Rising Up and Saving the World: Ishii Jūji and the Ethics of Social Relief during the Mid-Meiji Period (1880–1887)

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The child relief practices of the Meiji child relief worker Ishii Jūji (1865–1914), have often been described by biographers and historians as having emerged from Western European and American social gospel and child relief movements. While recognizing this legacy, the following article maintains that a fundamental aspect of Ishii's thought and practice has been overlooked: what has been discounted within studies of Ishii's child relief practice is the way in which fragments of eighteenth century ethics in Japan as well as a revolutionary model of social action rooted in the bakumatsu and post-Ishin periods continued to be revitalized within Ishii's greater vision of child relief. Focusing on Ishii's journal writings from 1882 to 1887, this study examines how Ishii developed his conceptual orientation within a discursive space that gave him access to a vast range of late Tokugawa and early Meiji theories and critiques regarding compassion, poverty, and the potency of youth.

Keywords: Ishii Jūji, Okayama Orphanage, childhood, child relief, ethics, religious syncretism

I. Introduction

In the late spring of 1887, at a time when recognition of the impoverished classes was still anathema to the Meiji state, a young Christian medical student, Ishii Jūji 石井十次(1865–1914), and his wife Shinako 品子, took in two drifting children and established the Okayama Kyōikukai 岡山教育会 (Okayama Education Society; hereafter Okayama Orphanage) in the grounds of a Buddhist temple in the city of Okayama, roughly a hundred and fifty miles south of Kyoto.[1] Two years later, Ishii, disillusioned with the programmatic structure of medical education, burned his medical texts in the temple grounds in a

Figure 1. Ishii Jūji bust outside the Okayama Hakuaikai Byōin 岡山博愛会病院, Okayama city, Okayama prefecture.

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1 Yūtani 1985, p. 29, and Nishiuchi 1918, pp. 57–58.

dramatic gesture, and vowed to devote the remainder of his life to child relief. Over the next thirty years, he experimented with various late nineteenth century institutional models of the orphanage, and developed new national networks through which to identify children in economic need as well as potential financial supporters of the Orphanage. In time, the Okayama Orphanage became known as the premier child relief institution of its day, both in the Imperial Household and amongst government bureaucrats as well as in the media and the public.[2] Although largely forgotten following Ishii's death in 1914, the Okayama Orphanage (as well as Ishii's life) has become the object of study over the last three decades because of a renewed interest in the history of social welfare in Japan.[3] Largely focusing on the Okayama Orphanage during the height of its institutional development (1887–1910), such scholarship has viewed Ishii's thought and practice within the context of Meiji modernization, and has also located social relief history within the context of the rise of modern institutions.[4]

In analyzing Ishii's extensive journals written during the early to mid 1880s, this article follows a different historiographical trajectory. Using intellectual history as the primary mode of analysis, I examine the relationship between an ethics of social engagement and social relief rooted in early modern thought and Ishii's conception of child relief. Crafting an intellectual history of Ishii's thought will provide a richer and more accurate historical contextualization of his child relief. For on the one hand, while early twentieth century hagiographers and biographers of Ishii's life and work have most often referenced his journals to document his individual spiritual struggle as a Christian convert and the "father of the Orphans," on the other hand more recent historiography has focused on Ishii's journals for what they reveal of the modern institutional development of the Okayama Orphanage.[5] Although methodologically diverse and divided on the issue of whether Ishii's work represents the success or failure of Meiji modernization, both historiographical interpretations have tended to view Ishii's child relief thought and practice as having emerged from Western European and American social gospel and child relief movements.[6] Undoubtedly, Ishii's own journal entries in regard to Christianity as well as Western European institutional models of the orphanage place a strong emphasis on an external modernizing process. From the point of his conversion to a Congregationalist form of Christianity in 1884, Ishii's journal writings consist of painstaking and lengthy exegeses of passages from the gospels of Matthew and John, Paul's letters to the Romans and other Epistles, as well as summaries and interpretations of lectures given by Kanamori Tsūrin 金森通倫 (1857–1945), former member of the Kumamoto Band and pastor at the Okayama church. In addition, social welfare historians have noted that Ishii wrote of his attraction to such late nineteenth century Western European practices of child relief as those of George Müller and Thomas

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2 In 1899 the Orphanage was visited by the Minister of Education, Kabayama Sukenori 樺山資紀, in 1901 by Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文, and in 1903 by the Minister of Justice, Kiyoura Keigo 清浦奎吾. These visits by high-ranking government officials foreshadowed a 2,000 yen donation by the imperial household in 1904 and the subsequent promise of 10,000 yen over the next decade to be distributed annually in 1,000 yen allotments. Although this was only between one and two percent of the Orphanage's total operating costs between 1906 and 1910, the donation from the Imperial Household imbued Ishii and the facility with a powerful new social prestige, and led to widespread public recognition. Shibata 1964, pp. 316–18.

3 See, for example, Tanaka 2000; Kikuchi 1998a; Kikuchi 1998b.

4 Hosoi 2009, p. 2.

5 Nishiuchi 1918.

6 Hosoi 2009, p. 2, and Shibata 1964, pp. 1–2.

Barnardo from 1886.[7] As Ishii became more firmly committed to the practice of child relief during the mid to late 1880s, his journal entries clearly indicate his elation on discovering and experimenting with mid and late nineteenth century models of child relief.

While I recognize the legacy of Christian faith and Western European child relief models within Ishii's practice, I argue that his thought was essentially grounded in earlier models of social action and social ethics, and that this has been discounted in the historiography of Ishii and the Okayama Orphanage to date. A deeper reading of Ishii's journals and an attentiveness to Ishii's rich cultural and historical references yields a more complex picture of the ethical sources of his conception of child relief—a picture that does not easily conform to the modern and early modern divide. In the following pages, I will discuss how Ishii's social relief practice was motivated by the concept of *risshin shusse* 立身出世 and models of loyalist activism. Furthermore, although Ishii's practice was inspired by loyalist models, the core of his thought was rooted in a Tokugawa 徳川 sense of compassion, submerged within a new Christian cosmology.[8] Such compassion was at the heart of Ishii's criticism of social and economic injustice during the 1880s and 1890s. Visions of a heroic and impoverished youth rising up to transform an unjust society emerged during a period of vivid revolutionary imagination in the decades following the 1868 Meiji Restoration, and remained with Ishii throughout his life. These revolutionary imaginings continued to politicize Ishii's child relief work to the extent that he began to see the children in his care as vehicles of political and social transformation. It is important to acknowledge the oppositional potential within Ishii's child relief practice, his desire for social and political renovation, and the still new and radical assumption that the impoverished children in his care were capable of becoming the agents of political and social transformation. Such an acknowledgement complicates rather than simplifies our understanding of both Ishii and his life work, and the potential of the political consciousness among Meiji subjects in general. This political consciousness was the basis of a mid Meiji civic engagement, and the roots of the civil society that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

