

# Hope and Japan: early ties

**When speaking to groups about international education at Hope, I often remark that one-third of the graduating class of 1879 was Japanese, including the valedictorian, who gave the graduation address in both Latin and Japanese.**

The statement never sounds as convincing if I say that the Class of 1879 consisted of only six graduates, and two were Japanese, but in reality, for that time period, this is indeed very significant.

The two men, Kimura Kumaji and Oghimi Motochiro, both came to Holland in 1871, to begin their studies at the Hope Academy. How they arrived in Holland, were transformed by their experience and went on to notable careers in Japan is an extraordinary story.

Both men were adopted, apparently not an unusual circumstance in 19th century Japan. Although both were born into samurai families, in the highly stratified class society of feudal Japan theirs were minor samurai families. Their future prospects must have been quite limited and so adoption by a more prominent samurai family was arranged to secure more opportunities.

For Kimura, adoption seems to have meant access to good education. For Oghimi, it meant employment in the finance department of the Shogun, then appointment as a court librarian and finally manager of the finance department, where he served quite directly the Tokugawa family. (The Tokugawa were the dynasty of shoguns, or warrior monarchs, who ruled most of Japan from the beginning of the 17th century.)

However, when the Shogun was overthrown and imperial rule restored under the Emperor in 1867-68 (known as the Meiji Restoration), the old samurai families were not just out of power but lost their social privileges and were stripped of the officially guaranteed stipends and income on which they lived. Kimura and Oghimi were on the losing side of this coup d'état, and thus enemies of the new government. In fact, Kimura was involved in local fighting in southern Japan only five days after his marriage. He seems to have turned for help to a prominent statesman of the time, Katsu Kaishu, who apparently played some sort of bridging role between the Edo Shogunate of Old Tokyo and the Meiji Emperor.

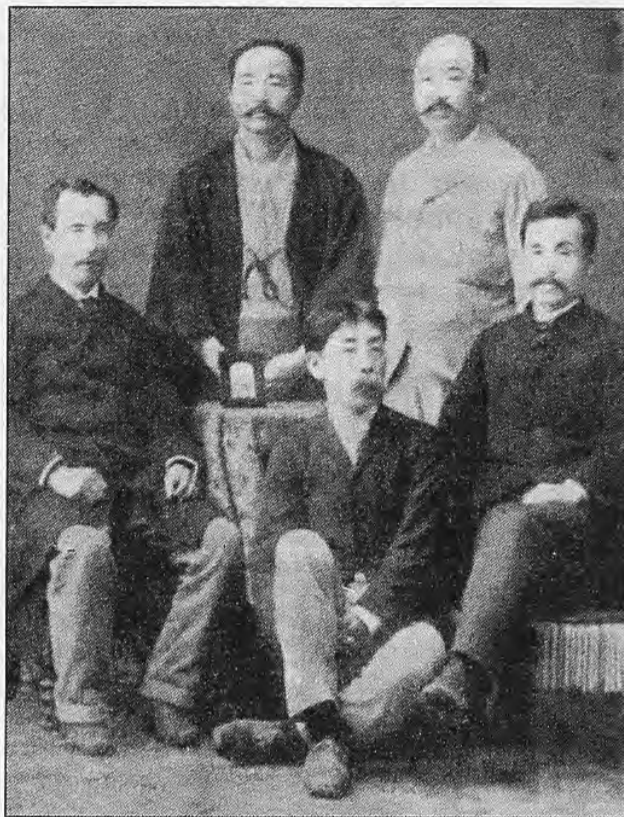
Subsequently, in 1870, Kimura and Oghimi travelled together to the United States with Arinori Mori, a Christian and an official of the Meiji government. Whether they knew each other prior to this is not clear.

Kimura left behind his wife and a three-year-old son, Yukichi. Oghimi, who was 27 years old at this time, had been engaged two years earlier to a girl who was eight years old. (He indeed married her, but when he was 39 and she was 23.)

Kimura and Oghimi arrived in San Francisco in December of 1870, and travelled to New York by train. On January 22nd they met President Philip Phelps, who was back east raising money. President Phelps arranged for the two penniless young men to attend the Hope Preparatory School, and they were on their way to Michigan within days, and, one assumes, Hope's first international student scholarship recipients.

At one time in these early years, there were as many as 14 Japanese students at Hope, and because most lived in Zwemer Hall, that became known as Japanese Hall. (Zwemer Hall stood where the Western Seminary library now stands.)

