

“Nationalism and Internationalism; Japanese and British Women’s Imaginations of the Other
in the World Student Christian movement after the Russo-Japanese War”

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On 22 April 1907, Ruth Rouse, a British woman who was the travelling secretary of the World Student Christian Federation (hereafter WSCF) landed in Japan for the first time in her life. The main purpose of her visit was to attend the Tokyo conference of the WSCF, the first one to be held in Asia, outside of Europe and North America. Another purpose was to visit Japanese Christian women students’ movements across the country and to extend her visits to Korea and China. It was at the Tokyo conference that she met Kawai Michi, a Japanese Christian woman who would soon after become the General Secretary of Japan YWCA. Impressed by Kawai’s charisma and her talent in making “first-class speeches,” Rouse invited Kawai to visit Christian students’ volunteer movements in Europe during her visit to the Berlin World YWCA conference in 1909. Kawai made a 11 month tour in Great Britain, Netherlands, France and Germany from August 1909 to June 1910 when she sailed for the United States. After the First World War, Kawai became the first Japanese delegate of the Japanese Christian association to visit Siberia for relief work. Accordingly, in 1920, Kawai was appointed as the Chairman of the General Committee of the WSCF and the Vice President of the WSCF, becoming the first woman to be appointed to these offices.

Ruth Rouse, on the other hand, was appointed as the first and only woman travelling secretary of the WSCF by John R. Mott in 1905 and served in that capacity until 1924. Rouse visited 66 countries around the world and worked among women students to

stimulate Christian student movement and studied the conditions of women and women's education in each country.

This paper intends to explore in what ways Kawai Michi, a Japanese YWCA leader and Ruth Rouse, a British leader of the WSCF shaped the ideas of internationalism and nationalism between 1907 and 1919. For this purpose, this paper examines three pivotal moments; 1907 Tokyo WSCF conference, Kawai's visit in Europe from 1909 to 1910 and Rouse's visit in the United States in 1912,. These visits all took place after the Russo-Japanese War.

Although both Christian women believed in the unity of Christianity around the world and shared the hopes to achieve Christian internationalism, their interpretations of internationalism were entangled with nationalisms. Accordingly, they were developing different and sometimes contesting interpretations on the meaning of nationalism and internationalism. As a first step to explore their different interpretations, this paper will discuss and compare how Rouse and Kawai shaped their imaginations of the other as they were developing their visions of Christian internationalism.

The 1907 Tokyo conference became a historic event for the European, North American and the Japanese delegates. Originally planned to be held in 1905 upon request from Reverend Honda Yoitsu, Japanese Vice Chairman of the WSCF, the meeting was postponed because of the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War between 1904 and 1905.

The WSCF founders were attracted to Japan as a potential promising field of evangelization from the beginning of its founding. As Rouse wrote in her book on the history of WSCF, it was an urgent call from Japanese students in 1889 that "Christ should be the King" that moved the reluctant students from Scandinavia to found the World Student Christian Federation at the Vadstena Castle in Sweden in 1895. More than 500 Japanese students including 96 women were inspired by Wishard's visit to Japan and sent such a telegram to the Northfield summer conference in 1889. Astonished to receive such a

powerful message from a heathen country in the Orient, the Scandinavian students learned how meaningful Christian gospel could be to a non-Christian country.

John R. Mott, the General Secretary of the WSCF, had visited Japan twice since 1896 and took leadership in shifting the focus of the student volunteer movement to Asia to achieve the goal of “the evangelization of the world in this generation.” Interpreting Japan as the harbinger of modernization among Asian nations, he was thrilled to discover how important the Tokyo conference became after the Japanese victory of the Russo-Japanese War. Learning that thousands of elite Chinese students and Korean students were flocking into Tokyo to acquire modern higher education and learn how Japan succeeded in rapid modernization after two centuries of seclusion, he felt that this special timing was an extraordinarily ripe opportunity. He wrote to Galen M. Fisher, the general secretary of Japan YMCA on April 3, 1906, that “even before the war we regarded it as ‘the most notable undertaking of the Federation’, but what should be said of it now?” He continued, “I believe it is impossible for anyone to overstate the possibilities of this gathering for the extension and establishment of Christ’s Kingdom in the Far East.” Therefore, he concluded that the WSCF should concentrate on “this great enterprise” and put aside their work in Europe for the time being.¹

Mott extended his conviction to Rouse that his visit to the Orient for the 1907 Tokyo conference would “complete my touch with practically all the most distant parts of the world.”² He urged Rouse to take enough rest from her work so that she would be well prepared for a year of “unexampled strain” of “what confronts you in the Far East.” Accordingly, Rouse, who had been working in South Africa and who had been planning to visit Austria-Hungary, Russia and Turkey, decided to put off some of her European work. She further decided not to go to China before Japan as Mott advised because she was convinced that “Japan is unquestionably more important from every point of view.”³

¹ JRM to Galen Fisher, 3 April 1906, RG46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

² JRM to RR, 27 December 1906, RG 46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

³ RR to JRM, 4 September 1906, RG 46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

