



Christianity and Copper Pollution: The Origins and Responses to the Ashio Copper Mine Incident

James Harry Morris, MTheol, PhD, FRAS
Waseda University
morrisjamesharry@gmail.com



A Brief History of the Ashio Copper Mine

- Transformed into a profitable facility by Furukawa Ichibei 古河市兵衛 (1832-1901) due to:
 1. Environmental factors.
 2. Technological innovation.
 3. Reformation of traditional labour systems.
- Ashio as a centre of technological innovation.
 - Transportation systems.
 - Electrification of mining.
 - Hydroelectric plants.
 - Western methodologies.

Increasing Production

Year	Furukawa's Total Production (Tons)	Ashio's Total Production (Tons)	Ashio's Production as a Percentage of Furukawa's Production	Furukawa's Production as Percentage of National Production	Percentage of Copper Exported from Japan
1882	737	132	17.9	13.1	49.4%
1883	1,671	637	38.7	24.7	-
1884	3,411	2,286	67	38.4	59.3
1885	5,250	4,090	77.9	49.8	-
1886	5,100	3,595	70.5	52.2	100.4
1887	4,455	2,987	67	40.3	-
1888	4,180	3,783	90.5	31.5	72.4
1889	5,999	4,839	80.7	36.9	-
1890	7,589	5,789	76.3	41.9	107.6
1891	7,681	7,547	98.3	40.4	-
1892	7,397	6,468	87.4	35.7	87.4
1893	6,928	5,165	74.6	38.5	-
1894	8,017	5,877	73.3	40.3	76.9
1895	6,587	4,898	74.4	34.5	-
1896	7,695	5,861	76.2	38.3	72.6
1897	7,964	5,298	66.5	39.1	-
1898	8,764	5,443	62.1	41.7	79.3
1899	9,191	5,763	62.7	37.9	-
1900	8,924	6,077	68.1	36.7	82

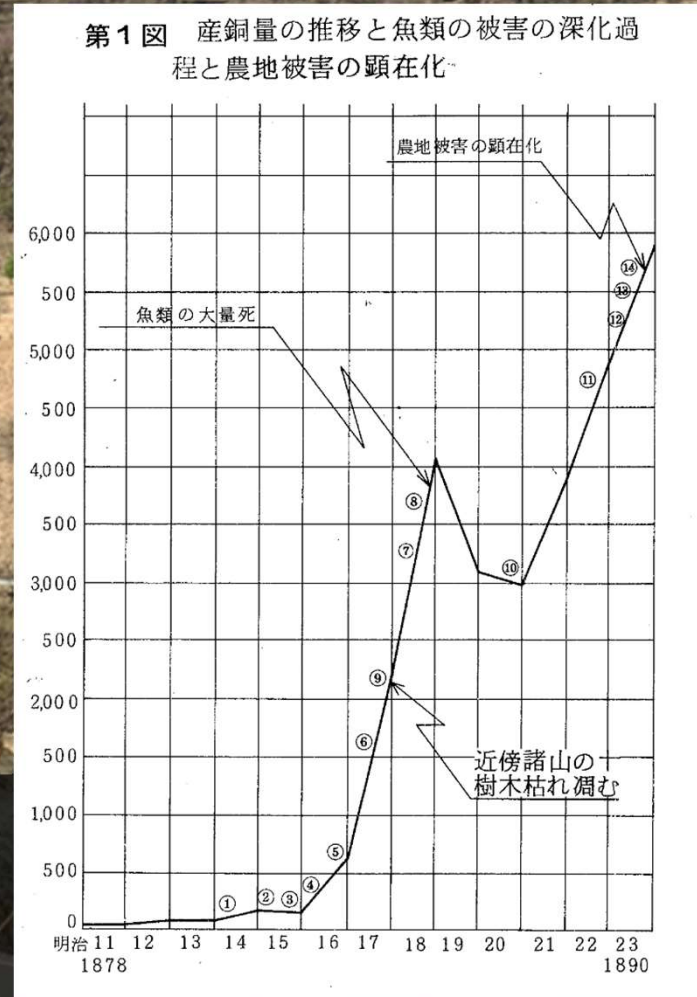


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The Ashio Copper Mine Incident





Water Pollution in the 1880s

- Appearance of dead fish on the Watarase and (*Watarasegawa* 渡良瀬川) and Tone (*Tonegawa* 利根川) rivers.
- Decline of fishing trade.
- Early linking of death of fish to pollution.
- Poor waste disposal practices.



