

論文

Faith, Empire, and Christian Modernity: A British Missionary Nurse and the Ainu of Japan

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Abstract: This article examines the cross-cultural encounters between British missionary nurse Edith Mary Bryant and Ainu women in colonial Hokkaido from 1896 to 1921. During the late nineteenth-century British Empire's expansion, the Church Missionary Society deployed a handful of missionaries to Hokkaido to begin evangelical work among the Ainu. Drawing on the concepts of 'Christian modernity' and 'contact zone', this article analyses how missionary narratives produced knowledge about the Ainu while simultaneously othering them. Bryant's quarter-century residence in Biratori village represents one of the longest sustained missionary engagements by a Western woman with the indigenous Ainu. Her role as missionary, nurse, and educator created complex power dynamics within this contact zone. Although her medical work provided crucial healthcare and earned the community's trust, her evangelical efforts achieved limited success, which revealed tensions between traditional Ainu beliefs and Christianity. Through critical analysis of missionary texts, the article demonstrates how Christian modernity functioned both as an ideology of cultural superiority and a contested space where Ainu women selectively appropriated, adapted, or resisted missionary teachings to serve their own needs.

Keywords: Ainu, Missionary Encounters, Gender, Christian Modernity

アブストラクト：大英帝国が拡大し積極的に海外宣教がなされた19世紀後半、英国聖公会宣教協会は北海道に宣教師を送り、アイヌの人々に対する伝道活動を他の宗派に先駆けて開始した。本稿ではChoi (2009) の Christian modernity および Pratt (1992) の contact zone を概念的枠組みとして用い、女性宣教師 Edith Mary Bryant の平取村における活動報告書の言説を分析した。四半世紀にわたり、宣教師、看護師、教育者としてアイヌの人々に尽くした Bryant は、医療活動を通じて地域の大きな信頼を得た。しかし同時に、キリスト教を基盤とする西洋文明の優越性を内在化していたため、アイヌを「他者」として捉える帝國的なまなざしから脱することはできなかった。一方、洗礼を受けたアイヌ女性たちも常に受け身であったわけではなく、状況に応じてアイヌの伝統文化や風習を並行して実践するなど、主体的な存在であった。その意味で、平取は非対称な関係性を持つ二つの文化が出会い、衝突し、格闘する contact zone、まさに相互変容の空間であった。

キーワード：アイヌ、異文化接触、ジェンダー、Christian Modernity

1. Introduction

On November 26, 1921, Edith Mary Bryant (1857-1934) sent her last Annual Letter to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) headquarters in London. Reflecting on a quarter of a century spent as a missionary among the Indigenous Ainu people in Biratori,⁽¹⁾ Hokkaido, she wrote:

But now at the end of 25 years...as one looks back to the beginning there is indeed progress, far, far below what one hoped for or what it should be, but still progress. Yesterday, at the gathering of Ainu men and women met to take leave of me before I go on furlough, when one after another rose to give thanks, and I knew there was love and simple faith behind the heartfelt words, I thanked God and took courage.

Bryant's reflections reveal the duality of her missionary experience: the deep bonds forged over decades of service, alongside her enduring disappointment at her limited evangelical success. Her description of Ainu men and women offering gratitude 'with love and simple faith' exemplifies their appreciation for her efforts in teaching, nursing and living within their community as its sole Western resident. Yet, her acknowledgement that 'progress' remained 'far below what one hoped for' reflects her disappointment at what she perceived as the limited degree to which she achieved the Christian transformation of the Ainu. At the same time, this limited progress also suggests the resilience of Ainu customs and beliefs against a foreign religion.

The nineteenth century witnessed a significant expansion of Christian missionary work, with both single and married women venturing across the globe to bring Christian 'civilisation' to non-Western societies (Namikawa, 2009). CMS statistics indicate that the number of women missionaries overseas had increased nine-fold since the late 1880s, reaching 348 in July 1895 (Murray, 2000). This growth coincided with greater educational opportunities for women and specialised training in fields such as medicine and nursing. The slogan 'women's work for women', which was closely tied to evangelism and social reform movements, gained increasing social acceptance and encouraged women to serve in overseas missions (Klein, 2016). Bryant exemplified such women. With a strong sense of moral duty, she endeavoured to spread the Gospel to the Ainu while transplanting Victorian ideals of the 'Christian Home', a middle-class domestic ideology structured around Protestant morality and clearly delineated gender roles.

