Amherst in the World

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Amherst graduates from 1909 onward will have seen the portrait of Niijima Jō hanging in Johnson Chapel. A gift from his graduating class of 1870, the portrait commemorates the first Japanese student to have graduated from a Western institution of higher education. It has also connected Amherst College to its sister institution in Kyoto, Dōshisha University. Founded by Niijima in 1875, the Dōshisha began with eight students, and today enrolls over thirty thousand students in fourteen undergraduate divisions and eighteen graduate programs. This does not include the separate Dōshisha Women’s College and twelve other secondary and primary schools. From its founding to this day, the Dōshisha has remained a Christian school in a way Amherst College has not.

In part, the Dōshisha returns us to the context of Amherst College’s early relationship to Christian missions. As Gary Kornblith and David W. Wills point out in this volume, Amherst produced a significant number of foreign missionaries during its first half-century. According to The Amherst Student in 1879, “A quarter of all the foreign missionaries sent out by the American Board are graduates of Amherst College.” Niijima Jō found his way to Amherst in part because of alumni like Elija Coleman Bridgman, the first missionary sent to China by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. (See K. Ian Shin’s chapter in this volume.) There he oversaw the translation of English-language books into Chinese, including his own Short Account of the United States of America, the very book that first sparked a young Niijima’s interest in the United States and Christianity.

The evident role Christian missions played in linking Niijima to Amherst College should not suggest, however, that he and the school he established in Japan were mere products of American missionary zeal. Rather, the fact that the Dōshisha maintains its Christian identity more clearly to this day than Amherst does tells us less about American Christian missions than it does about private higher education as it took shape in Meiji-era Japan (1868–1912). Niijima labored to introduce the liberal arts to Japan because he believed them to be vital for educating men and women capable of independent thought and guided by moral conscience. The avowedly Christian character of Niijima’s vision ensured that his
endeavor faced significant opposition in Japan, but it was precisely the distance and therefore independence that Christianity created between Dōshisha and state-sponsored forms of education that mattered to Niijima and his successors. The liberal arts sustained academic independence in Meiji-era Japan precisely because it was Christian, not in spite of it.

TO AMERICA

Arthur Hardy’s *The Life and Letters of Joseph Hardy Neesima* (1891) and Jerome Davis’s *A Sketch of the Life of Rev. Joseph Hardy Neesima* (1894) both provide vivid accounts, often in Niijima’s own hand, of his life. Rather than poorly imitate the oft-told story of Niijima’s dramatic decision to stow away on an American merchant ship in pursuit of Western education, the focus here is on the context that motivated Niijima to risk capital punishment and escape Japan in 1864. Niijima Shimeta was born in 1843, the eldest son of a retainer to the daimyo lord of Annaka and part of the 8 percent or so of the population that belonged to the samurai estate. He was ten when Commodore Matthew Perry and a squadron of American naval ships steamed into Edo Bay in 1853 to demand an end to the Tokugawa shogunate’s strict limitations on foreign contact. The so-called unequal treaties exchanged in 1858 between the shogun and Western powers opened a number of ports, including Yokohama, Nagasaki, and Hakodate granting extraterritoriality to foreign nationals. The West’s intimidating technological power and the ensuing influx of new information quickly cast doubt upon the viability of the two-and-a-half-century-old Tokugawa polity, organized around predominantly hereditary status distinctions and designed to resist any threat to stability.

Niijima belonged to a generation of young samurai galvanized by the apparent weakness of the Tokugawa shogunate. He and others like him sought knowledge about the wider world in order to reform and strengthen Japan against the threat of colonization. At the age of thirteen, Niijima took up *Rangaku*, or Dutch studies, and was reading texts on astronomy and physics in Dutch by age seventeen. When the shogunate opened its own naval academy, Niijima enrolled, spending time in the company of John Manjirō, a castaway who had been rescued by an American whaler, and spent his youth in Fairhaven before returning to Japan in 1851. In 1863, Niijima abandoned his study of Dutch in favor of English.

