CHRISTIANITY IN THE CONTEXT OF JAPANESE HISTORY

Christians have been active in Japan in two distinct periods. This diagram shows how they fit into the broader context of Japanese history. Christianity was not absent between the two periods; rather some practiced their faith in secret (*kakure Kirishitan*) during the intense persecution of the Edo period. This poster highlights some of the more notable events and people in the history of Japanese society and the Japanese church.

Ancient (Kodai) | **Medieval** (Chūsei) | **Early Modern** (Kinsei) | **Modern** (Kin-Gendai)

500 AD — 1000 AD — 1500 AD

- **Kofun** *(250–538)*
- **Asuka** *(538–710)*
- **Nara** *(710–794)*
- **Heian** *(794–1185)*
- **Kamakura** *(1185–1333)*
- **Muromachi** (Ashikaga shogunate) *(1333–1573)*
- **Azuchi-Momoyama** *(1573–1603)*
- **Edo** (Tokugawa shogunate) *(1603–1868)*
- **Meiji** *(1868–1912)*
- **Taishō** *(1912–1926)*
- **Shōwa** *(1926–1989)*
- **Heisei** *(1989–1019)*
- **Reiwa** *(2019–present)*

Nanbokuchō *(1336–1392)*

Warring States (Sengoku) *(1467–1573)*

Isolationist (Sakoku) *(1639–1853)*

Christian timeline #1

Christian timeline #2

538/552 Buddhism introduced from Korea

604 Prince Shōtoku's "Seventeen Article Constitution" promulgated

645 Taika reforms are introduced

710 Imperial court established at Nara, which becomes first permanent capital

794 Imperial court moves to Kyoto, starting the Heian era

1000-1008 Murasaki Shikibu writes *The Tale of Genji*

1016 Fujiwara Michinaga becomes regent, marking peak of Fujiwara power

1159 Taira (Heishi) clan takes power after Heiji war

1185 Minamoto clan ends Taira supremacy after five-year Genpei war

1192 Minamoto Yoritomo appointed shogun and establishes government in Kamakura

1221 Jōkyū disturbance establishes the supremacy of Hōjō regents in Kamakura over Kyoto

1274 Mongols' first attempt to invade Japan fails mainly due to typhoon

1281 Mongols' second attempt to invade Japan fails mainly due to typhoon

1333 Kamakura government falls

1333-1336 Kemmu Restoration, when Emperor Go-Daigo restores direct imperial rule

1336 Ashikaga Takauji captures Kyoto; Emperor flees to Southern court

1338 Ashikaga Takauji establishes Muromachi government and a second emperor in Kyoto (Northern court)

1392 Southern and Northern courts unified

1467 Ten-year Ōnin civil war starts, initiating Warring States Period

1542 First Europeans come to Japan from Portugal, introducing firearms and Christianity to Japan

1568 Oda Nobunaga enters Kyoto

1573 Muromachi government falls

1582 Oda Nobunaga is murdered and Toyotomi Hideyoshi succeeds him

1598 Toyotomi Hideyoshi dies

1600 Battle of Sekigahara. Forces loyal to Tokugawa Ieyasu prevail

1603 Tokugawa Ieyasu becomes shogun

1615 Toyotomi clan is destroyed after Tokugawa Ieyasu captures Osaka Castle

1639 Isolationist policies established that limit Japan's interaction with the rest of the world

1854 Shogunate opens up Japan to US trade after Perry's 'black ships' expedition

1868 Meiji Restoration, in which the emperor is restored to direct rule

1889 Mejii Constitution promulgated

1895 Japan defeats China after two-year Sino-Japanese war

1905 Japan defeats Russia after two-year Russo-Japanese war

1910 Japan annexes Korea

1912 Emperor Meiji dies

1923 Great Kanto Earthquake devastates Tokyo and Yokohama. About 140,000 deaths

1931 Japan annexes Manchuria

1937 Second Sino-Japanese war starts

1941 Pacific War starts

1945 Japan surrenders after atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

1947 Japan adopts new constitution

1952 Allied occupation of Japan ends

1964 Tokyo Olympics

2019 Emperor Akihito abdicates and is succeeded by his eldest son, Naruhito