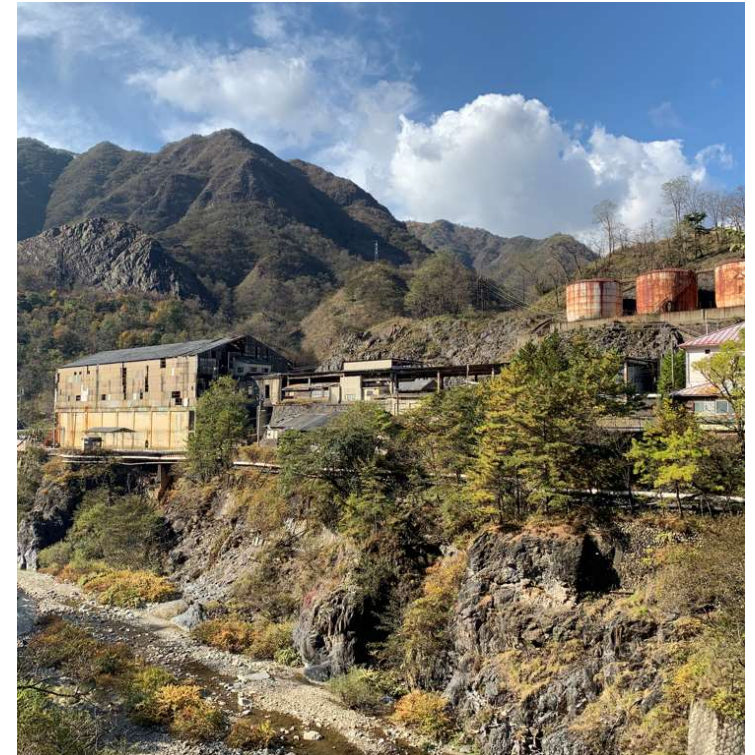
Floods of 1890

...it was as if the hand of death had passed over the land. Almost all vegetation touched by the flood waters shrivelled up and died. New seeds and seedlings planted in the affected land met the same fate. Not only would nothing grow, but men and women working in the affected fields soon developed sores on their feet and hands.

Notehelfer "Japan's First Pollution Incident," (1975), 363

Effects of Pollution

- Destruction of plant and animal life.
 - Riverside land in Ebise 海老瀬 village.
 - 1885-1889 an average yield of 207kg of barely, 162kg of wheat, 99kg of vegetables, 240kg of dyer's knotweed.
 - 1893 onwards – no yields of any crop.
 - Matsugi 松木 village.
 - No crop yeilds from 1900.
- Poverty.
 - Due to damage to field productivity.
- Health.
 - Malnourishment.
 - Decrase in fertility rates.
 - Infant mortality rates double those of non-polluted areas.
 - Breastfeeding issues.
 - High failure rate of military physical exams.
 - 69.29% failure for Aso 阿蘇 district applicants between 1887 to 1896 compared to 29.21% prefectural average.





1896 and 1897

- Floods in 1896 damaging:
 - 46,723 hectares.
 - 22,529 homes.
 - 23 Million Yen worth of damage (87 Billion 400 Million Yen today).
- Formation of protest movement with participation from prominent political and religious figures.
- Marches to Tokyo in March 1897.
- Government enquiry 1896.
- Government directives issued in December 1896, May 1897, 1901 and 1903 requiring action from Furukawa.



1900-1901

- Kawamata 川俣 Incident (February 13).
 - Re-emergence of Ashio's pollution within media.
- Suicide of Furukawa Tameko 古河為子 (November 30, 1901).
- Tanaka Shōzō's 田中正造 (1841-1913) attempt to directly appeal to the emperor (*Jikiso* 直訴) (December 10, 1901).
- Government decision to supplement directives and instate flood controls.



Thereafter

- Destruction of villages.
 - Yanaka 谷中 Village destroyed as part of flood control program (1907).
 - Matsugi, Kuzō 久蔵 and Nitamoto 仁田元 purchased by Furukawa company.
- Continued pollution and effects to the modern day.
- Settlement with victims in 1974.