In his thirst for knowledge, Niijima encountered not only the Chinese translation of Bridgman’s *Short Account of the United States of America*, but also Christianity. Newly opened treaty ports facilitated a largely unregulated influx of information, including Christian evangelical literature. By one estimate, over eight hundred Christian titles written in Chinese made their way into Japan by 1867. Bridgman’s volume introduced the history of the United States, its Constitution, and social institutions, including public education and correctional institutions. Strikingly, the list of young samurai who read and were influenced by Bridgman’s *Short Account* is a veritable who’s who of late-Tokugawa activists. The proposition that all were created equal and therefore the United States rejected hereditary rule and elected its president crystalized Niijima’s frustration with the Tokugawa order,
especially his hereditary obligations to his daimyō—what he later referred to as “my prince’s square enclosure.” Even though breaking the proscription against foreign travel remained a capital offense, and leaving the service of one’s lord without leave was also punishable, Niijima chose to risk not only his own life but also the livelihood of his family in order to escape. He secreted himself, with the captain’s blessing, aboard an American merchant ship in Hakodate. By the time he arrived in Boston a year later, he had his English name, Joe, and had exchanged one of his two swords for a Chinese New Testament.

Niijima was not the only young samurai to study abroad. The Tokugawa shogunate sent students to the Netherlands in 1862, the domains of Satsuma and Chōshū each sent students to Britain between 1863 and 1865, and the new Meiji government sent significant numbers of students abroad after 1868. In each case, the students were expected to acquire the expertise to rapidly transform Japan’s institutions, economy, and, above all, military. These students received government funds in exchange for their loyalty and commitment to state priorities; they promised not to convert to Christianity and studied only the subjects identified by their superiors as priorities. Niijima, by contrast, struck out on his own and, though supported by benefactors in the United States, was completely independent of authorities in Japan. He studied what he wanted without answering to anyone back in Japan. Keenly aware of and proud of this distinction, Niijima would later draw on it to argue for the importance of private higher education in Japan.

Niijima reached Boston in July 1865, just three months after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. The ship’s owner, Alpheus Hardy and his wife, moved by Niijima’s letter in poor but fervent English declaring his desire for an education, decided to sponsor his education, first at Phillips Academy and then at Amherst College, where Hardy was a trustee. Niijima adopted the name Joseph Hardy Neesima. During his nearly two years at Phillips Academy, Niijima drank deeply from the well of Puritan pietism, even as it was about to fade in Gilded Age America. Phillips Academy reinforced this influence with its strict code of conduct, which prohibited playing cards, dancing, smoking, and even the reading of novels. Niijima was baptized in the chapel of Andover Theological Seminary on December 30, 1866.

Niijima deepened his close association of education with Christian spiritual formation during his time at Amherst College, beginning in the fall of 1867. Though focusing his studies on the sciences, Niijima was deeply influenced by Julius Seelye, then-professor of mental and moral philosophy and an ordained minister. Amherst had witnessed the last of its great Christian revivals in the academic year prior to Niijima’s matriculation, and the growth of one’s Christian faith was still emphasized on campus. Of the 247 students at the college during the 1868 to 1869 school year, eighty-nine were preparing for ministry and twenty-four were “looking forward to [the] mission field.” Niijima immediately joined the “missionary band.” The pietistic brand of Christianity that Niijima imbibed emphasized a moral individualism that would shape his subsequent educational vision. Texts like Brown University president Francis Wayland’s The Elements of Moral Science (1835) taught Niijima that “the individual and his intensions, rather than the group, bore the onus of social responsibility.” The fundamental purpose of education, therefore, was to shape the moral character of individuals so that they could serve the common good. Seelye summarized
this perspective in his response to a solicitation from the Japanese diplomatic representative in Washington, DC. Asked for advice regarding the best form of education a reforming Japan should adopt, Seelye wrote: "Indeed, morality will only spring from some sort of a religious inspiration, and, unless our schools and educational influences can be penetrated by a religious spirit, they will not make men virtuous, however extensive their culture."\textsuperscript{18} Niiijima, who suffered from frequent illness, spent a considerable amount of his time recuperating in the Seelye household, and counted Seelye as a lifelong mentor. Influenced by Seelye, among others, Niiijima came to individual self-reform through Christian education as the answer to the challenge of reforming Japan into a civilization capable of surviving as an independent nation.\textsuperscript{19} A merely technical education would not suffice.