What is extraordinarily clear from the few Kimura letters we have seen is that the Phelps family was a major influence. Kimura describes President Phelps as "a person like God," "warm-hearted," "sincere" and a scholar. He



**The Rev. Philip Phelps, Hope's first president, brought several students from Japan in the college's early years. They remembered him fondly—as shown by the memorial service several held in Japan in his honor in 1896. The group (with a small photo of President Phelps on the table) includes Hope's first two Japanese alumni, Kimura Kumaji '79 and Oghimi Motochiro '79 (seated at center and right), who went from Hope to prominent careers as educators and missionaries in their native land. (Photo from the Hope College Collection of the Joint Archives of Holland.)**

also comments on how the Phelps helped poor people, and how the "whole town does good works."

But perhaps the greater role was played by Mrs. Phelps. She was highly regarded as a mother and wife, playing a role in the discipline and education of the children—something that stood out, for at this time in Japan women had no say in such matters. For Kimura, this was not just eye-opening but of profound significance—as evidenced by his involvement in the education of women upon his return to Japan.

The affection that these students had for President Phelps lasted long after they departed Holland. This is most clearly illustrated by a photograph showing five Japanese men, all apparently with Hope connections, who gathered in Japan in 1896, to hold a memorial service after learning of the Rev. Phelps's death.

Although Oghimi is said to have stated that he was "disinclined to be religious," the example they found in the Hope and Holland community led them to Christianity. They were baptized by the Rev. Abel T. Stuart at Hope Church.

Following graduation, both men went on to seminary. They graduated from New Brunswick in 1882, and were ordained in Albany as ministers in the Reformed Church in America and sent back to Japan as missionaries.

Upon his return in 1883, Oghimi was appointed minister at Kojimachi Church in Tokyo. He married in 1884 and soon thereafter was appointed a lecturer at Japan Christian Seminary, a school that later became part of Meiji Gakuin University. In 1886 he was appointed to the university's first board of trustees.

Oghimi went on to become a well-recognized pastor and educator, serving a number of churches and schools.

These included churches in Shizoku and Nagoya; the schools included one for the blind, Steele Academy, another mission school in Japan, where he was principal, and Tokyo Women's High School.

When he retired, he used his time to take up the new role of Christian scholar, realizing two of his most notable achievements, publishing the first Greek-Japanese lexicon and then a Greek grammar in Japanese. For the first time, Japanese seminary students could learn Greek directly from Japanese without having first to become fluent in another language.

Kimura returned to his wife and now 15-year-old son with an appointment to undertake mission work and Bible translation. Shortly after his return, he, together with his wife and her brother, founded Meiji Women's School, established for the purpose of educating modern women.

He later served as both pastor of the Daimachi Church in Tokyo and also as principal of Shoei Womens' School, which was founded by Quakers.

In 1893, Kimura was invited by influential people in Komoro City to found a private school, which he established in an old city gate.

Among those he invited to join him as teachers was a former student, Shimazaki Tozon. Tozon, who graduated from Meiji Gakuin University in 1891, is highly regarded as a romantic poet and novelist, and wrote MGU's school song. The time that Tozon spent in Komoro City was very influential on his writing; indeed, he described it as follows: "I went out as a teacher; I came back as a student."

While there, he continued to be influenced by his old teacher, and his fondness for him is most obvious from the characterizations of Kimura that are found in Tozon's writings, especially in two short stories in his book *Chikuma River Sketches*, one of which is titled "An Impoverished Bachelor of Science." The headmaster in this story and in another similar to it is modeled after Kimura. Tozon depicts the headmaster of his story as an older man, "his eyes alight with youthful vigor," "a man of imposing physique who always set a vigorous pace for one his age." He was a man of "ineffable elegance" and who like any good teacher "gestured vigorously" and was an "articulate speaker" from whom "the sparks seemed to fly when he got into his subject." With his "long, luxuriant beard" he must indeed have been an imposing teacher/mentor/pastor to his students and parishioners.

Following nearly 13 years at Komoro City, Kimura returned to the pastorate, this time at the church in Nagano, where he served for 11 years, retiring at the age of 73. He returned to Tokyo, where he died 10 years later, in 1927.

The lives of these two Hope grads seem to have consisted of pulls and tugs between scholarly/teaching careers and serving the Japanese churches that were always in need of pastors and preachers. Throughout their lives, Kimura and Oghimi seem to have carried on dual careers following one path and then the other, and sometimes both at the same time.

And yet the opportunities that came to them were not limited to the church and education; these were very prominent men, and many sought them out. At various times in their lives, powerful government figures tried to pull them into the political realm. This included Kimura being offered the position of Counsel General in New York. But each time they turned these other opportunities down and remained devoted to education and church.

They are indeed graduates of whom Hope and those in the community of Holland can be extremely proud.

*(Editor's Note: Dr. Sobania is director of international education and a professor of history at Hope. He notes that his research on Hope's early Japanese graduates is "a work in progress" that has benefited greatly from Kaoru Ogimi, the grandson of Motochiro, and Akitaka Miyao, a retired teacher in Komoro City.)*