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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Christian diplomacy in peace and war: Protestant internationalism, (anti-)imperialism, and the future of Asia, 1920–1950s

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Abstract

The 1920s to 1950s was a period of significant transformation and conflict in South and East Asia, marked by the forces of (anti-)imperialism, nationalism, and militarism, eventually escalating into the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Second World War. For a long time, internationalist initiatives hoped that de-escalation and peace could be achieved through diplomacy and exchange. Part of this approach included Asian Christians moving in the milieu of Protestant internationalism, a movement long dominated by American organizations and actors, which after the First World War saw a shift towards Asia—both in terms of representation from and interest in the region.

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, numerous international conferences, organized by missionary associations and organizations such as the World Student Christian Federation or the international Young Men's Christian Association, debated the political future of Asia in a changing and increasingly belligerent world. The period also witnessed numerous exchanges of Christian delegations between individual countries. By analysing the interrelated histories of three Asian Protestant internationalists—T. Z. Koo of China, Kagawa Toyohiko of Japan, and Augustine Ralla Ram of India—the article offers an examination of the mechanics of Christian diplomacy before, during, and after war. It shows that Protestant internationalist diplomacy, fellowship, and solidarity were often overshadowed by national and political ideologies. However, the article further argues that, despite its shortcomings, which challenged transnational solidarity and fellowship, Christian diplomacy was characterized by a resilience and reach that allowed its Asian protagonists a remarkable international operating space by providing useful networks, opportunities, and resources.

Keywords: Christian diplomacy; Protestant internationalism; pan-Asianism; anti-imperialism; Asian Christianity

Introduction

In December 1938, the three Asian Christians—Augustine Ralla Ram of India, Kagawa Toyohiko of Japan, and T. Z. Koo of China—crossed paths at the world conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) convened in Tambaram, India. Kagawa, Koo,

and Ralla Ram were prominent figures in a vibrant Protestant internationalist milieu, regularly speaking to Western audiences and described by contemporaries and later writers as 'Oriental missionar[ies] to the Occident',[1] 'Missionar[ies] from the East to Western Pagans',[2] or as 'ambassadors of the Christian people of India [to the West]'.[3]

However, such designations tell only one side of the story. They define these men and their careers merely in relation to the 'West/Occident' and obscure the fact that their internationalism was much more comprehensive in scope. As much as Koo, Ralla Ram, Kagawa, and others were interpreters of Asian Christianity to the 'West', they were also inter-Asian mediators concerned with the political future of Asia. At the conference in Tambaram, Christian diplomacy was under pressure. Contentious issues such as the Second Sino-Japanese War and the anti-colonial movement in British India, or the growing tensions between Japan and the United States, complicated transnational fellowship and brought the political situation in Asia into focus.

This is not to deny that Protestant internationalism in the first half of the twentieth century was still a Western- and especially American-biased affair, institutionally dominated by organizations led mostly by European and North American men (and, rarely, women) and conducted mainly in English. However, this constellation was challenged from the 1910s onwards. Accelerating after the First World War, Protestant internationalism as well as the related missionary movement saw a shift towards World Christianity and especially Asia, as evident in the conference being held in Tambaram. Concurrently, the 1920s–1950s were dominated by significant political and social transformations both globally and in Asian countries such as India, China, and Japan, shaped by forces like (anti-)imperialism and (inter)nationalism. In recent years, there has been an influx of scholarship on Protestant internationalism which considers it mainly as an American phenomenon and endeavour, and consequently adopts a predominantly American perspective when examining this topic.[4] While some non-American and non-'Western' figures do occasionally feature in these studies,[5] they are rarely the focus of the analysis. This omission is regrettable. John R. Mott, the pre-eminent figure of Protestant internationalism and ecumenism during the first half of the twentieth century, is rarely mentioned without the anecdote that he crossed the Atlantic more than a hundred times. However, he was not the only frequent traveller on the

[1]Jun Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution: The American Social Gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919–1937* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1996), p. 74.

[2]Robert Shaffer, '"A Missionary from the East to Western Pagans": Kagawa Toyohiko's 1936 U.S. Tour', *Journal of World History*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2013, pp. 577–621.

[3]Myra Scovel, *I Must Speak: The Biography of Augustine Ralla Ram* (Lucknow: North India Christian Literature Society, 1961), p. 36.

[4]Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Gene Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022); Justin M. Reynolds, 'Against the World: International Protestantism and the Ecumenical Movement between Secularization and Politics, 1900–1952', PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2016; David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[5]For example, Justin Reynolds, 'From Christian Anti-Imperialism to Postcolonial Christianity: M. M. Thomas and the Ecumenical Theology of Communism in the 1940s and 1950s', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2018, pp. 230–251.

Protestant internationalist circuit. While Ralla Ram, Koo, and others may not have reached the mileage Mott did, their pensum was still remarkable, and focusing on their activities will complement our understanding of Christian internationalist exchange during the 1920s to 1950s substantially.

This article analyses the intricate network of Protestant internationalist diplomacy in Asia that navigated the challenges Christian fellowship faced during these politically turbulent times when the world was torn between peace and war. To provide guidance through these extensive entanglements, the article will focus on the activities of the abovementioned three central figures: T. Z. Koo (1887–1971), Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960), and Augustine Ralla Ram (1888–1957). Born around the same time and mainly active between the 1920s and the 1940s, they exemplify a form of Asian Protestant internationalism that was able to imprint on the movement during these years in significant ways. Of course, in a late-colonial world, participation in Protestant internationalism was restricted to those who possessed an 'appropriate' Western, if not missionary/Christian, education: Koo had been educated at St John's University, Shanghai, Ralla Ram at Forman Christian College in Lahore and the Saharanpur Theological Seminary, while Kagawa received his education at the Tokyo Presbyterian College, Kobe Theological Seminary, and studied at Princeton Theological Seminary. Whereas much has been written on Kagawa, and especially his connections to the American Protestant milieu,[6] this article draws attention also to the lesser-known figures of Koo[7] and Ralla Ram.[8]

[6]For an extensive English biography on Kagawa, see Robert Schildgen, *Toyohiko Kagawa: Apostle of Love and Social Justice* (Berkeley: Centenary Books, 1988). A focus on Kagawa's relationship to Japanese imperialism can be found in the thesis by Bo Tao, 'Imperial Pacifism: Kagawa Toyohiko and Christianity in the Asia-Pacific War', PhD thesis, Yale University, 2019; cf. Bo Tao, 'The Chrysanthemum and the "Saint": Kagawa's Statue in the Washington National Cathedral', *Church History*, vol. 89, no. 3, 2020, pp. 567–591. Much has been written on Kagawa's reception in the United States and his relationship with American church men and women, missionaries, and Christian internationalists: cf. Shaffer, '"A Missionary from the East to Western Pagans"'; Robert Shaffer, 'A Japanese Christian Socialist-Pacifist and His American Supporters: Personal Contacts and Critical Internationalism', *Peace and Change*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2014, pp. 212–241; Mark R. Mullins, 'Christianity as a Transnational Social Movement: Kagawa Toyohiko and the Friends of Jesus', *Japanese Religions*, vol. 32, 1–2, 2007, pp. 69–87; Mark R. Mullins, 'Kagawa Toyohiko (1888–1960) and the Japanese Christian Impact on American Society', in *Encountering Modernity: Christianity in East Asia and Asian America*, (eds) Albert L. Park and David Yoo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), pp. 162–194; David P. King, 'The West Looks East: The Influence of Toyohiko Kagawa on American Mainline Protestantism', *Church History*, vol. 80, no. 2, 2011, pp. 302–320.

[7]On T. Z. Koo (alternatively transliterated as Koo Ts-Zung, Ku Zi-Zong, or Gu Ziren), see the contemporary short biography by R. O. Hall, *T. Z. Koo: Chinese Christianity Speaks to the West* (Rochester: Staples Press, 1950) or his entry in the *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*: Donald E. MacInnis, 'Koo, T. Z. (Koo, Ts-Zung; [Ku Zi-Zong])', in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, (ed.) Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 373.

[8]On Ralla Ram, see the short biography by Scovel, *I Must Speak*; also Student Christian Movement of India, Burma, and Ceylon (ed.), *An Appreciation of the Rt. Revd. Augustine Ralla Ram* (Allahabad: Allahabad Christian Press, 1947). Ralla Ram and his work as an Indian Christian internationalist and ecumenist have found some acknowledgement recently in Raj B. Patta, '"Lengthen Thy Cords and Strengthen Thy Stakes": Augustine Ralla Ram's Ecumenical Missional Contributions', in *A Light to the Nations: The Indian Presence in the Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century*, (eds) Jesudas Athyal and Michael Kinnamon (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2016), pp. 45–65.

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Examining the itineraries and interactions of these three individuals as well as the debates they participated in allows us to shed light on the complicated relationship between nationalism and internationalism among Asian Christians in the first half of the twentieth century. As Sugata Bose has noted in his seminal study on the interconnected Indian Ocean Rim, nationalism and universalism (or internationalism) were 'far from being in an adversarial relationship, [but] bound in a strong symbiotic embrace'.[9] Most Asian Christians active in Protestant internationalism were simultaneously vocal proponents of their respective national concerns and agendas. While their international and transnational outlook and activities did transgress the nation-state, they rarely substantially subverted it.[10] Indeed, the national belonging of Christians and other internationalists during the interwar period was instrumental in shaping their border-crossing understanding.[11] Claims to universality frequently justified very particular and national demands, and internationalism could be referred to as an ideal only in relation to individual nations, as Dick Stegewerns, for instance, has demonstrated in the case of Japan.[12]

The article thus asks how Protestant internationalism reacted to the political conflicts in Asia between the 1920s and 1940s. How did the national background of Ralla Ram, Kagawa, Koo, and others affect their actions in the internationalist field? Did their political outlook—heavily imprinted by the contingencies of late colonialism, (anti-)imperialism, and (pan-)Asianism—shape their approach towards international cooperation and diplomacy? How did they imagine the political future of Asia and future inter-Asian relations? Could Christian fellowship and internationalist affinities and networks transcend the constraints of enmity and war, and what means and strategies did Asian Protestant internationalists develop?

The article approaches these questions through an analysis of the intertwined itineraries of Ralla Ram, Koo, and Kagawa, as well as the discourses they engaged with. The article commences with an overview of the emergence and transformation of Protestant internationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and shows how it engaged with the issues of colonialism, indigenization, and the political future of Asia in the 1920s and 1930s. The subsequent sections tackle Christian diplomacy throughout the 1930s and the Second World War by focusing on various bundles of exchanges. First, the analysis of a visit of a Christian Indian delegation to Great Britain in 1932 and a visit of a delegation of African American Christians to India in 1935 demonstrates the potential and restraints of anti-colonial activity and solidarity in Protestant internationalism. The next section focuses on the conflict between Christian fellowship and nationalism in an era of growing tensions and eventual escalation by looking at Christian internationalist exchanges against the background of

[9]Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 31.

[10]Cf. Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905–1940)', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2012, pp. 65–92.

[11]Cf. Patricia Clavin, 'Introduction: Conceptualising Internationalism Between the World Wars', in *Internationalism Reconfigured*, (ed.) Daniel Laqua (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 1–14.

[12]Dick Stegewerns, 'The Dilemma of Nationalism and Internationalism in Modern Japan: National Interest, Asian Brotherhood, International Cooperation or World Citizenship?', in *Nationalism and Internationalism in Imperial Japan: Autonomy, Asian Brotherhood, or World Citizenship?*, (ed.) Dick Stegewerns (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 3–16.

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the Sino-Japanese conflict in the mid- and late 1930s. Finally, an examination of the visit of a delegation of Japanese Christians to the United States shortly before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the visit of an American Christian delegation to Japan shortly after the latter's surrender in 1945, as well as an insight into post-war Indo-Chinese relations, allows us to investigate the mechanics of Christian diplomacy during and after the war. As the article argues, Protestant internationalist diplomacy and fellowship were, in many instances, eclipsed by national and political ideologies. Protestant internationalism was substantially curtailed by the political escalation in East Asia in the 1930s and 1940s and could never not reach its diplomatic and political potential. Nevertheless, it exhibited a remarkable reach and resilience, fostered by continuing bi- and multilateral exchanges and facilitated by a strong and extensive organizational network that afforded their Asian protagonists an extraordinary transnational operating space.