The purpose of this article is to shed light on one female missionary's cross-cultural encounters with Ainu women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The article draws on two complementary

(1) Although Bryant referred to the village as 'Piratori' in her reports, this article adopts the current romanisation 'Biratori'.

analytical frameworks: the concept of 'Christian modernity' (Choi, 2009, p.8)⁽²⁾ and the concept of the 'contact zone' (Pratt, 1992, p.34).⁽³⁾ The former provides an analytical lens through which Bryant's missionary discourse can be interpreted. As Choi defines it, Christian modernity describes the ideological assumptions that were largely taken for granted among Victorian missionaries, embedded in the broader Western intellectual climate of that era. Through analysis of Bryant's Annual Letters (1897-1921) and other related CMS archives, I argue that Bryant's work illustrates how missionary narratives of 'Christian progress' were framed within Christian modernity. Pratt's concept of the contact zone further enables an analysis that moves beyond the binary of missionary as agent and Indigenous people as recipients. Although Bryant had internalised Christian modernity, she also felt genuine compassion for the Ainu and developed special bonds with them. This complexity allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between Indigenous Ainu women and Bryant, as well as of the ways in which Ainu women exercised agency within asymmetrical power relations.

Situating this analysis within existing scholarship on Ainu history further clarifies the significance of this gender-focused approach. The historiography of the Ainu was long regarded as a part of local history, or 'peripheral', and tended to lack an international perspective (Morris-Suzuki & Okawa, 2000). Over the last several decades, however, scholarship has increasingly re-examined Ainu history within broader transnational and colonial contexts (e.g., Emori 2007; Hudson, Lewallen & Watson 2013; Lewallen 2017; Tanigawa & Owa 2018; Walker 2001). Nevertheless, studies of foreign Christian missions and Ainu women remain relatively limited (e.g., Frey 2007; Nakamura 2003, 2005, & 2008; Tanabe 2019). By foregrounding gender and Indigenous agency, this article extends the new scholarship by centring interactions between a British woman missionary and Ainu women. Within this context, Bryant's experience offers insights into how British women missionaries like Bryant documented their evangelical experiences and the challenges they faced in colonial Hokkaido.

One major methodological limitation placed on this study is the near-absence of Ainu women's voices in the historical record. Ainu history and traditional knowledge were transmitted orally for generations, and literacy remained limited among many Ainu communities in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, it was not until 1918 that the first book authored by an Ainu teacher, Takekuma Tokusaburo, was published. Consequently, this article reads missionary sources 'against the grain', taking gaps, silences, and contradictions within CMS archival materials as indirect evidence of Ainu women's agency. The following section provides a historical overview of CMS engagement with the Ainu in Meiji Japan.

(2) Choi defines 'Christian modernity' as 'an ideology that promotes 'the idea of an inevitable historical movement toward material and technological modernity and places the moral, cultural, and spiritual role of Christianity at the core of that enterprise' (Choi, pp.10-11).

(3) 'Social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power' (1992, p.34).

2. Japan's Modernisation, the Ainu, and Anglican Missionaries in the Meiji Era

The Ainu are an Indigenous people who have long inhabited *aynu mosir*,⁽⁴⁾ their ancestral homeland. Their traditional territories encompassed the island of Hokkaido in the northern part of the Japanese Archipelago, along with Sakhalin and the entire Kuril Island chain which now form part of the present-day Russian Far East. The Ainu sustained themselves through fishing and hunting within their *iwor* (customary livelihood space) and maintained close relationships with nature and with *kamuy* (Ainu deities). In the Ainu worldview, *kamuy* exist everywhere around humans, including in natural phenomena, animals, plants, and tools. The Ainu venerate entities indispensable to daily life and beyond human control (Sekine et al., 2022). Although *wajin* (mainland Japanese settlers) introduced Buddhism and Shintoism to Hokkaido in the medieval period, the Ainu remained beyond the reach of Japanese religious sects.