II. Rising Up and Saving the World:
Imagining Social Relief Activism in the Post Restoration Era

Although Ishii began the process of Christian conversion after he moved to Okayama in 1882, it is clear that he was already utilizing a vocabulary of social engagement to frame his actions. A seventeen-year old Ishii Jūji, from the newly formed southern prefecture of Miyazaki, described his decision to attend medical school in Okayama as follows: "I have decided that I will go to the medical school of my aspiration (*risshi ichi gakkō* 立志一学校), and return to practice medicine for the sake of the people of Uwae 上江 village, and for my

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7 See Kihara 1999, pp. 52–73.

8 I draw a critical distinction here between compassion and empathy. On the one hand, I take compassion to imply a moral framework for sympathy with and evaluation of another's condition as the basis of action. Empathy, on the other, implies the ability to imagine oneself in the place of another, but does not necessarily indicate a moral evaluation of the other's condition, nor a moral imperative to intervene. In some cases, Ishii expressed a need for both compassion and empathy; however, he most often used the concept of compassion in order to articulate his vision of child relief.

own independence (*jiritsu* 自立)."[9] In this section, I will highlight how the concept of *risshin shusse* created a malleable structure that enabled Ishii to fulfill a greater social purpose within the quickly shifting social environment of early and mid Meiji. Moreover, although from 1884 Ishii engaged in an intensive exploration of his Christian religious faith, this did not immediately result in a concrete connection to social practice. In other words, Ishii used Christianity as a way to understand and guide his private moral actions such as sexual behavior and self-discipline. However, in regard to social action, it was the concept of *risshin shusse* and loyalist models that proved far more formative in the development of Ishii's understanding of social relief and, ultimately, child relief.

Within Meiji historiography, the phrase *risshin shusse* (or "rising up in the world") has come to signify the upwardly mobile ambitions of the first generation of Meiji youth amidst dramatic economic change. Takeuchi Yō 竹内洋 and Earl Kinmonth have argued that the expression refers to the aspirations of young members of the former samurai class to rise up socially and economically.[10] They emphasize *risshin shusse* as something akin to the "Protestant ethic," and as the driving force behind the development of Japanese industrial capitalism during much of the Meiji period. Kinmonth explains that in the first decade of Meiji the notion of "rising up" (*mi o tateru* 身ヲ立ル) embedded in *risshin* was used in primary and secondary school textbooks to foster notions of ambition and success.[11] Both Kinmonth and Takeuchi also point to Nakamura Keiu's 中村敬宇 (1832–1891) wildly popular *Saigoku risshi hen* 西国立志編 (1871) as evidence of this driving force.[12] As Kinmonth notes, *Saigoku risshi hen*— a loose translation of Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* (1859), a popular work that promoted the cult of the individual within the bourgeois and industrialist classes in Great Britain— implied that the substrata of low-ranking samurai who sought to advance Japan's social and economic progress were akin to such individuals in Great Britain.[13]

Figure 2. Ishii Jūji Shiryōkan 石井十次資料館, Chausubaru 茶臼原 village, Miyazaki prefecture.

Figure 3. Ishii Jūji statue outside Miyazaki Kenritsu Toshokan 宮崎県立図書館.

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9 IJN, 1882. For clarity, all volumes of Ishii's journals cited throughout this essay will be indicated according to the year in which the original journal was written.

10 Takeuchi 1997, p. 15, and Kinmonth 1981, p. 55

11 Kinmonth 1981, p. 55.

12 As Kinmonth notes, government officials, educators, members of the samurai class lined up for hours to purchase the first edition of Nakamura's translation—some even camping out overnight to make sure they obtained a copy. The work was reprinted countless times until as late as 1921. Kinmonth 1981, p. 10.

13 Kinmonth 1980, p. 550.

Although commonly recognized as signifiers of upwardly mobile aspirations of Meiji youth, the concepts *risshi* and *risshin shusse* were also rooted in earlier conceptions of social salvation. Kinmonth himself acknowledges that Nakamura's translation emphasizes the notion of social intervention in order to relieve social and economic distress. Moreover, he points out that the term *risshi*, closely related to *risshin*, is derived from Mencius, and means "righteous determination for the inspiration of others."[14] Kinmonth located one of the early uses of *risshin shusse* in the writings of Yoshida Shōin 吉田松陰, the mid-nineteenth century radical who influenced many of those instrumental in the overthrow of the Tokugawa political order.[15] Indeed, no lesser figure than Saigō Takamori 西郷隆盛 (1828–1877) advocated rising up against all adversity to achieve greatness.[16] The slogan evidently had roots in the political activism of late Tokugawa, and drew on earlier eighteenth century thought regarding meritocracy and individual talent as the necessary basis for political transformation.

Thus the term *risshin* does not merely indicate self-interested social and economic advancement, but also the achievement of ethical independence and maturity through social works. Nakamura's translation of *Self Help* included the phrase *keiten aijin* 敬天愛人 (respect for heaven and compassion for the people).[17] This was, according to Derek Wolff, "a reminder that the individual was 'obligated to work for the good of society as a whole rather than self-enrichment.'" Such expressions point to the multi-valence of the concept *risshin* and the possibility of its incorporation within a broader vision of social engagement and social relief.