Protestant internationalist circuits and the future of Asia

The foundations of the vibrant Protestant internationalist exchange discussed in this article were established during the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. Crucial were the activities and expansion of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) that established its international headquarters in Geneva in 1878, as well as other related ecumenical and Christian student organizations such as the World Christian Student Federation (WSCF), founded in 1895.[13] These organizations were influenced by liberal Protestant theology and the Social Gospel, which became a dominant force especially in North American Protestantism and quickly found its internationalization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[14] Closely related to the missionary movement and its mission boards and organizations, the Protestant internationalist movement was dominated by North American and British actors.

A significant milestone in the development of Protestant internationalism and the global ecumenical movement was the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. For the first time, particular attention was given to the 'younger churches' and the matter of indigenization, and the conference was indicative of the beginning of a slow transformation from mission to World Christianity in the following decades.[15]

[13]Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner and Ian Tyrrell, 'The Rise and Growth of a Global "Moral Empire": The YMCA and YWCA during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in *Spreading Protestant Modernity: Global Perspectives on the Social Work of the YMCA and YWCA, 1889–1970*, (eds) Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner and Ian Tyrrell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), pp. 1–36. On the WSCF, see Johanna M. Selles, *The World Student Christian Federation, 1895–1925: Motives, Methods, and Influential Women* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011). For an in-house history of the WSCF, see Philip Potter and Thomas Wieser, *Seeking and Serving the Truth: The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997).

[14]On the Social Gospel, see Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001); Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). On its internationalization, see Fischer-Tiné, Huebner and Tyrrell, *Spreading Protestant Modernity.*

[15]Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009); Klaus Koschorke, 'Christliche Internationalismen um 1910: Transkontinentale Netzwerke protestantischer Missionare und indigen-christlicher Akteure aus Asien', in *Weltreligion im Umbruch: Transnationale*

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Protestant internationalism gathered momentum in the wake of the conclusion of the First World War during a Wilsonian and internationalist age.[16] The 1920s and the interwar period saw a broad spectrum of activities that extended state-sponsored and state-driven internationalism, which included alternative forms and non-government initiatives such as pacifist, feminist, socialist, anti-imperialist, and religious or 'faith-based' endeavours.[17] Indeed, in the early twentieth century, religious internationals had witnessed a transformation from 'communities of faith' to 'communities of opinion' which—contrary to long-standing narratives of secularization—increased their participation and influence in the secular-political sphere.[18]

This post-First World War Protestant internationalist moment was manifested in the establishment of the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921, an international umbrella organization that stood at the interface between mission and ecumenical World Christianity; it would eventually merge with and be superseded by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the 1940s and 1950s.[19] In terms of geography, Protestant internationalism witnessed a shift in focus from the 'older churches' in the West to the 'newer churches' in the former mission fields. During the 1920s and 1930s this mainly meant a stronger representation from Asian countries, especially from India, Japan, and China. This was evident in the world conference organized by the IMC in 1928 in Jerusalem. While the 1910 conference in Edinburgh had been a mostly European and North American affair, the Jerusalem conference featured a considerable number of non-Western delegates mostly from Asian countries. The largest delegations present in Jerusalem came—after the United States and Great Britain—from China,

Perspektiven auf das Christentum in der Globalisierung, (eds) Olaf Blaschke and Francisco J. Ramón Solans (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2019), pp. 195–218.

[16]Dana L. Robert, 'The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement between the World Wars', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2002, pp. 50–66. Cf. Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity became a World Religion* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), Chapter 3. On internationalism and international non-governmental organizations in the interwar period, see Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

[17]Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, 'Rethinking the History of Internationalism', in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, (eds) Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 3–14; Stephen Legg et al. (eds), *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (eds), *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–39* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015); Michele L. Louro, Carolien Stolte and Heather Streets-Salter (eds), *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives, Global Connections* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020).

[18]Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene (eds), *Religious Internationals in the Modern World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[19]Kenneth R. Ross, 'The International Missionary Council between 1910 and 1961', in *A History of the Desire for Christian Unity: Dawn of Ecumenism*, (eds) Alberto Melloni and Luca Ferracci (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), pp. 722–743; Brian Stanley, 'The International Missionary Council', *International Review of Mission*, vol. 111, no. 2, 2022, pp. 268–284; Dana L. Robert, 'Cooperation, Christian Fellowship, and Transnational Networking: The Birth of the International Missionary Council', in *Together in the Mission of God: Jubilee Reflections on the International Missionary Council*, (ed.) Risto Jukko (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2022), pp. 3–29.

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India, and Japan.[20] The IMC's subsequent world conference of 1938 consequently was scheduled to take place in China, but due to the Sino-Japanese War eventually moved to Tambaram, India, and featured an even larger proportion of non-Western delegates.

The increasing involvement of Asian Christians in these conferences was not only indicative of a transformation in Protestant internationalism and mission, but also reflected a broader trend in global politics. From the 1920s onwards, India, China, and Japan were increasingly perceived as potential future global players, and there was a growing interest in the area from Western audiences and in Western politics.[21] Intellectuals and politicians from these Asian nations, too, detected a shift in global dynamics. Pan-Asian sentiments grew stronger and found expression in inter-Asian exchanges and conferences such as the Conferences of the Asian Peoples which were held in Nagasaki and Shanghai in 1926 and 1927, respectively.[22] Concurrently, in British India and in semi-colonial parts of China, anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments intensified. Moreover, Asian, and particularly Japanese, aspirations for a geopolitical reordering were thwarted in the 1920s by anti-Asian policies in Western countries such as the Asiatic Exclusion Act of 1924 which barred immigration to the United States from Asian countries.

In terms of the subjects under discussion, the influence of social gospel theology in Protestant internationalism showed in an emphasis on 'secular' issues such as social work, agriculture, or education.[23] From the 1910s onwards, a dominant topic was the relationship between the 'older' and the 'newer' churches and the future of Western missions. From a theological, missiological, and organizational perspective, this was discussed in regard to a devolution of missions and the potential and limitations of an indigenization of Christianity.[24] In the political sphere, these trajectories translated into an engagement with and critique of imperialism, geopolitical and 'interracial' injustices, and the prospective relationship between 'Western' and 'non-Western' countries. As a consequence of both the heightened involvement of Asian Christians in the movement and the growing interest in the region among European and American observers, the political future of Asia became a pivotal topic in this regard by the mid-1920s. In particular, East Asia and the Pacific area became a focal point of numerous activities. In June and July 1924, YMCAs from various countries bordering the (North)

[20]On the 1928 Jerusalem conference, see Jan van Lin, *Shaking the Fundamentals: Religious Plurality and Ecumenical Movement* (Boston: Brill, 2002); Jonathan Barnes, *Power and Partnership: A History of the Protestant Missionary Movement* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), pp. 170–182.

[21]Silke Martini, *Postimperiales Asien: Die Zukunft Indiens und Chinas in der anglophonen Weltöffentlichkeit 1919–1939* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017).

[22]Torsten Weber, 'Alternative Internationalisms in East Asia: The Conferences of the Asian Peoples, Japanese-Chinese Rivalry and Japanese Imperialism, 1924–43', in Legg et al., *Placing Internationalism*, pp. 199–215. On (Pan-)Asianism(s), see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Nicola Spakowski and Marc Frey (eds), *Asianisms: Regionalist Interactions and Asian Integration* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016); Marc Frey, 'Asianismen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert. "Asien" als Gegenstand nationaler und transnationaler Diskurse und Praktiken', *Comparativ*, vol. 18, no. 6, 2008, pp. 7–15; Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman (eds), *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History. Vol. II: 1920–Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

[23]See, for example, Michael Philipp Brunner, 'Developing the Countryside: Agricultural Missions, K. L. Butterfield, and Rural Reconstruction in Asia, 1920–50', *Church History*, 2025.

[24]Barnes, *Power and Partnership*, Chapters 4f.

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Pacific participated in a Pan-Pacific Conference in (rather ironically) Atlantic City. The Chinese delegation included T. Z. Koo. Koo had been working for the Chinese YMCA and the WSCF since the late 1910s. He had struggled for some time with his demanding role as a 'travelling secretary' for the WSCF, for health and family reasons as well as the racism he experienced regularly in Europe and North America. By the mid-1920s, however, his was convinced of the merits of his transcultural endeavours and fully engaged with his international work for the Federation.[25]

Koo also worked on setting up a Pacific Area Student Conference in China for the WSCF.[26] At the Federation's international meeting in Mysore, India, in December 1928, a proposal was made to organize a conference to deal with the 'pressing problems in the Pacific Area'.[27] In the early 1930s, the WSCF proposed the establishment of a separate office for the Pacific area, to be led by Koo.[28] While the WSCF's and Koo's plans were only partially realized, it was the YMCA that assumed the lead in connecting the Christian internationalists of the region. After Atlantic City, it launched a series of follow-up meetings, commencing in 1925 with a Christian conference of the Pacific Area, this time held more appropriately in Honolulu. The objective of the conference was 'to consider the contacts and conflicts of the pacific peoples and to develop understanding and cooperation'.[29] Subsequent meetings followed in 1927 again in Honolulu and in 1929 in Kyoto.

Arguably the most tangible result of the Atlantic City conference was the foundation of the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) in 1925. The IPR was an international think tank and research institute, funded largely by the American Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment. Although the Institute was American-dominated, from its inception it also saw a considerable degree of Japanese involvement. The Institute discussed and researched (trans-) Pacific as well as intra-Asiatic issues. It was soon confronted with the challenge of balancing scholarly research and political activism, as issues like anti-colonial and national movements, US-Japanese relations, or the growing antagonism between Japan and China arose as contentious topics.[30]

[25]T. Z. Koo to Suzanne Bidgrain, 2 September 1922, in World Christian Student Federation records, World Council of Churches Archives, Geneva (hereafter WCCA/WSCF)/ 213.05.12/7; Koo to Henry Louis Henriod, 24 April 1924, WCCA/WSCF/213.06.14/5; Koo to Henriod, 30 September 1924, WCCA/WSCF/213.07.4/12.

[26]'Bericht des Organisations Kommitees der "Pacific Area Student Conference"', 1926, WCCA/WSCF/213.08.54/5.

[27]David R. Porter, 'The Federation meets in India, December 1928', p. 3, WCCA/WSCF/213.09.19/2. Cf. Francis P. Miller, 'Memorandum containing relevant points in the discussions at Mysore regarding a Pacific Area Conference', WCCA/WSCF/213.09.19/1.

[28]Francis P. Miller to T. Z. Koo, 17 January 1930, WCCA/WSCF/213.10.2/11.

[29]'A Christian Conference of the Pacific Area, Honolulu, T.H., July First to Fifteenth, 1925', Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (hereafter KFYA), Y.USA.9-3, Box 11, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1925–26.

[30]Tomoko Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan, and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919–45* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003); Jon T. Davidann, '"Colossal Illusions": U.S.-Japanese Relations in the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1919–1938', *Journal of World History*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2001, pp. 155–182; cf. Priscilla Roberts, 'The Institute of Pacific Relations: Pan-Pacific and Pan-Asian Visions of International Order', *International Politics*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2018, pp. 836–851.

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The themes of anti-imperialism and international and 'interracial' relations rang loud at the 1928 conference in Jerusalem, too. Its programme included sessions on 'Missions and Race Conflict', 'International Missionary Relations', and the relationship between 'The Younger and the Older Churches'. Conferences, organizations, and networks like the Pacific Area and the Jerusalem conferences facilitated unprecedented opportunities for Christian travelling and international exchange. At the IMC conference in Jerusalem the concept of dedicated 'diplomatic missions' was drawn up. The Council's final statement on the 'Christian Message' called for an exchange of missions and delegations between the churches of Europe and North American and the churches of Africa and Asia.[31]

This appeal was put in action four years later when a 'Mission of Fellowship' comprising four Indian Christians—including Augustine Ralla Ram—undertook a four-month-long tour of Great Britain in 1932/1933. However, the visit was not without controversy. The following section focuses on this Mission, as well as the subsequent visit of a delegation of African American Christians to India, which was initiated by Ralla Ram three years later. An analysis of these exchanges will demonstrate how Christian internationalism and fellowship could serve as a conduit of anti-colonial and interracial solidarity. Concurrently, the examples highlight the challenges Protestant internationalist delegations faced in reconciling both spiritual and political ambitions and aspirations during their missions.