However, this situation changed drastically after the Meiji period began in 1868, when Japan pursued vigorous efforts to build a modern nation state. As part of the government's modernisation policy,⁽⁵⁾ the northern island of Ezo, which was inhabited by the indigenous Ainu people, was renamed Hokkaido. As Siddle (1996) argues, the island and its inhabitants were fully incorporated as an 'internal colony' of Japan and 'administered and exploited through colonial structures' (p.51). According to the provisions of the Family Register Act of 1871, the Meiji government nominally granted Japanese citizenship to the Ainu people as commoners. The Ainu were required to register themselves under newly created Japanese family names and were treated as little more than second-class citizens. In addition, traditional Ainu customs, such as women's tattoos, were considered uncivilised and banned.

As Japan underwent domestic reforms, its external policies also shifted. In 1873, the Meiji government ordered the removal of the public notices prohibiting Christianity. While Catholic, Protestant, and Russian Orthodox churches all sent missionaries to Japan, the Anglican CMS distinguished itself through its extensive work among the Ainu. Under the leadership of Walter Denning, the CMS Hokkaido mission was initiated in 1874, and he worked with both the Japanese and the Indigenous Ainu people by learning both languages. His Ainu work was subsequently taken over by John Batchelor (1855-1944) in the early 1880s.

Over time, Ainu communities were devastated by the dispossession of their lands, by the government's new regulations which restricted traditional fishing and hunting, and by the spread of epidemic diseases. Consequently, the benevolent works of CMS missionaries were generally well-received by the Ainu, opening a window of opportunity for evangelisation. The year 1885 saw the first Ainu convert, and Batchelor achieved

(4) In the Ainu language, *aynu mosir* literally means 'the land of the people' or 'the Ainu land'. In Ainu cosmology, it denotes the human realm, in contrast to *kamuy mosir*, the realm of deities.

(5) Kaiho (1992) notes that the Tokugawa regime regarded Ezo as a 'foreign region (*iiki*)' before the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda was signed (p.15).

notable evangelical success during the 1890s. He translated the Bible into Ainu, established private Ainu schools, and founded a hospital known as the 'Hospital Rest House' for sick Ainu in Sapporo (Batchelor, 1902). By the turn of the century, the Ainu constituted approximately sixty percent of the total adherents in the CMS Hokkaido mission, with the majority being women and children (Frey, 2007). This demographic composition created a need for female missionaries who could settle in Ainu villages and conduct sustained missionary work.

In a letter dated May 18th, 1896, Batchelor requested the CMS headquarters to send two ladies who could assist in teaching Ainu women, as he could not visit them regularly across the scattered settlements. He explained that 'the Ainu Church is pre-eminently a church of women', including over 500 women and children who were illiterate and could only receive verbal instruction. In fact, this gender imbalance reflected the ideological conflicts between traditional Ainu customs and Batchelor's baptismal policies that required alcohol temperance. While Ainu women traditionally abstained from alcohol, Ainu men were susceptible to alcohol addiction, particularly because alcohol was essential as a sacred offering to *kamuy* in Ainu rituals. Batchelor also pointed out that 'the race difficulties are yet far from having been done away with', making Japanese helpers unsuitable for work among Ainu women. Coincidentally, Edith Mary Bryant applied for CMS missionary work at exactly this time, and was consequently sent to the Diocese of Hokkaido, Japan, in the fall of 1896.

3. Edith Mary Bryant: A Missionary Nurse

Born in the British colony of Queensland (present-day Australia) in 1857, Edith Mary Bryant belonged to a prominent family whose members excelled in medicine, law, and politics. Her paternal uncle, Thomas Bryant (1828-1914), served as a surgeon at Guy's Hospital in London and was appointed Surgeon Extraordinary to Queen Victoria in 1896. Her maternal uncle, Edmund Barton (1849-1920), became Australia's first Prime Minister in 1901 and played a pivotal role in the federation of the Australian colonies. Her father, Francis Orr Bryant (1832-1914), was a London-born accountant who served as churchwarden of All Saints' Wickham Terrace, Brisbane's first Anglican church. Raised within this devout and socially prominent Anglican milieu, Bryant was shaped by ideals of duty and service characteristic of late Victorian middle-class Christianity.