TO A NEW JAPAN

A new oligarchic government, ruling in the name of a restored emperor, replaced the stifling Tokugawa polity that Niiijima had escaped following the so-called Meiji Renovation (\textit{Meiji Ishin}) of 1868. The new government declared its principal aims in April of that year with a five-article charter oath issued in the emperor's name:

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by open discussion.
2. All classes, high and low, shall be united in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall all be allowed to pursue their own calling so that there may be no discontent.
4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundation of imperial rule.\textsuperscript{20}

Though vague, the promise to dismantle the hereditary constraints on occupations, the rejection of "evil customs of the past," and the global pursuit of knowledge answered the frustrations of a generation of young samurai who had, like Niiijima, felt stymied by the old order. A tangible expression of the new government's willingness to radically reform Japan came in the form of the Iwakura Embassy in late 1871. Having successfully dismantled the last institutional vestiges of daimyo autonomy, the new government dispatched a full one-half of its leadership, accompanied by a large number of students, to the United States and Europe. The mission's firsthand observations of Western institutions and technologies shaped the direction of government reforms in Japan for a generation.\textsuperscript{21} The arrival of the Iwakura Embassy in the United States afforded Niiijima an opportunity to legalize his status as a Japanese subject and to forge close personal ties with the new political leadership. Niiijima aided the mission's investigation of Western systems of education. That experience, while valuable in itself, also foregrounded the distance between Niiijima's nascent
conception of a private Christian education and the vision of a centralized public education that the mission took away from its travels.

Having graduated from Amherst College with a bachelor of science degree in 1870, Niijima had commenced his seminary training at Andover when Mori Arinori, the Japanese chargé d’affaires in Washington, DC, summoned him to assist the Iwakura Embassy. While he complied, Niijima was intent on preserving his independence as a practicing Christian. The new government had formally inherited the Tokugawa-era proscription of Christianity within Japan, and the embassy met with considerable protest over the persecution of underground Catholics who had resurfaced in the Nagasaki region in the late 1850s.22 Japanese students sponsored by the government were required to promise not to convert to Christianity.

For Niijima, the ability to serve the higher moral cause of his faith was the goal of the independence and freedom, which mattered so much to him.23 His famous decision not to bow when introduced to Tanaka Fujimaro, the commissioner of education with the Iwakura Embassy, expressed his demand to be treated as an equal and free individual.24 During the year he spent accompanying Tanaka and the embassy, Niijima refused to travel on the sabbath and made no secret of his desire to evangelize in Japan.25 Even though they had formed a close working relationship, when Tanaka pressed him to abandon his theological studies and enter government service, Niijima firmly declined.26

Tanaka’s formal report on the education systems of the United States and Europe was written with Niijima’s assistance and shaped educational policy through the 1870s in Japan. Tanaka stressed the need for a practical and rational education, separated from religion and publicly controlled by the state. For example, Tanaka observed at the outset his general conclusion regarding the role of religion in education: “Countries that leave the method of education in the hands of commoners and priests (heimin sōryo), leaving the government outside of it, have lost the primary path to developing human knowledge, speeding the progress of civilization, and placing their country ahead of others.”27 Tanaka underscored the lesson that clergy impeded the proper purpose of education—advancing knowledge in the service of progress—by citing specific examples he observed in the United States and Europe. New England, for example, placed the administration of its schools in the hands of the government, thus progressing beyond the “shame of slavery.” British education, by contrast, had been held back by the dominance of the clergy and divisions based on sectarian affiliation. Hence, the 1870 education law introduced fundamental changes intended to strengthen nonclerical control over education.28 Niijima’s belief in a private Christian education would have to contend with this secularist approach to education.29

Having completed his service to the Iwakura embassy, Niijima Jō graduated from Andover Theological Seminar in 1874 and was ordained in the Congregational Church. He was also made a corresponding missionary with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, among the first and the largest Protestant mission organizations in the United States.30 The first hint that Niijima’s vision of Christian service in Japan would focus on education came at the American Board’s annual meeting in Rutland, Vermont, that year. Niijima wanted to ask for support in building a Christian school in Japan but was discouraged from doing so, even by Alpheus Hardy, his benefactor and a member of
the American Board. The board had long prioritized evangelism and the training of evangelists over broader educational enterprises. Niijima nonetheless persisted and made an impassioned appeal: “The church in Kobe has no educational institution, but she must have something of the kind. It is repulsive to the Japanese mind to beg, but I fear we must beg for that, for Christ says, ask and ye shall receive. Therefore I ask you to give help enough to start this training institution, to raise up teachers and preachers to help some 33,000,000 people.” Those in attendance were moved to pledge nearly $5,000 in support of Niijima’s school. An important ambiguity existed as to precisely what kind of school Niijima envisioned in his appeal; was it a liberal arts college on the model of Amherst College or closer to the evangelical training schools the American Board were accustomed to supporting? The gloss of his speech quoted above refers to a “training school,” which was the term the American Board would use until the late 1880s, indicating that the mission conceived of the school as an institution dedicated to training clergy and evangelists. Niijima would later claim that he envisioned something different, a school that harnessed Christianity in the service of a broader educational mission. The imprecision would create friction between Niijima and the American Board in the years ahead, but also created room for him to maneuver on the ground in Japan.