The term *shusse* 出世, or "going out into the world," also looked back to an earlier religious discourse of salvation. During the medieval and early modern period, *shusse* referred to the phenomenon of the Buddha entering the world and saving the masses from suffering and confusion, then leading them to enlightenment (*shujō saido* 衆生済度). Here it is important to consider *shusse* alongside other early modern expressions such as *keisei* 経世 "ordering the world" and *saisei* 済世 "saving the world." In both cases, *sei* 世 evokes a larger conception of acting on behalf of a greater social good. While further examination of the nuances of *shusse* during the late Tokugawa and early Meiji is necessary, it is notable that during the late 1880s Ishii Jūji continually invoked the historical figures of Jesus Christ and Shakyamuni as models of social action, i.e. going out into the world to save the people from suffering. The ethical imperative of the term was never lost. At the very least, Ishii's life—and the lives of the many first-generation Meiji activists who were part of his world—supports the idea that individuals interpreted *risshin shusse* as an ethical obligation to express their new identity as citizen by working to improve social conditions and relieve suffering.

During the early 1880s, Ishii's initial conception of economic and social relief was shaped by *risshin shusse* with the implicit relationship between practice and salvation that had been pervasive in the revolutionary discourse of late Tokugawa and early Meiji. Indeed, Ishii's diaries are replete with references to individuals such as Aoyama Nobuyuki 青山延于 (1776–1843), Rai Sanyō 頼山陽 (1781–1832), Morita Sessai 森田節齋 (1811–1868), Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山 (1811–1864), and Saigō Takamori, all of whom played a role in generating intellectual and social momentum that led ultimately to the overthrow of the Tokugawa

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14 Kinmonth 1980, p. 550.
15 Kinmonth 1981, fn 33, p. 58.
16 Katsuta 1894 (1976), p. 128.
17 Wolff 2003, pp. 218–22, and *Kagoshima-ken shi*, p. 871.

in 1868.[18] Although it is clear that during the mid 1880s Ishii derived deep spiritual fulfillment from the New Testament and the Christian community in Okayama, the concrete model of practice that moved him was the revolutionary heroism of the loyalists who rose up to topple the Tokugawa.

In his writings in the 1880s, Ishii makes references to bakumatsu discourses of restorationist loyalism, practical learning, and intuitionism of the Ō Yōmei 王陽明 school of thought. Although Ishii no doubt owed his familiarity with bakumatsu thought to his education at the Meirindō Academy in the village of Takanabe 高鍋, Christian circles may also have played a role. One potential source for Ishii's knowledge of Neo-Confucianism and Ō Yōmei was Matsumura Kaiseki 松村介石 (1859–1939), pastor of the neighboring Takahashi 高橋 church in Okayama from 1881 to 1884. Matsumura was himself likely introduced to Morita Sessai and Ō Yōmei thought by Yoshioka Kōki 吉岡弘毅 (1847–1932), a Christian pastor living in the Kansai area, and a former student of Morita Sessai's Academy in Kurashiki 倉敷 that focused on the study of Yōmeigaku during the late 1860s.[19] From 1884, Matsumura continued to write about Ō Yōmei thought in the *Fukuin shinpō* 福音新報, a Christian journal that Ishii read regularly.[20] By invoking individuals such as the loyalist historian and poet, Rai Sanyō, the restorationist and Yōmei scholar, Morita Sessai, and the progressive bakumatsu intellectual and reformer, Sakuma Shōzan, Ishii clearly connected the political thought and activism of the bakumatsu period to his own social practice. In the following extract from his journal from 1885, Ishii transcribed one of Rai Sanyō's poems after reading Rai's biography,

> As I lay dying in my room
> The gains and losses of a hundred generations plague my heart
> Though I do not lament these meals of meager salted greens
> I am anxious for the people and the realm
> Aah! Isn't this the kind of naïve fool that I am?[21]
> Yet, we do not know when the time will come in which such fools are remembered.[22]

He then commented: "After middle age Sanyō realized that unless one carries out virtuous deeds it is not possible to say that one has risen up in society. Rai Sanyō was a man of great will and immense dignity who clarified the way for the people. Because of this, the people around him deeply respected him."[23] Thus, through Rai Sanyō's writings, Ishii came to equate *risshin shusse* with a higher moral purpose and the salvation of the people.

Perhaps the most salient example of how bakumatsu discourses informed Ishii's desire to "rise up and save the world" is Saigō Takamori, a leading figure first in the 1868 overthrow of the Tokugawa government and then in the 1877 Seinan civil war intended to topple the newly established Meiji state. As a youth living in Kyushu, Ishii was politicized by the fissures

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18 See for example, IJN, 1885, pp. 267 and 270.
19 On this, see Mullins 1998, p. 72.
20 Mullins 1998, p. 72, and IJN, 1885, p. 24.
21 For reasons unknown, the following three lines were omitted from Ishii's transcription of Sanyō's poem: "My body is full with writing, but my writing doesn't save them from the famine. They change their measures for the sake of greed. This is a wrong I have never committed."
22 IJN, 1885, p. 270.
23 IJN, 1885, p. 270.

within the Restoration government, which were no more evident than in the person of Saigō Takamori. Like many other low-ranking rural samurai (*gōshi* 郷士) in Kyushu who had become quickly disillusioned with the political and economic policies of the new Meiji state, Ishii's father, Mankichi 万吉, was sympathetic toward Saigō Takamori's faltering troops as they retreated through northeastern Kyushu in autumn 1877. As a youth of twelve, Ishii Jūji shared his father's enthusiastic support for Saigō Takamori, and even witnessed the retreat of Saigō's rebels through his own village of Takanabe in September 1877.[24] Like many youths, Ishii became deeply immersed in Kyushu's radical politics, so much so that in 1880, after returning from Tokyo, he was arrested at age fifteen for threatening to assassinate the Meiji oligarch, Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視 (1825–1883), whom he viewed as responsible for Saigō's demise. Ishii was incarcerated for fifty eight days on suspicion of treason.[25]

During his short time in prison, Ishii found a concrete model of social activism when his cellmate, a former soldier of Saigō Takamori's army, told him about Saigō's land cultivation projects intended to assist impoverished samurai in the area of Yoshino village in the former Satsuma domain.[26] The prisoner was referring to the Yoshino Kaikonsha 吉野開墾社 (Yoshino land development cooperative), founded by Saigō in 1875 not long after he began his famous private academies for the training and education of local samurai youth.[27] Saigō Takamori's relief work reflected this Kyushu environment of social action and social change. Both Saigō's Kaikonsha and his private academies were inspired by a desire to create self-reliant rural samurai who could sustain themselves economically, but also engage in the political life of the new nation. According to Sho Konishi, this vision evolved from Saigō's earlier private academy in Tokyo and was intended to "develop a combination of warrior ethics and cosmopolitan knowledge through military training and 'foreign' education."[28] Although some Meiji leaders feared that the Kaikonsha and the *shigakkō* were merely a pretext for fomenting rebellion, historians such as Konishi and Yates have convincingly argued that Saigō was more interested in shaping young men into economically and intellectually independent citizens, committed to society and politics.[29]