Anti-colonial and interracial solidarity in the 1930s

The visit of the Indian delegation was organized by the British Conference of Missionary Societies and the IMC through William Paton, former YMCA secretary in India and general secretary of the National Christian Council of India (NCCI) between 1922 and 1926, and by the late 1920s secretary of the IMC. The ecumenical delegation from India comprised the Presbyterian Ralla Ram; Ma Nyein, headmistress of the American Baptist Mission High School in Burma; A. M. Varki, principal of Union Christian College in Travancore and church leader of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church; and the Anglican J. S. C. Bannerji, assistant bishop in Lahore. The itinerary of the delegation's tour through Great Britain included stops and speaking engagements in and around—in this order—Belfast, Dublin, Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, North and South Wales, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Leicester, and finally London. The visit concluded in a service at St Paul's Cathedral, a meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and a reception from the King and Queen.[32]

According to the British executive committee of the endeavour, the purpose of the delegation was spiritual and evangelistic, and the Indian Christians were supposed to show a British audience the reach of World Christianity, share with British believers the fresh breath of a young Indian Christianity, and encourage them 'by the witness borne to Christ by people coming out of a totally different cultural tradition'.[33] The

[31]International Missionary Council, *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 490.

[32]On the Mission of Fellowship, cf. Chandra Mallampalli, *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India, 1863– 1937: Contending with Marginality* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 101–106.

[33]'Memorandum suggesting Scope and Objective of the Indian Christian Mission of Friendship, [...] October 21st, 1931', in SOAS University of London, Library, Special Collections (hereafter SOAS), CBMS/01/E/55/01.

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timing of the mission, though, was no coincidence. The early 1930s were a period of heightened tensions in British India, characterized by growing hostilities between Indians and the British. The Indian National Congress (INC) had initiated the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the famous Salt March in March/April 1930 resulted in the arrest of Mohandas K. 'Mahatma' Gandhi and other Congress leaders. Between 1930 and 1932 three so-called Round Table conferences were held in London where British and Indian politicians and representatives discussed constitutional reforms and the political future of British India. The third conference was convened in November 1932, at which point the Mission of Fellowship was touring the country.[34] Accordingly, the executive committee of the Mission of Fellowship acknowledged that the possible 'secondary effect' of the visit may have lain in 'the promotion of a kindlier and more friendly feeling between Indians and Britishers in general'.[35] What the British organizers had not foreseen, however, were the activities that Augustine Ralla Ram would pursue during his stay in Great Britain.

Ralla Ram had previously served as pastor and professor at Ewing Christian College in Allahabad and was general secretary of the Student Christian Association (SCA) of India, Burma, and Ceylon from 1928. He participated in the WSCF world conference in Mysore in 1928 and was later vice president of the Federation. A second generation Christian with a Brahmin family background, Augustine Ralla Ram was part of a North Indian urban Christian middle class that by the 1910s and 1920s participated proactively in local church matters and had taken on more institutional responsibilities, as indigenization and devolution became the buzzwords of the day.[36] In addition to his work in the Indian Student Christian Movement, Ralla Ram was an active figure in the United Church of Northern India, formed in 1924 to unite Presbyterian and Congregational churches in North India. His interest in the international dimension of Christian fellowship also showed in his work for the United Church, whose Foreign Missions Committee he headed for many years.[37]

While Ralla Ram was undoubtedly aligned with the evangelistic objectives of the Mission of Fellowship, he also perceived himself as an 'Ambassador on behalf of India',[38] mediating between Britain and India. To him, Indian Christians were best prepared to act as 'mediators between India and other nations, especially England and America'.[39]

[34]For a recent account of the Round Table conferences and their 'behind-the-scenes' logistics and diplomacy, see Stephen Legg, *Round Table Conference Geographies: Constituting Colonial India in Interwar London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); and Stephen Legg, 'Imperial Internationalism: The Round Table Conference and the Making of India in London, 1930–1932', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2020, pp. 32–53. On the Indian Christian delegations (including S. K. Datta), see Nandini Chatterjee, *The Making of Indian Secularism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 229–233.

[35]'Memorandum suggesting Scope and Objective of the Indian Christian Mission of Friendship, [...] October 21st, 1931', SOAS.

[36]Jeffrey Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818–1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 25.

[37]Cf. *Minutes of the Third General Assembly of the United Church of Northern India, held at Lahore, December 27th to 31st 1929* (Allahabad: Mission Press, 1930), pp. 10f.; *Minutes of the Sixth General Assembly of the United Church of Northern India, held at Bombay, 21st October 1938* (Allahabad: Mission Press, 1938), p. 25.

[38]A. Ralla Ram to Kenneth Maclennan., n.d., SOAS/CBMS/01/E/55/01.

[39]Cited in Scovel, *I Must Speak*, p. 35.

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For the ardent nationalist and supporter of the Indian National Congress and Gandhi, this meant, not least, making the political aspirations of the Indian national movement heard in the metropole. Augustine Ralla Ram was part of a generation of Indian Christians who saw no contradiction in reconciling their Christian identity with Indian nationalist and anti-imperialist convictions. While the attitude of many Indian Christians towards the national movement had been somewhat ambivalent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—which often brought accusations of their being too close to their colonialist, Western co-religionists—by the 1920s and 1930s, a newer, often second-generational wave of Indian Christians identified fully with the national cause and found integration into the broader national movement.[40]

During the delegation's visit in Great Britain, Ralla Ram met privately with local pastors and churchmen, raised funds, and distributed a nationalist pamphlet titled 'The Present Indian Political Situation and the Way Out'. Ralla Ram's activities were perceived as a source of embarrassment by the British organizers of the tour, who responded promptly and attempted to calm the situation. Ralla Ram was pressured to publicly retract his actions and provide assurances that the tour had no political agenda (which he did only reluctantly and partially), thus effectively curtailing Ram's political expression in favour of a harmonious Protestant internationalist narrative.[41] This narrative is evident in William Paton's official reporting of the visit published in the IMC's public organ, the *International Review of Mission*. In his report, Paton placed emphasis on the 'clear and unambiguous purpose'[42] and the spiritual effects of the mission, touching upon the controversy created by Ralla Ram only indirectly by—in fact—denying it and attributing the mission's success to its apolitical nature. Paton assured that:

> If those responsible for the recent Mission had, under the guise of a mission of testimony and evangelism, really planned a tonic for missionary supporters or a campaign for goodwill towards India, they would have deserved the failure that would have ensued [...] It would have been spiritually insincere to have undertaken it on that ground, if it were an ostensible ground only and the real objects were the secondary ones.[43]

In contrast, Paton emphasized in his article the international and ecumenical character of Protestant Christianity, referring for instance to a recent visit by T. Z. Koo to

[40]On the relationship between Indian Christianity and nationalism, see Geoffrey A. Oddie, 'Indian Christians and National Identity, 1870–1947', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2001, pp. 346–366; Joseph Tharamangalam, 'Whose Swadeshi? Contending Nationalisms among Indian Christians', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2004, pp. 232–246; George Oommen, 'Protestant Christianity in India', in *Indian Christianity*, (ed.) A. V. Afonso (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2009), pp. 73–86, here 83ff. For the example of the internationalist YMCA in India and its complex relationship with Indian nationalism, see Harald Fischer-Tiné, *The YMCA in Late Colonial India: Modernization, Philanthropy and American Soft Power in South Asia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 38–45.

[41]Mallampalli, *Christians and Public Life in Colonial South India*, p. 106.

[42]William Paton, 'The Indian Mission of Fellowship', *International Review of Mission*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1933, pp. 215–224, here p. 224.

[43]Ibid.

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India, and expressing hopes for similar future exchanges, such as a visit from Kagawa Toyohiko.

Three years after the Mission of Fellowship, Augustine Ralla Ram himself was the organizer of a similar Christian exchange. In his capacity as general secretary of the Indian SCA, he extended an invitation to a delegation of African American Christians to undertake a tour of British India and Ceylon in late 1935 and early 1936. A committee of the SCA's American sister organization selected a four-member delegation comprising the couples Sue Bailey and Howard Thurman and Phenola and Edward Carroll. Howard Thurman, the head of the delegation, had previously held teaching positions at Morehouse College and Spelman College in Atlanta, and was dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University. First contacts between African American and Indian Christians had been established a few years earlier through the networks of Protestant internationalism and Christian student exchange. Thurman's friends Frank T. Wilson and Juliette Derricotte had attended the WSCF conference in Mysore in 1928. A direct connection was established in 1931, when Behari Lal (B. L.) Rallia Ram—another Indian Christian internationalist, Gandhian, secretary of the Indian YMCA, and not to be confused with his colleague Augustine Ralla Ram[44]—visited the United States and was invited by John Hope to give a lecture in Atlanta where he probably also met Thurman.[45]

The African American delegation, designated the 'Pilgrimage of Friendship', travelled through India, Ceylon, and Burma for six months, delivering lectures and talks in more than 50 cities along the route. As Ralla Ram explained in preparation of the delegation's visit, he saw the mission as a chance to correct the prevalent misconception in India that Christianity was 'identified with western imperialism'.[46] The interaction with and Christian witness from African Americans, who had themselves endured oppression by white Christians in the United States, served to demonstrate the universal appeal of Christianity to (non-Christian) Indians.[47] Howard Thurman perceived a similar rationale in the tour, assuming a common experience of oppression. In Thurman's view, the 'delegation [would] concern itself with interpreting the spiritual significance of life against the background and experience of an underprivileged minority in American life'.[48]

The experiences of the delegation in India were mixed. Generally, they were welcomed warmly and their lectures attracted large and interested audiences. Nevertheless, Thurman and the other members were frequently compelled to justify

[44]In both Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), pp. 69f., and Walter E. Fluker (ed.), *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2012), vol. I, p. 180, B. L. Rallia Ram is incorrectly identified with Augustine Ralla Ram, and the mix-up has since persisted in the subsequent literature on the matter. See Gary Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 523, fn. 94, and Paul Harvey, *Howard Thurman and the Disinherited: A Religious Biography* (Chicago: W. B. Eerdmans, 2020), p. 33. The fact that Augustine Ralla Ram himself had been part of a similar Christian delegation in Great Britain only a few years before the African American 'Pilgrimage of Friendship' to India, on the other hand, seems to have been missed by the Thurman-centred scholarship on the 1935/36 tour in India.

[45]'A Great Christian from India', *Spelman Messenger*, October 1931, pp. 24f.

[46]A. Ralla Ram to Frank T. Wilson, 28 June 1934, in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. I, pp. 193f.

[47]Cited in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. I, p. 181.

[48]H. Thurman to Henry Burke Robins, 11 October 1934, in ibid., p. 208.

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their allegiance to the 'religion of their oppressor', as Indians often highlighted the contradictions of American society, history, and Christianity. At an event at the outset of the tour in Colombo, Thurman was even called 'a traitor to the highest good not only of the Negroes in America but also of the darker peoples of the earth',[49] as he recalled. Others were receptive to the anti-imperialist and emancipatory rationale they discerned behind the Pilgrimage of Friendship, and were convinced that the African American experience imbued the delegation with credibility and insights into the Indian situation.[50] The delegation's visit coincided with heated debates about mass conversion in India in 1935 and 1936, after B. R. Ambedkar, a prominent leader of the 'depressed castes', announced his intention to leave Hinduism. While the American missionary milieu especially had high hopes for a mass movement, Indian Christianity was divided on the issue. Augustine Ralla Ram himself, who came from an urban high-caste background, was rather reluctant to embrace the idea of mass conversions from lower, mainly rural, Hindu classes that were based primarily on social, economic, and political rather than spiritual grounds.[51] Another Indian Christian internationalist, P. O. Philip, secretary of the NCCI, saw the Thurman delegation and possible future visits by African-American Christians to India as a way of convincing underprivileged Indian non-Christians of the spiritual merits of Christianity outside the confines of the organized church.[52]

Howard Thurman was keen to emphasize that the objective of the delegation was not evangelization, a point he felt compelled to make repeatedly during his visit, as it was important to him to ensure that the delegation would not be perceived as a missionary endeavour from the West. Indeed, while he heavily lauded the Indian SCA for the organization and support, he was critical of the close connection between the association and the missionary movement.[53] Notwithstanding these reservations and other setbacks—including occasional racism Thurman and his colleagues could not escape—the visit left a lasting impact on Thurman. As was the case with other African American intellectuals, Thurman had a particular interest in Mahatma Gandhi and his ideas. The delegation's meeting with Gandhi on 14 March 1936, during which they talked about the treatment of African Americans in the United States as well as Gandhi's views on non-violence, had a substantial influence on Thurman's further engagement with civil rights.[54] The meeting between the Pilgrimage of Friendship

[49]Thurman to Members of the India Committee, 19 November 1935, in ibid., p. 310. The encounter apparently left an impression on Thurman as he included it in his final report on the visit; see Thurman, 'India Report', 10 February 1938, in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. II, p. 134.

