

## *Danish mission in Japan – the beginnings*

Christian M. Hermansen

### ***Introduction***

The main activity of Danish related mission societies in Japan took place between 1899 and 2000. With few exceptions, most Danish missionaries worked in Japan between 1956 and 2000. While the history has not ended, it seems meaningful to review the motivations, the work and the results of these efforts. The ideal review will include the stories of the societies, the missionaries, the local church and the communities before and after. To research and recount all of these stories I have taken the first few steps, inspired by a similar work on missionaries sent by the Danish Mission Society to Manchuria (Gjerø 2007). With the kind openness of many involved parties, I have gathered a first impression to be shared below. The research is far from complete, so here I shall focus on the beginnings.

While there are and have been other missions, I shall only discuss the Lutheran ones. Using their relation to Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church as a guide, I will focus on three stories: The story of The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and J.M.T. Winther who helped create JELC, the story of the Christian Mission to Buddhists (CMB) and Harry Thomsen, who affiliated with JELC, and the story of the Danish Mission Society (DMS) and Ove Bartholdy, who decided to work within JELC. One keyword is *independence*. It shall be touched upon as well, but a full-fledged account would exceed the space available.

**The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America**, UDELCA, existed between 1896 and 1946, when it was renamed United Evangelical Lutheran Church, till 1960. It was formed by the merger of 1. (DA) – The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church Association (a.k.a. The Blair Church) (1884-1896) that had split from Norwegian-Danish Conference, and 2. (DN) – The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (a.k.a. North Church) (1893-1896) that had split from The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. The successor of UDELCA later merged with other Lutheran bodies to form The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, ELCA in 1988 (ELCA 2011).

The UDELCA was active in mission towards Mormon converts among fellow Danes in Utah (UHE 2011) and native Americans (Oaks 2011). In Japan, Jens M. T. Winther was supported by the mission from 1903 till 1941, and his daughter Maya from 1928-1941 and 1947-1966. While UDELCA transformed into ELCA it was and still is an important partner church of JELC.

*Jens Mikael Thøgersen Winther* (25 Oct 1874, Opsund, Denmark – 2 Mar 1970, Kobe, Japan)<sup>1</sup> was born of farmers on the Danish west coast, active members of the local conservative Lutheran Mission Society (Luthersk Missionsforening). First trained as a dairyman and an elementary school teacher Winther joined Frederik Nielsen, a missionary to China, when Nielsen was re-sent by a local South Jutland group of the Lutheran Mission Society. Nielsen had been back in Denmark to recover his health and took Winther along for China via the US in 1896. In Jamestown it turned out that Nielsen could not go to China – presumably for health reasons. Winther studied theology for two years at Blair College, Nebraska, under the guidance of its founder, professor Peter Sørensen Vig. The college belonged to UDELCA (Vig 1918). Once ordained, he continued the journey towards China, but his money could only afford a ticket to Yokohama, and shortly after the arrival in September 1898 he found room

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<sup>1</sup> Except where directly noted, this biography is based on Jakobsen 2011 and Winther 1960. See also Ishii 1987.

and board with a local Presbyterian, pastor Yoneyama in Tokyo. One year later he called and married Andrea Hansen (1870-1949), a trained nurse from South Jutland, whom he had met and engaged while in Nebraska. In 1901, the couple went from Tokyo to Kurume, Saga Prefecture on Kyushu, where Winther started work as missionary—initially supported by the South Jutland Lutheran Mission group but from 1903 the responsibilities for them were transferred to UDELCA. Only in 1892 had Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) been founded by American missionaries in Saga. Yoneyama, Winther's Tokyo host, changed denomination to JELC, and joined the Winthers, and together they build a second JELC congregation in Kurume. After a furlough in Denmark from 1906, Winther was involved in the foundation of JELC's theological seminary in Kumamoto (now located in Mitaka, Tokyo) in 1909 and taught there for 12 years along with his obligations as congregation pastor. In 1918, the congregation in Kurume inaugurated its own church building (cf. Kurume Church). 1921-27, the Winthers moved to Denmark, probably motivated by the children's need for schooling there, and he served as pastor to Hjerm parish 40 kilometers north of his parental parish. Japan was not forgotten. Winther introduced, hosted and guided the famous Kagawa Toyohiko during his visit to Denmark in 1925 (Winther 1925, Kagawa 1926: 124). The Winthers returned to Japan in 1927, and with the exception of a furlough in Denmark (1935) and an eviction to the USA (1941-50), he stayed till he died. His wife died in 1949. In his own words, he loved Japan, so in 1950, at the age of 76, he returned on his own—was not send—to Japan to work for a year or two at Kobe Lutheran Bible School (神戸ルーテル聖書学院) inaugurated that year by the Norwegian Lutheran Mission Society (cf. KLBI). He kept working there and also at the mission's seminary, started in 1957, till his death. It is evident from letters by Danish missionaries arriving in the 1950s and 1960s that Winther was a mentor and dear guest. The newsletters of both CMB and DMS carried several articles by him.

*Maya Winther* (1904 Kurume – Apr 2001 St. Paul, Minnesota ), J.M.T. Winther's younger daughter, was a missionary to Japan in her own right, sent by UDELCA. She

worked in Saga 1929-41 and 1947-66. After retirement she assisted her father in Kobe till he died, then returned to the USA of which she had been a citizen since 1941 (cf. Winther 2003, 135-138).