Theologizing about the Ashio Copper Mine Incident

Background

The headstrong modernization of the preceding two decades continued, but attitudes towards it changed. Most people found themselves proud of their Constitution and agreed with the spirit of the Rescript on Education. The major problem was how on the basis of the conservative consensus one should deal with specific problems as they developed. Concern over some of these policies gradually bred a lack of confidence in the new institutions.

The uncertainty was reflected in vigorous demands for change.

Bamba and Howes, "Introduction: The Setting for Japan's Pacifism," (1978): 18.



Christians and Socialists

Christian missionaries had been among the first to introduce socialist ideas. The socialists at the end of the century practised itinerant evangelization, and they found their warmest receptions in the provincial churches. Churches subscribed heavily to socialist magazines...The socialists...wrote in a manner similar to that of Christian writers. Apocalyptic tones like those of the Christian prophets often infused their articles. Until 1903, the two movements must have appeared to all but the most discerning as complementary if not two aspects of the same thing. After that time, the Christians lessened their emphasis on social reform, and the hardcore socialists found their work frustrated by increasing official suspicion.

Howes, *Japan's Modern Prophet* (2005): 138.



Uchimura's Early Works on Ashio

- Early articles in the *Yorozu Chōhō* 萬朝報:
 - Four Notorious Facts about Mountains (March 16, 1897).
 - A Pornograph (March 28)
 - Some Important Facts About the Ashiwo Copper Mine (April 4)
 - *Tanjū sūteki* 胆汁数滴 (Installments throughout April)
 - Count Katsu and His Sayings (May 4 and May 5)
- Protest movement as a fight between ruling classes/Mammonism and the peasants/Justice.
- Pollution caused by political and social corruption amongst the ruling classes and exacerbated by incompetent governance.





A Pornograph

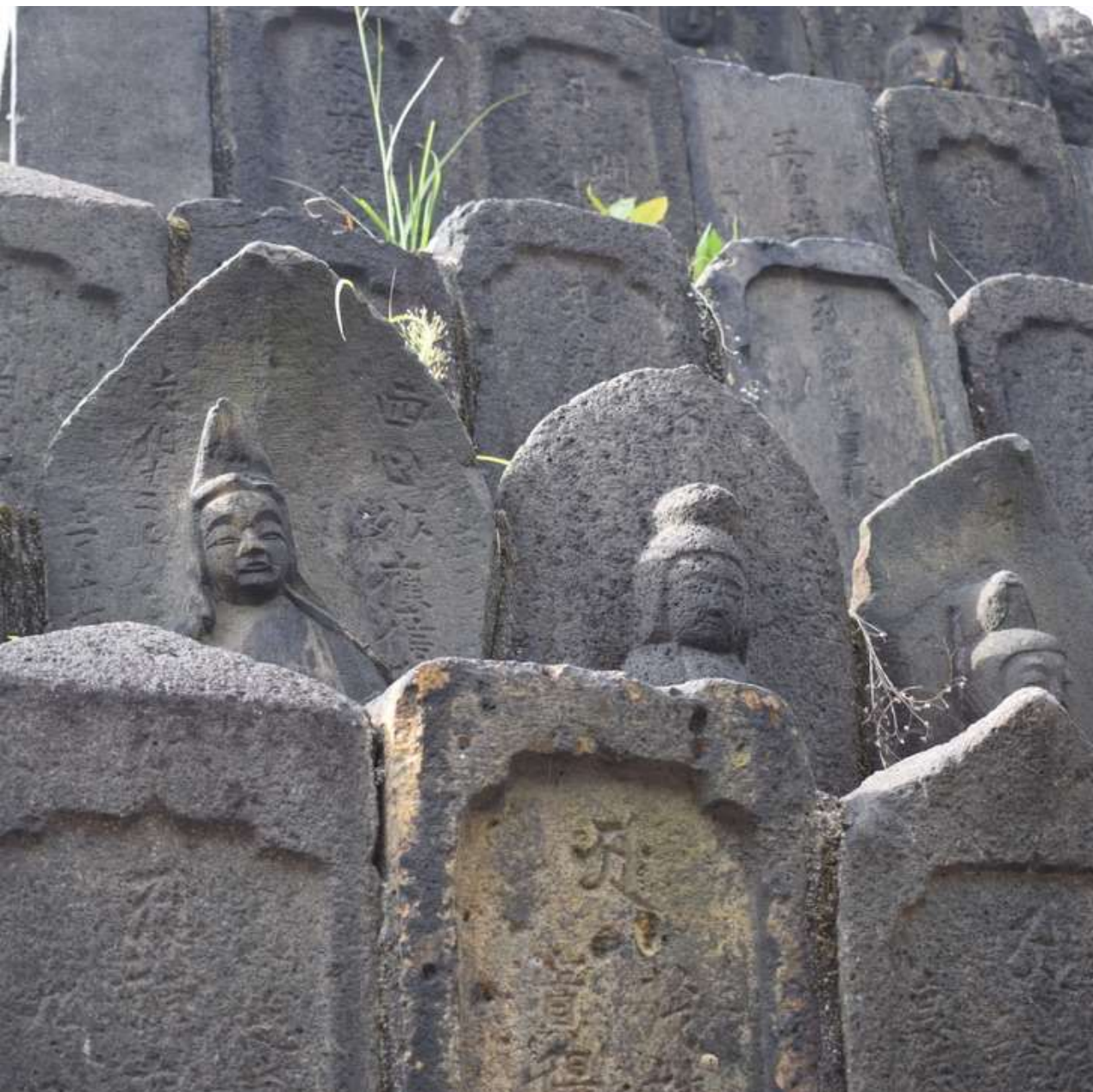
...we are afraid of the consequences of the real corruptions that have been creeping into official circles for these several years past. Sin will *never* go unpunished; and the punishment must be near at hand. The copper-mine disturbance may be the beginning of it.