[50]For example, Ch. John to Members of the India Delegation, 21 November 1935, in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. I, p. 311.

[51]Cf. Robert E. Speer to William Paton, 13 August 1936, in Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, RG 81/25/Folder 1: IMC, Correspondence, 1936; Laura Dudley Jenkins, *Religious Freedom and Mass Conversion in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), p. 54. On the debates on mass conversions and Ambedkar's decision, cf. Susan B. Harper, *In the Shadow of the Mahatma. Bishop V. S. Azariah and the Travails of Christianity in British India* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 306–318.

[52]P. O. Philip to Charles J. Ewald, 1936, copy of letter in United Methodist Archives, Drew University, Madison, Microfilm Edition of the Administrative Files Series of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church/Call no. 485, IMC, 1936, 6–9.

[53]Thurman, 'India Report', in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. II, p. 132.

[54]Thurman's encounter with Gandhi is analysed in detail in Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp.

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and Gandhi was part of a line of African American engagement with Gandhian ethics that eventually led to the 1960s' civil rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr., on whom Howard Thurman was a major influence.[55] Furthermore, it can be read as an example of a broader anti-imperialist internationalism or an 'anticolonial transnational' in the first half of the twentieth century, which saw solidarity, networks, and exchanges between very different groups and which could 'transcend[...] racial, colonial, or cultural boundaries'.[56]

Although the Pilgrimage was imbued with an impetus of anti-colonial and anti-racist solidarity, in the run-up to the delegation's visit Augustine Ralla Ram, now himself responsible for organizing the event, had urged restraint with regard to political activities. Ralla Ram cautioned the delegation that while they were at liberty to express their views on the relationship between India and Great Britain, they should keep respective statements and conversations private so that they would not have to fear repercussions from the British-Indian government.[57] Indeed, as Thurman later recalled, the delegation was subjected to constant surveillance by the British-Indian intelligence during their tour.[58] The issue of politization was addressed by T. Z. Koo, Ralla Ram's colleague at the WSCF, too. In early 1935, Koo offered a critique of Thurman's emphasis on the status of Indians as an 'underprivileged' group, pointing to prevalent feelings of Indian superiority that Koo himself had often encountered.[59] Koo argued that equating African Americans with Indians would result in an undue focus on the political aspect of the delegation. A few months before these statements, the Chinese WSCF secretary had met Thurman in New York City, when both talked about the upcoming African American delegation to India at a Federation luncheon. There, Koo had expressed a slightly different view, expressing hope that the delegation could inspire the Indians because the African American experience of suffering might speak to them. Additionally, he had hoped for the delegation to visit China.[60] Koo's rather inconsistent stance on the political and anti-colonial potential of the delegation is noteworthy, particularly given his own ardent Chinese nationalist beliefs. Conversely, his contradictory views illustrate the predicament Christian 'diplomats' in the inter-war period experienced: the challenge of reconciling an ethos of Christian fellowship

112–118; Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy*, pp. 141–145, and Gerald Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), pp. 114–117. On the meeting in the context of Gandhi's biography, see D. G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961), pp. 67ff.

[55]On the relationship between the African American civil rights movement and India and Gandhi, see Sudarshan Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet: The African-American Encounter with Gandhi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Horne, *The End of Empires*; Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*; Dorrien, *Breaking White Supremacy*.

[56]Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter (eds), *The Anticolonial Transnational: Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 5. Cf. Louro, Stolte and Streets-Salter (eds), *The League Against Imperialism*.

[57]Ralla Ram to Frank T. Wilson, 28 June 1934, in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. I, p. 193.

[58]Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979), pp. 121f.

[59]Thurman to T. Z. Koo, 8 February 1935, in Fluker, *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, vol. I, pp. 237f.

[60]Thurman to Joseph Baker, 4 December 1934, in ibid., p. 223.

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and testimony with the constraints imposed by the political realities. The following section will focus on the 'Far Eastern Crisis' of the 1930s and will probe further the relationship between Protestant internationalism and transnational diplomacy, which was put to the test in discussions concerning the political future of and Japanese imperialism in East Asia and saw differing interpretations of inter-Asian relations played out.

The Far Eastern Crisis and the limits of Christian diplomacy

When the Pilgrimage of Friendship coordinated by Augustine Ralla Ram came to an end in early 1936, the constantly travelling T. Z. Koo was touring the United States, speaking at several Christian student and ecumenical conferences. There, he crossed paths with the third main protagonist of our story: Kagawa Toyohiko. Kagawa had come to prominence in Protestant internationalism in the late 1920s and early 1930s as a result of his social work in the slums in Kobe as well as his Kingdom of God campaigns, which had caught the attention of Western, and particularly American, Christian audiences. The social reformer, labour activist, and pacifist was quickly designated the 'Japanese Gandhi' by his Western supporters and became one of the international faces of non-Western Christianity.[61] In 1936, Kagawa undertook an extensive and widely publicized tour of the United States. While the tour demonstrated Kagawa's huge popularity among American liberal Protestant audiences, they remained somewhat arrested by the tensions between Japan and the United States that had increased in the past years.[62]

In the aftermath of the First World War, Japan had taken steps to participate in a system of international law and arbitration, signing, for instance, in 1928 the Briand-Kellogg Pact that renounced war as a tool for international conflict resolution. By the mid- to late 1920s, Japanese politicians were envisaging a leading role for the country in Asian internationalism. Concurrently, however, many voices in Japan were critical of the Anglo-American dominated post-Versailles international order, and Japan's own imperial ambitions in East Asia and the growing militarism in the country undermined its aspiration for geopolitical integration.[63] Tensions between Japan and the United States in particular had already become evident at Versailles and continued to intensify throughout the 1920s. In particular, the Asiatic Exclusion Act in the United States, introduced in 1924, contributed to a significant degree to Japanese alienation.[64] The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and subsequent Japanese advances in northern China in the following years gave rise to considerable international protest and contributed to the deepening of the rift between the two countries.[65] Nevertheless, while

[61]King, 'The West Looks East'; Mullins, 'Christianity as a Transnational Social Movement'; Mullins, 'Kagawa Toyohiko'.

[62]Shaffer, "'A Missionary from the East to Western Pagans'". Cf. Robert Schildgen, 'How Race Mattered: Kagawa Toyohiko in the United States', *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, vol. 5, nos. 3/4, 1996, pp. 227–253.

[63]Urs Matthias Zachmann, *Völkerrechtsdenken und Außenpolitik in Japan, 1919–1960* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013), pp. 346–352; Ian Hill Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), Chapters 4f.

[64]Toshihiro Minohara, 'The Elusive Equality: Versailles as a Turning Point in U.S.-Japan Race Relations', in *Beyond Versailles: The 1919 Moment and a New Order in East Asia*, (eds) Toshihiro Minohara and Evan Dawley (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), pp. 106–131.

[65]Cf. Davidann, "'Colossal Illusions'".

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Japanese expansion was viewed with scepticism in the United States, which sought to advance its own interests in the Pacific area, the interwar period saw manifold initiatives from both sides to maintain diplomatic ties. Kagawa's visit in 1936, which occurred just months before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, can thus be viewed as part of a broader campaign of cultural diplomacy between the United States and Japan during the 1920s and 1930s, in which travelling Christian internationalists joined ranks in the form of friendship dolls and delegations of baseball players.[66]

The Sino-Japanese conflict reverberated heavily in the Protestant internationalist scene in Asia. In 1933, the YMCA convened a Far Eastern and Indian Area Conference in Baguio on the Philippine Islands, with delegates from Japan, Korea, China, Siam, India, Hawaii, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippine Islands in attendance. The political tensions manifested themselves repeatedly at the conference. However, as Sidney Phelps, honorary secretary of the YMCA in Japan, reported, it was not the Chinese and Korean delegates that caused an 'embarrassment' to the Japanese. Rather, it was the Indian delegation comprising Augustine Ralla Ram, B. L. Rallia Ram, and Surendra Kumar Datta that 'seemed to feel a special mission to help the Chinese and Koreans to secure a Christian settlement of all misunderstandings with the Japanese'.[67] Indeed, the Indians linked the issue to the political situation in their own country where Mahatma Gandhi had recently been arrested once more. However, although Datta,[68] who presided over the conference, tried to initiate a discussion, most of the other delegates were not willing to tackle the delicate topic.[69] To Phelps, this showed that 'there [could] be no engineered peace between these distraught brethren of the Far East',[70] and the American missionary in Japan urged that the situation be left to develop without interference from outside.

In his deflection Phelps did not represent an unusual position. American missionaries in Japan, particularly those who had resided in the country for an extended period, often stood out as apologists of Japanese imperialism in East Asia. While many American missionaries sympathized with anti-colonial sentiments, for instance in British India, missionaries in Japan were often inclined to adopt a lenient, if not understanding, stance towards Japan's hegemonic claims in the region. This was not necessarily at odds with the prevailing liberal missionary discourse as articulated in Jerusalem, which criticized 'imperialistic missions' and advocated for an 'indigenization' of Christianity. The activities of Japanese Christian missionaries in colonial Korea, for instance, were interpreted by American observers as an indication of a growing

[66]John Gripentrog, 'The Transnational Pastime: Baseball and American Perceptions of Japan in the 1930s', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2010, pp. 247–273; Rui Kohiyama, 'The 1927 Exchange of Friendship Dolls: U.S.-Japan Cultural Diplomacy in the Inter-War Years', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2019, pp. 282–304; Sandra Wilson, 'Containing the Crisis: Japan's Diplomatic Offensive in the West, 1931–33', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1995, pp. 337–372; Robert J. Sinclair, 'Baseball's Rising Sun: American Interwar Baseball Diplomacy and Japan', *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1985, pp. 44–53.

[67]G. S. Phelps to John Mott, 14 September 1933, KFYA/Y.USA.9-2-3/18/Japan Correspondence and Reports, May–December 1933.

[68]On S. K. Datta's activities and personal relationships in Christian internationalism, see Jane Haggis, 'The Limits and Possibilities of a Cosmopolitics of Friendship: The Cosmopolitan Thought Zones of S. K. Datta 1900–1942', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2021.

[69]Phelps to Mott, 14 September 1933, KFYA.

[70]Ibid.

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autonomy and maturity of Japanese Christianity.[71] Narratives of the legitimacy and necessity of further Japanese expansion in East Asia often remained similarly uncontested and/or were excused by reference to the United States' own imperialist agenda in the region.[72] Japanese Christians, too, employed the rhetoric of the modern missionary movement to justify Japanese imperialism and the missionary efforts of Japanese Christians in Korea and Manchuria. Ebizawa Akira, general secretary of the Japanese National Christian Council (NCC), for instance, acknowledged that Japanese Christians were in a 'extremely difficult position' in reconciling Christian brotherhood and patriotism. At the same time, he denounced the earlier Western missionaries who used to attack local traditions such as ancestor worship which, by contrast, were acknowledged by Japanese Christians. Ebizawa argued that there was a 'spiritual and cultural unity'[73] between Japan, Korea, and Manchuria. Japanese missions—that superseded earlier Western missionary efforts in colonized Korea and Manchuria—should thus be regarded not as imperialism but rather as a step towards the indigenization of Asian Christianity. In this narrative, Ebizawa combined the then topical Protestant internationalist issue of indigenizing Christianity with the pan-Asian sentiments that guided Japanese expansionism in East Asia, positioning 'Asia' vis-à-vis the 'West', and seeing the puppet state of Manchukuo as a model for the Japanese pan-Asian ideology of the 'harmony of five races'.[74]

Ebizawa was part of a group of Japanese Christians, predominantly from the YMCA and the NCC, the latter an umbrella association for Japanese Protestant Christianity established in 1923 following the formation of the IMC, who moved actively in the circles of Protestant internationalism. In the spring of 1937, shortly before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, a delegation of five Western missionaries and five Japanese Christians, including Ebizawa, was dispatched to China on behalf of the NCC of Japan. The delegation met with Chinese Christian leaders and educators at Christian universities in China as well as with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kuomintang government. The delegation, however, eschewed public events and lectures in order to avoid provoking protests from Chinese critics. As a member of the delegation reported, the Chinese were highly suspicious of the Japanese delegation's motives, suspecting that it had been sent by the Japanese government.[75]

The pressure on Japanese Christians within Japanese society increased over the course of the 1930s. Many Japanese Christians undoubtedly were sympathetic towards Japanese imperialism and developed their own interpretations of a Japanese empire.