When Niijima landed in the treaty port of Kobe in late 1874, a little more than ten years after his illicit escape from Japan, he confronted two challenges. On the one hand, he would be introducing Christian education to a country with strong anti-Christian sentiments and a government intent on centralizing educational regulations. On the other hand, he would have to contend with the American Board and its missionaries, who did not share his vision for an expansive, and expensive, form of Christian liberal arts. Even though these challenges caused tremendous difficulties for Niijima, and certainly exacerbated his already poor health, one could argue that Niijima succeeded in laying the foundation for the Dōshisha by playing one off of the other.

TO KYOTO

To be clear, Niijima was a fervent evangelist as well as an educator, and the Congregational Church in Japan, the Kumiai Kyōkai, grew to be one of the largest Protestant denominations in Japan, in part through his efforts. He spent, for example, his first three weeks back in Japan visiting his parents in Annaka, Gunma Prefecture, on the northwest edge of the Kantō Plains, where he planted the seeds of what would become the Annaka Congregational Church and one of the most thoroughly evangelized regions in Japan. Open and direct evangelism was still difficult in the early 1870s, however. Although the government had ceased openly prohibiting Christianity in 1873, administrative and social resistance continued to frustrate missionary activities. Education provided one path for evangelism. Some missionaries accepted teaching posts in public educational institutions, relying on proximity to indirectly expose young students to Christianity. Other missionaries opened their own modest, private language schools to achieve the same ends. Niijima and his American Board colleagues attempted to do the same by opening a school in Ōsaka,
near the foreign settlement, but the governor refused to grant permission for fear of anti-Christian agitation. Kyoto, the former imperial capital, surfaced as an alternate location for the school when Niijima made the acquaintance of one Yamamoto Kakuma.

A man of considerable intellect, Yamamoto had risen to be a consultant to the governor of Kyoto, Uemura Masanao, despite having fought against the new government during the brief civil war that preceded the Meiji Renovation. A Chinese text on Christianity had drawn Yamamoto to Christianity and paved the way for his support of Niijima’s educational vision. Without Yamamoto, the Dōshisha would never have been founded, and it would not have been located in Kyoto. The combined influence of Yamamoto with Governor Uemura in Kyoto, and Niijima’s direct appeals to Tanaka, then serving in the Ministry of Education in Tokyo, ultimately secured the permission he needed to found a private English school in Kyoto, a center of Buddhist opposition to Christian evangelism.

Despite its distance from the legal security of the treaty ports, Kyoto promised Niijima and his missionary colleagues a base of operations in the cultural heart of Japan. Founded in 794, the ancient capital hosted head temples for most Buddhist sects as well as prominent Shinto shrines. The symbolic value of locating a Christian school there escaped no one. Consequently, resistance, overt and covert, was palpable, and receiving dispensation for American Board missionaries to reside in Kyoto as faculty of the new school proved tremendously difficult. Foreign citizens needed special permission to reside outside the treaty ports, and it took all of Yamamoto and Niijima’s combined influence with officials to finally secure permission for Jerome Davis and his family to reside in Kyoto. Legal restrictions on property ownership by foreign entities were circumvented by forming a holding company, named the Dōshisha, which means “the company of shared purpose,” with Niijima and Yamamoto as the nominal trustees. To this company, Yamamoto arranged the sale of 5.5 acres of land for $550. This land, formerly the grounds of the Kyoto estate of the lord of Satsuma and located adjacent to Sōkokuji, a major Rinzai Zen temple, stood in the heart of Kyoto, directly north of the former imperial palace grounds. The American Board, still skeptical about the viability of a training school in the old capital, did not immediately release funds to build on those grounds. Still, by the fall of 1875, Niijima and Davis were ready to open the Dōshisha English School in rented buildings.

