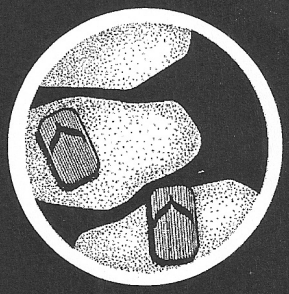

stepping stones

prayer letter of Iwa

transforming ministry and leadership in our community
december 2013 number 13-1

Christianity, the Tea Ceremony and the Unification of Japan

The major content of this issue of *stepping stones* is the research summary Stan gave to Dr. Greg Waybright of Lake Avenue Church in Pasadena, to share with his close friend—a seminary professor who taught for many years in Japan—who he thought would be keenly interested in what Stan is learning about the relationship between Christianity, the Japanese tea ceremony, and the unification of Japan. We hope it will excite you as much as it has us, and will enable you to see its potential for helping reach Japanese, Japanese Americans and Asian Americans for Christ.

Japanese Tea Ceremony Research Summary

Stanley Kenji Inouye, "Pivot Point in Japanese History: the influence of the Japanese tea ceremony upon the evangelization, cultural development and unification of Japan during the Christian Century, 1549-1639 AD," ongoing research project, Iwa, Inc., www.iwarock.org, November 14, 2013.

My current research examines the impact the Japanese tea ceremony had on the evangelization, cultural development and unification of Japan from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century often referred to as the Christian Century. By examining this historically pivotal period, I identify the process by which God began the transformation of the religion, culture and politics of Japan to become uniquely Japanese. This transformation occurred as a result of the convergence of the religious, cultural and political histories of Japan represented by three primary radical reformers: Francis Xavier, Sen no Rikyu and Oda Nobunaga. Central to the transformation of all three of these areas was the use and development of the Japanese tea ceremony.

Unlike the culturally impositional approach of other Catholic orders, Jesuits like Xavier sought to contextualize Christianity for the Japanese. Welcomed by Buddhists by being served tea, the Jesuits did likewise. Sen no Rikyu, a merchant from Sakai, reshaped serving tea from being religious, grand and expensive to secular, intimate and rustic for purposes of hospitality and diplomacy. After Rikyu was introduced to the Eucharist, similarities between the tea ceremony and Holy Communion eventually surfaced.

Oda Nobunaga, first of three successive supreme military rulers to unify Japan, began to end two centuries of civil war by promoting and protecting Christianity to suppress Buddhist power and influence. After deposing the Ashikaga shogunate and being commanded by the Emperor to unify Japan, Nobunaga made Rikyu his head tea master to reconcile and negotiate new alliances between warring *daimyo* (warlords), and train others to do likewise. Most, if not all, of Rikyu's seven core tea disciples were Christians; they were also among Nobunaga's most powerful military leaders. They modeled the political and spiritual unity that was possible for those who would follow their example. At least one core disciple used the tea ceremony for personal worship. Increasingly, the tea ceremony reflected Christian values that, in turn, influenced the architecture, art and culture of Japan.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi succeeded Nobunaga after he was assassinated, maintaining his Christian-friendly policies and those Christians in leadership under him. Hideyoshi not only made Rikyu his head tea master, but also, his personal secretary. However, after a military campaign to insure control of heavily Christian Southern Japan and having been warned about the conversion-then-colonization tactics of Spanish Conquistadors, Hideyoshi turned against Christianity. He issued the Edict of Expulsion, ordering all missionaries to immediately exit Japan, and, to discourage others from converting or perpetuating their Christian beliefs, ordered Rikyu to convince one of his most influential core disciples to renounce his faith. Apparently unsuccessful, Hideyoshi ordered Rikyu to commit ritual suicide. Also to discourage

further conversions, Hideyoshi tortured and crucified the Twenty-Six Martyrs, but, ironically, because of the way they died, many more became Christian.

After Hideyoshi died, Tokugawa Ieyasu usurped top military control of Japan. At first, hoping to expand trade with Europe, Ieyasu encouraged Christianity, opening Japan's doors to other Catholic orders. Briefly, Christianity flourished again. Sixty of 260 warlords (24%) were Christian. However, conflicts between the Catholic orders and another warning about the Conquistadors compelled Ieyasu to issue the Great Edict of Annihilation, demanding all missionaries to leave and all Japanese Christians to apostatize or die. 200,000 to 300,000 of the half million Christians in Japan at the time were tortured and executed.

Neither Nobunaga nor Hideyoshi could become shogun for lack of noble birth, however, Ieyasu was made shogun by the Emperor. As a result, he and the Tokugawa shogunate were able to shut Japan's doors for over two hundred years. They attempted to purge Christianity from Japan and its history, and reshaped Japan into a monolithic neo-Confucian, Buddhist/Shinto state that worshiped the Emperor. The tea ceremony was recast as a complex and minutely precise artistic cultural ritual that reinforced strict conformity and a rigid hierarchical social structure, which eventually came to be performed primarily by females subject to male accountability. After two centuries of anti-Christian indoctrination, the Japanese became inculcated with an irrational fear of Christianity. Much less than one percent has ever been Christian since Japan reopened its doors in the mid-nineteenth century. However, hidden Christians also emerged after seven generations of being underground. They secretly observed Holy Communion through the tea ceremony. Doctrinal material developed by women catechists led by the wife of one of Rikyu's core disciples was one way they sustained their faith. And, another of Rikyu's core disciples maintained his prominence as leading tea master even under Ieyasu and designed a "Christian Lantern" that directed hidden Christians to places of underground Christian worship.

This study reveals the reasons so many Japanese became Christian during the Christian Century, and why, after two centuries of isolation, they became so resistant to Christianity. Hopefully, effective application of this study's implications will lead to effective ways of reaching people of Japanese ancestry for Christ in Japan and elsewhere in the world. Some applications may include educating Japanese about Christianity's influence in Japan's history, hospitality based on tea ceremony principles, and reformation of the tea ceremony for Christian worship and evangelism in today's context.

To date, the study resources accessed are the Internet, articles, dissertations, archival research in English and Japanese, historically based novels and movies, videos and interviews. Future resources will include critical reviews by experts in the history of Japanese religion, culture, politics and missions and, potentially, original research in Japan.

Prayer Requests

- **Opening up of new channels for the distribution and use of Iwa's resources** such as the Japanese tea ceremony study, *the God Man* poem, and *the God Man* Bible study series, especially through this new relationship with Dr. Waybright.
- **Provision of health for staff members and their parents** so that the staff can be at full strength in carrying out the work of Iwa.
- **Supplying of financial resources that will enable Stan's outdated and dysfunctional computer and printer to be replaced** with a new laptop, large screen monitor and high quality printer so that the final proofs of *the God Man* poem in print, ebook, CD and DVD and *Meeting Jesus for the First Time* of *the God Man* Bible study series will be completed and distributed.
- **Provision of short-term and long-term solutions to Iwa's financial needs**, and the raising up of people through whom the Lord wants to provide for Iwa and its staff.
- **Causing of a spiritual breakthrough** that will open the minds and hearts of people of Japanese and Asian ancestry to Christ and the Good News he brings.

Do you still want to receive *stepping stones*?
If so, you don't have to do a thing. If you would like to discontinue, please let us know by mail, phone (818.541.9089) or e-mail (iwarock@aol.com). Please send us the names and addresses of anyone you think would want to receive *stepping stones*.

Iwa works in partnership with Christians, leaders and churches to discover and develop the needed resources that will lead to more effective evangelism, leadership development, church growth, church planting and spiritual renewal among Japanese, Japanese Americans, and Asian Americans. These resources include materials, programs, strategies and training.

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