In April 1892, aged thirty-five, she travelled to London and underwent a year of nursing training at Guy's Hospital, where her uncle Thomas had previously served.⁽⁶⁾ She subsequently worked as a nurse at both Guy's Hospital and Clapham Maternity Hospital for several years. This medical experience later proved invaluable in Biratori, where she treated sick Ainu and earned trust within the local community. In the late nineteenth century, nursing was understood to require not only clinical skill but also what Florence Nightingale described

(6) The length of nurse training recorded in the Guy's Hospital Archive (H9/GY/C/16/001) varies from one to three years. Brooks (2001) suggests that special probationer schemes allowed middle- and upper-class recruits to undertake a shorter programme prior to the Nurses Registration Act 1919.

as 'the morality and spiritual devotion of religious orders, the education of the middle-classes, combined with the hardiness of working-class girls' (Baly, p.37). These qualities – discipline, moral devotion, and service – were equally valued within the culture of female missionary work.

Though details remain unclear, Bryant's decision to enter missionary service appears to have reflected similar moral commitments. After some training with a clerical friend, she was accepted as a missionary on June 30, 1896, by the CMS Ladies' Candidates Committee. Only three months later, on October 9, she departed for Japan in the company of the first Anglican Bishop of Hokkaido, Philip Kemball Fyson (1846-1928), together with his wife, and three other female missionaries. Prior to her departure, Bryant received her instruction (dated September 29, 1896) from the CMS General Committee. They expected her to serve the Ainu and Japanese in Hokkaido by applying her educational experience and her technical skills, gained from working 'as a fully-qualified nurse in Guy's Hospital in London, and subsequently as a superintendent-in-charge'. The correspondence further noted that her upbringing in colonial Queensland had equipped her for the 'somewhat rough experience' she might occasionally encounter. This assessment reflected assumptions of imperial hierarchy, positioning her colonial background as an asset for work on another frontier territory.

After a two-month sea voyage, Bryant landed at Nagasaki on November 24th, 1896. She stayed briefly in Osaka before traveling on to Hakodate, where the CMS Hokkaido mission was based, arriving just before Christmas. Her assigned location was Biratori, an Ainu village over 20 kilometres inland from the southern Pacific coast of Hokkaido. Isabella Bird, the distinguished Victorian lady traveller, had previously stayed and written about this village, making it known to foreigners. However, Bryant's first assignment in Japan was not to visit Biratori, but to master the Ainu language. CMS regulations required missionaries to pass a local language examination before being fully acknowledged as missionaries and beginning their work. Consequently, as early as the New Year of 1897, she moved to Batchelor's house in Sapporo and studied Ainu intensively.

In her 1897 Annual Letter, Bryant wrote 'thanks to his (Batchelor's) great patience, the study has been a pleasure and a keen interest all the time.' She also wrote that 'there being no written character as in Japanese, it was not long before I was able to begin teaching two Ainu women and a girl to read and write.' Batchelor utilised the Roman alphabet to transcribe Ainu sounds, as the language had no established orthography. This approach proved advantageous to Bryant. Unlike other Japan missionaries who struggled to master the complex Japanese writing system from scratch, she could focus on acquiring spoken language without the added burden of mastering a new orthography. The absence of an intermediary written language may have enabled her to achieve more direct interaction with the Ainu.

Having completed several months of intensive Ainu language study, Bryant finally visited Biratori, accompanied by Mr and Mrs Batchelor, and spent two months there beginning in May 1897. She wrote in her first Annual Letter about her excitement at her first glimpse of 'real Ainu-land' and described her impression of the Ainu as 'a most interesting people'. Although they looked 'dirty' from her point of view, their smiles made

them 'seem much more like one's own kith and kin.' This comment suggests that she had found the Biratori Ainu approachable and relatable. As many Ainu villagers were baptised, she hoped that 'in spite of the dense ignorance which prevails among them...there is real knowledge of...Christ as their Saviour.' Her descriptions of Ainu as 'dirty', living in 'dense ignorance', and lacking 'real knowledge', reflect her Christian modernity perspectives. While more sympathetic than contemporary Japanese people who discriminated against the Ainu as 'savage', her observations still carry the sense of cultural and religious superiority assumed by other Victorian missionaries.