**Christian Mission to the Buddhists**, CMB, (Danish: *Den Nordiske Kristne Buddhistmission*), was founded in 1926 by people in Scandinavia to support the work of the Norwegian China-missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877-1952). In 1906, Reichelt had a vision of God's call to him to meet the Buddhists in their temples and bring them salvation. In 1922, he and his younger countryman Notto Normann Thelle opened *Ching Fong Shan* 光風山 (*The Shining Wind Mountain*) in Nanjing. It was a center for encounters and theological training with a pilgrims' hall. Thanks to Reichelt's many visits to Buddhist monasteries throughout China and the fact that Chinese monks in those days travelled much, many came to stay at Ching Fong Shan. The missionaries were sent by The Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and supported by sympathetic groups in Denmark and Sweden, but in 1925, NMS and Reichelt agreed on a separation as a consequence of his mission theology.

NMS found Reichelt too open minded in his approach to other religions especially the Buddhists; he argued that God had prepared them for the final revelation by revealing himself partially, as observable in the good elements in their religions. He referred to those elements as *points of connection* (Riisager 1997b). As Reichelt was open to other religions, so he was to various groups within the Christian church. His willingness to cooperate with liberal theologians, was a problem for the conservative controlled NMS and an important factor behind the split (cf. Riisager 1997a: 15-16).

After the split, the work in Nanjing continued supported by CMB, but China's internal war forced Reichelt and his co-workers to evacuate Ching Fong Shan in 1927. After an interim in Shanghai, a more permanent location was bought in Shatin, Hong Kong, and a new center for encounters was build, *Tao Fong Shan* 道風山 (The Tao Wind Mountain), TFS. The struggles and other stories of TFS have been

told elsewhere. Here it will suffice to observe that the Japanese occupation and the Chinese 1949-revolution gave TFS many opportunities to live the gospel but much fewer occasions to introduce that gospel to Buddhist monks, who could no longer move freely. This situation prompted the CMB board to search for new venues for mission to the Buddhists: Burma, Siam and Japan (NKBM Jan 1952: 8).

On 21 December 1951, pastor Gerhart M. Reichelt, son and successor of K. L. Reichelt, arrived in Osaka on his first scouting that lasted to the end of January 1952. Japan was not *terra incognita* to CMB. The old Reichelt had visited the country and developed contacts there, especially with the True Pure Land School of Buddhism<sup>2</sup>. G. M. Reichelt visited religious organizations and leaders at Mt. Kōya, in Tenri, Kyoto, Tokyo, Nagoya and Kobe. He communicated his experiences and observations in letters published in NKBM from January to June 1952.

“Does the road lead to Japan?” (*Går vägen till Japan?*) was the header of an article in NKBM in which Simon Admund, a Swedish CMB board member, argued that indeed the call to go there was clear. He quoted the leader of the Swedish Mission Alliance in Japan, Sam Sköld, who in a letter had encouraged CMB to come, “Mission among Buddhists is strongly needed. Little is done at the moment. Instead, the Buddhists are conducting effective propaganda among lazy, tolerant people from so-called Christian countries. (...) Buddhism is strongly consolidated in Japan, and little is done to get at it. We ordinary missionaries are not particularly fit for this field. (...) Welcome.” Admund, the article’s author, went on to recommend not to build a Japanese Tao Fong Shan from the beginning, but modestly send a man or two who could teach the missionaries already there, and he believed this might become a contribution to ecumenism (NKBM Jan 1952: 8-9).

The April 1952 issue of NKBM carried Stanley Jones’ view on Japan as a mission

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2 In a letter of 31.12.1951, G. M. Reichelt refers his readers to his father’s book *Fromhetstyper og Helligdommer* Vol. 2, pag. 73 for more information on the True Pure Land School’s temple Nishi Honganji in Kyoto. (NKBM Jan 1952: 2).

field. An experienced missionary to India, Jones, on visit to Norway, had said, “Japan is the most ripe mission field the Christian world has had in a thousand years. (...) I tell you, if Japan is baptized, the Japanese will be the obvious missionaries to evangelize the whole East. (...) Here in Japan it is not an open door, the whole wall is gone.”

Such inputs from people in the field and at home informed the CMB board’s decision in Copenhagen 20-22 May 1952. It wanted the mission to go ahead in Japan but cautiously. “A Chinese master of theology, Kung Tien-ming (sic), who already knows some Japanese is sent to Japan from this summer. For the moment, he will be connected to the Lutheran work there. (...) The Norwegian master of theology Ragnvald Hemstad, currently on a scholarship in England, has been recruited as missionary. We apply for permission to have him ordained as pastor. He will work in our home countries till we can decide whether to send him to Japan or Singapore.” (Minutes of the Board Meeting, reprinted in NKBM Jun 1952: 4)

These long quotations give an idea of the decision making process in CMB that took the sentiments and opinions of the supporters seriously. They show how the discussion and the education of the discussants were important to the organization<sup>3</sup>.

Hemstad was sent to Japan. After a shorter stay at Tao Fong Shan, he arrived at and lived in Kobe with Kung from September 1953 (NKBM Oct 1953: 118). In June 1954, they moved on and together established a *brother home* in Shūgakuin 修学院 in the north-eastern corner of Kyoto (NKBM Jun 1954: 69). The house was sufficiently big for the two men to have a private room each and a shared kitchen and they could let out rooms to university students, preferably Buddhists. Sharing life combined with studies of Buddhism, visits to Buddhist centers, and church activities made up Reichelt’s formula that Kung and Hemstad wanted to apply on themselves and on Japan.

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3 Regarding the educational aspect we note how the mission’s newsletter, in line with other missions’, often featured articles with an anthropological approach in their description of the Japanese and their every day life, their religions and their religiosity.

In September 1956, the two were joined by three Danes, Harry and Ene-Marie Thomsen and their infant son.