As Ishii's close friend and biographer Nishiuchi Tenkō relates, Saigō's educational and agricultural reforms inspired Ishii to become involved in local improvement in 1880 with his youth group the Goshisha 五指社.[30] In the summer of 1880, after his release from prison, Ishii returned to the village of Takanabe and immediately organized the Goshisha, a land development association directly inspired by Saigō's Kaikonsha. Throughout 1883 and 1884, Ishii gradually transformed the Goshisha into the Babaharu Kyōikukai 馬場原教育会, a cooperative educational society to raise local youths out of poverty, which itself became an early model for the Okayama Kyōikukai 岡山教育会. And, by 1890, Ishii had transformed the Okayama Kyōikukai into the Okayama Kojiin 孤児院 (Orphanage).

Saigō Takamori not only shaped Ishii's understanding of rising up and saving the world, but also led Ishii to envision poverty as a form of social potency and as a noble state. Ishii's

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24 *Kagoshima-ken shi*, pp. 984–1002, and Nishiuchi 1918, pp. 57–58.
25 Hastings 1996, p. 37.
26 Nishiuchi 1918, pp. 39–41.
27 *Kagoshima-ken shi*, p. 873.
28 Konishi 2003, pp. 43.
29 Yates 1995.
30 This translates as the "five finger society," and is a reference to the fact that all five fingers must work together to make one cut of the sword.

references to Saigō throughout his journal from the 1880s and beyond make it evident that Saigō's poetic portrayals of the nobility of poverty deeply affected him. In 1884, as Ishii began medical school at age nineteen in Okayama, and as he struggled to provide for himself, his wife (whom he had married four years earlier), and several other young students from Miyazaki by working evenings as a masseur, his rough clothing, his backwoods appearance, and thick Kyushu accent separated him from the more sophisticated urban milieu.[31] Ishii described in his journal how the city of Okayama was filled with "cold-hearted samurai elites" who were happy to mock and ridicule him.[32] He then took solace in a poem by Saigō Takamori: "As long as I possess a jacket, what else matters? The brocades of Yamato enshroud my heart."[33] Ishii continued to reference this theme of the nobility of poverty as he struggled economically and sought to find greater moral purpose. In May 1885 he recorded another of Saigō's poems,

> Accepting my situation
> I carry within the resolve of steel and stone
> Poverty gives birth to extraordinary men
> Virtuous duty results in disaster
> Plum blossoms become pure only with a heavy snow
> Maple leaves crimson only after the frost
> If I truly understand the will of heaven
> How could I dare to rest? [34]

Ishii then reflected: "I am happily awaiting the day that Paul has spoken of. Now I must study in order to fulfill myself regardless of the conditions. I have known the road of poverty and experienced the path of prosperity. I have known the feeling of fullness, yet I have also become adept at hunger. Because of Christ, who gives his power to me, I am able to comprehend these things."[35] Clearly, Ishii identified his own economic hardship with that of Saigō's poem and saw himself as one of the noble poor. This led him to a greater empathy with those suffering around him. He vowed to adopt an attitude "based upon love without discrimination toward those of the lower orders" (*onore yori shita no hito ni mo tada ai ni yorite kubetsu nashi ni* 己れより下の人にもたゝ愛に由りて区別なしに). Finally, he vowed to learn by following Christ's examples. Although it is clear from these passages that a Christian faith deeply informed Ishii's moral orientation, his belief in human equality and desire for alleviation of poverty were inspired by the fragments of loyalist thought that remained with him through the first two decades of Meiji.

In January 1887, roughly six months before Ishii made the life-changing decision to establish the Okayama Kyōikukai, he once again copied the same poem by Saigō that first appeared in his 1885 diary. He then commented:

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31 Motoi 1999, pp. 38–39.
32 IJN, 1884, p. 47.
33 IJN, 1884, p. 47.
34 IJN, 1885, p. 128. I have attempted only a literal rendering of the poem here. The original can be found in *Saigō Takamori den*, p. 1128.
35 IJN, 1885, p. 128.

For some reason, I began to consider my past and look at many things, and how they connect to the symptoms of my spirit. Then I began to think about how great people in the past rose from harsh environments and poverty; in particular, I recalled this poem of Saigō Nanshū [Takamori], written from his experience, which asserts that poverty will lead to greatness. When I reflected on this, I realized that this philosophy perfectly conformed to my own conceptions. And, I grasped it immediately as a curative for my headaches. I believe this poem will purge me of the pent up anger, frustration, and depression I have held onto for the last three or four years. Now, in the short term I have decided to cure myself and in the long term I have decided to save and provide relief (*kyūsai* 救済) for others. I have written down a plan below as to how I will do this once I reach Osaka. How happy I am![36]

Thus, Ishii, who was himself experiencing financial hardship and marginalization within the new Meiji social order, saw in Saigō's writings the possibility of a social identity not dependent upon economic power or status. By pursuing social relief, he could save himself in order to save others. He perceived a special connection between his own economic distress and the illness and suffering of others. This empathy, which emerged partly from his mental and physical vulnerability, rather than a position of moral superiority, first motivated him to provide a small school and orphanage for children in Okayama. The belief that poverty was caused primarily by social conditions, rather than the moral failings of the individual, would remain the key premise of Ishii's social relief work and communal vision of intervention until his death.