During her two-month stay, much of her time was devoted to treating Ainu patients, many of whom had travelled from neighbouring villages to seek medical care. This situation resonated with Isabella Bird's 1878 experience. After her experience of treating a sick Ainu woman, Bird had noted that 'a medically-trained nurse, who would give medicines and proper food...would save many lives and much suffering' (Bird, 2003, p.250). Bryant's appointment to Biratori two decades later affirms the relevance of Bird's insight. While medical intervention could give rise to asymmetrical relationships, it also created opportunities for contact and trust. Though hindered by limited language proficiency when communicating with the Ainu, Bryant found her first Biratori experience a 'very happy time'.

4. Missionary Work Among the Ainu (1898-1921)

In the spring of 1898, Bryant formally settled in Biratori, where she began her triple duties as a female missionary, nurse, and educator for Ainu women and girls. Traditional Ainu society was structured by gender divisions between public and private spheres. In ritual life, ceremonies to the kamuy (*kamuy nomi*) were performed by men, while women's participation was largely limited to household-based ancestral observances (*sinnurappa*). Batchelor interpreted this arrangement as evidence that Ainu women were denied 'any religious solace,' claiming that men considered them 'incapable of learning anything about God' (Batchelor, 1892, p.42). It was within this gendered space that Bryant undertook her missionary project.

In her 1898 Annual Letter, Bryant reported that she began outreach to Ainu women with the assistance of two Ainu Bible women, Maria (Kannari Matsu, 1875-1961)⁽⁷⁾ and Sarome (Kannari Nami, 1879-1964),⁽⁸⁾ both trained at the CMS Hakodate Ainu School. Her itinerating trips involved the use of Bible pictures, the singing of hymns, and instruction in the Ainu catechism. While she encountered some Ainu Christians with 'bright

(7) Matsu worked as a CMS Bible woman until 1928, and later became renowned for transcribing dozens of Ainu oral epic tales. In 1956, She received the Medal with Purple Ribbon from the Japanese government in recognition of her contribution to the preservation of Ainu oral literature.

(8) Nami was Matsu's younger sister. She was the mother of Chiri Yukie (1903-1922), who compiled *Ainu Shinyosbu* (1923), the first published collection of Ainu epic tales.

bits of real simple faith', she expressed disappointment that some baptized Ainu women had forgotten their earlier Christian instruction. Besides her teaching, she introduced practical initiatives, such as a 'weekly treat of Saturday night hot bath,' believing that these would cultivate 'cleanliness and self-respect' among Ainu women. This emphasis on hygiene reflected Victorian notions of modernity and civilization, revealing how Christian modernity operated through practices of bodily discipline.

Bryant's medical work attracted many Ainu villagers, and medical care often served as a point of entry for conversion. During the floods of 1898 and 1899, outbreaks of pneumonia and bronchitis required her constant care. Faced with severe food shortages, many residents were 'quite without food' and relied on Christian charity and limited government aid. Under these conditions, Bryant's medical relief and Christian charity gained her trust among Ainu people. She noted that these shared hardships 'drew us very close together', resulting in active participation by young Ainu in her Bible classes, while the Sunday school had 'nearly all the children' from Biratori and neighbouring villages.

The testimony of an Ainu catechist illustrates this point. Kiyokawa Ishichi (1874-1958), in an interview recorded by Hayakawa (1977, p.230), later recalled that medical work quickly became central in building trust in Biratori. Traditionally, illness was often treated through shamanic rituals (*tus*), and childbirth relied on midwives employing what he described as 'magical remedies'. Kiyokawa noted that Bryant treated Ainu patients suffering from colds, stomach pain, and burns, filling a void in basic healthcare. Her care not only alleviated immediate suffering, but also made her service indispensable in a community with limited access to modern medicine. Such accounts resonate with broader missionary strategies in which healing operated in tandem with evangelism.

Bryant's missionary work, however, also reveals tension between traditional Ainu beliefs and Christianity. Ainu shamans blamed Christian missionaries for misfortunes, saying of Ainu converts that 'by accepting Christianity they have forsaken their old gods and given up some of their ancient customs' (Batchelor, 1971, p.275). These accusations intensified after the 1898 floods, when hostility toward Christianity increased among non-Christian Ainu. Tensions were eventually eased through mediation by Ainu Christian women who had been treated at Batchelor's Ainu Hospital-Rest in Sapporo. This episode illustrates how Christian modernity was both contested and mediated, not only through medical care but also through the cultural and spiritual conflicts between the traditional and the new beliefs within Ainu communities.