*Thomsen, Ene-Marie* (25 Jun 1928, Timring) was a trained nurse. She worked at Aarhus Hospital for three years before marrying Harry Thomsen 4 June 1955 (cf. NKBM Aug-Sep 1955: 92-93, NKBM Oct 1956: 107). *Thomsen, Harry* (21 Feb 1928, Vildbjerg – 10 Nov 2008, Colorado Springs, USA),<sup>4</sup> graduated from Aarhus University with a MA in English and Christianity 1953. Shortly after the marriage he was ordained a missionary and a pastor. The couple left for Japan via the USA in August the same year. HT studied Japanese Religions with Joseph Kitagawa for one year at Chicago University and established contacts also with several Japanese and American Buddhists (NKBM Nov 1955: 127-129; NKBM Jan 1956: 7-8; March 1956: 28-29).

Like his Chinese and Norwegian colleagues, Harry Thomsen arrived with intentions of following the example of K. L. Reichelt. He joined them in studies of, visits to, and dialogue with members of other religions. Within a few years, Kung had married and moved on to the USA then Taiwan for studies and work, and Hemstad had returned to Norway. Thomsen therefore became the CMB representative, and as such he negotiated with JELC on several occasions.

CMB did not exclude cooperation with other churches in Japan, but the confessional background of the mission probably made JELC the logical choice as the closest local partner. The regional representative of CMB had visited JELC in 1954, and in 1959 Thomsen signed a contract with the church organization pertaining to a congregation that had been established in Shūgakuin. JELC was to provide a pastor while CMB would provide the ground and building for the new church. Thomsen did not found the Shūgakuin congregation, but the church together with the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions and Shin Rei San started under his guidance are his

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4 I have relied on an obituary notice "Til Avisen" for Danish newspapers, written by Thomsen and his family, as well as Thelle 2009, and the entries in NKBM, Aug-Sep 1955: 91-92; Oct 1956: 107.

legacy in Japan.

The NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions was the result of the late 1950s movement to establishing such centers encouraged by the International Mission Council. The traditions of CMB qualified it for joining the movement and it set up its first center in Hong Kong. The second was established in Kyoto “following an appeal from a group of outstanding Japanese and Western church men.”<sup>5</sup> The advisors met with Thomsen and G.M. Reichelt. They agreed on the need for a study center in Japan and that CMB was particularly fit for the task. Though only JELC among the Japanese churches was present at the meeting, the study center was believed to be of ecumenical interest, wherefore an advisory committee of ten denominational representatives was proposed convened. Diverse Christian world organizations were expected to help shouldering the costs. The center’s purpose was initially to gather and distribute information. “It was repeatedly emphasized that the purpose of the study center definitely is to bring the gospel of Christ to the non-Christian world in Japan, and an important part of this task will be to bring the Christian message to Buddhist monks and priests.” (NKBM Dec 1958: 130) In the words of Thomsen, when asked: “I feel I have been called to be pastor more than researcher, but the two can be united—as they were in Karl Ludvig Reichelt’s case. A study center will give us ideal opportunities to unit them” (NKBM Dec 1958: 130).

Thus were his intentions and his actions. The very next year, he organized visits to several religious headquarters for a large group of missionaries, and also for Japanese pastors. A quarterly was published with information on the other religions, especially the New Religions. These activities were possible thanks to the numerous visits Hemstad and Thomsen paid to such headquarters. Before Thomsen went on his

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5 The outstanding men were: Pastor Yamauchi, president of JELC, Dr. Kishi, former president of JELC and at that time president for the Lutheran Seminar in Tokyo, professor Kitagawa, history of religion at Chicago University (Harry Thomsen mentor during his stay in America), pastor Nordbø, missionary of the Norwegian Mission Society, and pastor Anspach, missionary of the United Lutheran Mission (NKBM Dec 1958: 129).



first furlough in Scandinavia in 1960, the study center was made a part of the National Christian Council of Japan, and the leadership transferred to professor Ariga Tetsutarō 有賀鉄太郎 (1899-1977), Kyoto University, and associate professor Kobayashi Sakae 小林榮, Kwansei Gakuin University.

One of Thomsen's motivations for passing the study center on may have been his belief that the best approach to Japan's *truth seekers* was to build a Tao Fong Shan in Japan. He began discussing the idea at least from the end of 1958. It was clear to him that more land than affordable in Kyoto was needed and that a location away from the distractions of the city would be ideal. He argued, the Christian missions and the churches mostly focused on the city dwellers and were forgetting that half of the population was living in the countryside.<sup>6</sup> In a 19-page prospect, Thomsen proposed CMB should address these several needs by building its Japanese Tao Fong Shan as a combine of a model farm, an agricultural school and a *brother home* (Thomsen 1961-1962). Using the means for and paths of decision making described above, Thomsen obtained the mission's support for his Shin Rei San-vision, and with much energy, enthusiasm and support from friends in Japan and Scandinavia, Shin Rei San 神霊山 was gradually build between 1962 and 1969. Throughout the 1960s, a fundraising campaign went on in Scandinavia. The missionary families of Roesgaards, Landes and Thelles were all sent initially to serve at Shin Rei San.<sup>7</sup> Danish agricultural experts volunteered to help establishing the agricultural part of the project: Emil Fenger, Kristian Møller, Charles Jensen, Johannes Kvist and Tage Sams (Fogh-Hansen 1997: 45). In short, for almost a decade, the main activity of CMB in Japan was Shin Rei San, and many resources of the organization were committed to that project.

The efforts resulted in the purchase of 300 acres of land in Misawa, between

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6 The section on DMS documents that HT wasn't alone with the sense that the farmers should be targeted.