2020-2022 Government-declared state of emergency due to COVID-19

2021 Tokyo Olympics held after one year postponement

1992 Bubble economy bursts

1995 Great Hanshin earthquake causes devastation in Kobe, killing about 6,400 people

1995 Sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway, perpetrated by members of the Aum Shinrikyo cult

2011 3/11 Triple Disaster: Great East Japan Earthquake, devastating tsunami, and meltdown of the First Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant. About 20,000 deaths.

Christian timeline #1

Key Christian people

1500 — 1600 — 1700

1506–1552 **Francisco Xavier** First Jesuit missionary in Japan

1533-1587 **Ōmura Sumitada** First daimyo lord to convert to Christianity

1552-1615 **Justo Takayama Ukon** A Christian daimyo who reliqueshed his samurai status and was exiled to the Philippines

1621-1638 **Amakusa Shirō** Christian who led the Shimabara Rebellion when he was 16 years old

1549 → Francisco Xavier, Portuguese Jesuit, arrives in Japan

1585 → A mission of four Japanese youths sent by Daimyo Ōmura in Kyushu meets Pope Gregory XIII in Rome

1587 → Toyotomi Hideyoshi issues edict banning foreign missionaries

1597 → Toyotomi Hideyoshi crucifies six foreign missionaries and 20 Japanese Christians in Nagasaki

1612 → Edo shogunate issues an anti-Christian edict, forbidding propagation of the faith and ordering churches to be destroyed

1614 → Tokugawa shogunate bans Christianity and promulgates harsh persecution resulting in many martyrs

1638 → Rebellion at Shimabara in Kyushu ruthlessly quashed by Tokugawa shogunate. The rebellion involved many Christians

Christian timeline #2

Key Christian people

1800 — 1900 — 2000

1843–1890 **Joseph Hardy Neesima (Niijima)** Missionary and educator of the Meiji era who founded Doshisha English School

1861–1930 **Uchimura Kanzō** Author, Christian evangelist, and the founder of the Non-Church Movement

1862–1933 **Nitobe Inazō** Agronomist, educator and author of *Bushido, the Soul of Japan*.

1900–1986 **Sugihara Chiune** Diplomat who saved thousands of Lithuanian Jews by issuing transit visas

1922–1999 **Miura Ayako** Prolific Christian novelist

1923–1996 **Endō Shūsaku** Roman Catholic author famous for his novel *Silence*

1936– **Yokota Sakie** Mother of Megumi, who was abducted by North Korea in 1977

1946–2019 **Nakamura Tetsu** Physician who was engaged in humanitarian work in Afghanistan when he was shot dead

1859 → First Protestant missionaries arrive

1865 → Japanese 'hidden Christians' declare their faith at Nagasaki's Oura Church

1873 → Government ban of Christianity lifted

1941 → Government orders Protestant denominations to merge

1946 → General MacArthur calls for 10,000 missionaries to come to Japan

1947 → Evangelical Missionary Association of Japan (EMAJ) founded (later became JEMA)

1949 → Many missionaries who were expelled from China come to Japan

1954 → First issue of *Japan Harvest* published

1956 → First Billy Graham crusade held in Japan

1967 → Second Billy Graham crusade held in Japan

1968 → Japan Evangelical Association (JEA) formed

1974 → First Japan Congress on Evangelism held

1979 → Tokyo Christian Institute (now TCU) forms through merger of three Christian schools

1993 → TCU receives government recognition

2011 → Many Christians help with relief efforts in Tohoku, mostly coordinated by CRASH Japan

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Christian dates mostly sourced from "A Timeline of Christianity in Japan," https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00597/a-timeline-of-christianity-in-japan.html (accessed April 27, 2023).
Please note that there is disagreement about some of the dates.