Education was another cornerstone of Bryant's work, and she had superintended the Sunday school since 1898. The school was fairly well attended by Ainu children, although the attendance usually declined in spring with the beginning of outdoor work. In winter, when girls were freer from household duties, she conducted a small school teaching Bible study, literacy, numeracy, sewing, and knitting, assisted by Ainu and Japanese Bible women. In her 1904 Annual Letter, Bryant wrote that 'all the girls were diligent, and for some things quite enthusiastic. They learn to read the Japanese Kana fairly quickly'. She also praised the Ainu girls' manual skills, noting that 'they love knitting and sewing generally.' According to Kiyokawa, Bryant was particularly good at

knitting, and these educational opportunities functioned both as a pathway for religious instruction and as a form of social training within a rapidly changing colonial Hokkaido (Hayakawa, 1977, p.230).

However, these missionary efforts unfolded alongside the Japanese state's assimilation policies. Bryant's 1899 Annual Letter records that Japanese school authorities discouraged Ainu boys from attending her Sunday school, suggesting that missionary education was perceived by them as a threat. As Ogawa (1997) notes, public debates over the need for Ainu 'protection' were shaped in part by concerns over the expanding influence of missionaries among the Ainu (pp.111-113). These concerns formed part of the background to the enactment of the *Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act* in 1899. While the Act cannot be reduced to no more than a reaction to Christianisation, missionary presence was part of the context informing policies of 'protection' and assimilation. At the same time, Bryant's work indirectly compensated for limitations in state provision. Her activities thus both conflicted with and operated within the structures of Japanese colonial rule, neither wholly resistant to nor fully aligned with the official policy.

While Bryant came as a missionary, many Ainu valued her medical work more than her evangelical work. She found herself most welcomed when her expertise was sought for healing rather than instruction. Her medical practice thus created a complex relationship within this unique contact zone. In 1903, she confessed:

The people are most grateful for the help...for their ignorance and helplessness makes[sic.] them very frightened. The village doctor, too, knows very little, and often I feel the responsibility tremendously. If I did not know that Christ the Healer was really there too, it would be too much to face sometimes.

Bryant's medical expertise earned her trust and made her indispensable, yet it also carried the burden of authority. Sustaining that authority required constant effort, and reinforced asymmetrical relations. Combined with profound isolation, this strain likely contributed to her recurrent exhaustion. Although adopting a disabled Ainu girl, Kimi, in 1906 brought her comfort, life in an isolated Ainu village undermined Bryant's mental well-being, necessitating several furloughs during her twenty-five years of service. Furthermore, as the only daughter, she was obliged to care for her elderly parents in Australia, and left Biratori from 1912 to 1914. After their deaths and her return to Hokkaido, she suffered again from nervous exhaustion and underwent treatment at a sanatorium in California in 1916.

Despite these challenges, Bryant returned to Biratori and developed a lasting attachment there. She cherished Kimi as 'God's gift'. After Kimi's death in 1918, Bryant published a memoir in *C.M.S. Japan Quarterly* (1919, March) describing her as 'a true lily, pure-hearted and lovely of mind' (p.92). In time, she gained social recognition among the local Ainu, and was accorded the honorific title, '*katkemat*'⁽⁹⁾ (Hayakawa,

(9) A respectful term for women of high status in the Ainu language.

1977, p.232). Her persistence shows how missionary work functioned as an enduring site of encounter where Victorian Christian ideals and Ainu cultures met, conflicted, and were negotiated within unequal but dynamic relations.

5. Missionary Encounters and Christian Modernity

Referring to missionary encounters and modern womanhood in Korea, Choi (2009) argues that the ideology of Christian modernity functioned as a framework through which missionaries negotiated racial, cultural, and gender hierarchies in the imperial era. Her analysis framed modernity as inseparable from Christian moral and spiritual values rather than merely material or technological advancement. Similarly, Bosch (2001) observes that missionaries often 'confused their middle-class ideals and values with the tenets of Christianity' (p.294), blurring the distinction between Christian doctrine and Western cultural norms. Building on Bosch's work, Goheen (2014) further notes that any 'balanced assessment' of missionary work in the colonial era reveals profound ambiguity. While missionaries genuinely intended to help 'heathens', they inevitably became aligned with imperial projects with the assumption of Western superiority. Indigenous practices were thus frequently dismissed as superstition or paganism. This Western-centric framework was also evident in Bryant's writings.