Ishii also found an ethical basis for his actions in classical texts embedded within Japan's early modern intellectual heritage. From 1885 he began to read classical works by Confucius, Mencius, Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627–1705), and Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–1648). Soon, Ishii began to view his own medical studies in the context of these works. For example, in April 1885 he wrote, "If, indeed, as the ancient texts state, medicine is the path to humanity (*jin* 仁)—in short, if I and my brothers hope to achieve the way of humanity by studying medicine—then we must strive to achieve a spirit of humanity."[37] In June 1885, Ishii reiterated, "The ancients state that medicine is the way of humanity and the truth."[38] And, in January 1886, he noted he had learned concretely the truths within the way of medicine and sought to profoundly understand it as a discipline and a profession: "I entered a Christian medical school to learn to become a true doctor. In my country there is a saying that 'to pursue the path of medicine is a means of virtue' (*idō o shite i wa jinjutsu nari* 医道をして医は仁術なり). In order to pursue this path I will save the wretched in my country, and I hope to help my brothers and sisters throughout this world."[39] In 1885 and 1886, Ishii viewed medical relief as a form of social relief, and he evidently found an authoritative model and concrete justification for his social action in the ancient classics as mediated by early modern thinkers.

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36 IJN, 1887, p. 6.
37 IJN, 1885, pp. 95–96.
38 IJN, 1885, p. 142.
39 IJN, 1886, p. 1.

Throughout 1885, Ishii's desire to ameliorate poverty through concerted social action was further confirmed by his reading of Ninomiya Sontoku 二宮尊徳 (1787–1856), whose ideas Ishii encountered in the *Kirisutokyō shinbun* 基督教新聞. Ishii came upon Ninomiya just as the latter's principles of *hōtoku* 報徳 (virtuous repayment) and his programs of economic recovery were being rediscovered throughout Japan. Ishii discussed his role as a physician as the key means for him to rise up in the world and help those in need, but it was not until his encounter with Ninomiya's work that the idea of a vocation devoted to the poor became integral to his larger understanding of social relief. Its impact on Ishii is evident in the following excerpt from his journal:

> We have to repay the blessings. We, the recipients of so many of God's blessings, must repay them. Whenever I think about this I am frightened. This Ninomiya Kinjirō 金次郎 [Sontoku], an important official from the region of Utsunomiya who withdrew from public life, is said to be the teacher of *hōtoku*. He made it the focus of his life's work to repay his ever-increasing virtue. Furthermore, he spent six years day and night in dire poverty in order to help prevent his lord from becoming bankrupt, and without using one cent for himself. He then returned home without a care to work in the fields. After this, he was hired by the head of the Odawara clan, and for the next ten years without any sense of value for his own life, he worked to heal the corrupted, wild, and abandoned land of Sakura village until it was transformed into a prosperous, good town. *Although his own household had no savings for the future, he continued to work ceaselessly in order to save the starving and the poor.* According to Ninomiya, we must always continue to repay our virtue for the sake of God, the ruler, and humanity. *He also says that although one human heart is very small, if one reaches this highest point of sincerity, then they will be in accordance not only with the gods and spirits, but that heaven and earth will be shaken.*[40]

In Ninomiya, Ishii found a late Tokugawa model of devotion to the amelioration of poverty as a natural reflection of a heavenly spirit. This helped him imagine the relationship between ethical ideals and the concrete practices of social relief. Although Ishii had been introduced to Catholicism in 1882, and was later deeply versed in the Okayama church's Congregationalist Christianity from 1884, his faith in Christ's love and sacrifice had remained at an intangible level of metaphysical abstraction. However, after encountering Ninomiya's writings in 1885, Ishii's religious faith moved beyond the interiority of his journal writings into social practice. By early 1887, he imagined himself rising up and saving the world much like Jesus Christ and the historical Buddha, and he described his own entrance into the world at the age of thirty one as his "hidden method" for the future.

> With the inherent love of Christianity as my steam, and with the heeding of Shakyamuni's calls to reject all pride as my rudder, I will navigate this future life. Timeline: Until about the age of thirty, both Christ and Shakyamuni remained hidden in this world so that they could sufficiently prepare, and then they left to go out into the world. Similarly, until the age of thirty, I will also prepare myself: over the next eight years I will

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40 IJN, 1885, pp. 154–55. The emphasis is found in the original.

devote myself as a student of medicine with no other objective. At age thirty one, I plan to go out into the world and throw myself into actual practice (*jicchi* 実地). (This has always been my plan since February 1883.)[41]

Ishii's encounters with loyalist activism, classical early modern thought, and early nineteenth century social relief evolved into a much more expansive vision of *risshin shusse*, in which both Christ and the historical Buddha now became the ideal models. Ishii does not refer directly to Ninomiya here, no doubt because he was more interested in equating his medical relief work with the divine. However, Ishii continued to reference Ninomiya throughout the 1890s and into the early 1900s when he began to develop his own new religion, Shintenkyō 新天教, based upon Ninomiya's thought.[42]

Thus, Ishii's reflections on bakumatsu social and political action indicate his belief that rising up in the world was an obligation to improve social conditions and relieve the suffering of others. However, it was only when Ishii began to encounter indigenous models of thought and action that his Christian faith took on a level of concreteness and became social practice. It was this combination of factors—his experience of early Meiji economic instability and political change; a growing conviction regarding the nobility of poverty; and a deep empathy—rather than a sense of elite moral virtue, that allowed Ishii to envision an ethical practice of social relief.

III. Rising Up and Saving the World: Compassion as the Ethical Core of Social Relief

While indigenous notions of social engagement and the nobility of poverty motivated his desire to intervene in the economic inequalities of his times, Ishii did not articulate his vision of social relief and child relief until 1887 when he established the Okayama Kyōikukai. Between May and September 1887, he drafted a series of statements to define the Orphanage's mission and purpose. These drafts were an early formulation of his conception of social relief and of his belief in the need for a special focus on the child.

Figure 4. Ishii Jūji's "Raion kyōiku" ライオン教育 (Lion Education).

In the following discussion, I highlight three key notions of the mission statement drafts in order to reveal the sublimation of early modern ethics within Ishii's Christian orientation: the first is that economic equality necessarily follows from compassion; the second is that poverty is rooted in social conditions outside of individual control, rather than in an innate moral failing; and the third is that children and youth should be the focus of one's compassion, and thus social relief, because of their unique vulnerability to the vagaries of

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41 IJN, 1887, p. 1.
42 Maus 2014.

economic forces. It is my contention that Ishii rearticulated the ethics of compassion he found in mid and late Tokugawa discourses of social practice through Christian principles of social and economic equality.

In the first draft of the mission statement from May 1887, Ishii develops the argument that compassion is the essence of one's humanity which is realized primarily through economic and material intervention.