The Dōshisha English School formally opened on November 9, 1875, with eight students (it would grow to forty students by the next spring). The school promised to teach a wide range of subjects, including English, Chinese studies, mathematics, surveying, geography, astronomy, physics, anatomy, chemistry, geology, world history, international law, economics, and ethics. From its inception, the school was caught between the American Board’s focus on Christian evangelism over education and the demands of government regulations. For example, when Niijima sought approval to hire two additional American Board missionaries as faculty for the school that year, the governor resisted, citing ongoing protests from Buddhists in the city. The governor relented only when Niijima promised that the school would not teach Christianity except “under the name of moral science.” Although the missionaries were to be allowed to preach in their private homes, the removal of Christianity from the curriculum of the school from the outset precipitated a crisis between Niijima and the American Board.
On the one hand, in the spring of 1876, the American Board missionaries voted to erect two buildings that combined the function of dormitory, classrooms, chapel, and library. But even when the buildings were complete, some missionaries still wanted to reject Niijima’s compromise with the governor, even if that meant being driven out of Kyoto altogether. Niijima weathered this storm by deciding to dedicate the new buildings with a Christian service in the chapel and to begin teaching theological courses, except for biblical exegesis, on campus. The deep trust that the American Board felt toward Niijima, who was nearly one of their own, allowed him to weather this and similar storms. That trust also endowed the Dōshisha with an important measure of independence from the board that meant the school was never fully a “mission school” under the control of foreign missionaries.

The arrival of a group of students in the fall of 1876 dramatically impacted the character and future direction of the Dōshisha and furthered its development of the Christian liberal arts. The so-called Kumamoto Band was a group of young men, almost all former samurai, who had studied under captain Leroy Lansing Janes, an American army veteran hired to teach at the Kumamoto Ōgakkō, a school created in 1871 to teach Western military science. Thirty-five students, drawn to Christianity by Janes’s moral discipline, famously climbed Mount Hanaoka on Sunday January 30, 1876, to hold a service and sign a declaration of their faith. This public act of Christian conversion led to the immediate closure of the Kumamoto school. Janes reached out to Davis to secure the students’ admission to the Dōshisha, where they could continue their education with their Christian faith preserved.

The significance of this influx of students for the future of Niijima’s school is difficult to exaggerate. Its members included four future presidents of the Dōshisha, future financiers and industrialists, educators, and prominent Protestant Christian leaders. Tokutomi Sohō is most famous for his long and prominent career as a journalist while Miyagawa Tsuneteru, Ebina Danjō, and Kozuki Hiromichi are counted among the founding fathers of the Congregational Church in Japan, and were prominent public intellectuals in their own right. The students were, however, less than impressed with the school that greeted them. Kozaki Hiromichi famously recalled their first impressions of the Dōshisha when they arrived:

The school consisted at that time of only two small houses, with no equipment to speak of, and, if the Ōgakkō boys and four or five others be excepted, the rest were all more or less transient students. With no fixed rules or regulations, without a fixed course of study, and with little order or discipline, the school was in a condition exactly similar to the old-time private schools for the study of Chinese. Among the students were found ex-policemen, blind masseurs, and many others with no preparatory education of any sort, who had flocked to the school through the introduction of missionaries. [As they formed the larger part of the students,] their disorderliness and irregularities were beyond imagination, and we who had been trained at the Ōgakkō where order was kept, could not help being surprised and disappointed.
Keenly independent and strong-willed, the young men of the Kumamoto Band took Janes’s admonition to heart to “make it the perfect place you desire,” and set about fashioning the Dōshisha in their image. They introduced strict rules, requiring all students to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and gambling. Mandatory chapel attendance was enforced. These standards emphasized self-regulation, equality, and independence among the students, ideals that Niijima shared but could not enforce by himself.

Improving the academic standards of the Dōshisha proved more challenging for the Kumamoto Band. They chafed at the low quality of instruction and frequently challenged the faculty in class, including Niijima. Tokutomi, who left the Dōshisha prior to graduation but maintained close ties to Niijima and the school, later observed that Niijima was a man of heart if not of intelligence. Theological instruction was a particular bone of contention. A course of theological studies was created separate from the English school to accommodate the Kumamoto Band’s interest in entering the ministry. They resented, however, the naïve, literalist interpretation of the Bible and the plain pietism taught by the American Board missionaries. The Kumamoto Band were more interested in liberal theological currents, especially higher criticism. This openness toward Unitarianism and the embrace of evolutionary theory created an important fault line separating many Japanese Christian leaders, including Kozaki Hiromichi and Ebina Danjō, from their missionary counterparts. It also brought into relief the diverging visions of Christian education at the Dōshisha. The Kumamoto Band amplified Niijima’s commitment to a broad educational institution by demanding a version of Christianity that was open to scholarly inquiry.