In her 1903 Annual Letter, Bryant highlighted the transformation of an Ainu girl, Potamia.⁽¹⁰⁾ Her shift from 'half-savage thing' to a disciplined, obedient Christian who had learned to 'control her temper' and to be 'tidy and clean', embodied the Victorian ideals central to missionary endeavour. Such narratives framed personal change as evidence of both spiritual uplift and alignment with Christian modernity. Yet Bryant's writings on Ainu women and girls reveal recurring tension and disappointment. By 1903, she had come to suspect that the Ainu had 'carefully concealed' what she called 'the depth of sin and blackness' from her. After returning from her furlough in Australia in 1908, she reported 'a general deterioration among all the young women of the village', and interpreted the remarriage of an Ainu woman to a man who already had a wife as evidence that they had fallen 'back into old ways'.

Although she acknowledged that 'poor ignorant' Ainu women faced greater hardships in everyday life and expressed a desire to help them, she attributed her missionary difficulties to their 'lives of constant work' and the 'slowness with which they take in spiritual ideas'. In fact, the resilience of traditional Ainu beliefs was stronger than Bryant had expected. In times of trouble or illness, there were Ainu Christians who turned to Ainu shamans rather than to a missionary, and this practice appeared 'much more common, or perhaps more open, than formerly'.

Bryant constructed her accounts of 'perils and triumphs' through an orientalisising gaze, depicting Ainu as

(10) According to Bryant, her Christian name was taken from 'Mesopotamia'.

ignorant 'heathens' resistant to 'civilisation'. However, what Bryant interpreted as moral failure may equally represent adaptive choices shaped by a cultural logic different from Victorian norms. It should also be noted, however, that Bryant's narrative likely reflected her awareness of her English readership, who expected both success stories and justifications for continued financial support.

6. Bryant Through the Eyes of Women Visitors: Tsuda Umeko and Elizabeth Keith

Bryant's lonely struggle and her dedication to her mission were documented by two prominent women visitors: Tsuda Umeko (1864-1929), founder of Tsuda University⁽¹¹⁾ and one of Japan's first female exchange students to the United States, and Elizabeth Keith (1887-1956), a Scottish artist and writer. Their accounts provide an external female perspective on Bryant's missionary work and illuminate how Christian modernity was interpreted beyond the mission itself.

During her visit in the summer of 1909, Tsuda wrote to her close friend about Bryant, who lived 'absolutely in the midst of these Ainos'.⁽¹²⁾ As an Anglican, Tsuda praised Bryant's work and her life as 'most wonderful.... Privation and self-sacrifice, surrounded by only the lowest and most ignorant of humanity' (Furuki et al., 1984, p.379). Having stayed in the United States for more than a decade, and having been educated at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, Tsuda's writing reveals both her admiration for Bryant's devotion and her internalisation of the civilisational hierarchy of nineteenth-century America. Her account thus illustrates that Christian modernity was not confined to Western missionaries but had also been appropriated by the Japanese female elite.

Elizabeth Keith's writings provide another external perspective on Bryant's work. In her book *Eastern Windows* (1928), she recounted her visit to Biratori around 1918. Keith described what she called 'an amusing contrast in civilisation' between the 'primitive scenes' of the village and the Victorian-style mission house, where Bryant maintained her 'high standard of personal refinement' (pp.100-102). Such Victorian domesticity went beyond practical necessity, serving as an active demonstration of Western superiority in Biratori. The mission house itself functioned as both a symbol and agent of Christian modernity.

At night, Keith observed evening prayers where 'Ainu women, bare-legged, with their coarse black locks all tangled and matted' (p.101) knelt and sang old hymns in Ainu, while Bryant played the harmonium. Although Keith respected Bryant's dedication, she offered a rather sceptical view:

(11) Tsuda University was originally founded as Joshi Eigaku Juku in 1900, later renamed Tsuda College in 1948, and became Tsuda University in 2017 (Tsuda University official website).

(12) The term 'Ainos' was sometimes used in English-language sources of the period to refer to the Ainu people, although 'Ainu', adopted by John Batchelor, became more common by the early twentieth century.