> Using our heaven sent (*tenpu* 天賦) heart of compassion (*jiaishin* 慈愛心) as the foundation, we should strive to cultivate a spirit of love for our neighbor (*tonari o aisuru* 隣を愛する): with hearts that suffer with those who suffer, grieve with those who grieve and rejoice with those who rejoice, we should then take this compassion and transform it into a proper method for giving rice, money, and other goods, and thereby bringing relief (*kyūjutsu* 救恤) to those of our brothers who live in illness, hardship, and suffering, and who have nowhere to turn in their impoverished suffering and hardship.[43]

For Ishii, an abstract feeling of compassion is without meaning unless it is externalized through a concrete amelioration of economic suffering. Such amelioration should result in economic equality, and such equality can only be realized through empathy. In the following passage, Ishii asks the reader more explicitly to imagine the conditions of poverty when he writes:

> See your brothers and sisters who live in poverty, who are orphans, who are young children who cannot go to school! [See] the mute, the blind, and those who have much ability that cannot be developed, or those who are ill and in their poverty are unable to get medicine or treatment! They become poor and can no longer receive their wages. See those who are overwhelmed by [illness, hardship, and suffering], and fall into a world of suffering (*kuyo* 苦世). Surely you must know the many hundreds who live in this world of suffering.[44]

Ishii thus calls on his readers/audience to exhibit both compassion and empathy—in the senses defined above—and identify with others based upon a shared economic vulnerability: in other words, to "suffer with those who suffer, grieve with those who grieve and rejoice with those who rejoice." This combination of compassion and empathy enriches Ishii's understanding of poverty as located within social forces rather than individual moral failing. For Ishii compassion ultimately originates with a divinely ordained ethical order:

> With hearts of benevolent love (*jin'ai* 仁愛) that heaven (*ten* 天) has bestowed upon all human life, we, as human beings, are meant to practice loving assistance toward others (*aijin saisei* 愛人済世), without discrimination. Moreover, because this is the practice through which we must ensure each other's happiness and well being, loving assistance toward others is the essence of human life. Whether one is of high or low status, no one may run from this obligation.[45]

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43 IJN, 1887, p. 53.
44 IJN, 1887, p. 53.
45 IJN, 1887, p. 53.

It is tempting to assume that such concepts as "heart of compassion" (*jiaishin*) and "love for one's neighbor" (*tonari o aisuru*) originated in the Christian lexicon. Certainly, Ishii was deeply shaped by his conversion in 1884 to the Congregationalist style of Christianity espoused by Kanamori Tsūrin. In 1884 and 1885 in particular, Ishii used his private journal as a vehicle for interpreting and grappling with New Testament teachings and concepts that he encountered through Kanamori's lectures and the JC Hepburn version of the Bible. Ishii's language of compassion does indeed resonate clearly with New Testament language. However, there is also little doubt that it traces its origins to an earlier ethical heritage in Japan. As Yoshida Kyūichi 吉田久一 points out, early Meiji translations of the New Testament incorporated language such as *megumi* 恵み, *aware* 憐れ, *jihi* 慈悲, and *itsukushimi* 慈しみ, which had deep resonances with the Buddhist notion of salvation, especially in regard to the poor and the downtrodden.[46] The intellectual heritage of mid Meiji converts such as Ishii drew upon this Buddhist lexicon of mercy and compassion as well as various strains of Confucian thought, concepts such as *jin'ai* (benevolent love). These constituted the basis for their understanding of *rinjin ai* 隣人愛, or "loving one's neighbor as oneself."[47] Without a premodern ethical vocabulary that emphasized notions of love of other, the Hepburn translation of such terms within the New Testament would not have been possible.

I would argue that Ishii's incorporation of the language of compassion and love, within his mission statement is not simply the result of the unintentional diffusion of an early modern discourse; rather, it reveals a direct lineage to an early modern ethics. The similarities between the language of Ishii's May 1887 founding statement and the ethical vocabulary of the late seventeenth century philosopher Itō Jinsai are too close to ignore. In 1884 and 1885, Ishii was deeply immersed in biblical studies, yet by mid-1885 he was committed to a new regimen of scholarship, which meant the study of "the ancient sages of the past," including men such as Nakae Tōju and Itō Jinsai.[48] Although Ishii does not mention how he became aware of Tōju and Jinsai, one possibility connection is Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930). According to Hiroko Willcock, Uchimura began to promote Tōju and Jinsai in 1880 and 1881 from the Sapporo Agricultural College (SAC), as part of a larger philosophy of independent thought and practice in Japan within an indigenous liberal tradition.[49] Willcock describes how progressive students at the SAC revived the thought of Neo-Confucian scholars of the Ō Yōmei tradition, in particular, because such thinkers sought to align principle with flexible social action.[50]

In particular, the ideas that shaped the passages above may be traced back to Itō Jinsai, who asserted that the greatest of all Confucian virtues, humanity, could result only through the actualization of love itself.[51] As Jinsai wrote,

> To go forth and relate to all things with a heart of compassion (*jiaishin*)—to externalize this from within oneself and extend it to all things on the outside—to be free of a heart of cruelty and weak emotions, that is humanity. Love is found even within the

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46 Yoshida 2003, p. 200.
47 Yoshida 2003, p. 212.
48 Ishii also touched upon the life of Nonaka Kenzan 野中兼山, and briefly discussed his achievements in the area of *saisei* 済世 before describing his death by cremation. IJN, 1885, p. 211.
49 Willcock 2000, p. 1013.
50 Willcock 2000, p. 1011.
51 Itō 1972, p. 485.

smallest division in time, it is at work even while sleeping; love is already within the heart, the heart abounds with love, the heart and love are one: this is humanity. To merely extend love here and not there, this is not humanity. To love one individual and not others—this is not humanity. . . Therefore, to love others is the greatest virtue and to harm another is a great evil.[52]

Thus, in Jinsai's thought, humanity results from the essential human qualities of love and compassion, rather than vice versa. As Peter Flueckiger cogently observes, "The implication [of Jinsai's thought] is that it is not that people have, for example, an innate virtue of humaneness, which is manifested outwardly in the emotion of compassion, but rather they begin with the innate feeling of compassion which is the starting point for the cultivation of humaneness."[53]