7 Olaf and Martha Roesgaard were at Shin Rei San 1963-66 and 1971-74.

the town of Fukuroi and the Pacific Ocean in Dec 1962<sup>8</sup>; development of agriculture also on slopes that had been deemed unproductive over the following couple of years; construction of and use a unique combination of a water- and clock tower 1964; import of 15 Danish heifers and two bulls Nov 1964; construction of a new church in Shūgakuin in Dec 1964 on land donated by CMB; opening of an agricultural school Oct 1965; and the inauguration of a church on Shin Rei San in 1969. The publicity was favorable; local news media reported on the inauguration ceremonies and visits by VIPs. Nevertheless, not very many students joined the school – three the first year, nine the following – and the vision of a *brother home* frequented by people of other faiths, the “trademark” of CMB,” never materialized.

The Thomsens went on a furlough in 1966, and due to her poor health condition, Ene-Marie and the children remained in Denmark, when Harry returned to Japan early on in 1967. However, he eventually decided to leave Japan by the end of that year. After a few years in Denmark the family left the country and CMB to resettle in the USA in 1970. What caused the break is not evident. The Norwegians, Aasulv Lande and Notto Raider Thelle, had to take over the management of Shin Rei San, and none of them were trained for this, nor were they apparently very enthusiastic about the whole concept.<sup>9</sup> They shifted the focus back to the city, to Kyoto and the NCC Study Center. Perhaps Thomsen realized that in a decade of miracle economy and hyper-urbanization, contemplation in the countryside had little attraction? Notto R. Thelle speculates that Thomsen may have understood his project “was based on shaky assumptions” (Thelle 2010: 3). With regards to the school part of the project, Japan changed sufficiently dramatically in the 1960s to make what looked firm in the early years look shaky in the latter. In support of this interpretation I refer to the call for

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8 A telegram on 23 December 1962: “LAND CONTRACTS SIGNED PRAISE GOD BLESSED CHRISTMAS HT.” In CMB’s box in the National Archives of Norway.

9 I met Harry Thomsen once, in 2004, where he mentioned he felt a lack of support for Shin Rei San within CMB in the latter half of the 1960s, and the younger missionaries’ eagerness to go to the city instead.

more agricultural schools combined with mission that came from other parts of Japan (see the case of DMS in Hokkaido below). As to the interreligious dialogue aspect, Thelle is no doubt right that Thomsen was too optimistic.

Shin Rei San still exists, but the farm school was closed down in the early 1970s. It has been replaced with a home for children who have dropped out of the ordinary school system, a nursing home for the elderly and most recently an institution for children placed outside of their homes. The farm is used for therapeutic purposes and the products sold to support the running costs. The Shin Rei San Church has been included in the JELC family. Further studies are needed to determine if the project was a wrong bet. Others have concluded that indeed, had one known how the level of difficulty the project had, Shin Rei San would never have been commenced in the first place (cf. Fogh-Hansen 1997: 45).

In 1997, CMB was reorganized under the name Areopagos as a foundation that supports mission activities in the tradition of CMB's history, mostly in Scandinavia and East Asia. It supported the NCC Center in Kyoto financially for five years, before concluding that the center at that time lacked the intentions or possibilities of supporting the Church more directly through its work with interreligious dialogue, at least not in a way Areopagos found agreeable with its own bylaws. At the moment of writing, I am the only missionary affiliated with Areopagos in Japan.

**Det Danske Missionsselskab**, DMS, was founded by pastor Bone-Falch Rønne in 1821. Its first missionary was the German Christopher Ochs, who worked in Tamil Nadu in South India, whom DMS took over in 1863, and in 1865 it sent its first Danish missionaries to India. In 1892, the first missionary was sent to China and from 1896 the organization focused on Manchuria (modern Dongbei) (Danmossion 2012). After the Chinese 1949-revolution, missionaries either returned to Denmark or were moved to other countries and territories in the region. In 1955, the DMS' General Conference decided to seek "new fields" and after an inspection visit by the chairman, pastor C.

Rendtorff, it was decided to send missionaries to Japan in 1956.

Pastor Ove Bartholdy (10 Jul 1928, Vester Karleby – 10 Jan 2008, Horsens) and his wife Fritzie (5 Sep 1932, Copenhagen -), a professional secretary, were the first to go, arriving in 1958. Whereas Rendtorff had understood Shikoku to be “virgin” territory for Lutherans, Bartholdy found that the US based Augustana Lutheran Mission already had plans of working in the western part of the island, wherefore DMS might end up starting “at the other end of the island, in Tokushima Ken (Prefecture). There is a need for missionaries equal to that of Ehime, well actually there are a lot fewer Christians and pastors compared to Ehime. Whatever the negotiations with the JELC ends up with, we certainly will find a place that needs us in this country which has almost 200 heathens for every Christian person.” (DMS 1959: 119). Thus, in 1958, no specific place had been laid or concrete work commenced. Bartholdy’s further research made him conclude that though offered full cooperation with the Augustana Lutheran Mission, DMS ought to find somewhere else, and a call came from Hokkaido. The call was for mission to village youths and an agricultural school to help local farmers prosper with the use of Danish know-how (DMS 1960: 132), but Bartholdy had reservations regarding the economy and feasibility of the project. While recognizing the need, he saw a risk of students feeling baptism to be an obligation once they had entered the school, whereas, in his words, “Rather than turning the certificate of baptism into some sort of graduation document, I would make it an entrance document” (DMS 1960: 134). The following year saw several changes. In June 1959, an agreement of cooperation between DMS and JELC was signed by Bartholdy. It specified Hokkaido, Ikeda Mission, as DMS’ area of operation.