[71]Noriko Ishii, 'Imagining an Anti-Racist Cosmopolitanism: Localization, Imperialism and Transnational Women's Activism in Interwar Japan', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2021.

[72]Sandra C. Taylor, 'Japan's Missionary to the Americans: Sidney L. Gulick and America's Interwar Relationship with the Japanese', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1980, pp. 387–408; Shaffer, 'A Japanese Christian Socialist-Pacifist and His American Supporters'.

[73]Ebizawa Akira, 'Korean Christianity: Its Progress and Current Development', n.d., WCCA/IMC/26.5.106/Japan NCC: Akira Ebisawa Papers.

[74]Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War. 1931–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 110–114. On Japanese interpretations of pan-Asianism and their relationship with Japanese imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century, cf. Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (eds), *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History. Colonialism, Regionalism, and Borders* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[75]M. S. Bates, 'A Delegation of Japanese Christians in China', n.d., WCCA/IMC/26.31.03/2.

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At the same time, it became increasingly difficult to express dissenting opinions, as the Japanese government became more coercive and tightened the regulation of the various religious communities in the country.[76] When the Sino-Japanese conflict escalated and the Japanese invasion of China started in July 1937, the NCC of Japan released a statement in English declaring its full support of Japanese Christianity for 'the spiritual awakening of the nation' and the 'constant desire to secure the stability and prosperity of the Far East',[77] following official Japanese declarations that proclaimed a Japanese-dominated pan-Asian 'New Order' in (East) Asia.[78] In an 'Open Letter to Christian Brethren throughout the World', which was signed by 45 prominent Japanese Christians, the signatories reiterated the official position of the Japanese government, which asserted that the Japanese attack on China was an act of self-defence.[79]

Outside of Japan, in the arena of Protestant internationalist exchange, the Japanese Christians' position was contested. At the YMCA world conference in Mysore, India, in May 1937, the Sino-Japanese conflict pervaded the atmosphere of the meeting. Following the argument that Indian internationalists tended to emphasize throughout the 1930s, most of the participants agreed that Japanese imperialism in East Asia was no different from British rule in South Asia.[80] The Indian support of and solidarity with China among Protestant internationalists reflected shifting trends in inter-Asian relations and pan-Asian visions in the 1920s and 1930s. While Japan had previously been regarded as a role model and beacon of Asian modernism in the early twentieth century—particularly following its victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905—in British India, public and intellectual opinion about Japan gradually changed as Japanese imperialism in East Asia became more aggressive.[81] Alternatively, pan-Asian visions were reinterpreted and focused more on the relationship and solidarity between India and China.[82]

[76]Emily Anderson, *Christianity and imperialism in Modern Japan: Empire for God* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 16ff.; Sheldon M. Garon, 'State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912–1945', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1986, pp. 273–302. On the role and situation of other religious groups, cf. Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 114–132; Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), pp. 28–53.

[77]'Statement of the National Christian Council of Japan on the Emergency', 22 July 1937, WCCA/IMC/26.31.12/5.

[78]Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War*, pp. 141–176.

[79]'An Open Letter to Christian Brethren throughout the World', n.d., WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan: Sino Japanese Relationships 1936–1938.

[80]Administrative Report of Arthur Jorgensen to Eugene E. Barnett, Executive Secretary, International Commission YMCA, May 1937, KFYA/Y.USA.9-2-3/18/Japan Correspondence and Reports, 1937.

[81]Cf. Harald Fischer-Tiné, '"The Cult of Asianism": Asiendiskurse in Indien zwischen Nationalismus und Internationalismus (ca. 1885–1955)', *Comparativ*, vol. 18, no. 6, 2008, pp. 16–33. On the various types of Indian Asianism, cf. Carolien Stolte, 'Compass Points: Four Indian Cartographies of Asia, c. 1930–55', in Spakowski and Frey, *Asianisms*, pp. 49–74.

[82]Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017); Madhavi Thampi (ed.), *India and China in the Colonial World* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 293–337. Cf. Martini, *Postimperiales Asien*, pp. 349–361; Birendra Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia (1900–1947)* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1952), pp. 47f., 87f., 99–110, 150–174. On Indo-Chinese relations, cf. Tansen Sen and Brian Tsui (eds), *Beyond Pan-Asianism: Connecting China and India, 1840s–1960s* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021); Thampi, *India and China in the Colonial World*.

The Sino-Japanese conflict had a profound impact on T. Z. Koo. The fighting between Japanese and Chinese forces during the January 28 Incident in early 1932 had left Koo's childhood home in Shanghai in ruins and contributed to a partial disillusionment about the efficacy of Christianity in achieving peace.[83] Nevertheless, his confidence in the capacity of international Christian fellowship was not completely broken. Koo was a strong advocate of the indigenization of Christianity in Asia. In China, he pushed for hybrid conceptions of Christianity that were receptive to Confucian and Buddhist traditions. While working closely with Western missionaries and Christian internationalists, he was also committed to the idea of devolution and the slow withdrawal of Western missionaries from China and Asia.[84] Building on his work for the WSCF on Asian and Pacific conferences, he continued to work for inter-Asian and Sino-Japanese exchange. In 1934, he discussed with Saito Soichi, general secretary of the Japanese YMCA, the possibility of convening a series of Sino-Japanese conferences of Christian leaders in North, East, and South China. While the official topics were supposed to focus on contemporary life in Japan and China and the place, function, and message of Christianity in both countries, on an informal level the programme was to 'center round the topic of Sino-Japanese difficulties'.[85]

Protestant internationalist diplomacy, however, was significantly incapacitated by the conflict. This was evidenced in December 1938, when the IMC convened its next world missionary conference in the Indian city of Tambaram. The conference featured a who's who of Protestant internationalism with an even stronger representation from non-Western and especially Asian countries than at the meeting in Jerusalem ten years earlier.[86] The conference was attended by over 470 delegates from 70 countries, including T. Z. Koo, Augustine Ralla Ram, and Kagawa Toyohiko, as well as numerous other influential Asian Christian leaders and internationalists such as P. C. Hsu, T. C. Chao, B. L. Rallia Ram, Rajah B. Manikam, Ebizawa Akira, and Saito Soichi. The ongoing war in China weighed heavily on the shoulders of the delegates.[87] A British participant remarked that the Chinese delegates in Tambaram seemed rather 'reserved', whereas the Japanese were described as 'isolated'.[88] For an Indian observer, P. D. Devanandan, the Japanese 'were restrained and at times, embarrassingly quiet',[89] whereas he felt that the Chinese contributed most to the conference. As M. S. Bates, an American missionary and professor at the University of Nanjing, noted, the Japanese participants were under considerable pressure not to anger the Japanese government with their performance in Madras. Interestingly, it was the Chinese delegation that suggested refraining from political debates between Japanese and Chinese delegates at

[83]Hall, *T. Z. Koo*, pp. 24f.

[84]Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution*, pp. 77, 84.

[85]T. Z. Koo to Saito Soichi, 18 April 1934, KFYA/Y.USA.9-2-3/18/Japan Correspondence and Reports, 1934.

[86]Frieder Ludwig, *Zwischen Kolonialismuskritik und Kirchenkampf: Interaktionen afrikanischer, indischer und europäischer Christen während der Weltmissionskonferenz in Tambaram 1938* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000); Ian Randall, 'Tambaram, 1938: Christianity's Shift to the Global South', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2023, pp. 350–365.

[87]Cf. Ludwig, *Zwischen Kolonialismuskritik und Kirchenkampf*, pp. 267ff.

[88]'A British Point of View on "Madras"', n.d., WCCA/IMC/262.012/Tambaram Recommendations.

[89]Cited in Henry Holland, 'The Tambaram Conference', *Lahore Diocesan Magazine*, April 1939, pp. 191–195, here p. 194.

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the conference.[90] Augustine Ralla Ram, too, was impressed by the 'Christian dignity and forbearance with which the Chinese delegation conducted itself inspite [sic] of the terrible aggression which Japan [was] carrying on against it'.[91]

The tense situation in Madras can be seen in the performances of both Kagawa Toyohiko and T. Z. Koo. Kagawa, then probably at the peak of his prominence in the Protestant internationalist scene, delivered a speech on the 'Message of the Cross'.[92] The speech refrained from touching on any current political issues but emphasized Christ's suffering. As with other Japanese Christians, Kagawa found himself in a delicate position. His stance on Japanese imperialism and militarism has been deemed ambivalent in newer research.[93] For throughout the 1930s, Kagawa maintained a pacifist stance that drew much suspicion from the Japanese government. At the same time, while he usually refrained from the more jingoistic language used by more vocal Japanese Christian nationalists such as Ebizawa, he often showed at least a formal endorsement of Japanese expansion that cannot be explained by government pressure alone. During the mid- and late 1930s, Kagawa actively supported and collaborated in the agricultural colonization efforts of Japanese Christians in occupied Manchuria, guided by a combination of patriotic sentiments of imperial state-building and romantic and spiritual visions of Christian settlement in a 'promised' and 'uninhabited' land.[94] While Kagawa Toyohiko's speech refrained from touching on any sensitive points, his presence at the world missionary conference in Tambaram still left an impact. His image as the 'Japanese Gandhi', however, was somewhat tarnished in the aftermath of the conference. Kagawa did not return to Japan immediately but instead used the opportunity to visit the actual (Mohandas K.) Gandhi.[95] During their conversation, Gandhi brought up the Sino-Japanese War. While Kagawa responded cryptically that his views made him 'rather a heretic in Japan', he refrained from further elaborating his position but instead turned the question on Gandhi, inquiring what the Mahatma would do in his place. Gandhi insisted on Kagawa taking a public stance against the war, despite the Japanese activist being advised by other Japanese to keep quiet.[96]

In contrast to Kagawa, T. Z. Koo addressed the Sino-Japanese conflict head on in Tambaram, talking about 'The Church and the International Order'. In his speech, Koo, identified a conflict between 'two concepts of political development [...], namely, nationalism and internationalism'.[97] Directly addressing the atrocities perpetrated by

[90]M. S. Bates, 'Thoughts on Meeting the Japanese Delegation to the Madras Conference, confidential', 9 September 1938, WCCA/IMC/26.5.106/Japan NCC: Miscellaneous Papers/12.

[91]A. Ralla Ram to John Mott, 19 January 1939, in Yale Divinity Library, Yale University, New Haven (hereafter YDL), RG 45: John Mott R. Papers, Box 72, File 1328.

[92]Kagawa Toyohiko, 'The Meaning of the Cross', in *International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras, December 12–29. Vol. VII: Addresses and Other Records*, (ed.) International Missionary Council (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 23–27.

[93]Cf. Tao, 'Imperial Pacifism'; Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism*.

[94]Tao, 'Imperial Pacifism', pp. 155–191; Anderson, *Christianity and Imperialism*, pp. 229–235.

[95]Ludwig, *Zwischen Kolonialismuskritik und Kirchenkampf*, pp. 192–196.

[96]Mahadev Desai, 'Dr. Kagawa's Visit', *Harijan*, vol. 6, 21 January 1939, pp. 430f. Cf. Tao, 'Imperial Pacifism', pp. 146–149.

[97]T. Z. Koo, 'The Church and the International Order', in International Missionary Council (ed.), *Addresses and Other Records*, pp. 76–91, here 79.