Moreover, there was a precedent during the Tokugawa period itself for Jinsai's thought to be translated into concrete visions of social relief. As Tetsuo Najita has shown, Jinsai's awareness that compassion must be externalized through the economic assistance of the vulnerable and the poor became part of a larger impulse toward social action. In one instance, during the 1720s, the study of Itō Jinsai's philosophy led commoners and farmers who joined the Gansuidō 含翠堂 study group outside Osaka to develop a program of "learning and practical philanthropy."[54] From its inception, members of the Gansuidō dedicated themselves to philanthropic efforts intended to "educate the local populace and to aid the hungry and poor."[55] Commoners and wealthy farmers of the Gansuidō worked together to create a relief fund to help local populations during the devastating famines that occurred in the area and, from the 1830s, they also began to use this relief fund to care for abandoned children.[56] Najita also documents another strong correlation between the principle of compassion and its expression during the mid Tokugawa period. In 1757, Miura Baien 三浦梅園 (1723–1789), a relatively obscure philosopher of political economy, established a mutual aid cooperative in his own village of Tominaga 富永, Kitsuki 杵築 domain on the remote Northeastern coast of Kyushu. In his founding statement, Baien urged villagers to join the association and donate rice to assist those suffering economic misfortune. As he called for the establishment of a cooperative, Baien appealed strongly to people's compassion. He held that since all were vulnerable to disaster and misfortune, all must be capable of empathizing with the suffering and thus acting in response to economic need. In the founding statement of his mutual assistance association, Baien wrote:

Now would it not be tragic if misfortunes like these were to strike those who had not been so afflicted before? Indeed, would this not be truly tragic should these misfortunes happen to you? . . . . Our hearts break when we ponder the sight of people in misery. We see that they are victims of disastrous storms, famine, and cold or have encountered unexpected illness. Not to give aid would mean despising those who ought not be despised, speaking with hatred to those who should not be addressed that way. . . Those who eat beyond being full, overly bundle themselves in warm garments, and simply look with indifference

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52 Itō 1972, p. 485.
53 Flueckiger 2010, p. 54.
54 Najita 1987, p. 62.
55 Najita 1987, p. 67.
56 Najita 1987, p. 68.

as others die before their very eyes will incur the wrath of heaven, and in the social world around them they will have divorced themselves from human ethics. . . .[57]

Baien thus exhorts villagers to practice compassionate and empathetic economic intervention and, as Najita argues, "the Tokugawa ethic of care and aid—or 'love of other' (*tasha ai* 他者愛) in the words of Itō Jinsai, the philosopher of ethics—has been rendered concrete and put into practice in Baien's method and organization."[58] Rhetorically and conceptually, Ishii's mission statements of more than a century later share tantalizing similarities in their calls for compassion as a means to ameliorate economic hardship.

For example, in Ishii's July 1887 revision of the mission statement, he again calls on readers to imagine and show compassion "How many are there who at a tender age have been separated from their father or lost their mother, and have fallen into the extreme suffering of poverty, at a loss for the day's food, bordering on starvation? Are you not aware? . . . Children! If we say we love each other, we cannot love simply by words, but we must do this through practice (*jissen* 実践) and in reality (*jijitsu* 事実)."[59] Ishii's understanding of compassion and its expression through social relief clearly drew on early modern precedent. Yet, at the same time, this conceptual universe still appeared only fleetingly and was easily subsumed within Ishii's Christian faith.

In the following passage from the July statement, Ishii invoked a more overt Christian ethos to explain the metaphysical source of compassion and economic equality.

The Bible says that those who have clothes should give them to those who have none and those who have food should do the same (Luke Chapter 3, 9–11). If our brothers—or our sisters—must live their daily lives naked, subsisting in poverty, what is the use of our faith? (Book of James Chapter 2, 14–17). . . . The Lord sacrificed his life for us so those who have God-given resources of the world must look at those in desperate poverty and come to them with an open, giving heart. Is this, our compassion (*aware* 哀レ), then not the same as that love that we have for God?. . . Among the sinners, the greatest sinners of all grow fat and do damage to the Heavenly Father's will. Where there is much wealth, there is little giving. However, even they can be saved by the Lord, whose love is as great as their sin.[60]

Here it is clear that Ishii's Christian orientation came to subsume the early modern discourse found in the May draft of the founding statement. Ishii's writings above, which assert Christ's sacrifice for humanity as the root of human compassion, embrace the earlier Tokugawa understanding of social practice as the means to realize moral virtue. His compassion led him to conclude that poverty originates in social conditions largely outside of individual control, rather than with innate failings of individuals themselves. Nowhere does this understanding become more apparent than within Ishii's desire to take action against the economic harm to youth during the mid 1880s. In the passage below Ishii argues that the greatest obstacle to economic flourishing is external conditions of poverty, Ishii writes,

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57 Najita 2009, pp. 96–97.
58 Najita 2009, p. 99.
59 IJN, 1887, p. 78.
60 IJN, 1887, p. 98.

> This committee will establish a basis for the future civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化) of our village and bring about the God-given happiness and blessings for the thirty nine households and 198 of our brothers and sisters of this village. Together and with one heart, we will cooperate to help those children who are currently coming of age in our village, who hold great promise, but because of hardships within their families cannot get ahead.[61]

Here "civilization and enlightenment" are explicitly cited as the rationale for the creation of the Babaharu Kyōikukai, as are the notions of youth and promise. Ishii's desire to focus on children and youth as the key component of his social relief work was undoubtedly shaped by transformations in the Meiji social structure. Historians of childhood in the Meiji period have documented how the creation of a universal education system and the introduction of conscription between them demarcated new boundaries of childhood, youth, and adulthood.[62] As the Meiji leadership carried out economic reforms to align Japan with modern industrial nation-states, it also employed similar strategies to structure human lifecycle in response to economic demands. Moreover, new ideological slogans such as *fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵 and *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment) implied an emphasis on youth as the means of realizing national strength and Western-style civilization.