A translation of the agreement as it is in the JELC’s records:

*Minutes of the General Convention 1959/05/05 Item 14 pp. 3-5 Agreement on cooperation between JELC and DMS (Denmaaku dendōkai デンマーク伝道会). Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission Society have concluded the agreement below, and endorse the following activities for the sake of the development of the Lutheran Church in Japan.*

“Agreement between Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission Society (DMS)

Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission Society maintain the same faith and confession of creed.

They share the goal of working for the kingdom of God and the development of the Lutheran Church in Japan.

Consequently, Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission Society conclude the agreement below, and will work together on these activities.

### **I The Area of Work**

(1) The Danish Mission Society is responsible for the evangelical mission work in the eastern part of Hokkaidō

### **II The District**

(2) When at least three individual

churches have been established in the assigned part of Hokkaido they can form a district within Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church.

(3) All missionaries of the Danish Mission Society in Japan are full members of the district.

(4) Until a district is formed in the assigned part of Hokkaido the missionaries belong to the North Eastern Regional Conference (*tōshin kita bukai* 東信北部会)

### **III The Missionary Group**

(5) Missionaries of the Danish Mission Society located in Japan form a Missionary Conference named *Danish Missionaries in Japan* (DMSJ).

(6) The missionaries group has the following competences

a. Management of affairs solely related to the missionaries.

b. In consultation with Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church decide on the missionaries' post and the style of work.

c. Appointment of Japanese workers in the said area and all affairs pertaining to the Japanese churches are handled by the organization of Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church.

### **IV The General Conference**

(7) Ordained missionaries of the Danish Mission Society working in Japan

are members of the Pastors Assembly under Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church.

(8) The missionaries' leader is a full member of Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church's General Conference.

(9) For every three churches established within the assigned district, one missionary can be added as full member of the General Conference.

(10) Any other missionary of the Danish Mission Society, man or woman, working in Japan, has the right to be present at the General Conference as an associate member.

(11) At Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church's General Conference, Japanese pastors appointed to the said district shall consult with the Danish Mission Society.

(12) One missionary of the Danish Mission Society will be auditor of the finance section.

(13) The General Conference will consider the representative of the Danish Mission Society for important appointments, for example the board of trustees for the School of Theology or as member of the Mission Section.

## **V Finances**

(14) The assets procured by the Danish Mission Society in Japan shall be under mutual financially agreement when employees of Japan Evangelic Lutheran Church arrive in (are deployed to) the

assigned area in Hokkaido.

(15) The Danish Mission Society in Japan will, for the financial support, under mutual agreement, pay a special amount according to its financial strength to Japan Evangelic Lutheran Church's general work, for instance its mission or its School of Theology.

(16) One of the missionaries of the Danish Mission Society in Japan will be advisor for the budgetary planning of Japan Evangelic Lutheran Church.

## **VI Property**

(17) The land used for churches and pastors' homes as well as all the buildings on that land shall be registered in the name of "The Religious Person of Japan Evangelic Lutheran Church." However, the missionaries' houses shall belong to the Danish Mission Society.

## **VII The Headquarters of Danish Mission Society.**

(18) Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church sends its annual report on activities and budget to the headquarters on the Danish Mission Society.

(19) All public correspondence from the president of to the headquarters of the Danish Mission Society shall be send in copy to the leader of the Danish Mission Society's Missionaries Assembly.

### VIII Revisions and Termination

(20) The items of this agreement can be revised under mutual agreement by Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission Society.

(21) Should it be necessary or deemed the best course, this agreement can be terminated by either of the parties (Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Danish Mission Society) with at least one year of notification.

### IX The Agreement's Period of Validity

(22) This agreement shall be effective when the first missionary of the Danish Mission Society in Japan settles and commences working in Hokkaido.

Shōwa 34 May 5 (5 May 1959)

President of Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church

Yamauchi Rokurō

Representing the Danish Mission Society

Bartholdy

In accordance with the agreement, the Bartholdys went to Ikeda in Hokkaido to pursue language and culture studies, and so did his fellow missionaries Karl Emil Melchiorson (4 May 1928, Sønderborg -) and Ellen Melchiorson (9 Feb 1928, Sønder Kongerslev -). However, a visit in October 1959 by the general secretary of DMS, pastor Erik W. Nielsen, led to a wish to revise the agreement in line with a newer trend among mission societies whereby missionaries from DMS should be sent to a local church that should be free to deploy them for tasks at its own discretion (DMS 1960: 103). So although their work situation had not yet been defined, the Bartholdys settled in Ikeda and they started a Sunday school “in a smaller town north of Ikeda” (DMS 1960: 105). At that time, JELC had three churches on Hokkaido: in Sapporo, Hakodate and Ikeda. Pastor Kume, who worked in Sapporo from 1962, has related how he personally liked Hokkaido, but that one could easily feel lonely not at least in a small town like Ikeda (personal conversation, Jan 2012). The isolation may explain why in 1960 the two Danish missionary families asked for and got permission to move to Sendai and the Tokyo area “to get a better understanding of Japanese language and culture” (JELC 1960/11/8 p.126 and 1961/3/15-17 item 6).