The Dōshisha bore the stamp of the Kumamoto Band by the time they graduated as its first class in 1879. Christian service had become a prominent element of campus life; traveling between school terms, members of the Kumamoto Band had planted a number of Congregational churches in Okayama, Nara, Hikone, Ōtsu, Osaka, and Annaka. The anniversary of the Kumamoto Band’s conversion on Mount Hanaoka was celebrated by the Dōshisha student body, at least until Niijima’s death. They had also collaborated with Niijima to establish a clear program of secular studies modeled after the Yōgakko. The first year was devoted solely to the study of English, and the following four years were given over to a balanced study of the sciences and humanities. Abe Isoo, later a prominent Christian socialist, recalls that when he arrived at the Dōshisha in 1879, its residential character distinguished the school from others in Japan. The one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty students lived a life strictly regimented by rules they voluntarily adopted. Classes were held in the mornings, five days a week. This allowed students significant amounts of independent study. Upper-classmen tutored the under-classmen, and Abe boasted that the level of English mastery among Dōshisha students was impressively high.

1879 also proved a pivotal year in redefining the relationship between the Dōshisha and the American Board. The new governor of Kyoto reported to the Ministry of Education in Tokyo that the school was not in fact under Niijima’s control, but was rather a thinly disguised front for a foreign mission. To deflect this threat, Niijima pressed the American Board in Boston for a permanent endowment that the Dōshisha would control. The board granted an annual appropriation of $8,000 directly to the school in November 1879, with
the stipulation that the funds be expended in consultation with the mission. In his letter to the Prudential Committee of the American Board explaining the need for this change, Niijima took the opportunity to lay out why the Dōshisha had also become something more than a training school for ministers and evangelists:

In this connection I must mention the standard of our school. Our people are making a bold strike in educational affairs. The government institutions of learning as well as some private schools are advancing above us. If we do not strive to improve we shall be left in lower strata of educational system, and fail to lay hold of the best class of students. Our good missionary friends have thus far tried to teach the Bible too much and neglected scientific teaching. Numbers of promising boys were much disappointed and have left us to go to the schools in Tokyo, where they will have no Christian influence.

The problem stemmed, in Niijima’s view, from too narrow a conception of what a Christian education should produce: “If I were in the place of Dr. Clark I should put all my effort in founding a strong Christian university in Japan, in order to raise up Christian ministers, Christian physicians, Christian statesmen, and even Christian merchants. Christians must not be charged with being ignoramuses, or we shall not get the respect of the people. We shall be ridiculed for our ignorance as well as for our faith.” Niijima echoed the Kumamoto Band’s frustrations, and his decision to hire three members of the graduating Kumamoto Band (Yamasaki Tamenori, Ichihara Morihiro, and Morita Kumando) as faculty marked a clear effort to strengthen the educational scope of the school.

SEEKING A UNIVERSITY

Aided in part by the influx of the Kumamoto Band and by its growing fiscal and curricular independence from the American Board, Niijima’s school entered the 1880s more confident in its vision to become a comprehensive Christian university built on a liberal arts foundation. Niijima’s efforts to turn the Dōshisha into a university began in earnest in 1882 and persisted until his untimely death in 1890. Room does not permit a thorough account of his efforts and the gradual evolution of his vision for a university. Crucially, Niijima appealed for support to a wide audience, not just Christians, repeatedly arguing that a private higher education based on Christian principles would benefit Japanese society as a whole. He organized local support in Kyoto, and traveled to Tokyo to appeal to elite politicians and industrialists. His appeal was aided, in part, by the government’s efforts through the 1880s to revise the unequal treaties. Elites in Tokyo calculated that publicly supporting a private Christian school would curry favor with the treaty powers.