In order to make Tokyo conference successful, Mott made meticulous plans to select Japanese delegates from nine different classes including the “distinguished Christian Japanese laymen” in high social status, such as “members of Parliament, judges, officers in the army and navy, and men of large wealth” as well as “a carefully selected list of Christian Chinese and other Christian Oriental students studying in Japan” so that he could assemble “the most influential company of Japanese Christian leaders ever brought together under any auspices” to promote “Student Evangelism” for the “evangelization of Asia.”⁴ For Rouse, however, the Tokyo conference marked an important advance in women’s official participation in the WSCF as “the new clause in the Federation Constitution relating to women” was to be adopted and the “sub-committee on women’s work” was officially launched.⁵ As a result, the foreign delegates who attended the 1907 Tokyo conference consisted of 107 men and 24 women including ten Chinese women delegates.

Compared to Mott, Rouse had a more moderate view on the importance of reaching out to Japanese women. Rouse stayed for two months in Japan from April to June 1907, then visited Korea and China. Her travel reports of the Far East reveal that although she was highly impressed by the rapid development of women’s education in Tokyo, Osaka and other cities in Japan and by the highly efficient management skills of the Japanese that surpassed those of the Europeans and of the North Americans, she was much more thrilled by the evangelical revivals that she witnessed among Korean Christian women in Korea. Rouse was highly impressed by the rapid and solid development of women’s education in Japan, but at the same time, overwhelmed by her tight schedule of press interviews and official lectures in front of Japanese governmental, corporate and educational leaders. She agreed with Mott that Caroline MacDonald, the Canadian general secretary of Japan YWCA seemed to be “quite an ideal worker” and that MacDonald “roused an enormous amount of interest in Japan.”⁶ Thus, Rouse was able to enjoy meeting Japanese Christian women leaders including Kawai, but missed visiting more student centers for women in Japan.

⁴ JRM to Fisher, 3 April 1906, RG46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

⁵ RR to JRM, 16 July 1906, RG 46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

⁶ RR to JRM, 4 September 1906, RG 46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

That said, however, it was Rouse that strongly supported Kawai to be invited to Europe in 1909 and negotiated with Mott so that the WSCF and not the World YWCA would pay for Kawai's expenses of the European tour. Kawai's invitation took place by accident, because Miss Singh, an influential woman leader from India and the Vice Chairman of the Women's Committee, had suddenly died in May 1909. To this emergency, Rouse suggested to Mott whether to "ask Miss Kawai of Japan or Miss Tsao of China to substitute for Miss Singh" at the 1909 WSCF conference in Oxford. Rouse wrote to Mott, "Either would be good. I know Miss Kawai is a first class speaker."⁷

Owing to such strong support and recommendation by Rouse, Kawai sailed to Europe and spent 10 months from August 1909 to June 1910, visiting women's colleges and the women's student Christian movement in Great Britain, Netherlands, France, Germany and Switzerland. She worked with the students and gave speeches at women's meetings in churches and schools on such topics as "Why the Far East and Japanese students need Christianity now," "the duties of international students," "the situation of Japanese students, their benefits and weaknesses," and "the ideal womanhood of the East and the West." Although this was the second time for Kawai to visit Europe, Kawai gained two important messages from this visit. First, she was astonished that the ecumenical movement led by the WSCF in Europe went beyond Protestantism and challenged to reach out to the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodoxy churches and the Jewish church, far beyond her imaginations of ecumenism. Recollecting her European tour, Kawai wrote to Rouse in 1912, "thanks to my tour in Europe, my viewpoint expanded from what we call in Japanese proverb 'a frog in the well' to a vast universe in which I began to see not only a large sea but multiple oceans of God's works."

Second, for Kawai, another revelation took place when she met two different Russian refugee women in Freiburg, Germany. Kawai expressed a contradictory response. The first Russian woman in her fifties, came and spoke to Kawai in a friendly manner, saying that she had prayed for Japanese women during the Russo-Japanese War. In rage, Kawai wrote,

⁷ RR to JRM, 27 May 1909, RG46 Box 23, Special Collections YDSL.

“Why could she speak such words of betrayal to her own mother country? She may have said so with a feeling of compassion for me, but I cannot stand such superficial compliments” in her report to the WSCF and the General Committee of the World YWCA in 1910. On the other hand, however, she expressed contrasting emotions in the same report about her relationship with another young Russian woman.. She wrote how she shared feelings of war experiences with this woman as follows: “When she explained how her home town for generations fell when Sweden was defeated by Russia, I was almost in tears. How I praised her when she expressed her conflicting emotions between patriotism, justice and revolutionary spirit with a shaking voice. Japanese traditional warrior would have said ‘here is my enemy of high respect’ and I feel honored as a Japanese Christian to be able to say that she is ‘my sister and friend.” She wrote that she sympathized with this Russian woman because she and her family immigrated to Germany because of war, she loves Russia and Russian people as the mother country and that the Russian government is only to blame and not the Russian people. Therefore, this woman believed Russia needed Christ and to this, Kawai strongly agreed and fostered deep friendship. The latter experience instilled long-lasting impact on her that she recalled and wrote in her 1939 autobiography, *My Lantern*, as follows:

With the younger sister I went for a walk along the border of the Black Forest, and we sat down under a tree and talked about the political situation between our countries. The international wounds had not had time to heal since the Russo-Japan War of 1904-5; but, though we represented hostile countries, yet we sat there like old friends, with the tall church spires and red roofs of an alien land lying below us. We knelt together, she praying for Japan, I praying for Russia; and with a warm handclasp we pledged ourselves to work for international peace through our common Savior.⁸

⁸ Michi Kawai, *My Lantern* (Tokyo: Keisen Girls' School, 1939), 130.