I never forget that for twenty years this woman has stayed in the wilds among these children of age-old paganism. They may never become Christians, but they get something warm, human, and clean, from this bright little house. (Keith, 1928, p.101)

Keith's account shows her ambivalence toward Ainu Christianity in two ways. First, she did not fully recognise even baptised Ainu women as 'true' Christians. She remained doubtful about the depth of Ainu conversion, implying that 'genuine' Christianity required full assimilation into Western civilisation. At the same time, she acknowledged the mission's value in providing a 'warm, human and clean' space for Ainu women and girls. This space offered practical benefits and emotional refuge, suggesting that the mission's significance extended beyond religious conversion.

As Bowie (1993) argues, conversion to Christianity does not entail total adoption of missionary values, and 'some sort of accommodation must be reached between old and new systems of thought and practice' (p.40). Bryant's 1920 Annual Letter reveals that some Ainu Christians preferred their funerals conducted according to Ainu custom for fear of 'not entering the Ainu heaven'. In such contexts, the relationship between *Kamuy* and Christ was not necessarily experienced as contradictory by Ainu converts. When the Ainu women 'concealed' cultural practices from Bryant, this did not necessarily reflect guilt, but might also have demonstrated their strategic awareness of missionary disapproval. Yet this did not imply a uniform dual observance among all Christian converts, nor did it diminish the sincerity of those who adhered exclusively to Christian teaching. Rather, religious practice varied according to circumstances, generation, and individual conviction, even when missionaries found it unacceptable.

A rare Ainu female voice further clarifies this dynamic. In an interview with the *Hokkai Times*, Kannari Matsu, a CMS Bible woman and Bryant's former helper, stated, 'I am genuinely one of the fortunate, saved by God. All those who place their faith in His teachings and live within His grace are blessed' (27 July, 1921). At the same time, Kannari mentioned that Ainu converts were regarded as deviant individuals by many non-Christian Ainu, whose traditional practices she described as lacking 'unified religious beliefs'.⁽¹³⁾ In response, she emphasised that education and religion were essential to eliminate ignorance and improve the lives of the Ainu as soon as possible.

While her language suggests internalisation of Christian modernity, Kannari was also a custodian of Ainu culture and demonstrated detailed knowledge of Ainu oral traditions. Significantly, she noted that missionary work among the Ainu could not proceed 'by setting aside the elderly' and stated that 'it would take a decade before our work would be understood'. Kannari's case illustrates that conversion did not necessarily erase

(13) The precise meaning of 'unified religious beliefs' is unclear, though it may refer to the doctrinal and scriptural foundations that characterise Christianity.

cultural identity. As a Bible woman, she engaged strategically with the hierarchies and cultural traditions of the Ainu community while maintaining her Indigenous agency.

Conclusion

Bryant's Annual Letters and her visitors' accounts illustrate the complex dynamics of missionary encounters within the framework of Christian modernity. Her experience was marked by significant challenges: a shortage of missionaries, personal struggles with isolation, and the responsibility of caring for elderly parents in Australia. Despite these difficulties, her experience proved transformative, albeit in a limited way. Initially, she viewed the Ainu as 'subalterns' in need of spiritual guidance and Christian civilisation, yet her genuine interactions with the Ainu fostered a more nuanced understanding of indigenous culture. In particular, individual cases such as Potamia and Kimi came to represent successful examples of ideal conversion.

Bryant's experience thus demonstrates that Christian modernity in colonial Hokkaido functioned not only as an ideology of cultural superiority, but also as a contested space shaped through encounters between a British missionary nurse and Ainu women. Despite asymmetrical power relations, Ainu women selectively appropriated, adapted, or resisted missionary teachings in ways that preserved their cultural identities and agency. Biratori itself operated as a contact zone where two cultures met, giving rise to a process of mutual, though unequal, transformation and negotiation.



Figure 1. Bryant with Ainu Girls ⁽¹⁴⁾

(14) Courtesy of Mrs. Kono Mariko. Bryant (back row, far left), Usuda Ume (back row, centre), and Ainu girls. Frederick Starr's field notes (Frederick Starr Papers, Box 15, Folder 2) record that 'Miss Bryant's group of girls' was photographed on 25 February 1904, when Starr was visiting Biratori. As Miss Usuda worked in Biratori from September 1903 to June 1905, this image may correspond to the photograph Starr recorded.

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