The move did not bring clarity for the missionaries, however. In an article for

the Yearbook 1960-61, Bartholdy outlined the history of Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and its process towards independency (DMS 1961: 148-160). He obviously agreed with the goal and concluded:

Thus DMS has a double task: on one hand to assist the Japanese church in bringing the gospel to the millions who have yet to hear it; on the other to be a role model for other missions in the attempt to help JELC becoming an genuinely independent church. (DMS 1961: 162)

Bartholdy's words reflect the spirit of a proposal for a contract prepared by the DMS board and forwarded to JELC in June 1960. Johannes Lund has summarized the ensuing in DMS' yearbook 1962-63, from which I will extract the most important points for the present discussion:

1. DMS' work is considered an organic part of JELC's proclamation of the gospel in Japan.
2. Danish missionaries are to be send to JELC and deployed by JELC and their tasks to be assigned by JELC in council with DMS (and the missionary in question).
3. The board understands that, for the moment, at least, missionaries will be deployed in Hokkaido. It is a fundamental principle, however, that DMS does not have its own specific geographic territory, but will work where it is deemed most needed by the mission strategy of JELC.
4. Economy. The outmost should be done to make JECL economically independent as soon as possible. Any financial support from DMS ought primarily to be given for specific projects and certain institutions – in every case at the mutual agreement among the two partners.
5. Any property, land, etc. must be registered in the name of JELC (a change of use of such property, land etc. will be decided in council between JELC and DMS). (Translated from the Danish text reprinted in DMS 1963: 100)



This proposal, considered radical in its day, did not lead to an immediate, final agreement. In those years, JELC was negotiating unification with two other Lutheran churches wherefore it could not or did not want to conclude agreements with third parties. The unification between JELC and Tōkai Lutheran Church was finally completed and signed on 3 May 1963.<sup>10</sup> This led DMS to expect its contract with JELC “to be signed in September 1963” because the JELC president, Dr. Kishi, was scheduled for a visit to Denmark that month (DMS 1963: 100-104). The contract would be modified. Paragraph three no longer stipulated Hokkaido as a place of deployment, and was rephrased:

3. In consequence of the above, DMS does not have its own specific geographic territory, but will work where it is deemed most needed by the mission strategy of JELC.

The missionaries had been frustrated by the absence of a contract, in part because they did not belong to any church—in those days the Danish Folk Church laws excluded them from belonging to it, while on the other hand JELC could not include them either. This experience as well as some proposals from JELC were reflected in three additional paragraphs:

6. DMS’ missionaries will be ordinary members of a JELC congregation, and their status will be determined by the constitution and regulations of JELC.
7. The missionaries’ salary and expenses during their stay, such as rent, school fees, medical expenses, taxes, language studies and travel expenses will be paid by DMS. When the missionaries travel as members of a committee, the expense will be paid by JELC.

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<sup>10</sup> In a special edition of *Dansk Missionsblad*, is a letter signed by Dr. Kishi on 18 October 1965, in which he writes, “The new Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in May 1964.” In *Nihon Fukuin Rūteru Kyōkai 100 nen shi*, the date for the unification is given as 2 May 1963 (Tokuzen 2004: 132).

8. Persons from JELC, who are invited by DMS for studies in Denmark, will have their expenses for travel, stay and other necessities covered by DMS according to mutual agreement between the two partners. (DMS 1963: 102)

Johannes Lund added that The North German Mission in Bremen had made an agreement with JELC similar to DMS' intent, but in addition encouraged JELC to develop new diaconal tasks and gave both partners the freedom to come up with any proposal they deemed necessary.<sup>11</sup> "This contract is more considerate towards any wishes for initiatives the partners' might harbor, and thus less unilateral than DMS' proposal" (DMS 1963: 103).

Due to illness the Bartholdys resigned to Denmark in 1961, and the Melchiorsons decided to return to and remain in Denmark in 1963, in consequence of the husband's depression resulting from frustrations in Japan (DMS 1963: 103).

DMS' commitment to Japan did not end, however. Anne Marie and Frode Leth-Larsen served in Chiba Prefecture 1963-71, Birthe and Villy Malmgren Jensen in Osaka 1969-80, Marit and Erik Wengel in Tokyo 1979-88, Anne Sophie and Leif Holm in Osaka 1979-83, Else and Kristen Christensen in Shizuoka, Yokohama, Sendai and Kyoto 1981-98. In the 1980s, a volunteer program was developed by DMS and under this five or six persons in their early 20s were sent to Japan for up to a year, beginning with myself, who stayed in Tokyo and Osaka 1987-88, but also visited Shin Rei San in Fukuroi and the works in Kumamoto.

If looking for results of DMS' work in Japan, one will not find new structures like CMB's Shin Rei San or the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions. As

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11 The North German Mission (Die Norddeutsche Mission) was an active partner of JELC and the United Church of Christ in Japan between 1953 and 1971, when it transferred its obligations to the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Braunschweig ("Über das Japan-Komitee Deutscher Missionen entsendet die Norddeutsche Mission Mitarbeiter in die Lutherische Kirche und die Vereinigte Kirche Japans. 1971 wird die noch bestehende Japanarbeit an die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Braunschweig übergeben.") (Unsere Mission 2009).

agreed to in 1963, the missionaries have worked like other JELC personnel and as such served in congregations and, unlike most JELC personnel, worked in nursing homes. This has brought sermons and pastoral care to many and given inputs to professional development of local social services. It remains a task for future studies to examine some of these results in a historical perspective, but as examples can be mentioned inspiration for the reconstruction of Tōkyō Rōjin Hōmu, help to develop the School of Social Work at the Lutheran College in Tokyo, or the decision by an individual first to be baptized, then to go to Denmark, and finally to open a nursing home in Denmark.

### *Independence*

I believe the materials introduced so far make it clear that “independence” was an issue in mission. DMS and JELC were most obviously conscious of it, while CMB touched less upon it. The question is, whose independence should weigh the more—the local church, the mission’s, the missionary’s?