Uchimura, "A Pornograph" (1897).



Kinoshita and *Ashio kōdoku mondai*

- Kinoshita's articles in the *Mainichi Shinbun* 毎日新聞:
 - *Ashio kōdoku mondai* 足尾鑛毒問題 (1900).
 - 17 articles serialized in the *Mainichi* and published as an individual monograph in June
 - *Sano dayori* 佐野だより (February 17).
 - *Kōdoku himatsu* 鉍毒飛沫 (February 19).
 - *Secchū no Nikkō yori* 雪中の日光より (February 22).
- Journalistic approach.
- Pollution the result of government neglecting its duties and social degradation.



Visiting the Polluted Lands

If you want to research the mine pollution problem, you must place the mines at the top of your agenda. Even if the disastrous scenes of the damaged wastelands along the Watarase is something that strikes the eye...first commence to the root of the harm at the mining facilities, search for the particulars one by one, and believe that which is well reasoned.

Kinoshita, *Ashio kōdoku mondai* (1900).

Theology and Politics as a Second Step

- Physical move of Christian and non-Christian activists from economic and political centre to polluted periphery.
- Theology as a second step (reflecting and attempting to bring about transformation based on first step i.e. experience of poverty and oppression).





Uchimura's First Visit

- Visit and lectures by Kinoshita, Uchimura and Iwamoto Yoshiharu to Ashikaga's 足利 *Yūai Gidan* 友愛義団 on April 21, 1901.
- Following day Kinoshita, Uchimura and Harada Sadasuke 原田定助 (1867-1925) visit the polluted lands south of Tomita 富田 station.
- Visit recorded in *Kōdokuchi junyūki* 鉾毒地巡遊記 published in the *Yorozu* between April 25 and April 30, 1901.



Kōdokuchi junyūki

- Focus on the victims.
- Defining Ashio's pollution as a man-made calamity (*Jinsai* 人災) opposed to a natural disaster (*Tensai* 天災).
- Like Kinoshita outlines the need to go to affected areas.
- Outlines the need for both secular and religious action.

Kōdokuchi junyūki

The Ashio Copper Mine Incident is a great stain on the Japanese Empire...this must not be made into a regional problem, it is a problem for the nation, it is a problem for humankind. The Ashio Copper Mine Incident may even destroy the nation!...Why not float the *Hatsuse* on Lake Chūzenji, send the *Asahi* up the Watarase, and bombard Ashio Copper Mine from both sides? That is what I would do if I were Prime Minister.