These anecdotes suggest that Kawai found it difficult to reconcile nationalism and internationalism immediately after war with a woman from the former enemy country. Yet, by identifying those who went to war between two countries were their governments and not the countries or the peoples themselves and by recognizing and sharing the conflicting emotions, she finally imagined that it was possible to reconcile nationalism and internationalism and that the shared notion of unity in Christ would make such reconciliation possible.

Another issue that impressed Kawai highly in this tour was her visits at women's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge. Here she stayed at the women's dormitories and observed how British women made sophisticated arguments in conducting debates in their classes. Through these experiences with British college students, Kawai learned the importance of women's education to develop women's thinking skills and independence and highlighted the need to further advance women's higher education in Japan in her essays that she published in *meiji no joshi*, the periodical of Japan YWCA.

Rouse, on the other hand, was impressed by Kawai's impact on European women students. European students were inspired by the presence and by the powerful words that flowed from Kawai. In addition to being a "first class speaker," Rouse imagined that Kawai's power of impact on European women students lay in the exotic image of a non-Western Asian woman transformed into an evangelical leader with strong, spiritual power. Rouse interpreted that for Western women in particular, Kawai rendered special power precisely because she appeared to represent a living evidence of the power of Christianity on a heathen exotic woman from a non-Christian world.

Acknowledging such unique spiritual power Kawai may render to Western women in general, Rouse wrote to Kawai that she "cannot find the right words to express how much I want you to come" and pleaded Kawai to attend the 1913 Lake Mohonk conference in the United States. Rouse wrote that Kawai was unique and the only woman of her knowledge who could inspire both North American women and European women about the importance of Unity in Christ because Kawai had the experience of women's student Christian

movements in both the United States and Europe. As an Asian woman with both experiences, Kawai, in Rouse's interpretation, was the only woman who could explain European and Asian situations to American women and explain American situations to European and Asian women. Rouse made this special plea to Kawai because she had developed concerns about the spiritual condition of American Christian women during her visit in 1912. In her travel reports, Rouse wrote that American Christian women students showed "tremendous enthusiasm for social service" but that this was an "overemphasis on the outward side of Christianity" and had "a tendency to let the mystical slip out of sight." She was also critical that American women students tended to be narrow-minded and that they had "very little theological knowledge and practically no interest in theology."⁹ In order to inspire such American women students, Rouse interpreted that only Kawai would be able to render such evangelizing power.

What Rouse did not realize, however, was the inherent contradiction her reasoning entailed. Rouse had shaped the visions of internationalism based on unity in Christ, in which all women from around the world were equal humans before God and Christ. Nevertheless, her interpretation and reasoning that Kawai rendered unique evangelical power among Western women was founded on the hierarchical assumption of her imagination that Kawai was the exotic Oriental "other," subordinate or different from the Western White women. In other words, although Rouse espoused the vision of internationalism based on unity in Christ in which all women were equal before God regardless of race, ethnicity or nationality, the basic assumption of her imagination of "the other" of Kawai was based on an unequal Orientalist gaze. Therefore, the basic logic that supported her purpose and method contradicted in itself, although she never realized the contradiction.

⁹ RR, May 1912 "USA Report of RR to Student Department YWCA," RR travel reports, RG 313, Special Collections YDSL.

To conclude, the transnational experiences of the ecumenical movement of the WSCF for Kawai and Rouse affected both women to conceptualize their imaginations of the “other” in distinctly different and contesting ways. For Kawai, her encounter with Russian refugee women in Germany demonstrated that nationalism was important for her. She could not accept a Russian woman who negated her own nationalism. On the contrary, she could relate with another Russian woman who accepted common conflicting emotions between nationalism (patriotism) and justice and managed to seek internationalism and friendship across divisions through the visions for church unity. For Kawai, her reconciliation between nationalism and internationalism with this Russian woman was conceptualized by seeing the “other” as equal to herself. On the other hand, Rouse respected and valued Kawai’s remarkable evangelistic power shown among European women students. She also hoped that Kawai’s evangelical power would inspire and render a positive impact on American women students. Although Rouse embraced the idea that all Christian women were equal before God regardless of race, ethnicity and nationality, the very assumption that supported her imagination of Kawai’s unique evangelical power was her Orientalist gaze of Kawai as the exotic “other.” Therefore, Rouse’s conceptions of internationalism and the “other” were self-contradictory in which the former espoused equality as the latter conceptualized the “other” from an unequal Orientalist gaze.