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Japanese forces during the ongoing war, and specifically the Massacre of Nanjing in December 1937, Koo reflected on how difficult it was for him to maintain a feeling of Christian fellowship, noting that 'a sense of strain bears down heavily upon my Christianity when I face a Japanese'.[98] Nevertheless, Koo's speech concluded on a conciliatory note, leaving open a window for redemption and forgiveness. As was the case with other Chinese Christians of the time, Koo was caught in a 'conflict between his Christian convictions and sympathy for anti-Japanese patriotism'.[99] Chinese intellectuals operating within the Protestant internationalist milieu had cultivated a strong sense of Christian pacifism that drew from both Christian and Confucian ideas. However, their hopes for a Christianity-driven international code of conduct were severely challenged as Japanese imperial aspirations accelerated and escalated in the 1930s. Most internationalists like T. Z. Koo eventually compromised their principled pacifism to support armed resistance to at least some degree.[100]

By the late 1930s, Protestant internationalist diplomacy in Asia was facing a critical juncture. It had lost much of its potential for anti-imperialist solidarity. While some found ways to downplay and/or justify Japanese (and other) imperialist advances, to others in the Protestant internationalist milieu the conflict had reached a boiling point. In September 1939, Ebizawa Akira published an article that employed a strong anti-colonialist, anti-Western, and occidentalist[101] rhetoric to bemoan the 'pitiful semi-colonial existence' that the 'materialistic West' had imposed on the nations of East Asia—with the exception of Japan. In the article, Ebizawa placed Christianity at the service of Japanese expansion in the region: the Japanese people had 'been thrust spontaneously into the leadership of East Asia' as 'a trust from the Creator God'.[102] For the IMC's William Paton the remarks from Ebizawa were 'appalling stuff' and Japan's behaviour towards China unacceptable, and he noted that Japanese Christians apparently had not learnt any lessons from the Tambaram conference.[103] Nevertheless, Christian diplomacy demonstrated a remarkable resilience and persisted, even as the outbreak of the Second World War further escalated the conflict lines and brought the Far Eastern Crisis into an even more global framework. A final Protestant internationalist attempt to salvage Japanese-American relations was made in 1941, just months before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The following section will focus on two significant Protestant internationalist delegations—one from Japan (including Kagawa) to the United States shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and one from the United States to Japan that took place

[98]Ibid., p. 84.

[99]Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution*, p. 147.

[100]Ibid., pp. 125–151. On Chinese Protestant resistance against Japanese imperialism, cf. Thomas H. Reilly, *Saving the Nation: Chinese Protestant Elites and the Quest to Build a New China, 1922–1952* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 141–172.

[101]On 'occidentalism' as a rhetorical strategy that subverted 'Orientalism' by contrasting a 'materialistic West' with a 'spiritual East', see James E. Ketelaar, 'Strategic Occidentalism: Meiji Buddhists at the World's Parliament of Religions', *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 11, 1991, pp. 37–56.

[102]Ebizawa Akira, 'Christianity and the Establishment of a New Order in East Asia', English translation, original published in *Japanese C.M.S. Quarterly*, September 1939, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Nationalization of the Church, The New Order in Asia.

[103]W. Paton to A. L. Warnshuis, 6 November 1939, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan Post War Approach, Correspondence.

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shortly after the Japanese surrender in 1945. These examples show how Christian internationalists reacted to the effects of global and local war and highlight both the resilience and the reach of Protestant internationalist diplomacy. As the war situation brought tighter governmental supervision and more restrictions for international exchange, the entanglements and influence of Protestant internationalists beyond the purely religious milieu became more visible, extending well into official diplomacy and national governments.

The Second World War: Resilience and reconciliation

In early 1941, the Japanese NCC approached the American Federal Council of Churches with a proposal for a delegation of Japanese Christians to undertake a tour of the United States. The NCC gave assurances that recent developments in Japan had not altered the desire of Japanese Christians to keep an 'intimate fellowship with the Church in the United States and throughout the world' and that the NCC was 'unanimous in feeling that the Christians of both nations should leave no stone unturned in an effort to relieve the present tension and discover some solution for the problems which [were] alienating the two nations'.[104] The proposal was accepted and in early April the Japanese delegation set out for a three-month tour. The original main purpose of the delegation—'to strive for a betterment of Japanese-American relations'—expanded during the preparations to encompass questions pertaining to the future of the Japanese church and the role of Western missions in Japan.[105] The amendments were a response to concerns and uncertainties in the United States that emerged after the Japanese government introduced the Religious Organizations Law in 1940. The legislation granted the state more control over religious organizations. It restricted the inflow of foreign funding, prompted the withdrawal of Western missionaries, and brought the forced reorganization of the various Christian denominational bodies in the establishment of a United Church of Japan (Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan), which eventually also replaced the NCC.[106]

The liberal Protestant establishment in the United States had high hopes for the Japanese visit, although some were more sceptical. The IMC's A. L. Warnshuis remarked that the Japanese plans were 'based upon the persistent, naïve idea that if Americans only "understood" Japan's real purpose and plans there would be no opposition'.[107] Nevertheless, Warnshuis eagerly anticipated the visit and assisted in overcoming the bureaucratic hurdles the delegation faced. He provided an affidavit to the American authorities to facilitate the issuance of a visa for Kagawa Toyohiko, assuring the State Department that Kagawa and the delegation 'would not discuss political or military matters in public, nor [engage in] any attempts at propaganda for Japan'.[108] To the

[104]Tsunetaro Miyakoda to J. W. Decker, 20 January 1941, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Delegation to the USA 1941, Correspondence.

[105]'Purpose or Agenda', n.d.; William Axling to Dear Colleagues in Christian Service, 17 March 1941, both WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Delegation to the USA 1941, Correspondence.

[106]Garon, 'State and Religion in Imperial Japan', pp. 300f.; Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, pp. 39ff.

[107]A. L. Warnshuis to William Paton, 19 March 1941, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan Post War Approach, Correspondence.

[108]'Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Committee on East Asia, New York, 8 May 1941', WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Japanese Delegation 1941, Papers; 'Affidavit to the Immigration and

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organizers it was clear that the Japanese delegation would be incomplete without Kagawa and his participation was made a priority.[109] In Japan, too, the authorities had to be convinced by Japanese sympathizers of Kagawa in the state bureaucracy to approve his participation in the delegation. Kagawa, whose internationalist activities and connections made him suspicious in the eyes of the Japanese government, had been arrested in August 1940—ironically, not primarily due to his own cautious pacifist statements, but rather to their dissemination abroad[110]—and was since his release under constant surveillance by the authorities. Eventually, he was permitted to travel—on the condition that he refrain from engaging in any political activities.[111]

The Japanese delegation, comprising Kagawa, Abe Yoshimune Abe, Kozaki Michio, Matsuyama Tsunejiro, Saito Soichi, and the only female delegate, Kawai Michi,[112] and accompanied by the American missionary in Japan William Axling, held a number of conferences, including major ones in Riverside, Chicago, and Atlantic City.[113] The conferences were small and confidential in nature and attended by church and missionary leaders. It was decided to not keep and release official minutes of the meetings and the delegates were regularly reminded that 'at all times there shall be no public speaking or questioning on political or diplomatic subjects, nor shall these subjects be discussed with press representatives'.[114]

The visit can be considered a partial success for the Japanese delegation, particularly in terms of public relations. While it—unsurprisingly—could not prevent the eventual escalation in the Pacific, the visit proved effective in portraying the recent religious policy of the Japanese government, and in particular the forced church union, as an expression of the liberal Protestant internationalist agenda of indigenization, self-support, and financial autonomy of non-Western churches, rather than as hypernationalist and authoritarian measures.[115] As one observer noted, 'U.S. churchmen left Riverside with a real feeling that the Nippon Kirisuto Kyodan, being as indigenous as Fujiyama, might make Japan more Christian than foreign missions ever succeeded in doing'.[116] Politically, the delegation's visit did not achieve much. Prior to his return to

Naturalisation Service, U.S. Department of Justice, 29 March 1941', WCCA/IMC/26.5.103/Japan, Kagawa Correspondence regarding 1941–1950.

[109]J. W. Decker to Kagawa, 14 April 1941, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Delegation to the USA 1941, Correspondence.

[110]Tao, 'Imperial Pacifism', pp. 194–201.

[111]Ibid., pp. 220ff.

[112]On Michi Kawai, cf. Amanda L. Izzo, '"By Love, Serve One Another": Foreign Mission and the Challenge of World Fellowship in the YWCAs of Japan and Turkey', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2017, pp. 347–372. On relations between American and Japanese Christian women in the 1930s and 1940s, which paralleled many of the experiences and dilemmas faced by Kagawa and other male Japanese Christians, cf. Noriko Ishii, 'Difficult Conversations across Religions, Race and Empires: American Women Missionaries and Japanese Christian Women during the 1930s and 1940s', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2017, pp. 373–401.

[113]An overview on the delegation's visit from the perspective of the Japanese NCC can be found in National Christian Council of Japan, *The Japanese Christian Fellowship Deputation to the United States, April Twelfth–June Fifth 1941* (Tokyo: NCCJ, 1941).

[114]'Recommendations—Itinerary of Japanese Visitors', n.d., WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Japanese Delegation, Papers.

[115]See, for instance, A. L. Warnshuis, 'Memorandum concerning the Meeting in Chicago with the Members of the Japanese Christian Fellowship Visiting America, May 29–3, 1941', 23 June 1941; Galen Fisher, 'The Riverside Japanese-American Christian Conference', n.d., both in WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Japanese Delegation, Papers.

[116]'Crossroads Conference', n.d., WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Japanese Delegation, Papers.

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Japan, Kagawa Toyohiko sent a letter and a gift to the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt, but nothing came of it. Upon his return to Japan, Kagawa attempted to utilize his Christian internationalist networks to reach out to American officials and other political and church leaders back in the United States, primarily through his friend, the prominent missionary E. Stanley Jones, who was a close adviser to Roosevelt.[117] Jones was able to secure an audience with the president in early December 1941; however, just a few days later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, marking the beginning of the war in the Pacific. The Second World War and its consequences in the Pacific theatre significantly impeded Protestant internationalist exchange, but could not halt it completely. Kagawa undertook individual trips to India in 1942 and (occupied) China in 1944.

In late 1944 and early 1945, Augustine Ralla Ram was part of an Indian Mission of Fellowship invited by the Presbyterian Church to visit the United States. Ralla Ram had intensified his ties to the United States during the ongoing war, when many American airmen were stationed in Ralla Ram's hometown of Allahabad and Ralla Ram was part of an 'East-West Association'.[118] In the run-up to the Mission of Fellowship, the British-Indian authorities had reservations about issuing Ralla a visa for the United States. Ralla Ram was known to the authorities for his 'anti-imperialist views and his pro-[Indian-National-]Congress sympathies',[119] not least since his subversive activities during the Fellowship of Friendship to Great Britain 12 years earlier. As Ralla Ram told John R. Mott in 1941, he had a vision of a '[post-war] world order in which nations together will establish a brotherhood in which there will be no suggestions of a governing nation and a subject nation'.[120] However, John B. Weir, secretary of the India Council of the American Presbyterian Church, assured the British-Indian authorities that Ralla Ram had been advised to refrain from political activities while in the United States and that he had 'under pressure from [the India Council] accepted this special appointment as entirely a religious mission' and would 'observe scrupulously the terms of [the] understanding'.[121] Like a decade earlier in Great Britain, however, Ralla Ram hardly felt bound to these instructions once he was in the United States. The political future of India was a recurring topic in his talks, and Ralla Ram's American audiences were indeed 'impressed with his capacity to interpret the significance of Christian impact upon the problem of Indian independence'.[122] Unlike in Great Britain, there was not much initiative from the delegation's organizers to contain Ralla Ram's nationalist expressions. The Indian struggle for political freedom—often

[117]Kagawa's last efforts for peace in 1941 are detailed in Bo Tao, 'The Peacemaking Efforts of a Reverse Missionary: Toyohiko Kagawa before Pearl Harbor', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2013, pp. 171–176.

[118]Scovel, *I Must Speak*, p. 37; cf. A. Ralla Ram to John R. Mott, 22 May 1941, YDL/RG 45/72/1328.