Uchimura, *Kōdokuchi junyūki* (1901).



The Place of the Commoners

We believe no more healthy thought was given unto men than that Divinity dwells among the Poor. A man or a nation enters a new career, when, instead of looking up to some imaginary figure as the seat of all authority, it begins to look down on the mass as the chief object of its service.

Uchimura, "Adoration of the Poor," (1897).





Kami no ai suru mono

God loves the commoners. He loves the nobles that the commoners love. He protects the royals who safeguard commoner's rights... If you love the commoners, you become closer to God, if you worship the nobles, you become more distant from Him.

Uchimura, "Kami no ai suru mono," (1900).

An aerial photograph showing a large area of land flooded with muddy brown water. A river or canal winds through the landscape, separating a town with dense buildings and a grid-like street pattern from the flooded fields. The sun is low in the sky, creating long shadows and a hazy, golden light over the scene.

Further Visits

- Sano 佐野 (June 21).
 - Part of role in committee of *Kōdoku chōsa yūshikai* 鉅毒調査有志会.
 - Tour with Tanaka.
- Sano (November 29).
- Yanaka and Ebise (December 27).
 - Visiting with other Christian thinkers and 700 students.



Mujin mureikon ron

Itō [Hirobumi, Japan's Prime Minister] and Furukawa Ichibei are gods. Go, kneel, and worship them!...Heaven is in Shinbashi, it's in Yanagibashi...The Angels are the whores. So Drink! Eat! Be Deceived! And thus die! For there is no God in the world who offers you life and there is no heaven to receive you.

Uchimura, "Mujin mureikon ron" (1901).



Resolving the Pollution Problem

- Uchimura argues that:
 - Japan must adopt Christianity as it is essential to European thought and methods.
 - Individualism without Christianity “degenerates to selfishness.”
 - Japanese scientists and thinkers cannot make advancements when they only seek profit and fame.

Tennen (Nature)

The long-continued peace of two-hundred years brought in luxuries and dissipation among men of all classes, and indolence thus introduced had immediate effects upon the cultivated fields. In many places, the revenue from land decreased by two-thirds. Thistles and bushes invaded the once productive fields, and what little was left in cultivation had to bear all the feudal dues levied from the land. Village after village bore an aspect of utter desolation. Honest labor becoming too onerous, men betook themselves to dishonest ways. From the kind earth they ceased to look for her ever bounteous gifts, and by cheating and defrauding one another they sought to acquire what little they needed to sustain their ill-doomed existence. The whole cause of their evils was moral, and Nature refusing to reward her ignoble sons, brought about all the miseries that befell the land.

Uchimura, *Japan and the Japanese* (1894).



Appropriate Methods

If one waters the wilderness, plants trees in it and harvests the fruit, something comes of it. It [is] a very simple matter. It may [be] simple, but it [is] not easy. Nothing in the world is as difficult as a man-made desert... If only one waters a natural desert and tends it well, it turns into fertile soil. However, it is extremely hard to resurrect a desert which has been laid waste because of human recklessness. But the Jutland heath was precisely that kind of wasteland. 800 years ago, there were good luxuriant forests there. And until 200 years ago, oak forests could still be seen here and there. But as civilization progressed, the appetites of people grew; it was more important for them to take from the earth and the reward they reaped was that, as time went by, it became more and more withered until it was in the state it was 40 years ago. But not even human greed can kill the land forever. The land can be brought from its worst state back to its original condition by using the appropriate methods that God and Nature show us.

Uchimura Kanzō, *Denmaruku no hanashi* (1911).





Conclusions

Uchimura and Kinoshita:

- Identity origins of the Ashio Copper Mine incident within societal degradation and inadequate governance.

Kinoshita:

- Highlights the importance of visiting the polluted lands.

Uchimura begins to build a theology which:

1. Defines the causes of pollution as a societal sin.
2. Places the commoners at the centre.
3. Suggests that God will bring about punishment for the social and political sins that have caused pollution by acting through the commoners or through the medium of Nature.
4. Argues for the adoption of a moral system (Christianity) to quell societal ills and create reforms.



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