 六合雜誌 (The Cosmos), the magazine published by the JUA. For example, in his essay “Shakai dōryoku no keizai” 社会動力の経済 (Economics of Social Endeavor) Hirai (1900b) analyzed three periods of human development based on Auguste Comte. According to this theory, in the first period the aim is to control natural power, in the second to develop human power, and in the third to develop the economics of social power. From that viewpoint Hirai criticized the system of licensed prostitution in Japan and the expansion of armaments of Western countries, both as obstacles to social progress.

In another article “Jinrui shinpo-ron” 人類進歩論 (Treatise on the Progress of Humankind), Hirai (1900c) argued that the progress of scientific knowledge had greatly developed human technical intelligence, but human morality and ethics had not yet advanced from its earlier stage. Hirai claimed that moral progress combined with the development of scientific knowledge could be attained by welfare work based on socialism. In the same article Hirai denied the validity of spiritualism and occultism of the supernatural since these were based on superstition and ignorance. We can see here that his rationalism about religious matters was maintained during

his Unitarian period, but he would approach occultism and lose his rationalist attitude later after his withdrawal from Unitarianism.

Hirai promoted the abolishment of Chinese characters and recommended the use of the Latin alphabet in the future. In his article “Moji to kotoba ni tsukite” モジとことばにつきて (About Letters and Language), for example, Hirai (1901a) used only *kana*, the Japanese syllabic writing system, without any Chinese characters. He was part of such a movement in the Meiji Period to abolish Chinese characters and pursue an easier communication with Westerners.

In the article “Kagakuteki oyobi shikateki shakai” 科学的及詩歌的社会 (Scientific and Poetical Society), Hirai (1901b) criticized the expansion of armaments by Japan after the First Sino-Japanese War (1894). He was alarmed that the lack of freedom, science and criticism would bring decline to the nation. Morality and religious philosophy must be applied to society for improvement of real life. If these things are considered the same as poetry, and if people play with impracticable theories and use rhetoric like the Sophists did, it would cause nations to fall as in the cases of ancient Greece and India.

#### *From Unitarianism to Occultism*

From the records of *Rikugō zasshi*, it is known that Hirai lectured at the Unity Hall in Tokyo until November 1903. Thereafter, however, Hirai's activity in the Japan Unitarian Association clearly decreased. After MacCauley returned to America in 1900, the administration and management of the Japan Unitarian Association was handed to Japanese members, but tension and disharmony among its members grew more and more. In 1903, when the AUA sent Thomas Lamb Eliot to Japan as commissioner, Kanda Saichirō 神田佐一郎, secretary of the JUA, opposed the activity of the socialist movement in the Unity Hall. In 1904, conflicts between Saji Jitsunen and other members caused a split in the Association. Hirai sent a letter to Napp and condemned Saji Jitsunen for committing abuses. (Tsuchiya 2005: 153) Because of these internal conflicts, Hirai eventually became disappointed with the Unitarians and quit the JUA together with some other members.

In 1906, the Mormon missionary Alma O. Taylor (1882-1947) asked Hirai to help with his translation of the *Book of Mormon* into Japanese. Hirai himself did not accept this task, but he introduced Noguchi Zenshirō and his own brother Hirai Hirogorō 平井広五郎 as translators. According to the diary of Alma Taylor, Hirai gave advice and support to the project of the Mormon translation. (Taylor 1906)

In 1907, Hirai and Matsumura Kaiseiki 松村介石 (1859-1939) founded the Japanese church organization that became known as Dōkai 道会 (Association of the Way) a few years later. This group was a non-sectarian religious movement which aimed at establishing a new type of universal religion for Japanese people. Matsumura was a member of the Yokohama Band, a group of Japanese who were

guided to Christianity by missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church in Yokohama. Matsumura became a lecturer at the YMCA Hall in Tokyo and offered lectures on self-discipline and moral ethics. However, he gradually abandoned the teachings of the Reformed Church and resigned from his post at the YMCA because when he developed the idea of universal ethics he combined Christian morality and Confucianism. Hirai and Murai moved near his residence and the three began this new religious movement as a team. (Mullins 1998: 69-71)

In this group Hirai often made experiments in psychic phenomena and wrote articles about the results in the journal *Michi* 道 (The Way). In these experiments the members tried out table turning, telepathy, remote viewing, channeling, telekinesis, Ouija boards, etc. Hirai wanted to understand such phenomena via scientific analysis and explanation. In the experiments participated also Motora Yūjirō 元良勇次郎 (1858-1912) who was the first professor of psychology at the Imperial University in Tokyo. Motora had been a graduate of Dōshisha and had received his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University under Granville Stanley Hall. A pupil of Motora, Fukurai Tomokichi 福来友吉 (1869-1952), also joined these experiments, but some years later the latter was expelled from his university post because of his enthusiasm for occultism.

Hirai could not retain his rational and skeptical attitude after he withdrew from Unitarianism. He was so sensitive to the transformations of religious thought taking place in this time that he could never adhere to a single denomination or sect. In his later years, he renounced his earlier rational attitude to religions and turned to belief in supernatural power and occult practices.

### Conclusion

This article has focused on Hirai Kinza's life, thoughts, beliefs and activities. Thereby it has shed new light also on the broader social, intellectual and religious situation of the Meiji Period. Japan's rapid modernization and Westernization forced many individuals to search for a new orientation in order to cope with the challenges posed by such social and economic changes. It was in such a situation that Hirai developed his viewpoint. He underwent subsequent transformations which seem to contradict each other, such as from an anti-Christian Buddhist apologetic to a Unitarian, from a rationalist to a practitioner of occult rituals, and (in political terms) from a nationalist to a universalist. These personal transformations would not have occurred without the direct encounters Japanese experienced abroad. Hirai was very much influenced by American Unitarians.

Reform Buddhists like Hirai were critical not only of Christianity and its mission, but also of traditional Japanese Buddhism. On the other hand, Unitarians were critical of traditional American Christianity and thereby searching for more modern, broader and tolerant forms of religiosity. Thus, because the interests of both



sides coincided somehow, both were able to stimulate each other considerably. In a time of increasing polarizations and diversification, both were seeking harmonization of East and West, and a higher unity of Christianity and Oriental religions. In their attempts to solve social, political, intellectual and religious tensions and conflicts, these people from East and West established groups and organizations aimed at solving the problems of the time, but ironically they eventually ended up contributing to the ongoing segmentation and diversification.

The present investigation showed in particular the significant role the World's Parliament of Religions played in this process of mutual stimulation: it enabled many encounters among people of different nationality and religion, and subsequently triggered all kinds of international exchange and cooperation, not only between religionists like Japanese Buddhists and American Unitarians, but involved also poets, artists and architects. This account of Hirai's life and activities indicates in particular that Japanese and Americans, some of them Christians and some Buddhists, met in their search for something new, something which would solve the spiritual problems of their times. Both stimulated each other, in an unprecedented way and with long lasting impacts.

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