[119]'Note on Reverend Augustine Ralla Ram, General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement in India, Burma and Ceylon', in National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI), Government of India/Home Department/Political (I) Section/File No. 69/44-Poll (I), available at https://www.abhilekh-patal.in, Identifier: PR_000003014878 [accessed 22 May 2025].

[120]A. Ralla Ram to John R. Mott, 19 April 1941, YDL/RG 45/72/1328.

[121]John B. Weir to F. C. Smith, Secretary, Home Department, Government of India, 29 July 1944, NAI/Government of India/Home Department/Political (I) Section/File No. 69/44-Poll (I), available at https://www.abhilekh-patal.in, Identifier: PR_000003014878, [accessed 22 May 2025].

[122]Marion V. Royce to Helen Morton, 2 March 1945, WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

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compared with the United States' own road to independence—had many sympathizers in the United States, among both the general audience and the missionary and internationalist milieu.[123]

Similarly to Kagawa, Ralla Ram sought to make his case heard through official diplomatic channels, too. He planned to meet Edward Wood, the first Earl of Halifax, former viceroy of India (1926–1931) and now British ambassador in the United States, during his stay in the country. Ralla Ram had previously met Wood in 1932, when he was part of the Mission of Fellowship. He hoped to host a public event that would have Wood as well as the prominent Indian diplomat Girija Shankar Bajpai in attendance. Eventually, Ralla Ram's plans resulted in 'only' having an interview with the ambassador. In his talk with Wood, the Indian Christian assured him that India did not seek 'rabid nationalism and isolationism but brotherhood and fellowship of nations' and was hoping for 'a special British and Indian alliance in a Brotherhood of Nationals with all empire ideologies eliminated'.[124] As reported by Ralla Ram, Wood expressed sympathy with the Indian nationalist's concerns but could not commit himself more concretely.[125]

In April 1945, while touring the United States, Ralla Ram received a letter from his WSCF colleague Helen Morton who had been surprised by the sudden appearance of T. Z. Koo in the United States. Morton jokingly speculated that Koo might have asked Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek himself for speedy transportation to the United States.[126] In fact, this was not too far from the truth. In late 1941, Koo had intended to travel to the United States, but after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor he was stranded first in Hong Kong and later in Shanghai. He was prevented from travelling between 1942 and 1944, but eventually managed to reach the (unoccupied) interior of China and Chongqing, where the Republic of China had its provisional capital during the war.[127] In 1945, Koo was selected as an adviser to the Chinese delegation to the United Nations Conference on International Organization, which convened between April and June in San Francisco. Already by the 1930s, Koo had received (and declined) offers to work with the Kuomintang authorities, for example as a secretary for Kai-Shek or on the staff of the social-reformist New Life Movement.[128]

Koo and Augustine received much positive attention in the United States. Koo, who in his capacity as a WSCF official visited various conferences and college campuses after the United Nations Conference, was lauded as 'a world citizen' who would 'interpret [...] the Christian message with the practical directness of the West, the wealth of Oriental insight, [and] the outlook of world statesmanship'.[129] Ralla Ram was conferred

[123]Nico Slate, *Lord Cornwallis Is Dead: The Struggle for Democracy in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019). On missionary and Christian internationalist anti-imperialism in general, see Thompson, *For God and Globe*.

[124]A. Ralla Ram to Lord Halifax, 26 January 1945, WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

[125]Cited in Scovel, *I Must Speak*, p. 39.

[126]Helen Morton to Frances Paton, 28 March 1945, WCC/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

[127]T. Z. Koo, 'The Fellowship of the Federation', *The Student World*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1945, pp. 180–182, reprinted in Elisabeth Adler (ed.), *Memoirs and Diaries: The World Student Christian Federation, 1895–1990* (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, 1994), pp. 67–70.

[128]Hall, *T. Z. Koo*, p. 23. On the New Life Movement, see Federica Ferlanti, 'The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 5, 2010, pp. 961–1000; Reilly, *Saving the Nation*, pp. 79f.

[129]'T. Z. Koo', informational leaflet, WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/6.

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with an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from the College of Wooster in Ohio.[130] The positive reception must have left an impression on him. In April, he approached his colleagues in the United States, informing them that he had felt a 'divine call' to leave the Indian Student Christian Movement and pursue a new assignment 'which [would] keep him shuttling between the Orient and Occident [...] as an ambassador of the Christian enterprise',[131] dividing his time between the United States and India.[132]

Only a couple of months later, still in the United States, Ralla Ram had another 'vision'. On 15 August 1945, the Japanese emperor Hirohito had announced Japan's surrender, thereby bringing the war in the Pacific to a conclusion. During the war, Ralla Ram had continued to criticize the Japanese advances in East Asia, frequently invoking Japanese imperialism as a rhetorical means to critique British colonial rule in India. He had urged 'treat[ing] all empire ideologies as a menace to the peace of the world', seeing not much difference between allegedly 'benign' empires such as the British and the Axis powers.[133] Now that the war had abruptly ended, Ralla Ram, as he told his friends in the United States, was overcome by an urgency to travel to Japan and take a first step towards reconciliation with his 'Japanese brothers'. The idea was met with approval by his American WSCF and missionary contacts, who considered it 'a God-given opportunity to take first steps toward Christian reconciliation'.[134] In the end, however, due in part to Ralla Ram's own travel schedule, it did not materialize and it was not Ralla Ram, who travelled to post-war Japan in an 'official' capacity as a Christian diplomat, but an American delegation.

Shortly after the Japanese declaration of surrender, the American secretaries of the IMC again took up the matter of sending a Christian delegation to Japan.[135] American church and missionary leaders were encouraged by a speech delivered by Toda Tsunetaro, the head of the Cultural Department of the All Japan Religious Association. In a radio broadcast, Toda had welcomed an American Christian deputation to Japan.[136] The proposal was further discussed by the so-called Riverside Fellowship which had formed in the aftermath of the 1941 Japanese delegation to the United States. Its members approached George Atcheson, who was serving as a political adviser to General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers during the American occupation of Japan, as well as Russell Durgin, a former YMCA secretary in Japan and now part of Atcheson's staff.[137] The Riverside Fellowship was

[130]Scovel, *I Must Speak*, p. 41.

[131]R. H. Edwin Espy to Robert Mackie et al., 1 May 1945, WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

[132]A. Ralla Ram to Robert Mackie, 14 May 1945; A. Roland Elliott to R.H. Edwin Espy, 26 April 1945, both WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

[133]A. Ralla Ram to Arthur A. Davies, 21 July 1943, extract, NAI/Government of India/Home Department/Political (I) Section/File No. 69/44-Poll (I), available at https://www.abhilekh-patal.in, Identifier: PR_000003014878, [accessed 22 May 2025].

[134]Claire Weaver, Michael Pratt, Mabel Wilson to Robert Mackie and Charles T. Leber, 19 August 1945; cf. various signatories to Mackie and Leber, 27 August 1945, both in WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

[135]Max Warren to Norman Goodall, 22 August 1945; J. W. Decker to Goodall, 27 August 1945; Decker to E. K. Higdon, 27 August 1945, all in WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan Post War Approach, Correspondence.

[136]Extracts from the speech in English can be found in in WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan Post War Approach, Correspondence.

[137]J. W. Decker to George Atcheson, 3 October 1945; J. W. Decker to Rajah B. Manikam, 23 October 1945, both in WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan Post War Approach, Correspondence.

even able to obtain a letter of endorsement from President Harry S. Truman in support of the plan.[138] Eventually, General MacArthur granted his approval, and the delegation became the first American civilian, non-military delegation to visit post-war Japan. Indeed, MacArthur was fully supportive of the plans as he was 'convinced—and urgently convinced—that a glorious opportunity at the moment present[ed] itself for the Christian missionary enterprise in Japan'.[139] MacArthur's support for the delegation was only one of numerous initiatives meant to encourage the Christianization of Japan that the general supported and himself initiated during the American occupation of the country.[140] For IMC chairman James C. Baker, MacArthur was 'a gift of God to Japan and the world'.[141]

A arrangements committee selected the delegation, which consisted of four American high-profile church and missionary leaders, representing the IMC, the WCC, the (American) Federal Council of Churches, as well as the Foreign Missions Conference of North America. Earlier plans to include British and Chinese members were abandoned in order to facilitate a timely visit. The delegation departed in October and travelled through Japan on a tight itinerary, culminating in an audience with the Japanese emperor.[142] Some members of the delegation additionally undertook a visit to Korea. Initially, the committee had decided against a Korea visit, as it considered it politically too sensitive. However, it was General MacArthur and John R. Hodge, commanding general of the United States Army Forces in Korea, who urged the delegation to include Korea in their itinerary.[143]

The delegation and its reception back in the United States provided an opportunity to re-evaluate the stance and role of Kagawa Toyohiko during the Second World War.[144] Despite his ostensible support of Japanese imperialism and its war campaigns, Kagawa himself had endured much hardship during the war. As the delegates reported, Kagawa was in a state of poor health when they met him.[145] While most parts of the Protestant

[138]'Minutes of a Meeting of Members of the Riverside Fellowship, Hotel Parkside', 15 October 1945, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Post War Visits to Japan 1945, Papers.

[139]Letter to Norman Goodall, 26 February 1946, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Post War Deputation to Japan 1945, Corresp. after Visit.

[140]Ray A. Moore, *Soldier of God: MacArthur's Attempt to Christianize Japan* (Portland: MerwinAsia, 2011).

[141]'Informal notes: Message from Japan; being a report from the deputation that went to Japan, October 1945', presented at an open meeting of the Japan Committee, FMC, 27 November 1945, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Post War Visits to Japan 1945, Papers.

[142]An overview on the visit can be found in Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and Foreign Missions Conference of North America, *The Return to Japan: Report of the Christian Deputation to Japan, October–November, 1945* (New York: Friendship Press, 1945).

[143]'Minutes of a Meeting of Members of the Riverside Fellowship, Hotel Parkside, 15 October 1945' WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Post War Visits to Japan 1945, Papers; D. B. Gibson to Stanley H. Dixon, 23 November 1945, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Post War Deputation to Japan 1945, Corresp. after Visit; Douglas Horton to A. L. Warnshuis, 28 October 1945, WCCA/IMC/26.5.104/Japan, Post War Approach, Correspondence.

[144]For example, the widely circulated article by Richard T. Baker, 'Kagawa's Wartime Stand', 1946, WCCA/IMC/26.5.103/Kagawa's War Time Stand; or L. S. Albright, 'What is Kagawa Doing? An Analysis of What is Actually Known', 16 June 1945, WCCA/IMC/26.5.103/Japan, Kagawa Correspondence regarding 1941–1950.

[145]Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and Foreign Missions Conference of North America, *The Return to Japan*, pp. 10f.

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internationalist milieu still supported Kagawa, the war had left a stain on his reputation. After 1945, there were rumours in the United States that his 1941 visit had been orchestrated by the Japanese government and that Kagawa had travelled to the United States as a spy.[146] Others countered that while Kagawa undoubtedly had supported the war effort, so had almost all other Japanese Christians. Kagawa's support, however, had been comparatively cautious and since the end of the war, he was 'on the side of the angels'.[147] Kagawa eventually returned to the United States in 1950, where he still had many friends and supporters and was warmly welcomed.[148] Kagawa's swift rehabilitation was part of a broader reintegration of defeated Japan into the post-war order which was facilitated by significant transformations in Asia, by 'anti-colonial, nationalist and pan-Asian movements, the demise of European empires, the Chinese Communist Revolution and the onset of the Cold War'.[149]

Epilogue: Protestant internationalism and the early Cold War

With the advent of the Cold War in the late 1940s, the framework defining Christian internationalist fault lines changed. Communism and one's positioning in the Cold War slowly became the pivotal ideological factors that structured many post-Second World War debates in Protestant internationalism.[150] Illustrative of this are the circumstances surrounding the East Asia Christian Conference held by the WCC in December 1949. The conference made international headlines because it was heavily attacked by the American Christian fundamentalist and evangelical Carl McIntire.[151] McIntire was a vocal opponent of the theologically liberal WCC, and in Bangkok, he targeted mainly the Chinese T. C. (Tzu-ch'en) Chao, dean of Yenching University and one of the six presidents of the WCC, whom he accused of being a communist.[152]

In 1945—a few months before the Japanese surrender—Augustine Ralla Ram had prognosticated in his message to Lord Halifax that Japanese imperialism would soon become a thing of the past, and he forecasted that India and China would take up future leadership in Asia.[153] After the Second World War, Ralla Ram worked on Indo-Chinese relations. In 1947, he was part of a small Indian Christian Mission of Fellowship to

[146]E. Gilbert Forbes to R. A. Doan, n.d.; Doan to Walter Van Kirk, 30 April 1947; L. S. Albright to Doan, 7 May 1947, all in WCCA/IMC/26.5.103/Japan, Kagawa Correspondence regarding 1941–1950. On the various accusations towards Kagawa, cf. Schildgen, *Toyohiko Kagawa*, pp. 256–260.