The three missions under discussion were formed by individuals with roots in local Lutheran churches and they identified themselves as members of the world wide Lutheran Church, wherefore they sought to create and cooperate with its Japanese branch. Evidently, their relations to JELC were different. The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in the capacity of Jens T. M. Winther was instrumental in building up Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. He belonged to a conservative line of theology, a fact that may explain his commitment to the conservative Norwegian Bible Study School in Kobe in his last twenty years of service. The Nordic Christian Mission to Buddhists and the Danish Mission Society came late to Japan, riding on the second Protestant awakening in the 1950s prompted by political changes in China. Both were on confessional wavelength with JELC but in line with its history the CMB did not feel restricted by it, whereas DMS decided to become a servant of JELC. Like UDEVLC, the two Scandinavian missions contributed to the building of JELC, if in

rather different ways.

DMS' contract process with JELC illustrates a paradigm change of the view on foreign mission groups and local church resulting from the transformed view on the relationship between the West and the Rest as well as the global proliferation of liberation movements in those decades. The simultaneous history of CMB's Shin Rei San demonstrates that a religiously open mind does not necessarily mean leaving all major decisions to a local partner. To be sure, the leaderships of the CMB's projects Shin Rei San, Shūgakuin Church and the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions were transferred to Japanese Partners within 10 years of their initiations, but with the exception of the NCC Center, the works were started on the initiative of the mission, without preceding negotiations with a local church organization. CMB acted independently with a certainty of what ought to be done and how to do it. Whether the works were the most appropriate is another question, but there can be little question that CMB acted in a traditional way of mission, with a vision of breaking the path and making a difference.

Related to the discussion on mission societies, local church and independence is the treatment of wives.

The question "what is the status of a missionary's wife?" may seem odd from a 2012-perspective, but it has been one of the issues with which the Danish missionary families have struggled, at least in the 1980s and 1990s. Meeting the Wengels and the Christensens in 1987, both families shared in a frustration that "DMS sent two missionaries, but JELC only received one," to quote Erik Wengel. The wives were treated like a pastor's wife: a housewife and homemaker, who should serve as volunteer in various church connections as far as her home obligations permitted. Anne Sophie Holm, in an interview, expressed satisfaction with her situation as housewife during her years in Japan. She made the most of it by associating with women among their neighbors and in the church. Specifically, she recalled meaningful participations in women's conferences organized by the church.

Judged by her self-introduction in the August-September issue 1955 of CMB's newsletter NKBM, Ene-Marie Thomsen voiced an interpretation of her role as a missionary's wife that fitted well with that of JELC. She first reflected on the value of being a professional nurse, "Japan has a modern hospital system, the most advanced in Asia, if not comparable to ours, still my training may come in handy, if for nothing else when "the husband" gets ill." She went on:

As a part of our work our house will be open to Buddhist novices and monks, who will attend meetings or come for *samtaler*,<sup>12</sup> so house cores will no doubt keep me busy, not at least the Japanese ones such as pouring tea 14 hours a day. (NKBM Aug-Sep 1955: 93)

Ene Marie Thomsen is silent in NKBM when compared to her husband. Between her self-presentation and a speech reprinted in the Aug-Sep issue of 1960, there is one letter of hers describing the situation shortly after she and her family arrived in Kyoto (NKBM Nov 1956: 119). In 1960, she gave her speech at the mission's annual meeting The Fiskumstævne in Norway. She told the audience *that* Japanese food is beautifully served but mostly not tasty, sukiyaki being an exception; *that* the monotony of the food – rice three times a day with vegetables and fish – has caused the Japanese poor health conditions; and then went on

(...) wherefore Japanese women have a deep interest in studying our foreign cooking, which has led to us to start a women's association in our church in Shugakuin. (...) We meet every fortnight, starting with a hymn or two, the our young Japanese pastor Koizumi-san or Harry gives a simple talk on a Bible text, whereupon I teach them cookery—when the food is prepared we eat together and talk for a while before everybody returns home. In this way, several women from the neighborhood have been connected to the church and have

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12 *Samtaler* literally means "conversations" but encompasses all degrees from light conversations to serious talks and counseling, none of which nuances are excluded by the context here.

started attending our worship services. –Thinking about our women’s circle<sup>13</sup>, I recall what bishop Noack said to my five years ago, “Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading through!”—he likely meant me to be a good housewife for my husband and children, and guests, but the basket and the kneading through have in fact also become the entrance to the church for some of our neighbors out there.<sup>14</sup> (NKBM Aug-Sep 1960: 83)

While her speech did not fault the bishop’s interpretation, Ene Marie Thomsen seemed to signal a self-understanding that went beyond “housewife” into “missionary,” which would not be surprising, given her childhood dreams and adult ideas of going to China as missionary (cf. NKBM Aug-Sep 1956: 92). Could it be that her humorous comment had a touch of protest against being confined to the former by a socially conservative milieu?

Was CMB in the 1950s socially conservative? Page 107 in NKBM Oct 1956 has a set of portraits of missionaries in or assigned to Japan. The editing of the short biographical notes for the three photographs at least indicates a “yes” to the question. In two of the pictures are married couples: the Kungs and the Thomsens. Compare the information on the four persons

<i>KUNG TIEN MIN, born in Hangchow 1925. Baptized 1 May 1946. The Lutheran pastoral school 1948-1953. To Japan 1953. Ordained a pastor at Tao Fong Shan 1954.</i>	<i>HARRY THOMSEN, born 21.2.1928 in Vildbjerg, Denmark. MA 1953. Two periods of studies in the USA. Teaching activities. Ordained a pastor 7/8 1955. To Japan August 1955.</i>
<i>KUNG SAN, born in Japan. Baptized in the Lutheran Church. Lutheran Bible School 1954. Married to Kung Tien Min 30.4.1955. Son: Ai Hwa.<sup>15</sup></i>	<i>ENE MARIE THOMSEN ne Jensen, born 25.6.1931 in Timring, Denmark. Trained nurse. Married to Harry Thomsen 4.6.1955. Child: Erik.</i>

13 *Women’s circle* literally translates the Danish *kvindekreds* that E.M. Thomsen used here in her speech; the Japanese equivalent would probably be *fujinkai* 婦人会. In the first part of the quotation, E. M. Thomsen used *kvindeforening* = women’s association or –gathering.