It is possible to see both the nobility of poverty and compassion as motivating Ishii's program for child relief. Ishii later connected his decision to pursue child relief back to those days in his village where he witnessed the economic suffering of his childhood friends.[63]

> I was born in Takanabe of Hyūga 日向, in a small hamlet called Babaharu, which was poor with only about forty households. There were only about seven or eight others who had been born in the same year as I, and these became my childhood friends. However, among them there were almost none who did not suffer from lack of money, and there were almost none who had both parents living with them. . . . I also had the feeling that since there were really none among my friends who were very well off that I had the responsibility to help them. . . .[64]

Both passages suggest how youthful friendship informed Ishii's child relief. For Ishii, the child also represented promise and potential agency within the swiftly changing social landscape of the Meiji period. By September 1887, in the official mission statement of the Okayama Orphanage, Ishii explicitly stated that the focus of his social relief efforts would be the child. In the excerpt from the founding statement below, Ishii explains that although many suffer from economic distress, the most tragic of these are children and youth. This is because, he tells us, their innate potential is destroyed by poverty "before it takes flight."

> Although they may live in the same world, the fortunes and fates of human beings vastly differ. From birth, some live in fortified turrets untouched by the winds and

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61 Nishiuchi 1918, pp. 62–64.
62 See, for example, Naka 1977; Piel 2007, pp. 95–107; Tanaka 2004.
63 IJN, 1887, pp. 131–32. This passage was excerpted from a narrative that Ishii wrote in the mid 1890s and was later inserted in the pages of the 1887 diary.
64 IJN, 1887, pp. 131–32.

storms; they have at their fingertips delicious food and warm clothing to wear as if they are royalty. After some time has passed, they enter a distinguished school and receive a high level of education. However, there are those youths who have more than enough ability, but because their households are poor, want for food and clothing; they have no one to turn to for their tuition. Thus, their talents never take flight, and their lives come to an end in emptiness.[65]

Ishii's point is that if youths are given the opportunity to overcome economic difficulty, they will rise up and enter society. The source of economic suffering is the failure of human beings to create ethical social relationships that will ensure that all material needs are adequately met for those most vulnerable and those most able to shape a new social order.

By 1890, Ishii had clearly begun to flirt with socialism as the necessary vehicle for his social reform efforts.[66] On 16 June 1890, he recorded:

Ah, is it I who must take on the great responsibility of social reform by becoming the leader of the socialist party (Shakaitō 社会党) of our country? Ah, I cannot. However, whoever does become this leader, he must become proof of the imperfect nature of social organization and he must be one who washes the feet of the poor. The orphanage will in fact be the school of the socialist party. I believe this to be a great responsibility.[67]

Thus, three years after founding the Okayama Orphanage, Ishii had moved toward a Christian socialist stance, and although he declined to be leader of the socialist party, he believed that the Orphanage itself would ultimately become its vanguard. Moreover, by the mid 1890s after several years of working with the economically disadvantaged throughout Okayama and surrounding prefectures, Ishii began to describe his child relief activities using such explicitly political language as social "transformation" (*kaikaku* 改革) and "revolution" (*kakumei* 革命). Increasingly, Ishii saw the Okayama Orphanage and the youths in his care as a means of political agency. When he wrote in 1893, "It is my heavenly calling to save these children from today's corrupt society and protect them within the Orphanage; to make them completely autonomous and independent beings (*ikkō dokuritsu no ningen* 一向独立の人間) who will then purify this corrupt society," it is evident he viewed the Orphanage as a training ground for social transformation.[68] Such statements reveal the increasing politicization of child relief within Ishii's thought, and his larger vision of the child as a means of transformation. However, such politicization—with its accompanying notions of economic equity—would not have been possible without his sense of economic injustice. These elements of leveling and critique were not divorced from larger global currents of Christian activism and institutional models of social relief.

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65 Yūaisha Manuscripts.
66 Kosaka 1958, pp. 322–25.
67 IJN, 1890, p. 187.
68 IJN, 1893, p. 69.

Conclusion

Within the recent historiography of Japanese social relief, it is commonly argued that relief workers facilitated the dissemination of Meiji state and institutional power as it sought to mold individuals even at the lowest levels of society into national subjects who would comply with its ideological objectives. However, I have sought to demonstrate through the figure of Ishii Jūji, that a more nuanced analysis of the thought, motivations, and actions of social relief workers may complicate this understanding. Further research regarding the thought of other social relief workers may yield similar multi-faceted understandings, and may reveal the constraints and contradictions under which individuals attempted to realize their vision of a more equitable society. Such an analysis of nineteenth century social relief in Japan may also expose yet unexamined currents of social and economic justice that continue to inform contemporary social welfare efforts by individuals in present-day Japan to improve the social well-being of others

In the pages above, I have discussed how Ishii Jūji's mid-Meiji child relief was informed by the thought of such late Tokugawa and early Meiji figures as Rai Sanyō and Saigō Takamori. Their shared belief was that individuals were obligated to improve the political, economic, and social conditions of those within the realm. In addition, Ishii's social thought and action was inspired by a Tokugawa ethics that asserted that compassion and love, externalized through practice, was at the core of the larger Confucian virtue of humanity. While the concept of *risshin shusse* is most commonly associated with an ideology of personal economic advancement within the new social order of the Meiji state, I have demonstrated that *risshin shusse* also evoked an ethical vision of "rising up and saving the world" in the sense of the most vulnerable members of the larger national community. Such a vision clearly informed Ishii's own desire to intervene in the economic suffering of children and youth. Moreover, within Ishii's founding statements of the Okayama Orphanage, there is a clear resonance with Itō Jinsai's ethical imperatives to love one another expansively, compassionately, and without discrimination.

Ultimately, Ishii's conception of child relief, grounded in Tokugawa ethics as well as a Christian socialist ideal of economic leveling, would lead him to a larger critique of mid-Meiji political, economic, and social structures. As a result, Ishii's thought and action constitutes an ongoing legacy both of Tokugawa ideals regarding economic and social justice and of the Meiji Restoration, with its promise of a more just social and economic order. Such ideals, when placed against the failure of the mid-Meiji state to address social problems, provided an alternative standard by which to assess the government's legitimacy. By the mid 1890s, Ishii was actively condemning the Meiji political leadership and, by the early 1900s, he was seeking to sought to create his own utopian community in Miyazaki prefecture in order to realize a distinctive vision of religious and economic equality beyond the dictates of the state. In this sense, tracing the conceptual legacy that informs Ishii's practice shows us the dynamic and creative potential of Meiji individuals as they sought critically to negotiate and transform the political and institutional failings of their times.

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