[147]J. W. Decker to Norman Goodall, 17 January 1950, WCCA/IMC/26.5.103/Kagawa's War Time Stand.

[148]Tao, 'Imperial Pacifism', pp. 363–369.

[149]Daniel Clayton and Hannah Fitzpatrick, 'Countenancing and Conferencing Japan at the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1945–54', in Legg et al., *Placing Internationalism*, pp. 178–196, here 178.

[150]On the Protestant internationalist and ecumenical movement's relationship with communism, cf. Gene Zubovich, 'The Protestant Search for "the Universal Christian Community" between Decolonization and Communism', *Religions*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2017, p. 17; Reynolds, 'From Christian Anti-Imperialism to Postcolonial Christianity'.

[151]An overview of the events can be found in Thoburn T. Brumbaugh, 'Report on the East Asia Christian Conference', Annual Meeting of the FMCNA, 11 January 1950, WCCA/IMC/26.5.005/Eastern Asia Christian Conference; Bangkok December 4–11, 1949, Reports.

[152]McIntire published his collected attacks on the conference (previously printed in his newspaper *The Christian Beacon*) as Carl McIntire, *The Battle of Bangkok: Second Missionary Journey* (Collingswood: Christian Beacon Press, 1950).

[153]A. Ralla Ram to Lord Halifax, 26 January 1945, WCCA/WSCF/213.12.46/4.

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China. However, border disputes between China and India, which sprung up shortly after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, complicated the evolving relations between the two now-independent Asian powers.[154] The victory of the communists in the Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the PRC affected not only global and Asian politics in general, but Protestant internationalist exchanges in particular.

In summer 1955, the National Christian Council of India approached the Government of India and asked whether they would favour sending a 'Mission of Fellowship' to China, and whether the government would render assistance in approaching the Chinese authorities. While the Indian officials expressed their general support for the exchange between India and China, they refrained from officially sponsoring or encouraging the delegation. As Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself noted, at best the only support they could render might be an informal exchange with the Chinese ambassador in Delhi.[155] The Indian government was reluctant to take any action that might antagonize their Chinese counterparts. A source of concern for the Indian officials was the NCCI's affiliation with the Anglo-American missionary movement. In contrast to its predecessor, the nationalist Kuomintang government, the new regime of the PRC was opposed to any form of foreign influence and, in particular, targeted Western Christian missionaries after 1949. In 1954, the PRC established the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM; advocating the principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation) as the official supervisory body of Chinese Protestantism.[156] As observed in 1956 in *Tian Feng*, the mouthpiece of the TSPM, by the 1950s 'missionary work [was] regarded only as one of the supplementary ways for putting current American world policy into practice'.[157] Referring to India's own difficult relationship with Pakistan, Indian officials acknowledged the 'Chinese sense of insecurity towards these seemingly harmless tentacles of the west',[158] as they confirmed their intention to refrain from any involvement in the delegation. While in 1945 the British-Indian government's reservations regarding Ralla Ram's trip to the United States had been based on the latter's anti-imperialist stance, it was the Indian Christians' ties to the 'imperialist' Western missionary movement that made the government of the post-colonial, secular Republic of India wary of an official sponsorship of a Christian delegation to China.

[154]On the transitional period in Indo-Japanese relations around and after the foundation of the PRC, see Madhavi Thampi, 'Window on a Changing China', *China Report*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2014, pp. 203–214; Shalini Saksena, 'Indian Perceptions of the Emergence of the People's Republic of China', in *India and China in the Colonial World*, (ed.) Thampi, pp. 199–223. Cf. Sen, *India, China, and the World*, pp. 348–372.

[155]Note by J. Nehru, 10 August 1955, NAI/External Affairs/F.E.A./File No. 1(50)-FEA/55, available at: https://www.abhilekh-patal.in, Identifier: PR_000001614978, [accessed 22 May 2025].

[156]Reilly, *Saving the Nation*, pp. 199–204; Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Chapter 7: 'Christianity and the New China, 1950–1966'; Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990).

[157]'Colonialism and Missions in China', draft, July 1956, Editorial Office, Tien Feng Magazine, NCC, Shanghai, WCCA/IMC/26.5.036/China Research Dept. 1949–1952 Papers.

[158]Note by A. J. Kidwei, 8 August 1955, NAI/External Affairs/F.E.A./File No. 1(50)-FEA/55, available at: https://www.abhilekh-patal.in, Identifier: PR_000001614978, [accessed 22 May 2025].

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Eventually, it was only Rajah B. Manikam, joint secretary for East Asia of the IMC and the WCC, who in early 1956 travelled from India to China at the invitation of the Union Theological in Nanjing and Beijing. Manikam met with Chinese church leaders as well as Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to whom Manikam suggested sending a delegation of Chinese Christians to visit India in return. Zhou Enlai and the church leaders welcomed the invitation from India.[159] However, they had a problem with the fact that the invitation was backed by the WCC and the IMC—organizations they now equated with 'ecclesiastical colonialism'.[160] Ironically, considering the controversies around the Bangkok conference a few years earlier, the main point of the Chinese criticism directed at the WCC was the latter's alleged anti-communist stance.

Conclusion

The post-Second World War era saw significant shifts in Protestant internationalism. New topics emerged, its organizational centres shifted, and its leadership changed. T. Z. Koo had settled down in the United States in 1945 and became a visiting professor teaching 'Oriental studies' at various American universities. Augustine Ralla Ram retired from the SCA of India, Burma, and Ceylon in 1947, and Kagawa Toyohiko had to slow down his activities when his health significantly deteriorated in the 1950s, before passing away in 1960.

For several decades, the three Christian activists had shaped Protestant internationalist networks and debates in and on Asia. As an Indian official noted in 1955, many Asian Protestant internationalists shared at least partially an 'Anglo-American orientation [in] their training and outlook'.[161] Nevertheless, Koo, Ralla Ram, and Kagawa—and many other Asian Protestant internationalists—pursued their own agenda in trying to reconcile their internationalist and nationalist interests during a period of significant political transformations in South and East Asia. The main question that haunted the Protestant internationalist travellers was: how much politics could Christian fellowship endure? Koo, Ralla Ram, Kagawa, and other Asian internationalists found different answers to this question, but all made ready use of their networks to pursue and express their visions.

The different Christian internationalist organizations in which they operated offered different frameworks and opportunities. The YMCA, with its early and strong focus on local, Asian secretaries, was the pioneering and most active and politically motivated organization in promoting internationalism, while the smaller WSCF was less able to organize large conferences, but facilitated more specific diplomatic exchanges through its close and personal network and the work of its highly committed secretaries. The IMC had a more reserved role. Having to accommodate its associated mission boards in Europe and North America, it pursued a more sanitized,

[159]'Interview by R. B. Manikam with Chou Enlai, Beijing', 27 March 1956; interview by Manikam with Chinese church leaders, Beijing, 17 February 1956, both in WCCA/IMC/26.5.036/China Research Dept. 1949–1952 Papers.

[160]Term used by Kiang Wen-Han, interview by Manikam with Chinese church leaders, Beijing, 17 February 1956.

[161]Note by A. J. Kidwei, 8 August 1955, NAI/External Affairs/F.E.A./File No. 1(50)-FEA/55, available at: https://www.abhilekh-patal.in, Identifier: PR_000001614978, [accessed 22 May 2025].

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apolitical but often still evangelism-oriented form of Protestant internationalism, though it could not entirely escape the political debates that drove many of its various associates. Rather difficult was the situation for the various national associations, such as the National Christian councils or the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, which were more closely tied to and guided by the specific political developments and sentiments in their countries, as we have seen, especially in the case of Japan.

It was their internationalist outlook and activities that afforded activists like Kagawa their prominence among Western and American audiences. A large part of their success was due to their charisma and personality, which made them highly sought-after speakers at conferences and workshops, and provided them with opportunities, resources, and a global range of movement that may have not been available to many of their non-Christian compatriots.[162] As has been recently argued, in the 1920s and 1930s the international conference became 'the defining arena of modern internationalism [...] because it was simultaneously a space of scientific analysis and a forum for political action, a place where internationalism was both studied and implemented'.[163] Conferences, along with other internationalist networks and opportunities for exchange, were significantly driven by personalities and personal relations.[164] As we have seen, the lines between friendship, solidarity, and conflict were thin in the 'cosmopolitan thought zone'[165] of Protestant internationalism. Personal exchanges were crucial in fostering transnational affinities that countered the often anonymous forces of nationalism and high politics.

Augustine Ralla Ram used his Christian networks to build anti-imperialist solidarity between India, China, and the United States. Backed by his leading role in both the WSCF and his work for the Indian church, he not only participated in but also organized delegations, associations, and meetings. Regularly praised for his oratorical skills and friendly personality, T. Z. Koo maintained an abiding hope in the reconciling potential of Christian fellowship and spent many years travelling and speaking, working both to gain sympathy for his country's struggle and to maintain lines of communication between warring nations. Kagawa Toyohiko, too, exerted his influence and vast personal connections in an effort to save, especially, Japanese-American relations, but eventually he could not resist the forces of Japanese ultranationalism and his work was tainted in the eyes of critics. Nationalism fuelled both rapprochement and division. Indeed, the changing geopolitical constellations and the internationalists' positioning within them and the socio-political development of their home country

[162]Cf. Guoqi Xu, 'Networking Through the Y: The Role of YMCA in China's Search for New National Identity and Internationalization', in *Networking the International System: Global Histories of International Organizations*, (ed.) Madeleine Herren (Berlin: Springer, 2014), pp. 133–147.

[163]Mike Heffernan et al., 'Toward a Historical Geography of International Conferencing', in Legg et al., *Placing Internationalism*, pp. 11–36, here p. 12.

[164]Stephen Legg, 'Political Lives at Sea: Working and Socialising To and From the India Round Table Conference in London, 1930–1932', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 68, 2020, pp. 21–32; Margaret Allen and Jane Haggis, 'Introduction to "The Cosmo-politics of Friendship in Imperial Contact Zones 1870–1950"', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2021; Jane Haggis et al. (eds), *Cosmopolitan Lives on the Cusp of Empire* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

[165]Cf. Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (eds), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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had a significant impact on Protestant networks. They forged inter-Asian and anti-imperialist alliances, as well as different interpretations of the future of Asia, which shifted between the 1920s and the 1950s, between early Wilsonian sentiments after the First World War and the new ideological divides of the early Cold War.

The dichotomy between loyalty to the nation and loyalty to the Christian world community was not only a dilemma for the Christian internationalists themselves, but also posed problems for governments and colonial authorities dealing with them, as we have seen in the cases of Ralla Ram and Kagawa. At the same time, the fact that Protestant internationalists had access to and interacted with political figures such as Chiang Kai-shek, Emperor Hirohito, King George V, Zhou Enlai, and Jawaharlal Nehru, shows that Protestant internationalism was not merely a marginal religious movement but rather had a significant influence and reached into the depths of contemporary Asian and global politics. Protestant internationalist diplomacy and its pacifist agenda must thus be read as part of a broader phenomenon of 'cultural internationalism'.[166] And while it could neither end British imperialism in India, nor halt the escalation of the Sino-Japanese conflict, or prevent the Pacific War during the Second World War, its persistence and transformation into the post-Second World War era serves to illustrate the complex relationship between the secular and the non-secular into much of the twentieth century.

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[166]Cf. Liping Bu, 'Cultural Understanding and World Peace: The Roles of Private Institutions in the Interwar Years', *Peace and Change*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1999, pp. 148–171; Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

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