14 Carl Wulff Noack (1885-1960), bishop of Haderslev Diocese 1937-1955, was chairperson of CMB in 1955; he was quoting Deuteronomy 28:5 on the occasion of sending out the Thomsens.

15 In a letter by Ene Marie Thomsen, she refers to the child of the Kungs as “her little girl” (NKBM Nov 1956: 119). Kung himself, in a “Japan-letter” told his Scandinavian friends that

This information is likely based on what the editor had at hand. Of interest is that compared with the Danes, the details on the Chinese/Japanese couple are sparse, especially regarding Mrs. Kung San.<sup>16</sup> In the newsletters, this is the only place her full name is given by anyone mentioning her—her husband, fellow missionaries or visitors. Whereas letters from the Thomsens were signed with the names of every family members, those from pastor Kung were signed in his name only—wherefore he may have been the conservative in the communication including the personal information mentioned above? In 1955, two of Kung's letters told that Mrs. Kung's work included organizing the Sunday school (NKBM Nov 1955: 123), but that activity was not mentioned later. Her role as wife overshadowed that of missionary and individual. The proportion of information on husband and wife is typical and indicative of the conservatism (cf. missionary profiles in DMS yearbooks from the 1960s).

## *Conclusion*

This brief introduction to Danish missionaries in Japan has demonstrated the contributions their activities have made to Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular, materially as well as organizational. It has provided the background, however superficially, for further studies on the motivation for foreign mission in a particular area and the mission's relationship with a local church. Because the Danes and their missions were usually minor players in the field, their influence was probably also less than that of North Americans or other Scandinavians, but enthusiasm and perseverance were equally called for among the missionaries and their sending bodies. The fact that they were few may actually have increased the stress the individual had

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"my wife got a little girl at the end of February. Both are healthy. We have named our daughter the beautiful name Kung Ai Hwa. Ai Hwe[愛華] can mean "China-lover" as well as "Flower-lover." (NKBM Jun 1956: 63). Obviously, "son" is a mistake in this case.

16 The wife's name may be San, though it does not sound very Japanese. Could it be a Chinese pronunciation of the characters used for her name?

to endure, which may explain why several returned to Denmark because of illnesses, although only one was diagnosed with stress. In this relation, I think the issue of *independence* is important, related as it is to the sense of freedom and self-esteem the lack of which can be stressful. The issue is not confined to missionaries, of course, since the Church is a community that inevitably puts social demands on its members thereby creating sources of potential stress inducing frictions.

It would be natural to try and evaluate the work done by the Danes. In the introduction I have already indicated the steps I think are necessary to take before being able to make a qualified evaluation. Those steps lay ahead, and I plan to take them.



***List of Danish missionaries in Japan 1899-1998***

Name	Vital data	Profession	Time in Japan
<i>Bartholdy, Fritzie</i>	1932 –	Secretary	1957-1961
<i>Bartholdy, Ove Peder</i>	1928 – 2008	Ordained pastor	1957-1961
<i>Christensen, Else</i>		Teacher	1981-1998
<i>Christensen, Kristen</i>		Ordained pastor	1981-1998
<i>Holm, Leif</i>	1945 -	Carpenter and hospital caretaker, ordained deacon	1978-1983
<i>Holm, Anne Sophie</i>	1948 -	Social worker, ordained deacon	1978-1983
<i>Leth-Larsen, Anne Marie</i>	1934 -	Certified teacher	1961-1974
<i>Leth-Larsen, Frode</i>	1931 -	Ordained pastor	1961-1974
<i>Malmgren Jensen, Birthe</i>		Nurse, social worker, ordained deacon	1969-1980
<i>Malmgren Jensen, Villy</i>	1940 -	Nurse, social worker, ordained deacon	1969-1980
<i>Melchiorsen, Ellen</i>	1928 -	Trained at “Marthabo”	1959-1963
<i>Melchiorsen, Karl Emil</i>	1928 -	Ordained pastor	1959-1963
<i>Roesgaard, Martha Højlund</i>			1963-1966 1971-1974
<i>Roesgaard, Olaf</i>	1933 -	Trained teacher, ordained pastor	1963-1966 1971-1974
<i>Thomsen, Ene-Marie</i>	1928 -	Trained nurse	1956-1967
<i>Thomsen, Harry</i>	1928 - 2008	MA in English and Christianity, ordained pastor	1956-1967
<i>Wengel, Erik</i>	1946 -	Trained nurse, ordained deacon	1979-1988
<i>Wengel, Marit Sølyst</i>	1949 -	Trained nurse, ordained deacon	1979-1988
<i>Winther, Andrea</i>	1870 – 1949	Trained nurse	1900-1921
<i>Winther, Jens Mikael Thøgersen</i>	1874 – 1970	Dairyman, teacher, ordained pastor	1899-1921 1927-1941 1950-1970
<i>Winther, Maya</i>	1904 – 2001	Teacher of English	1928-1941 1947-1970

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