The highwater mark of Niijima’s efforts was the publication of an appeal in November 1888. Carried in most major newspapers and magazines, the appeal summarized the history of the Dōshisha and laid out Niijima’s argument that a private university, voluntarily supported, was vital to educating individuals willing to and capable of serving the common good: “We do not believe that it is a good plan to leave the work of education entirely in the
Niijima Jō, the Dōshisha, and the Christian Liberal Arts in Meiji Japan

hands of the government. We ourselves as citizens are duty bound to educate our children, and we can accomplish this with greater thoroughness, energy, and economy, because we are carrying out our own ideas." Relying solely on the government to define the object and character of education, Niijima argued, betrayed "a spirit of indifference and lack of initiative," the opposite of the sense of independence and autonomy he sought when he escaped his hereditary obligations. Government education, he continued, focuses almost entirely on utility and not on developing the character of the student, with the result that students emerge with narrow competences and outlooks: "Their method is coercion and suppression rather than training up men of open mind, men of self-discipline who are free and independent, self-reliant, working out their own destiny." Out of this critique of state-controlled education comes Niijima's full-throated appeal for a Christian university in Japan: "Some may say that it is a scheme for propagating Christianity or for training evangelists. Such objections do not at all understand what we have in mind. Our aim is not so narrow. We are making Christianity the basis of our education because we believe that its principles alone have a vital power to mold the character of young men. And in addition to the theological course, already in operation, we plan to establish regular university courses in politics, economics, philosophy, literature, and law." Niijima had arrived at the mature definition of a Christian liberal arts in Japan, a definition that owed as much to his understanding of the dominance in Japan of state-controlled education as to his experiences in New England. His vision for a Christian education differed, on the one hand, significantly from what his missionary colleagues sought and, on the other hand, was openly critical of the ideological bent of state education.

The nearly incessant travel for fundraising rapidly undermined Niijima's already poor health, and he finally succumbed in January of 1890 at the age of forty-seven. His final wishes for the future of the Dōshisha were dictated from his deathbed:

1. The work of the Dōshisha will consist hereafter of three inseparable ideals; that is, moral education based upon the Christian religion, literary and political development of the nation, and scientific progress of the people.
2. The object of the Dōshisha will be in the teaching of theology, politics, literature, science, etc. Nevertheless, every endeavor should be used in the making of men who will be possessed of an energetic spirit and active force to be devoted to their country and who will love true liberty.
3. The members of the Dōshisha will treat the students with appropriate courtesy and consideration.
4. Students of a free and independent disposition shall not be restrained in their acts but guided in conformity with their original nature to the end that their character be fully developed.
5. With the growth of the institution there is a tendency of its turning into a machine. Serious care should be taken to guard against this.

Although a gift of $100,000 from Jonathan Harris of New London, Connecticut, promised in late 1888 for the purpose of creating a school of science at the Dōshisha, boosted
Niijima’s hopes for expanding his school into a university, the decade following his death was a difficult one for his successors and for the Dōshisha.68

Japan in the 1890s turned from relatively open and pragmatic approaches to education toward an increasingly nationalistic conservatism. With the Imperial Rescript on Education, issued just seven months after Niijima’s death, the state claimed control over moral education in the name of the emperor, and schools like the Dōshisha struggled to maintain their avowed dedication to a Christian education.69 The Japanese government constructed an educational system with imperial universities at the pinnacle, relegating private institutions of higher education to a vulnerable and supplemental role. Private schools came to depend on privileges conferred by the state, especially conscription deferrals, which rendered them vulnerable to ideological pressure. The need to compromise with those pressures would culminate in a substantial crisis in 1896, over the whether the Dōshisha would remove its commitment to a Christian education in article one of its constitution. The affair further divided the school from the American Board and led president Kozaki Hiromichi to resign.70 It was a painful reminder of the precariousness of private education, especially a Christian one, in an increasingly imperialistic Japan.

The question of when the Dōshisha realized Niijima’s original vision is difficult to answer. Its current status as a formally recognized private university dates from 1948, but it can be argued that the school moved toward its current shape through incremental recognition by the Japanese state in 1912 and 1920. The 1920s also marked the moment when Amherst College alumni ceased teaching at the Dōshisha as American Board missionaries. From James Jenkins in 1921 onward, Amherst College came to forge a more direct and secular connection with its sister institution in Japan. Student representatives were sent from 1922 onward, until John Whitney Hall returned in 1941. Those ties were renewed after the Second World War and continue to this day.71 Even as Amherst College and the Dōshisha forged new and stronger ties through the twentieth century, the Christian liberal arts have remained central to the Dōshisha mission and self-definition.

For over a decade, every graduating class of the Dōshisha Elementary School has visited Amherst College in June as the concluding piece of their six years of elementary education. Those students begin their weeklong stay in Amherst with a Christian service in Johnson Chapel. They pray, sing hymns, and listen to their school principal remind them of the founding ideals of Dōshisha—ideals that Niijima formed during his time at Amherst College. Long after Johnson Chapel ceased to be a place of regular Christian services, those who celebrate Niijima’s founding vision return to Amherst to consider what he meant by a Christian liberal arts education. While their visits may remind the college that Christianity was once central to the way it first engaged with the wider world, the students may find the significance of Niijima’s legacy closer to home.

Notes

1. Niijima’s names are rendered in a number of ways in the sources, owing to the shifting conventions of Romanizing the Japanese language and to Niijima’s own informal adoption of American names. American sources from the nineteenth century frequently identify him as Joseph Hardy Neesima, Hardy being the surname of his chief benefactor. For the sake of consistency, I will use the modern Japanese rendering of his name, Niijima Jō 新島襄. All Japanese names are rendered surname first, per convention.
2. Originally a holding company for foreign mission property, the Dōshisha, whose board of trustees govern Dōshisha University and all other affiliated schools, is conventionally written with the definite article.


7. Ueno, 31–32. These include Sakuma Shōzan, Yoshiida Shōin, and Yoko Shōnan.


11. You can read Niijima’s letter to the Hardys in Davis, Sketch, 3–10.


15. Kitagaki Muneharu, Niijima Jō to Āmosuto Daigaku (Kyoto: Yamaguchi shoten, 1993), 293.

16. Davis, Sketch, 75.


19. As Irwin Scheiner succinctly puts it, “secular and religious were identified; national aims became identical with the objective of the pious”; Scheiner, Christian Converts, 154.


23. Niijima reportedly worried that the Japanese government would offer to repay Alpheus Hardy for his educational expenses and wrote to Orilla H. Flint in March 1871 that he hoped Mr. Hardy would decline to be reimbursed; Nishida Takeshi, “Bushidō-teki kirisuto-sha’ Niijima Jō: Takahira Kogorō no Amāsuto enzetsu,” Kirisutokyō shakai mondai kenkyū, no. 55 (December 21, 2006): 37.


25. The records of Niijima’s time with the embassy are found in Niijima Jō zenshū, vol. 7 (Kyoto: Dōmyōsha, 1983), 37–86.

26. Davis, Sketch, 40.


29. Niijima would later summarize the lesson of his time with the Iwakura Embassy in the following way: "In addition came the belief that if my country desires to rival Western civilization, it must do more than imitate their external material culture; it must seek to attain to what is essential and fundamental in the West. As I pondered thus, I made a vow that on my return to Japan I would establish a private university and so do my best for the advancement of my country." Niijima Jō, The Founding of the Doshisha and Doshisha University. (Kyoto: Doshisha, 1960), 12–13.

30. Davis, Sketch, 40.

31. When missionary D. C. Greene sought permission from the board to engage in educational work, he was told: "You know well how strongly averse the Committee are to mere literary and education missions, and I am sure you will make the subject one of much thought and much prayer before you settle down in the belief that Christ sent you there not to preach the Gospel but to study, teach, and write books." Quoted in Paul V. Grisely, "The Dōshisha, 1875–1919: The Indigenization of an Institution" (EdD diss., Columbia University, 1973), 77.


34. For a recent study of Congregationalist Christianity in Japan centered in Annaka, see Emily Anderson, Christianity and Imperialism in Modern Japan (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

35. Maxey, Greatest Problem, 77–81.


41. Davis, Sketch, 57; Ueno, Dōshisha, vol. 1, 88–90.


43. Ueno, 93.


46. Hardy, Life and Letters, 207–12.

47. Of the thirty-five who signed the pledge on Mount Hanaoka, eighteen enrolled in Dōshisha.


50. Pierson, Tokutomi, 57.


52. Ueno, Dōshisha, vol. 1, 100.


54. Ueno, Dōshisha, vol. 1, 143.
55. Ueno, 149.
56. Pierson, Tokutomi, 57.
59. Hardy, 231, 233.
60. Hardy, 227–28.
61. Hardy, 228–29.
63. Itô Yahiko, Niijima zenshû wo yomu (Kyoto: Köyô shobô, 2002), 47–54.
64. Niijima, Founding, 19.